

# **The Church Preserved**

The History of the Church in Europe  
30AD to 1970 AD

Gert Slings

First published in English in 1988 as *Outlines in Church History*  
Revised edition 2021

ISBN 978-0-6483812-6-6

Published by Pro Ecclesia Publishers  
[proecclesia.com.au](http://proecclesia.com.au)

Previously published in Dutch in *Rechte Sporen*, a magazine of the 'Bond voor Gereformeerde Jeugdorganisatie' in the Netherlands.

# Contents

1. The First Christian Congregations	7
2. The first Christian Churches	13
3. The persecutions of the first century	20
4. The Compiling of the Canon	27
5. From Persecuted Church to State Church	35
6. Augustine – Defender of God’s Truth	42
7. The Church under the yoke of a hierarchy	49
8. Christ plants his Church in the Netherlands	56
9. Islam	64
10. The Crusades	72
11. The Church of the Late Middle Ages	80
12. Forerunners of the Reformation	87
13. The approaching Reformation	94
14. Martin Luther: The Preacher of the Grace of God	104
15. John Calvin - Preacher of the Honour and Glory of God (1)	112
16. John Calvin - Preacher of the Honour and Glory of God (2)	120
17. The Counter-Reformation	127
18. The Anabaptists	135
19. Guido de Bres - Drafter of the Belgic Confession of Faith	143
20. The origin of the Heidelberg Catechism	151
21. The Remonstrant Controversy	159
22. Breach of the Covenant in the Eighteenth Century	167
23. The Reveille	174

24. Events preceding the Separation	182
25. The Separation of 1834	189
26. The founding of the Theological College in 1854	195
27. The 'Doleantie' (Second Secession) of 1886	203
28. The Union of 1892	209
29. Events preceding the Liberation	217
30. Liberation of 1944	224
31. The years following the Liberation	231
32. Mission Work	238

## PREFACE

This book is a collection of church history outlines that were first produced in the Netherlands for the youth of the church, and published in the periodical 'Rechte Spooren'. It aims to show today's readers how Christ has continued to gather, defend and preserve his Church throughout the past twenty centuries. In the meantime Satan has continually sought to frustrate that work and destroy Christ's church through cruel persecutions and cunning deceit.

The outlines were completed in the 1970s, and therefore do not cover more recent events in the history of the Reformed churches in the Netherlands and throughout the world. Driven mostly by migration to countries such as Australia, New Zealand, North America and South Africa, Reformed churches have continued to grow in number. Over time their ethnic character as a 'Dutch-church' has changed as members from the surrounding societies also are directed by the Spirit to the Reformed faith. These churches are active in setting up Christian schools, in mission work, in training young men to become ministers of the Word, in writing and publishing, and also in theological study. Reformed congregations and groups are also found in countries such as Singapore, the Philippines, China, Papua New Guinea, Indonesia, South Korea, Eastern Europe and Brazil.

Whilst modern communications and transportation over the past 40 years has paved the way for greater contact and cooperation between federations, ecumenism, science and 'new hermeneutics' have affected the church. The later involves new interpretations of the scriptures that attempt to fit the message of the gospel to modern day culture and norms. Sadly, this has led to new fractures in Reformed churches and federations.

A more thorough account of recent history is yet to be written. However, this book is a faithful account of almost 200 years of Church history from a Reformed perspective, and should provide readers with a general overview and thereby a sound basis for further study.

The publishers



# CHAPTER 1

## **The First Christian Congregations**

The Belgic Confession of Faith in Article 27 says that the Church has been from the beginning of the world and will be to the end. You can read a similar thought in answer 54 of the Heidelberg Catechism: “The Son of God, out of the whole human race, from the beginning to the end of the world, gathers, defends, and preserves” the Church.

This is a wonderful certainty for the children of the LORD. No matter how hard Satan tries to destroy the Church, he will never succeed. He can try to introduce a false doctrine. He can try to remove the Church from the face of the earth through persecution, but the Church will always be there. For there is someone who looks after the Church, and that is our Lord Jesus Christ. He is given all authority in heaven and on earth (Matthew 28:18). He is the guarantee that the gates of hell shall not overcome it (Matthew 16:18).

### ***The beginning of the Christian church***

The Christian church has existed since the day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit was poured out. Before the Lord Jesus was crucified, He had told his disciples that they would not be left on their own. He had promised them that his Spirit would be poured out. “When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth” (John 16:13).

After the day of Pentecost the apostles, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, started to arrange and organise the Christian Church. This Church is no longer only for the Jews, but for all people. Local churches which are governed by Jesus Christ were to be instituted everywhere. Jesus Christ uses ministers, elders and deacons to rule

the Church. This is the organisation of the Church until the return of the Lord Jesus Christ.

### ***What are the characteristics of the Christians?***

One thing that is very obvious about the newly formed Christian Church is that the members loved each other and showed this openly. In that first period, people offered their possessions willingly so that poverty was non-existent and people did not lack anything. In Acts 2 it says that they shared everything. If there was a shortage of money or materials, the rich sold part of their possessions in order to share their money.

It has been said that the first congregation was communistic. You probably know that communism wants nothing to do with people having their own private possessions. But that was not the case with the first Church. When people sold their possessions to aid the poor, they did this voluntarily. Communism is based on a compulsory system.

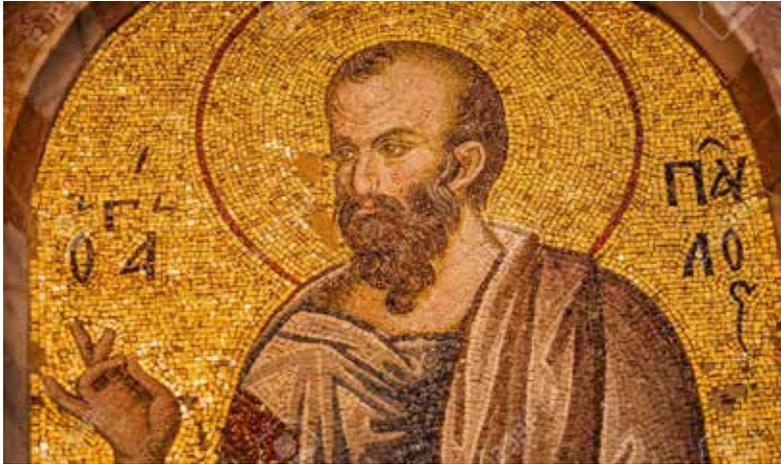
In spite of their great readiness to help, we must not idealise the life of those first Christians. They also had to struggle against false doctrines, sin and lies. We must not imagine that it was a time without any struggle. The Church of Jesus Christ has never had a moment of rest. The struggle against the devil, against sin and against our own weaknesses will always continue.

### ***Satan attacks the Church by force***

Satan attacks the church by force. At the conclusion of Acts 4 beautiful things are said about the first congregations. They are all of one heart and mind. That was the reason for Satan to attack immediately. You all know about the persecutions undertaken by Saul of Tarsus. He became an instrument of Satan in the destruction of the young Church.

You must never forget what the LORD said to Saul on his way to the congregation of Damascus, "Saul why do you persecute me?"

Whoever touches the Church, touches Him, the King of the Church!



*A mosaic of the apostle Paul in the Chora Church in Istanbul.*

Then the incredible occurred. Christ penetrated that instrument of Satan through to the core of his heart. The fanatical persecutor of the first Christians became an instrument in the hands of Christ for the preaching of the forgiveness of sins to the heathens.

Christ never abandons his children. He confirms his promises. He gathers, defends and preserves his Church against the attacks of Satan.

### ***Satan attacks the church by means of a lie***

Satan is also called the father of all lies (see John 8:44). He has more means at his disposal than only persecutions. He has only one aim and that is to destroy the work of Christ, also by means of lies and deceit.

Satan soon found some people (Ananaias and Sapphira) in the first congregation to carry out his purposes.

No doubt you all know the story. They pretended that they, filled with love for the brothers, gave all their money to the poor, when actually they gave only a part of it. Peter, enlightened by the Holy Spirit, unmasked them. Their names are recorded in God's Word as a living example of the tricks which Satan uses to try to destroy the Church.

### ***Satan attacks the church by means of false doctrines***

A devilish doctrine which caused much strife cropped up very soon in the first congregations. It was the doctrine of the Judaists. The Judaists, who were converted Jews, taught that you could only be saved by Christ if you kept part of the law of Moses, so that salvation was not through faith and grace alone.

This false doctrine was readily accepted by the thoughts that live in the hearts of every sinful person. Everyone would love to contribute something towards his own salvation. That we are saved 'through grace alone', goes against man's sinful nature. The apostles really stressed this point in several letters: we can only be saved by faith in the cross of Christ.

### ***Satan attacks the church by means of discord***

Discord means quarrelling, fighting, or disagreeing. In order to have a proper understanding of this discord, we must realise that the New Testament had not yet been compiled. That would not happen till much later. In the beginning, the gospels had not yet been written. Nor had the letters. In short, the first Christians did not have the complete Bible as we know it.

During this period of time, the LORD granted the congregations the gifts of the Spirit. That means that there were members who were filled with the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit enabled them to heal the sick. There were others who had the gift of speaking in unknown tongues; that is, they uttered sounds which could not be understood.

It was the Holy Spirit, therefore, who granted these special gifts because the Bible had not yet been completed. In several congregations this gave rise to jealousy and envy. Some people considered themselves to be better Christians than others. They were no longer one in heart and mind. Division and disunity arose. Satan used these special gifts to create discord among the brothers.

When the books of the New Testament were compiled later on, we see these gifts disappear. The LORD no longer needed them. Everyone

could now read the will of God for themselves, for it was written in the Bible.

### ***Christ protects and increases his church***

We will not tell you the full history of the first congregations, because it is recorded in the book of Acts. However, we want to give an impression of the struggle in which the first Christians were involved, and above all, with seeing how the LORD protected the first congregations against the tricky attacks of the devil.

As time goes on we see Christians come together outside the land of Israel, in Asia Minor, and later in Europe. Christian Churches were instituted everywhere, not through the work of humans, but through the work of the Holy Spirit who made use of the apostles. These young congregations were led by elders who had the task of instructing the congregations in the Word of God. The story of the first congregations is one of struggle, but above all, of grace and of the protecting and preserving power of the King of the Church, our Lord Jesus Christ.

### ***Questions:***

***The answers to these questions may be found in the outline.***

1. When did the Christian Church begin?
2. Tell what you know of the life of the early Christians.
3. How does Satan attack the Church by force?
4. How does Satan try to destroy the Church by means of lies and deceit?
5. Which false doctrine caused much struggle in the early Church?
6. How did discord enter the first congregations?
7. What is the most important point in the struggle of these Churches?

***Questions to think about.***

8. Satan uses different methods to try to destroy the Church. Which do you think is the most dangerous one? Why is that?
9. Why are the words which Christ spoke to Saul on his way to Damascus so important for the history of the Church? Why are they important for you?
10. Can you explain exactly what the Judaists taught? Why did this teaching appeal to people's sinful hearts at that time? Does it appeal to our sinful hearts? If someone has done public profession of faith, does he have less of a struggle against sin than beforehand? Is it easier for a minister?
11. The 'charismatics' or 'pentecostals' of today claim to have the same gifts of the Spirit as the early Church had. Their claims have a great attraction for many people, especially young people, but are their claims valid? Why were there these special gifts in the first congregations, and why are they not necessary any more?

***Questions which may be discussed in groups.***

12. How does Satan attack the Church today? How can he try to pull you away from the Church? How can you arm yourself against that? If you hear people talk as in question 11 above, do you recognise Satan's cunning in that?
13. There are people today who think things are rather dull in our Church. They will try to get you to attend a meeting in a pentecostal church or go to a Christian revival rally. They claim that you will find true, happy Christians there. What would you answer them?

# CHAPTER 2

## **The first Christian Churches**

### *Christ uses office bearers*

There are office bearers in the church. This makes the gathering of believers a church, and not a club or a group of individuals with a common interest. Behind each office is the King of the Church. He calls everyone to his office and he equips the office bearers so that they faithfully discharge their office in obedience to their King.

The great office bearer is our Lord Jesus Christ. He is our greatest Prophet and Teacher, our only High Priest and our eternal King. He is also the One who has instituted the offices in the Church. That is a great gift of his grace. He wants to use sinful people to be his instruments in the work of his Kingdom.

### *The special office of apostle*

In the early years of the New Testament Church, the Lord Jesus used the apostle to be his witnesses. The word 'apostle' means 'one who is sent'. They did not authorise themselves, but they came in the name of their Sender, Jesus Christ. The office of apostle was the only office which only lasted a limited time. This meant that the apostles had no successors. The uniqueness of the apostles was that they were called and instructed by the Lord Jesus Himself. They continually emphasised this fact.

The apostle John, for instance, said: "that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you" (1 John 1:3). The apostles had known the Lord Jesus face to face. "This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses." (Acts 2:32). The apostles occupy a unique position in the history of the Church. Their office was not limited to a particular church, but it was for the benefit of all the churches. Their

work formed the basis for future centuries, for in their life time the offices of elders and deacons were instituted. Also, and this is of great importance, the New Testament was completed.

### ***How the apostles were assisted***

The apostles were extremely busy. That is why they were assisted in the carrying out of their offices by evangelists and prophets. These evangelists had not been directly appointed by Christ. However, they, as well as the apostles, preached the gospel and baptised people. The office of evangelist disappeared after the age of the Apostles came to a close. The name 'evangelist' from then on was used only for the writers of the four gospels.

There were also prophets as well as evangelists. They too were not appointed by Christ. They possessed other special gifts of the Holy Spirit such as the gift of foretelling the future and the gift of healing.

In this way the time of the apostles was a very special one for the Church. They carried out their task with apostolic authority. Christ ruled his Church by means of the apostles. Besides their task of preaching the gospel, they had to rule the Church under the authority of Christ. When the apostles had been taken away by the LORD, God's Word was complete and the Church had received sufficient to enable it to enter the last period of God's history.

### ***The institution of the Offices in the Church***

We can recognise a church by the three offices: the ministry of the Word, the elders and deacons. As long as there is only a group of believers, there is no church, as such. It is only after the offices have been instituted, that the Church starts to exist. Then church history starts in that place.

Deacons are first mentioned in Acts 6. When the apostles wanted to concentrate more on the preaching of the gospel, seven deacons were chosen in the congregation of Jerusalem. The apostles laid their hands on them, and then through them, Christ looked after the poor people



*Fishing for souls, by Adriaen Pietersz. van de Venne (1589–1662)*

of his Church. He is the merciful High Priest who uses the deacons as his office bearers to bring relief to the poor.

We also read of elders in the very early churches. Paul already ordained them everywhere during his first missionary journey. The office of elder or ruler consisted mainly of ruling in the beginning. The apostles with their helpers looked after the preaching of the gospel. Later on, when the church started to spread, the office of elder became a teaching, as well as a governing office. In 1 Timothy 5:17 and 18, Paul clearly distinguishes between elders who teach and elders who govern.

### ***The Office Bearers are Christ's instruments***

The office bearers are really instruments in the hands of Christ to rule and maintain his Church. They are actually slaves of Christ. The office bearers are the address of the church, so that every Christian can join that Church. God's Word clearly teaches us that every local church is independent. Paul writes letters to Corinth, Colosse, Philippi, Thessalonica etc., individually. Christ writes seven letters to the seven churches in Asia Minor and each of those letters has a different address. Each local church is complete church.

## *Church Services in the first Christian Congregations*

The first Christian Church services were very sober. The people came together in the open air or in the house of one of the members of the congregation. There were hardly any church buildings as we know them. During the first services, sections of the Old Testament were read out. Later on, when the apostles wrote their letters and the Gospels had been completed, these were read out. The previously mentioned evangelists and prophets explained these parts of the Scriptures.

The believers preferred to hold their meetings on the day of Christ's ascension, i.e. the first day of the week, as we still do. They thanked God and prayed for his protection. Baptism was administered mainly to adults because heathens came to faith daily. At the conclusion of the service, the believers organised so called 'love feasts' during which the death of the Lord Jesus was commemorated. Because of the growth of the congregations and the numerous misuses which developed, these 'love feasts' were phased out. In 1 Corinthians 11:21,22 Paul writes: "For in eating, each one goes ahead with his own meal. One goes hungry, another gets drunk. What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in?"

The celebration of the Lord's Supper came into existence. Songs were sung to the glory of God. Church services were becoming more regular with set prayers, confession, reading of Scripture, preaching and the Lord's Supper celebrations.

It is difficult for us to get a clear picture of these early gatherings because we are so used to our own church services. Our services are determined mainly by the reformation of the 16th century. However, the early believers gathered together to honour, laud and praise the King of the Church and to hear his Word. Although the procedure has probably changed considerably, the contents of the services have stayed the same. In this lies the unity of the history of the Church.

The believers then, and the believers now, all confess the same LORD and submit themselves to the same Word. The weekly gatherings were central to them, as they are to us. Together with them, we are

the one people of God built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets, of which Jesus Christ is the corner stone (Ephesians 2:20).

### *The end of the Apostolic Age*

The Apostolic Age lasted from the day of Pentecost to approximately 100 years after Christ's birth. In this period of time, the Lord Jesus used the apostles to establish his Church in many places. The church offices were instituted and the Bible completed.

A very special instrument in the hands of Christ was Paul. He was endowed with so many gifts that he was fully qualified for his task. He was a Jew by birth, and had received a thorough education 'at the feet' of the wise Gamaliel. Therefore he was able to effectively address the Jews. At home he had also learnt the Greek language so that he could also instruct the Greeks in their own language. Because his birthplace was a Roman city, he had the status of a Roman citizen. This meant that he had many more privileges than a person who was not a Roman.

Paul worked unceasingly in the service of his King. He was allowed to undertake three long missionary journeys. After the third journey he was accused by the Jews in Jerusalem and as a result spent the next two years in prison. Then he was transported by ship to Rome, because as a Roman citizen he had appealed to Caesar. In his rented house in Rome, guarded by a soldier, he could freely preach the gospel to Jew and heathen alike.

It is likely that he was pronounced innocent at his first hearing, after which he possibly went on a trip to Spain. Then he was imprisoned for a second time and killed by the sword in 64 AD, under Caesar Nero.

Peter first led the congregation at Jerusalem. Later he went to Antioch, and possibly also to Corinth. Like Paul, he also died a martyr's death during Nero's reign.

Shortly after Paul's death, John arrived in Ephesus. He was exiled to the island of Patmos and spent a long time there. That is where he

wrote the book of Revelation. After his release he worked in Ephesus until he was very old. He probably died a natural death.

We know nothing with certainty of any of the other apostles. What is certain is that the Lord Jesus also used them to plant and spread his Church. They were also allowed to be part of the plan that Christ had for his Church.

When the last one had died, the Apostolic Age had come to an end. The special power to bind and loose things on earth was not passed on to anyone else. The pope is not Peter's successor, nor is he the head of Christ's Church. Christ Jesus is her King.

The special position of the apostles is also shown by the fact that their names will be found in the new Jerusalem which will descend from heaven. "And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb." (Revelation 21:14)

### ***Questions:***

#### ***Answers to be found in the outline.***

1. What does the word 'apostle mean? Why are they called by this name?
2. What was so special and unique about the apostolic office?
3. What happened during the time of the apostles?
4. Who assisted the apostles? What was their task?
5. What are the offices in the church? Relate their early history.
6. What is the meaning of 'the office bearers are instruments of Christ'?
7. What happened during the worship services of the first Christian congregations?

***Questions to think about.***

8. What is the difference between the apostolic office and the offices of minister, elders and deacons?
9. Why is hierarchy so dangerous?
10. What does 1 Timothy 3:1 say? What may an office bearer not do according to Article 31 of the Belgic Confession of Faith?

***A question which may be discussed in groups.***

11. Is the most important characteristic of an office bearer that people 'like him', and can 'get along with him' and that he 'understands people'? What should be your attitude towards an office bearer whom you personally do not like very much? What does the conclusion of Article 31 of the Belgic Confession of Faith say about this?

# CHAPTER 3

## **The persecutions of the first century**

### *Satan uses forceful means*

The devil never leaves God's Church in peace. He only has one aim: the destruction of the Church, the body of Christ. He can no longer touch the Head, for the devil is no longer allowed to enter heaven. Now his attacks are directed at the body, that is the Church. Read Revelation 12:8 and find other examples of this in the Old and New Testament.

These attacks vary in the way they are carried out. Sometimes the devil uses false doctrines. At other times he sows discord so that there are disagreements and quarrelling among members. At yet other times he uses force. The history of the Church shows this when describing shocking persecutions. But no matter how great the troubles were, the Church can derive comfort from the fact that Christ never deserts his children.

In the early years of the Christian Church, Satan did everything possible to stop the spread of Christianity. He was determined that he would keep Europe in his grasp. If the LORD had not protected his children and had not preserved his Church, then the gospel would not have spread. Then we would have had to live and die as blind heathens (Ephesians 2:1,12).

### *Adoration of the emperor*

During the first centuries, the Romans ruled the world with Rome as *the* all powerful centre. With massive armies the emperors had forced their will onto many nations. The Romans were exceptionally proud of their power and expressed this in their worship of the emperor.

This worship consisted of, among other things, the offering of incense in honour of the emperor, who was adored as a god.

There was scope for other religions as well. The Jews were allowed to serve their God freely. Rome was tolerant as long as the emperor was honoured. For a long time they even enjoyed special privileges.

To the Romans, the new Christians appeared to be a group of Jews who were honourable citizens, and who cared for the poor, sick and widows. They feared God and honoured the emperor although they offered no sacrifices to him. Criminals, adulterers, thieves and murderers were not found among them. They lived according to the preaching of the apostles.

### ***The Christians become a political threat***

It soon became obvious that Christianity could not be lumped together with other foreign religions. They preached the Kingdom of God which had already been established here on earth and had to extend to the farthest corners of the world. The Romans soon thought that their greatest enemy had arrived. To a Roman, nothing was more important than the Roman empire. Although the Christians were obedient citizens and prayed for the emperor, it was clear that the Kingdom of God was much more important to them than the Roman Empire. Included in their preaching was the fact that the Son of man would one day appear on the clouds and no Roman Emperor would be able to stand against Him.

Christianity was regarded as a power which was a threat to the foundation and existence of the Roman Empire. The offering of that bit of incense was therefore so important to the Romans because it proved whether or not you were politically dangerous.

Explained in this way, it becomes clear how someone could be sentenced to death without having committed a single crime, just because he confessed to be a Christian. Confessing Christ was an admission of the greatest crime anyone could commit, namely a conspiracy against the Roman Empire.

## *Other causes of the persecutions of the Christians*

The behaviour of the Christians was also a reason for mistrusting them. Once a week they gathered together for worship, particularly in the evenings. That already made people suspicious. The Romans also heard rumours of the eating of flesh and the drinking of the blood of Christ.

This caused false accusations, such as: "In their gatherings they slaughter their children and they drink their blood." Further, they called each other brothers and sisters. This led people to believe that they committed all sorts of vile things.

The Christians led a sober life and this set them apart, for they did not join in with the numerous heathen feasts. They were not found at the drunken feasts in honour of the heathen gods, nor were they seen in the arenas where gladiators fought their bloody fights against wild animals and each other. This was another reason to despise them and to accuse them of showing 'hatred toward the human race' and being 'despisers of the world'. The false accusations did not stop at this point. The Christians were accused of sorcery and of dealing in black magic, and of worshipping a god with the head of a donkey.

Many other vile things were attributed to the Christians. It became more and more clear that popular opinion was increasingly being directed against the confessors of the Name of the LORD. All sorts of calamities were blamed onto the Christians. Years later, someone said, "Whenever the Tiber floods its banks, or the Nile stays too dry, whenever the sky is made of brass, or the earth quakes, whenever there is a famine or any other calamity, the cry 'Christians to the lions' is heard."

The Christians were accused of atheism. It did not help matters when they explained that it was because of the unbelief of the heathens that God sent all these calamities upon the world. The Roman people did not rest before their desire for revenge was satisfied and the Christians were torn to pieces by the wild animals in the arenas.



*Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna (69–155).*

*Fresco of Ignatius (c. 35 to c. 108–140)  
in the Hosios Loukas Monastery, Boeotia,  
Greece.*

## ***The first persecutions***

The first persecutions took place during the reign of the cruel emperor Nero in the year 64 AD. He was suspected of having set fire to the city of Rome, but he managed to put the blame onto the Christians. Terrible acts of cruelty followed. It even happened that many Christians were made to suffer as human torches at the imperial garden parties. Others were wrapped up in animal skins and allowed to be torn up by wild animals.

Although the persecutions were not equally intense and the different emperors were not all equally cruel, the murdering of the Christians always continued. It even went on during the reign of the best, most

noble and gentle of the emperors. That was because the attitude of the Christian Church towards worshipping the state did not change. Fortunately, there were periods of rest. But the fire kept smouldering and could break out into a blaze of persecution at any moment.

### *Heroic faith, but also unfaithfulness*

When we read the story of the martyrs, we often notice heroic faith. We learn then that the blood of the martyrs became the seed of the Church. At times even the executioners were converted by the courage of their victims. There were not only elderly people who confessed their faith, but also people of your age. They considered it an enormous privilege to be able to die for their Saviour. They were filled with joy because they received the honour of being considered worthy of belonging to the martyrs of the Church.

Well-known among the martyrs is Ignatius, the bishop of Antioch, who was thrown to the wild beasts in 110 AD, at Rome. While he was being tortured on the rack, he said, "Bread of God am I, and by the teeth of beasts will I be crushed, so that I will be found to be the pure bread of Christ".

There was also the grey-haired bishop of Smyrna, Polycarp. When he was told, "Revile Christ, and you will be released," Polycarp answered, "Eighty and six years have I served him, and he has never done me wrong; how can I blaspheme him, my King, Who has saved me?" Many others, whose names have been recorded, could be mentioned. There are also many more whose names we do not know, but who are now allowed to proclaim God's honour with the apostles and the prophets in his glory.

However, there were also many others who were unfaithful and loved their lives more than they loved Christ. Many of them sacrificed incense on the emperor's altars anyway. They excused themselves by saying that only their hand had become unfaithful to Christ. Other 'bought' proof that they had sacrificed. It was particularly difficult for the rich people to forfeit their possessions. Many would have lived with a conscience accusing them of preferring to live a dishonourable

life rather than die a martyr's death in honour of their King. It also often happened that they repented under the influence of the heroic death of the martyrs.

The attacks of Satan were unsuccessful. He wanted the emperors to be instruments for the destruction of the Church. However, the reverse occurred: the blood of the martyrs became the seed of the Church. That is the miracle of God's grace. He made his children faithful even unto death. Many Christians did not possess such a heroic faith out of themselves, but they received it in answer to their prayers. Their Master had foretold them, "In the world you will experience suffering and persecutions." But he had also said, "I am with you even unto the end of the world."

### ***Questions:***

***Answers to these questions may be found in the outline.***

1. What is Satan's one and only aim? How does he try to achieve this aim?
2. What did emperor worship consist of?
3. Why were the Christians said to be politically dangerous?
4. How were the Christians reviled?
5. Which natural disasters were the Christians accused of having caused?
6. What do you know about the persecutions? Why did Satan's attacks fail?

### ***Questions to think about.***

7. How does Satan attack your church today? How can you arm yourself against his attacks?
8. Can you imagine a time in the future when the Christians in this country will be persecuted? Are you allowed to be afraid of this?

9. Is it at all useful to discuss the persecutions of the early churches? Why?
10. What is your opinion of this statement: "At times even the executioners were converted by the courage of their victims"?

***A question which may be discussed in groups.***

11. What is the best time for the Church: a time of persecutions, or a time of affluence and peace such as we experience today?

# CHAPTER 4

## **The Compiling of the Canon**

### *What does the word “canon” mean?*

In your reading of church history, you will regularly come across difficult names and words. You should not be put off by this. You must try to find out the meanings of difficult words, and that also applies to this word: ‘canon’.

Originally a ‘canon’ was a sort of wooden measuring stick. Later on it came to have the meaning of a ‘guide’, a ‘rule’ for our faith and lives. The canonical books of the Bible were given to us by God so that we may know how we must live. ‘Canon’ also means a catalogue or list. The Canon is the list of holy books which together make up the Holy Scriptures: the rule of faith of the Church.

Whenever we speak of the canon of the Holy Scriptures we mean to say that God’s Word is a collection of Bible books which have been inspired by the Holy Spirit. To us God’s Word is the guide, the norm, a rule for what we must believe and how we must live. Read Article 5 of the Belgic Confession of Faith.

### *The necessity of the Canon*

It is a miracle of God’s grace that the young Christian churches were able to withstand the massive attacks of the Satan: attacks by means of terrible persecutions and by means of deadly false doctrines. These struggles sharpened the perceptions of the Christians. By the guidance of the Spirit of God, they learned to discern the spirits. By this we mean: they soon knew what sort of people they were dealing with.

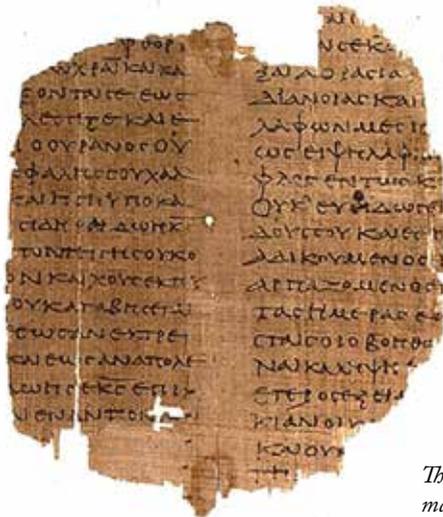


*The codex climaci rescriptus: a 146 leaf remnant of nine separate manuscripts, seven are in Christian Palestinian Aramaic and two are in Greek. They contain much of the text of the Gospels, Acts and the Epistles, and sections of the Old Testament.*

The teachers of false doctrines came with a doctrine which *appeared* to be very pious, but which was not pious at all. That made the defence of the truth very difficult.

This struggle did not take place without losses. Many young Christians became entangled in the net of false doctrines. In this struggle the Church received a new weapon from the LORD to preserve the believers. It was essential that there was a good guide to enable believers to attack the false doctrines: a complete Bible. Every believer had to be aware that this was the Word of God. Until this time the Church had only one book that served as a canon, as a rule and norm for faith and life, namely the Old Testament.

That Old Testament had been accepted unanimously by the believers. It was written by God himself who made use of people in doing so. The LORD prepared these people for this very special work. We can therefore say that the Old Testament came into being under the special guidance of God without us knowing exactly when this happened.



*The earliest New Testament-manuscript fragment discovered is of the Gospel of Mark.*

The question may arise, “How can we be sure that the books of the Bible really are God’s Word?” People could have made mistakes, couldn’t they? We have actually answered the question already. That Word came into being through God’s special guidance. To this end, He used people whose characters differed widely. God enabled them to be born and to live so that they, by the guidance of the Holy Spirit, could make a link in the chain of God’s Word.

When our Saviour started his work, we also see that he simply accepted the Old Testament. Moreover, he showed the Church that the Old Testament was crying out for fulfilment. Christ, through his work of redemption, had ushered in a new dispensation, a new era. A New Testament was necessary.

### ***The Canon: weapon against Marcion***

A complete Bible was badly needed in order to contest heresies. For how otherwise can you tell what is, and what is not, a heresy? You can only do this by testing it on the Bible.

We have mentioned that the compiling of the books of the New Testament was a result of the struggle against false doctrines.

One of the false teachers was Marcion. He was a rich man who owned a profitable shipping business along the Black Sea. Around the year 138 he went to Rome, the heart of the Roman Empire. There he joined the local church. His ideas were rejected by the church, and he himself was excommunicated.

The fiery and active Marcion did not leave it at that. He was good at organising. This was apparent when he instituted a new church which soon spread rapidly. After several decades his church was almost the size of the Christian Church. It was not until a few centuries later that his church slowly died out.

What was so dangerous about this heretic Marcion? He rejected the Old Testament which speaks about God the Creator. He taught that although God was not wicked, he was an inferior God who wanted to do good but did not have the power to do so. This God wanted to be righteous, but he became cruel. He had given the law to the world with good intentions, but every sin against that law demanded heavy punishment. Therefore God became a merciless judge.

Then Jesus came. He could not be the son of that cruel God of the Old Testament. This Jesus was sent by an unknown god. Although this god had nothing to do with the creation of the world, he started to feel sorry for the people on earth. Therefore he sent his son in order to free them from that cruel God.

This is more or less the heresy of Marcion. This heretic, therefore, made a distinction between the law (Old Testament) and the gospel (New Testament), and also between God and Christ. Marcion thought he caught a glimmer of this antithesis between law and gospel in the letters of Paul. Therefore he accepted these letters as the Word of God.

It will be clear to you that he did not understand Paul's preaching at all. There is no contrast or distinction between the Old and New Testament in Paul's eyes. To him Christ is the Son of God, the Father, the Creator of heaven and earth. The result of Marcion's heresy was that

he put forward a canon of his own. He actually compiled his own bible. He was the first one to publish a list of authoritative books. It will not surprise you that he did away with the Old Testament. Of the four gospels he only approved of Luke, most probably because it corresponded with Paul's writings more than the other ones. He accepted ten of Paul's letters.



*Justin Martyr (100–165) who opposed Marcion. Woodcut by André Thévet (1502–1590)*

### ***The Canon: weapon against Montanism***

This 'list' activated the Christian Church. Over against the canon of Marcion she put forward her own: the canon as we know it today. Thus Marcion directly contributed to the compiling of our Bible. Our canon was born as a result of struggle and strife, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit; it came into being in order to preserve the Church and keep it close to the reliable Word of God.

As well as the attacks of Marcion, the Church also had to suffer a great deal from a certain man named Montanus. This false teacher was responsible for the rise of Montanism, which placed great emphasis upon the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

You know that there was a 'changeover period' between the times of the Old Testament and the New Testament Church. After the conclusion of the Old Testament on the day of Pentecost, all the New Testament books still had to be written. This did not happen overnight. It needed time.

During this 'changeover period' the Church of the New Testament was supported, much the same way as scaffolding supports the construction of a large building. In this particular period of time

God made use of the special gifts of the Holy Spirit: for example, the healing of the sick and the speaking in tongues. When the New Testament Bible was eventually completed, those special gifts were no longer needed to reveal the will of God. The 'scaffolding' could be cleared away for the Bible was now complete.

Montanus was not at all impressed by the disappearance of these mighty gifts of the Holy Spirit. In about 150 AD he came up with a 'revival movement'. In his opinion church life had become rather dull because there were now fixed offices and everything was organised. Against the offices and organisation of the Church, Montanus put forward the spontaneous expression of the Spirit. He even dared to say that he had brought the Holy Spirit back with him.

To counteract the heresy of Montanism, the Church taught that the time of special revelations had come to a close. The New Testament Bible had been accepted, and therefore special manifestations of the Spirit were no longer necessary. From now on the Church had to bow before the unconditional authority of God's Word, as found in the Old and the New Testament. This dealt the death blow to the heresy of Montanism. The canon was complete. There is no continuing revelation and no continuing inspiration. God's Word is complete. In it the LORD had given to the Church the norms and rules according to which the believers have to live.

### ***How was the canon of the New Testament determined?***

In the time after Pentecost the congregations often had to be satisfied with verbal accounts of the teachings of Jesus. But as time went on, the Gospels and the letters of the apostles, who had personally heard Jesus' doctrine, came to be written. These writings were passed on to others. Through the guidance of the Holy Spirit they were recognised as God's Word. We must accept, in faith, that the Lord has carefully made sure that only those books which are now in the Bible are those which he destined thereto.

Around the year 200, the Church possessed the New Testament more or less in the form as we know it now. In the year 367 Athanasius made a list of the New Testament books as we know it now. Since that time, no changes have been made. It was about the year 500 when the Canon was accepted by the whole Church in several countries. The various synods which had concerned themselves with compiling the canon did nothing else but determine what lived in the hearts of the believers. They did not dictate anything.

We have seen how much struggle accompanied the compiling of the Canon, but also how necessary it was for the Church. Articles 2 to 7 of the Belgic Confession of Faith deal with the canonical books. You also read about the apocryphal books. These do not have a divine origin. Not one text from these apocryphal books is quoted in the New Testament. The name 'apocryphal' says it all: it means hidden, doubtful, secret. We do not know where these books originated. They are the works of man as opposed to the divine character of the canonical books.

### ***Questions:***

*Answers to these questions may be found in the outlines.*

1. What does the word 'canon' mean?
2. Why was it necessary to complete the Canon?
3. Could the authors of the Bible books have made mistakes? Give reasons.
4. What did Marcion teach?
5. Why was the Canon so necessary to contest the errors of Marcion?
6. What did Montanus teach?
7. Why was the Canon necessary to contest the errors of Montanus?

***Questions to think about.***

8. Read article 3 of the Belgic Confession of Faith, and explain what it means.
9. What does article 5 say? Do you understand that last sentence?
10. What does article 6 say about the apocryphal books?
11. Article 7 is about the ‘sufficiency of Holy Scripture’. What does this mean?

***A question which may be discussed in groups.***

12. This outline deals with difficult things: the Canon, Marcion and Montanus. Is this not a waste of time? What does it benefit you to know these things? Are the ideas of Montanus, for example, still found these days?

# CHAPTER 5

## **From Persecuted Church to State Church**

### *Three centuries of persecutions*

For almost three centuries the Church of Christ was persecuted. It certainly was 'the church under the cross'. The children of God had to carry the cross of persecutions during the first centuries.

We devoted a whole outline to this topic (see part 3). You will remember how the first large scale persecutions broke out during the reign of the cruel emperor Nero.

As time progressed, the Church increased rapidly. This was not the result of extensive mission work, but was chiefly due to the life style of the Christians. The courage with which many obtained the crown of martyrdom brought forth a deep feeling of admiration, which was often followed by conversion. In this way, the blood of the martyrs became the seed of the Church.

### *Persecutions once again*

The continually growing church became an increasingly bigger problem for the later emperors. The extensive Roman Empire, consisting of all the conquered nations, did not, of course, form a unity. In such a situation, a state within a state presented an even greater danger. This is what the church was, because she went her own way. She did not want to be regarded as one of the many religions. She preached the one true God to Whom everyone must bow.

In the years 250 to 300 in particular, there were three emperors who tried to destroy the Christians because they were considered to be a threat to the unity of the empire. You will remember how everyone

had to sacrifice on the altar of the emperor. We have seen how many were unfaithful by sacrificing just a few grains of incense.

Under emperors Decius, Valerian and Diocletian, many were “put to death by stoning; they were sawed in two; they were killed by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated—the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, living in caves and in holes in the ground.” (Hebrews 11:37,38). This happened to them for the sake of the unity of the empire.

### ***The complete change under emperor Constantine***

Although Emperor Diocletian did everything he could to crush the faith of the Christians, on his death bed he had to admit that he had not succeeded. All the fiery darts which he had shot were extinguished by the shield of faith.

In the struggle for power which followed his death, Constantine was the victor and therefore he became the next emperor. In the year 313 the Edict of Milan was issued. It stated that the Church received absolute freedom of religion. It was also decided that possessions which had been taken away from Christians had to be returned or compensation paid.

This was a totally new decision in the history of the New Testament Church. Such an official freedom had not been experienced by the Church of the New Testament before. This came about not only because the emperor realised that persecutions did not have the desired effect, but also because he had a specific purpose in mind.

Constantine wanted to use the invincible Church to ensure the unity of the state. “If you can’t beat them, join them,” was his cunning thought. “This is the only way to strengthen your own position.”

Perhaps you know the story which Constantine told one of his ministers later. This story revealed why he changed so suddenly. One of his opponents in the struggle for the position of emperor was Maxentius. During the evening before the decisive battle,



*Statue of Helena (c246/248–c330),  
mother of Emperor Constantine the  
Great. Capitoline Museums, Rome.*



*Emperor Constantine (c272–337).  
Capitoline Museums, Rome.*

Constantine saw a sign of victory in the form of a cross, lit up, above the setting sun. Underneath were the words: “Conquer in this sign.”

While he meditated on the meaning of this sign, he fell asleep. In a dream, he saw Christ appear with the sign. He commanded him to make a copy of it and use it as a means of defence in the battle. The following morning Constantine gave an account of this vision to his fellow soldiers. He commanded tradesmen to construct the sign. It was also depicted on coins and helmets later on. Constantine defeated Maxentius, who fell into the Tiber with his horse and drowned.

We do not know how much of this story is true. In any case, the King of the Church used Constantine to give his children breathing space after three centuries of persecutions. Constantine’s conversion is a beautiful example of the power of God who changes the heart of kings as he changes the water courses. He is the sovereign God and he uses whom he wills, even the mighty emperor of a world empire (see Proverbs 21:1).

## *On the road to a state church*

The protection of Constantine had many significant consequences for the Church. It had been persecuted, even to death, until just before this time and now the emperor sought protection and support from this self-same church. The recognition of Christianity as a lawful religion would in later times lead to it being the only lawful religion.

Together with his mother Helena, a Christian, Constantine did much for the Church. He granted 150,000 dollars for the upkeep of the 'clergy' in Africa. He erected magnificent churches everywhere. The older Christians in particular, who had still experienced persecutions, did not know what had come over them.

Yet heathenism was still tolerated under Constantine. Therefore we must be careful when speaking of his Christianity. Some of his closest friends at court were heathens. One side of the coins he minted displayed the word Christ, but on the other side was an image of a sun-god. He busied himself to have the Sunday observed, but he himself hardly ever attended a church service. His large gifts to the Church served mainly to increase her external splendour. His mother Helena also encouraged the deterioration in the church: she ordered the so-called 'cross' of Christ to be dug up! Even the nails were recovered and these objects were worshipped and adored by her.

It was not until near the end of his life that Constantine allowed himself to be baptised in the presence of many bishops whom he received with great pomp and ceremony.

Constantine was an instrument in the hands of the King of the Church, Jesus Christ. After three centuries of persecutions he gave the Church freedom of religion.

We do not have to judge Constantine's heart, nor the extent to which he was serious about being a Christian. We are not allowed to worship people. To God alone be the glory.

### ***The church becomes a state church***

It was not until fifty years after the death of Constantine that the Christian Church became the official state church. After Constantine's death Julian the Apostate tried to curb Christianity. In all sorts of ways he ridiculed the Christians. Abuse, mockery and even violence were permitted when it was directed against the Christians.

It was Theodosius the Great who raised Christianity to the status of official state religion in the second year of his reign. It became compulsory to believe in the trinity. Heathenism became punishable and heathen temples were destroyed or converted to Christian churches. Everyone who occupied an official position had to be a member of the state church. Without this membership there was no possibility of promotion.

### ***The temptations of a state church***

It used to be a matter of faith to be a Christian, but now it became a matter of convenience. If you desired promotion, you no longer offered sacrifices to the emperor, but you let yourself be baptised. A stream of new members joined the church daily. You can understand that being a Christian was a matter of outward appearance only for many people. The more the Church became a state church, the more worldly she became.

On top of all this, the state started to interfere in all sorts of Church business. Church services were often a grand show of beauty and splendour with luxurious garments, incense, images such as those of angels and Mary, and relics.

Soon there was hardly anything left of the powerful faith which was there during the times of the persecutions. This time is often referred to as 'Christianity's fall into sin'. In the space of one century much can change, also for the worse.

## ***The advantages of a state church***

Besides the dark side to this promotion to state church, there is also a bright side. The resulting external protection and security caused the study of theology to flourish. All sorts of problems which could not be solved before due to lack of time, could now be studied thoroughly. Besides, the masses could now be reached. The whole of society could now be influenced by the preaching of the gospel.

This period of time produced men such as Athanasius and Augustine. They were allowed to strive for purity of preaching and of Christian doctrine.

Yet a state church is a detestable thing. The emperor made himself head of the church as the supreme judge and law giver. This is contrary to the Word of God. The head of the Church is Jesus Christ who rules by means of the office-bearers (Ephesians 5:23).

Many centuries would pass before the light of God's Word would reveal this.

## ***Questions:***

***Answers to these questions may be found in the outline.***

1. What is another name for the persecuted church?
2. Why did the persecutions start up again?
3. What change was there in the days of Constantine?
4. How was Constantine converted?
5. What does it mean: the church became a state church?
6. What are the disadvantages of being a state church?
7. What are its advantages?

## ***Questions to think about.***

8. Describe the spiritual armour as depicted in Eph. 6. What, according to this chapter, is our most dangerous enemy?

9. Do you agree with the expression “the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church”?
10. What is your reaction to the story of Constantine’s conversion?
11. Why is Ephesians 5:23 referred to in this outline?

*A question which may be discussed in groups*

12. The Church often flourishes in times of persecutions. In a period of peace and prosperity, church life often deteriorates. Would you like persecutions to break out? Should we long for them, or is that the wrong attitude?

# CHAPTER 6

## **Augustine – Defender of God’s Truth**

### *The time in which Augustine lived*

When Augustine was born in 354, the Church had already experienced more than three centuries of struggle and strife and persecutions. If the future of the Church had been dependent on man, there would have been nothing left of it by this time. How many martyrs had not been thrown to the lions and how many errors had not already entered the church!

The end of the persecutions seemed to be a thing of the past for the time being, for the mighty Roman Emperor, Constantine the Great, had proclaimed the Christian Church to be the state church. That meant that Christianity was no longer an illegal religion. The Church could even rely on the emperor’s protection. Last time we saw that as a result of this, however, many people became a member of the Church in order to occupy an official position, and not because they wanted to serve the Lord in obedience to Him.

Many errors had been attacked during the previous few centuries. We want to mention one of them: the false teachings of Arius.

Arius was a heretic who taught that the Lord Jesus was a sort of semi-god, and not the Son of God. At an ecumenical church meeting, the Council of Nicea, in 325, this false doctrine was rejected by the Church. Emperor Constantine called this Council together. A person who played a very important part in the struggle against this heresy was Athanasius, who later became bishop of Alexandria. He was the person used by God to keep the Church pure in doctrine according to the true Word of God.



*Council of Nicea shown in a fresco in Capella Sistina, Vatican, 1590.*

However, the Church's struggle by no means ended here. Slowly but surely it became clear that the Church of Rome wanted to dominate the other churches. The bishop of Rome referred to himself as 'Peter's successor'. He thought that he, as the Vicar of Christ, could dictate his will to the other churches. Since the bishop of Constantinople, which today is called Istanbul, did not want to be ordered around, a strained relationship developed between these churches. It was not a matter of submitting to the authority of Christ, but of demanding submission to human power and authority. From this you can see how slyly the devil works. He loves to sow disharmony.

We also see in the days of Augustine increasing support for the idea that life in a monastery was more pious than everyday life in the world. We know of many hermits at this time. They separated themselves from the world to dedicate their lives to God in quiet and lonely surroundings.

This ideal of living in a monastery is contrary to the Word of God. The Lord wants us to serve him wherever he has placed us: in other words, simply in our daily work at home and at school. All that we

do must be done to God's honour and glory. It seems very pious to separate yourself from the world, but it was originally a heathen ideal which the Satan used to try to disturb the proper service of the Lord.

### *The life of Augustine*

We will now tell the story of how the Lord led Augustine's life in such a wondrous way, and how he prepared him to be an instrument in God's hand for the protection of the Church. The Lord often chooses people other than those whom we would expect. In this he is sovereign. It shows that he is not dependent on humans; he chooses whom he wills.

At the end of his life, Augustine wrote a book called "Confessions" describing God's guidance in his life. We will tell you a few things from it.

Augustine was born in 354 in Tagaste. This was a city on the border of what are now Algeria and Tunisia in North Africa.

Augustine had a very pious mother, Monica, who meant a lot to him. His father, Patricius, was a pagan. He died young, and although he became a Christian just before he died, Augustine's life was mainly influenced by Monica.

Nothing in Augustine's youth pointed to the fact that he would become an important instrument in God's hand in later years. He was very intelligent and attended the university in Carthage. The instruction given there was purely heathen. Despite the admonitions of Monica, Augustine did not live as she had taught him according to God's Word. He lived a life of sin. When he was eighteen years old he had a son already, though he was not married. This was not the only thing which hurt Monica so much. For ten years he was member of a heathen sect. It seemed as if Augustine had definitely turned his back on Christianity.

Monica reverted to the only thing a mother can do in such circumstances: she prayed. Augustine, however, shocked his mother by quietly departing for Rome. He did not enjoy Rome very much, and therefore left for Milan in 385. Here the well-known Ambrose,



*Augustine of Hippo (354–430). The Four Doctors of the Western Church, by Gerard Sebgers (1591–1651). National Trust UK.*

famous as an orator, was bishop. Augustine regularly listened to him to admire his oratory. Monica followed him to Milan, glad that he had broken with the heathen sect. His sinful life, however, continued. He wanted to become engaged, but the girl was still too young. He had to wait for two years. In the meantime, he took another girl. Monica went to Ambrose to seek comfort. He said to her: “Do not worry so; a son of so many prayers cannot be lost.”

### ***The Lord hears Monica’s prayers***

The Lord certainly heard her prayers. Augustine did not only enjoy Ambrose’s sermons because of his choice of words, but also because of their contents. He became more and more restless because he realised that his life did not at all correspond to the Word of God.

One day, while he was being torn apart by the conflict of whether or not he should completely dedicate his life to God, he heard a child's voice in a neighbouring house singing, "Take and read," three times. Immediately he took up his Bible and opened it at Romans 13:14. It says, "But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires."

Rest and peace now entered Augustine's heart, for he had found God. He received catechism instruction from Ambrose and was baptised on the night of Easter in 387. Monica's heart's desire had been granted. Her task was completed, and a few days later she died in the arms of her son.

Augustine then went to live the life of a hermit like so many of his time. Later he was called to be a bishop in Hippo Regius.<sup>1</sup> There he stayed until his death. It was there that he wrote his book and fought the heresies of Pelagius. He died in the year 430, while the city was besieged by the fierce Vandals.

### ***The struggle of Augustine against Pelagius***

The great significance of Augustine was in his struggle against the heresy of Pelagius. The Lord used him for this. Pelagius was a British monk who had worked in Rome since the year 400. This heretic taught that man is not totally depraved, and that people could work their own salvation through their free will. Actually, this is an old heathen thought which keeps coming back, posing a threat to the Church.

If man could earn his own salvation, then Christ's sacrifice would not have been necessary. Augustine showed that the Scriptures speak about man in an entirely different manner. Man is completely corrupt from his birth. Over against this he puts God's grace which he had experienced in his own life. Our deliverance does not depend on us, but on God. He has elected us to be his children. We ourselves have done nothing towards this. God is sovereign. That is why we speak of God's sovereign grace. That is the heart of the message of God's Word.

---

1. *The ancient name of the modern city of Annaba, Algeria.*

From Rome, Pelagius travelled to North Africa to propagate his heresy. He found Augustine to be his greatest and fiercest opponent. But actually the struggle was not between Augustine and Pelagius, but between Christ and Satan. He used his child Augustine to carry out this offensive and keep the Church close to the pure Word of God. In 431, the teachings of Pelagius were condemned.

### ***The significance of Augustine today***

The teachings of Pelagius were condemned. That does not mean that Satan remained idle. Despite this condemnation by the Church, the Roman Catholic Church of the Middle Ages continued to adhere to a sort of semi (half) Pelagianism. Man could not be saved through his own free will alone, but he could do something, it was taught. In the Reformation of the 16th century, both Luther and Calvin returned to the doctrine of 'free grace', which Augustine had also taught, according to the Scriptures (Belgic Confession of Faith Articles 14 and 15).

Years later the Remonstrants again dug up the old heresy of Pelagius. At the well-known Synod of Dort in 1618-1619, this doctrine was once again sharply condemned in line with Augustine's teachings. This Synod spoke of people digging up the Pelagian heresy out of hell. In essence, we have the same struggle today. Either we surrender ourselves to God's sovereign grace, or we want to save ourselves. Let us never forget Augustine's struggle in which he was an instrument in God's hand.

### ***Questions:***

***Answers to these questions may be found in the outline.***

1. When did Augustine live?
2. What was the heresy of Arius?
3. What do you know about the rise of the papacy, and monastic life?

4. What part did Monica play in the life of Augustine?
5. Describe the conversion of Augustine.
6. What did Pelagius teach? What was Augustine's teaching over against this?
7. What is the importance of Augustine?

***Questions to think about. You may enlist the help of family members.***

8. What is wrong with the ideal of living in a monastery?
9. What must we understand by 'grace'? What is sovereign grace?
10. Look up Canons of Dort, Chapter 2 of the Rejection of Errors, Articles 3 and 6. What does it say about the teachings of Pelagius?
11. Is there any connection between Article 9 of the Belgic Confession of Faith and the heresy of Arius?

***A question which may be discussed in groups.***

12. What is your opinion of the remark of Ambrose: "A son of so many prayers cannot be lost?" Does this mean that God always acts according to the multitude of prayers? Are there such things as unanswered prayers?

# CHAPTER 7

## **The Church under the yoke of a hierarchy**

### ***Satan's attacks continue***

Revelations 12 describes the attack of the great red dragon who tries to devour the Child first of all. When he does not succeed in this, he directs his attacks against the woman, that is, the Church.

Church History is one long account of the struggle of the devil against the Church. But it is also a song of praise about the faithfulness of God who continually brings the Church back to the pure Word of God.

Sometimes it seems as if the devil is victorious. Then apostasy has set in and has spread. It seems as if the Lord has left his people. They can become unfaithful and fall into terrible sins, but the King never abandons his people. Church History is full of evidence of this fact.

### ***The gap between office bearers and believers increases***

Slowly but surely a terrible heresy crept into the Church. The clergy started to put themselves above the common believers, the laity, and this gap widened. When such a separation is brought about, the basis for a hierarchy is laid down. 'Hierarchy' means the dominance of the clergy.

In outline 2 we looked at the offices of the first Christian congregations in detail. We then observed that you can recognize a Church by its three offices: those of the ministry of God's Word, the elders and the deacons.

Those who fill these offices in the Church are instruments in the hand of King Christ to rule his Church and keep it close to his

Word. In fact, they are the servants and the mouth of Christ (see 2 Corinthians 5:20, 21).

Time and again it proves to be difficult for the office bearers to *serve*. To dominate is much more attractive. Very early in the history of the Church, there was already a small group of office-bearers which started to exercise dominion over the congregation. They acted as if they knew more than the other church members. In doing this they put themselves between Christ and his congregation. In essence they denied that Christ wanted to use them as instruments, as unprofitable servants.

### ***The beginning of a hierarchy***

How did this happen? You can try to imagine it in this way: In the beginning the apostles worked alongside the elders and the deacons. The elders were also called presbyters. Already in the second century, the government of the Church came into the hands of just one of those presbyters, who was then called a bishop. He was regarded as a sort of successor of the deceased apostles. It was acknowledged that he received the power and the guidance of the Holy Ghost in the same way that the apostles had. The deacons increasingly became helpers of the bishop. A deacon was also called the ‘ear, mouth, heart and soul’ of the bishop.

How did matters develop further? Once a distinction was made between more and less important offices, the hierarchy became more complicated. Who, now, would be the most important bishop? Soon it became the bishop of a large city in a given district. When a Church meeting had to be held, it took place in the largest regional city and the bishop of this metropolis, that is chief city, chaired the meeting. Of course, this bishop had to be given another title. He was therefore called the archbishop or metropolitan bishop.

### ***From archbishop to pope***

This was not the end. By now there were several groups in the Church: the ordinary members, or laity. Above them were the

elders (or presbyters) and the deacons. Then came the bishops, who themselves were under the archbishops. And further? You can probably guess who were above the archbishops: they were the archbishops of world famous cities, who became known as patriarchs. Of course Rome was one of those important cities. Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem were also included.

### *The pope of Rome*

One more question needs to be answered. It is this one: “Why did the patriarch of Rome finally become the pope”?

Many reasons can be given. 1. Rome was the capital of the powerful Roman Empire. 2. The church in Rome was large and consisted of a great variety of nationalities due to the colourful mixture of the population of this capital city. 3. The Church of Rome was very rich. Many needy churches were supported by it. 4. The Church of Rome had been in the forefront of the struggle for the purity of the doctrine. The ‘Apostles Creed’ and the Canon of the New Testament were compiled here. 5. Paul, the great apostle of the heathens, had worked here. 6. It was said that Peter was the first bishop of Rome. He was the rock upon whom the Lord would build his Church. Many legends about Peter circulated among among the churches.

### *The first popes*

The last point in particular, served to raise the patriarch of Rome to the position of pope. It is remarkable that the power of the pope increased in the time of the decline of the emperors. It seemed as if the pope of Rome took on the power and might of the emperor of Rome. This was the result in particular of the actions of Leo the Great (440-461) who was the first pope.

This pope mainly referred to Matthew 16:18 to confirm his position. He was of the opinion that this text did not apply to the confession of Peter, but to Peter personally. Whatever applied to Peter, was also true of his successors. In actual fact this Leo the Great was the founder of the Roman Catholic Church.



*Pope Leo the Great (c540–604) meeting Atilla the Hun, in the Apostolic Palace, Vatican, a fresco by Raphael (1483–1520) in 1514.*

After Leo 1, several bishops occupied the papal seat. The most important one of that time was Gregory the Great. He was pope from 590 to 604. He ensured that popes could exercise a vast amount of power over the lives of Church members in the Middle Ages. He initiated mission work among the rising nations of the time, including the Netherlands. Whereas Leo was the founder of the Catholic Church, Gregory the Great was the founder of the secular (worldly) power of the papacy.

### ***Christ dethroned by the hierarchy***

If a general issues an order, it is passed down to the ordinary soldier. It can be seen how great the power of one man can be in the military hierarchy of the army. Thus General Eisenhower had to make the decision of whether to invade Europe or not in the Second World War.

If hierarchy penetrates the Church, a similar thing happens. The commands of the pope are passed down to the ordinary people, the laity, who simply have to carry them out. You can understand that this makes it easier for Satan to poison the Church. If he has power over one man, he has power over all. This power of the pope is a mortally dangerous weapon in the hands of Satan.

Yet this is not all. The worst part about it is that in this way Christ the King is dethroned. The clear rules set out in God's Word are not kept. There, Christ is depicted as the King of the Church who rules by means of ministers, elders, and deacons who are his office bearers. Christ himself said 'for you have one teacher, and you are all brothers' (Matthew 23:8). He is also described as Head of the Church (Ephesians 4:15,16; 5:23).

Under the dominion of the popes the decaying process in the Church increased alarmingly. Gradually the reading and studying of God's Word by the laity was forbidden. The popish mass replaced the Lord's Supper. It was believed that the bread really changed into the body of Christ during Mass, and the wine truly became his blood. Therefore the one sacrifice of Christ was not sufficient, but he had to be sacrificed again every day.

Under the influence of the popes the adoration of Mary became more widespread. Mary is called a privileged woman in the Bible (see Luke 1). She was chosen to be the mother of the Lord Jesus. But the Roman Church made an idol of her. She was called the mother of



*Pope Gregory (c540–604) by Antonello da Messina (c1430–1479), Palazzo Abatellis in Palermo, Italy.*

God, the Queen of heaven, the mediatrix, and the intercessor with Christ. She is said to have been born without sin. Her ascension to heaven was even celebrated.

Under the leadership of the popes the worshipping of idols was introduced, as well as the adoration of the saints, going to confession, the doctrine of good works, the worship of relics, the avoidance of the world in living in a monastery, etc.

During the course of the centuries the power of the pope has increased. It often degenerated into pure tyranny. It was not uncommon to have a pope who was a drunkard or a murderer, or one who was much more suited to wearing a suit of armour than a bishop's attire.

However, we should not concentrate on the personalities of the various popes. The fact remains that the Church was imprisoned by the chains of hierarchy. The load of that dominion was a heavy one, much heavier than the yoke of Christ. For his yoke is easy, and his burden light.

He is the one and only Bishop, the Head of the Church, which he bought with his own blood.

### ***Questions:***

***Answers to these questions may be found in the outline.***

1. What can you say about Satan's role in the history of the Church? What about the Lord's role?
2. What marked the beginning of the hierarchy?
3. How did this continue to develop? Name the various positions, in ascending order, of this hierarchy.
4. Why did the patriarch of Rome become pope?
5. What do you know about Leo the Great and Gregory the Great?
6. Why can you say that Christ was dethroned by this hierarchy?

7. Give as many examples as possible of increasing apostasy and decay within the Church.

***Questions to think about.***

8. What does the Bible say about the position of office bearers in relation to Christ? See 2 Corinthians 5:20,21; Ephesians 4:15,16; Ephesians 5:23.
9. Why is hierarchy such a dangerous weapon in the hands of Satan?
10. Pope Leo justified his position by referring to Matt. 16:18. Why was he wrong in doing so?
11. What does Article 30 of the Belgic Confession of Faith say about Church government?

***A question which may be discussed in groups.***

12. Why would you reject the position of the pope and his power on the basis of Scripture?

# CHAPTER 8

## **Christ plants his Church in the Netherlands**

### *The low countries in the clutches of darkness*

When Paul saw the man from Macedonia signal “Come over and help us,” Europe was still completely under the dominion of the devil. He tried to prevent the coming of the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the utmost of his ability. This did not seem too difficult to do because only two men, Paul and Silas, came over. If the devil could remove these two men, Christianity would be choked at birth. Therefore it was not long before they were sitting in the dark depths of a prison with their feet in stocks.

Soon it became apparent just what was the force and power behind these two helpless men. Despite their raw backs, they sang psalms. God’s answer to this was an earthquake, and soon they were free. The jailer and his family came to faith and the journey of the Gospel through Europe began. Rome was the destination for the time being.

The Germanic tribes lived in the Low Countries at that time. ‘Germanic tribes’ was a term denoting various heathen tribes: the Batavians, Frisians, Saxons, etc. These Germans worshipped many gods. Wodan was their chief god, Donar was their god of thunder and lightning and Tius was the god of war. However, they had many other gods as well.

For many centuries these Germanic tribes were immersed in the terrifying darkness of heathendom. They had never heard of God the Father who had sent his beloved Son to deliver sinners and free them from the chains of sin. Their fear of the gods was apparent from their regular human sacrifices. It was a dark time in which the devil held

the people in his destructive grasp. But soon a power would become manifest which would prove to be stronger than that of the Satan and his demons.

### ***The advance of Christianity through the Romans***

Before the great upheavals caused by massive migration, that is, before 400 A.D., Christians came to the Low Countries together with the Roman legions. In several southern cities there were even bishops. A flourishing congregation was established in Maastricht around 350 A.D. under the leadership of Bishop Servatius. A beautiful church built there was named after him.

The first introduction to the gospel was only a fleeting one. Aroused by savage hordes of Huns from central Asia, various Germanic tribes migrated to another part of Europe. This was accompanied by many struggles and much destruction. Whatever had been done to build up churches in the south was soon shattered.

Yet a few Germanic tribes had already been reached by missionaries. Unfortunately they were not taught the pure Christian religion, but the heresy of Arius. This heresy had been rejected by the Church at the Council of Nicea. Just as well, for Arius taught that Jesus Christ was not the Son of God, but merely a superior human being. Arius, however, still had some followers in the north of the Roman Empire. When these Germanic tribes attacked the Roman Empire, they not only came into contact with other races, but with another religion as well. This often caused much tension and strife.

### ***The arrival of Christianity by means of the Frankish missionaries***

Following these massive migrations, the Netherlands were inhabited by the Frisians, the Franks and the Saxons. The Frisians lived in the northern and western coastal areas. They had not come into contact with Christianity before. The Franks populated the southern part of the Low Countries, down to what is now Belgium, and spread as far

as the north of France. In the east there were the Saxons whose area stretched beyond the borders of what is now Germany.

When missionaries came to the north from France around the year 600, they were not expecting a friendly welcome. The Frisians, in particular, did not at all relish the thought of becoming dominated by the Franks.

The best known Frankish missionaries were Amandus and Eligius. Amandus was of noble birth and was very rich. He did not use his riches to live a life of leisure, but he dedicated his money to the service of his King Christ. With his money he freed slaves whom he then instructed to become his helpers. Full of love and unending patience he proclaimed the good tidings to the Frisians. It was a source of great joy to him when, at the end of his life, several Frisians wanted to confess Christ as their LORD.

Eligius was not of noble birth, but he did occupy an important position: he was a goldsmith who was appointed to mint the coins for the whole Frankish kingdom. That was a confidential position. However, Eligius considered service to the gospel to be more important than fame and honour. Together with Amandus, and by himself after the latter's death, he preached among the "barbarians along the coasts".

### ***The arrival of Christianity by means of English missionaries***

At the end of the seventh and during the eighth century various missionaries came from England to the north of the Netherlands. It was, of course, the Lord Jesus who wanted to use these English missionaries to establish his Gospel there.

Two factors made their work easier: 1. The Frisians and Saxons did not have to fear that the English were paving the way for an invasion of their land, as had been the case with the Frisian missionaries. 2. Their languages were similar, particularly Frisian and English.



*Left: Amandus (584–679) and the serpent. 14th century manuscript.  
Above: Eligius (c588–659) in his goldsmith workshop. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.*

But we will now first go back in history and learn how the English had first heard the gospel.

### ***How England came into contact with the gospel***

Patrick (a Celt) had brought the gospel to the Scots living in Ireland, and a flourishing church originated. Church leadership rested with the many monasteries which sprang up like mushrooms.

The new English Christians did not want to have anything to do with the pope, although they did have bishops. It was noteworthy that the Irish monks displayed a previously unknown zeal for mission work. Throughout the whole of Europe, and also in England, they proclaimed the good news.

Of course Satan did not stand by idly. He made use of heathen tribes. When these endangered the work of the Irish missionaries, Pope Gregory the Great sent forty missionaries under the leadership of a certain Augustine (not the well-known Church Father) to England. They were ordered to adapt themselves to the ancient religious

customs by giving them a new meaning and filling them with a new Christian content.

Pope Gregory literally wrote: “There must be no question of destroying the temples of these people, but only of the idols they contain. Then holy water must be prepared and sprinkled over these sanctuaries. Altars must be built as well, and relics placed there. The temples must be changed from a place where a demonic cult is practiced to a place for the service of the true God. When the people see for themselves that their temples are not destroyed they can heartily put aside all that is wrong and false, acknowledge and worship the true God, and, as was their usual custom, come together in their familiar worship place.”

This lengthy quotation is noteworthy, for the Roman Catholic Church still carries out its mission work in this way.

The work of those forty missionaries resulted in the establishing of a church in England which fervently worshipped the pope and was possessed of the Irish urge to carry out missionary work. We need to know this background in order to understand the work of two great English missionaries, Willibrord and Boniface.

### ***The work of the missionary Willibrord***

In 690 the monk Willibrord landed in Friesland with eleven helpers. He sailed his ship up the Rhine to a place called Utrecht. The infamous Radboud I ruled here and refused Willibrord permission to land, so he journeyed southwards. Consequently he could not work among the Frisians until 700.

Later on, he worked intensively among the Frisians in North Holland and in Walcheren. When he died in 739 in a monastery established by him, many Frisians had come to faith because of his work. In Heilo (North Holland) there is still a small church and a well in remembrance of him.



*Left: Statue of Saint Willibrord behind the “St. Willibrord Basilika”, Echternach, Luxembourg. Above: Boniface on a postage stamp 1964.*

### ***The work of the missionary Boniface***

One of Willibrord’s fellow workers was Boniface, who was younger than him and continued his work. This work was of decisive importance not only to the Netherlands, but also to the North of Germany. In 716, Boniface arrived at Wijk by Duurstede, and started work among the Frisians there. In 719, he was consecrated by the pope to be a ‘missionary of Peter’. From then on, Boniface occupied himself with organising the Roman Church, requiring the people to give unconditional obedience to the pope.

For over thirty years he worked among the Germans, so he was known as the ‘apostle of Germany’. Congregations were established in many places, and bishops were appointed. Many monasteries were established. When in 754, at the age of 74, Boniface visited Friesland for the third time, he was attacked by a mob of armed heathens near Dokkum and was killed.

## *Christ plants his church in the Netherlands*

We have till now discussed various missionaries and their work. We must be aware of the fact that they were no more than instruments in the hands of the King of the Church, Jesus Christ, to bring the joyful and saving Gospel to the Netherlands. To Him be all the glory.

When the Lord Jesus Christ ordered mission work to be carried out, he said, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.” (Matthew 28).

When we compare the work of the Frankish and English missionaries to the truths of God’s Word, we do not find they have much in common. They adapted themselves to a far too great an extent to all sorts of ancient heathen customs. At the same time, the power of the pope increased, also as a result of their work. In the previous outlines, we considered the dangers of having a hierarchy. This was accompanied by the adoration of Mary, relics, idolatry, etc. The conclusion is therefore that the preaching of the missionaries did not conform to the mission command as found in the Bible.

Yet we must bear in mind that the Roman Church was the Church of Christ at that time. The work of Jesus Christ in gathering his Church went via the Christian (Roman) Church of those centuries. Therefore the account of Willibrord and Boniface is actually our Church History, even though the Roman Catholics have erected all sorts of places of pilgrimage in remembrance of them.

Today, therefore, we may still thank the Lord for what he wished to perform among those people (who may be our forefathers) by means of these missionaries. Through their work he planted his Church in the Netherlands. For this we may eternally thank and praise Him.

## ***Questions:***

***Answers to these questions may be found in the outline.***

1. Describe the situation in the Netherlands before the arrival of missionaries.
2. How did the Romans promote the advance of Christianity?
3. What can you tell about the work of the Frankish missionaries?
4. What made the work of the English missionaries much easier?
5. How did England come in contact with Christianity?
6. What do you know about the work of Willibrord?
7. What can you tell about the missionary, Boniface?

## ***Questions to think about.***

8. What do you know about the method Pope Gregory recommended for carrying out mission work? Do you agree with this method?
9. What must you understand by 'the church gathering work of Christ'?
10. Explain why the story of the Roman Catholic missionaries, Willibrord and Boniface, is also Church History?
11. Why should all attention be focused on the Sender, Christ, and not on the missionaries?

***A question which may be discussed in groups.***

12. Can you detect a return to heathendom in our days? Give examples of this. When this happens, is there not the danger that we will be dragged along in this process? How can we arm ourselves against this? Is mission work in foreign countries still necessary then? After all, heathens are now the people next door.

# CHAPTER 9

## Islam

### *Satan launches his attacks on the church of Arabia*

During the fifth century, the powerful Roman Empire stretched out in a westerly direction, as well as towards the east. In the west, it was attacked by the Germanic tribes who captured Rome in 476. That was the end of the Western Roman Empire. The Eastern Roman Empire, however, continued to exist. North Africa, Egypt, Palestine and Syria belonged to it. It was still a powerful empire, but not a very close-knit one. There was much division through riots and internal strife.

The state of the Christian Church in this part of the Empire was not too good, and things soon went from bad to worse. It started with idol worship, and once relics and saints were worshipped as well little remained of the faith in Jesus Christ. The old pagan worship took over and gradually choked the Christian Church. The Lord punished this disobedience. He took the candlestick away from this part of the world. The light of God's Word gave way to the dark night of heathendom (Revelation 2:2-7).

Also in Arabic territory the Church deteriorated rapidly. The apostle Paul had even preached here. In Galatians 1:17 he wrote, "...but I went away into Arabia, and returned again to Damascus." The Arabs of those days were famous for their large scale trading activities. Particularly well-known is their use of camel caravans. Traveling and trading Arabs would certainly have come in contact with the Gospel. Many Christian churches were established. However, they did not last long. The people left their first love and chose to serve idols instead of the living God. The judgment was not long in coming. Satan obtained a firm footing in this once so blessed Arabia. From

Arabia he planned his attack on the faithful congregations. His instrument was Mohammed.

### ***Allah is God, and Mohammed is his prophet***

Mohammed was born in 570 of influential, but poor, parents. He became an orphan at six years of age. His grandfather raised him. As a boy he looked after the sheep and camels belonging to his uncle. When he grew up he was the leader of large trading caravans. On these trips he travelled to many countries such as Egypt, Israel, Syria and Persia. On these occasions he came in contact with Jews, Christians and heathens.

He rejected heathenism. Unfortunately, he came in contact with Christianity at its worst. He did not for a moment consider becoming a Christian. Nor was the Jewish religion attractive to him as an Arab. However, later on, he borrowed his religious thoughts from the Jewish as well as from the Christian religion, and from heathendom.

When he was about forty years old he received, according to him, a vision in which a heavenly character appeared to him. He was told that God had called him to be a prophet of his people. His story was not well received in Mecca. The people considered him to be suffering from too much imagination. Therefore he fled to Medina in 622. The Mohammedans count this year as the year zero when working out their dates.

Everyone who did not believe in Mohammed's calling by the angel Gabriel would be sorry. Mohammed set out from Medina to fight his holy war: the sword would have to decide. In this way, Islam (Mohammed's religion) not only became a religion, but also a world power. Mohammed made it his task to institute a world empire. Allah would be its god with Mohammed as his prophet.

### ***The holy stone***

In 630, Mohammed captured Mecca, after which this became the holy city of the Mohammedans. There is also a temple there, the



*The Ka'ba in Mecca.*

Holy Ka'ba, and the holiest part of the Ka'ba is the black stone. It is embedded in the temple wall, not much above ground level. Pilgrims have to circle the Ka'ba five times, and each time they must kneel down to kiss the stone.

The story about the Ka'ba is typical of the Islamic religion. The Arabs say that after the fall into sin, Adam and Eve were driven out of paradise so forcefully, that they became separated. After a thousand years they found each other again at the spot where Mecca now stands. At the same spot where Adam prayed to Allah every day, Seth built a temple which was destroyed by the flood. Abraham and Ishmael (the founder of the Arabs) built a new sanctuary on this same spot and from the same stones. This is the present Ka'ba.

The holy stone, they say, had been given to Abraham by Allah. At that time it was pure white. It had originally been an unfaithful angel who had been turned into a stone by Allah. This angel was supposed to have guarded paradise so that Satan could not enter. How had this white stone turned black? From the many sins of the people! When over the years the Arabs fell to worshipping idols, they had filled the Ka'ba with images. Mohammed now crushed all the idols into thousands of pieces and converted the Ka'ba into an Islamic temple.

This story illustrates Mohammed's imagination. He borrowed stories here and there from the Bible, but this cannot be said to be God's Word. After Mohammed's death in 632, his stories and so-called revelations from the angel Gabriel were recorded in the Qur'an (Koran). To this day this is the holy book of the Mohammedans.

### ***Short review of the doctrine of Mohammed***

We have already seen that Islam is a mixture of Jewish, Christian and heathen elements. Mohammed took over the worship of Allah from the Arabians, as well as the adoration of the Ka'ba. From the Christians he derived the faith in one god only.

The Islamic religion knows many prophets, twenty eight in all. For example, one of them is Alexander the Great. Six of these twenty eight are great prophets: Adam, God's elect; Noah, God's preacher; Abraham, the friend of God; Moses, the lawgiver; Jesus, the Messiah; and Mohammed, God's apostle.

The Islamic law knows five duties, which are called the five pillars. This is an apt way of describing that the duties of the Islamic law are the foundation of Mohammedanism.

The first pillar: The Islamic religion has the shortest confession of faith in the world. It is: "There is no god but Allah, and Mohammed is his prophet." This is the chief pillar of the Islamic religion on which everything rests. Whoever confesses this with the mouth and believes it, is a Muslim. Every prayer must contain this confession. This is the first pillar.

The second pillar: Prayer. Every day people in every Muslim city and village are called up to pray five times a day. You cannot really compare these prayers with our prayers. It consists of prescribed movements accompanied by the uttering of a number of fixed formulas. The movements consist of bowing and kneeling all done facing Mecca. They express subjection to Allah. Islam actually means subjection to Allah.

The third pillar: Fasting. The Muslim must fast one month a year from sunrise to sunset. During the day he is not allowed to eat,

drink or smoke. This is a difficult task, especially if the person has to work hard. After sunset, and early in the morning, a person may eat as much as he likes. In many Muslim countries there is a 'carnival atmosphere' during the evenings of such a month. The real aim of the fasting is to exercise obedience to Allah; it is also a means of repentance.

The fourth pillar: Pilgrimage to Mecca. Once in his lifetime, every adult Muslim male or female must make a pilgrimage to Mecca; that is, if he can afford the trip and is in good health. A pilgrim wears special clothing: two white lengths of cloth, head uncovered and sandals on his feet. Once in Mecca, he has to walk around the Ka'ba and its holy black stone several times. He has to carry out several more prescribed actions, and then ends by offering his sacrificial animal and shaving his head. The actual pilgrimage is then finished.

The fifth pillar: Almsgiving. The last compulsory task is the giving of alms. It is a relatively heavy tax of about 10%. It is money destined for the poor, the slaves, the fighters for Allah, etc.

If a Muslim faithfully fulfils these five tasks plus a number of other obligations, he is assured of a place in the eternal paradise. Note how he can earn his own salvation!

### *The holy war*

Islam is not a demanding religion. Chapter 4 of the Koran states: "Allah does not want to ask much of you, for he knows that human beings are weak. If you abstain from the offensive things which we have specifically forbidden you, we will cover up your wrongs, and ensure free access to paradise for you."

However, every Muslim is called up to join in the Holy War. A Muslim who dies with the sword in his hand will go directly to paradise. God has determined the fate of every person. This thought explains the incredible contempt for death displayed by them in their holy wars. "If Allah has decided that I shall die, I cannot change that in any way," a Muslim will argue. Moreover, it is an honour to die for Allah, and besides, they are well rewarded for it too.

## *The spread of Islam*

After the death of Mohammed in 632, Islam spread rapidly by means of the Holy War. For centuries, the Turks were a threat to Western Europe. In 732, the Muslims were finally defeated near Poitiers in Southern France by Charles Matel and were forced to remain on the southern side of the Pyrenees. Later they were completely driven out of Western Europe. In Spain there are still many remains of the Islamic religion.

Islam met less resistance towards the South and East. Jerusalem was captured and Islam penetrated Persia and Egypt. It even reached Pakistan where there are now more than 60 million followers.<sup>2</sup> Indonesia also has a great number of Mohammedans.

Today, Islam is among the four biggest religions of the world, with more than 350 million followers.<sup>3</sup> Through the introduction of foreign workers, the number of Muslims in the Netherlands is increasing.<sup>4</sup> It is therefore good to know something about this religion.

The power of the Muslims reaches all over the world because they possess a great deal of the world's sources of oil. The closing of the oil taps would spell disaster for the Western world.

## *Our attitude towards Islam*

The Lord Jesus said, "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life." This is rejected by the Muslims. Jesus is regarded as an important prophet, but to the Mohammedans he is not the Redeemer. Therefore there is only one possibility open to us, one task for us: mission work among the Muslims. They should not kneel before Allah or Mohammed, but before the cross of Jesus Christ, the only LORD.

There are people today who call themselves Christians but who do not find this mission work at all necessary. They argue that the

---

2. Over 200 million in 2019.

3. In 2018 this figure was over 1.5 billion.

4. 880,000 in 2018. In Australia there are Muslim descendants of the old-time camel drivers, as well as among the newer immigrants.

Mohammedans possess a part of the Bible and that Islam is one of the four religions working repentance so we should have a discussion (a dialogue) with them, as equals. This shows how much Christianity has deteriorated nowadays. It is ashamed of the Gospel of the cross.

Mohammed was a false prophet and Islam is a means by which Satan gathers his prey. This is a reality. Therefore the bringing of the Good News to the Muslims is, and remains, a calling to us.

### ***Questions:***

#### ***Answers to be found in the outline.***

1. What happened to the Christian Church in the Western Roman Empire?
2. Briefly, retell the life history of Mohammed.
3. What do you know about the holy stone?
4. Name the five pillars of Islam. Why are they called pillars?
5. Give some details about each of these pillars.
6. What is the holy war?
7. What do you know about the spread of Islam?
8. What must be our attitude towards Islam?

#### ***Questions to think about.***

9. Explain that 'when adoring saints and relics, little is left of faith in Christ'.
10. What can we learn from the fact that things usually go from bad to worse in the Church? Does this also apply to people individually?
11. What does it mean that he has taken the candlestick away? From which Bible book is this expression taken? Can this happen to us?

12. Can you mention examples from Scripture of attacks by Satan on the church of Christ?
13. Can you compare Christ with Mohammed? Elaborate on your answer.
14. What do we mean when we say that Islam is a legalistic religion (that is, a religion of following laws)?
15. Why are Muslims not afraid of dying in a holy war?

***Questions which may be discussed in groups.***

16. Mohammed did not have a favourable impression of the Christians of his day. Do you think setting an example of Christian living is important in connection with the spreading of the gospel? Do you think the example of Christian living alone is sufficient? Do you know a situation in which the example of Christian living played a role?
17. What would be a great difficulty for a Muslim who is converted to Christ?
18. What would you say to a fellow Christian whose opinion is that mission work and evangelism among Muslims is not at all necessary because, "They also believe in God. We should also see what we can learn from them. We must not act as if we alone have the truth. That is a proud sort of attitude."?

# CHAPTER 10

## The Crusades

### *Why we deal with the crusades*

It would not be strange if you were to ask, “Why do we need a whole outline dealing with the Crusades? Why should we pay that much attention to the Roman Catholic Church? After all, we are Reformed people.”

However, we must not forget that the Roman church was the Church of Jesus Christ right up to the time of the Reformation. In those times, the Lord gathered his congregation in the Church of which pope was in charge. It is true that the situation in the Church was not good. It was a Church in deformation, yet it was the Church of Jesus Christ. Therefore the Church History of those days is also the history of our church. Despite the sins of the Church, Christ continued with his Church-gathering work.

### *The rise of pilgrimages to Palestine*

We do not go on pilgrimages, and that is just as well. In John 4:20-23 the Lord Jesus says that we no longer have to go to Jerusalem to pray. But these words of the Lord have not always been obeyed.

While discussing Islam, we learnt that one of the duties of a Muslim was to go on a pilgrimage to Mecca. It was believed that prayer in Mecca had more value than a prayer said at home.

In the Christian Church, pilgrimages to Jerusalem arose during the reign of Constantine the Great. His mother, Helena, had the so-called ‘cross of Christ’ dug up. The ‘nails’ too, had been recovered. She was the first to go on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. Since then Palestine has been called the “Holy Land”. The error of going on pilgrimages



*The Siege of Acre. The Hospitaller Master Mathieu de Clermont defending the walls in 1291. By Dominique Papety (1815–1849), Chateau de Versailles, France.*

gained a permanent place in church life from that time on. Going on a pilgrimage was even regarded as a good work, and could count as part of earning our salvation. People forgot that we must live from grace. Our good works must arise out of thankfulness for our salvation through Jesus Christ. Our good works do not give us a single right, nor any privileges.

### ***How problems arose in Palestine***

As long as the Arabian Muslims ruled Palestine, going on a pilgrimage was hardly a problem. The powerful Charles the Great had made sure that the Muslims left the pilgrims in peace.

Difficulties arose when a Turkish tribe conquered Palestine. These Turks troubled the pilgrims in every possible way, especially when, around the year 1000, the pilgrimages increased considerably in number and magnitude. The reason for this was that many considered

that the world would come to an end in the year 1000 A.D. These people wanted to be in Jerusalem on Judgment Day.

However, nothing special happened in the year 1000. The only difference was the increased pressure exerted by the Turks. They robbed, persecuted, and even killed Christians.

The pilgrims who succeeded in returning to their own country unharmed, talked about the dangers of their trip and the persecutions of the Turks. Thus it became generally known in Europe that things were not so holy in the “Holy Land”. You were lucky to escape death or injury there.

### ***The first crusade***

One man who witnessed the tortures and persecutions to which Christians were subjected in Palestine was Peter the Hermit from Amiens. He carried letters with him from the leader of the Church in Jerusalem addressed to the pope and the nobles in Europe. The letters contained descriptions of the circumstances in Jerusalem as well as requests for help and support. But that was not all. Peter the Hermit told the crowds (who readily believed him) that the Lord Jesus had appeared to him commanding him to rid the Holy Land of ‘unbelievers’.

Peter the Hermit went to Pope Urban with his letters and stories. The pope then took on the leadership of the campaign. From Rome, the Church would be called up to take part in a journey to the land of the cross. This cross had to conquer the unbeliever found there. The battle cry of the movement became “God wills it”.

Because of their enthusiasm, the pope and Peter the Hermit managed to convince thousands of the need for a crusade.

### ***The plans for the first crusade***

Pope Urban took some measures which made it attractive for believers to take part, namely: 1. All who took part received absolution from sin. All who died in the struggle against the Turks

would be assured of eternal life for themselves. 2. Whoever was to steal anything from those who were journeying to Jerusalem would be ex-communicated until he had repaid in full. 3. Serfs would be freed from their masters, the knights, on their return.

Peter the Hermit travelled through the whole of Europe proclaiming the slogan “God wills it”. Everywhere, in Italy, France, and Germany, he managed to make people enthusiastic for a crusade. In 1095 a church meeting was held in Clermont in France and more than 400 of the clergy were present. They had been forced to attend by Pope Urban. By means of a fiery sermon in which “God wills it” was often repeated, he charged the clergy to do everything possible to make the crusade a success. They had to urge princes and nobles to take part and set a good example.

Many thousands of people answered the call. From some red material they made a cross which they fastened to their sleeves. Thus the pilgrims could easily be recognised. Pope Urban himself did not take part, but the Archbishop of France went in his stead. Godfrey of Bouillon would lead the army.

### *The crusade of the unorganised*

For many people the time of preparation was too long. They decided to leave immediately. In March 1096, the first procession departed under the leadership of Peter the Hermit. They were poorly organised, poorly equipped, there were many disreputable people among their ranks, they had no money and not enough provisions for on the way. This was not considered necessary for nothing, they felt, could go wrong under the leadership of such a holy man. However, on the long journey many died of diseases, hunger, exhaustion or in battles.

Not long after this, another group left under the leadership of a knight. As an army it was a good group, but it had little else to commend it. After much robbing and fighting it reached Constantinople. There the group joined up with the remains of the group led by Peter the Hermit. Even before they reached Palestine,



*Godfrey de Bouillon. Hofkirche, Innsbruck, Austria.*

the Turks attacked them. More than 40,000 dead were left behind on the battlefield.

Yet another group had left early, under the leadership of Bishop Gottschalk, from the Rhine district. Almost all of the eighteen thousand participants died.

Finally, there was the army of the goose and the goat. It was so named because a goat and a goose were carried at the head of the procession. The people were convinced that the Spirit of God had taken possession of these animals. This group was made up of people of the worst sort. The ‘pilgrims’ left a trail of destruction and plundering behind them. Nearly all of these “pilgrims” were also killed on the way.

## ***The first crusade of 1096***

In August 1096 the large army of Godfrey de Bouillon was finally ready to leave. It was an endless procession: 10,000 knights, 80,000 foot soldiers, all accompanied by a large multitude of servants, monks, clergymen, and even women and children.

Discipline was good: there was no looting or plundering on the way. As it travelled on, the army gradually grew in size. When it crossed over into Asia in May 1097, it consisted of 300,000 foot soldiers

and was by now accompanied by 200,00 people who were pilgrims, clergymen, women or children.

After much hardship and struggle, Jerusalem was finally taken in July 1098. A horrible massacre followed. The streets and houses of the “Holy City” were piled with 40,000 dead bodies, including women and children. The people wanted to crown Godfrey of Bouillon as king, but he refused this. He did not want to be crowned king in the place where Christ had worn a crown of thorns. He wanted rather to be called “Protector of the Holy Sepulchre”.

After this crusade it was necessary to keep organising more of them, because the Turks managed to recapture the land every time again.

### *The significance of the crusades*

There were positive as well as negative sides to the crusades. To sum up we can say:

1. The Church became further entangled in false doctrines. (a) It was considered that prayer in Jerusalem was more powerful than prayer elsewhere. We have already seen the foolishness of this thought. (b) The Lord does not want the Church to turn to the sword in order to achieve her aim. The only means the Church may use is God’s Word and the Spirit. (c) The Lord does not want the Church to deceive people into thinking that their sins are forgiven because they are taking part in a certain campaign.
2. The Church became progressively richer and more powerful. The nobles of those times possessed much land, but little money, and so they borrowed this from churches and monasteries which had plenty. Through this, the church gained more and more worldly power.
3. Although many people took part in the crusades for the wrong motives, there were also many people who went in faith. A great number of people did not go because they felt the need to free Jerusalem, but because they wanted to satisfy their lust for adventure, or to become rich, or to be free from their masters. However, the majority of people, deceived as they were by the

Church leaders, were only concerned about setting free the land of Jesus.

4. In the Middle Ages, people hardly saw Jesus as the perfect man. He was seen as a very strict King, who sat on his throne, far away. Mary, as mediatrix, had to plead with Him for the people. As a result of the crusades, the people came to see Jesus more in his human nature. After all, He was equal to us in all things, sin excepted. As a result of the crusades, there arose a striving to copy Jesus as man. People wanted to live as perfectly as Christ had done. In this way, they could earn part of their salvation. This idea is, of course, typically Roman Catholic.
5. Finally, the crusades were of enormous importance to trade, and the arts. A completely new world, the world of the Orient, was discovered.

### ***Judging the crusades***

In short, our opinion of the crusades, on the basis of God's Word, is this: despite all the good intentions, the crusades were a result of terrible heresies. We have mentioned some of them. "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit," said the Lord (Zechariah 4:6). Further, we see how terrible the results can be if people depart from God's ways: ten thousand were killed for a cause which was not pleasing to God (Matthew 26:52).

Finally, we who live in this century may be filled with thankfulness for the reformation the Lord has given to us. To this we add the petition that the King of the Church may keep us from following heresies.

### ***Questions:***

***Answers to these questions may be found in the outline.***

1. Why do we discuss the crusades as part of our Church History?
2. What is the origin of the pilgrimages to Palestine?
3. How must we view the pilgrimages in the light of Scripture?

4. How did problems arise in Palestine?
5. What gave rise to the first crusade?
6. What are the Scriptural objections against the crusades?

***Questions to think about.***

7. Can you give another name to a church which is in deformation? How can such a church once again become reformed? What do you know about churches today which are in deformation?
8. Do you know of any heresies which attract thousands of followers, yet which expect people to sacrifice a great deal?
9. How must we judge Peter the Hermit's slogan: "God wills it"? Can you describe a situation in which it could be used correctly?
10. What do you think of the expression, 'the Holy Land'? Give reasons.
11. Give an example from God's Word where the victory is obtained through the Spirit and not by means of the sword.

***A question which may be discussed in groups.***

12. In the outline we are confronted by the question of whether we may use violence in the name of Christ. What is your opinion? Can you think of any situation in which the Church takes up weapons or uses violent means? To what extent must we be governed by Christ's word: "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit" (Zechariah 4:6).

# CHAPTER 11

## **The Church of the Late Middle Ages**

### *The downward trend within the Church*

When the Church of Christ departs from the Word of God, things always go wrong. Then the Church undergoes a deformation. That means: the Church becomes deformed or malformed. She no longer directs people to Christ, but separates them from Him. The Church then no longer cares for her people like a mother. The people are no longer safe and protected there. Real peace can be found there only with great difficulty.

Whoever departs from the Word of God, tampers with it, touches God Himself... a terrible situation. Therefore there has always been struggle in the history of the Church. When erring leaders want to rule over the Word of God then God ensures that there are true children of his who stand up for his Name and his honour and his majesty. God uses them to lead his Church to a reformation.

The Middle Ages reveal a picture of an increasingly deformed Church. By the Middle Ages we mean the period of time between the years 500 and 1500. The church became less and less a church of Christ. There was an alarming downward trend.

### *The pope instead of Christ*

We see the continually growing power of the pope of Rome. Everyone had to obey him, both laymen and clergy. The high-ranking clergymen even had to swear a special oath of loyalty to the pope. He had the right to appoint bishops too and to remove them from office. He had the right to levy taxes by all sorts of means.

This developed to the stage where the pope not only considered himself to be the supreme ruler of the Church, but also the supreme ruler of political affairs. A great deal of influence was exerted through the confessor of the king or nobleman. Naturally, the pope and the emperor were rivals. Yet for a long period of time the pope proved to be the stronger.

The worst aspect of the pope and his clergy was that he placed himself between Christ and his Church. The pope made the church people dependent on him and not on Christ in the first place. Of course, we could name many more errors, some worse than others. Together they add up to the fact that the Word of God no longer had complete authority. At a later date it would reach the stage where the people who did want to listen to that Word, would be pushed out of the Church. When this stage was reached in the Church of Christ, everything was completely wrong. Then the Church had become a false Church, because she persecuted the faithful children of God.

### ***The deformed Church of Christ.***

The Church of the late Middle Ages had not yet reached this stage. The Church was still the Church of Christ, but it was a deformed Church which more and more kept the Word of God closed. It was a deformed Church, in which the only sacrifice of our Saviour on the cross was not considered sufficient. This is shown in the following points:

- He was sacrificed every day again in the celebration of the Mass.
- Mary was worshipped and adored as the Mediatrix.
- The believers tried to earn their salvation by doing good works.
- All sorts of ‘saints’ were called on, and ‘holy’ articles (relics) were worshipped.
- The remission of sins could be obtained by the buying of indulgences.

We therefore repeat: little was left of the pure preaching of the Word of God. In the late Middle Ages the Church went downhill rapidly, but the Lord never left his people. Before we deal with the

reformation, we would like to discuss an important figure in the Roman Church.

### ***Bernard of Clairvaux***

The fact that Bernard was an important man appears from the words Luther once spoke about him: “If ever there was a true God- fearing pious man, it would have been the saint Bernard for whom I have infinitely more respect than all the monks and priests on earth. Indeed, I have never heard or read of anyone to equal him”.

Bernard was a knight born in Burgundy, France in 1091. His pious mother had destined him for a monastic life, because she knew he would not be able to cope with the rough life of a knight. When his mother died, he chose for a worldly life after all, and was knighted.

At 22 years of age, he repented, and chose the harsh life of a monk. At a very young age, he was only 24 then, he became the abbot of the monastery. The life of a monk now became his ideal, the stricter the monastery, the better. He established his own monastery in a lonely and wild district in the south of France. It was given the name “Clairvaux” which means something like ‘clear valley’. Within half a century, the number of monasteries belonging to his order had risen to 700. The personal influence of Bernard in particular and his talent as a speaker when he managed to sweep his audience along with him, played an important role in the spreading of the ideal life in a monastery.

### ***The unscriptural basis of the ideal of monastic life.***

Of course, it does seem very pious when someone separates himself from all worldly goods and pleasures, and locks himself up in a monastery to pray and study in the silence of a cell. And that was not all. Often people would promise never to speak again, so that they would not sin with their mouth. Many people lived only on water, bread and some salt. Frequently they tortured themselves. They chastened their sinful bodies by means of a whipping. Bernard too, did this often. Is it not true then, that man is pulled away from God



*Saint Bernard mediates a dispute between Bishop Stephan von Bar and Duke Matthew von Lothringen in Metz. Metropolitan Museum, New York.*

by means of prosperity and worldly pleasures? Is it not true then, that one's body with its lusts and desires can often lead to sin? (see 1 John 2:12-17).

These are all Scriptural truths. But the ideal of monastic life is, in essence, a heathen one. Its basis is that there is a distinction between our normal earthly lives and our spiritual life. It is also called a distinction between nature and grace. Added to this is the thought that everyday life is less important, of a lower order, than spiritual life. If you want to live closer to God, you have to turn your back on normal, everyday life. All that reminds you of this earthly life must be forgotten.

God's Word does not teach us this. The Bible teaches us that our life is one. There is no distinction between our earthly and spiritual lives. The Lord wants us to serve Him in our spiritual, as well as in our

everyday lives. Life is a unity. The monks saw this in a completely wrong light. It is incorrect to say that a minister lives closer to God than a housewife. Both have to love the Lord, each in his own task and place.

There is another aspect of life in a monastery which is against God's Word: the monks thought that they could earn a part of their own salvation through doing good works, that is, by their own effort. They twisted the Word of God around. The Bible says that good works must follow from the forgiveness of sins. We can earn nothing at all; good works cannot obtain anything for us. They have to flow out of our thankfulness. Moreover, our good works must correspond to the demands of Scripture (see Heidelberg Catechism Lord's Day 31, Q & A 91).

### *The mysticism of Bernard of Clairvaux*

In the Roman Catholic Church the people believed that the Bible was actually an obscure book. It was considered absolutely essential that the clergy explained it. In effect, the Bible was closed by this reasoning. The Reformed Churches teach that the Bible is transparent and clear, if one reads with a believing heart and allows oneself to be led by the Holy Spirit. One must study it with prayer.

Yet in the Middle Ages we see symptoms appearing which show that that clear, pure Word of God was being despised. People started to try to come into contact with God outside of that Word. That is called mysticism. Those people close their eyes, so to speak, and search for God deep in their own heart.

You can understand that this striving to become one with God, apart from the Word, originated especially with the monks in their cells. In his teaching, Bernard of Clairvaux asked for particular attention for the suffering of Christ. For a long time people had regarded Jesus as a stern King who sat far away on his throne. They were afraid of Him. Now, however, by imitating Christ's suffering and sharing his poverty, people tried to come into closer contact with Him. Christ then becomes the Bridegroom, and one's soul is the bride.

## ***The significance of Bernard of Clairvaux***

In actual fact, Bernard did not help the Church of his days, but rather led it further away from the road to reformation. He did not fight the unscriptural ideal of monastic life. On the contrary, he ensured that this ideal became more firmly entrenched in the Church. He did not stir the people up to accept God's Word, but by means of his mysticism, he led the people of the Middle Ages further away from the Word.

He fought against the pope's desire for power and his worldly lifestyle, yet he continued to acknowledge the pope as the head of the Church, instead of giving that honour to Christ.

### ***Questions:***

***Answers to these questions may be found in the outline.***

1. What does the 'deformation' of the church mean?
2. What are some of the things which prove that the church of the Middle Ages was a deformed one?
3. What do you know about the life of Bernard of Clairvaux?
4. What is meant by the 'ideal of monastic life'?
5. What unscriptural distinction is the basis of this ideal?
6. What can you say about the significance of Bernard of Clairvaux?

### ***Questions to think about.***

7. Is a deformed church the same as a false church?
8. What is unscriptural about the 'monastic ideal'?
9. What did the monks think about doing good works? What does Scripture say about them? What does our Confession teach about good works?

10. What does the Roman Catholic Church teach about the Bible? What do the Reformed Churches say in defence?
11. What is mysticism?

***A question which may be discussed in groups.***

12. There is always the danger of a distinction between nature and grace in the life of a Christian. How can this show up? What does it mean to you in your every day life that 'life is one'? What bearing does the fact that you are a Covenant Child have in this context?

# CHAPTER 12

## **Forerunners of the Reformation**

### *What are forerunners?*

Towards the end of the Middle Ages, the Church came to a reformation. Martin Luther, John Calvin and many others played an important role in this, and yet the Reformation was not the work of man. Luther's struggle against the corruption in the Roman Church was aimed at bringing the Church to repentance. There was no thought in his mind of eventually breaking with Rome.

God himself led the Church to a reformation. In his grace he guided the history of the Church in such a way that part of it was led back to the pure fountain of his Word. The reformation is the work of the LORD alone. In carrying this out he wished to make use of people. They were, however, only instruments in his hand.

The great Reformation was prepared by a number of serious-minded men from the Late Middle Ages. They fought against certain errors in the Roman Church, but they lacked a clear insight into the Word of God. Often they struggled against its excesses (the worst and most obvious faults), but not against its hierarchy. They fought against the pope's ungodly walk of life, but not against the organisation which put the pope at its head in the most powerful place.

### *The light is struggling to break through*

However, the struggle of these men was often fought in all seriousness. In the darkness of the Middle Ages they saw a glimpse of the light of the Word. The LORD himself was preparing the Reformation. These men who kindled the light, who pointed out heresies and spread the Word of God, are called the forerunners of the Reformation. You could also call them heralds. It did not please

the Lord to use them to bring about the great Reformation, but they were allowed to prepare the people for it. In this way they were heralds, people who prepare the way. It was not all done according to the Scriptures, but it was something new in those dark days. Several of them, in their task of forerunner, had to forfeit their lives as martyrs.

We have often said that the Roman Church of the Middle Ages was the Church of Jesus Christ. But she was a deformed one, deformed by thousands of sins and heresies. However, the LORD never deserts his Church. The gates of hell will not prevail against her. In the Middle Ages God was busy preparing the Reformation, and he used forerunners for this task. They were the instruments who had to call upon the believers to turn to the living God once again. This action often led to death on the stakes. That also was a means by which the light of God's Word was beginning to break through. It would not be long before that light would start to shine brightly during the Reformation.

### ***John Wycliffe: forerunner in England***

One of the instruments in God's hand was the English nobleman, John Wycliffe. He was born in 1324 of an old English aristocratic family. He studied theology at the famous Oxford University, and became a professor there in 1372. Through his study of God's Word he came to realise that the Roman Church was in a very bad condition. The ignorance and superstition of the English people was astounding.

Wycliffe aimed to preach the Gospel among the people. He sent out travelling preachers, in groups of two, to explain the Word of God. The more he studied the Scriptures, the more he realised the necessity of an English translation of the Bible. Then whoever wanted to do so, could study the Word himself. This is of vital importance for the progress of the Gospel. Wycliffe gave the English people the first Bible in their own language. It was a translation of the New Testament.

## *John Wycliffe's struggle*

Wycliffe did not stop here. He strongly opposed the hierarchy of the pope. He even dared to go so far as to call the pope the antichrist. The pope did not ignore these attacks. Four times he issued a bull condemning Wycliffe's teachings. He even issued a command from Rome to put Wycliffe in prison. Fortunately, Wycliffe had many friends among the nobles so that the pope's order was not carried out.

Wycliffe also opposed the begging friars. He contested their false doctrines and called them lazy loafers. He criticised their so-called poverty while, in reality, they were not poor at all.

There was hardly a heresy which Wycliffe did not oppose. He preached against worshipping the saints and relics, the selling of indulgences, the confessional, pilgrimages, mass for the dead, and purgatory.

## *The struggle against the popish mass*

Wycliffe was most strongly opposed to the popish mass, against the doctrine of what is called transubstitution. He declared openly that, among all the heresies which had crept into the Church, there



*Wycliffe Bible: John 1:1-3: In þe bigynnyng was/ þe word & þe word/was at god/& god was/þe word*

was not one which had led to so much idolatry and robbing of the people as the doctrine of transubstantiation. During the mass, Christ is offered daily: the bread becomes the body of Christ and the wine changes to the blood of Christ in the priest's hands. The Heidelberg Catechism, in Lord's Day 30, calls this an accursed idolatry. Wycliffe also did this, two centuries earlier before the Catechism was written.

### ***The end of Wycliffe***

If the Lord had not protected his instrument, Wycliffe, he would certainly have died a martyr's death. His attacks on the mass led to his losing his position as a professor, but his life was not in danger. He could continue his work in his congregation. Just before his death in 1384, he received an order from the pope to come to Rome to defend his views and justify them. Wycliffe's answer was short, but clear: "I will not come." Then the Lord took him unto Himself. The time was not yet ripe for the great Reformation.

Thirty years later the general Council of Constance condemned all of Wycliffe's teachings and writings. In 1417, his bones were dug up and burnt!

### ***Jan Hus: forerunner in Bohemia***

Towards the end of the Middle Ages, an active exchange existed between the universities of Oxford and Prague. The King of England was married to the daughter of the German Emperor who was also King of Bohemia. Jan Hus, as rector of the Prague University, had come in contact with the writings of Wycliffe. It did not take long before Hus openly defended the attacks of Wycliffe on the Roman Church.

Hus also attacked the corrupt papacy. He, too, desired to have the pure Gospel in his mother tongue. He also opposed the selling of indulgences which the pope preached in order to pay for his war against Naples. Hus preached: "Not the pope, but Christ is the Head of the Church."



*Jan (Johann) Hus (1369–1415) at the Council of Constance. By Karl Friedrich Lessing (1808–1880).*

The pope excommunicated Hus on the grounds of his opposition. Hus appealed to the Council of Constance which was meeting at that time. Emperor Sigismund promised Hus a safe conduct to and from Constance. However, he had hardly arrived at Constance, when he was bound and imprisoned. The Emperor had been persuaded to change his mind; a promise made to a heretic need not be kept!

### ***The martyr's death of Jan Hus***

Hus was cruelly tortured to try to make him change his mind. Despite countless hearings and torturing, Jan Hus did not take back anything. Finally he was sentenced on 4th May, 1414, of being an adherent of Wycliffe. When he still did not want to take back anything, unless it could be proved to him on the basis of the Scriptures that he was wrong, he was condemned to be burnt at the stake. Praying, and praising Christ, he climbed the stake. One legend has it that Hus said to his torturers, “Today you will burn a goose but

a swan shall arise out of my ashes which you shall not be able to roast.”

Indeed, a century later Luther would arise as a swan out of Hus’s ashes. This is why the Lutheran Church steeples are decorated with a swan, rather than a rooster.

Hus had acquired innumerable followers as result of his talent as a speaker. These followers continued the struggle. A year after his death, Rome struck another blow. John’s friend, Hieronymus of Prague, was also burnt to death.

The death of Hus, and his friend, did not stop his influence. His ideas had gained ground at the University of Prague and among the Bohemian nobility. Important people defended the idea of preaching in the people’s own language. This struggle became very intense when Emperor Sigismund, who had earlier broken his promise to Hus, became King of Bohemia as well. A civil war between the followers of Hus and those of the Emperor broke out. Because of disagreements among the followers of Hus, they finally had to submit themselves.

### ***Judging the forerunners of the Reformation***

The strength of these forerunners was that in their protests against the decline in the Church, they referred back to the Word of God. Through their accusations against the Church, it had to become clear to many people how much the Roman Church had departed from that Word. They were instruments in the hand of the King of the Church to prepare for reformation. In the light of God’s Word, they witnessed against heresies, often sealing their struggle with their blood.

However, it must be said that often they could not let the clear light of the Word shine forth, because they concentrated on the excesses of the papacy and the decay, which resulted from the heresies in the Church. John Wycliffe was an exception. But even in these dark times, the light of God’s Word was visible, even though it would only start to shine brightly and clearly in God’s time during the Reformation.

## ***Questions:***

***Answers to these questions may be found in the outline.***

1. What are forerunners?
2. What do you know about the life of John Wycliffe?
3. Describe John Wycliffe's struggle.
4. How did John Wycliffe's life end?
5. What did Jan Hus struggle against?
6. Describe the death of Jan Hus.

## ***Questions to think about.***

7. What can you say about a church which persecutes her faithful members? (See Article 29 of the Belgic Confession of Faith)
8. Was Wycliffe right in calling the pope 'antichrist'? Explain.
9. How must we judge the forerunners of the reformation?
10. Is it Scriptural to speak about the LIGHT of God's Word? Can you explain?
11. Why did God's Word only become bright and clear during the Reformation?

***A question which may be discussed in groups.***

12. How can you be recognised as a child of the Light? Is it important that the young people of the Church are also recognisable as 'Lightbearers'? Do you have to make a conscious effort to be this, or does it come automatically?

# CHAPTER 13

## **The approaching Reformation**

### ***The church at the end of the Reformation***

During the period of the Middle Ages, between the years 500 and 1500, the Roman Church possessed tremendous power. Almost everyone went to church. And they all went to the one and only Roman Church. The people's lives were controlled by that church from the cradle to the grave.

In many respects the church of Rome was in a sorry state. Yet in those days it was still the Church of our Lord Jesus Christ. As long as the LORD had not brought about a reformation, he gathered his people by means of the preaching of the clergy. The pure stream of the Word of God had gradually become a muddy creek. If you drank from it, you put your life at risk.

However, the LORD had not yet blocked up the stream. That would be done during the Reformation. Then the Roman Church excommunicated the faithful servants of Christ and persecuted them. They even ended up on the stakes. In doing so, the true Church of Christ became a false church. From then on Christ's church-gathering work went via the churches of the Reformation.

### ***God's Word remained a closed book***

The pure Word of God had not been administered for years in the Church of the Middle Ages. Often a story from the Old Testament was told. This would contain a lesson which would be good and useful for the people to know.

The apostasy was very great. The reason for this was that hardly anyone read the Bible any more. There was not even a Bible for the

members of the congregation. It was not until 1477 that a Bible appeared in the language of the common people (in the Netherlands -tr.<sup>5</sup>). This was the Delft Bible. It was not the complete Bible, but merely the Old Testament without the Psalms. You had to know Latin well to be able to read God's Word in those days. Also bear in mind that hardly anyone could even read at that time!

Whenever someone of the clergy wanted to study the Bible, he had to obtain special permission to do so. In later years Luther said, "The Bible has been lying in some forgotten corner all those years." Besides, it was not unusual for the clergy to be rather unfaithful servants of Christ. Some did not give a good example at all. Over against these, there were examples of faithful love and great self-sacrifice.

### ***Idolatry and superstition***

This apostasy from the Word of God did not occur overnight. An important event was a church meeting in 1215 - the Fourth Lateran Council. This took place during the rule of one of the most powerful popes, Innocent III. To give you some idea of the magnitude of this council, almost every European ruler had sent important representatives, and there were also 412 bishops and 800 abbots. The church leaders of Jerusalem and Constantinople were there as well.

The terrible doctrine of transubstantiation was accepted here. The one sacrifice of Christ on the cross had to be repeated every day in the celebration of the mass. The bread changed into the body of Christ and the wine changed into his blood (see Lord's Day 30). Also remember that the sacrifice of the mass was only allowed to be offered by the priests.

It was also made compulsory for every adult to go to confession at least once a year. If this was not done, he or she was not buried in consecrated earth. Decisions were also made about how to deal with heretics. The basis was thus laid for the inquisition of later years.

---

*5. The first European language translation of the whole Bible was into Old French in the late 13th century, and into Czech in around 1360. John Wycliffe produced the first complete English translation in the late 14th century.*

In the meantime we find superstitions becoming more and more a part of daily life. Instead of calling upon God, people addressed the saints who had to protect the believers against dangers and to cure them of their ailments. The adoration of Mary intensified. She was the mediatrix between Christ, the Judge, and man.

All sorts of objects called relics were worshipped. Splinters of the cross, Peter's tears, Christ's garment and many other 'holy' things were carried in solemn processions while people bowed down to them in holy reverence. Moreover, there were also pilgrimages, indulgences, the seven sacraments, and more.

### *The papal hierarchy*

The preachers and elders ordained by the apostles were replaced by priests. At their head was the pope of Rome. This was a process that also took centuries. First of all, only the bishops of Rome enjoyed certain privileges. However, the old rule that all bishops were equal still applied. Then, at a certain period in time, it was declared that the bishop of Rome was the one and only bishop, the substitute/successor of Christ. All the other bishops were to obey him.

Since that time, church laws were no longer confirmed by a council but proclaimed by a pope. From that time onwards he appointed and replaced the bishops of the church. His grip on church life tightened. Slowly but surely a large circle of priests, the Curia, gathered around him. In order to be able to support them, all sorts of ecclesiastical taxes were levied.

The church was organised by the pope like an army with a general at its head. However, the church did not really resemble the army of Christ any longer. The believers were no longer looked upon as his soldiers. They were not warriors of Christ but were called laymen who had no say in matters. The clergy determined things. The laity, therefore, were completely dependent on the priesthood. Note how the devil increased his grip on the church!

## *Scholasticism*

Scholasticism was a very important aspect of the Church in the Middle Ages. The word is derived from 'schola = school'. At the seminaries they tried to make the contents of the Word of God conform to the thinking of man. In other words, everything should be able to be reasoned out and explained. In practice it meant that human thinking started to rule over the Word of God. But, the Holy Scriptures must be believed. That does not mean that we must shut off our minds. On the contrary. However, there will always remain many things in the Bible which we cannot grasp with our human intellect. Faith must be the starting point of our thinking. Through scholasticism the believers were not bound to God's Word, but to human thought processes.

One example of scholastic thought was the contrast between nature and grace. Natural life was of a lower order, not so important. Everyday things such as work, marriage, having children, etc., belonged to that 'natural' life. Of a higher order was the 'life of grace'. To this belonged the priesthood and all things connected with the church. That was real living: for God and close to Him. That is why so many entered the monasteries. That is the reason for the error of celibacy. Priests were not allowed to marry because marriage belongs to natural life. Satan's power can also be seen in this.

This clearly contradicts the Word of God which teaches us that life is one. There is no contrast between natural life and supernatural life. All our work is work in God's Kingdom. Doing homework is not of less importance than the making of a sermon. All that we do, we do for the LORD (Colossians 3:23).

## *Mysticism*

There was also another direction which could be seen, that of mysticism. Not the mind, but one's feelings were placed on a higher level than the Word of God. Not what was right according to one's intellect, but what was right according to one's emotions,

predominated. The highest aim of mysticism was seen to be the inner relationship with God.

Man sought communion with God apart from his Word - in a direct line, in other words. Man's eyes were closed to the external and the natural world. Everything concentrated on man's inner self, what man could see and experience of God inside himself.

A well known German mystic was Meister Eckhart. He taught that man had to ban all search for personal happiness. All selfishness had to be wiped out. The best way to do this was through suffering. Eckhart said that suffering was the mother of all virtue, all good. Man's own will and working for own advantage were, he said, killed by suffering. In this way God joins himself to man's soul without any external means (e.g. preaching). Then God is wherever man is. The highest purpose in life, Eckhart said, is to become one with God.

As with scholasticism, so also here we find a contempt for the Word of God among the followers of mysticism. God has made himself known to us in his Word. It is sufficient for our salvation and for our service in his Kingdom. God's children are sent into a totally wrong direction by mysticism. Ultimately, mysticism is concerned with man himself and his experiences, while man should be concerned with the honour of God and his great deeds.

### ***Resistance against the Roman heresies***

What was said earlier about the Roman Church cuts deep. It was not so that there were just a few heresies, but for the rest things were not too bad. No, the evil had penetrated deeply - right down to the roots. It is good for you to see the terrible results of departing from the Word of God.

In previous chapters we have already said something about resistance against apostasy within the Church. A few more remarks about this now. Fortunately there were men in the Middle Ages who attempted to be faithful to the Word of God. That was not an easy task. However, they received strength from above.



*Savonarola's execution in the Piazza della Signoria Florence, 24 May 1498. By Francesco di Lorenzo Rosselli (c1445–1513).*

Severe criticism was levelled at the abuses within the Roman Church. By means of various servants the LORD called up the members of the congregations to repentance. When we observe the end of the Middle Ages, it is striking that almost every western country had a well-known forerunner of the Reformation within its borders.

### ***England: John Wycliffe (1320 – 1384)***

We dealt with John Wycliffe extensively in chapter 13. Now we will outline just a few main features. John Wycliffe, you remember, dared to call the pope 'anti-christ', back in those days. He was allowed to undertake a very important task of translating the Bible into English. Because of this, more and more ordinary people could study the



JEAN WICLIF.

*Left: John Wycliffe (c1328–1384), Engraver: Bernard Picart (1673–1733). Right: Thomas à Kempis (c1380–1471).*



Word of God independently. Wycliffe understood that this was of the utmost importance: to let the people live according to his Word.

### ***Czechoslovakia: Jan Hus (1369 - 1415)***

Hus was deeply affected by the work of Wycliffe. He mainly preached in and around Prague. His influence became so widespread and he attracted so many hearers that the pope even excommunicated the entire city of Prague. Almost a century before the LORD would use Luther as his instrument in bringing the Church back to the Word of God, Hus was burnt at the stake as a martyr.

### ***Italy: Savonarola (1452 - 1498)***

Savonarola worked mainly in Florence. He called for repentance in the land of the pope, right near the lion's den. The city of Florence was full of sin and unrighteousness. Savonarola emerged as a preacher of penitence.

He preached without respect of persons. He attacked the ordinary people, the royal de Medici family, and especially the pope of Rome because whilst they led a luxurious way of life, they did not care for the poor people at all.

Savonarola especially called upon the people to lead a pious life. Although he left Roman doctrine in peace, the pope did not appreciate him. The vicar of Christ (as the pope called himself, claiming to be Christ's representative on earth) had Savonarola imprisoned. After he was sentenced to death, he was burnt alive.

### ***The Netherlands: The brethren of the common life (15th Century)***

The Brethren of the Common Life worked in this region. Common here means "communal, collective". They lived together and had no personal belongings. This group of people exercised considerable influence upon the life of the nation. In several places they instituted schools where many were instructed to live a pious life.

Well known names in this group are Gerhard Groot, Thomas a Kempis and Wessel of Gansfort. They called upon the people to live the way the apostles taught, when the church was not yet corrupt.

### ***The approaching reformation***

At this time something was happening in the Church in various countries. The so-called forerunners of the Reformation very often lacked a clear insight into God's Word. Some did have a clearer view than others, but the bright, unhindered light of God's Word would only breakthrough in later times.

God prepared for the great events of Church history. The forerunners were allowed to serve as heralds, to prepare the way. They did their work in all seriousness and sincerity. Many sacrificed their lives and died a martyr's death.

The period of time that this outline deals with is an important one. It deals with the Church of the exalted Christ just before the

Reformation. It tells how various people have called for repentance, no matter how imperfect their call may have been. Their trumpets did not yet produce a pure sound, but they did make a sound. The waiting was for the breakthrough of this insight of faith: by grace alone.

### ***Questions:***

***Answers to these questions may be found in the outline or in Scripture.***

1. Why was the Roman Church of the Middle Ages the Church of Christ? What image is used in the outline to clarify this? When did the Roman Church become a false church? Why?
2. What can you say about the use of the Bible in the Middle Ages? What was the first Dutch Bible called? Was it complete? What did Luther say about the Bible in the Middle Ages?
3. What can you tell about the Fourth Lateran Council? What was decided about the mass, and about going to confession?
4. What can you tell about superstitions of those times? What about the adoration of Mary, and the worshipping of relics?
5. What was a decisive event in the development of the Roman hierarchy? Which old rule did it make powerless? What proved the extent of the power of the pope? Why did the Church no longer resemble the army of Christ?
6. What do we mean by scholasticism? Do we have to shut off our minds and intellect when attempting to understand the Scriptures? What should we do then? Give an example of scholastic thinking. What does God's Word say about it?
7. What is mysticism? How is God's Word devalued by it? What did Master Eckhart teach? Why must we reject mysticism?

### ***Questions to think about.***

8. Is it important to concern yourself with the question of whether the Church of the Middle Ages was the Church of

Christ or not? What must we think of the image that is used to describe the Church at the end of the Middle Ages? Is it a Scriptural image?

9. Is it important to deal with the differences between the mass and the Lord's Supper? Is it useful to know Lord's Day 30 by heart for this? What must we think of the expression 'accursed idolatry'?
10. Much is said about the Roman hierarchy. Many people consider it a good form of government. When Jethro visited Moses, he advised him to reorganise the people according to this model (see Exodus 18). On what model is Reformed church government based? Why are Reformed people so afraid of hierarchy?
11. In the discussion on scholasticism the example was given of the distinction between nature and grace. Is it not true that we easily disassociate Christ from certain areas of life? If someone wants to discuss, eg., listening to pop music, or watching certain TV programmes, or going to certain places, are you not inclined to be on the defensive immediately? What about the expression 'life is one', and 'all that we do, we do for the Lord'? How can you experience, and take into account, the reality of the Covenant to which you belong?

*A question which may be discussed in groups.*

12. There are many people who say, "If I had to give up my life for Christ, for example to be burnt at the stake, I do not know if I could do that." What should our reply to that be?

# CHAPTER 14

## **Martin Luther The Preacher of the Grace of God**

### *The middle ages*

During the Middle Ages, the people were divided into three classes. First, there were the knights who lived in their impressive castles and fortresses. Often their lands had been borrowed from the emperor. In turn, they lent their land to less important aristocrats or important citizens. This was called the feudal system.

Besides the nobility, there were the clergy. The head of the clergy was the pope of Rome. The Roman Church was a very powerful institution. The pope and the emperor continually struggled with each other to gain the upper hand. This struggle was not very edifying. The spiritual leaders (the clergy) often behaved in a most unspiritual way.

Finally, there was the third class, the commoners. In the early Middle Ages, the commoners had little or no say. Often they were serfs or agricultural slaves, attached to a certain castle. Gradually cities were established. Do not think too much of them, however. They were merely small towns which received certain rights in the course of time. These rights were granted them by the nobility.

### *The time in which Luther lived*

The time in which Luther lived saw a decrease in the power of the upper classes and the clergy. The influence of the nobles, in particular, saw a marked decline. The Crusades had cost them much money, and moreover, many had died. They had also been forced to give up all sorts of rights to the commoners in exchange for their support in

the Crusades. The invention of gunpowder, around the year 1450, put an end to the invincibility of their castles and fortresses. The cities continued to make themselves more independent and stronger by strengthening their walls and deepening their moats.

The clergy generally lived in monasteries during the Middle Ages. They believed they could live a more pious and holy life there, than in society. Although the monastic ideal was an unscriptural one, the work done in them was often very beneficial. The monks studied the life and writings of the Church fathers. They copied books and decorated them beautifully. They helped to open up and reclaim new land for agriculture. They grew herbs known for their healing powers, and taught at convent schools.

The invention of the printing machine around the year 1450 made it much easier for the ordinary people to learn to read and study. As a result, the absolute power of the clergy was slowly but surely being undermined. The common people increasingly freed themselves from the influence of the nobility and clergy as the Middle Ages progressed. Through the Crusades, the city dwellers came into contact with foreign people and customs. Trade expanded. As a result of the invention of the compass, the lower classes were able to sail the oceans and trade with distant nations. A certain amount of prosperity was the result.

### ***God used Luther as his instrument***

Luther lived in the time when all these developments were in full swing. A new era announced itself. The Lord guided history in such a way that reformation was made possible. He wanted to lead his people back to the clear and trustworthy Word. To achieve this, the Lord used Luther as his instrument.

Luther himself had not desired this. You should not think that at a given moment he thought, "Now I will become a reformer." That is not how things go. The heavenly King sovereignly chooses his servants. He uses them whenever he wills it, in the service of his Kingdom.



*Martin Luther in 1529.  
Lucas Cranach the  
Elder (1472–1553).  
Kunstsammlungen  
Böttcherstrasse, Bremen,  
Germany.*

You must not think that the Reformation can be explained in terms of the time in which Luther lived. The Reformation was a miracle of God's grace. A miracle cannot be explained, or it would not be a miracle. It was not Luther's courage which made him a reformer, nor his intelligence, nor his search for the truth. It was only the extreme faithfulness, the grace and good pleasure of our God. To Him be all the glory and praise for this.

### ***Luther as monk***

We will not discuss Luther's life in detail. Many books have been written on this topic. We would, however, like to mention a few of the important points. His father wanted Luther to become a lawyer. He himself preferred religious orders. But he was obedient to his father's wishes and started studying law.

Already as a child Luther was deeply conscious of God's holiness and his own unworthiness. He would tremble at the thought of having to appear before the Judge of heaven and earth. Fear of a sudden death

without having made peace with God continued to haunt him while a student. When in 1505 he was surprised by a violent thunderstorm on his way home, he cried out, "Help me, Saint Anna, and I will become a monk."

On 16 July 1505, Luther enrolled at the strictest monastery that Erfurt possessed, that of the Hermits of Augustine. He became a real Roman Catholic monk. By means of self-chastisement he tried to earn his own salvation. He was so conscientious about his new life as a monk that later he said, "If ever a monk would have gone to heaven by living as a monk, then I would have done, as all my fellow monks who know me, would be able to testify. For I would have, if I had continued for long enough, tortured myself to death with praying, going without sleep, suffering from cold, reading, and other occupations."

In the monastery, Luther was given permission to study the Bible. The Lord used this Bible to open Luther's eyes to God's grace. Luther came to the realisation that all his attempts to earn eternal life were doomed to fail. He had to receive it through grace alone. As a sinner, he deserved eternal death. But through God's grace, his debts were remitted by means of the work of Christ.

### ***Luther as professor***

Because he was very talented, Luther was appointed as a professor. In the years 1513-1516 he dealt with the Psalms, Romans and Galatians with his students. In this period of time Luther came to the right insight into the Scriptures. He understood that Christ had fully paid for our sins on the cross. Through faith in the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus on the cross can people be saved, not by means of good works. Good works are a result of faith. Out of thankfulness for his deliverance, a believer starts to spend his life in God's service and do good works. Luther's lectures changed. His students noticed it straight away. Their tutor spoke of free grace. He put all the emphasis on Romans 3:28. The joyful message of God's Word which had been hidden beneath the dust for so long, had taken hold of Luther's heart.

### ***Luther under the ban***

The traffic in indulgences hastened Luther's development. Johann Tetzel tried to squeeze money from the pockets of the poor and simple German people for the building of St. Peter's Basilica in Rome. "When the money drops in the box, the soul jumps into heaven" became a well-known saying.

On 31 October 1517 Luther publicly acted against the Roman Church. He nailed 95 theses to the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg. These theses were against many of the errors or scandalous practices of the Roman Church. These theses were translated from Latin into German, distributed and read everywhere.

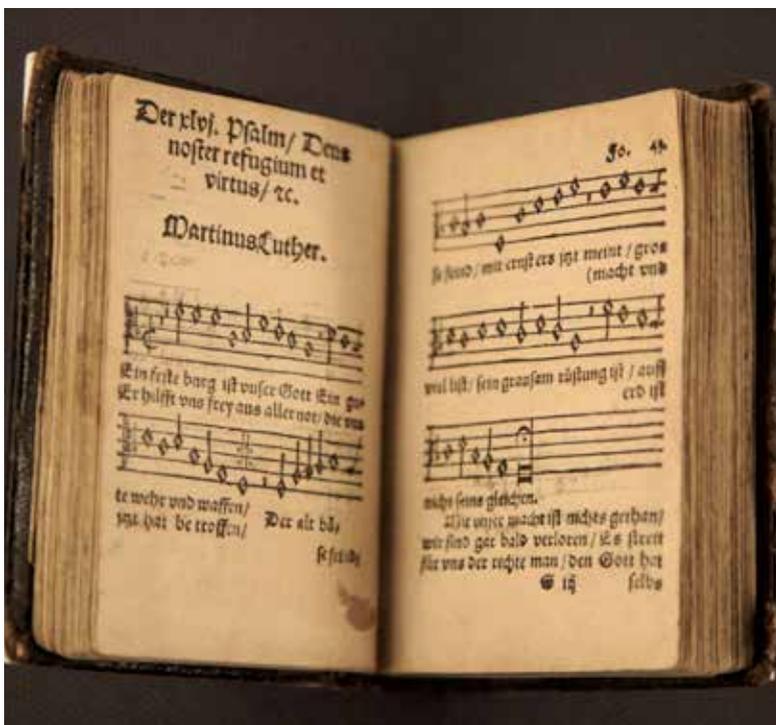
The pope immediately took the strongest measure possible. He put Luther under the ban. On 10 December 1520, Luther publicly burnt the papal bull.

### ***The roman church becomes a false church***

The pope had thrown out a faithful servant of the King of the Church. According to article 29 of the Belgic Confession of Faith, the Roman Church had now become a false church. The conclusion of this article states, "It (the false church) relies more upon men than upon Christ; and persecutes those who live holy lives according to the Word of God and who rebuke it for its errors, covetousness and idolatry." When Luther burnt the ban, one of his students asked him, "Where will you go, if everyone leaves you?" He answered, "Under the heavens, where God lives."

### ***Luther as translator of the Bible***

After the Diet of Worms in 1521, where Luther had to defend himself before the Emperor, he was kidnapped by friends and taken to Wartburg Castle. Here he did the most important thing he could ever have done: he translated the Bible into the language of the people. Every German believer could now read and study God's Word for himself. As early as 1522, the New Testament could be distributed. In 1543, the Old Testament was also completed.



*One of only very few early printings of Luther's hymn: "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God." There are no known first edition printings left. This book is a second edition, and extremely rare. Lutherhaus museum in Wittenberg, Germany. Photograph by Paul T. McCain. June 2006. Wittenberg, Germany.*

In 1526, the first completed Bible appeared in the Netherlands. It was the Liesveldt Bible, named after the Antwerp printer, Jacob ven Liesveldt. Part of the Old Testament of this translation was based on Luther's translation, whereas the whole of the New Testament was his work. Liesveldt had to pay for this publication with his death at the stake.

The widespread and rapid distribution of the Holy Scriptures is proof of a hungering after the Word of God. The Reformation was not restricted to Germany. On 1 July 1523, the first martyrs in the Netherlands, Hendrik Voes and Johannes van Essen, were burnt to

death. The first proclamation against the new doctrine had already appeared in 1521.

In the Netherlands, Lutheranism was replaced by Calvinism later on, but today we still find Lutheran Churches in Sweden, Denmark and Finland, as well as in Germany, of course.

### ***Luther's significance***

The King of the Church had wanted to use Martin Luther as an instrument in leading his people to a reformation, to a returning to his Word. Luther brought the Bible out of its hidden corner. He again pointed to the grace of God, the only means whereby we can be saved.

In several aspects, Calvin was more advanced than Luther, in particular with regard to the government of the Church, the Lord's Supper and the relationship between Church and State. However, even Calvin does not have the final say. This is left to God's Word, by which the Church must be guided every day again.

### ***Questions:***

***Answers to these questions may be found in the outline.***

1. What are the three classes in society in the Middle Ages? What do you know about them?
2. What can be said about the three classes in Luther's time?
3. Can you explain the Reformation in terms of the time in which Luther lived?
4. Why did the tone of Luther's lectures change?
5. Why did the Roman Church become a false church? What does Article 29 of the Belgic Confession of Faith say about this?
6. What do you know about a) Luther as translator of the Bible?  
b) The first Dutch Bible translation?

***Questions to think about.***

7. Explain: “The spiritual leaders often behaved in a very unspiritual way.” What characteristics of an unspiritual life are listed in Galatians 5? The marks of a Spiritual life are also mentioned. What are they?
8. Why is the ‘monastic ideal’ not Biblical? What beneficial work was done by the monks in the monasteries?
9. The King of the Church sovereignly chooses his servants, often contrary to their own wishes. Explain the word ‘sovereignly’. Think of the expression ‘sovereign good pleasure’. Can you give Biblical examples of people who were chosen to serve God - contrary to their own desires?
10. A text such as Romans 3:28 was of very great importance to Luther. Explain why this was so.
11. Why is the reading of the Bible a mark of a Reformed, or a Lutheran, Church but not of a Roman Church?

***A question which may be discussed in groups.***

12. Luther vowed a vow during a terrible thunderstorm. We regularly come across instances in which people vow a vow in the Scriptures. For example Jacob in Genesis 28:20, and Jephthah in Judges 11:30-40. Are we allowed to vow a vow today, for example during a serious illness, or when in prison, along the lines of: “If I recover, then I ...” or “If Thou wilt release me from prison, then I ...”?

# CHAPTER 15

## **John Calvin - Preacher of the Honour and Glory of God (1)**

### *Calvin - instrument in the hand of God*

Church History is never concerned with people alone. We must continually keep our eyes open to how the LORD uses people as instruments in his service. This he did in the past, and this he does today. This he will also do in the future. Therefore we should not glorify the instrument used, but God who uses it. To Him be all praise and glory and thanks for everything that he does by means of that instrument.

When dealing with Calvin we could say, “Calvin was very intelligent. Calvin worked very hard. Calvin was a very good preacher. Calvin had such a great influence on the course of history.” But if we discuss him in this way, we are on the wrong track. Then we are glorifying a human being. But history is not concerned with the man Calvin and his merits, but with the King of the Church who sovereignly chooses human beings to be his servants. Thus the Lord had also chosen Calvin to be his slave and servant.

### *Calvin's youth (1509 - 1523)*

Calvin was born in Noyon, Northern France, in 1509. In other words, he was a Frenchman. His father occupied an important position in the Roman Catholic Church, where he was the secretary of the bishop. Noyon possessed a grand cathedral, as well as many monasteries and chapels. It was a relatively important city in those days.

Luther was a man of humble birth. Calvin, however, spent his youth among the upper circles of the nobility and the clergy. This made

it possible for him to communicate freely with men of importance in later years. As a boy he was allowed to study together with the children of one of the local noblemen.

It soon became evident that he had a sharp and intelligent mind. Later he would be allowed to use it in the service of God and his Church.

### *A young curate*

Also in France, the Roman Church was full of evils. It was entangled in false doctrines, and corrupt practices were common. We will give an example of the latter from the life of Calvin. When he was twelve years old, he was already the curate of one of the Roman churches in Noyon. This was in 1521, the year in which Luther had to defend himself at the Diet of Worms. You may well ask, "How is that possible? Only twelve years old, and a curate already?" (A curate is an assistant to the parish priest).

Well, it was like this: someone else did the job and received some money for that, while Calvin's father pocketed the greater portion of the money set aside for a curate. Because of his close association with the bishop, it was not difficult to arrange this for his son. Such arrangements were quite common in those days. There had even been a pope who had made a boy a cardinal, merely so that he could receive the money. Someone else did the actual work. Mammon, not God, was served.

### *His study in Paris (1523 - 1528)*

When Calvin was fourteen years old, his mother died. Shortly after her death, he went to Paris to become a clergyman. He studied at the Latin school. This was similar to the senior high schools of today. The study of Latin received particular emphasis at this school.

When he had completed his course, he had to consult his father concerning the place where he was to continue his studies. But in the meantime his father had come into conflict with the church rulers in Noyon. He therefore no longer desired his clever son to become a priest. He would rather see him study law.



*John Calvin (1509–1564).*

Calvin did not mind changing the course of his studies. He had had close associations with the priesthood. These relationships had not been all that pleasant, for many church leaders lived immoral lives following after the lusts of the flesh. In many cases, the clergy was corrupt.

As for Calvin's father, we can see in his actions that "man proposes, but God disposes". The father wanted to make his son famous and celebrated. The LORD used this study of his in order to make better use of his instrument.

### ***His study at Orleans (1528 - 1531)***

In France at that time, whoever wanted to study law had to go to Orleans. Therefore Calvin left Paris to go to that city. He studied hard there, too hard really. During the day he did not eat enough, and at night he did not have enough sleep. This may be the cause for his poor health in later years. He was such an outstanding student that he was sometimes allowed to lecture instead of listening to his professors. The decision to grant him the title of 'doctor' was a unanimous one. At that time he was still only twenty years of age.

The importance of his stay at Orleans lay not in his study of law there, but in the fact that he came in contact with God's Word. He started to study Greek and daily searched the Scriptures.

After he left Orleans, Calvin went to Bourges for a while where there was also a university. Professor Melchior Wolmar, who advised him to study theology, lectured there. At Wolmar's house, Calvin came in contact with the ten-year-old Theodore Beza. At that time, he had no idea that this Beza would become his helper, and later his successor, in Geneva.

### ***The death of his father***

When Wolmar strongly urged him to study theology, Calvin had already been occupied with the study of God's Word for quite some time. It had already become clear to him that the Roman Catholic doctrine conflicted with the teachings of the Bible in many instances. He really wanted to study theology. However, his father still did not want him to become a priest.

The situation changed in 1531. His father's conflict with the Church rulers at Noyon became so acute that he was excommunicated. Even when his father was dying, the ban was not lifted. He died without having received the last rites of the Church. This was terrible in the eyes of a Roman Catholic. Calvin and his brothers managed to get their father buried in consecrated earth after a great deal of effort. It shows how Roman Calvin still was in his thinking. However, it meant that Calvin was now free to choose his own course of study.

### ***Further education at Paris (1531 - 1533)***

He returned to Paris to attend the Sorbonne, a university which was fiercely Roman Catholic. As well as his studies, Calvin occupied himself in attending secret meetings in which the Bible was discussed. The errors of the Roman Catholic Church were discussed in the light of God's Word. Calvin became one of the most important leaders of these gatherings.

It was during this period that Calvin came to faith. It is not known exactly when this happened. Calvin seldom spoke about his spiritual life. He preferred to speak about his God rather than to speak about himself. The most important aspect of his conversion he

once expressed in these words, “Through a sudden conversion God subjected my soul into willingness. I, and all that I am and possess, belong to Him, and I seek his honour only.”

### ***Flight from Paris (1533 - 1534)***

Calvin now began to work hard and courageously for his Saviour. He became the pastor and teacher of the persecuted flock of the LORD. He even managed to penetrate the prisons to comfort victims of persecutions. The stakes of Paris were meant to frighten people. However, also here “the blood of the martyrs was the seed of the Church.”

Another remarkable thing happened. A new rector was appointed to the Sorbonne, Professor Nicolas Cop. He delivered a rectorial address about the glory of the Gospel: through grace alone, and not by our own merits. The audience was tense. Those who were fiercely Roman Catholic left the gathering. A charge was laid against Cop. When it was made known that Calvin had helped write Cop’s address, the persecutions were directed at him. The door of the house in which he was staying was forced open. In the meantime he was lowered out of a window in a basket. Disguised as a vine-dresser, he fled Paris. His life as a wanderer - being hunted like some animal - had begun.

### ***To Basel (1535)***

Having fled from Paris, Calvin first went to his birthplace, Noyon. Here, in 1534, he gave up his ecclesiastical income. When it became too dangerous for him in France, he retreated to Basel in 1535. There his cousin Olivetan was working on a French translation of the Bible. Calvin, with his linguistic skills, became his co-worker and wrote a preface to the French publication of the Bible.

From French refugees, Calvin heard about the terrible persecutions in his home country. Francis I had issued an edict against all those who misused the reformation as a means of bringing about political and social changes. The Anabaptists were the cause of this. However, the faithful children of God were regarded as being one with those



*Fourth edition of Calvin's  
Institutio Christianae religionis  
(Institutes of Christian religion).  
Geneva: Robert Estienne, 1559.*

revolutionaries and were therefore also persecuted. Calvin was not prepared to allow this to happen, because in this way, the French martyrs were not only robbed of their lives, but also of their honour.

### ***Calvin writes the 'Institutes' (1536)***

With great zeal, writing day and night, Calvin worked on a defence of the Christian faith. It was completed in 1536. He wanted to show the French king and the people that the Reformed people were not rebels, but simply people who faithfully wanted to live according to the Word of God. He also explained this in a letter. Calvin stated that they did not desire a political or social revolution at all. They were obedient subjects of the king. He need not fear them in the least.

The original title of Calvin's book was Institutions of, or Instructions in, the Christian Religion. It was divided into four books which dealt with 1. the Creator; 2. the Redeemer; 3. the Holy Spirit; and 4. the Church. It seems incredible that this book was written by a young man, 25 years of age, who had been brought up in the Roman Catholic religion. His exceptional knowledge of the Bible was revealed in every page. There are few people as convinced of the truth and significance of God's Word as Calvin was. To him, God's honour and glory was of utmost importance.

### ***Questions:***

***Answers to these questions may be found in the outline.***

1. Why should we not pay attention to people in the first place when dealing with Church History? What other word could we use instead of 'instrument'? (Which instrument is mentioned, for example, in the beginning of Romans 12?)
2. What do you know about Calvin's family? How could he be a curate at such a young age? What does this prove about the Roman Church? Why did Calvin switch from the study of theology to that of law?
3. Why was Orleans so important for Calvin? Whom does he meet there? What do you know about the death of his father?
4. Did Calvin write much about his conversion? Why? What do we know about it? Why did Calvin have to leave Paris? How did he manage this? Does this show lack of courage?
5. Where did Calvin flee to? What work did he assist in doing? What happened in France during the reign of Francis I?
6. Which book did Calvin write? Why did he write it? How is the book divided?

### ***Questions to make you think.***

7. Can you also be an instrument in God's hand? How? Should we pray for this? What does it mean when the outline says that God sovereignly chooses his instruments?

8. The proverb “Man proposes, God disposes” is mentioned. In which context is this? What does James 4 say about this matter? Give one example of this proverb from the Old and one from the New Testament.
9. There are people who say that study is not necessary for church people. They say, for example, “No learned ministers, just converted ones.” Do you know of a church or sect which teaches this? Is this Biblical? What should our reaction be? What does Calvin’s life show on this point?
10. Is it necessary for a child of God to pinpoint the time and place of his or her conversion? Do you know of any churches or sects which consider this to be of great importance? What is the basis or background of this thought? Can you explain why the Covenant-promises receive a less important place as a result of this thought?
11. The outline mentions ‘honour’ a few times. What is meant by ‘honour’? Are you invested with honour? What does it mean when it says, “To him, God’s honour and glory was of the utmost importance”? Give examples from the Old and New Testament in which God is given the honour and glory.

*A question which may be discussed in groups.*

12. What does it mean that “the blood of martyrs is the seed of the Church”? Is our affluence and our freedom bad for the Church? What are the dangers in time of persecution, and in time of prosperity? How can we arm ourselves to withstand these dangers?

# CHAPTER 16

## **John Calvin - Preacher of the Honour and Glory of God (2)**

### *With the Countess of Ferrara*

Calvin had frequent contact with the Countess of Ferrara in Northern Italy. This countess was French by birth and agreed with the Reformation. When in 1536 John Calvin was wandering through Northern Italy (so dangerous for someone in his position), this Countess sent masked horsemen to 'kidnap' him and take him to her castle. Something similar had earlier been done to Luther. Calvin exchanged many letters with this believing woman during his life. From these letters we have learnt many things about his life and struggles.

### *Back in his place of birth*

After half a year, Calvin had to leave Ferrara. He went to Noyon, the place where he was born. Here he dealt with some family matters and had long and earnest discussions with his brother Antoine and sister Marie. It was a cause of great joy to him when these two were converted from the Roman heresies. All this time his life was full of danger. We have no idea how often Calvin's life was threatened by death. However, the LORD still wanted to use him. For this reason, his life was spared until God's hour had come. Calvin still had much work to do.

### *In Geneva*

Once, when Calvin was spending the night in Geneva on his way to Basle, he received a visit from William (his name is Guillaume in French) Farel. This French exile had arrived here in 1532 and

was allowed to preach the Word of God. Farel was placed before the difficult task of teaching the people of Geneva to learn how to submit to that Word. He experienced a great deal of opposition from a certain section of the population who followed after all sorts of ungodly practices. The last thing they felt like doing was living obediently according to the Word of God. Farel persevered for a year, but it became too much for him. One day he cried out, “Lord, send me someone who is stronger than I am.”

When Farel heard that the famous writer of the “Institutes” was staying in the city, he went to see John Calvin. He begged him to remain in the city and work for the conversion of all the people. Calvin did not feel like doing this at all. He considered himself too



*Saint-Pierre cathedral, Geneva, Switzerland*

young and inexperienced. Besides, he was planning to write more books and needed peace and rest to be able to do this. Farel then spoke the well-known words, “You speak of study and rest! Well then I declare unto you in the name of the Almighty God: may God curse your studies if now, in her time of need, you refuse to lend your aid to his Church, for you seek yourself more than Christ!”

Calvin could not refuse any longer. Years later he wrote, “I was struck by an unnamed terror. Immediately all my resistance ebbed away.” With unmatched zeal and energy Calvin commenced his work, despite his poor health.

### ***Minister at Geneva (1536 - 1538)***

Calvin composed a Church Order in which he outlined all sorts of rules for exercising discipline over those who did not live according to God’s Word, or who followed after false doctrines. He determined that every inhabitant of Geneva had to subscribe to the Confession. Psalms had to be sung during the Church services, an unheard of thing in the Roman Church. He also drafted new marriage laws. In short, all of life had to be completely subjected to the Word of God. Everyone had to put himself in the service of God and live to his glory.

These radical measures cut too deeply into the sinful flesh of the people of Geneva. Opposition against Calvin and Farel increased. In 1538 it became so intense that both of them had to leave the city. Calvin’s striving for God’s honour and glory was not appreciated. People wanted to throw him into the Rhone River. Banishment from the city followed, but not his death, for his task was not yet complete. The Lord had further use of him.

### ***Calvin’s stay at Strasburg (1538 - 1541)***

With Farel, Calvin left Geneva. Farel settled in the Swiss city of Neuchâtel and never again entered the gates of Geneva. Calvin moved on to Strasburg. Here the LORD had prepared another task for him. He married Idelette van Bure, a widow to whom he was happily married for nine years. They received three children whom the LORD

took unto himself while they were still very young. Calvin also experienced the loss of children through death. He was not spared any trials and afflictions.

In the meantime Calvin kept up an intensive correspondence with the congregation of Geneva. This was extremely important, for the Roman Church did everything within its power to make the people of Geneva return to the yoke of Roman hierarchy. Things ended differently to what Rome had hoped. The inhabitants again elected to the government those who supported the Reformation.

As early as 1539 Calvin and Farel were invited to return. However, Calvin preferred to stay in Strasburg. Here he served a comparatively small refugee congregation and had more time for essential study of God's Word. He spent a great deal of time on the Psalms. He converted some Psalms into a rhymed version. Others he took over from the French poet, Clément Marot. The rest were converted to rhymed (metrical) versions by Beza.

The singing of Psalms, which played such an important part in the worship services of the Reformation, was rightly valued highly by Calvin. It was one of the means by which people sang praises to the glory of God. Think of Psalm 22:4.

### ***Back to Geneva (1541 - 1564)***

We have already heard that the attempts of the Roman Church to recapture Geneva for the pope ended in failure. The congregation longed for Calvin's return. In September 1541 he returned, to the great joy of the government and the people.

Yet it cost him a great deal of effort to bring himself to go back to this congregation again. He had written to Farel, "I would rather die a hundred deaths than let myself be nailed to this cross." From this it is clear that he knew very well that it was a difficult task that awaited him.

With great zeal he continued the work he had previously begun in Geneva. He commenced with the writing of a Catechism. He knew that people, young or old, would perish without knowledge of the Word. Further, he drew up all sorts of laws for the inhabitants

of Geneva: how they had to dress, how long a party was allowed to last, how the Sunday - the day of rest - was to be kept; and also punishments for transgressing these laws.

Calvin experienced a great deal of opposition from the so-called Libertines who did not want to lead such a strict life. They hated Calvin so much that some of them called their savage watchdogs 'Calvin'. However, Calvin did not allow this to interfere with his work. He instituted a Protestant university. From all parts of Europe students headed for Geneva to sit at the feet of Calvin.

The decision to study in Geneva was a matter of faith for many, for it meant that they chose for the Reformation, and against the powerful Roman Church. In practice it often meant breaking with their own families and even putting their lives in danger.

The composer of the Dutch national anthem (known as the "Wilhelmus"), Marnix van St. Aldegonde, was one of the many students in Geneva.

### *The end of Calvin's life*

Calvin was allowed to be of great significance for the Church. Besides writing the "Institutes", he wrote a commentary on almost every book of the Bible. Hundreds of his letters have been preserved. He preached countless sermons. All this he did despite his poor health. Often he made do with only a few hours' sleep a night. He was also afflicted by intense headaches and illnesses lasting for weeks on end. However, he spent himself in the service of the LORD. Calvin knew that he did not live for himself, but that he had to be a faithful instrument in the hand of his LORD.

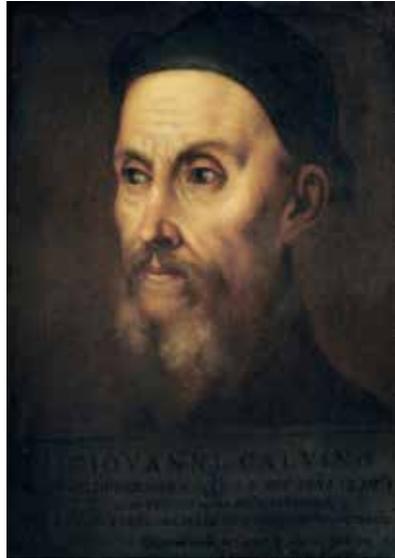
Calvin's enemies have often described him as a power-hungry and merciless man. This is a lie. Calvin was by nature a gentle man, but when God's Word was at stake, he could be hard. He knew that desperate cases call for desperate remedies.

In 1564 this reformer of Geneva died. He only reached the age of 55. His task on earth was complete. God took him unto himself in his glory. Before he died he had said that a gravestone was not allowed to

be placed on his grave. He had not been concerned with his own honour and glory but with the glory of his God, in whose service he was allowed to live and die.

### ***Calvin's significance***

Of course, it is not possible to sketch the full significance of Calvin's work in a few sentences. It has become clear that the LORD used Calvin to bring the Church under the authority of the Word of God again. His writings have been studied by millions of readers until this very day.



*Jean Calvin (1509–1564) by Titian (1490–1576).*

### ***Questions:***

***Answers to these questions may be found in the outline.***

1. What is known about Calvin's contacts with the Countess of Ferrara, and with his brother and sister?
2. What were Farel's problems in Geneva?
3. How did Farel persuade Calvin to work in Geneva?
4. What actions did Calvin take in Geneva? Why?
5. Why did Calvin go to Strasburg? What did he do during his stay there?
6. What happened during his second stay in Geneva? What did he write? What did he institute?

***Questions to think about.***

7. Calvin considered himself to be too young for the difficult task in Geneva. Where in the Old and in the New Testament do you find also find this argument used? What do you think about young office bearers? How old should an elder be, and what about a deacon?
8. Was it right to speak the words which Farel spoke to Calvin? Would you dare to say the same in a similar situation? Would Calvin have stayed in Geneva if Farel had been more careful in his choice of words?
9. What is meant by the sentence, “These radical measures cut too deeply into the sinful flesh of the people of Geneva.” Can you think of measures which would affect you in the same way?
10. It has been said of the Theological College of Geneva that “here wood was carved into arrows”. Try to explain this expression using people as an example (e.g. Marnix van St. Aldegonde).
11. It was stated that Calvin was not spared trials and afflictions. Mention some of them. Why does the LORD test his children?

***A question which may be discussed in groups.***

12. Calvin made all sorts of laws in Geneva: how a party was to be celebrated, how the day of rest was to be kept. Can you make laws concerning these things, or does everyone have to determine that for himself? Try to make laws about these things: our dress, our parties, the keeping of the day of rest. Use Scriptural proof to support them if possible.

# CHAPTER 17

## The Counter-Reformation

### *What is meant by the Counter-reformation?*

While dealing with Luther and Calvin we learnt of the bad state of the Church in the Middle Ages. Many false doctrines had a firm grip on the people. God's Word lay covered with dust in a forgotten corner. The spiritual leaders, from the pope down to the parish priest, often led an unscriptural way of life. Instead of a flourishing church there was a decaying church. People had left God's Covenant and had gone their own way.

By the grace of God a new beginning was made. The King of the Church used Luther and Calvin, among others, to bring about the Reformation. People who wanted to live faithfully according to God's Word were persecuted and excommunicated. This Reformation grew into a powerful movement in which many surrendered themselves to the pure Word of God.

At first the Reformation almost paralysed the Roman Church. This was the fault of the popes in particular. They were more concerned with their own position in Italy than with the spread of the Reformation. Slowly but surely they began to realise that something had to be done.

The result was a violent, purposeful reaction by the Roman Church against the Reformation. This strong reaction was also called the Counter-Reformation (counter = against). Everything possible was to be done to keep the Roman Church intact, even to the extent of wiping out the Reformation.

The devil, the old serpent, was behind this movement. Here he also fought his big battle against the seed of the woman, against the

faithful Church and against Christ. It was the age-old struggle of Revelation 12.

The Counter-Reformation did not aim to return to the Word of God. It was only a form of restoration. You know what this means. Old, dilapidated houses are sometimes restored. Everything is rebuilt in the old style. This is what they felt had to be done in the Roman Church. They knew that many corrupt practices existed. These had to be cleared away, but the false doctrines remained. Every day again Christ had to be sacrificed during mass. There was no turning back to the old Word of God, but a turning back to the old Roman rules and laws.

### *The role of Ignatius de Loyola*

The first step on the road of restoration was taken in Spain. This country took the lead in the Counter-Reformation. For centuries there had been a strict Roman Church there. They had had to fight against the Muslim Moors for hundreds of years. They already had an Inquisition which had to wipe out and prevent heresies.

Ignatius de Loyola was born in this fanatically Roman country, Spain. His family belonged to the nobility. When he was thirty years old, he was badly wounded in a war. During a lengthy illness, a change took place in him. Physically he was never the same again either. Fighting battles was now a thing of the past for him. However, while reading books about the saints, a new ideal grew within him. He dedicated his weapons to Mary and in the future he would fight for her as a spiritual soldier. To this end he was willing to sacrifice everything. He fasted, chastised himself, fought with evil spirits, and according to him, met Mary more than thirty times.

### *Setting the Order of Jesuits*

According to Ignatius he had a vision in which he was told to go to Jerusalem. There, on Mount Zion, he would accomplish more than any of the tens of thousands of crusaders before him. However, the bishop of Jerusalem thought he was dealing with a mad beggar rather than a spiritual soldier. Meanwhile, the attempts of Ignatius

to convert Muslims were unsuccessful, and he returned home discouraged.

At that time he was 33 years of age and he decided to start studying. Thus he arrived in Paris at about the same time as John Calvin. It is a strange thought that two men were preparing themselves there for a terrible struggle which would violently disturb the Church. Here in Paris Ignatius gathered a small circle of followers around him. With them, he daily performed 'spiritual exercises' by means of which they attempted to control their wills completely.



*Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556), depicted in armour with a Christogram on his breastplate. Palace of Versailles, France.*

In 1540, Ignatius and his group were ordained by the pope as an Order of the Church. The pope soon realised that this Order could be of great significance for the Roman Church. It called itself "Compagnia de Jesus" which in Latin is "Societas Jesu". It is abbreviated as S.J. Today the members of the Order of the Jesuits still place these initials after their names.

### ***The structure of the Order of the Jesuits***

The Order was organised like an army. Ignatius became the first general. Only physically fit and spiritually gifted young men could be recruited into this spiritual army. After a trial period of two years they took the three monk's vows. In doing this they vowed to live a life of obedience, poverty and chastity. After following a long road



*Council of Trent, Museo del Palazzo del Buonconsiglio, Trento, Italy.*

of spiritual exercises there was the possibility of taking another vow: that of complete obedience to the pope.

The most important demand of this order was blind obedience. The Jesuit was to submit himself as completely to his superiors as if he were lifeless. That is why people speak of 'mindless discipline'. The Jesuit no longer acknowledged any family ties, for these may hinder his work. He was not even allowed to have his own opinion on anything. To repeat, a Jesuit was a mindless instrument of the pope.

In a short period of time these extreme fanatics occupied all key positions in the Roman Church, but also those outside it. They were the confessors at the courts of kings. The Jesuits were the leaders at universities, in the Inquisition, in mission work, and everywhere.

Despite the tremendous growth of this Order, the demand for strict obedience was not slackened. If someone was not trusted, even though he may have been a very important member of the Order, the Inquisition got rid of him.

The great aim of the Order was to convert heretics from following the Reformation, and to convert heathens. To this end, any means was permitted. That was the terrible character of this Order: the end justified the means. Everything was permitted, no matter how terrible, as long as the goal was a worthy one (in their eyes, that is).

The Jesuit army still exists and is one of the reasons why today hardly any Protestants live in Spain, and why the Roman Church is so very powerful in Belgium and France. It was, and is, a powerful weapon in the hands of the devil.

### ***The Council of Trent (1545 - 1563)***

The large church gathering in Trent was of great importance for the restoration of the Roman Church. The Council was called together by the pope who was urged to do so by the German Emperor.

This emperor felt himself threatened by the Turks. He wanted to put an end to the divisions in his empire. The Lutherans and the Romans were to sit together around the discussion table and try to mend the breach. The Council of Trent was not successful in doing this.

### ***Some decisions of the Council of Trent***

The Council met three times, but with long periods of inactivity between these meetings. The result was that heretics were to be wiped out and their doctrines were cursed. We will deal with a few of the important decisions:

1. The Council said that the Word of God is not transparent and clear. It has to be explained by the tradition of the Church. This means that the Church determines how the Bible has to be interpreted. Reformed doctrine states that God's Word is transparent and clear for everyone who, praying for the guidance of the Holy Spirit, seeks his salvation therein. They teach "Sola Scriptura": the Word alone (see Article 7 of Belgic Confession of Faith). You can understand that this is very important. By this conclusion of the Council, the Roman Church is deified (made

godlike). The Scriptures become dead writings which have to be made alive by the living traditions of the Roman Church.

2. In the Bible, faith in Christ is all-important. Man is justified by faith alone. The Council's decision stated that good works determine the salvation of man. The Council literally said, "If someone says that the faith which makes one righteous is nothing else than a trusting in the mercy of God who wants to forgive sin for Christ's sake, then cursed be that person."

### ***The significance of the Council of Trent***

We have only mentioned two of the decisions made at Trent. Many views which were fundamental to the Reformation were cursed. In doing this, the Roman Church firmly chose for idolatry. In the Middle Ages it was still possible for a true believer to be a member of the Roman Church, but that time had now passed. The Church was now completely in the power of Satan. If there were still true believers in the Roman Church, they had become so despite that Church.

After Trent, the Roman Church was ready for the fight against the Reformation. Doubts and hesitation were no longer possible. One either chose to stay with Rome or one joined the Reformation. Actually the decision was for or against Christ. The fight started by the Jesuits became a life-and-death struggle.

After Trent, the fires of the stakes started smoking. Whoever did not bow down to the pope of Rome was given up to the fire. The blood of martyrs started to flow profusely. The Counter- Reformation had been launched.

However, the blood of the martyrs will always be the seed of the Church for, according to Christ's promise, the gates of hell shall not prevail against the Church. He has kept that promise right up to today.

## ***Questions:***

***Answers to these questions may be found in the outline.***

1. What is meant by the Counter-Reformation? Who was the driving force behind it?
2. Why is the Counter-Reformation sometimes called a restoration?
3. What do you know about Ignatius de Loyola?
4. How was the Order of Jesuits organised?
5. What was the purpose of this Order? How did it try to achieve its aim?
6. What was the Council of Trent? What are some important decisions made by this Council? What did the Reformation teach against this? What was the significance of this Council?

## ***Questions to make you think.***

7. The outline refers to Revelation 12. Read this chapter. Which verses are about the war of the dragon against the Church? Where is this struggle of serpent versus seed of the woman mentioned first in the Bible? How is the dragon attempting to lure you away from the seed of the woman today?
8. Explain the difference between restoration and reformation.
9. Blind obedience is required by the Jesuits. Must we blindly obey the Lord? Does that fit in with the Covenant in which we live with the LORD? What are the marks of Christian obedience today?
10. The Council of Trent cursed 'justification by faith alone'. What is understood by this term? Lord's Day 23 of the Heidelberg Catechism speaks about justification. So do Articles 22 and 23 of the Belgic Confession of Faith. Read these sections and ask about anything you do not understand.
11. The pope visited the Netherlands in 1985. There was a discussion with representatives of Reformed Churches. Not

every Protestant Church wanted to join in. Should our Church have been there? The decisions of Trent are still binding today, therefore Rome still denies the doctrine of justification by faith alone. Many Roman Catholics state that they no longer adhere to the decisions of Trent. What must be our reaction to that?

*Questions which may be discussed in groups.*

12. When the pope planned to come to the Netherlands many people made fun about it. Many Roman Catholics were offended by this. During the time of the Reformation, Marnix of St. Aldegonde ridiculed the pope in a book in which he compared the Roman Church to a beehive. Is ridicule an acceptable weapon? Think of what Elijah said to the priests of Baal on Mount Carmel.
13. Is it true that 'if now there are still believers in the Roman Church, they have become so despite that Church'?
14. Should we concern ourselves about doctrinal pronouncements made over 400 years ago - even those in which many Roman Catholics do not believe? Does the LORD require this of us? Prove this from the Scriptures.

# CHAPTER 18

## The Anabaptists

### *The name 'Anabaptists'*

During the period of the Reformation, the Church did not only have to fight a bitter struggle against the Roman Church but also against the Anabaptists. This name clearly shows that the followers of this sect were baptised again (ana = again, anew). Thus they rejected the baptism of infants. Adults who showed that they were really converted, and possessed a true faith, had to be baptised whether this had already been done when they were infants or not.

In infant baptism all attention is focussed on God and his Covenant. The Covenant promises are not only for adults but also for their children. The forgiveness of sin through the blood of Christ, and through the Holy Ghost who works faith in the hearts, is also promised to the children. In infant baptism, all emphasis is on God's grace. In adult baptism, the emphasis is on man's own achievements in faith.

The Anabaptists are now known by other Baptist names. However, they prefer to call themselves 'Brethren' or 'the company of the committed'.

### *The Teaching of the Anabaptists*

We do not only deal with this sect because they played an important role during the time of the Reformation, but also because various Anabaptist teachings are still to be found today. In the following points we will discuss some of them.

1. Their most important characteristic is the complete separation between everyday life and spiritual life; in other words, between creation and re-creation (or rather regeneration). The Anabaptists

teach that our everyday natural life is sinful. Marriage, family and social life, government, these all belong to this world which is completely evil. Man must not only be saved from his sins but he must also be delivered from this world which is Satan's territory. The Anabaptist does not have to fight against sin in this life but he has to be delivered out of this life, out of this world. Once this has been done, he is without sin.

2. They did not believe that the Church had to be reformed. A completely new congregation of pure, sinless saints, who had to wait for the Millennium, had to be formed. As long as the Millennium had not come, they had to break up any relationship between church and state. The office of government instituted by God in his service was not acknowledged by them. They also refused to take an oath or be conscripted into the army.
3. Over and above God's Word they placed the inner light. The Bible was only a 'dead piece of writing'. The Spirit makes people alive and works directly in the hearts. More value was placed on inspiration than on the written Word of God.
4. Because everyday life was sinful and corrupt, it is impossible for Christ to have taken on the flesh and blood of the virgin Mary. He took his human nature with Him from heaven. Christ could not have taken anything from Mary, He merely passed through her into the world. Compare this with Lord's Day 14 and Article 18 of the Belgic Confession of Faith.

### ***Revolutionary and world-shunning Anabaptists***

The Anabaptists believed in the establishment of a completely new kingdom, the 'realm of God'. The sinful world would not be recreated and renewed by means of Christ's work. No, a new 'realm of God' had to be instituted, which had nothing to do with this world. The creation had to be destroyed.

When people are so against a normal, natural way of life, two attitudes are possible: either they attempt to destroy this old world and forcefully establish 'the new order', or they endeavour to carefully



Left: Melchior Hoffman (c1495–c1543). Right: Jan van Leiden (1509–1536) in 1536. By Heinrich Aldegrever (1502–c1558).

avoid this sinful world. Both courses of action have the same root cause: this world is sinful right to its core. Declaring total war on this world, or avoiding that world, are two seemingly opposite ideals, yet they are closely connected.

### *The 'God-state' of Munster*

One of the first influential Anabaptists was Melchior Hoffman. He did not preach revolution, but his followers caused one. He called himself the Elijah who would precede Christ. Within seven years Christ would return and destroy the world. Then a kingdom of peace lasting a thousand years would be established during which the enemies of the Anabaptists would be punished.

After his death we find the spirit of revolution making headway among the Anabaptists. The man behind this revolution was a baker from Haarlem, John Matthijsz. He called himself Enoch. He sent his apostles throughout the country in pairs. Within a short period of time, many Anabaptist congregations had been instituted. In a vision



*Cages used to starve John van Leyden and his compatriots to death in 1535 are still hanging from the church steeple in Munster.*

(via his inner light) it was revealed to him that the 'realm of God' had to be established at Munster.

The Lutheran preacher at Munster, who had many followers, allowed himself to 'repent' and join the Anabaptists. Soon the Anabaptists occupied the leading positions in the city. In February, 1534, everyone who did not join them was thrown out of the city. John Matthijsz was the supreme ruler who had unlimited power. He established a 'commune' in which all goods were shared and sent his followers out in all directions to make converts.

Their call to repentance with all its terrible consequences, was followed up in the Netherlands in particular. Fortunately the government intervened so that a massive exodus to Munster was prevented. Great numbers of people were arrested everywhere. For example, 3000 were arrested in Kampen (the Netherlands).

John Matthijsz was killed in a battle when the Bishop of Munster besieged the city. He was succeeded by John of Leyden (Leiden), a tailor. He had himself crowned king of the whole world. He lived in incredible luxury. He loved to preside over court cases in the market place, wearing a king's crown on his head and a golden chain around his neck from which hung a pendant in the shape of the world. He

considered himself the new king David. Every transgression of 'God's laws' was punished without pardon by death.

In the meantime the city was still besieged and conditions were worsening. In the summer of 1535 the kingdom of 'the New Zion' perished. The Anabaptists were cruelly killed. They let John of Leyden starve to death in a cage suspended from a church steeple. The revolution had come to an end. The fall of Munster sparked off widespread persecutions. Thousands died a martyr's death.

### ***The significance of Menno Simons (1496 - 1562)***

After the annihilation of the revolutionary movement, a second movement, that of shunning the world, now saw its chance. Its leader was Menno Simons, born in Witmarsum (Friesland, The Netherlands). Here, in 1539, he gave up the priesthood after he had become impressed by the heroic courage of the Anabaptist martyrs. He put a great deal of effort into leading the Anabaptists along more peaceful paths.



*Menno Simons from the book "Two hundred German men in portraits and biographies", Leipzig 1854.*

After Munster, the Anabaptists retreated into their own communities. Their spiritual mark was not an aggressive desire to conquer the world, but to shun the world. We have already noted that the root of both these movements is the same. In essence, there is no difference. In practice, there is.

By exercising strict church discipline, Menno Simons was able to cultivate a sober way of

life among his followers. Some Anabaptists are also named after him and are called Mennonites.

### ***The followers of the reformation versus the Anabaptists***

When the Reformation had only just started, everyone who left the Roman Church was judged to be the same. The Counter-Reformation and the Inquisition regarded them all as heretics. The followers of the Reformation were at pains to clearly distinguish themselves from the Anabaptists.

It is completely wrong to class Anabaptism as a reformational movement along with Lutheranism and Calvinism. The doctrine of the Anabaptists excluded all possibility of a reformation.

The Belgic Confession of Faith as well as the Heidelberg Catechism therefore repeatedly mention and oppose the Anabaptist heresies. In Article 34 of the Belgic Confession we read, “Therefore we detest the error of the Anabaptists, who are not content with the one only baptism they have once received.”

Also Article 36, which deals with the government, opposes the Anabaptists: “Wherefore we detest the Anabaptists and other seditious people, and in general all those who reject the higher powers and magistrates and would subvert justice, introduce community of goods, and confound that decency and good order which God has established among men.” This last phrase refers to polygamy which was being practised, particularly in Munster.

Right up to today we have to deal with Anabaptist heresies in different countries, also in the Netherlands. The anti-conscription movement, for example, often has an Anabaptist background. Radical political parties, supported by revolutionary theologians, do not shrink from attacking the legal government and undermining it by supporting strikes. The revolutionary attitude of many students often stems from the revolutionary philosophies.

Already in the 16th Century it was declared that Luther and Calvin were only semi-reformers. The Anabaptists said they desired a radical reformation. The term 'radical' is therefore not modern. We have learnt that Anabaptism has nothing to do with Reformation. Therefore Reformed people strongly opposed Anabaptists, and still do so today.

### ***Questions:***

***Answers to these questions may be found in the outline.***

1. What is the mark of a sect? Name some modern sects.
2. Can a Church also be called a sect?
3. Are there any sects today which baptise only adults?
4. The Anabaptists can be divided into two groups. Which are they? Can you explain how they can have the same origin?
5. What is the significance of Menno Simons?

### ***Questions to think about.***

6. Do you understand that in infant baptism the emphasis is on God's grace, whereas adult baptism is concerned with the presence of faith in man?
7. Why does the government sometimes call for an oath? Give an example. Do we also take an oath in Church?
8. Are there also movements in Protestant churches which are concerned about an 'inner light'? Do you know of any? What is sinful about these movements?
9. How would you explain to an Anabaptist why Reformed people practice infant baptism?
10. How does God speak to us today? What should be your reaction if someone were to tell you that God appeared to him?

*Questions which may be discussed in groups.*

11. There have always been sects which have predicted the end of the world. Do you know of any sect today which does this? What does the Bible teach us about the end of the world?
12. In Munster they practiced polygamy and public nudity. There is much interest in nude beaches today. Can a Christian go there? Why not?
13. The anti-conscriptionists and people of various peace movements often refer to the Biblical commandment: "You shall not kill." What should be our reaction to that? What does the word "kill" mean here? How can we use Romans 13 and Article 36 of the Belgic Confession in this context?

# CHAPTER 19

## **Guido de Bres - Drafter of the Belgic Confession of Faith**

### *The time in which Guido de Bres lived*

Whenever you come together peacefully to discuss a section of the history of the Church you can hardly imagine that there has been a time when this was punishable with the death sentence. This was the case in Guido de Bres's time. We will give an example of this.

When discussing John Calvin, we learnt that he first worked in Geneva. When this was made impossible for him, he fled the city together with William Farel and went to Strasburg. When the people of Geneva asked him to return in 1541, Peter Brully became his successor. He did not stay long, however. Within a short time he left for Doornik, then a city in the southern Netherlands,<sup>6</sup> where de Bres later became a minister.

Brully was sought by the Roman Inquisition. Just like Calvin, he tried to leave the city in a basket. When he stepped out of it, he was struck by a stone thrown from the city wall which crushed his leg. Brully's flight was unsuccessful and he was imprisoned. For four months they tortured him to try to make him deny his faith. In 1545 he was sentenced to be burnt at the stake. He was slowly burnt alive above a small fire, causing him the most horrific pains. This was quite common in those days. In this way, thousands were put to death by the false church because of their faithfulness to the truth of the Gospel. In all sorts of ways Satan tried to crush the Reformation. It was the period of the martyrs, but also of heresies. The Anabaptists, in particular, were very active. They taught that the Word of God was merely a series of

---

6. *This town, now known as Tournai, lies in southern Belgium near the French border.*

dead letters. Not the Word, but the ‘inner light’ was important. This was the direct working of the ‘Spirit’ in their hearts. To the Roman Church, the different movements were all the same. Anabaptists and the Reformed Churches were all judged alike. Because Anabaptists often acted in a revolutionary way, persecutions continually broke out. It was an extremely dangerous and confusing period of time. If the Lord had not guided and protected his people, the Reformation would have ended in nothing. In protecting his Church, God wished to use of Guido de Bres as an instrument in his service.

### *The life of de Bres*

Little is known about his youth. He was born in Bergen in the province of Henegouwen,<sup>7</sup> in 1522. There he learnt the trade of glass painting and was therefore engaged in designing and constructing stained glass windows for the Roman Churches. Heretical writings were spread around Bergen, too, and young Guido came into contact with the ‘new doctrine’, and was converted. When persecutions intensified in 1548, he crossed over to England where he joined a refugee congregation in London. There he was trained in the ministry of the Word, particularly under the Polish nobleman Jan Laski who spent much time in creating an orderly church life.

When he was about 30 years old, de Bres returned to his birthplace, no longer as a glass painter, but as a preacher of the Gospel. He became a minister at Rijssel. Here there were followers of the new doctrine, but church life as it should be was not yet flourishing.

Leading church life into proper channels became one of his tasks. In utmost secrecy, he explained the Scriptures to small groups of people. When persecutions also intensified here, he was once again forced to flee. This time he went to Germany where he met many acquaintances from his stay in London. It is known that in this period of time he travelled to Geneva to hear Calvin himself explaining the Scriptures. De Bres used this time to equip himself more fully as a minister so that he could continue his work with increased strength and power.

---

7. *Now in Belgium.*

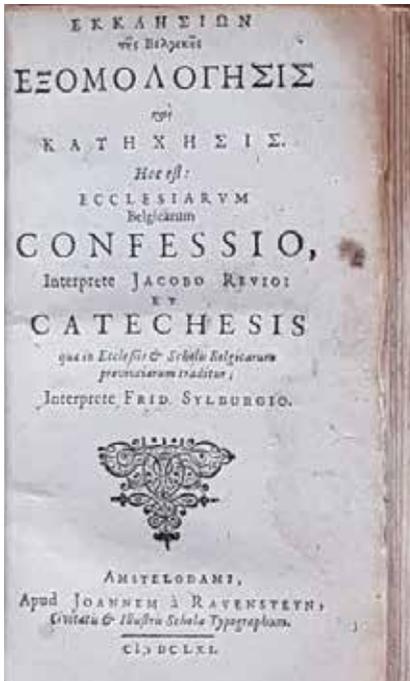


*King Edward VI gives permission for John a Lasco (Laski) (1499–1560) to set up a congregation for European Protestants in London in 1550. Westminster College, University of Cambridge.*

In this period of time de Bres married Catherine Ramon. For her it was an act of faith for she knew that the Inquisition was after her husband and therefore life with him would be full of uncertainties and danger. However, she supported her husband in all things. They received five children who saw less than usual of their father because the cause of the Reformation demanded so much from him.

### ***To Doornik in 1559***

After being in exile for three years, de Bres moved to the congregation of Doornik. Zealously he started to explain God's Word. The seed he sowed bore fruit with God's blessing. Some of de Bres's faithful followers belonged to the governing body of the city.



*Title page for 1661 edition of the Belgic Confession published in Amsterdam.*

In the meantime he had started writing a series of articles now known as the Belgic Confession of Faith. It was his aim to further the unity of the believers by clearly stating the contents of the Reformed doctrine. However, he also had a second aim. He wanted to show the Roman Church leaders that Calvinists were not Anabaptists who caused unrest and upheavals by their revolutionary actions.

However, Satan was not idle. This time de Bres was not attacked from outside, but from within. A section of his congregation formed a procession through the city, loudly singing psalms as they

went along. In their opinion de Bres worked too quietly. Besides, there were followers among the leaders of the city's government, so who could harm them now?

The Roman clergy quickly passed on the news of the procession to the Governess Margaretha. She sent in some investigators whose duty it was to restore law and order. It was clear to de Bres that the Reformed people would be accused of Anabaptism. What could he do about this?

He knew that the investigators were staying at the castle. Suddenly he had a good idea. His confession of faith had been completed. If he could let these people read it, then they would know that they were not dealing with Anabaptists. His confession stated that the

Reformed people wanted to obey the authorities. He had dealt with this subject in Article 36.

After he had written an accompanying letter to the king, he threw the 37 articles wrapped in a parcel over the castle wall during the night of the first to the second of November, 1561, hoping that it would be found. The LORD led events in such a way that it was found. The consequences were not what de Bres had hoped they would be. On the fourth of November a poster appeared which stated that the possession of this booklet was to be punished by death. The Inquisition also arrested various people. The following description of de Bres was passed around: a man of around 40 years of age, of tall stature, pale complexion, thin and long face, reddish beard and poorly dressed in a black coat with a worn out collar.

### ***In exile once again***

It soon became clear to de Bres that he could no longer stay in Doornik. This was the start of a period of wandering restlessly from one place to another, like a wild animal which is being chased. In the meantime he wrote a thick book against the Anabaptists who were increasing their influence everywhere. He wandered through France and also appeared in different parts of Flanders now and again. But everywhere he went, he tirelessly preached the pure Word of God.

You must not consider de Bres' life as an exception. Many Calvinist preachers and church members lived and worked this way. Many gave up their lives for the cause of their faith. However, the blood of the martyrs was the seed of the Church. Satan did not succeed in destroying the Church of the Reformation!

### ***Martyr Guido de Bres***

An important city in the history of Calvinism was Valenciennes.<sup>8</sup> The Calvinists ruled it. Small wonder, then, that one day the army of Phillip II besieged the city. After a short period of time the city

---

*8. Valenciennes lies in northern France, about 37 kilometres south-east of Doornik (Tournai).*

was forced to surrender and de Bres, who was there at the time, was imprisoned.

In his dark cell he succeeded in writing an encouraging letter to the members of the church of Valenciennes, despite the fact that his hands were bound. He wrote, "In particular, do not forget the honour which God has bestowed upon you by giving you a man (he himself) who is not only a servant of the Son of God, but also so privileged by God and held in such high esteem that he considers him worthy of obtaining the martyr's crown."

Not only his congregation, but also his beloved wife received letters. From all those letters it can be learnt that the LORD gave him strength to view his martyrdom as an honour. You can imagine how comforting those letters would have been for the persecuted children of God.

On the 31st of May, 1567, he was executed, along with several other members of the congregation of Valenciennes. He had an opportunity to speak to his fellow prisoners: "My brothers, today I am sentenced to death for the honour of the Son of God. Therefore, praised be his Name! I rejoice. I never thought that God would honour me so greatly."

While standing at the top of the ladder with the rope around his neck, he urged the people to obey the civil authorities. He urged the believers to persevere in following the doctrine of Christ as he had preached it to them. Then the ladder was removed and several minutes later de Bres was with the LORD. He had been a faithful servant. His earthly task was finished.

### ***The significance of de Bres***

After the parcel containing the Confession of Faith was thrown over the castle wall at Doornik, the secret of its existence was spread among the believers. Since 1566 it has been accepted by the Reformed Churches as their confession. It was decided by the well-known Synod of Emden<sup>9</sup> of 1571 that every minister had to

---

*9. In north-western Germany close to the current-day border with the Netherlands.*

sign this confession. Thus the name of Guido de Bres lives on. It was the desire of the King of the Church to use this minister as an instrument in his service, to gather his Church and to protect it against the attacks of Satan. Right up to today, Satan is attempting to take this confession away from the Church. This must never be allowed to happen, because it is a document in which the Church expresses what she believes, based on God's Word.

## ***QUESTIONS:***

*Answers to these questions may be found in the outline.*

1. Tell something about the time in which de Bres lived.
2. Which means does Satan use to attack the Church? How did he use these means in the time of de Bres?
3. What do you know of the life of de Bres?
4. Why did he write the Confession of Faith?
5. How did he manage to bring this document to the attention of the authorities?
6. What do you know about the imprisonment and death of de Bres?

## ***Questions to think about.***

7. Why would the LORD allow some of his children to die a martyr's death?
8. Which do you think is the more dangerous: persecution which may lead to martyrdom, or heresies in the church? How can you prepare yourself for this?
9. Are you allowed to bring your wife and children into a dangerous situation, as de Bres did?
10. The Bible mentions persecutions and suffering of God's faithful children. What do you read about this in Philippians 1:29 and 1 Peter 2:19-25?

11. John Laski worked hard to establish an orderly church life. What do we mean by that? Why is this necessary? How is our church life ordered?

***Questions you may discuss in groups.***

12. What do you think of the expression ‘the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church’? Is this a true saying or not? Give reasons to support your answer.
13. If people accuse Reformed believers of placing too much emphasis on our Confessions, saying that the way we live is important, not our doctrines, what would you answer them?
14. Do you think it is of benefit to discuss a topic such as ‘Guido de Bres’? Try to defend your answer.

# CHAPTER 20

## **The origin of the Heidelberg Catechism**

### *The book of comfort for over four centuries*

When we study Church History, we come across people who have played a special role with their thoughts, words and actions. We must pay careful attention to this. However, in the first place we should take note of what the LORD did by means of these people. He determined the history of the Church. Nothing occurred outside his knowledge and will. He continually determined which people would act and when they would act.

When we learn about the origin of the Heidelberg Catechism, we also come across people: people in authority and their subjects, young people and old, learned and simple people. We must become very familiar with the words and deeds of these people in order to see what the LORD has done and to see how he cared for his Church. That is the Church of which you are a member.

The Catechism has been allowed to exercise its influence for more than four hundred years. In terms of size it is only a small booklet, but its contents are incredibly rich. In the time of the Reformation no single book left such a mark on the believers as the 'old Heidelberger'. Many martyrs have been allowed to draw comfort from it. On the stakes and the scaffold they knew themselves to belong to their faithful Saviour, Jesus Christ. Throughout the centuries, year in-year out, children of the Church have bowed their heads over this booklet. At times they would have sighed as they tried to drum into their heads some of those long answers. However, having grown up, they were thankful to the LORD for this effort. By

means of this ‘book of comfort’, they were able to learn more about Him and to love Him better.

Nobody can measure the tremendous influence of the Heidelberg Catechism. It is a precious gift from God to his Church, a book of instruction - instruction in the doctrine of Jesus Christ - for catechism classes and Church services, for baptisms and funerals and all of life in between: a book for life and death.

### ***The role of Frederick III of the Palatinate***

The writing of the Heidelberg Catechism is unthinkable without the action of the pious prince, Frederick III. Heidelberg was the most important city in his electorate (Palatinate). He came to power in 1569. There was already a swing towards Calvinism under way in his Palatinate. In 1561, Frederick III confessed the Reformed doctrine with all his heart.

This public decision of Frederick had far-reaching consequences. The



*Frederick III, Elector Palatine of the Rhine (1515-1576).*

German princes had the right to determine which religion was to be practised in their electorate. This had been agreed upon in Augsburg where, in 1555, an agreement on religious peace was reached between Catholics and those who subscribed to the Lutheran confession. Reformed people were left out of it.

Therefore, Frederick’s decision to introduce the Reformed doctrine in the Palatinate Was an act of faith.

His decision was attacked from all sides. He was the odd man out: neither Roman Catholic nor Lutheran. He experienced

more opposition from the Lutherans than from Romans. The attacks were very severe. However, Frederick was able to remain steadfast.

The introduction of Reformed doctrine did not take place overnight. Much had been done before this was achieved. Heidelberg possessed one of the oldest universities in Germany. It had been instituted in 1386. Before Frederick took over the leadership in 1559, a heated struggle had been raging within its walls concerning the directions in which instruction should move. The strict Lutherans set to work with great zeal and energy. They wanted the Reformed faith to be wiped out. The less strict Lutherans also had to disappear.

Frederick the Pious tried to have the different parties come to an agreement. When he did not succeed, he ultimately let the theological school be completely guided by Reformed professors. Among them were Caspar Olevianus and Zacharias Ursinus. The University of Heidelberg was of great importance for the progress of the Reformation in the Netherlands. Many Dutch ministers received their instruction here.

As important as the Reformation of the theological school, was the changing of the Church into a Reformed Church. At Frederick's command, crosses and altars were removed. However, this was only a change on the outside. Frederick understood that what was really important was the reformation of doctrine and life. Because of this, he gave orders for putting together the Heidelberg Catechism.

### ***The aim of the Heidelberg Catechism***

What did Frederick III have in mind with this catechism? Simply the instruction in the Christian doctrine. To achieve this, he instructed the professors Ursinus and Olevianus to compile a lesson-book. In the preface to the edition of 19 January, 1563, Frederick further explained his intentions.

It worried him that the youth of his Palatinate were so carelessly instructed in the Christian doctrine, both at school and in Church. Every instructor did what was right in his own eyes. The result was that the young people often grew up without fear of God

or knowledge of his Word. Sometimes the young people were confronted by important issues, or by false doctrines.

That is why a Catechism dealing with our Christian doctrine on the basis of the Word of God, is so very important. If the youth are not instructed in the pure doctrine of the Holy Gospel and the true knowledge of God, things go wrong in society. Then nothing will come of the offices in the church or in the state. Discipline and other virtues which characterise good subjects can only grow and increase if young people are continually taught the doctrine of Christ.

Hence the Catechism was drawn up, not only so that the young people would be taught in the Church and at school but also so that ministers and teachers would have a firm basis for teaching the doctrine of Jesus Christ. It meant, finally, that everyone had to be thoroughly instructed in this doctrine by means of the preaching of the Catechism.

Every Sunday, before the morning service, ministers had to read a large section of the Catechism 'clearly and easily understood'. Within nine Sundays they were required to have been through the whole Catechism. Then they started all over again. In the afternoon service the Catechism was preached as it is still done today. Only the way in which it is done is different. The young people had to recite questions and answers in the presence of the whole congregation. The minister then had to explain and clarify the next questions and answers. In this way the whole Catechism was dealt with at least once a year.

### ***The drafters of the Heidelberg Catechism***

Before the Heidelberg Catechism was written, similar instruction booklets for young people were already in use in different parts of Germany. Frederick, however, wanted a Reformed Catechism. Most of the work in compiling the booklet was done by Ursinus. He had already written a large catechism, with a total of 323 questions, in Latin. Later, he wrote a shorter one with 108 questions.

This did not mean that what Ursinus had written was immediately adopted by the Church. A synod was called together from 11 to



Left: Zacharias Ursinus (1534–1583) from “*het schat-boeck, der verklaringhen over de catechismus*” printed by Hendrick Laurensz, 1647. Right: Caspar Olevianus (1536–1587) by Theodor de Bry (1528–1598).

17 January 1563, in which Frederick gave instructions to have the Catechism thoroughly scrutinised. Many alterations were made. More than likely it was Olevianus who played an important part in determining the final contents.

Ursinus and Olevianus, both students of Calvin, were still very young when they were called by the LORD to contribute their part to the history of the Church. They were 28 and 26 years of age, respectively. They thankfully made use of all the good information which other instruction booklets contained. They chose sections from the catechism books of Strasburg, Basle, Zurich, Geneva, Emden and London. The best parts of these books were combined with the best parts of Ursinus’s own work.

The result of this work was a book with outstanding characteristics, which has clearly shown its significance and worth throughout the centuries. The ‘father’ of the Heidelberg Catechism, Frederick the Pious, was therefore not only of importance for his own

Palatinate but also for countless Reformed people in many countries, particularly the Netherlands.

### *The beginning of the triumphal march of the Heidelberg Catechism*

It is particularly after the introduction of the Heidelberg Catechism by Frederick III in 1563 that he had to give an account of his actions. His opposers demanded that the Catechism withdrawn. There were even plans to depose Frederick and sentence him to death.

Despite the danger, Frederick trusted in God for protection and attended a meeting in Augsberg. In the midst of his enemies, he defended this Catechism before the emperor: "It is founded in God's Word and therefore cannot be put aside." The Margrave of Baden called out: "What are we doing, fighting this man? He is more pious than we are." From then on, he was known as Frederick the Pious. It was decided not to take any action against the Heidelberg Catechism.

Immediately after it was published in 1563, it was translated from German into Dutch by Peter Datheen. In 1568 it was accepted as a confessional standard at the Synod of Wesel. If someone wanted to become a minister, he had to prove that he agreed with the doctrine of the churches in his examinations.

This doctrine was summarised in the Belgic Confession and the Heidelberg Catechism. The Synod urged ministers to teach the Catechism. Ensuing synods continued this line of thought. Thus the Heidelberg Catechism has become one of the Forms of Unity, as our confessional standards are called.

For more than four centuries it has been able to do its blessed work, not only in a part of Germany and the Netherlands but also in Hungary, South Africa, the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and Indonesia, just to mention some countries. Frederick III was a powerful instrument in the hand of the King of the Church.

The Church of all ages owes heartfelt thankfulness to them for writing the Heidelberg Catechism because this made instruction in the doctrine of Jesus Christ possible in a thorough, systematic way.

## ***QUESTIONS:***

***The answers to these questions may be found In the outline.***

1. Why is our Catechism called the 'Heidelberg' Catechism? What is the purpose of this Catechism?
2. How was the Catechism used in Frederick's days?
3. How was the Catechism composed and written?
4. What is the importance of the Heidelberg Catechism?

## ***Questions to think about.***

5. Sometimes you may sigh when you have to learn a particularly long question and answer. Can you imagine a situation in which you would be thankful that you know these things by heart? Or have you already experienced this?
6. In the preface to the Catechism, Frederick III actually states, "If things go wrong in the Church, they also go wrong in society." Is this true? Can you prove that?
7. It was also said, "discipline and other virtues can only grow and increase." What do you understand by this?
8. Can you imagine that in churches which deviate from the Reformed path the Catechism is pushed into the background more and more? Why would this happen? Do you know of any church in which this is happening?

## ***Questions which may be discussed in groups.***

10. Is it necessary to know the questions and answers of by heart, or is it sufficient to be able to summarise the contents in your own words? Is there a danger in this?

11. Why is the Catechism called a 'book of comfort'? What does the word comfort actually mean? How could you comfort a sad person with the Catechism?
12. There are people who consider that a four-hundred-year-old book does not suit modern times. What would you answer them?

# CHAPTER 21

## The Remonstrant Controversy

### *The progress of Calvinism through to all sectors of life*

Once Reformed Churches had been established in the Netherlands people did not rest there, satisfied. All sorts of Roman customs and practices were attacked and wiped out. Prince William had granted Leyden a university where young men could be instructed in the ministry of the Word. Besides this, Church consistories made sure that there were Reformed teachers. In all sorts of ways Reformed people tried to introduce the spirit of Geneva. They strove to let the light of God's Word shine on all facets of life, to acknowledge Christ as King over the whole of creation.

This progress of Calvinism resulted in resistance from two sides. First, there were the followers of Erasmus.<sup>10</sup> They did not want to be bound to the Reformed Confession. It was too restrictive, too stifling, for them. They also did not want to hear about Church discipline. They were all for tolerance and acceptance. This meant that they wanted everyone to be free to interpret the Bible in his own way.

Second, there were the ruling parties who wanted to prevent the progress of Calvinism. These were the people in authority in the cities and the provinces. In general they could not care less about religion. They were quite happy for ministers to preach obedience to the authorities, but were not at all pleased when the ministers pointed out the responsibilities and obligations of these authorities, as set out in Article 36 of the Belgic Confession of Faith. These ruling parties did not mind interfering in Church matters, but could not bear being told what to do by the Church.

---

10. *Desiderius Erasmus (1466-1536), a Dutch humanist scholar.*



Left: Franciscus Gomarus (François Gomaer) (1563-1641).  
 Right: James Arminius (1560-1609) by David Bailly (1620)

What happened then was that the followers of Erasmus, together with the ruling parties, resisted the Calvinists. These two groups of people are called the Libertines. This word means ‘liberty’ or ‘freedom’. They wanted to be free from Confession and Church Order. They were also called ‘flexible’ and ‘moderates’ in contrast with the ‘strict Calvinists’, as the Reformed people were called.

The differences between Reformed people and the Libertines grew with time. A violent clash became unavoidable. Satan launched his attack against the progress of God’s Word in the lives of the people. We will learn how cunningly he did this.

### ***Arminius versus Gomarus***

The differences of opinion between Reformed people and the Libertines became very marked when Jacob Arminius was appointed professor of theology at the University of Leyden. Reformed people already distrusted Arminius at this stage. As a minister, he had on several occasions proven to be unfaithful to the Reformed Confession. When he became professor, however, he promised to

subject himself to the Reformed Confession. But it was soon shown that he was not to be trusted on this point. This was especially clear in his public discussions with François Gomaer, better known as Franciscus Gomarus.

Their main difference of opinion concerned predestination. This subject is difficult to understand. It means that God has elected us with the aim that we will believe. God acts sovereignly in electing people. We have come across that word in previous outlines. It means that in the answer to the question: “Who will be saved?” we believe that it lies completely with God. He is not dependent on anyone. Thus Gomarus, on the basis of God’s Word, taught that faith is a gift of God’s sovereign election, of his sovereign good pleasure.

Aminius and his followers disagreed violently. They taught that God elected us because he could see who would choose to believe. But in this way the decision lies with man, and not with the LORD. This is made clear, for example, in the following expressions of the Arminians: “man forges his own salvation” and “man’s will can stop God’s grace”.

This teaching of Arminius is a heresy in which man occupies the central position. We therefore find that this doctrine has resulted in liberalism. It is then not all about ‘faith in God’, but ‘faith in man’.

Arminius died in 1609. This did not mean that the controversy came to an end. The new leader of the Arminians was now the court and army chaplain, Johannes Uytenboogaert. Together with forty others, he submitted a remonstrance, a protest, to the States General of the Dutch Provinces in 1610, in which Arminius’s thoughts were clearly set out. From that time on, Arminians were also called Remonstrants. In 1611, the Reformed people prepared an answer, the so-called ‘Contra-Remonstrance’. This led to their being given the name ‘Contra-Remonstrants’.

### ***Oldenbarnevelt versus Maurice***

The struggle between the Remonstrants and the Contra-Remonstrants intensified when the leaders of the provinces, under

the leadership of Johan van Oldenbarnevelt, interfered. In many places, the leaders acted to support the Arminian minority. The government started to interfere with the Church. The result was that the strict Calvinists started to have their own meetings with their own ministers. As a result of the action of government leaders, a tense situation arose in several places. This worsened when Oldenbarnevelt gave city leaders permission to employ soldiers in their service. These were known as 'local militia', and their job was to keep Reformed people in order. The situation changed when the stadtholder, Prince Maurice, openly chose the side of the Contra-Remonstrants. In other words, he was for the Reformed people or strict Calvinists. He sacked the 'local militia' and appointed new governments to cities, e.g. in Utrecht. The court chaplain, Uytenboogaert, was also told to leave, while rebellious government leaders were imprisoned. Oldenbarnevelt suffered the same fate, and was beheaded in 1619 for high treason at the age of 72. Uytenboogaert only managed to escape by fleeing to another country.

### *The Synod of Dort*

Now that Prince Maurice had openly chosen the side of the Reformed people, the way was open to convene a national synod. Here the differences in doctrine could be discussed. The last synod had been held in 1586. The ruling parties had continually resisted the holding of a synod since then. As a result there was a long list of things to be dealt with on the agenda in 1618.

At Dort on 13 November 1618, the synod was opened with pomp and ceremony. Not only had the provinces sent delegates, but at the government's request many Reformed people from abroad were also present. Johannes Bogerman, a minister from Leeuwarden, was chosen as the chairman.

An important decision had to be taken at this synod. Would the Churches remain Reformed, or would they choose for liberalism? Would they continue to glory in God's sovereign grace, or would the glory be in the will of man? The Remonstrants received ample opportunity to defend their point of view. However, they misused



*The Synod of Dort. By P. Weyts, Stedelijk Museum Dordrecht*

this through their defiant attitude and their continual delaying and stretching out of the discussions. On 4 January 1619, Bogemman's patience had run out. In a thundering speech, he dismissed the Remonstrants from the meeting. They had been patient with them long enough. The Remonstrants were then judged by their writings. This procedure was much quicker.

In April of that year, the ‘Five Articles Against the Remonstrants’, also known as the Canons of Dort, were completed. Together with the Heidelberg Catechism and the Belgic Confession of Faith they became up the confessional standards (the Three Forms of Unity) of Reformed Churches in the Netherlands.

The fight for the truth of God’s Word was settled in favour of the Reformed doctrine. With God’s help the attacks of Satan were averted. The Churches were kept close to the pure doctrine of the Scriptures.

All sorts of other matters were also dealt with at this synod. Various forms were decided upon and accepted; for example, the forms for baptism and the Lord’s Supper. Furthermore, the Church Order of Dort was written. In this document the relationship between local churches was dealt with and practical aspects of church life were regulated. The most important regulation was the one stating that no church may rule over another church. Every form of hierarchy was hereby suppressed.

It was also decided to once again translate the Bible from the original manuscripts. The existing translation was no longer satisfactory because it was largely a translation from the Lutheran Bible. The new translation was made possible financially by the government or the ‘States General’. It was known in Dutch as the *Statenvertaling* (the States translation). It took many years to complete. It was only in 1673 that the first copy was presented to the States. Thus the LORD had not only used the Synod of Dort to keep the Church close to the pure doctrine, but also to build up the Church.

### ***What happened to the Remonstrants?***

Now that the Reformed Churches had rejected the errors of the Remonstrants, further action had to be taken. If Remonstrant ministers promised that they would remain silent, they were allowed to stay in the country. If they did not want to promise this, they were exiled to a country of their choice. Many withdrew to Antwerp. After the death of Prince Maurice in 1625 they could once again move about the Netherlands without much difficulty. From 1631 onwards,

they were again permitted to hold their own Church services and to openly proclaim their heresy.

The course of Church History has shown that the Reformed people were right. They had not allowed themselves to be misled by the often very pious talk of the Arminians. In a Church struggle it is important to be able to distinguish carefully between the truth and the lie. The Remonstrants often used Reformed words in order to give the appearance that they were speaking the truth. It was the LORD's desire to open the eyes of the Reformed people to the enormous threat of this attack of Satan.

Today little is left of the Remonstrant churches. They have become true modernists. God's Word is no longer preached in them. The spirit of Erasmus has triumphed in these churches! They are concerned only with man, who is considered good by nature. Man himself is allowed to determine how he shall live.

Through God's grace the Reformed Churches have remained steadfast in the pure doctrine. This has proved to be of the greatest importance. The history of Dort is your history. Without God's grace, which produced people faithful, the Reformed Churches would have disappeared in those days. However, they were allowed to remain steadfast and faithful to his Word, through his power.

## ***QUESTIONS:***

***Answers to these questions may be found in the outline.***

1. Which two groups turned against the Reformation in the seventeenth century? Why did this happen?
2. Try to explain as clearly as possible in your own words the doctrine of predestination.
3. What were the Remonstrants' thoughts on this doctrine? How do you explain two of their sayings as quoted in the outline?
4. What happened to the Remonstrants at the Synod of Dort? Why did this happen?

5. Can you name some other matters which were discussed at this Synod?

***Questions to think about.***

6. The followers of Erasmus did not want to know about Church discipline. What is Church discipline and what is its aim? What does Article 29 of the Belgic Confession say about it?
7. What does the following mean: “Satan launched his attack against the progress of God’s Word in the lives of the people”?
8. It is stated in the outline that Erasmus preached tolerance. To what extent must we be tolerant? Can you give examples of this? When are you not allowed to be tolerant? (See Ephesians 4:2; Colossians 3:13; Revelation 2:2)

***A question to be discussed in groups.***

9. Can you clearly distinguish between a) God has chosen us and therefore we will believe, and b) God has chosen us because we would believe?

# CHAPTER 22

## **Breach of the Covenant in the Eighteenth Century**

### *The Age of Enlightenment*

In this outline we want to study the eighteenth century. In Dutch this period was called the 'era of the wigs'. It was the time of pompous gentlemen, who decorated themselves with powdered wigs, dressed themselves extravagantly in colourful silk and velvet garments, and wore knee-breeches and three-cornered hats.

It was the time of ladies with towering hairstyles, which famous hairdressers worked on for hours, tiny waists and wide-hooped skirts which often made it difficult for the wearer to enter a doorway.

The houses and gardens were done in the 'French style'. People spoke French, read French, and even thought in French. All the people who could afford to, imitated the 'French way of life'. Of course, this left hardly any time for work. However, this was not necessary either.

The upper and middle classes, made rich by the flourishing trade of the Golden Age,<sup>11</sup> could live on the affluence of the previous generation for the time being. Besides, the ruling classes in particular had managed to obtain positions which brought in much money for little or no work.

The 'lord' regents felt themselves so superior that they looked down on everyone who did not belong to their class in society. The purpose of the charity they practised often seemed to flatter their feelings of self-

---

*11. The Dutch Golden Age is a period of time, mostly in the 17th Century, when the Netherlands was the greatest economic power in the world. They had a large influence in art, science, trade and the military during this period.*

righteousness. In their contacts with the poor people they were often very condescending. Houses for needy elderly people, orphanages and poor-houses were often clearly inscribed with the name of the 'charitable' person who had donated money towards this establishment, so that he would not be forgotten throughout the centuries.

Of course, people started to rebel against the showy, affluent way of life of the rich and the rulers, for the common people often suffered poverty. However, rebellion and dissatisfaction were punished severely and therefore it was better to suffer in silence.

### ***Conditions in the church***

After this sketch of life in the 18th century, you might ask, "What has this have to do with Church History?" The situation was this: those same regents and prosperous citizens also sat in the best pews, especially reserved for them, in Church. They were also the 'rulers' in the Church and their word was law.

Was their way of life in accordance with the faith and convictions of the Church? No, not at all. Their arrogance and pride, their luxurious way of life, did not agree at all with the Word of God. How was such a situation possible? Was not the greatest blessing of the Reformation the fact that the Word of God once again ruled the lives of the people?

For centuries popes and priests had pushed the Word to one side and had ruled the church themselves. However, because of the Reformation, the Scriptures once again occupied the central position. How rich the effects of this were! Living a sober Christian life, showing love to one's neighbour, and zest for work had reaped rich fruits in the Golden Age. How was it possible that practically nothing of a Christian, Biblical lifestyle was left in the 18th century? There were various reasons for this. We will point out some of them.

### ***Man the centre of attention***

God's Word makes it clear to us that we are by nature incapable of doing any good and attracted to what is evil and sinful. However, it is

very difficult for man to accept that he lives by grace alone. Therefore the false doctrine, which teaches that man is not so bad, continually reappears in Church History. It is a teaching which says that we can still do something towards our salvation.

Is our heart sinful? Is the flesh weak? Yes, the adherents of this teaching say, we will agree with that, but we can still control our will. In any case, we ourselves will determine whether or not we will serve God. The Scriptures, however, teach that the LORD works faith in us according to his sovereign good pleasure (Philippians 2:13).

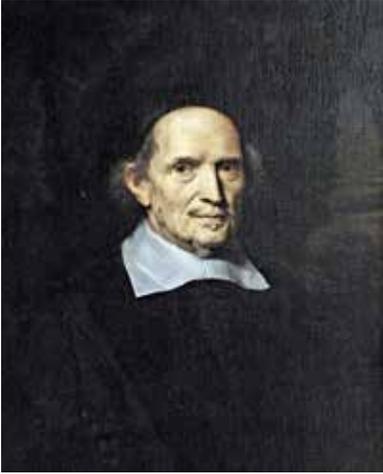
The well-known Synod of Dort rejected the error which taught that man was like a smith who could forge his own will. The Arminians were silenced and driven into exile. However, the heresy returned. It is actually present even in our own hearts. Only by living in faith, close to the Scriptures, can that false doctrine be kept in check. It is the heresy of arrogant man who puts himself, instead of the Word of God, in the centre of attention. Unfortunately, the majority of the people in the Church of the 18th century no longer lived close to the Scriptures.

### ***The church of the Reformation become a state church***

One of the causes of the deterioration in the Church was the fact that the Reformed Churches could not free themselves from the civil government's rule. The task of the civil government is to guard and guarantee the freedom of the Church, but she is not permitted to meddle with church affairs. This, however, was the case in the Reformed Churches, often with very harmful results.

Everyone who wanted a government position had to be a member of the privileged church. The result was that many people were Reformed in name only. Further, the carrying out of Church discipline was often rather difficult to do, particularly if it concerned important government officials. Often regents had given financial assistance to poorer families so that their sons could study for the ministry. However, they expected deep gratitude in return.

The civil government also had the final say in whether or not a synod was to be called. From 1618 to 1816 not a single synod was held. The



*Left: Gisbertus Voetius (Gijsbert Voet: 1589– 1676) by Nicolaes Maes (1634–1693), Utrecht University. Right: William V, Prince of Orange (1748–1806). By Henry Bone (1755–1834), Royal Collection Trust, UK.*

authorities repeatedly refused requests for a synod, for the sake of peace in church and state. The rhymed version of the Psalms in the Netherlands was also forced onto the Churches by the authorities – really an illegal way of doing this. For more than 200 years the Churches were saddled with many unbiblical ideas and expressions in this rhymed version of the Psalms.

### ***Making a God of the human mind***

Finally we arrive at the most important cause of the deterioration in the Church and the departure from God's Word. The church of the 18th century exchanged her living faith for human reasoning. Anything that could not be understood by the human mind was discarded as superstition.

Europe was ruled by the spirit of Enlightenment. That was what the spirit of that age was called. This spirit did not halt at the doors of the Church. The professors at the theological colleges taught the young ministers-to-be that they should only believe what they could understand with their minds. Thus, sermons often became lengthy,

learned discourses. The living God was pushed into the background. No account was taken of Him in everyday life.

### ***Process against the deification of the human mind***

Was there nothing good left in the Church then? Oh yes, there was. There were the followers of Gijsbertus Voetius who was a professor in Utrecht. He had been a student of Gomarus and a delegate to the Synod of Dort. He defended Reformed doctrine tooth and nail. In particular, he emphasized a pious life, living close to the Word of God. The further we advance into the 18th century, the weaker we see the resistance becoming. This was also because of the interference of the government which pressed for tolerance. It did not want another civil-war as in the days of the Synod of Dort. Thus the resistance bled to death. There were still faithful Christians who adhered to God's Word. However, they retreated into gatherings in the homes of certain people. They looked for comfort among the 'writers of old'. But the vast majority of church members considered themselves safe under the protection of the human mind. It was thought that children came into the world pure and undefiled. If they were brought up in every form of virtue, all would be well with them. They no longer believed in the total corruption of man.

### ***Leaving God's Covenant***

In this way the Church was 'almost reduced to nothing', as Article 27 of the Belgic Confession states. The salting salt had lost its flavour. The Church had broken the Covenant with God. Then the words of the Scriptures in Jeremiah 6:19, "Behold, I will bring evil upon this people", came into force. What the church sows, she will reap. The French revolution came. A small number of faithful people regarded the French as a whip in God's hand for the punishment of the nation.

Prince William V also believed this when he had to leave the country in 1795 as an exile. "God has a controversy with the Netherlands," he said.

Did the people learn a lesson and returned to the living God after the French era, when the French rule came to an end in 1813 and William of Orange was back in the country? Did the Church again stand up as a pillar and firm foundation of the truth? Not at all. In future, the king was to decide the procedures in the Church. He would determine if there was to be a synod. The Scriptural government of the Church was destroyed by the 'Regulation' of 1816. Nothing was left of the independence of the local churches. Hierarchy had made its appearance.

Future ministers no longer had to swear allegiance to the Word of God. As long as they promised to be faithful to the Bible in so far as it agreed with their own convictions. In doing this, the door was opened to liberalism and freedom of doctrine.

However, Christ protects his Church, although for a time she seems to be reduced to nothing in the eyes of man, such as in the days of the ungodly Ahab, when 7,000 did not bow their knees to Baal.

In the next part we will see how the LORD led his Church back to the true preaching of the Word by means of the Secession (*Afscheiding*). The consequences of departing from God's Covenant were terrible. But the LORD remains merciful, for He is a God full of compassion. Church History is filled with proofs of this, also today.

## ***QUESTIONS:***

***The answers to these questions may be found in the outline.***

1. This outline included the heading: leaving the Covenant. What do we mean by the Covenant? Can you also give examples from the Bible of people leaving the Covenant? Do people leave the covenant today? How?
2. The 18th century is known for riches for many. Is a Christian allowed to strive for riches? What does 1 Timothy 6 say about riches?

3. Is it always right to 'suffer in silence' when there is injustice? Can you give examples from the Bible of people who did, and those who did not, do this?
4. Is there still a danger today that the rich people will govern the affairs of the church?
5. It was stated that the blessing of the Reformation was that the Word of God ruled the whole of people's lives. What does this mean? Is it difficult to put into practice?
6. What does the expression 'to live by grace alone' mean?

***Questions to think about.***

7. Philippians 2:13 states that God works in us both to will and to work. However, vs. 12 states that we must work out our own salvation with fear and trembling. How do you explain this?
8. Does the civil government have a task in relation to the Church? (See Art. 36 of the Belgic Confession.)
9. Do we have to 'switch off' our minds in matters of faith? Can we understand everything?

***Some questions which may be discussed in groups.***

10. If a new-born baby is not to be regarded as pure and undefiled, how then must we view it according to the Word of God? Can a Reformed mother sing at the cot of her baby, "Many sins I've done this day, please LORD take them all away"?
11. Today we live in an apostate age. Can you provide proof of this?

# CHAPTER 23

## The Reveille

### *What is Le Reveille?*

During the course of the history of the Church it has often happened that, at times of great apostasy and falling away, little is left of the Church of Christ. There are many examples of this in the Old Testament, as well as in the period after Christ's coming down to earth. The Church then breaks the Covenant with the Lord. Obedience then gives way to worldly thoughts and a worldly lifestyle. Man, and not God's Word, becomes the deciding factor. The confession 'the LORD is my shepherd' no longer applies because 'man is his own shepherd'.

But remember this: no matter how great the apostasy and disobedience to the Word of God is, the LORD always preserves a small group of faithful sheep. These Church members do not remain faithful because they are such good people. No, they are upheld by grace. The Scriptures call these believers 'a remnant'. In Romans 11:5 they are even called "a remnant according to the election of grace".

There was also such a remnant in the beginning of the nineteenth century. It often consisted of sheep without a shepherd. The ministers, the shepherds, were often false shepherds because they did not preach the Word of God.

When the French soldiers invaded the Netherlands, crossing over frozen stretches of ice, the stadtholder William V spoke the well-known words, "God has entered into a controversy with the Netherlands and reveals this in the failure of all our attempts and now also in the spell of heavy frost which has turned the rivers and waters into paved roads." And yet, there were many straying ministers

who thanked God for the frozen rivers, which were like paved roads to the soldiers of the revolution.

However, the sheep were not without the Good Shepherd. He never leaves his flock to look after itself. After all, he paid for them with his own blood. He called up men who dared to raise their voices against the great apostasy in the church. A spiritual awakening came to the countries abroad, particularly Switzerland and France. This awakening or revival is known by its French name 'Reveille'. Literally it means 'wakening' or 'revival'.

### ***The Reveille in the countries abroad***

In 1816 a Calvinistic English merchant, Richard Wilcox, arrived in Geneva to carry out his business. It shocked him when he saw how little was left of the work of Calvin. Students at the university which Calvin had instituted were supposed to become ministers, but hardly studied the Bible. The Old Testament was used one hour a week during their Hebrew studies, and the New Testament was regarded very critically. They needed to believe only what they could understand.

There were some students who wanted to serve the LORD in obedience to his Word. But in the official Church they received, as it were, stones for bread. Therefore they joined the Moravian Brethren, spiritual descendants of Jan Hus. These were sincere believers. However, when the university's professors found out what they were doing, it was forbidden them. Whoever was not obedient, would just have to leave the university.

Richard Wilcox came in contact with the students during these difficult days. He gave them true instruction in the Scriptural truths. He pointed out the rich promises of God and the power of our prayers. He was an instrument in God's hand to encourage the persecuted students.

Thus Geneva once again became the place from which God's Word went out to Europe. One of the initially unbelieving ministers in Geneva was Cesar Malan. He, too, came to faith, and could not



*Left: Isaïc da Costa (1798–1860) by Johann Heinrich Rennefeld (1832–1877), Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam. Right: Willem Bilderdijk (1756–1831), by Charles Howard Hodges (1764–1831), Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.*

remain silent about that. Sunday after Sunday he impressed upon the congregation, “You are saved through faith, by grace. Repent and return to the living God.” There was a great deal of resistance to his preaching. Malan found a good supporter in another minister, Merle d’ Aubigne. He, too, had previously been one of the fiercest opponents of the truth. He, as well as Malan, became a fiery preacher of God’s grace.

This awakening, this Reville, resulted in persecutions in Geneva. Church services were interrupted. Faithful believers were maltreated and pelted with stones. Although those who were persecuted were protected by the government, the official church did not want to have anything to do with them. Faithful ministers were removed from office and excommunicated.

The Reville did not stay within the borders of Switzerland. In France, in particular, there was also a revival. There were, amongst

others, the brothers Monod who preached God's Word and thereby fought against the apostasy and revolution of their days.

In Germany, England and Belgium the Reville gained many followers. The light of God's Word once again started to shine in darkened Europe.

### *The Reville in The Netherlands*

The father of the Reville in the Netherlands was Willem Bilderdijk. He was born in Amsterdam in 1756. Already at an early age it was obvious that he was very intelligent. Because of an open wound on his foot, he was unable to play outside as a child and his entire youth was spent among books. He studied in Leyden and obtained a law degree in 1782. In the meantime he had studied many other subjects as well, and become knowledgeable in them.

He was a fierce opponent of the revolution. When the French ruled the Netherlands, all lawyers had to swear an oath of allegiance. This oath required them to honour the rights of every human being and clearly stated that the country should be ruled by the people. Bilderdijk refused to take this oath, and even opposed it strongly. The result was that he was exiled.

A difficult time followed for him, in England and Germany. He had to work day and night to earn a living. Several of his children died very young.

In 1806 he returned to his home country. It was his ambition to become a professor. However, this ambition was never realised. He was very, very intelligent, but no one wanted such a 'difficult' man. If he had not opposed the revolution so strongly, he would probably have been accepted as a professor.

Yet Willem Bilderdijk did lecture in Leyden, though not in the official status of professor but privately at home. From 1817 to 1827 he gave lectures in history and constitutional law to a handful of students. In those ten years he only had about forty students. That was a small number, but their influence was great. Via these students the



*Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer (1801–1876), by Charles Howard Hodges (1764–1837), Cultural Heritage Agency of the Netherlands Art Collection.*

anti-revolutionary ideas of Bilderdijk spread all over the country. He taught them to discern the spirit of the times and to fight against it.

Well-known students of Bilderdijk were Isaac da Costa and his friend Abraham Capadose. Both were of Jewish origin. Bilderdijk was instrumental in bringing them to faith in Jesus Christ. It was a moving moment for Bilderdijk when, in 1823, they were baptised. Da Costa, in particular, continued Bilderdijk's struggle as a poet and writer. He also declared war on the unbelief and revolution of the time. He called upon fellow Christians to oppose the spirit of the times. Of course, people strongly resisted him. Satan does not allow himself to be conquered so easily.

Another very well-known student of Bilderdijk was Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer.<sup>12</sup> He, too, became a Calvinist through the

---

*12. Although Groen was part of his surname, he was commonly known as Groen and not Guillaume.*

influence of his lecturer. The history lectures which he received from Bilderdijk were expanded in his book *Handbook of the History of the Fatherland*.<sup>13</sup> Bilderdijk's views on revolution can be found in Groen's book *Unbelief and Revolution*.<sup>14</sup>

For years, Groen was a member of parliament. There he also fought the spirit of revolution. In parliament and outside it, Groen fought for equal rights for Christian schools. Some of his well-known expressions are, "In our isolation lies our strength" and "against the revolution is the Gospel". Thus he became the founder of anti-revolutionary politics which were still propagated by the G.P.V.<sup>15</sup>

Many followers of the Reveille were able to do a great deal for the weak and unprotected members of society. Thus Rev. OG Heldring of Zetten founded the well-known Heldring's Institutions. Here Christian charity was brought into practice.

### ***Addressing Le Reveille***

The significance of the Reveille was that its followers resisted the spirit of unbelief and revolution with great force and energy. They called upon people to have faith in Jesus Christ and not to fall away from the Covenant. They put their faith into practice. Generally, it was the well-off people who were involved in this movement. However, they did not keep their money for themselves. A great deal of it was sacrificed for Christian 'homes' and 'institutions'.

The weaknesses and shortcomings of the Reveille were that it did not call for a reformation. The followers remained members of the Reformed Church (the mainstream church). The Reformed Confession was not sufficiently valued by them. In their personal lives they were genuine Christians, but they did not fully understand the significance of the Church. Therefore, when the 'men of the Reveille' died, the movement as such died with them.

---

13. In Dutch "Handboek der Geschiedenis van het Vaderland".

14. In Dutch "Ongeloof en Revolutie".

15. *Gereformeerd Politiek Verbond, a political party in the Netherlands, associated with the Dutch Reformed Churches.*

It is very sad that they did not join the “Secession” (Afscheiding). That was a true reformation in which all the members of the Church were involved, also the young people. This was an ecclesiastical movement in which the Reformed Confession was restored to its position of honour.

## **QUESTIONS:**

*Answers to these questions may be found in the outline.*

1. Can you give examples from the Bible in which the Church had almost completely disappeared because of great apostasy? Can you also give examples from the history of the Church of the New Covenant?
2. Can you tell something about the origin of the Reveille movement, and its later development?
3. How was Bilderdijk important in this movement? Name some of his students as well.
4. In what way was Groen van Prinsterer important? Name some of his books.
5. What was the strength of the Reveille? What was its weakness?

## **Questions to think about.**

6. What do we mean by ‘worldly thoughts’ and a ‘worldly lifestyle’ (coming to the world)? How does this show up today? How did it show up In Old Testament days?
7. In the outline we wrote that ‘man was his own shepherd’. Do you know what is meant by that? What do we mean when we say that only the LORD is shepherd?
8. Why could Bilderdijk not swear the oath of allegiance to the Rights of Man? What do you think of the expression “We should not speak of the rights of man” but of the “rights of God on man”?

9. What do we actually mean by revolution? How would you typify the age in which we live?
10. Is there anything wrong with the view that a country should be governed by its people?

***Questions which may be discussed in groups.***

11. Do you know what is meant by the expression 'in our isolation lies our strength'?
12. Sometimes we hear people say that 'catechism and Bible study societies are not so important; surely the most important thing is whether you love the LORD.' Other people claim that such an attitude is highly dangerous. What do you think?

# CHAPTER 24

## Events preceding the Separation

### *The church in the beginning of the nineteenth century*

The previous outlines have revealed that the Church of Christ in the Netherlands was no longer a reformed Church, but a deformed one. It really seemed as if the battle of the Synod of Dort had been in vain. That synod had fiercely opposed the heresies of the Remonstrants and decided in favour of the Reformed Confession. Yet by the nineteenth century that same Confession was buried beneath a thick layer of dust. No-one was bound to the Confession, but freedom of the doctrine was the accepted thing.

For centuries the young ministers had been required to promise to preach the doctrine which agrees with God's Holy Word. This was no longer considered necessary. All they now had to do was to agree with any doctrine in so far as it agreed with the Word of God. Thus they were allowed to determine for themselves what parts of the Bible they wanted to believe what parts they wanted to reject. You can understand that this meant that the death blow was delivered to the faithful preaching of God's Word. Not the Scriptures but proud man had the last say. He himself set out to determine what he did and did not want to believe. Of course, Church discipline was non-existent as a result.

### *The Groningen School*

As proof of the deformation of the church in the early nineteenth century we will discuss the Groningen School. The University of Groningen, where many ministers were trained, was spreading a false doctrine under the leadership of professor Hofstede de Groot. This false doctrine taught that Christ should no longer be accepted as

being the Son of God. This was actually an ancient heresy. Centuries ago, Arius had denied that our Saviour was truly God. The people who were followers of Arius's heresy were said to belong to the Groningen School.

This Groningen School did not want to believe that Christ had shed his blood on the cross for our sins. They considered this a 'terribly bloody doctrine'. They found it awful to have to believe that God first wanted to see blood before sins could be forgiven. God was not a God of blood, they said, but a God of love.

The death of the Lord Jesus was not accepted as a payment for sins. They considered that he had died for an exceptional cause. To them he was not the Redeemer but the example of an ideal person. From him one could learn how man ought to be. In essence, man had to become an ideal person all by himself. He could work his own salvation by following the example of Jesus and his love.

Every Sunday this false doctrine was preached from many pulpits, for Hofstede de Groot had many followers. They were friendly people, often very tolerant and well-mannered. However, they did not want to be confronted by God's Word. If they were told, "It is written, and you must accept that," their tolerance disappeared rather suddenly. Then they revealed their true nature. When dealing with the faithful followers of the Scriptures they were rock-hard and relentless. This was proved by the history of Rev. Hendrick de Cock.

Departing from the Reformed path always happens a little at a time, step by step. Hofstede de Groot had clearly understood this when he had said, "First I called the people away from the Confession back to the Bible, and now I call them from the Bible back to the gospel of the Bible."

### ***Groningen versus Dort***

It is comforting to see that in the early nineteenth century the LORD used insignificant people and unimportant ministers to bring a small section of his straying Covenant people back to the pure Word.

The important people were the so-called pious people supporting the Groningen School of thought. However, God does not need important people at all. He wants to make use of humble and modest people who believe Him on the basis of his Word. Through the ages he sovereignly goes his own way in delivering his people. The LORD is actively involved in this. He uses whom he wills as instruments in his service. Church history is full of examples of this fact. It is one great demonstration of his faithfulness and his compassion over against the pride and unfaithfulness of man.

One such modest minister used by God was Rev. Nicholas Schotsman of Leyden. In 1819 he published a book with a lengthy title: “Monument in Honour of the Memory of the National Synod held in Dort Two Hundred Years Ago, erected by Nicholas Schotsman.” What a flood of criticism was levelled against this book! How could that man have even thought of erecting a ‘monument’ in honour of the Synod of Dort of 1618 – 1619. The critics thought that this was absolutely ridiculous.

The struggle between Dort and Groningen had started. It was a fight concerning the heart of the gospel. It was a battle between faith in man, who wants to save himself, and faith in Christ the Saviour, who died on the cross for our sins. In essence it was another struggle between Remonstrants and Contra-Remonstrants, although they now had different names.

### ***Hendrik de Cock – God’s Instrument***

In 1826 Hofstede de Groot was ordained as a minister in Ulrum, in Groningen. We have already learnt something about him. His sermons were not reformed. The death of the Lord Jesus on the cross was not the basis of his preaching. Jesus was preached to this congregation as being an example. This minister did not stay in Ulrum long. In 1829 he became professor at the University of Groningen.

The congregation of Ulrum received another minister, a friend of Rev. Hofstede de Groot. He was Rev. Hendrick de Cock. His sermons were like those of his predecessor. Yet this man was destined by the LORD to lead his people out of the house of bondage, which at the time was the Dutch Reformed Church. God wanted to use him to lead the people back to the pure, unadulterated Word.



### ***Hendrik de Cock turns his back on the Groningen School***

*Petrus Hofstede de Groot (1802–1886).  
By H. Boss, Groninger Archieven  
(1536–2453).*

Rev. de Cock was struck by the remark of an ordinary church member, Klaas Kuipenga, who had said, “Even if I only had to breathe one sigh towards securing my salvation, I would be lost for ever.” This expression dated from the time of the Synod of Dort. It meant that salvation is by grace alone, only Christ can work salvation for us.

However, de Cock was not aware of this. He had never read Calvin’s Institutes. He did not know the contents of the Three Forms of Unity. Through Klaas Kuipenga and other faithful reformed church members, de Cock learned about the reformation of the 16th century.

The LORD began to make it clear to him that the doctrine of the Church was the doctrine of the Word of God. It was also made clear to him that the LORD had guided him to Ulrum to lead him back to the Confession of the Church, and therefore to God’s Word, via Klaas Kuipenga. This did not happen overnight. It was years before de Cock broke completely with the thoughts of the Groningen School.

## ***The Book of Reverend Molenaar***

In his thirtieth year, in 1831, he started to study Calvin's Institutes. It struck him that centuries ago Calvin had already clearly written about things which had only recently become clear to him from God's Word. He also read Rev. Dirk Molenaar's book of 1827 once again. Rev. Molenaar was from de Hague and had written a book called, "An Address to All My Fellow Reformed Believers." Herein he clearly showed that the Church was moving away from the Confession. The book re-awakened many people. It was so popular that it was reprinted nine times in 1827. Unfortunately, Rev. Molenaar, fearing the king and Minister of Justice, voiced his regrets for having published his book.

Meanwhile the book had its effect, also on de Cock.



*Hendrik de Cock (1801– 1842).*

## ***Hendrik de Cock is converted to the Reformed Confessions***

The Church members of Ulrum soon realised that there was a change in the sermons of their minister. In increasingly clearer terms he spoke of grace and forgiveness of sin, of Christ who was the Saviour of the world and not just an example of how to live a good life. This change was noticed not only in Ulrum, but its news was spread to the surrounding districts. From far and wide believers who craved for preaching which was faithful to the Scriptures came to the

insignificant village church where de Cock preached the Christ of the Scriptures.

Of great significance is the fact that de Cock published a book in 1834. It was a reprint of the Canons of Dort. Through this, too, it can be seen that in de Cock, Dort triumphed over Groningen. In a foreword he clearly and sharply stated that almost the whole church had become Remonstrant. De Cock's strength lay in the fact that he did not come with a pious hobby-horse of his own, but that he came with the confession of the Church. In this way the LORD led his Church to a reformation. To this end he used Rev. de Cock as an instrument.

### ***QUESTIONS:***

*Answers to these questions may be found in the outline.*

1. Which false doctrine was propagated by the Groningen School?
2. Who was an important man in this movement? What tactics did he use to try to direct the Church away from Reformed doctrine?
3. What do you know about the book of Rev. Schotsman?
4. Which expression of Klaas Kuipenga made a deep impression on Rev. de Cock? Do you know what this means?
5. Which book did Rev. de Cock publish?
6. There is some reference to the faithful preaching of God's Word. What are some of the marks of such preaching? What should be done if preaching is no longer Scriptural?
7. Why was Church discipline non-existent?

### ***Questions to think about.***

8. Can you explain the difference between
  - a. the doctrine which agrees with the Bible, and
  - b. the doctrine in so far as it agrees with the Bible.

9. Why should we not have freedom of doctrine in our Churches? Who has to supervise purity of doctrine, and what would happen if a minister taught something not in accordance with Reformed doctrine or the Bible?
10. Can you explain what Hofstede de Groot meant when he said, “First I called the people away from the Confession back to the Bible, and now I call them away from the Bible and back to the gospel of the Bible”.

*A question which may be discussed in groups.*

11. What are some of the points raised in the outline which are important to us to today?

# CHAPTER 25

## **The Separation of 1834**

### *Hendrik de Cock deposed*

When Satan had succeeded in having almost the whole of the Reformed Church in his power, he used every way and means available to him to prevent a return to God's Word. This can be seen in the life in Hendrick de Cock. When he started to preach the pure Word of God, Satan had only one aim: Away with that minister!

There was a great desire for the faithful preaching of the Word. People came to Ulrum, where Rev. de Cock was minister, from as far away as the Dutch provinces of Friesland and Drenthe. Many started travelling already on Saturdays. Often the church building to which the people flocked was too small to hold them all. If the weather was fine, church services were held outside. This mass movement to Ulrum every Sunday was viewed with displeasure by the important church leaders. Their displeasure became even greater when Rev. de Cock started to baptise the children of other congregations at the request of their parents.

A book by de Cock directed against two ministers, Revs. Brouwer and Reddingius, was the last straw. These two ministers had written a booklet in which they slandered the Reformed doctrine and those who adhered to it. Such a publication required a reaction. The title of de Cock's book was formidable: "In defence of the true Reformed doctrine and the true Reformed people attacked and exposed by two so-called teachers of religion", or, "The sheepfold of Christ assaulted by two wolves and defended by Hendrick de Cock, Reformed minister of Ulrum".

A complaint had already been lodged against him because he baptised children from other congregations. When this book



*Ulrum in de 19th century: the grainmill with the church in the distance.*

appeared on the scene, it was the final straw. He was suspended by the classis on the grounds of causing a schism. "It was his desire to encourage disagreements, sects and rebellion within church and world governments." The meeting which suspended him had no right to do so, for only five of the nine members were present. No complaint had been lodged against his book, while this was stated as being a major reason for his suspension.

Thus they condemned a minister who had done nothing but defend the Reformed doctrine of the confessional writings against two of his colleagues. This faithful minister, who had sounded pure notes on the trumpet of God's Word so that they could be heard once again, was suspended by an illegal meeting, although he would continue to receive a salary.

Rev. de Cock appealed against this decision, also on behalf of the Church Consistory of Ulrum which had been completely ignored by the classis. His appeal had no effect. On the contrary, his sentence was increased to two years suspension without payment of salary.

It did not end here. A member of the congregation wrote a book against the singing of evangelical hymns in church. Rev. de Cock wrote the foreword to the book and published it. The provincial governing body of the church was furious. Such a person, who had already been suspended because of creating disorder and confusion, no longer deserved to be called a minister. He had to go. On the 29th of May 1834, Rev. Hendrick de Cock was deposed (removed from office).

## *The Separation of 1834*

It seemed as if Satan had achieved his aim. The “one that troubles Israel” was silenced. Like a rotten body part, he had been cut out of the church body. In doing this, the Reformed Church had become a false Church. It was impossible for a faithful servant of Christ to preach there. As a result, the Word of God was silenced. However, what appeared to be the end in the eyes of man was a new beginning to the LORD.

Rev. de Cock tried to obtain justice from the synod. This was an absolute failure. He refused to sign a document stating that he regretted his actions. Therefore he remained a deposed minister. The congregation of Ulrum wrote to the synod that it would continue to acknowledge de Cock as its lawful minister.

It was a sad situation in which the de Cock family found itself. The minister had been deposed without a source of income. His beloved daughter had died during these troubled days.

Then help and comfort arrived. A friend of de Cock, Rev Hendrik P Scholte, came to Ulrum from Doeveren in Brabant. Through previous correspondence he had come to know all about the situation in Ulrum.

At the request of the Church Consistory of Ulrum, Rev. Scholte conducted a church service on a Friday night. When the church building was not made available on the following Sunday, the congregation gathered together in a field behind the manse, where Rev. Scholte preached the Word of God in the open air.

On Tuesday, 14 October 1834, the Church Consistory read the act of separation and return which was signed by 144 people. In the new minutes book, Rev. de Cock wrote, “On Tuesday night, after having prayed and knelt down while looking up to the LORD, we separated ourselves from the false church.”

The Dutch Reformed Church was called a false church on the basis of the Confession. The LORD had reformed his Church. It was an insignificant beginning which would soon grow and spread.

One would expect that in a tolerant country such as the Netherlands the people who had separated themselves would not be hindered in any way. The contrary was the case. On Sunday, 19th October, de Cock was prevented from ascending the pulpit by the police. The church was filled to capacity. People crowded the aisles. A minister from one of the nearby churches, who did have permission to preach, could not get through the crowd. From all directions people called out to him that it would be better if he went away. Then Rev. de Cock climbed onto the elders' pew and conducted the service from there. The preaching was on Ephesians 2:8-10. When the church service had ended and all the people had left, the church building was locked and guarded by the police.

### *Not tolerance, but persecution*

On Saturday, 25 October, 150 soldiers marched into the town. They were under orders to crush the Secession. Twelve soldiers were stationed in de Cock's house so that he was a prisoner in his own home. On Sunday it looked as if Ulrum was occupied by enemy troops. Nobody was permitted to speak in the street. People congregating together were dispersed. Rev. de Cock was confined to his house. It was a Sunday never to be forgotten.

On the 31 October Rev. de Cock had to face the court, being accused of having disturbed the peace on Sunday, October 19. No matter how hard he tried to defend himself by simply relating the facts, he was awarded the maximum penalty, a fine of one hundred guilders and three months imprisonment. De Cock appealed against this sentence. On November 27, the Groningen court of justice confirmed the sentence. During the winter of 1834/35, Hendrick de Cock spent his time in a prison cell in Groningen.

No matter how much Satan ranted and raged, he could not hold back the work of the LORD. In several other parts of the Netherlands, Churches of the Secession appeared. Of course, there was one in Doeveren, where Rev. Scholte was minister, as well as one in Hattem with Rev. Anthony Brummelkamp, in Drogeham with Rev. Simon van Velzen, and in several other places. The pure Word of God was

once again preached from some of the pulpits. The LORD had made a new beginning. However, troubles did not pass by the Churches of the Secession.

### ***Strife within the churches of the Separation***

On several occasions it has been pointed out that Satan does not only threaten Christ's work by means of persecution but also through inner strife. This he tried to do by sowing the seeds of division among the brothers. There were many causes of internal strife. There were different thoughts about the Church Order, how the minister should dress, about baptism, etc. Personality differences between ministers also played a part.

It is not possible to go into details about all these differences. One thing is certain: if the LORD had not preserved his Church, the Secession would have come to nothing. He guided the Churches of the Secession in such a way that a Theological College was founded in Kampen in 1854. Finally, after a period of trouble and strife, a start could be made in building up and edifying church life. Rev. de Cock had already died in 1842. Known as the 'Christian Reformed Church', the Churches of the Secession were permitted to continue rowing against the current of the times. By the grace of God, the spirit of Dort had triumphed over that of Groningen.

### ***Questions:***

***The answers to these questions may be found in the outline.***

1. Of what was Rev. de Cock accused by the classis?
2. What did the congregation of Ulrum do after Rev. de Cock was suspended and, later, deposed?
3. Why was de Cock called "one who troubles Israel"?
4. Which of the Articles of the Confession deals with the false church? Which church became a false church according to this article?

5. In what way were the people of the Secession Churches persecuted?
6. What were some of the differences troubling the Churches of the Secession?

***Questions to think about.***

7. Why was the founding of the Theological College in Kampen important for the building up of church life?
8. Do you know anything of the Secession in the places where your parents or grandparents (if they are of Dutch origin) came from? Can you find out some of the history as it happened there?
9. Can you explain what is meant by the last sentence in the outline?

***A question which may discussed in groups.***

10. What is meant by “rowing against the current of the times”? Does it apply to us today? How?

# CHAPTER 26

## **The founding of the Theological College in 1854**

### *The Theological College*

The Theological College is known by many Dutch church people as 'our College'. Lectures are given by professors who are appointed by the synod of the churches. This college is completely financed by the churches themselves. It is not subsidised by the government but financed by means of collections, donations and subscriptions.

The people of the Secession were convinced that the training for the ministry of the Word for the benefit of the churches must be initiated and carried out by the churches. Therefore they spoke of a training for the church, by the church.

It is of the utmost importance that we care for the wellbeing of our theological college(s). Therefore it is good that so many children collect money for its library. Perhaps you have also heard your parents or grandparents talk about the times when they used to visit the 'School day', a sort of 'open day' of the college when many thousands of people visited Kampen, listened to lectures and looked over the buildings of the college. It is encouraging for all those connected with the Theological College to know that their work is supported by the prayers of the members of the church. Without these prayers their responsible work would be futile.

### *The training of ministers of the Word immediately after the Separation*

Immediately after the Secession there was a great need for theological training. There were only seven ministers. Later on, three

more ministers from the Dutch Reformed Church joined them. Naturally ten ministers were far too few in number to serve more than a hundred congregations!

From where could they obtain ministers in a hurry? Was it possible to train them abroad? A few young men went to Geneva to study. However, this was not an ideal situation. Nor could they be advised to study at a state university either. All in all it was not a problem to which there was a simple solution.

It was decided that the best way of solving it was for ministers to train future ministers themselves. The first to busy himself with this task was Rev. Hendrick de Cock. As early as 1835, after his release from prison, he started a discussion on the training for the ministry of the Word. From his new home in Smilde he travelled to Dwingelo every week, where he lectured future ministers of the congregations in the manse of Rev. FA Kok.

He did not only train future ministers. There were also what we would call 'lay preachers'. These were unusually gifted men who were not required to study the classical languages because of the urgency of the situation. Of course, Rev. de Cock demanded that these men meet certain requirements. He wrote, "With regard to these people, attention must be focussed on whether they have reasonable gifts for the ministry; whether they have a reputation of a godly life and knowledge of the truth and whether they are capable of shutting the mouths of those who oppose them."

### ***Subsequent arrangements concerning the training for the ministry***

The provincial synod of Groningen was the first to do something about training ministers in a more permanent, official way. On 13 March, 1839, a training college was founded. Here instruction was given by Rev. Hendrick de Cock. He was also made responsible for the theological training in province of Drenthe. Letters were sent to Church Consistories requesting them to ascertain carefully whether

there were men in their congregations who were suitable, and prepared to study, for the ministry.

Some twenty men came to Groningen from various places to be instructed in the Scriptures. In Drenthe there were eleven students. They were predominantly uneducated men, having only had a primary school education. During the day they worked for a living, which often consisted of hard physical labour. Their evenings were given over to study. Very often it meant burning the midnight oil. How they slaved away, especially at learning the classical languages! Latin, Greek and Hebrew were very difficult for them.

### *After the death of Hendrik de Cock*

This situation remained unchanged until 1842. After the death of de Cock, Rev. TF de Haan continued the instruction in Groningen. It was acknowledged by everyone that he was a gifted person. Rev. FA Kok and Rev. WA Kok succeeded de Cock in Drenthe. They had been his pupils. In the meantime, the churches in the provinces of Overijssel and Gelderland had also started theological training classes. Rev. A Brummelkamp was instructor there. This example was followed by those in the province of South Holland where the first classes were held in Dordrecht, but from 1849 they were held in Schoonhoven.

You do not need much imagination to understand the negative consequences of having so many different places of instruction. This did not exactly stimulate unity between the churches of the Secession. The adversaries of these Reformed Churches laughed secretly. They hoped that the Secession would peter out.

There was not only a difference of opinion about the training of ministers. Rev. Scholte, for example, did not support a church government as set out in the Church Order of Dort. And so there were other points on which they did not all agree.



*Simon van Velsen (1809–1896) in 1908.*

But, through the miracle of God's grace and his compassion, the Secession did not dig its own grave. The LORD preserved his Church. The events following the Secession teach us that we should not expect anything from man. God alone can be praised for the fact that 'the burning bush was not consumed'.

### ***Events preceding the institution of the theological college***

People in the Churches of the Secession became increasingly more convinced that things were going wrong with the theological classes. The fact that almost every province had its own set of courses was detrimental to the unity of the churches. As well as this, the standard of education varied. The 'professors' in one province had a more stringent set of requirements than in another province. It was necessary to have one college serving all the churches. There the future ministers would have to be thoroughly educated. Moreover, this would promote the urgent need for unity.

It was a long process before such a college became a fact. There was disagreement about where such a college ought to be. In that period of time, the famous university of Franeker closed down. This seemed to be a suitable place. The synod of 1849 agreed to this proposal with a majority vote. However, the decision was not carried out. Why not? Well, the churches of North Holland did not agree with the choice of Franeker at all. According to them, Amsterdam was the right place. A college belonging to the churches ought to be in the capital city and nowhere else. The result was that the plans failed.

### ***Slowly but surely the time ripens***

Looking back it can be said that, through the childishness of the people, the LORD worked for the good of his Church. The time was not yet ripe for the setting up of a college belonging to all the churches.

Some of the churches in Overijssel and Gelderland withdrew from the bond of churches. There were objections against Rev. Brummelkamp. In 1834 he was the minister of the seceded church of Hattum and later on of Arnhem. He was considered to be preaching God's Word too liberally. As well as this it was said that he was too lenient in his views of the Dutch Reformed people.

Fortunately, all were united again after some time because Rev. Brummelkamp was a firm supporter of the Reformed Confession. With great love and energy he worked for the advancement of the cause of the Confession both within and without the bond of churches. The ranks of the Churches of the Secession once again closed. Now the time was ripe for the founding of a training course for future ministers which would serve the whole country.

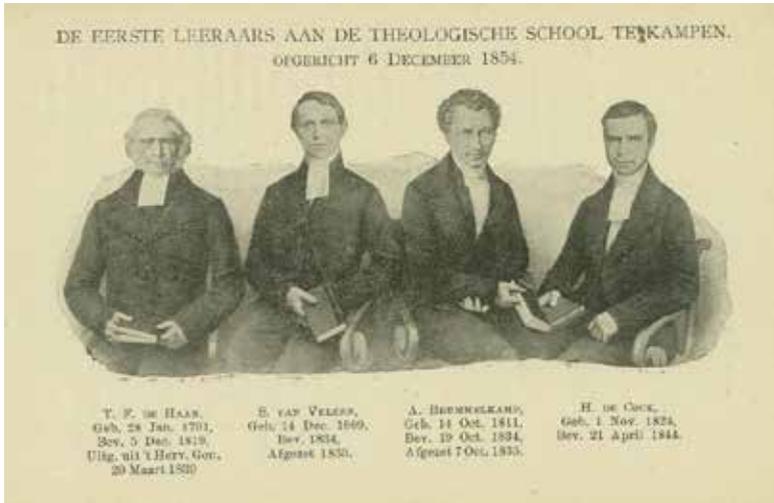
### ***The start of the theological college in 1854***

The synod of Zwolle was held in 1854. On June 15, after a great deal of discussion, it was decided to start a college. The only difficult point which now remained was where? The following cities were recommended: Amsterdam, Groningen, Zwolle, Meppel, Kampen, Franeker, Amersfoort and Leyden. After a lengthy discussion, three names remained: Zwolle, Kampen and Groningen.

This was the time of decision. After a thorough discussion, it was decided to vote on the issue. First Psalm 131:4<sup>16</sup> was sung. Then they prayed for the guidance of the LORD. The outcome of the vote showed Kampen to be the appointed place.

---

16. *The Dutch rhymed version.*



*The first professors at the Theological College in Kampen, 1954: TF de Haan, S van Velzen, A Brummelkamp and H de Cock.*

The following people were appointed professors at the college: Rev. TF de Haan, Rev. S van Velzen, Rev. A Brummelkamp, and subsequently Rev. Helenius de Cock, son of Rev. Hendrick de Cock. They were the most capable men the Churches of the Secession possessed.

The Theological College was solemnly opened on 6 December, 1854. Rev. de Moen conducted the opening meeting. He impressed upon the newly appointed professors the heavy responsibility of their task. "The Lord Jesus looks upon you. The eyes of God's congregation are on you. The eyes of those who have brought the College into existence are upon you. The eyes of the whole of the Netherlands follow you. The father of lies also has his eyes on you."

Following this, Rev. van Velzen delivered a speech titled, "The great importance of the work of the minister of the Gospel."

The number of enrolled students was 37.

## *A Gift of Grace*

Thus the year 1854 was an unforgettable one for the Churches of the Secession. After a great deal of discord and disagreements, a period of building up had at last arrived. No longer were there various courses for the training for the ministry of the Word. Moreover, there were more results. All the various streams in the church were guided into the one river bed. Remember, for example, the dissension caused by Rev. Brummelkamp earlier on.

It is striking that in 1854 it was not disputed whether or not the church was called to provide a theological training course. In general, all agreed with the words Rev. van Velzen wrote, “Even the most uneducated person would answer: this is the duty, the calling and part of the work of the church.”

The LORD richly blessed the Churches of the Secession in granting them their own Theological College. The churches could now develop and grow. The various schools of thought received an opportunity to understand and appreciate each other more. All knew themselves to be bound to the Word and the Confession based on it. Everyone also knew that in the Theological College they had received a gift of grace from their heavenly Father.

### *Questions:*

*Answers to these questions may be found in the outline.*

1. What is meant by the expression ‘for the church and by the church’?
2. What do you know about the training of ministers immediately after the Secession?
3. Why was it necessary to have one training course?
4. How did Rev. de Moen show the first professors their great responsibility?
5. What had Rev. van Velzen written about having a theological college?

6. Instead of training at a college, would it be sufficient to have ministers whose only qualification is that they are pious men?

***Questions to think about.***

7. Is it still possible nowadays for unusually gifted men to become ministers without having a formal training? Who makes the decision about this?
8. Why should future ministers learn the classical languages? Do you know the name of a professor who teaches Hebrew, and Greek and Latin? Do you know the name of any other professor?
9. Do you think it is a good idea that the Theological College in Kampen has an 'open day' every year? What would be the good of such a day?
10. Imagine that the government would propose to subsidise a Theological College. Can you state the advantages and disadvantages of such a proposition? What would our churches decide in keeping with the line of the Reformation?

***A question which may be discussed in groups.***

11. If a friend were to tell you in confidence that he would like to become a minister but is not sure whether he 'is suitable', what would you say to him? Do you think that someone has to have certain qualities before he can become a minister? Why is that?

# CHAPTER 27

## **The ‘Doleantie’ (Second Secession) of 1886**

### *The Dutch Reformed Church following the Separation*

You now know what the Secession of 1834 was: the LORD used Rev. Hendrick de Cock of Ulrum, Groningen, as the instrument by means of which he brought the Church back to the Word. The ‘Act of Secession or Return’ was signed by the members of his congregation. In it, the Dutch Reformed Church was called a false church. They no longer wanted any communion with the Dutch Reformed Church “until it returns to the true and faithful service of the LORD”.

In what now follows it will be seen that nothing came of that. Things even went from bad to worse. The Groningen School of thought, led by Prof. Hofstede de Groot, reigned supreme. There were many ministers who no longer believed in Jesus Christ as the Saviour. There was even a minister who wanted to baptise people in the name of the Father only. Other ministers baptised in the name of faith, hope and love.

The Modern School of thought deviated most from the Bible. Man’s mind and understanding was its only rule and guideline. Whatever could not be comprehended by man with his ‘normal’ mind (common sense), was rejected. For example, every miracle was attacked or explained away.

The leading man of this school of thought was Prof. JH Scholten, of Leyden. One of his students was a young man called Abraham Kuyper, who would be used by the LORD to lead another group of believers back to God’s Word.

## ***Disobedient in the choice of their church***

Unfortunately, not all believers were immediately obedient in their choice of church during the time of the Secession. Many remained in the so-called 'mother church'. They hoped that the terrible process of deformation would come to a halt.

One of the most important leaders of this group of people was Groen van Prinsterer. He continually fought against the spirit of revolution, and continually called upon the people to bow down to God's Word. Groen had been a student of Bilderdijk, the father of the Reveille. Do you remember this international movement, mainly among the rich and learned people, which aimed to live closely to God's Word once again? The followers of the Reveille had done a great deal of good, particularly for the handicapped, and the chronically and long-term ill. They were true Christians in word and deed.

Unfortunately they were wrong when it came to joining the true Church. Groen did a great deal for the people of the Secession. At times he even attended their Church services, but he continued to be a member of the 'national church'.

In short, we can say that Satan had almost unlimited freedom in the Dutch Reformed Church. All sorts of movements, which did not subject themselves to the Word of God, became established. But not every member bent his knee before the god of reason. Some people wanted to hold on to the Scriptures. They did not, however, join the Churches of the Secession. They would have had their reasons for not doing so, but it was a wrong decision to make. The Confession does state, after all, that the believers must separate themselves from those who do not belong to the Church. See Article 28 of the Belgic Confession of faith.

## ***Abraham Kuyper***

The believers in the Dutch Reformed Church received a promising leader, Abraham Kuyper. Much can be said about this talented man with his many and wide-ranging interests. We will limit ourselves to a few major aspects of his life. The first congregation he served was

Beesd on the banks of the River Linge. Here he entered the ministry as a liberal minister. After all, what would you expect? He had been a student of the infamous Prof. Scholten.

In Beesd, Kuyper came in contact with a simple woman, Pietje Baltus. She was one of those simple believers who clung to the truth of the Word of God. She was the means by which he came to repentance and conversion. He once again studied Calvin's works, but this time with the attitude of a minister who wanted to be completely bound to the Scriptures.

Just like Rev. Hendrick de Cock, he started to realise that the Three Forms of Unity are a true and faithful summary of God's Word. This insight gave him the strength to fight for the honour and glory of God in every sector of life, also in church life.

Thus the discussions with Pietje Baltus led Kuyper back to the Scriptures and the Confession. After having accepted a call to Utrecht, Kuyper asked, in his farewell sermon, forgiveness of those people whom he might, in ignorance, have shown the wrong way.

### *Via Utrecht to Amsterdam*

In Utrecht it became increasingly clear to Kuyper what God's Word asked of him, also concerning the situation in the Church. It was in Utrecht that he met Groen van Prinsterer for the first time. Groen was one of the leading men involved in the struggle for the establishing of, and receiving government funding for, Christian schools. In connection with this campaign, a meeting was held in the Dom Church in Utrecht. Groen chaired the meeting and Kuyper held a speech to stimulate this cause.

The Dutch Reformed Church in Utrecht was well-known for its orthodoxy (adherence to Scriptural principles). Yet Kuyper, in his struggle for the restoration of the Church, experienced a great deal of opposition here. They even considered deposing him. Fortunately, things did not reach this stage.

Then he was called to Amsterdam where the majority of the Church Consistory members desired to remain faithful. This was proved,



*Abraham Kuyper (1837–1920).*

among other things, by the fact that once again they decided to uphold the Confession when young members wanted to do public profession of faith.

There were some baptised members who did not clearly want to say that they accepted Christ as their Saviour. Neither did they believe in the resurrection. These people did not receive permission from the Church Consistory of the Dutch Reformed Church in Amsterdam to do their public profession of faith.

As a result of this refusal, The Church Consistory clashed with the regulations of the Dutch Reformed Church which stated that these baptised members should not have their request refused.

This had, of course, not happened before. Unbelieving 'confession class students' would make a quick trip to a neighbouring liberal Church Consistory. They would take a good reference (or attestation) with them. However, now that the Church Consistory no longer wanted to take part in this deceitful practice, classis gave the command to issue these attestations before 8th January, 1886.

It was a very grave situation. The Church Consistory knew that the end result would be their suspension from the Dutch Reformed Church. Unfortunately, the members of the Consistory worried unduly about the church building and goods. What would happen to them if they were suspended? The Church wardens were told that the Consistory would remain in charge of all the church possessions.

Eighty Church Consistory members voted for this decision. When the classis of Amsterdam heard of this decision, those eighty members were suspended, and later deposed. Moreover, a good attestation was given to those liberal confession class students.

### ***The 'Doleantie' of 1886***

These eighty Consistory members appealed against the decision, but the General Synod confirmed their suspension and deposed state. On 16 December, 1886, the Church Consistory in Amsterdam broke with the synodical hierarchy.

The new church called itself the Netherlands Reformed Church, followed by the word 'Dolerend' in brackets. The word 'dolerend' mean lamenting or complaining. They are known as the people of the 'Doleantie' because they complained to the courts of justice that their church buildings and goods had been wrongfully taken from them.

Not only in Amsterdam did people break with the Dutch Reformed Church. Church Consistories in Voorthuizen and Kootwijk also made the break at this time. Their examples were followed by people in many other places. By breaking with the hierarchy and separating from the Dutch Reformed bond of churches, they returned to a Scriptural church government.

The churches of the Second Secession ("Doleantie") only wanted to bow down to the Word of God and the confession based on it. Once again the LORD had worked a reformation, twice in the same century.

### ***Questions:***

***Answers to these questions may be found in the outline.***

1. Which schools of thought influenced the Dutch Reformed Church in the nineteenth century?
2. Who were the leaders of these different schools, and what did they teach?

3. Who continually warned the people against the spirit of revolution? Why did he not join the Churches of the Secession?
4. Where did Kuyper come to repentance, and who was important for him at this time?
5. What wrong practices existed in Amsterdam when young people wanted to do public profession of faith?
6. Tell what you know about the ‘Second Secession’.
7. What name did the ‘new’ churches give themselves? What does that word in brackets mean?

***Questions to think about.***

8. What do you think was meant in the outline where it said that Satan had almost unlimited power? Was that really true? Why do you think this?
9. Can you explain the difference between ‘hierarchy’ and Scriptural church government?
10. If there were to be a church division in your town, how would you know which church to join? Read the Belgic Confession Articles 27 to 29.
11. What would be your reaction if people say that doctrine is not so important, but that how a person lives is what counts for God?

***A question which may be discussed in groups.***

12. Can you imagine that parents are very sad if their children want to join another church? Is the choice of church really so important, for surely you can serve God wherever you are?

# CHAPTER 28

## The Union of 1892

### *Circumstances after the 'Doleantie' (Second Secession) of 1886*

A great deal occurred in Dutch ecclesiastical circles during the 19th century. The Secession took place in 1834. Under the leadership of Rev. Hendrick de Cock, the faithful believers of Ulrum, Groningen, separated themselves from the Dutch Reformed Church. They returned to God's Word and the Reformed Confession as well as the Reformed way of church government. It was only a small beginning: 136 members of the congregation placed their signatures or crosses beneath the "Act of Secession or Return".

Despite internal divisions and conflicts, the LORD preserved these churches in his grace. A theological seminary was even instituted in Kampen in 1854. There was also a great deal of rejoicing when the break between the so-called "Churches under the Cross" and the Churches of the Secession was healed in 1869. Since then the official name of these Churches was 'Christian Reformed Church' in the Netherlands.

A Second Secession from the Dutch Reformed Church took place in 1886 under the leadership of Abraham Kuyper. It was a second reformation. In several places in the country believers once again separated from the 'main church' and returned to the Three Forms of Unity and the Church Order of Dort, just as the Churches of the Secession had done fifty years before. They called themselves the Netherlands Reformed Church.

Thus the situation arose in which there were two Churches who wanted to be bound by God's Word and the Confession. They were now required to carry out the instructions in John 17 which speaks of

the search for unity. This was easier said than done. Many obstacles had to be overcome before this actually took place. For the time being it was of the utmost importance that both churches wanted to subject themselves to Christ's command to seek unity.

### ***Problems encountered in realising the Union***

Naturally, if there had been no differences it would not have taken six years to achieve the union. But differences there were. This was not surprising, for the Churches of the Secession had already had fifty years of independent church life, while the churches of the Second Secession (Doleantie) had only just appeared on the scene, so to speak.

Solving these differences was not just a matter of meeting together and making some compromises. It was God's grace that made it possible. If the LORD had not built the house, the ecclesiastical builders would have toiled in vain.

We ought to keep this in mind continually. It is God alone who defends, protects and preserves his Church. This is not the work of human hands, but of God. All the praise and thanks is to be directed to him.

### ***Chief problem: Is the Dutch Reformed Church a false Church?***

The most important difference concerned the question: "How must we see the Dutch Reformed Church?" The Churches of the Secession had called it a false church right from the start. They had not thought this up themselves. In doing this, they had repeated the Confession in what it says in Article 29. Moreover, they had continually called on the believers in the Dutch Reformed Church to separate themselves from that false church and to join with them. Again, this was in accordance with the Reformed Confession.

The churches of the Second Secession had other thoughts. They only considered the government, or the organisation, of the Dutch Reformed Church to be false. The local churches could be true churches. It is only

when there are only ungodly people left in the church that it may be called false. The churches of the Second Secession, therefore, did not at all agree with the “Act of Secession or Return”.

### ***The solution of the chief problem: The proviso***

The chief cause of the problem lay with Kuyper. If he had simply kept to the Reformed Confession, the problem would not have occurred. Unfortunately, Kuyper had not wanted to accept the Confession on this point. However, if the churches of the Second Secession had kept their stance, a union would never have taken place.

When the whole thing seemed doomed to failure, the people of the Second Secession asked the Churches of the Secession for a proposal. At the Christian Reformed synod in Leeuwarden in 1889, the following was put forward: The Churches of the Secession remained of the opinion that the Secession was an act of God and was in accordance with his Word and the Confession. The opinion of the people of the Second Secession about the Church was to be their own responsibility.

Despite their differences, all the churches of the Secession really did want to achieve a union. It was essential, they thought, that they acknowledge each other as the true Church without any restrictions or reservations. And then came the important point: both the Churches of the Secession as well as those of the Second Secession were required to acknowledge that not only did they have to break with the government of the Dutch Reformed Church, but also with the local Dutch Reformed Church. This is required by God’s Word and the Reformed Confession, and is therefore essential. The above statement is called the proviso, which is a condition.

This condition was unanimously accepted at a synod of the Second Secession in 1891. Delegates to the synod of Leeuwarden could now shake hands with fellow believers of the Second Secession, accepting them as brothers. The most important difference had been resolved. It was a miracle of God’s grace.

## ***A Second Problem: Training for the Ministry***

The Churches of the Secession had, after much struggle and strife, opened their own theological college at Kampen in 1854. Remember, it was a ‘school for the churches, by the churches’.

In 1880 Abraham Kuyper had opened the ‘Free University’ (*Vrije Universiteit*, now VU) in Amsterdam. The people of the Second Secession wanted the VU for the training of the ministers. The College at Kampen could then be used for practical education. In essence this meant the end of the Theological College in Kampen. The ‘Proviso’ had also mentioned the training for the ministry. It stated that the church is called to have its own institution to train her ministers. This ‘own institution’ was in Kampen and had to stay there too.

Fortunately, this condition was not opposed by the people of the Second Secession. The ‘school’ of the churches remained in Kampen, while the VU had much looser ties with the churches.

## ***The Union of 1892***

On 17 June, 1892, the first General Synod of the Reformed Churches met in Amsterdam. It was a miracle of the LORD. The chairman was Rev. WH Gispén, minister of the Churches of the Secession. He asked the meeting to sing Psalm 106:25 and 26<sup>17</sup>. He then read Ps. 126. In the opening address a special welcome was extended to Rev. S van Velzen. He was the only one left of those men of 1834, the fathers of the first Secession, and he was now 82 years old. He had been carried to the church to enable him to participate in this festive event.

Dr. Kuyper, the deputy chairman, also greeted the old professor of the Theological College with enthusiasm, “I cry out to the Simeon in our midst: Let now, o LORD, your servant depart in peace, according to thy Word, for you have given him his heart’s desire. Van Velzen, you have been a brother and father in Christ to me, and it is largely in you, that the historical union and the communion between our churches, lies sealed.”

---

17. *The Dutch rhymed version.*



*Left: Simon van Velzen (1809–1896). Right: Lucas Lindeboom (1845–1933).*

Kuyper also spoke other important words. “I do not like every single Calvinist, and many a Calvinist dislikes me. However, this does not matter. After all, it is not our personal sympathies which must decide our love in Christ’s church. Wherever this is done, the principles upon which Christ’s church is built are being abandoned. You are to love your brothers, not because they appeal to you, but because God loves them and God has brought them and you together. Also, we are a struggling church, and it is our general, Jesus Christ, who has positioned us and placed us next to each other to fight in the same rank and on the same battlefield. Therefore we shall, we must, love those whom he has placed alongside us and cover them with the shield of (our) faithfulness and loyalty.”

Following this address, both chairmen shook hands with one another. It was a moving moment. After the son of Rev. van Velzen spoke on behalf of his father, the meeting sang Psalm 133. His heart’s desire had become a reality for old Rev. van Velzen.

### ***Not all joined in***

Unfortunately, not all the ‘Seceded’ churches went along with the Union. They had objections, particularly against Rev. Kuyper’s ideas.

They continued to exist as the Christian Reformed Church, their original name.

The synod which discussed their objections was of the opinion that the confessional unity was sufficient ground for a union.

If we examine their objections, we should not immediately remark that they are unfounded. Men such as the Seceded professor Lindeboom from Kampen had also warned against certain of Kuyper's ideas about baptism. However, in Lindeboom's opinion this was not a reason for rejecting the Union. Its foundation was sound. The Church is a gathering of believers and not a club of like-minded people. Therefore the LORD demanded that the Union take place.

### ***A-Churches and B-Churches***

The LORD preserved his Church by means of the first and second Secession (Article 27 of the Belgic Confession of Faith). In 1892, the two streams were allowed to flow together in the one riverbed. We have seen how this took place at a national level in Amsterdam.

Now the unity had to be made visible locally. There, however, things did not go too smoothly. It took years before all the local churches were joined together.

Since 1892, one could differentiate between Reformed Church A (which had come out of the Secession) and the Reformed Church B (which had originated from the Second Secession (Doleantie)). In some places it took years before they were united. Through God's grace most places eventually had just one Reformed Church.

### ***Questions:***

***Answers to these questions may be found in the outline.***

1. Name some of the important ecclesiastical events which occurred in the Netherlands in the nineteenth century.
2. What was the situation after the Second Secession of 1886?

3. What did the people of the Secession think of the Dutch Reformed Church?
4. What did the people of the Second Secession think of the Dutch Reformed Church?
5. How was this problem solved?
6. What was another problem, and how was this solved?
7. Tell what you know of the Union of 1892.
8. Why did some people not join the Union? What is the name of their church?
9. What were the A-churches and the B-churches?

***Questions to think about.***

10. If the risen Christ had not protected his Church, she would have become a victim of Satan who would have destroyed her. Can you recall situations described in the outline where things could have gone seriously wrong? How does Christ lead the history of the Church? In other words, how does Christ work in Church life? How do we allow ourselves to be led by him?
11. The main problem between the two groups of Secession churches was how they saw the Church. There are people who claim that the choice of church is not important. They say, "The important thing is that you believe in the Lord Jesus. You will not be asked to give account of what church you happened to belong to." What do you think of this argument? What should be your attitude to believers who are not members of the true church?
12. Do you understand why the people of the Secession were so loyal to the Theological College in Kampen? How important is a Theological College for our churches? Do you know how the College is supervised? Do you think it is necessary to remember the College in your personal prayers? Why?

*A question which may be discussed in groups.*

13. Can you think of some problems which can occur when two churches wish to unite? What should be the basis of a union? If there are two true churches in the one city, do they need to unite?

# CHAPTER 29

## Events preceding the Liberation

### *Tension within the Reformed churches*

In the last chapter it was seen that a miracle took place in the Church History of the Netherlands: the churches of the 'first' and the 'second' Secession joined together. This was not the work of man. The King of the Church brought his children together in his grace. This happened in 1892.

Since then, a restless mood had seized the Reformed Churches. On the one hand there was a movement under the leadership of Abraham Kuyper. Many people looked up to him. He was a great leader, both in political and church circles. The situation was such that often Kuyper had the final say, and not the Scriptures. Often his ideas were the end of all argument.

On the other hand there were Kuyper's opponents. They generally came from the churches which had originated in the first Secession. One of their men was Prof. Lucas Lindeboom, who defended maintaining the Scriptures and the Confession. Differences became so great that the synod of Utrecht, 1905, had to deal with them.

### *Kuyper and presumptive regeneration*

We will start with Kuyper's ideas. He became tied up in a knot when thinking about baptism. He argued more or less in the following manner. At the baptism of a child, many great and wonderful things are promised by the LORD. For instance, there is forgiveness of sin and eternal life. When the LORD promises these things, He certainly carries them out as well. Yet we see many baptised people depart from God and therefore become lost forever. How can this be possible?

Kuyper tried to find a solution to this problem. He believed that at birth a child has the germ, or embryo, or seed (that is, a small beginning) of faith within him. In actual fact, the child has already been regenerated by the direct action of the Holy Spirit. It may take years before this germ develops and grows to maturity in some people.

What, according to Kuyper, now happens when a child is baptised? He argued as follows. Baptism seals the regeneration which has been implanted at birth by the Spirit. Because we do not know with certainty whether that child will come to faith in later years, we must presume that it is regenerated. If this child comes to faith later on, its baptism was a real one. However, if it follows its own sinful ways, its baptism was not real and authentic.

### ***Professor Lindeboom and the covenant***

Prof. Lucas Lindeboom defended the Reformed view of the Covenant and baptism against Kuyper. He said, “Certainly the LORD promises great and wonderful things at baptism. What he promises, he will certainly bring about. A child who is born of believing parents is a real covenant child. Nobody ought to doubt this fact.”

But how did Prof. Lindeboom then solve the problem of children who prove to be unbelievers in later life? He showed, using the Scriptures, that a demand always accompanies God’s promises. God gives his promises on one condition: that of faith and repentance.

Further, Lindeboom did not at all agree with Kuyper that a child is already regenerated at birth. Regeneration is worked by means of the preaching of the Word (see Article 24 of the Belgic Confession of Faith). It is not worked by a direct act of the Spirit at birth. This is not taught anywhere in the Scriptures.

Lindeboom wrote, “How can a presumed regeneration be sealed? What then does baptism mean to a child who is not regenerated? According to the Scriptures and our Confession, there is nothing we may presume, but we are required to obey him who caused elected and probate children to be born into the Covenant and commands

us to administer the Holy Baptism, the sacrament sealing his promises, to all of those children.”

### ***The Synod of 1905***

All sorts of objections to Abraham Kuyper’s teachings were tabled at the General Synod of Utrecht, 1905. What did this synod consequently do? Did it clearly outline and reject Kuyper’s heresies? No. A sort of pacifying or reconciliatory declaration was adopted in order to keep the peace. Because this declaration criticised a few of Kuyper’s ideas in carefully chosen words, Prof. Lindeboom also voted for it.

In short, the declaration stated: “Children must be considered to be regenerated until it is proven otherwise in later years. It is less correct to say that baptism is administered to the children of believers on the ground of their presumed regeneration, because the basis of their baptism is the demands and the promises of God.”

Thus it can be seen that, on the one hand, Kuyper was said to be right (presumptive regeneration), and on the other hand, Lindeboom was agreed with (God’s covenant promises).

### ***The significance of the 1905 Synod of Utrecht upon the Liberation***

As long as a synod did not pronounce Kuyper’s doctrine binding and did not impose it upon the churches, a relative amount of peace reigned in the churches. It is not uncommon to have differences of opinion within the bond of churches about certain issues. It certainly seemed as if the Synod of Utrecht had come to a wise decision. Everything now seemed to be fine again. Youth societies flourished, Reformed people were influential in political affairs, there were even Reformed Prime Ministers (Kuyper and Colijn). The Free University of Amsterdam turned out Reformed doctors, teachers, judges and lawyers, etc. In short, the Reformed influence was starting to be a force to be reckoned with in public life.

It was, however, only a comparative state of peace. Kuyper's influence finally became so great that his ideas were promoted to the level of church doctrine in 1942. We will discuss the consequences of this next time.

### ***The Geelkerken affair – Assen 1926***

In the meantime it became clear from various remarks made by young graduates of the Free University that they were against strict adherence to the Confession. They had been educated to become learned and knowledgeable men. Therefore, with their learning and knowledge they would surely be able to see the faults in the Confession, they argued.

This showed up, for example, in a sermon by Rev. Johannes G Geelkerken about Lord's Day 3 of the Heidelberg Catechism. This particular Lord's Day deals with the creation and fall into sin. Geelkerken wanted to retain the possibility that Genesis 2 and 3 were not to be taken literally. It could be possible that the serpent did not, in actual fact, speak. Further scientific investigations by means of excavations could result in the view that Genesis 2 and 3 ought not to be taken literally.

The case of Rev. Geelkerken was dealt with at the Synod of Assen in 1926. Geelkerken had to sign a declaration which stated that his views conflicted with Articles 4 and 5 of the Belgic Confession of Faith. When he refused to do this, he was suspended and removed from office.

To conclude that there was no place for him within the Reformed Churches in his office as minister, was correct. However, it was wrong of the Synod to suspend him. That is the solely the duty of the Church Consistory.

The result was that various young people left the church together with Geelkerken. They called themselves the Restored Bond of Reformed Churches. These churches joined with the old Dutch Reformed Church in 1946. In 1967, this decision was revoked.

## ***Back to the Scriptures***

Kuyper's teachings received increasingly more support and gained more influence. Were then no objections voiced against these unscriptural thoughts? Certainly there were. Dr. Saekle Greijdanus lectured at the Theological College in Kampen. He continually opposed those thoughts of Kuyper which were unscriptural. He received support from Dr. Klaas Schilder in 1933 when the latter also became a professor in Kampen.

People from the Free University attempted to make Kampen as insignificant and unimportant as possible. However, the LORD desired to make use of Professors Greijdanus and Schilder to open the eyes of the members of the Churches to the Scriptural teachings about the Covenant.

The actions and teachings of the two professors unleashed an underground struggle within the churches. Many attempts were made to destroy Prof. Schilder's work. The 1936 the Synod of Amsterdam even spoke of a movement which was poisoning the churches. It was, however, a call back to the Word of God and the Reformed Confessions.

The reformative movement which issued from Kampen and called members back to the Scriptures, eventually became completely opposed to the teachings of Kuyper. The objection against this movement was that it deviated from the so-called accepted opinions of the day. These accepted opinions were, for example, the teachings of Kuyper about presumptive regeneration. The Reformed Churches had reached the stage where the opinions of a man (Kuyper) were raised above the authority of the Scriptures and the Confession.

## ***Reformed church government at stake***

At the Synod of Amsterdam, 1936, a complaint was tabled by a few professors of the Free University against the work of Greijdanus and Schilder. It was then decided to appoint a committee which had to examine the 'differences in doctrine'.

The worst part about this action was that the above-mentioned discussion was not even on the agenda of the Synod. After all, a Reformed Synod is only allowed to deal with matters which the churches or church members have raised. If a synod ignores this precept, she is guilty of acting in a hierarchical way. This occurred at the Synod of Amsterdam of 1936.

You understand that many people protested against the actions of this synod. The struggle within the Reformed Church increasingly became sharper. It was a fight for life or death. Ultimately it concerned the authority of the Scriptures and the Confession, as well as the Reformed Church Order.

### ***Questions:***

***Answers to these questions may be found in the outline.***

1. Which man came to have great influence in the churches after 1892? What was not good about that?
2. What did Synod of Utrecht in 1905, decide?
3. What was wrong with Rev. Geelkerken's teachings? How did synod Assen 1926 deal with this problem?
4. Which two professors at Kampen went against the teachings of Kuyper?
5. What decisions were made at Synod of Amsterdam in 1936? In what way was this synod wrong?

### ***Questions to think about.***

6. Try to explain the doctrine of presumptive regeneration.
7. Prof. Lindeboom did not think it was important to take everything literally as it is told in the Bible, e.g. whether the snake actually spoke in paradise or not. Should we be concerned about that sort of thing, or is it really unimportant?

8. This outline deals with struggles within the Church. What should be our attitude towards this? (Read 1 Timothy 1:18; 6:12 and also 1 Timothy 3:3; 2 Timothy 2:23)
9. In the outline it was mentioned that the Scriptural doctrine of the Covenant was once more taught by Greijdanus and Schilder. Why is the Covenant so important? What significance does it have for you personally?
10. Can you explain what regeneration is? (See Canons of Dort Chapter 3/4, Articles 11 to 14.)

***A question which may be discussed in groups.***

11. When there are differences of opinion in the Church, how do you know who is in the right? What do we base our arguments on? Where can people go wrong?

# CHAPTER 30

## Liberation of 1944

### *Church struggle in the war years*

In the previous chapter we saw that a reformative movement became completely opposed to the teachings of Dr. A. Kuyper. This movement, under the leadership of Dr. K. Schilder, called the church people back to the Scriptures and to the Three Forms of Unity, the confessions which are based on Scriptures. This was not the result of human achievement. Remember this. No, it was Christ who was guiding the history of the Church. To him be all the praise and the glory.

The Synod of Amsterdam in 1936 had appointed a committee which had to examine the differences in doctrine. The synod decided to do this even though the churches had not asked for it. This is a characteristic of a hierarchy.

The dark years of the Second World War followed. Within a short time, several newspapers and weekly magazines were no longer allowed to be published by order of the occupiers of The Netherlands. One of the magazines affected by this order was *De Reformatie*. Prof. Schilder was its chief editor. Displaying great courage, he had called upon the Reformed people to rise up against the Germans. The title of one of his articles was "Get out of your bomb shelters - put on your uniform". His magazine was one of the first to be declared illegal, and Schilder was taken prisoner.

In the meantime the struggle within the church continued. Despite many requests to steer clear of the differences in doctrine until after the war it was decided to go ahead with the issues. People pointed to the communication difficulties, the daily worry to stay alive, the imprisonment of many ministers, and the fact that many important church publications had been declared illegal. All these requests were



*Klaas Schilder (1890–1952).*

to no avail. The Synod decided to go ahead and discuss the doctrinal differences.

### ***Under the yoke of a hierarchy***

In 1939 a synod met in Sneek. When the war broke out, it was decided to hold the meetings in a more central location, Utrecht. These meetings went on until 1943! I hope you know enough about church government to realise that something was wrong here. A synod

may only act on those things which the churches have requested or ordered her to do. As soon as the agenda has been dealt with, a synod is dissolved. Never is it allowed to deal with all sorts of matters without the express mandate to do so from the churches. If this does happen, we speak of a hierarchy.

This is what happened at the Sneek–Utrecht Synod of 1939–1943. Over half of the churches had requested the synod to postpone the discussion. However, the synod just continued to deal with the differences in doctrine. Moreover, it did so in closed sessions which are normally reserved for personal matters such as cases of excommunication.

On the 8th of June, 1942, the synod finally pronounced a decision about the differences in doctrine. It boiled down to the fact that Kuyper's teachings about the Covenant (see previous chapter) were regarded as Scriptural. It was a decision made without the authority and initiative of the churches, and was even made without the will of the churches.

The previous outlines showed that the Synod of Utrecht, 1905, allowed for differences of opinion about the Covenant. Now this was changed and everyone was forced to teach an unscriptural point of view as being the only right one.

### ***Objections against the forced acceptance of a false doctrine***

The synod continued to meet in 1943. Many people sent appeals to the synod objecting to Kuyper's doctrine of the Covenant. However, all these appeals were swept aside. Once again the synod ordered that "anything that is contrary to the doctrine we have pronounced to be true, may not be taught in the churches." Added to this was the fact that newly ordained ministers had to declare that they agreed with the decisions of the synod when they took office.

The synod instructed a number of its members to have discussions with those who had objections. They were asked to put their objections in writing. This they did in what came to be called the 'Clarification of Feelings'<sup>18</sup>. Herein the Scriptural teachings of the Covenant were once again set out and explained.

Each child of believing parents is a Covenant child (Acts 3:25). The promises of the Covenant are for each and every one of those children (Acts 2:39). Those promises are sealed at baptism. If baptised church members go their own way in later life, they break the Covenant relationship. Then they no longer receive the promises of the Covenant but the Covenant curse.

This 'Clarification of Feelings' displayed a similar trend of thought to the arguments of Prof. Lindeboom in 1905, which were declared to be truly Reformed at that time. The synod let the objectors talk but took no notice whatsoever of what they said. There was no reaction to the Declaration at all. The synod did, however, insist that nothing contrary to its doctrinal decisions was to be taught in the churches.

---

18. *Verklaring van Gevoelen*

### ***Satan proceeds to suspend faithful servants***

One of the men who was accused of having departed from Scripture and Confession was Prof. K Schilder. He could not defend himself at first because he had been imprisoned by the Germans. You have already read that many people passionately appealed to the synod to wait until better times. The synod turned a deaf ear. It should have ended much earlier, but it continued to meet. This was against the rules of the Church Order.

After Prof. Schilder was freed, he also raised objections against such a hierarchy. He did this before his church consistory in Kampen. He asked the consistory to pass on this objection in the correct ecclesiastical manner to the synod in order to put an end to the hierarchy.

The synod was outraged when it received the objection. It accused Prof. Schilder of sparking off a mutiny or rebellion in the churches. He had dared to oppose the hierarchy and therefore the synod suspended him and removed him from office. When Prof. Schilder showed that the synod's actions constituted hierarchy it was the final straw. They would not tolerate such an accusation from a professor of the Reformed Churches, and therefore suspended him. Moreover, he was also suspended from the office of minister emeritus of the church in Rotterdam – without the church consistory knowing anything about it. Once the wheels of suspension from office were set in motion, the elderly professor Greijdenus became the next victim. Following this, many ministers, elders and deacons were suspended, and later deposed, because they refused to bow under the yoke of hierarchy. This was further hierarchical action.

### ***The Liberation: 11th August 1944***

The darkest days of the war were coming. A winter of starvation was just around the corner. Communications, for the greater part, had been disrupted. However, the LORD did not abandon his work. The members of the synod probably thought: "Things will work out all right. Nothing much will come of our actions. Those 'objectors' are

only a nuisance and we had better remove them.” In the meantime, however, faithful servants had been thrown out. This is one of the marks of a false church. A doctrine which did not agree with God’s Word had been forced upon the churches. That is another mark of a false church. One of the sacraments was not administered according with the Word of God. This is the third mark of a false church (see Article 29 of the Belgic Confession of Faith).

Despite disrupted communication systems in the country, hundreds of ‘objectors’ gathered together in The Hague on 11th August, 1944. It was not a triumphant gathering of people, for there was great sadness of heart because things had reached this stage. However, there was also great thankfulness because the King of the Church had kept his people close to his Word.

### ***“The Act of Liberation and Return”***

On this solemn occasion, Prof. Schilder read out the ‘Act of Liberation or Return’. It was a liberation from those decisions of the synod which were not in accordance with God’s Word. It was a return to obedience to Scriptures and the Confession.

The aim of the Liberation was not to start up some new movement or sect. Its followers simply wanted to remain Reformed, which means they wanted to be faithful to God’s Word and not to human teachings. They wanted a Reformed Church government and not a hierarchy. They wanted to abide by the Reformed Confessions and not the ideas of clever professors. By God’s grace, the Reformed Churches were preserved and kept close to the Word, the Reformed church government, and the Three Forms of Unity. His preserving arm brought his people to a Reformation. If he had not provided deliverance and help it would all have come to nothing. To him be all praise and glory!

The synod tried its utmost to minimize the damage in all sorts of ways. Unfortunately, many stayed in the false church, under the yoke of hierarchy. Each had his own reason for remaining. Many ‘objectors’ also remained in that church, taking upon themselves a heavy

responsibility. Their choice was, for the most part, also the choice of their descendants.

Today we can see what the results are: Liberalism. We ought to hope and pray that, more than 40 years after the Liberation, the eyes of many may be opened and that they may see God's preserving hand in those dark war years in which the light of the Word once again began to shine forth.

This story does not revolve around the achievements of certain people. In the 'Act of Liberation or Return' there is a section in which sins and shortcomings are confessed.

No, it is not concerned with people, but only with Christ and the continuation of his work, and the glory of his kingship over the whole of life.

### ***Questions:***

***The answers to these questions may be found in the outline.***

1. What wrong decision was taken by the Synod of Amsterdam 1936?
2. Do you know what hierarchy is? Can you give examples of hierarchy mentioned in the outline?
3. Of which magazine was Prof. Schilder editor? What did he call the people to do?
4. What did the Synod of Sneek–Utrecht decide in 1942? Which demand did the Synod of Utrecht 1943 make? Where did they go wrong?
5. Tell what you know about the suspension of Prof. Schilder and Prof. Greijdanus. Why were these suspensions wrong?
6. Where was the "Act of Liberation or Return" read out in public? What was the result of this meeting?
7. What did the 'Liberated' people claim to be?

***Questions to think about.***

8. What marks of the false church are mentioned in Article 29 of the Belgic Confession of Faith? Do they apply to the Reformed Churches of 1944? Do they still apply to those churches now?
9. Would you call the 'Liberation' a reformation? Do the events of 1944 show any similarity to those of 1834?
10. If you were asked, "What do you mean by the Liberation of 1944?" what would you answer? Do you think it is important to know about the Liberation?

***These questions may be discussed in groups.***

11. It is now some time ago that the Liberation took place. Do you know if (and what) danger is threatening the churches now?
12. Is it possible to be truly Reformed and still belong to the 'wrong' church? Do you know of this happening?

# CHAPTER 31

## **The years following the Liberation**

### *The work of God, or of man?*

The first few years following the Liberation were years of great joy and thankfulness. The battle had been fought and had been followed by rest. Yet there was sadness too. Many families were divided. People with whom one had fought side by side during the war now sat at different Lord's Supper tables.

Very soon there arose a difference of opinion about the real value and meaning of the Liberation, and therefore also about its consequences. Was the Liberation a reformation which affected the whole of life? Or was it an argument between scholars which had led to a schism and was therefore of no real consequence? If so, should this schism therefore not be healed as soon as possible?

Most of the people who had joined the Liberation agreed that it was a reformation. The LORD had preserved his Church and led his people out of the synodical house of bondage. Clearly a line could be drawn from 1517 via 1834 and 1886 to 1944. Seen thus, the Liberation was not the work of man but it was God's doing. It was God who kept his people close to his Word.

However, a smaller section of the Liberated people did not agree at all. They argued that, in essence, it had only been a quarrel between brothers. For them there was only one solution to this; discuss things together and be reconciled. Thus, ultimately, they aimed for a reunion with the Reformed (Synodical) Churches.

## *The Liberation was an act of God*

Most people, then, did not doubt that the LORD himself had led his people to another reformation. The effects of this reformation should show in all of one's life. Many people began to ask themselves, "How can I pray together at school, in politics, and at work, with people who do not want me at their Lord's Supper table on Sunday?" It became clear to them that they could not. This issue was called the ethical conflict or controversy.

This was not the only reason they had for establishing their own schools and forming a political party. The rejection of, and departure from, the Word of God by those in the Reformed (Synodical) Churches became an increasingly greater reality. Some people saw this deterioration sooner than others. It was a process which happened much quicker in some areas than in others. However, this deterioration was the most important reason for taking these actions.

The Church is the source of power and energy for the whole of life. If things go wrong in the Church, daily life is also affected. The truth of this statement became increasingly clearer. Today hardly any Reformed person doubts this. But it was not immediately clear to all the people after the Liberation, and certainly not to those who hoped for a rapid reunion.

## *Consequences of the urge for a union*

The first group of people who returned was led by Rev. BA Bos. This movement is also known as the 'Bos Campaign'. This group left the Liberated Churches in 1950. A few years after the Liberation some of the group's members had had discussions with the synodical people and also denied that the Liberation was an act of reformation. However, the Synodical Churches did not show a single sign of a return to the Scriptures and Confession.

To have a discussion with the Synodical Churches or not was a question which occupied the minds of quite a few people in the Liberated Churches. Most were of the opinion that it was sinful to have a discussion when there was no sign of true repentance or



*The faculty at the Theological College, Broederweg, Kampen, after the Liberation: DK Wielenga, C Veenhof, P Deddens, S Greijdanus, K Schilder (rector), B. Holwerda and DJ Burwalda.*

a genuine remorse about the excommunications which had been carried out.

Unfortunately, there is still no sign of repentance in the Synodical Churches today. On the contrary. The developments in these churches are alarming. The synod was declared to be the supreme body within the church. Reformed Church government was thereby rejected. In 1946 the decisions which had caused the Liberation were replaced by the so-called 'Replacement Formula'. However, in essence, nothing had changed. The former decisions which had led to the unscriptural excommunication of various people were maintained and enforced. In 1959 the 'Replacement Formula' was repealed.

However, this did not signify a return to God's Word. It was stated that it had been a rich blessing while in force. Moreover, it was becoming more and more obvious that God's Word was being rejected.

What sense would a discussion therefore have? The only result would be that the Liberation would be undone. That is, if that were possible. However, the LORD does not abandon the works of his hand.

Yet many people returned to the synodical churches in the course of time, for various reasons. However, those reasons boiled down to this: that they did not understand that the LORD had worked a reformation in the Church.

### ***The struggle surrounding the “Open Letter”<sup>19</sup>***

This question about a discussion with the synodical churches led to a schism. In South Groningen Rev. A van der Ziel wanted to have such a discussion aimed at a reunion. His consistory did not allow this and when he did not heed his consistory he was deposed and excommunicated. He then instituted a church of his own which met in a building in Groningen which was called “Home”. This led to their being given the name of ‘Home Church’ or ‘Home Congregation’.

On Reformation Day, 1966, approximately 26 members of the liberated churches, 19 of whom were ministers, signed an ‘Open Letter’ to the “Home Church”. It stated, amongst other things, that it was dangerous to believe in the Liberation as an act of reformation. The cause of the Liberation, it said, was a quarrel between brothers. In other words, the authors of the ‘Open Letter’ did not see it as an act of God, but of man.

This letter intensified the controversy. Rev. BJF Schoep, the writer of this public address (the ‘Open Letter’), was not accepted at the Synod of Amersfoort, 1967. The delegates from North Holland walked out of the meeting. This led to a schism in many places in that province. Thus a group of churches broke away from the bond of Reformed Churches (Liberated). They were called “Buitenverbanders” – because they were outside the bond of churches. Later they took on the name Dutch Reformed Churches.

### ***The “Buitenverbanders”***

Not all the churches which ended up outside the bond of churches agreed with Rev. Schoep. This minister soon returned to the Synodical Church anyway. There were other causes for this schism as well.

---

19. In Dutch: “Open Brief”

First of all, there was the case of Rev. Telder. He was a minister in Breda who published a book in 1960 titled "Death... and then?"<sup>20</sup> In it he stated that a believer who has died does not go straight to heaven. Heaven is still unoccupied at the moment, he said, and it is only on the day of the resurrection of the dead that the dead will be with Christ. This thought clashes with what we confess in Question and Answer 57 of the Heidelberg Catechism, which states that we will be taken up to Christ immediately. This deviation from true doctrine is not just a matter of minor importance. It has everything to do with our whole outlook on God's Word. Several churches ended up outside the bond of churches because of this matter.

Other churches had difficulty accepting the bond of churches. They found it too restrictive. They desired contact and relations within the bond, but on a much more informal basis. Still others were for allowing children to participate in the celebration of the Lord's Supper. Over time of these churches also considered one church service per Sunday to be sufficient.

Much more can be said. It is incredibly sad to see a development which results in many Reformed people deviating from the right path. This includes people who originally had truly Reformed thoughts. We also see a development which fills us with alarm and horror because of the speed and ease with which many older members fallen into line. How much have they not already forgotten of what they once publicly confessed at the public profession of faith! Besides, there is no indication that their children stop at that point. They will more than likely continue to disregard those things which are simply truly Reformed.

### ***Only God keeps his Church erect***

Bible History and Church History are filled with this theme: if the LORD had not preserved his Church, there would be nothing left of it. Then we would be like the heathens of long ago. It is not thanks to our faithfulness and our actions that a truly Reformed Church still exists today. All credit is due to the LORD alone. We cannot

---

20. In Dutch: "Sterven... en dan?"

emphasize this enough, also when we speak with those outside the bond of churches. We are no better than they. It is only through God's grace that we are allowed to stay on the right path. We can only repeat: through God's grace alone.

### ***Questions:***

***The answers to these questions may be found in the outline.***

1. What differences of opinion arose after the Liberation?
2. What do we mean by the 'ethical conflict'?
3. What was the most important reason for establishing a Reformed political party and Reformed schools?
4. What was the basic reason for the return of some people to the synodical churches?
5. Can you tell in your own words what the outline says about the struggle surrounding the 'Open Letter'?
6. What did Rev. Telder teach about death? What does the Reformed Confession teach about this?

### ***Questions to think about.***

7. How would you explain to an 'outsider' that the Liberation was an act of God?
8. Do you think it is necessary to have Reformed schools? How would you defend this?
9. Are we allowed to speak of 'more important' and 'less important' parts of the Confession? Why, or why not?
10. What is the value of the bond of churches? Why do so many people outside our churches have objections to this?
11. Why do we not allow children to partake of the Lord's Supper? What is wrong with having one church service per Sunday?

*A question which may discussed in groups.*

12. The church is called the source of power and energy for the whole of life. Try to work this out for every aspect of life, e.g. marriage, family, bringing up children, school, work, politics.

# CHAPTER 32

## Mission Work

### *The start of mission work*

“Go therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:19–20). This is the well-known mission mandate of the Lord Jesus Christ which he gave to his disciples before he ascended into heaven.

From the first Christian congregation at Jerusalem the Gospel spread all over the land of the Jews, but also beyond their country. The congregation of Antioch became the first calling church. This happened when this congregation sent out Paul and Barnabus to proclaim the Gospel to the heathens (read Acts 13).

These missionaries went to the island of Cyprus and a part of Asia called Asia Minor. With other helpers such as Silas, Luke and Timothy, Paul later travelled to Greece. He even reached the centre of the Roman Empire, the city of Rome.

### *Mission work through the course of the centuries*

In the centuries which followed, mission work was continued in the countries around the Mediterranean Sea and in Europe as far north as Scandinavia and England. Church history is, in part, the history of mission work. In chapter eight we concentrated on the establishment of the Christian Church in the Low Countries. This was carried out mainly by French and English missionaries after the seed of the Word was sown by Christian soldiers in the Roman army.

At the end of the Middle Ages, around the 1500's, great expeditions for exploration were organised and fantastic discoveries were

made – and so Christians from Europe came to America, South Africa, India, Indonesia, Australia and South Pacific islands. Thus, for example, the Geneva of Calvin's days did its share by sending fourteen missionaries to South America.

It was especially in the previous century and in the beginning of this century that mission work among heathens was strongly continued with renewed zeal and energy in many of these areas.

This was not carried out by individual churches, even though the mission mandate was given by Christ. Missionaries were mainly sent out by mission societies or mission fellowships. Many missionaries carried out this work, often surrounded by much danger, with great courage derived from faith. Some well-known names are: David Livingstone, the Scotsman who worked in the Congo area; Ludwig Ingwer Nommensen, the German who worked on Sumatra; and Nicolaus Adriani and Albert Kruyt, Dutchmen whose area of work was Celebes. These are only a few of the well-known names among all those faithful servants who followed Christ's mission mandate.

### ***Mission work is the task of the Church***

The Acts of the Apostles is full of the accounts of mission work, yet you will not find any account of the apostles reporting to societies or fellowships. No, they reported to the congregation. Read Acts 14:27, for example: "And when they arrived (in Antioch) they (Paul and Barnabus) gathered the church together and declared all that God had done with them, and how he had opened a door of faith to the gentiles." They also delivered a report to the congregation in Jerusalem (Acts 15:4).

It is important to note, in connection with this, that the congregation's prayers were requested, so that the LORD would open a door for the Gospel. This you find in Colossians 4:2-6, for example. Paul writes here, "Pray for us also, that God may open a door for the Word, to declare the mystery of Christ." When the Church forsook her duty, societies were set up with the aim of carrying out mission work.

The Moravian Brethren were also very active. A congregation of the Brethren in Zeist (in Holland) sent out a great number of missionaries to Surinam. They also established hospitals and schools. The Moravian Brethren even sent out missionaries to work among the Australian Aborigines in 1850. Fortunately the Reformed Churches (Gereformeerde Kerken) decided that mission work is the task of the Church at the Synod of Middelburg in 1896. Through this decision, mission work was guided onto a Scriptural course once again. Mission work is the planting of churches by the Church in the name of Christ.

### *The aim of mission work*

After the Liberation, mission work was organised from within the churches, for they also wanted to be faithful to their calling in this. Important decisions were made at the Synod of Amersfoort 1948 concerning mission work. This was necessary because outside 'our' churches a wrong understanding of the way in which mission work should be carried out was gaining ground. It was especially in the Dutch Reformed Church ('Hervormde Kerk') that people were of the opinion that the aim of mission work was to establish a whole society with a Christian way of life. They said that the Christianisation of the whole of life by means of medical services, agricultural aid, technical instruction, education, etc., belonged to mission work.

During the synod at Amersfoort this was disputed. Nowhere did Christ command us to bring a new civilisation to a whole nation by means of mission work. The aim of mission work, according to the Scriptures, is the preaching of God's Word in order to plant the Church in this way. The whole of life is not renewed by all sorts of development programmes but by the Word of God, which is living and powerful. By means of that Word, the Lord creates and prepares a people for himself who will laud his praise.

Of course, it is important to give help in many different ways. However, that is not the calling of the Church but of the believers. The Church must call on its members, the believers, to alleviate the

distress found on the mission field. However, the Church as such may not institute hospitals and schools.

### ***Missionwork after the Liberation***

At the synod of Amersfoort, the locality of a mission field was also dealt with. Mission work was being carried out on Sumba, an island in Indonesia. However, churches had already been planted there. These now had to take over the mission mandate for their own area. Thus mission work on Sumba was coming to an end and this was cause for joy. For the Word that had been sown was bearing fruit.

Other mission fields had to be found, however. Since 1951 the Church at Drachten carried out mission work in Borneo, a part of Indonesia, at a place called Kalimantan-Barat. Another area in South Africa, Mamelodi, was added in 1964. A large mission field has been worked in Irian Jaya since 1956. Several churches work together there. They are the sister churches in North Enschede, Groningen, South Spakenburg and Canada.



There are several smaller mission fields. The calling church for mission work in Curitiba, Brazil, is Assen; the Church in Rijnsburg works in Curacao; and 's Hertogenbosch is the calling church for work in Surinam.

Perhaps your head is spinning after reading all these names of places. You do not have to remember them all. However, it is quite probable that your Church is involved with one of these mission fields. There are only a handful of calling churches, but they are supported by many other churches, usually in their area. Therefore your church has also joined in an arrangement to support one of these mission fields. Or perhaps your church has started mission work in a new area.

### ***“Our distant neighbours” (“De verre naasten”)***

At the Synod of Amersfoort, 1948, the aim of mission work was once again formulated in a Scriptural way. Unscriptural thoughts and insights were rejected. The believers were also emphatically reminded of their task to show mercy and loving-kindness.

Initially there were several organisations to carry out this work of mercy. Perhaps you have heard the names ‘Mesoz’ or ‘Meschobor’. Both these organisations were involved in medical care and education on the mission fields. They have now joined forces to form one society with the new name *De verre naasten (Distant Neighbours)*. This new society is responsible for all the tasks which are not included in the mandate of the Church.

What are these tasks carried out by ‘Distant Neighbors’? Medical assistance is given by nurses and doctors. Technical assistance is given by specially qualified men. Agricultural experts are sent out to teach better agricultural methods to the native people. There are also instructors, teachers, who are sent out to perform the important task of teaching the people to read the Bible.

This is by no means everything that they do. The LORD has richly blessed ‘our’ churches in their mission work. We cannot be thankful enough to Him for this. You, too, can show your interest in mission

work by reading what the mission workers write about their work in your local church papers.

Most importantly, do not forget to mention mission work in your prayers. For it concerns the praise of his glory and the redemption and salvation of heathens. And, above all, it is a specific mandate of Christ, given to his children, to be continued until he returns!

### ***Questions:***

***Answers to these questions may be found in the outline.***

1. What is the mission mandate of Christ? Do you know it off by heart? Do you know where to find it in the Bible?
2. Which church was the first calling church and who were the missionaries?
3. What do you know about mission work throughout the centuries?
4. How do we know that mission work is not the task of societies but of the Church?
5. Which unscriptural view of mission work found more and more acceptance after the Second World War?
6. What did the Synod of Amersfoort in 1948, state over against this?
7. What is the name of the organisation responsible for lending assistance on the mission fields? What are some of the tasks it carries out?

### ***Questions to think about.***

8. Which mission field is your church involved in? Do you know who is working on that particular mission field?
9. Do you read the mission news which is published in your local church paper? What, for instance, have you learned from reading it?

10. Can you think of any aspects of mission work which have not been mentioned in the outline? Is this an important aspect or not?
11. Why would there be different calling churches? Would it not be better or easier if there were only one calling church?

*A question which may be discussed in groups.*

12. Mention some ways in which you can become more involved in mission work. Which do you think is the best one

# Index

## A

Adriani, Nicolausi 239  
Age of Enlightenment 167–168  
Ambrose 44  
Anabaptists 135–139  
Ananaias 9  
Apostle, Office of 13–17  
Arius 57, 183  
Arminius, Jacob 160  
Athanasius 33, 40, 42  
Augustine 40–44  
Australia 239–240

## B

Belgic Confession of Faith 143–147  
Bernard of Clairvaux 82, 84, 85  
Beza, Theodore 115, 123  
Bilderdijk, Willem 177–178  
Boniface 60, 62  
Bos Campaign 232–233  
Brethren of the Common Life 101  
Brummelkamp, Anthony 192, 199,  
201

## C

Calvin, John (Jean) 87, 112–116,  
120–124, 175, 239  
Canon, Compiling of the 27–31  
Canons of Dort 164–165  
Capadose, Abraham 178  
Church Order of Dort 164  
Constantine, Emperor 36, 37, 39, 42  
Constantinople 75  
Cop, Nicolas 116  
Council of Nicea 42, 57  
Council of Trent 131–132  
Counter-Reformation 127–131  
Crusades 72–76

## D

da Costa, Isaac 178  
de Bres, Guido 143–147  
Decius, Emperor 36  
de Cock, Helenius 200  
de Cock, Hendrik 183–186, 189–193,  
196  
de Groot, Hofstede 183, 203  
Diet of Worms 108  
Diocletian, Emperor 36  
Doleantie 203–205  
Dort, Synod of 162

## E

Edict of Milan 36  
Eligius 58  
Erasmus 159, 165

## F

Farel, William (Guillaume) 120–121  
Frederick III of the Palatinate  
152–155

## G

Geelkerken, Johannes 220–221  
Geneva 120–124  
Godfrey of Bouillon 75, 76  
Gomarus, Franciscus 161, 171  
Gregory the Great 59, 60  
Greijdanus, Saekle 221  
Groen van Prinsterer, Guillaume 178,  
204–205  
Groningen School 182–186

## H

Heidelberg Catechism 151–155  
Helena (mother of Constantine) 38

Hierarchy 49–53, 96, 172, 225  
Hoffman, Melchior 137–138  
Hus, Jan (John) 90–91, 100, 175

## I

Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch 24  
Ignatius de Loyola 128–129  
Indonesia 239–240  
Institutes of the Christian Religion  
117  
Irian Jaya 241  
Islam 64

## J

John, Apostle 17  
Judaists 10  
Julian the Apostate 39

## K

Koran 67  
Kruyt, Albert 239  
Kuipenga, Klaas 185–186  
Kuyper, Abraham 203–207, 209–213,  
217–221

## L

Leo the Great 51  
Liberation 217–221, 224–228,  
231–235  
Lindeboom, Lucas 218, 226  
Livingstone, David 239  
Low Countries 57  
Luther, Martin 87, 104–108

## M

Marcion 30  
Marnix van St. Aldegonde 124  
Marot, Clément 123  
Matthijsz, John 137  
Maxentius, Emperor 36

Mecca 65, 67  
Medina 65  
Middle Ages 80, 94  
Mission Work 238–242  
Mohammed 65  
Molenaar, Dirk 186  
Monica (mother of Augustine) 44  
Montanism 31, 32  
Montanus 31  
Munster (Germany) 137–138  
Mysticism 97–98

## N

Nero, Caesar (Emperor) 17, 23, 35  
Nommensen, Ludwig Ingwer 239  
Noyon 112

## O

Office bearers 13–15  
Olevianus, Caspar 153–155  
Olivetani 116  
Open Letter 234–235  
Orleans (France) 114  
Oxford University 88

## P

Palestine 72  
Paris 113, 115  
Patrick 59  
Paul, Apostle (Saul or Tarsus) 8, 17,  
238  
Pelagius 46  
Pentecost 7  
Persecutions 20–24  
Peter, Apostle 9, 17, 18  
Peter the Hermit 74, 75  
Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna 24  
Pope Urban 74

## Q

Qur'an 67

## R

Radboud I 60  
Remonstrants 159–163  
Reveille 174–178  
Roman Empire 20, 21, 35, 57

## S

Sapphira 9  
Savonarola 100  
Schilder, Klaas 221, 224–228  
Scholasticism 97–98  
Scholte, Hendrik P 191–193, 197  
Schotsman, Nicholas 184–185  
Second Secession 203–205  
Second World War 224–228  
Separation, The 182–186, 189–193  
Servatius, Bishop 57  
Simons, Menno 139  
South Africa 241  
Strasburg 122  
Surinam 240  
Synod of Dort 47, 162

## T

Telder, Rev B 235  
Tetzel, Johann 108  
Theodosius the Great 39  
Theological College 195–199

## U

Union of 1892 209–213  
Ursinus, Zaraharias 153–155  
Uytenboogaert, Johannes 161–162

## V

Valerian, Emperor 36

van Oldenbarnevelt, Johan 162  
van Velzen, Simon 192, 200, 212  
Voetius, Gijsbertus 171

## W

Wilcox, Richard 175  
Willibrord 60, 62  
Wittenberg 108  
Wolmar, Melchior 115  
Wycliffe, John 88–89, 92, 99