

104 THE FOOLISHNESS OF THE DUTCH

In the meantime, what was happening in The Netherlands? How did the Enlightenment and the French Revolution affect that little country?

Not good at all!

The 'Enlightenment' had a devastating influence there as well. The people had left the path of truth despite God's continual care for them.

The authors promoting the ideas of 'Liberty, Equality and Fraternity', were mainly writers from different countries who lived in The Netherlands. They had moved to the Lowlands because this country was known to be very tolerant of people with different ideas.

Streams of blood flowed in France as millions of people were callously murdered. Thankfully, this didn't happen in The Netherlands. Why not? Were they better? Oh no, on the contrary! But because the Lord protected them. Only God's incredible patience is the reason for this. The Dutch people must thank God that during the Revolution, Dutch soil was not soaked in blood.

Slowly but surely, deformation set in. At the beginning of the 18th century, the people outwardly still professed the truth, but genuine love and fear for the Lord was growing cold.

THE REVOLUTION TAKES HOLD

As a result, they eagerly read the wicked books in which the doctrine of Revolution was taught. As in France, it poisoned the minds of thousands of people. It even penetrated the Church. Instead of opposing and warning against the spirit of Enlightenment, the Church began to *teach* it!

The spirit of Enlightenment penetrated the theological colleges. The professors taught that the Reformation was not about serving God according to His Word, no, the Reformation had come so that we could study God's Word freely! Well, isn't that true? Shouldn't we study God's Word? Yes, of course! But the question is, *how* must we do this? Prayerfully, in subjection to that

Word, or ruling *over* that Word? They are two very different attitudes!

The people thought they had become so educated and clever that they could judge which parts of the Bible were true and which parts were just fables. They knew better than the Bible. People believed they were 'enlightened'!

Believe *everything* in the Bible?

Not likely!

Many stories are just Jewish fables.

The Bible is full of lies!

Election and reprobation?

Nonsense!

If people just live decently, they'll be okay.

That man had to repent and convert?

That their sins had to be forgiven by the perfect sacrifice of Jesus Christ?

No, of course not.

The people *were* not that bad!

They no longer believed that a person had to be justified by faith alone.

No, those ideas were old fashioned. They didn't believe *that* anymore! They had become too intelligent for that!

In the Bible and confessions, we read about 'original sin'. But that was the wrong term, so they replaced it with 'moral corruption'! That sounded a little more refined!

They no longer spoke about man's 'depravity'.

They changed that term to 'weakness' and 'infirmities.

God's wrath upon sin?

Brrr, no, that sounds way too harsh. They changed that term to 'holy displeasure'. That sounds a bit nicer.

Regeneration?

Not likely, that was not necessary.

Ridiculous!

They changed that term to 'moral improvement'! That sounds better! The people could improve *themselves!*

Sanctification through the blood of Christ?

Nonsense!

The people had to live virtuously. That's what counts!

And so we could go on.

Reason and intellect replaced the authority of the Word of God. They even openly told parents to: 'Carefully hide the Bible from your children!' Is that not *terrible*?!

God's Word teaches us differently. There we read: 'And you fathers, bring your children up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.'
But they laughed at that. That was old-fashioned.

The government protected those wicked and deceitful ministers. They were the 'intelligent' ones, so the people had to listen to them. True, there were still ordinary people who feared the Lord uprightly. But nobody listened to them as the 'Enlightened' people knew better now.

THE DUTCH IMITATE THE FRENCH

Do you notice how things developed the same way in the Netherlands as in France before the Revolution? They imitated the French in everything. Fashion was copied, and the upper-class even started speaking French instead of Dutch; that was more fashionable, more dignified!

In France they had rejected royalty; the Dutch imitated that as well, they rejected the House of Orange.

Their governors William IV and especially William V were not strong leaders. They were too easygoing and friendly. They wanted to be friends with everyone. And now the people called them 'tyrants'! How could they? They were not tyrants at all!

The people who said these things called themselves *patriots*! Those Dutch people would only be happy if the House of Orange were expelled.

When something went wrong?
Then the governor got the blame.

When things did not go their way?

Then the governor got the blame.

A war broke out with England, and the Dutch navy was no match for the English fleet. The governor got the blame, even though he had urged them to build up the fleet, but they had refused to listen!

They even got Patriotic ministers. With a sword belted to their side, these ministers climbed the pulpit and preached about 'true' liberty. Those fools!

No, it did not go well in The Netherlands.

When the Church was flourishing, our fore-fathers insisted on a good education. Children had to learn to read so they could study scripture and confession.

But now the new age of Enlightenment had arrived. So education had to change, and children may no longer read the Bible.



Governor Willem V
1751 -1806

In 1784 a society was established in The Netherlands to take care of education. That society received the appealing name: 'Society for General Welfare.' New, modern and beautiful schools were built everywhere. That society also organised the training of teachers and provided new, bright, modern-looking books for the children. These were all good things. Nobody would deny that. And yet... that 'Society for General Welfare' brought *corruption* into the country because those new teachers followed the 'Enlightenment'.

Those who rejected the Bible had to teach the children.
No good could come from that.

And those new books, so nice and bright? They were full of so-called 'honesty', and 'virtue'. Poor children! From their youth, they were pumped full of false teachings!

But was no one left to warn against that? Yes, there were some.

One was the godly Alexander Comrie. He was a minister in the little town of Woubrugge, near Rotterdam. He was born in Scotland and originally came to The Netherlands as a clerk.



Alexander Comrie.
1707 -1774

This Reverend Comrie fought against that spirit of 'Enlightenment' for his entire life. He focused on preaching justification by faith alone, which was the opposite of the 'Enlightenment' teachings of 'virtue', 'honesty', and 'being a good citizen'. He was a minister in Woubrugge for almost forty years.

GOD COMES WITH HIS JUDGEMENTS

A biting east wind blows over the Dutch fields. Shivering, the people seek shelter indoors against the bitter cold. Everything is covered with a thick layer of snow; the waterways are frozen. Even the *major* rivers lie covered under a thick layer of ice.

The French army approaches the southern border. They cross the border and arrive at those major rivers, but these cannot prevent them from advancing, for the ice is thick and strong enough to hold them all. Cannons, horses and wagons, thousands of soldiers; they all ride or march over the frozen river into The Netherlands. It couldn't get any easier.

But. . . but... is that allowed? Can they just cross the border without anyone offering any resistance? Where are the Dutch soldiers who should be defending their country against the invading army?

Offer resistance?
Fight?

No way. The French troops, bedraggled and shivering from the cold in their threadbare uniforms, can simply march in unhindered. Offer resistance?

Everywhere the French forces are welcomed with cheering. The bewitched people skip and dance with joy. Yes but, isn't it the *enemy* that is approaching?

Enemies?
Not at all!

They are friends! They come to bring *true liberty* and deliver them from the 'tyranny' of the princes of Orange.

Liberty, Equality, Fraternity!

Wherever the French army marches into a town, the people receive them with open arms and throw big parties. They set up a tall pole, decorate it with wreaths and ribbons, and a 'revolution hat' adorns the top.

Arm in arm with French soldiers, the people dance and skip around the 'Tree of Liberty'. Now true happiness will begin, and therefore they celebrate. Happiness is worth celebrating, isn't it!

WILLIAM V

In that same bitterly cold month of January 1795, a man stands at the empty beach of Scheveningen, absorbed in gloomy thoughts. That man is Governor William V. The majority of the



Tree of Liberty

Dutch people had rejected him. So to prevent bloodshed, he decided to leave voluntarily.

There stands that so-called 'tyrant'.

He departs without resisting. The boat that will carry him to England lies ready.

Yet he hesitates, for he finds it so hard to leave his beloved country. He walks up and down the beach, still waiting and hoping for favourable reports.

Perhaps he need not go.

Perhaps a miracle will happen.

But he waits in vain. The miracle did not happen!

Although he received reports from The Hague, they are all bad reports. He hears that the French have entered the country by crossing the frozen

rivers and are already approaching The Hague. No one offers any resistance. Sighing, he turns around.

“God has a dispute with The Netherlands,” he tells the few friends who are there to see him off. Then he boards the ship and leaves.

Throughout the country, there were still many people loyal to the House of Orange, but they were shouted down by the noisy Patriots.

In the meantime, the bewitched people danced around the Tree of Liberty. In Utrecht, they even proclaimed a day of prayer to thank God for sending the French troops to 'liberate' them.

One professor dared to write: 'This is the Lord's doing; it is marvellous in our eyes.'¹ True, the LORD did direct all this and prepared the way for the French army. He sent the severe frost which turned the rivers into highways for the French.

It is true; the Lord directs *all* things.

That professor and the many misguided people saw this as a BLESSING!

But it was a JUDGEMENT.

When people see the judgments of God as blessings, it shows how bewitched they are.

THE NETHERLANDS BECOMES A PROVINCE OF FRANCE

In 1810 the Netherlands became a French province. Napoleon, the powerful French emperor, wanted it that way. The Dutch completely lost their independence. The French laws came into force as they became French subjects.

It got even worse.

Napoleon conscripted many Dutch boys into the French army. Thousands of these young men lost their lives on the battlefields of Europe or froze to death on the Russian snowfields.

Would that professor still say that the coming of the French was a blessing from God?

The Dutch people groaned under the tyranny of the oppressor.

Napoleon even compelled the ministers to pray for his welfare. These same ministers had cheered when the House of Orange fled the country. Would they still cheer now?

Since the state had seized the church properties, the church could no longer support their ministers. Well, the state would take over. Those ministers now became officials of the state. During Napoleon's rule, the ministers received no wage at all for months! They suffered bitter poverty. Many ministers had to sell their books, furniture, and even their clothes to be able to buy food. When they had nothing left to sell, they were supported by the deacons.

Indeed, God severely punished the foolishness and the godlessness of the church and Dutch people. God is an Avenger of sin. He did this in France, but also the Netherlands.

Yet the Lord was pleased to answer the many prayers for deliverance from this great oppression. He is longsuffering and gracious and abounding in mercy. He did punish them, but not according to their sins!

Napoleon's army was repeatedly defeated. Finally, somewhere in France, Napoleon was imprisoned. The French armies had to leave The Netherlands. The country was free again. The House of Orange returned. No, not governor William



Dutch boys in the French army



*King William I
1772 -1843*

¹ Psalm 118

V. He had died in exile. But his son William I, was received with loud rejoicing and made king. The Netherlands became a kingdom with King William I at her head.

The enemy left the country, and The Netherlands became an independent nation, with a prince of Orange at her head!

Oh, now everything would return to normal, at least that is what the people hoped and thought.

Oh, yes..?

QUESTIONS

1. How did the Enlightenment affect the following groups:
 - a. The Church
 - b. The governors
 - c. The theological college
2. What did the Enlightenment teach about the following:
 - a. God's Word
 - b. Election and reprobation
 - c. Necessity of regeneration
 - d. Original sin
 - e. Depravity
3. Explain how the Dutch imitated the ways of the French.
4. Who were the Patriots?
5. Why did the Patriots turn against the House of Orange?
6. Explain the purpose of the 'Society for General Welfare.'
7. Who was Alexander Comrie?
8. What did he emphasise in his preaching?
9. How did the Patriots rise against the governor?
11. Why did William V leave the Netherlands?
12. What is meant with: 'God has a dispute with the Netherlands'?
13. What is the 'Tree of Liberty'?
14. How was this slavery experienced under Napoleon?

15. What hopes did the people have when William I ascended the throne?

FOR FURTHER STUDY

1. Look over your list of false teachings listed under question 2. Which one do you feel was the most serious error? Why?
2. Does the error you listed in Question #1 exist today? What are the results of this error in our time?