

## 107. The Minister of Ulrum

It is silent in the church at Ulrum, even though there is not a single empty seat. That building is overflowing. The people are even sitting on the steps of the pulpit. The voice of the minister is crystal clear everyone can hear him. His large audience listens attentively.

In simple, clear language, he explains man's sinful condition. Man is dead in sin and lost in guilt. But he also proclaims the riches of grace in Christ Jesus who came to deliver people lost in sin from eternal destruction. In other words, this minister is preaching a truly 'old-



*Nave of the church in Ulrum*

fashioned', Reformed sermon. I purposely write 'old-fashioned'. By that, I do not mean that the truth becomes old-fashioned because that remains new. God's Word never changes! But with 'old-fashioned' we mean that in those days such sermons were rare. In previous chapters, we discussed that people no longer wanted to know about the reality that man is dead in sin. Most Dutch people



*Church and manse in Ulrum. This church was built in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. The study in the manse, where Rev de Cock wrote his sermons can still be visited today*

were hostile to this message. They wanted to hear about *man's* virtue and goodness instead!

But this minister does not want a bar of those new-fashioned ideas. Therefore, many people in the Netherlands esteem him highly, while others hate him with a passion.

Who is he?

He is Hendrik de Cock, a young man in his early thirties. Born in Veendam, he is now the minister in Ulrum, a small town in Groningen, a province in the north of The Netherlands.

We wrote that it was utterly silent in the church, where everyone is listening intently to the minister's sermon. This minister preaches the gospel as it is, and that touches their hearts. Again, that message was not heard much in those days. From most pulpits, ministers told the people that they had to live good and respectable lives to help earn their salvation. But Hendrik De Cock preached differently. He emphasised man's total depravity.

Not so long ago, Hendrik the Cock was teaching differently than he does now. He studied at the university at Groningen. In his youth, he had also been a child of his time, when liberalism was popular, especially at the university in Groningen. The professors taught the most abominable errors there. The Trinity of God, as well as the two natures of Christ, was disputed there. At this university they no longer believed that the Lord Jesus suffered and died on the cross to pay for our sins, or that this was necessary. They denied the truth of the gospel!

The doctrine of salvation-by-Christ-alone was rejected at that university in Groningen. But how is that possible?! Weren't those professors warned? And if they refused to change their mind, wouldn't they be dismissed? Wasn't their teaching contrary to God's Word? Is the doctrine of salvation allowed to be changed? Sadly, we need to say that these professors at Groningen could teach their destructive doctrines undisturbed!

That was the terrible result of synod The Hague 1816, of which we told you a few chapters ago, when that synod allowed doctrinal freedom in the churches.

Before that, ministers had to preach according to God's Word and the confessions. This is what they promised when they signed the form for ordination. But that form had been changed! The form now said *that only where* the confessions are in line with Scripture, did they need to follow the confessions. That meant that ministers and professors could teach as they wished. So the confessions were sidelined whenever they thought they were not in agreement with Scripture. Everyone could decide for himself what was true in those confessions. Doctrinal freedom had entered the church!

Now the professors at Groningen could freely teach their students the most abominable and God-dishonouring false doctrines, and nobody could do anything about it. They did not even *want* to do anything about it because liberalism had free reign.

Hendrik de Cock had studied at that same university, and he agreed with all those errors. When he had finished his studies, Hendrik de Cock also preached that the people had to live honest and blameless lives, then they would not have to worry about eternal life.

## DE COCK'S CONVERSION

In 1829 de Cock receives a call from Ulrum, and he accepts it. In his new congregation, De Cock visits an elderly member, Mr Kuipenga,



Reverend Hendrik de Cock 1801 - 1842

who complains about his sins and his inability to do any good. Rev. De Cock tries to encourage the old man.

*'If I must add one sigh to my salvation, then I am lost forever. I need a different ground for my salvation, Reverend!'*

*(Klaas Kuipenga)*

'Come on, it's not that bad,' the minister says, trying to comfort him. 'Man is still able to do some good. If we do our best, then we will discover that we can conquer sin.'

The old man shakes his head, looked at his minister with pity and answers:

"If I must add one sigh to my salvation, then I am lost forever. I need a different ground for my salvation, Reverend!"

Rev. De Cock thinks deeply about those words as he travelled back to the manse. "A different ground for my salvation..." Those words continue to echo through his mind; he can't get rid of them, though he tries! The Lord used that conversation to convert him.

One day, someone gives him Calvin's Institutes to read. Day after day, he studies that book, and the LORD opens his eyes. Enlightened by the Holy Spirit, he learns to see that man is incapable of *any* good. He discovers that by nature, only evil lives in his heart continually. He learns that the Lord Jesus needs to become his righteousness before God. He understands with increasing clarity the truth of Mr Klaas Kuipenga's words: 'I need a different ground for my salvation.' That 'different ground', he now realises, is in Christ his Saviour!

We realise of course that now Rev. De Cock is unable to preach the way he used to. In his sermons, he now points to the Lord Jesus, as the only way of salvation.

It does not take long for people to realise that Rev. de Cock is converted. Many people travel from far and wide to Ulrum to listen to Rev. de Cock. Many arrive Saturday evening. At times more than seventy carriages stand in a long row in front of the church building. In Ulrum they hear what they didn't hear from their own ministers anymore.

Today we travel to church by car, in those days they came by horse and cart. Others used a boat to get there. It is not surprising that the little church in Ulrum is overcrowded every Sunday. Soon that church building



*Some travelled more than 14 hrs to get to Ulrum. (28 hours up and back)*

becomes much too small. It can no longer contain the ever-increasing number of people. When the weather is suitable, Rev. de Cock

preaches outside. Then he stands on a hay wagon and the people stand or sit on the grass around him. The area next to the church where Rev. de Cock stands to preach is so full that the people still stand pressed together. Some climb up to the church attic, remove some tiles from the roof to poke their head through. Now they can hear the minister much better!

## THE ENMITY GROWS

The progressive ministers from the surrounding towns and villages cannot stand it that Rev. De Cock attracts so many people. Their own church members are leaving them. They grow jealous and full of malice and hatred. True, Rev. De Cock receives many friends, but gets even more enemies! The people travelling weekly to Ulrum are teased and ridiculed. Some compose nasty songs about them such as: 'Johnny's travelling to Pastor Cock...' This single sentence shows a world of hatred and venom.

All this clearly shows that there are still many people who long for the pure preaching of the Word. For that, they brave the scorn of their fellow villagers and travel many hours. But that is not all.

One day some parents from a nearby village come to Rev. de Cock to ask him to baptise their children. Since their minister does not teach the sound doctrine, they do not want their children baptised by him. The form for baptism tells the parents that they must promise to bring their children up in the doctrine of *this* Christian church. When those progressive ministers ask that question, they are unable to answer 'yes, I do'. That's why they ask Rev. de Cock if he will please baptise their children. Although this is not according to the church order, it *was* understandable! This is one of the sorry consequences of the doctrinal freedom which had invaded the churches. It caused a moral dilemma for the ordinary people. Rev. de Cock hesitates because he fears more trouble will come from it. He knows that the liberal ministers will get

mad at him. Thinking about it, he decides to ask a few friends for advice. For instance, he wrote a letter to Rev. Molenaar at The Hague<sup>1</sup>.

Reverend Molenaar advises him not to do it as unrest could develop in the churches because of it. However, the parents continue to come back with the same request.

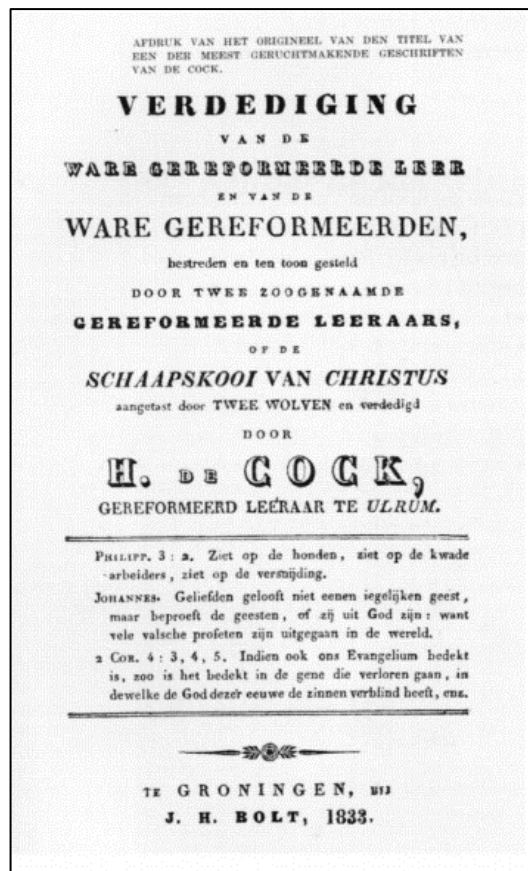
Finally, Rev. De Cock no longer dares to refuse, and he does baptise those children.



Rev Molenaar

### MORE COMPLICATIONS

In the meantime, two liberal preachers had written several booklets against Rev de Cock. Those booklets attack the faithful preaching of God's Word! One of those hostile ministers



*'The sheepfold of Christ attacked by two wolves and defended by Hendrik De Cock.'*

challenges Rev. De Cock to refute him. So, Rev. De Cock does. He also writes a booklet and directs it against those two liberal ministers who attacked him. Its title was: *'The sheepfold of Christ attacked by two wolves and defended by Hendrik De Cock.'* It is true, Rev. de Cock is sharp, very sharp in what he writes in that little book, but he is *honest*. He calls those liberal ministers 'wolves' ... 'blind fools' ... 'Pharisees and hypocrites' ... 'slanderers' ... 'deceivers and thieves.' He is correct in that; these liberal ministers are destroying God's church. They are deceiving the people and robbing them of true faith and eternal life!

Yet it would have been wiser if Rev. de Cock had been more careful. Again, Rev. de Cock was entirely correct. The Lord Jesus also called the Pharisees hypocrites and deceivers. Yes, our Saviour even used the words 'serpents and a brood of vipers'. Rev. de Cock always used Biblical words. But his enemies and opponents were even harsher; they did not use language from the Bible; they called Rev. de Cock 'schismatic' ... a 'deceiver' ... a 'friend of the Jesuits'.

In another booklet, he was called a 'raving monster', and they accused his followers of being 'dumb cattle'.

These two developments: baptising children from other congregations and writing that booklet against the liberal ministers, prompted the classis to summon Rev de Cock to their next meeting. When he arrived, they didn't mention a thing about baptising those children; all focus was on the booklet he wrote against his colleagues. Had he not called them 'wolves' in that brochure? 'That's going too far!!' was the judgement of the classis, and they suspended him for an indefinite time. Okay, they would not reduce his stipend yet, but he was not allowed to do his ministerial task. So, he could no longer preach, no longer teach catechism, visit the

<sup>1</sup> See previous chapter.

sick or do any other work in his congregation. What a terrible punishment!

Besides, this suspension was entirely *illegal*. The classis didn't even have a quorum! Various delegates of that classis weren't even there! This meeting had no right to make that decision.

That suspension of Rev. de Cock was also *unjust!* According to classis, he was not allowed to call his colleagues 'wolves'. Fair enough, it was not very flattering, but those liberal ministers had called him a 'stirrer', a 'schismatic', and 'a friend of the Jesuits'. *Was that allowed?* ...If calling each other names was the issue, then classis should also have suspended the two liberal ministers. But *that* did not happen! *They* could slander as much as they pleased, but Rev. de Cock had to be quiet. I repeat, that suspension was *unjust*. You can guess that there was something else behind it. It was not really about those few words but about the *content* of that booklet. Rev. de Cock was not allowed to proclaim the *truth!* They didn't want to hear about man's total depravity or about being saved by Christ through grace alone. No! No! Man must be nice and good, well behaved, respectful, live decently, then the 'Supreme Being' would certainly open heaven for such 'noble people'.

This judgement showed their hostile opposition to the doctrine of free grace, which was the real reason why they suspended Rev. de Cock.

The congregation in Ulrum is terribly angry when they hear that the classis has suspended their beloved minister. What should Rev. De Cock do now?

Ignore it?

Abandon the struggle?

That is the easy way out and often happens when we cannot have it our way.

## THE LONG ROAD OF APPEALS

However, Rev. de Cock does *not* abandon the struggle. He is *not* the schismatic of which

they so often accuse him. What then? Should Rev. De Cock simply submit to that unlawful and unjust sentence? The classis has suspended him, but there are higher assemblies to which he can appeal and that is what he decides to do. He appeals to the regional synod at Groningen. Maybe *they* will pass a fair judgment. But the faithful minister of Ulrum will be bitterly disappointed.

This regional synod only makes things worse! They suspend Rev. de Cock for another two years, and this time they withdraw his stipend as well!! That throws him and his family into sudden poverty. This decision again shows deep hostility towards the Reformed doctrine.

Despite this, Rev. de Cock does not abandon the struggle. He writes a letter to King William I, yes, he even travels to The Hague,



King William I

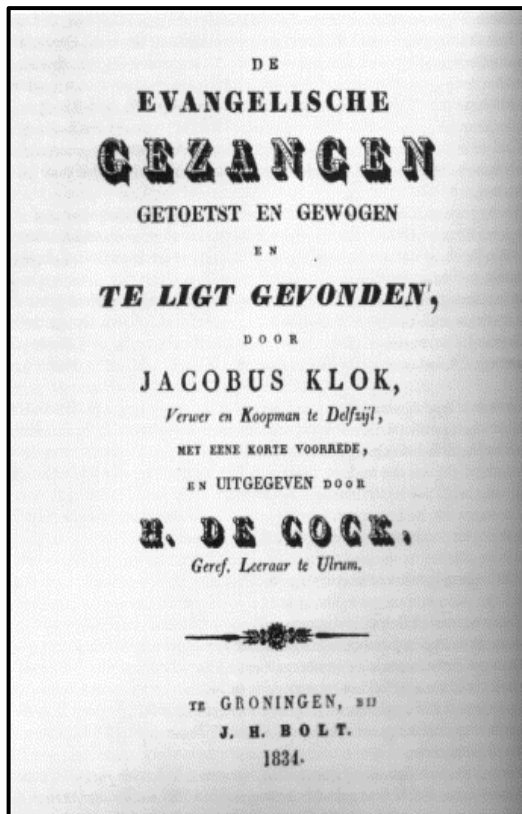
hoping that the Dutch Prince will show more justice. He manages to talk with King William I, but the king is stiff and unfriendly towards him and will not listen to his pleas. Again Rev. de Cock

is deeply disappointed. He travels back to Ulrum without having accomplished anything.

Then something happens which makes things even worse. Remember how in 1816 the synod of The Hague decided that every minister must include at least one hymn in the liturgy?

While Rev de Cock is suspended, a member of the church writes a booklet *against* the use of hymns in the church service. Rev. de Cock writes an introduction for it and publishes it. When that booklet spread and became

popular, the hatred toward Rev. de Cock increases even more! His enemies accuse him



*Booklet against the introduction of hymns. This booklet was written by Jacobus Klok who was a painter and businessman. Rev de Cock wrote the introduction and had this booklet published in 1834.*

before the regional synod and ... that synod dismisses Rev. de Cock! They cannot not tolerate him any longer! Away with him! Dismiss him!

Why?

Because he defends the *truth*. Even after this harsh sentence, Rev. de Cock does not give up. True, the regional synod dismissed him, but there was an even higher assembly! That is the national synod. So, Rev. de Cock appeals to that synod, hoping that this highest ecclesiastical body will finally do him justice. But he hopes in vain! That national synod also declares Rev. de Cock guilty. However, they give him six months to regret his actions, show remorse and make amends. Then he is ordered to appear before the regional synod again, and...? Rev. de Cock goes to that assembly which has treated him so unjustly.

We will follow him and join him at that meeting...

When Rev. de Cock enters the room he is not welcomed or received with love and respect. Those present show no patience or tolerance, no understanding or sympathy to him. On the contrary! They receive him with suspicion and hatred. They present him with a written statement and sternly command him to sign it. The document states that Rev de Cock regrets his actions, that he sincerely promises to conduct himself respectfully and show obedience to the rules and governing bodies of the church! When Rev. de Cock asks if he can please say something in his defence, the men bluntly refuse! He must sign the document as is...*end of story!* That is terrible!

Of course, the document does not get signed, and Rev. de Cock remains dismissed. He is deposed by men who despise and reject the doctrine of the Reformation! Rev. de Cock did his absolute best to defend and uphold Scripture and confessions. But that is exactly why he was cast out.

This excommunication of Rev. de Cock was the beginning of the Secession of thousands and thousands of faithful people from the Dutch Reformed Church. Rev. de Cock did *not* force the Secession, the liberal leaders of the church *did!* True, these sad events are not the real reason for the Secession. The real reason is the departure from the ways of the Lord and lack of appreciation for the Word of God and the confessions.

The dismissal of Rev. De Cock has been the impetus for the Secession. Is it not sad, even tragic, that the church of the Reformation could do this? These events make up some of the blackest pages of the history of the Dutch Reformed church. How great is the guilt of those church governments — great guilt before a holy and righteous God Who loves the truth and hates the lie! — great guilt towards their brothers and sisters for whom they should have been shepherds but whom they led astray. Yet also in this history, we

observe the golden thread of God's Council. He always watches over His Church.

## QUESTIONS

1. What is Rev. de Cock's background?
2. How did his sermons differ from most sermons in his day?
3. How did 'doctrinal freedom' enter the church?
4. How was Rev. de Cock converted?
5. How did God bless his reading of Calvin's Institutes? What did he learn?
6. How did this knowledge affect his preaching?
7. Why did other ministers resent him?
8. What dilemma did parents face regarding the baptism of their children?
9. Why did Rev. de Cock hesitate to baptise these infants?
10. What was the booklet about written by Rev. de Cock.
11. Why was he summoned before the classical government?
12. Why was the sentence illegal?
13. Why was it unjust?
14. What was the real reason behind his suspension?
15. Define the term 'schismatic.'
16. Why did every attempt to appeal decisions fail?
17. List the causes of the Secession.
18. Which event prompted the Secession?

1. Explain the statement of Mr Klaas Kuipenga the elderly man to Rev. de Cock, 'If I must add one sigh to my salvation, then I am lost forever. I need a different ground for my salvation.'

2. Read the following title, 'The Sheepfold of Christ Attacked by Two Wolves and Defended by Hendrik de Cock.' In this book, de Cock called the liberal ministers 'wolves, fools and blind, Pharisees and hypocrites.' The author states that it would have been wiser if Rev. de Cock had used more moderate language. What did he mean by this?

3. Was Rev. de Cock a 'schismatic'? Defend your opinion.



## FOR FURTHER STUDY