

107. The Minister of Ulrum

It is quiet in the church at Ulrum.

The building is overflowing.

People are even sitting on the steps of the pulpit! The minister's voice is crystal clear, and 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-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 understand that such sermons were rare in those days. In previous chapters, we discussed that people no longer wanted to know about the reality that man is dead in sin. Most Dutch people 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.



Hendrik de Cock

We wrote that it was very quiet in the church, where everyone listened 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 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 de Cock was teaching differently than he does now.

He studied at the University of Groningen. In his youth, he was also 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



Nave of the church in Ulrum. Pulpit photo courtesy P. Witten.



Reverend Hendrik de Cock 1801 – 1842. Wikipedia.

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 the synod at The Hague in 1816, which we discussed 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 *they need to follow the confessions **only** where they are in line with Scripture*. That meant that ministers and professors could teach as they wished. 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



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

an elderly member, Mr Kuipenga, who complains about his sins and his inability to do any good. Rev. De Cock tries to encourage the old man.

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

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

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

Rev de Cock thinks deeply about those words as he travels back to the manse. "A different ground for my salvation..." Those words continue to echo through his mind; he can't escape 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 that man is incapable of doing *any* good. He discovers that by nature, only evil lives in his heart continually. He realises 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 on Saturday evening. At times, more than seventy carriages stand in front of the church building in a long row. In Ulrum, they hear what they didn't hear from their own ministers anymore.



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

Today, we travel to church by car; in those days, they came by horse and cart. Others used a boat to get there. Unsurprisingly, the little church in Ulrum is overcrowded every Sunday. Soon, that church building 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 and remove 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 can't 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 many people still long for the pure preaching of the Word. For that, they

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

Klaas Kuipenga

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 cannot 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 that 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. He wrote a letter to Rev Molenaar at The Hague¹.



Rev Molenaar

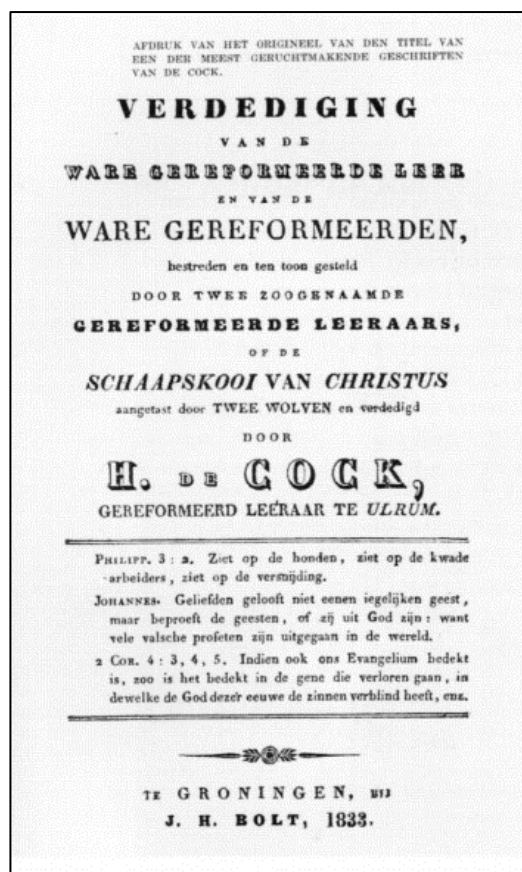
Reverend Molenaar advises him not to do it as unrest could develop in the churches. However, the parents continue to come back with the same request.

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

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 challenges Rev de Cock to refute him. So Rev de Cock does. He also wrote a booklet that directed the attack against the two liberal ministers who attacked him. Its title was:

'The sheepfold of Christ attacked by two wolves and defended by Hendrik de Cock.' True, Rev de



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

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 the true faith and eternal life!

Yet it would have been wiser if Rev de Cock had been more careful. Again, Rev de Cock was right. 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, they called him a 'raving monster', and they accused his followers of being

¹ See previous chapter.

'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 indefinitely. Okay, they would not reduce his stipend yet, but he was not allowed to do his ministerial task. He could no longer preach, teach catechism, visit the 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, and 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 was angry when they heard that the classis had suspended their beloved minister. What should Rev de Cock do now?

Ignore it?

Abandon the struggle?

That is the easy way out, and it 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.

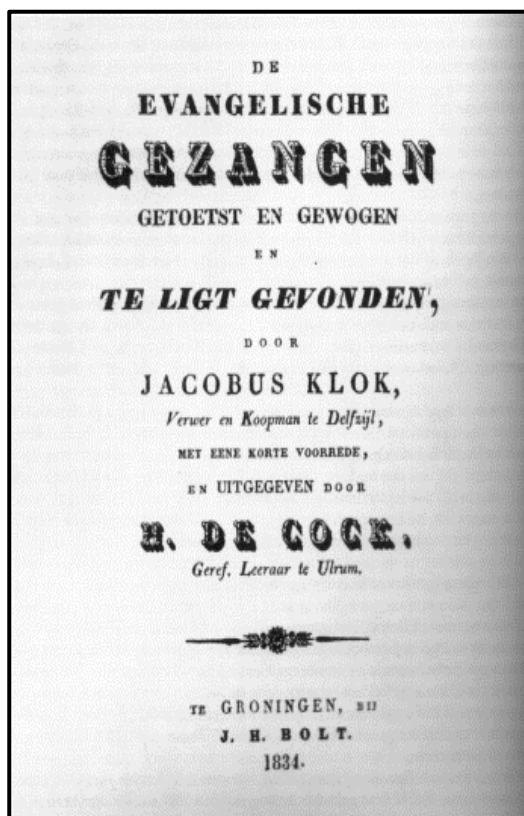
This regional synod only makes things worse! They suspend Rev de Cock for another two years, and this time they withdraw his stipend as well!! That throws him and his family into sudden poverty. This decision again shows deep hostility towards the Reformed doctrine.

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



King William I

Then something happens that makes things even worse. Remember how, in 1816, the synod of The



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.

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 increased even more! His enemies accuse him before the regional synod, and ... that synod dismisses Rev de Cock! They cannot 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 him no patience, tolerance, understanding or sympathy. 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 and 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 utmost to defend and uphold Scripture and confessions. But that is precisely 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 the lack of appreciation for the Word of God and the confessions.

The dismissal of Rev de Cock has been the impetus for the Secession. Isn't it 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 Netherlands 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 that Rev de Cock wrote?
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?

FOR FURTHER STUDY

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 forever lost. 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.

