

## 106. THE REVIVAL

### THE REVIVAL IN SWITZERLAND

The university, founded by the God-fearing Calvin in 1559, still stands in Geneva today. That school has been a blessing for many in the dark days of persecution. Above the entrance, we read the inscription:

*'The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.'*

It is now two centuries later, and that school is still attended by students training for the ministry, but. . . the Bible is no longer taught!

The future ministers don't even get to *see* the New Testament. The Old Testament was used once a week, not to learn the *contents* of God's Word but only to study the *language*. That hour served only to enhance their academic knowledge.

The spirit of enlightenment poisoned the university that Calvin had once founded. If Calvin had lived to see that, he would have been extremely distressed and offended!

This clearly shows that around 1800, things in Geneva were in a sorry state. Not much was left of the fruits of the Reformation; instead, there was much deformation.

There was still a faithful 'Brotherhood' in Geneva, but it was small.

Some students attending uni at the time were not happy with the outward religion of those days. So, they joined the 'Brotherhood'.



The 'Calvin College' Completed in 1559

However, the liberal Genevan ministers discovered that and ordered the students not to go there; if they did, they would be expelled!

In 1816, a salesman named Wilcox arrived in Geneva from England. This Wilcox belonged to the Whitefield Methodists.

He meets the students who want to join the forbidden Brotherhood. Soon, they come together and start holding secret meetings.

But they do not manage to do this for long because the liberals discover them again, and they order Wilcox to leave the city. Before he leaves, Wilcox begs the Lord for a new leader to serve the Brotherhood. God answers that prayer. Just as Wilcox leaves the city of Geneva, Robert Haldane enters it.

Robert Haldane?

Who is he?

Robert Haldane was an evangelical minister from Scotland.



Robert Haldane  
1764-1842

Rev. Haldane meets a theological student from the University of Geneva, and these two have an in-depth discussion. The next time, that student brings some of his friends. Soon, this develops into regular meetings in Robert's apartment, and Robert becomes the new leader of the Brotherhood.

Together, they study the letter to the Romans. This study of God's Word is in stark contrast to the lessons at the university. Although Satan always tries to destroy God's work, God continues with *His* plan.

### CESAR MALAN

One day, one of the liberal ministers from the Genevan university reads the Bible. His name is Cesar Malan. He reads from Eph 2: 8:

*'For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God.'*

These words have a powerful impact on Cesar Malan. He reads that text repeatedly, and God uses those words to work conversion in his heart.

This happened when the university professors had just introduced a new rule. They had decided that from now on, they would not speak to the students about a Jesus Who was God *and* Man. Nor would there be any more discussions about original sin, grace, and election. That was not necessary. All we need to worry about is to live uprightly. A sound confession of faith was not needed.



Cesar Malan (1787-1864)

One Sunday, Cesar Malan enters the pulpit. The church people expect the usual sermon: do good works, live honest and respectful, etc. etc.. They already know this message; they've heard it so often.

But as soon as Cesar Malan started preaching, it became so quiet that you could hear a pin drop. Even the sleepers wake up. Listen, Malan presents a vastly different message today:

*'For by grace you have been saved through faith'!*

Malan sincerely and passionately preaches that to be saved, man must repent. Salvation is only possible by faith in Jesus Christ. He stresses that good works do *not* earn salvation.

The people look at each other.

They are not used to such preaching.  
They get restless.

When the service is over, the people walk home, busily discussing and disputing the message. This sermon creates confusion and contention.

Other ministers hear about it and visit Malan the very next day. They ask him not to preach like that again. That was against the decision they had just made not to talk about Jesus as Saviour. Malan refuses and tells them that he neither *can* nor *may* preach otherwise. The liberal preachers don't like his response; they become angry and prevent him from entering any pulpit in Geneva. He may not teach at the university anymore, either. He loses his job and income just like that. That is terrible as he is married and has five children.

What now?

He needs to support his family, doesn't he? To earn something, he takes in a few boarders. In the meantime, he continues his Bible lectures. More and more people come to listen to him.

But then, the hostility of the liberal people of Geneva also flares up. They force their way into the meeting room and break up the group. Once outside, the liberals pelt the students who had been listening to Malan, with stones.

However, this goes too far for the city council of Geneva. They move to protect Cesar Malan and his followers. Malan then asks for a church building, but they reject that request.

So he builds a chapel in the garden behind his house, and they have their meetings there. He hopes that the liberals will leave them in peace there. Instead, the hostility from his liberal 'brothers and sisters' escalates.

This situation cannot continue, so Malan and the Brotherhood separate themselves from the Genevan church and establish their own. They call this church 'The Little Church' to distinguish it from the national Church of Switzerland, 'The Large Church.'

The liberals mockingly call them 'Mimichers', which means 'Hypocrites'.

This new awakening is known in history as *The Revival*.

It is an awakening from the outward religion of good works and a return to the teachings of Calvin. This awakening is not limited to Geneva. No, it spreads to other provinces of Switzerland. They begin to distribute Bibles. In many cities and villages in Switzerland, they begin to do mission work. They organise Sunday Schools; yes, they even establish a theological college where men receive training to be ministers.

## REVIVAL IN THE NETHERLANDS. WILLEM BILDERDIJK.



Willem Bilderdijk  
1756 – 1831.

This spiritual awakening also spread to The Netherlands. *Willem Bilderdijk* was the forerunner of this awakening.

He was born in 1756 in Amsterdam, before the French Revolution. At that time, many quarrels between the Patriots and the followers of the Prince of Orange made

life miserable.

Willem's father was a fervent follower of the Prince, and Willem followed his dad in this. He was a clever and gifted young man who strongly opposed the Revolution.

Unsurprisingly, when the French invaded The Netherlands in 1795 and the foolish people danced around the Liberty Tree, Willem was banished from the country. Of course, such an 'enemy' of the Revolution could not stay. Please get rid of him!

First, Willem went to live in London, but later, he settled in Germany in the province of Brunswick. In the meantime, the French yoke pressed hard on the Dutch people. While Napoleon ruled in France, his brother Louis ruled the Netherlands. He became king in 1806.

That same year, Willem Bilderdijk was permitted to return to the Netherlands. Bilderdijk, who was a linguist, became Louis Bonaparte's tutor. He had to teach the king the Dutch language because it would not do for the king of The Netherlands not to speak Dutch!

The years flew by.

Napoleon Bonaparte was defeated.

The Netherlands was liberated from the French yoke.

The House of Orange returned. This made Bilderdijk happy; he wrote a beautiful poem about this.

We know that the *spirit* of the Revolution did not leave the country with the French. If only it had! No, that revolutionary spirit kept spreading, and Bilderdijk continued to warn against it, experiencing much opposition and enmity from the liberals because of it. Bilderdijk would have liked to become a professor at one of the universities. He had the skills for that. But the 'enlightened' ministers strongly opposed the idea.

No way!

They did not want a man who warned *against* the spirit of enlightenment at the university! All his life Bilderdijk was despised, hated and ridiculed, they even called him 'The Beast'. Despite these hardships, he persevered and managed to teach the truth to some noble young men. That teaching produced rich fruit.

The name of one of those young men was Isaac da Costa.

## ISAAC DA COSTA AND ABRAHAM CAPADOCE

Isaac da Costa was a Jew whose ancestors lived in Portugal before they fled to The Netherlands.

Bilderdijk instructed this young Jew in God's Word, and this teaching bore much fruit.



Isaac da Costa 1798 - 1860

One day, da Costa took along one of his Jewish friends, Abraham Capadoce. Like Isaac da Costa, Abraham also studied at the University of Leiden. He was a medical student.

These two young Jewish men became great friends of Bilderdijk.





Abraham Capadoce  
1795 - 1874

Together, they studied the Bible, and Bilderdijk explained to these Jewish men who Christ was. God blessed this teaching, and both men learned to embrace the Lord Jesus as the promised Messiah.

When Capadoce told his family about his faith in the Lord Jesus,

they responded with bitter hatred and enmity. They tried to convince him that he was wrong and to return to the Jewish faith. When that didn't succeed, his family disowned him. This was extremely difficult for young Abraham.

Da Costa could not keep quiet about his faith, either. He also experienced much hatred and enmity.

Da Costa was engaged to a distinguished Jewish girl and loved her very much. At first, he didn't dare to tell her about his newfound faith. He feared that she would break the engagement, and he didn't want to lose her. This was a big spiritual struggle for him. But eventually, he could no longer keep silent, and with a trembling heart, he told her that he had learned to know the Lord Jesus as the true Messiah and Saviour. While telling her, he hardly dared to look at her.

Would she reject him now?

He waited for her answer...

But when she remained silent, he looked at her timidly and saw that her eyes were full of tears. Then she told him she had also learned to know the Lord Jesus and believed in Him as the only Saviour.

She had not dared to speak to da Costa about it, fearing that *he* would reject *her*, and Isaac had not dared to tell her for a long time because he was afraid *she* would reject *him*!

You can imagine their great joy and happiness! God had paved the way for them, and though they experienced much hostility from both families, they could comfort each other, knowing that God had brought them together.

How beautiful are God's ways, don't you think?

Isaac and Abraham were baptised at the same time. What must have lived in the hearts of those young men? Only God knows. This story shows that the devil may rage, but God continues *His* work.

Both these men became faithful co-workers of the awakening in The Netherlands.

Da Costa wrote a book entitled '*Objections to the Spirit of the Age*'. In it, he argued against the spirit of enlightenment, which sadly was accepted in the church. He also gave regular lectures. He repeatedly warned against unbelief in the church, politics, and education. He was not ashamed to be open about his convictions.

He had to swim against the current, and that is always difficult. His friend Abraham supported him faithfully in that struggle.

Abraham also held religious meetings, first in Scherpenzeel, a town in the province Gelderland, later in The Hague. He established Sunday schools to instruct children in the true doctrine.

The work of these men attracted attention and caused turmoil in The Netherlands. Of course, that work *could* not remain unnoticed. That was not the intention either. The fierce hostility of the liberal ministers flared up again. They tried everything to crush their influence and make them appear ridiculous in the eyes of the Dutch people. One newspaper publicly called Isaac da Costa 'a villain'!

Yes, slander is cheap.

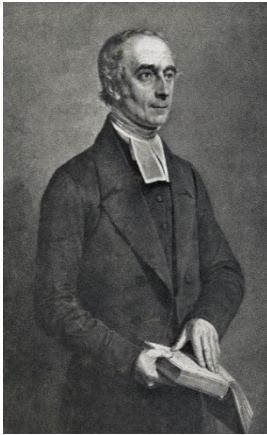
They lost many of their friends, but their instructor Bilderdijk did not forsake them. He continued to support them faithfully.

## KOHLBRUGGE

Many more joined the revival movement. One of them is Kohlbrugge. His family came from Germany. They moved to The Netherlands and



'Objections to the Spirit of the Age'



Herman Friedrich  
Kohlbrugge  
1803 - 1875

lived in Amsterdam, where his father ran a prosperous soap factory.

Dr Herman Friedrich Kohlbrugge preached God's Word: the profound misery of man, dead in sin, the sovereign power of God and the riches of His grace. But that was not to the liking of the liberal preachers. Man dead in sin? No, don't paint man so black! Man

is not so bad.

We know how the spirit of enlightenment stressed honesty and virtue. These were the days of 'goody-goody two shoes'. Kohlbrugge preached directly against that.

*Is man a goody-goody two shoes, able to save himself by doing good works?*

*No, man is damned before God in his loathsome, sinful state!*

That was the theme of Kohlbrugge's preaching. However, he didn't leave man there. No, he pointed to the amazing power of divine grace.

Dr Kohlbrugge was opposed from all sides.

He wished to become a minister of the Restored Lutheran Church as that's where he was a member. However, all pulpits were closed to him because he accused another minister of teaching false doctrine. He would have been happy to join the Netherlands Reformed Church, but they didn't want him either.

Just imagine!

Someone who preaches that we are dead in sin and can only be saved through Christ alone is not wanted! Stay away from him!

Kohlbrugge experienced much opposition and hostility during his life, for he loved and defended the truth like many other faithful men.

Here, too, the words of the Lord Jesus are fulfilled: "They have hated Me; they shall also hate you!"

Eventually, Dr Kohlbrugge returned to Germany, where he became a minister of a congregation that had seceded.

### GROEN VAN PRINSTERER

I must still mention one more well-known leader of the Revival movement: Mr Groen van Prinsterer.

Groen came from a prominent family.

His father was a minister, and Groen was allowed to study literature and law.

He could learn exceptionally well and passed all his exams with honours. When he finished his studies, he became a lawyer in The Hague.

This educated, refined and prominent man also joined the battle against liberalism in the church. He wrote various important books such as '*Unbelief and Revolution*'. For many years he was a member of parliament where he fought for the rights of Christian schools. In those days, children went to the 'neutral' state school. These schools received the best educational tools available while the government paid their teachers' salaries.

The few Christian schools received *nothing*. That was their 'punishment' for being stubborn! Groen van Prinsterer continually fought for equal funding for state and Christian schools. When the

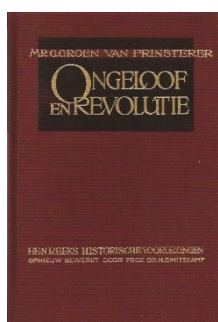


Mr Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer  
1802 – 1876.

government finally agreed to equal funding, Groen van Prinsterer had already died.

Almost all the men of the revival belonged to the nobility. They didn't aim for secession but fought for reformation *within* the church. Their struggle was mainly against the false doctrine which had the upper hand in the church. They worked hard and undoubtedly did a lot of good.

They warned and fought against corruption in the church, but their opinions and objections were simply swept under the carpet. Although they did their best, the men of the Revival could not hold back the Secession.



Groen van Prinsterer's lectures on Unbelief and Revolution

Why not? Because the leaders in the church would not listen. The ordinary church people had given up the battle a long time ago. Yet many of them were genuine and sincere believers. They disagreed with the preaching of those liberal ministers. Of course! The Bible had taught them differently. Finally, they could no longer go and listen to those 'enlightened' ministers and...they simply stayed home. The liberals

ignored their warnings anyway. *They* simply didn't count. So they sought each other's company in so-called *conventicles*.

There, they discussed the Bible together and listened to lay preachers.

They didn't hear the true message in church anymore. They no longer received food for their soul.

When the Lord's Supper was celebrated, they stayed home! They no longer had any respect for those false teachers even though they were ordained ministers.

Many parents didn't have their babies baptised. Why not? For the same reason: they no longer respected those liberal ministers, who preached false doctrines from the pulpit.

The deformation rapidly grew. Confusion, hatred, and enmity were everywhere. How would that end?

## A PAMPHLET CAUSES MUCH TURMOIL

Unexpectedly, a small pamphlet was distributed, titled: '*Address to all my Reformed Fellow Believers*'.

It was anonymous.

That pamphlet stated:

- that The Netherlands Reformed Church was to blame for all the current confusion.
- that 'The Hague Synod' was wrong.
- that governing the church by The New Regulations was contrary to the Church Order of Dordt.
- that the liberal ministers are disloyal.

In brief, the author exposed the whole sorry situation in the church.

The impact of this pamphlet was huge. It was read again and again all over the country. It was reprinted nine times in one year. Everywhere people asked: 'Who wrote it?'

The liberals were furious! They hurled abusive language at the unknown author. They called him schismatic; a quarrelsome person; a Jesuit, and much more. King Willem I also read that pamphlet.

"No way" he thought, "that is going much too far. I did my best for the church, and now all my good work is condemned in this pamphlet. That is terrible; I *must* know who the author is!"

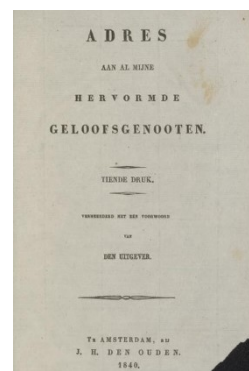
He ordered the police to find the author.

The police did their job well.

They soon discovered that a certain Rev.

Molenaar, from The Hague, had written this pamphlet.

When Rev Molenaar heard that the king was furious, he wrote a letter to King Willem I in which he expressed sincere regret for writing the pamphlet and promised that from now on, he would not disturb the peace in the church.



'Address to all my Reformed Fellow Believers' (10<sup>th</sup> print)



Rev D. Molenaar  
1786 – 1865.

This letter of Rev Molenaar was printed and sent to all consistories. Then everyone could read that the author had retracted everything he wrote. Rev Molenaar kept his word.

Some years later, he was made 'Knight in the

Order of the Lion of The Netherlands' and remained friends with King Willem I till his death.

From now on, he wore a medal!

But...would the *Lord* give Rev Molenaar a medal as well? What do you think? I don't think so.

What Rev Molenaar wrote was true. Rev Molenaar was *not allowed* to be sorry for that. He chose the earthly king's friendship above the heavenly King's approval!

Although Rev Molenaar was sorry that he had written that pamphlet, the people continued to read it. The eyes of many were opened, and on Sundays, more and more people stayed . . . at home! The number of unbaptised children in the country grew.

Everyone can understand that the situation could not continue like this. A change was necessary so the church of the Lord would not perish. Liberalism completely dominated the church.

Warning voices were ignored.

The ordinary church members were treated with contempt. The enlightened people only had an arrogant smile for them: those poor people knew no better! The leaders of the Revival had ridicule and scorn heaped on them. The liberals ignored their arguments!

And then ...

## QUESTIONS

1. What changes had come in the university founded by Calvin?
2. Who is:
  - a. Wilcox
  - b. Robert Haldane
  - c. Cesar Malan
3. How did God use the Scriptures to convert Malan?
4. What new regulation was adopted by the university?
5. Why did Malan receive such opposition?
6. Why was this change termed the Revival?
7. Give the background of William Bilderdijk.
8. Why was he banished from The Netherlands?
9. How did he feel about Willem I's return?
10. Why was Bilderdijk so despised?
11. Give the background of Isaac de Costa.
12. Who was Capadose?
13. What was the purpose of De Costa's book, 'Objections to the Spirit of the Age'?
14. What was the content of Kohlbrugge's preaching?
15. List two groups who refused to admit Kohlbrugge as a minister. Why did this happen?
16. Give the background of Groen Van Prinsterer.
17. What is meant by 'equality' in education?
18. What is the difference between a church 'restoration' and a secession?
19. What were conventicles?
20. List the main points of Rev Molenaar's pamphlet.
21. How did God use this pamphlet?
22. What was the outcome for Rev Molenaar?

## FOR FURTHER STUDY

1. God supports and maintains His church until the end of the world. There is always a faithful remnant when error abounds, as we see in this chapter. Point to a time in God's Word when the true servants of the Lord were few.
2. Are there any dangers to equality in education?
3. Find one text that should have been a word of warning to Rev Molenaar when he promised to be silent.