

105. THE SYNOD OF THE HAGUE, 1816.

THE CHURCH MUZZLED

“**H**oly Father, keep through Your name those whom You have given Me, that they may be one as we are.”

This is what the Lord Jesus prayed when He was celebrating Passover with His disciples just before He died. Who had to be 'one'? Just read the text: “Whom you have given Me”. With this, the Lord meant His church!

But look at what's happening now. Those words of the Saviour are in stark contrast with the present situation. What a lot of division and strife! How many different churches would there be now? It is almost impossible to keep track of them. There is so much disunity, so much resentment and hostility. Unity is hard to find.

How did that all that happen?

Well, that is the sad story we wish to tell you in this chapter. We will try to explain it as clearly as possible. Just pay attention!

With the Reformation, God led His church out of the darkness of Rome's heresies. That Reformation was not Revolution, but an act of God! The Roman Catholic Church *was* no longer the church of Christ, but sadly, she became the false church. Oh, the church of Rome got plenty of warnings and admonitions, but Rome did not want to listen. How far the apostolic church of Pentecost has strayed from the truth. Oh, that Rome would repent!

Be that as it may, God sent the Reformers and brought about the Reformation! That church of the Reformation flourished for many years in the Netherlands.

True, the devil has attacked and tried to destroy that church; remember the Remonstrants and how the Synod of Dordt repulsed that wicked heresy?

But gradually, heresy and deformation returned. In the previous chapter, we explained how the spirit of Revolution had entered the church and how God came with His judgments. Those judgments were severe and painful. The Netherlands had groaned under the tyranny of Napoleon. His reign came to a dramatic end in the snowfields of Russia, and The Netherlands became free again. The House of Orange, once contemptuously driven out, returned. The liberated Dutch people rejoiced! Many of them thought: “Now everything will return to normal.” Sadly, they were mistaken. ‘The old times’ did *not* return! Although the French oppressors had left the country, the revolutionary spirit of 'enlightenment' remained.

Outwardly, everything prospered. The Netherlands slowly recovered from the results of the war.

King William I was on the throne and the people expected much from him. The House of Orange had shown good leadership before. Unfortunately, all those who placed their hope in this king were bitterly disappointed.



King William I

DECLINE IN THE CHURCH

As prosperity returned, it was time to improve the situation in the church as well!

Changes came.

But they were *not* improvements!

The church had been through a difficult time. The truth had to return; therefore, the people called

for a National Synod. A National Synod, like the one in 1618, must drive out the spirit of Revolution. Indeed, that *should* have been done, but that did not happen! The spirit of Enlightenment still infected many ministers of the Reformed Churches. Many hoped that King William would show sound leadership and intervene.

He did intervene.

But how...!

Remember how, during the French rule, many ministers lived in bitter poverty. They received no salaries from the government, and since church properties had been confiscated, the Church itself was no longer able to pay them. One of the first things the king did was to pay the ministers their salary, with the promise that from now on salaries would be paid on time. Understandably this made the ministers incredibly happy as this solved their financial problems.

“Don't you see? Don't you see?” the people cried out happily, “the king is the rescuer of the church! We have not trusted in him in vain!”

But they forgot that the church is not saved with *money*. If the church wants to be saved, the *truth* must return. Did *that* happen?

True, the king paid overdue salaries, but he went much further. Secretly he appointed a committee of eleven ministers to advise him on church matters.

The government made up a list of *Regulations* which stipulated how the church had to be governed. They forwarded these regulations to the eleven ministers for their input. And... those eleven ministers approved of it! The king then *imposed* those regulations on the churches!

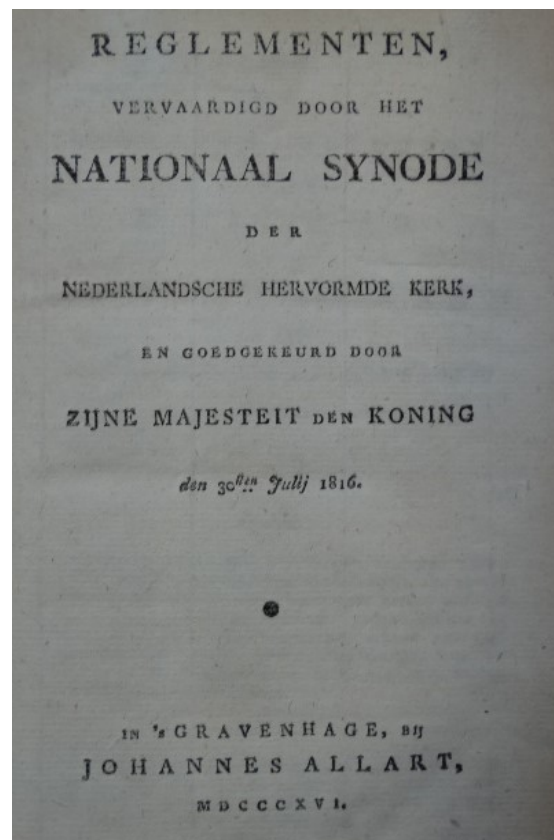
Of course, that was completely wrong! Not the king, but the church is in charge of the way she is governed. Here the king overstepped the boundary between church and state.

THE KING'S NEW CHURCH ORDER

And what did those regulations say?

Just listen.

A general synod was scheduled, and for the first



A copy of the Regulations approved by the Synod of The Hague in 1816 which caused so much misery in the churches

time, all its members will be appointed by the king.

Another mistake! The *church* must appoint members of synod.

The regulations also stipulated that for each delegate, six names must be placed on a list and the king would choose one of them to be the actual delegate.

The king would also appoint members of minor ecclesiastical assemblies, such as provincial synods, classis, etc.

The king must also approve for a minister to move and serve a different congregation.

The king must approve all synod decisions; otherwise they will not be valid.

The new regulations removed all authority from the local consistory. From now on the church was governed by the synod under the final authority of the king. He had to approve every decision!



*Jacobus Diedericus
Janssen.
He was the
minister of
Religion and
driving force
behind the New
Regulation*

This *New Regulation* bound the church hand and foot! The church had become a servant of the state.

But what is the right way to do things?

The church fathers had explained this very clearly in the Church Order of Dordt.

The church may not be governed from the top. The opposite is true: congregations and consistories must make those decisions. It is the task of consistories to appoint delegates to the classis and the task of classis to appoint delegates to the synod.

Consistories must govern the Church. When a minister accepts a call to another congregation, it is none of the king's business; William I is not king over the church but the Lord Jesus is.

The Church Order of Dordt was ignored completely. It was replaced by the New Regulation which muzzled the churches.

But . . . did the Church allow this to happen? Did no-one protest? Sadly, we must say, almost no-one!

Many ministers and elders were corrupted by the spirit of the enlightenment. Well then, those 'enlightened' office bearers were called '*The liberals!*' They were the people promoting 'liberty'. They hated the pious people, those fussy ones! They were ridiculed, laughed at, and ostracised. Those fussy ones were too old-fashioned; they could not keep up with the times.

Their warnings were ignored. It was impossible to talk sense into those people.

The Liberals rejoiced when the *New Regulation* came out. Of course, that's the way things should be done! They praised King William I for being an intelligent and 'enlightened' monarch. They wanted him to take care of and watch over the church, and then things would turn out okay. Maybe it flattered the king to be praised like that. This may have encouraged him to enforce The New Regulation.

CLASSIS AMSTERDAM APPEALS

Classis Amsterdam was the only classis who protested. They sent an appeal to the king. Very politely, they thanked him for all the good things he had done for the benefit of the church. But they did not agree with that new church order. That was not right. The king acted wrongly in that. Very respectfully, they let the king know that the church must govern itself.

Classis Amsterdam did the right thing! It was their *duty* to do this. If only other classis had done that too, then the king may have pulled back a little. A few other classes risked a weak protest, but this made no difference.

What response did classis Amsterdam receive? The king wrote back that they had no right to object to the New Regulation, and besides, they must hold their tongue because the state paid them!

End of story!

It is true, the secretary of State wrote on behalf of the king that the *doctrine* of the Reformed Church would not change, but for the rest, they must obey! Full stop!

Their protest was simply put aside!

Of course, why not, the committee of eleven ministers had approved it, hadn't they? There were thousands of church members who did not agree, but the liberals ignored their concerns and treated them with contempt. According to the Liberals, those people were annoying 'fuss pots'.

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THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE 'THE HAGUE SYNOD'.

When the king's response became known, the Liberals thought: 'Great, now they'll stop arguing, perhaps this will settle the matter.'

But they were mistaken!

It did *not* settle the matter. On the contrary, the struggle had just begun.

That 'Hague Synod' has had terrible consequences. That Synod divided and tore the church apart. Deformation set in and the king introduced more and more regulations.

We must discuss one extremely dangerous regulation.

Listen carefully.

A NEW SUBSCRIPTION FORM

As you know, the Church has doctrinal standards; we call them 'The Three Forms of Unity': The Heidelberg Catechism, The Belgic Confession and The Canons of Dordt.

Every new minister must subscribe to these Three Forms of Unity and sign a subscription form. That means that he promises to preach nothing but what is in God's Word as summarised in those Three Forms of Unity.

The Synod of Dordt had put this subscription form in place to guard the church from false doctrines.

But the Hague Synod abolished all that.

A different subscription form was adopted.

That new form stated that ministers should preach and teach everything that agrees with Scripture *in* the Three Forms of Unity.

Maybe you think: 'That's a good thing, isn't it?'

No, this new form was extremely dangerous!

Why?

The liberal ministers happily signed that new form. They had no problems with it at all!

Why not?

When sometime later they preached in their congregation, they confidently denied the truths:

- that man is dead in sin,
- that a person must be born again,
- that a person is justified by faith only.

Those liberal, enlightened ministers preached very differently! They taught that man was not so bad and could be saved by living a good life. When those liberal ministers had it pointed out to them that

they had signed the subscription form and must abide by it, those ministers got a knowing smug look on their face. Then they answered:

"Of course, we have signed that *new* form. But not *everything* in the Three Forms of Unity is according to God's Word. Parts of it are *not* according to God's Word and so we don't need to preach that because the Subscription Form says we only need to teach the confessions *where they agree* with Scripture. That is *exactly* what we are doing."

To put it simply: the liberal ministers decided what was right or wrong in the confession; they could preach whatever they liked, even if it disagreed with the Three Forms of Unity!

Do you understand why that *new* Subscription Form was so dangerous?

No one could do anything about it. Under the old Subscription Form they could be suspended and excommunicated. Just think of the Remonstrant preachers who were sent out of the Synod of Dordt.

This new Subscription Form gave the necessary loophole so they could continue to destroy the congregations with their false doctrine. They *purposely* changed that old form, very craftily, very sneakily, very carefully, so nobody would realise their devilish intent.

Why did they do this?

To put it simply: the liberal ministers decided what was right or wrong in the confessions; they could preach whatever they liked, even if it disagreed with the Three Forms of Unity!

So they could change the doctrine!

The truth of God's Word must gradually disappear!

King William I destroyed the church with these New Regulations.

Because of this, secession *had* to come. One of two things had to happen: either the church must re-introduce the old Subscription Form to protect the *truth* and reject all heresies, or a Reformation had to happen.

At stake was the question of *who* the *king* of the church was: King William I with his New Regulation, or King Jesus Christ Who had bought His church with His blood!

OPPOSITION GROWS

The opposition to The Hague Synod's decisions grew! God's people *cannot* and *may not* obey the New Regulations. They must obey God rather than man.

The Liberals became angry.
They began to insult the people.
They ridiculed and ignored their many warnings.
And then 'The Secession' finally came!

It was very sad that this 'Secession' was necessary, but it had to happen. There was no alternative because the majority would not listen to the warnings of those who loved the truth. And what was so terrible:

King William I with his 11 ministers were the cause of The Secession.
They *cast out* the faithful ones!
We may never forget that.
How grievous was the sin of King William I.
How grievous also the sins of all those liberal ministers and office-bearers! They were the cause of the schism in the Dutch Reformed Church.
The facts are undeniable.

If only they had listened, The Secession could have been avoided.
If only they had maintained the *truth* and disciplined those who strayed from the truth, The Secession would *not* have been necessary.

We hope to tell you more about that in the following chapters.



King William I. 1772 - 1837

QUESTIONS

1. Why did the church fail to return to the situation as it was after 1618/19?
2. How did King William I make the ministers happy?
3. Why does the author state: 'The church is not saved with money'?
4. How did the king regulate the following:
 - a. appointment of synod members
 - b. calling of a minister to a different congregation
 - c. all synod decisions
5. Why was it so dangerous for the church to become the servant of the state?
6. What had the Church Order of Dordt stated about the government of the church?
7. Why did the 'enlightened liberals' approve of the New Regulation'?
8. How did the classis of Amsterdam appeal?

9. What reply did the king give to their appeal?
10. What was the new subscription Form?
11. What impact did the signing of this form have on the preaching?
12. What was the 'Secession'? Why did it happen?

FOR FURTHER STUDY

1. King William I came back from England with strong views regarding church/state relationships. Did English customs influence him? Study the relations between church and state in England. What beliefs did King William I adopt?
2. Find one text in the Bible to show that the government should not set itself up as the highest authority in the church.
3. When may an individual or a group 'secede' from a church? Should this be done quickly? Why or why not?