

91. GOD'S CARE FOR HIS CHURCH IN THE NETHERLANDS

The Netherlands did not have any 'home-grown' reformers like Germany, France and Scotland, yet the Reformation took deep root in The Netherlands. Extermination proved to be impossible. As we have seen in previous chapters, the Roman Catholic Church tried its brutal best but was unsuccessful. Rome continually lost more ground, and the Reformation grew more and more.

ANABAPTISTS

The Anabaptists caused a lot of damage to the Reformation. We mentioned them when we discussed the history of the Reformation in Germany. Remember? They were erring spirits! They placed their 'internal light of revelation' above the Word of God! This error is very dangerous. We will fall for the most terrible falsehoods when we let go of God's infallible Word and rely on our feelings. This happened to the Anabaptists. They rejected infant baptism and would only baptise adults. They taught that a person can live a perfectly holy life now on this earth. That contradicts the Word of God because the Bible teaches us that we are dead in trespasses and sin, and even God's people have only a small beginning of holiness. But that happens when we don't follow the teachings of the Bible.



Jan van Leiden crowned himself the new king in Munster in 1534. <https://bibleresearchtoday.com/>

Those Anabaptists tried to force changes to the existing beliefs. They tried to start a revolt. In various places, they even went on strike! They assembled in large groups and attacked multiple cities. They would have driven the government away and taken over the administration if they had succeeded. Thankfully, this effort did not succeed anywhere in The Netherlands. We know that they did succeed in Germany. They made the city of Munster a so-called 'Heavenly Kingdom'! But things turned out very badly with that 'Heavenly Kingdom'. They did all sorts of foolish things. Here is one example:



Jan van Leiden, the anabaptist king of Munster. Wikipedia

ANABAPTIST FOOLISHNESS

One day in Amsterdam, several Anabaptists, both men and women, were dashing naked through the streets. Why?

Well, they had all been in a meeting. Suddenly one of them, a so-called prophet, cried out that the end of the world had come. The 'spirit' had just revealed it to him. We understand that not the Holy Spirit but an evil spirit made him believe that. However, the others believed him immediately. They all threw their clothes into the fire and ran onto the street, shouting that judgment day had come! The people outside looked astonished and were offended by that strange group. Thankfully, that foolishness did not last long. The authorities quickly arrested the entire group of nudists and killed them. The government took exceptionally rigorous measures against the Anabaptists.

Perhaps you ask:

"But how did the Reformation suffer so much harm from the Anabaptists? They taught something totally different, didn't they?"

Yes, indeed! The Anabaptists preached revolution, and the Reformation was the opposite: no revolution! But do you know what was so bad? Thousands of people thought that the Anabaptists

and the Protestants *taught the same!* They did not differentiate between them. Rome tarred the people of the Reformation and the Anabaptists with the same brush. Until now, thousands of Roman Catholics took offence at the persecutions against the people of the Reformation. Many asked:

"Is that *really* necessary? Is it so bad that they don't attend the Roman Catholic Church? They don't harm or bother anyone, do they?"

These questions lived in the hearts of many Roman Catholic citizens. But now all that changed. After the actions of the Anabaptists, those same people thought destroying them was essential! Of course! It had never entered their heads that those "heretics" wanted to overthrow the government and desired a revolution. If that were true, it would be better to get rid of them. So those people now adopted a hostile attitude toward those heretics, those agitators. Because of that, the Reformation suffered much damage because the people were confused about the two groups. They blamed the Reformation for everything, but that was not right. They made a mistake. Later, a man called Menno Simons worked hard to end all the corrupt ideas of the Anabaptists, and they began to conduct themselves peacefully without annoying other people.

PHILIP II

In 1555 Charles V abdicated from the government. Although he was not yet old, he was a broken man because his life's aim (to destroy the Reformation) had utterly failed. Christ, the King of kings, did not step aside for *any* monarch, no matter how powerful. Charles V was succeeded in The



Philip II (Painting by Titian 1550)

Netherlands by his son Philip II. Philip lost his mother when he was twelve, and his father was often away. He hardly ever saw him. The lack of parental guidance in his childhood years shaped Philip's character. He was very suspicious and didn't trust anyone!

He had spies everywhere and was crafty and untrustworthy. Though he trusted no one, he was not trustworthy himself. He was very indecisive. His pride repelled everyone. No, he was not a pleasant, gracious king. On the contrary, he had a very unpleasant character.

His father, Charles V, had fervently hoped that the Germans would choose Philip as emperor of Germany, but the Germans did not like him and did not desire him as their emperor. They chose Charles V's brother as emperor and ignored Philip. That was a great disappointment to Philip and his father.

But he did become king of Spain and lord of The Netherlands because they were his royal inheritance.

Instead of the persecution becoming less, it became worse. Philip II was an exceptionally zealous Roman Catholic who hated the 'heretics' wholeheartedly. He was born in Spain and grew up there; that's where he felt at home. He disliked The Netherlands and the Dutch people.

When his father abdicated, and Philip succeeded him, he had to be in The Netherlands for the occasion, but he longed to return to Spain as soon as possible. However, that was impossible during the first years of his reign because the war between Spain and France had broken out again, and of course, The Netherlands became involved in that war. This war ended in favour of Philip II. Not because he had commanded his troops as a brave general; he was too cowardly. He was very different to his father because Charles V was no coward. Do you know who won that war? Count Egmont! But that's enough background.

In 1559 Philip II and Henry II, the king of France, signed a peace treaty. Even more: those two monarchs made a covenant with each other. Remember, the Huguenots were in France. Those two



Henry II, king from 1547-1559. Portrait by Francois Clouet's workshop

kings agreed that they would exterminate the heretics with one blow. Henry II would settle accounts with the Huguenots in France, while Philip II agreed to forcibly suppress the Reformation in The Netherlands. They decided three thousand Spanish soldiers would remain behind in The Netherlands. They kept that alliance top secret. No one knew anything about that terrible plan.



William of Orange, also called William the Silent.

Not even one? Yes, indeed, there *was* one! Prince William of Orange was in Paris to help negotiate the peace treaty. King Henry of France confided in William of Orange. But William never repeated it to anyone. Although Prince William was still Roman Catholic then, he

felt deeply sorry for the poor Dutch people. He constantly urged Philip II to take those three thousand soldiers back to Spain. The war was over, so those Spanish troops were no longer necessary in The Netherlands. But Philip became very angry when he suggested that.

Philip finally left for Spain in 1559, but the three thousand Spanish soldiers remained because, when everything was ready, they would have to massacre the Dutch inhabitants.

Although the king had left, somebody had to govern the Dutch provinces. Philip had organised that.

He appointed his half-sister, Margaret of Parma as governess. She was the daughter of Charles V but had a different mother. They had the same father but not the same mother. She grew up in Brussels but did not know a word of Dutch. She was also crafty, cunning and deceitful! Her co-workers experienced that.

She appointed governors over the various provinces. Some of those governors are well-known in history. We shall mention only the names of William of Orange, Egmont and Hoorn. The task of those governors was to assist the

governess and counsel her in governing The Netherlands in the name of the king. Together they formed *The Council of State*.

Besides that, there was also a *Privy Council* that consisted entirely of Spaniards. The chief of that "Privy Council" was Cardinal Granvelle. This man had studied in Paris. Granvelle was the archbishop of Mechlin, and the pope later appointed him as cardinal.

When the Diet of Worms was held in 1521, he was also present and witnessed Luther's speech. The speech hadn't impressed him because he enthusiastically persecuted 'heretics'. He signed many a death sentence. He attended the Council of Trent more than once.

For some years, Granvelle significantly influenced the government of The Netherlands. He had *too much* influence because the governess did not listen to the advice given by the governors, The Council of State but instead took advice from the Privy Council and especially from Granvelle.

That was the political situation in The Netherlands after King Philip II had left for Spain. Philip never returned to that country. This history shows much political change in The Netherlands.

But one thing did not change. The persecution continued to rage. The stakes smoked as much as ever. The Inquisition skulked and snooped throughout the whole country. Cowardly heretic hunters betrayed friends and neighbours because the Dutch government had also offered money for every 'heretic' delivered to them.



Margaret of Parma, governor of The Netherlands from 1559-1567. Painted by Antonio Moro.



Cardinal Granvelle. Painted by Willem Key

Whoever delivered a 'heretical' man or woman to the Inquisition received a reward of twenty-five florins.

Whoever delivered an elder or deacon into the hands of the Inquisition received fifty florins.

Whoever informed against a preacher received three hundred florins.

We know that Tall Marge in Antwerp received eight hundred florins for the betrayal of Christopher Smith. Perhaps that was a special case.

Many plunged their neighbours or acquaintances into ruin because the government bribed the people with blood money. This bribe resulted in terror and dread among the faithful across the entire nation. Good neighbours no longer trusted each other. And all this lasted such a long time!

The years came and went, but they continued to murder the faithful. Would it never stop?

THE BIRTH OF THE BELGIC CONFESSION OF FAITH

The night between the 1st and 2nd of November 1561 is dark.

The outline of the castle towers at Tournai, Belgium, the governor's residence, is scarcely visible against the night sky. Everything is very quiet because it is late. Cautiously, a dark figure approaches the walls surrounding the castle. Coming close, he stands still, listens carefully for any unusual sound, and, hearing nothing, forcefully hurls a small parcel over the high walls. He stands and waits for a moment, ears pricked. He hears the parcel fall inside the wall of the castle. Then he slips away, and the darkness soon absorbs him.



Ruins of the old Casle at Doornik, Tournai. Wikipedia

The next morning a soldier finds the little package. He takes it to the governor. Curiously, the governor fumbles with the rope tied around it, unravels it, and to his great astonishment, finds a little book with a letter addressed to King Philip. The governor has this delivered by a messenger to Brussels, to the governess, and leaves it for her to deal with. However, Margaret of Parma doesn't know what this means either. She writes a letter to her brother Philip informing him of what she has received and asking him what she must do with it. Immediately Philip writes back that he wants to know what is written in that little book and that letter addressed to him. So the governess sent it to Spain, and Philip II received it, as the author hoped and intended.

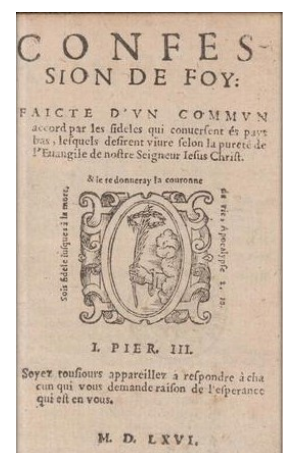
What was written in that little book and letter?

Many reformed people believed the king was unaware of what was happening in The Netherlands.

They imagined that their enemies accused them falsely before Philip II. They imagined that their enemies slandered them before the king. Perhaps the king thought they were the same as the Anabaptists, who wanted to revolt against the government. So they said: "Do you know what we should do? We should fully inform the king about all

the issues. He must know what we stand for and be well-informed about what we teach!" They were confident that the king would then command a halt to the persecution. And so, they drew up a *Confession of Faith* that accurately described what the Reformers believed.

They also wrote an impressive and touching letter of introduction to the king. They implored him not to listen to the slander that Rome spread about them. The



A copy of the *Belgic Confession of Faith*. It was written in the French language. Wikipedia

king must not listen to those who stirred him up against them. They were not Anabaptists and did not agree with their teachings. They did not want a revolution.

On the contrary, they continually prayed for the king and his government. They implored the Lord to give wisdom to the king and his government and begged that He would protect them. At the end of that letter, they respectfully but urgently asked the king to stop the dreadful persecutions. When it was ready, they neatly wrapped that little book and the letter in a parcel and tossed it over the castle's wall in Tournai, hoping the king would get it.

Well, that happened. The king *did* get it and *read* it! However, his response deeply disappointed them. Instead of the king becoming more favourably disposed toward them, he was highly insulted and became angry at the incredible 'cheek' of the heretics.

He wrote a cutting letter back to the governess in which he emphatically commanded her that she must hunt down the author of that booklet and severely punish him. She must make every effort to track down those impudent heretics and eliminate them! The persecution must continue undiminished.

Who was the writer of that little book? That man's name was:

GUIDO DE BRES!

Guido was a stained glass artist by trade. We know that some church buildings have beautiful stained



Guido de Bres 1522-1567

glass windows. The pictures are mostly scenes from the Bible. Those windows are painted with beautiful colours, applied to the glass by artistic hands. Guido de Bres was one of those artists. But to paint Biblical scenes, he must know the Bible story! That's why he

studied the Holy Scriptures: to learn about and paint those narratives. God used that searching of His Word to open Guido's eyes and heart to the truth of the Word of the Lord and the lie of the Roman Catholic Church. When that Light shone in his heart, he could no longer be silent. However, speaking was dangerous. Guido de Bres soon experienced that! To save his life, he had to flee, and he took refuge in London, where Edward VI reigned. He stayed in London for four years and studied the prophecies and catechisms available at the time.

During the reign of Bloody Mary, it became too dangerous for him in London. He had to flee again and returned to Europe. He even studied in Geneva at the University of Calvin! That's how God prepared him for the task which awaited him. This man was the author of the Belgic Confession of Faith! He divided this confession into 37 articles. Clearly and in a structured way, he explained what the reformers believed about the doctrine of salvation. He gave many Scriptural proof texts. That confession of faith has been a blessing for many. Even now, the churches still have this document as one of their most significant doctrinal standards, and it is one of the Three Forms of Unity.



*Guido de Bres,
chained in prison.*

At the command of Philip II, Guido de Bres must be hunted till found. Alas, that succeeded six years later. In 1567, he, with another preacher, was arrested and condemned to death. They ordered that he must hang. While standing at the gallows, he asked if he could pray once more, but Rome refused that request. While he was climbing the ladder, he addressed the people. Hastily the executioner prepared the noose. While Guido was still speaking, he thrust him from the ladder. His voice suddenly stopped because the rope around his neck silenced him. A short death struggle and it was over.



Guido the Bres hanged. Drawing by J.G.L. Riecke.

Nobody will hear that voice on earth again, but in heaven, he sings with all the redeemed: "Blest are the people who acclaim You as their King, Who know the festal shout and of Your mercy sing!" Guido de Bres received the best reward possible!

OF PSALMS AND HYMNS

We sing several psalms or hymns during the church services every Sunday. It would be odd if we did not sing at all! Singing God's praises is part of our service to Him! It is beautiful when the congregation lustily sings a psalm.

In the first centuries, the Christians already had gifted men who promoted church singing. The church father Ambrose (chapter 22), who preached in Milan, composed spiritual hymns that the people sang during the church services. Time and again, God gave people who devoted their talents to develop suitable church singing. Naturally, when the churches left the truth of God's Word and degenerated, many songs appeared which were not sound. Numerous hymns appeared that reflected Roman Catholic doctrines. Then the Reformation came, returning to the truth of God's Word and breaking with Roman Catholic errors. With that came a great need for good hymns based on the Scriptures. Luther realised that too, and he did much for church singing. He wrote the well-known reformers' song: 'A mighty fortress is our God!' He also composed other hymns. Yet, much confusion continued in the sphere of psalms and good hymns.

Calvin especially understood the necessity of bringing a change in that area. More uniformity had to come. The church had to have a good collection of Scripturally sound church hymns. We could say a lot about this, but let us be brief. The Psalms of David were put into verse by Marot and Beza.

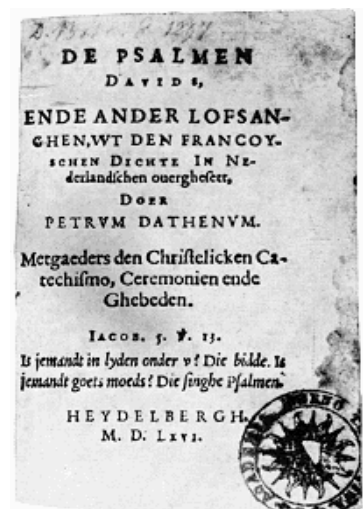
But they were in French, and people of other languages could not use them. True, various rhymed versions of the psalms existed in Dutch but did not include all of the psalms. The churches only used them because there was nothing better. And so, a level of turmoil reigned in the churches of The Netherlands regarding the singing.

Thankfully, in 1566, the well-known collection of psalms by Peter Dathenus appeared. This man was born in Flanders in 1531. When young, he lived there as a monk. However, at nineteen, he chose the side of the Reformation. He was not a man to keep that to himself



*Pieter Dathenus
1531-1588
Wikipedia*

because he had a very zealous character. He became a preacher in some Flemish towns. It didn't take long before he gained a reputation with friend and foe. The Inquisition did its best to find and arrest him. That soon compelled Dathenus to flee if he did not want to end his life at the stake. He fled to England because peace ruled there during the reign of King Edward. But when Bloody Mary came to power, it became dangerous for him in England. He had to get away in a hurry. He fled to Denmark, where he did *not* receive a warm welcome. That grieved him.



Copy of Dathenus's 1566 Book of Praise. <https://www.dbnl.org/tekst>

So he left Denmark and went to Germany. He ministered to the Flemish refugee congregation in the German city of Frankfurt-on-Main. During those years, he met Calvin and became a convinced Calvinist. Eventually, he became a court preacher for Frederick III of the Palatinate (Germany).

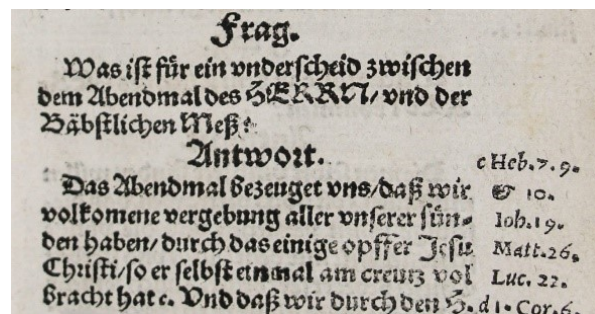
You may remember that this elector had ordered the Heidelberg Catechism to be written by Zacharias Ursinus and Casper Olevianus. In safety provided by this elector, Peter Dathenus translated Marot and Beza's rhymed version of the psalms into Dutch.

This version of the psalms by Datheen, as they also called him, received a prominent and beloved place in the Dutch churches, in Dutch families and in the hearts of the thousands of Calvinists throughout the country.

Most Dutch churches accepted the rhymed psalms by Datheen. This acceptance gave uniformity in church singing.

Marnix of St. Aldegonde, a great friend of William of Orange, also composed a rhyming of psalms which were more harmonious in some places, but the people still preferred singing the psalms of Datheen. Those psalms of Datheen are mocked by many in our present time, but how often haven't they comforted and supported the discouraged

people of the Lord? The persecution raged, the stakes smoked, and the prisons were overcrowded. Terror and fear reigned, but the psalms of Datheen continued to be sung — at the stake, amid the flames, in the musty sombre cells of prisons, in barns and attics; the psalms of Datheen rang out everywhere. This



Question and answer in the first German print.

collection of Datheen's psalms was first published in 1566.

The Heidelberg Catechism was written in 1563 and was accepted as part of the Three Forms of Unity. Peter Dathenus agreed with them and translated the Heidelberg Catechism

from German into Dutch. He organised for this Catechism to be printed at the back of the Psalm book to distribute them throughout The Netherlands efficiently.

Later, in 1773, an updated version of Psalms was published, and in many places this replaced the rhymed psalms by Datheen. Yet even today, people are still singing the psalms of Datheen. Now they are called "The Old Version". When we ask:

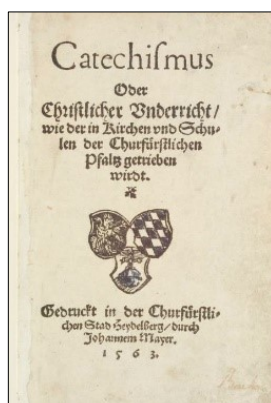
"But which rhymed psalms are the best?" everyone will have different opinions and stick up for the version *they* sing! They all imagine their preferred version is better or more Scriptural than the other one!

God can use *both* versions to encourage and comfort His people. Some psalms are better in the old version, and some are better in the new.

From this history, it is evident that God took care of His Church in The Netherlands. He ensured that the Anabaptists could not destroy the work of the Reformation. He gave His Church the Belgic Confession of Faith, the Psalms and the Heidelberg Catechism, in which His people were instructed in the doctrine of salvation and received weapons in the spiritual warfare against their powerful enemies. They had no *swords* and *guns* but *doctrinal standards* to help them defend themselves and answer their accusers. That's why this chapter is titled: "God's Care for His Church in The Netherlands!"

QUESTIONS

1. List four errors of the Anabaptists.
2. Why was the group so dangerous to society in general?



Copy of the German Heidelberg Catechism of 1563. Wikipedia

3. How did the cause of the Reformation suffer because of the Anabaptists?
4. What brought about a change in Anabaptist views?
5. Why did Charles V abdicate?
6. Why was the ascension of Philip II to the throne such a blow to The Netherlands?
7. Identify Margaret of Parma.
8. What was a governor?
9. Identify the following:
 - a. Council of State
 - b. Privy Council
 - c. Chief of Privy Council.
10. What effect did Granvelle have on the Reformation in The Netherlands?
11. Why was a Confession of Faith drawn up? Who was the author?
12. Why was a copy sent to the king?
13. What was the king's reaction?
14. Summarise the life of Guido de Bres.
15. How did he die?
16. Identify Peter Dathenus. Summarise his life.
17. How was the Heidelberg Catechism translated into Dutch?

FOR FURTHER STUDY

How is the Heidelberg Catechism divided?

REVIEW

Fill in the following blanks:

1. The 'Old version' is the version of....., published in.....
2. Mrs.....testified against the idolatry of the mass.
3. wrote the Belgic Confession of Faith.
4. The Confession of Faith was sent to in the hope that he would get a better understanding of Protestant views.
5. The encouraged revolution against existing governments.
6.taught that the pope is the antichrist.
7.was betrayed for 800 florins by a woman known as.....
8. abdicated the throne because he was discouraged.
9. The Inquisition rewarded those who betrayed,, and
10. The Anabaptists made the city of a so-called "Heavenly Kingdom."
11. The chief of the Privy Council was
12. William of Orange was one of the governesses
13.translated the Heidelberg Catechism into Dutch.
14. One German composer of psalms was.....
15. One early church father who composed hymns was.....
16. The entire family was burned at the stake.
17. The Anabaptists rejected the baptism of.....
18. encouraged the Anabaptists to become more peaceable.
19. Philip II allied with the king of France.
20. was appointed governess over the Dutch provinces.
21. The Confession of Faith is divided into articles.
22. It is one of our three
23. Dathenus served as a court preacher in the court of
24.did not have to burn because the Lord took him to Himself just before he was to meet his end.

RESEARCH TOPICS

1. Read the book Glorious Heretic and list the highlights of the experiences of Guido de Bres.
2. Do research on Menno Simons. What change did he bring to the Anabaptist movement? What errors did he believe?