

108. THE SECESSION OF 1834.

The people of Ulrum were shocked and indignant when they heard of the sentence that the synod pronounced on Rev de Cock. They had no intention of accepting that unjust sentence! The consistory wrote to the synod that they would continue to acknowledge Rev de Cock as their lawful minister. The thought of seceding had not entered Rev de Cock's mind yet. He considered appealing to the king again despite



Rev. H.P. Scholte
1805-1868

having been bitterly disappointed in the king the first time. But it never eventuated because as soon as the news of Rev de Cock's dismissal spread through the country, his friend, Rev Scholte of Doeveren, travelled to

Ulrum to support him.

That Friday evening, Rev Scholte held a speech. On Sunday, he planned to lead the church service, but the counsellor of the Ulrum congregation would not permit that. So Rev Scholte preached in the garden of the manse standing on a farm wagon.



Rev H. de Cock
1801 - 1842

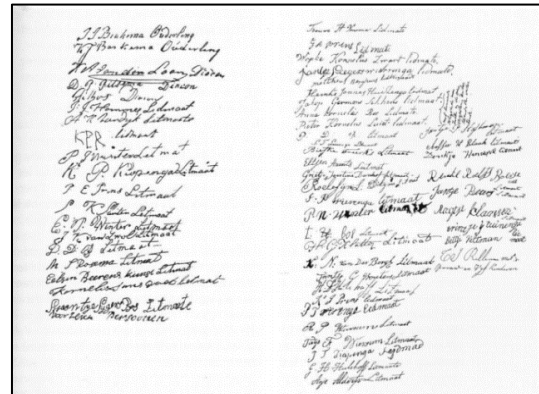
During that visit, the two ministers discussed how to deal with the many church issues, and Rev Scholte persuaded Rev de Cock to secede.

Ulrum's consistory had advised him to secede for some time already, but Rev de Cock was very reluctant

to make this difficult step. But now Rev de Cock realised that he had done all he could and there was no other option *but* to secede. The church hierarchy had left them no other choice.

THE START OF THE SECESSION

On Monday, 13 October 1834, almost the entire congregation of Ulrum, except eight members, signed the 'Act of Secession or Return'. They now considered The Netherlands Reformed Church (The Church of the Reformation) false.



Signatures of church people in Ulrum who signed the Act of Secession. A total of 137 people signed this document. There are still a few crosses as well from people who didn't master the skill of writing.

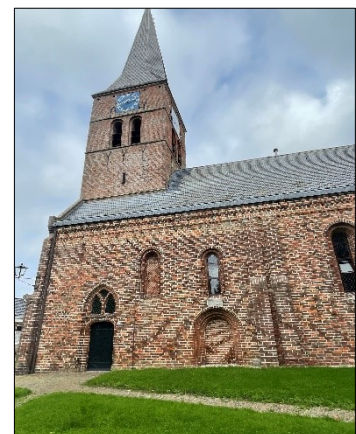
This 'Act of Secession' states that they are returning to the sound Reformed doctrine of the Church Fathers. They are the continuation of the church of the Reformation.

Rev de Cock and the consistory of Ulrum think that the church property, the church building, and the manse, will remain theirs.

They notified the classis, the Provincial Church Administration, the synod, and the king that they had seceded and asked for their protection.

On Sunday, 19 October, Rev de Cock goes to church as usual to lead the service. However, he may not climb the pulpit when he enters the church building.

The church is packed. The liberal minister from the neighbouring congregation will preach that Sunday, but he cannot get through the crowd of people. The church members of Ulrum will not let him through!



Church in Ulrum.
They thought it would remain theirs...
Photo courtesy P. Witten.

Then a member of the congregation shouts:
"Who must preach this morning? The
neighbouring minister or Rev de Cock?"

With one voice, they answer: "Rev de Cock!"
Again Rev de Cock asks the police, who are
barring him from the pulpit, if he may please have
access. They deny his request.

So he stands on one of the consistory pews to
preach that morning while the police continue to
guard the pulpit.

After the service, when the members had gone
home, the police lock the church building so no
one can enter.

This act clearly conveys to the congregation that
the authorities have confiscated their church
building.

What to do next?

The following week, they quickly clear a barn and
make it ready for the congregation to meet the
following Sunday. They manage to prepare it for
the service by Saturday. Now, at least, they have a
place where they can come together.

That Saturday afternoon, one hundred and fifty
soldiers unexpectedly march into the quiet town
of Ulrum. What a commotion that caused!

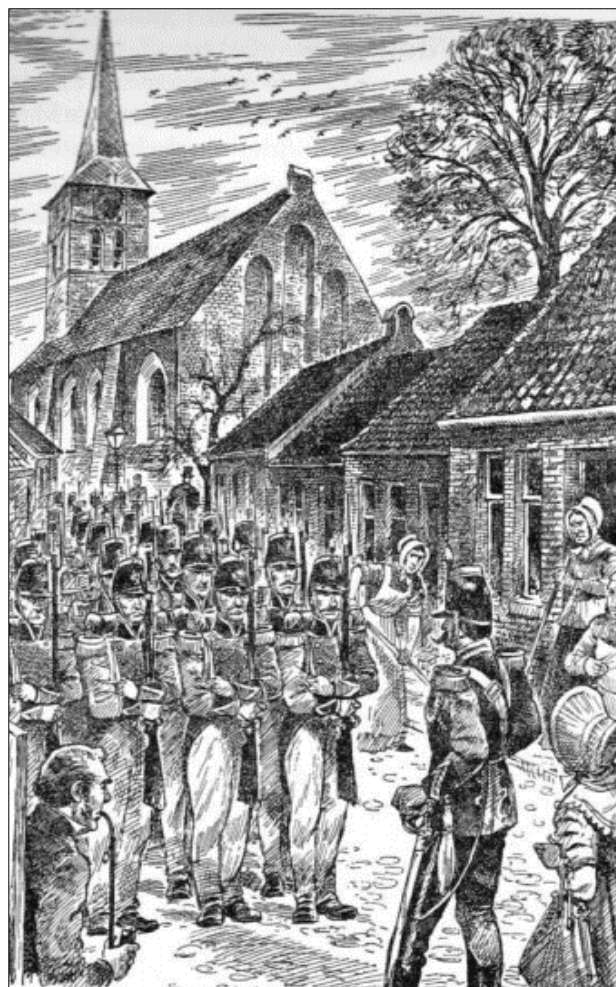
The government, stirred up by the synod, is
intervening!
They place Ulrum under 'martial law'.
They billet the 150 rough soldiers with the locals.
The manse receives twelve of them to care for.

It becomes a weird and restless Sunday for Rev de
Cock and his family. The whole day, those
shouting and bullying soldiers take over their
house. Rev de Cock and his wife are not even
allowed to leave their room.

Much of their furniture is either senselessly
destroyed or severely damaged by those rough
soldiers; bedsheets are trampled on and torn to
pieces.

But that is not all!

Rev de Cock must appear in court and is
sentenced to three months imprisonment and
fined 150 guilders! That was a significant amount
in those days. This heavy punishment was for
daring to stand on a pew and preach the previous
Sunday!



150 soldiers billeted in Ulrum.

Rev de Cock goes to prison for three months.
There he sits in a cold, gloomy cell, like a
criminal...
And his family?

The soldiers drive his wife and children out of the
manse and onto the street, with nowhere to go.
It was the middle of winter!
Could it be worse?



*The prison in the city of Groningen where
Rev de Cock spent three months.*

It seems as if the days of the Roman Inquisition had returned. The faithful minister at Ulrum suffers much hatred and vengeance at the hands of the church authorities. They cannot even leave his family in peace! A member of the congregation takes care of his wife and children for the time being.

Rev de Cock is not the only one to suffer. In 1835, more ministers were suspended. The first one to follow Rev de Cock is Rev Scholte from Doeveren, who had visited his sorely tried friend at Ulrum. When Rev Scholte returned from that visit, the classis immediately suspended him, for having the courage to preach at Ulrum. That is a big no-no! It is not so much the sermon that bothers them but the fact that he has chosen to side with the despised Rev de Cock!

They already have a grudge against Scholte because he refuses to have hymns sung in the church service.

In response, Rev Scholte and his consistory also decide to secede.¹

Rev de Cock's experience shows very clearly that appealing doesn't help anyway. Like in Ulrum, Scholte's congregation also loses their church building, and he and his family are driven out of the manse.

MORE MINISTERS SECEDE.



*Rev A.
Brummelkamp
1811-1888*

Rev Brummelkamp from Hattem is also suspended. He refuses to obey the 'New Regulations' to have at least one hymn sung per service. Therefore, away with him!

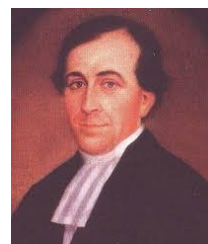
In the Brabant village of Almkerk stands a minister named Gezelle van Meerburg. This minister is very mild and

gentle. He tries to avoid anything that could lead to trouble. To keep the peace, he occasionally has his congregation sing a hymn. Some of his church members strongly oppose singing those hymns. Whenever Rev van Meerburg announces a hymn, some of them walk out of church in protest.

Others remained seated but kept their mouth shut. The hymn issue creates unrest in the church.

Rev van Meerburg thinks: "To avoid this unrest, I'll stop announcing hymns." And?

Rev Gezelle van Meerburg gets suspended by the provincial church government of North Brabant because, according to them, he is 'unfit for the office of minister!' It's the same story here: disobeying the 'New Regulation' is unacceptable.



*Rev G.F. Gezelle
van Meerburg
(1806-1855)*

Another minister, Rev van Velzen, is suspended because he allowed a colleague on his pulpit who refuses to include a hymn in the liturgy. The same issue again: hatred toward the sound Reformed doctrine.



Rev van Velzen

A certain Rev van Raalte, who has finished his studies for the ministry, refuses to promise to include hymns in the liturgy.

Result?

He is not ordained as a minister!

He joins the Secession as well.

That's how the synod tries to expel all the 'troublesome' ministers. Then peace will return to the church. At least, that's what they think! But they are mistaken.



*Rev van Raalte
1811-1876*

To their anger and dismay, thousands of ordinary church members leave The Netherlands Reformed Church. Many hardly attended anyway, as the liberal ministers no longer preach the truth there.

Remember, many children are still unbaptised because non-church attendance has skyrocketed among the faithful. Those people now joined the seceders; they go to listen to the expelled

¹ These two congregations are the only two congregations which seceded, all others are individuals who formed new congregations.

ministers. Finally, they hear the faithful preaching of God's Word again! It's not surprising that those ordinary people who thirsted for the truth separate themselves. The church governments refuse to listen to their complaints. Instead, they are treated with contempt.

Some say:

"They should not have separated, no matter what!"

But what else can they do?

For them, it was simply a matter of upholding the *truth!*

Those deposed ministers explain the riches of God's promises for them and their children again. They receive proper instruction and are comforted again.

On the other hand, we see the stubbornness and spiteful hostility of the church leaders, who refused to bow before the truth. They forced faithful people out of the church and broke the unity by deposing faithful ministers!

The deposed ministers travel throughout the country and institute congregations. In 1835, delegates from sixteen newly established congregations met in Groningen; in 1836, the seceders held their first synod in Amsterdam. Not being bound to the rules of the 'New Regulations' and liberal governments, the new church grows.

THE LIBERALS FIGHT BACK

"Schismatics! That's what they are! Deserters!"

That was the scornful response of the synodical church government. With hatred and bitterness in their hearts, they think:

Just wait, we'll teach them a lesson!

The synod stirs up the government against them. Their church services must be made impossible. Strict measures must be put in place to curb their independence and growth.

And yes, the government agrees! Even the king is in favour and thinks stern measures must be taken. That's not surprising, as the majority of the government was liberal. One member of parliament even dares to say: "We must treat those seceders as 'insane'!"

PERSECUTION BY THE POPULATION

Most Dutch people agreed with the church officials and the national government! In every possible way, the general population ridiculed and opposed the seceders.

One employee has worked hard for his boss for many years to earn a living for his wife and children. However, this man has joined the Secession. One day, he suddenly gets the sack. He need not come back.

What?

Why not?

Didn't he do his work properly anymore? Has he lied or stolen from his employer? No, he hasn't! He has served his employer faithfully for many years and still does! But why does he suddenly lose his job then? Simply because he joined the Secession, that was the *only* reason! Just like that, the liberal employer plunges him and his family into extreme poverty. But *that* does not matter. It serves him right! He shouldn't have joined the Secession! The boss no longer has work for such schismatics, for such radicals!

And when he applies for work elsewhere, no one



One employee has worked hard for his boss for many years to earn a living for his wife and children.....

<https://www.bol.com/nl>

wants to hire him. Why not? Because he belongs to that 'fussy' group.

On the corner of the street, a baker has a flourishing business. He is a skilled tradesman and serves his customers well. But in a short time, that baker loses almost all his customers. Why? Isn't his bread good anymore?

Is he dishonest?

Oh, no, he serves his customers very well, but... he has joined the Secession, and that's why they go to another baker. That throws the faithful baker into instant poverty with his wife and children. But *that* does not matter. It serves him right! He shouldn't have joined those 'fuss-pots'².



'The faithful baker is thrown into instant poverty...'
<https://www.eenwagenvolverhalen.nl/>

Many seceders experience this type of hostility. They are banned from their village community and suffer much misery. God alone knows how many hot tears are shed! Indeed, the Dutch people are also guilty.

And yet...despite all oppression, hatred, envy, ridicule and slander, the seceded congregations grow, and new ones are instituted. Those people make huge sacrifices so they can hear the truth. Do they lose their church buildings? Very well, they just meet somewhere else: in a barn, farm, warehouse, or attic - anywhere they can meet unhindered. How willing they are to make these sacrifices! Would we do the same?

PERSECUTION BY THE RULERS

The growth of the Secession causes much bitterness among both the synod and

government. They scheme and plot to stop this growth. This development must be stamped out! And yes... they find something!

They resurrect an old obsolete law that Napoleon once implemented to stop groups of more than twenty people from meeting and possibly resisting his rule. This outdated law is revived and used to disperse the church services of the Seceders.

Listen.

In the village of Rhenen, a group of seceders meet to hear the faithful preaching of God's Word. They can no longer listen to those liberal preachers. They long for the true doctrine.

But while they are listening attentively, several fellow villagers gather outside, making nasty threats.

The people inside are unaware...

Suddenly, they are distracted by something unusual. The people inside hear the faint crackling of burning wood and flames, and choking smoke fills their meeting room.

What's going on? The people outside have set fire to the house!

The small group of seceders leave the house quickly.

As they come out, they are ridiculed, punched, and beaten.

The offenders celebrate their 'victory'. How terrible!!

Soon after, the owner stands by a smoking heap of rubble. He was unable to save any of his possessions. Nobody shows any sympathy.

A small group of people meet on a *Monday* evening in Amsterdam to celebrate Holy Supper. Reverend van Raalte is the minister. As secretly as possible, they have come together in their little church. Only a few candles light the room to avoid attracting attention. The building is dim, but their hearts are light, for the Lord is in their midst. They are not discovered this time and remain together until two o'clock at night.

But a few days later, also in Amsterdam, a few seceders meet in a back room on the top floor of

² They were called 'fuss-pots' because they insisted on upholding Scripture and the Confessions.



Painting of a service of a Secession congregation in a farmhouse.

a house. The weather is cold and miserable; there is snow outside. Some people discover what is happening in that back room upstairs. Braving the cold, a crowd assembles in front of the house. A shop selling pottery is on the ground floor.

The crowd forces its way into the store and smashes everything to pieces. The offenders yell, shout, and rage, crashing cups, saucers, bowls, and plates. The police come running. Good! Now the rascals will be punished. Isn't that what the police are for?

But what happens?

The police ignore the destruction of the shop and go thundering up the stairs! They force their way into the backroom and flog the seceders, chasing them downstairs and outside. The mob in the street shouts and cheers. While the police were inside, they quickly greased the pavement outside the shop entry with butter. When those 'fussy' seceders come outside, they slip and slide; some fall and others stumble, trying to escape. The mob attacks, kicking, punching, and beating them till they bleed. The police stand by idly, smiling at that sickening scene.

Incidents like these are widespread throughout The Netherlands.

At Bunschoten, a town in the south, the seceders are meeting on a ship. They are discovered, and soldiers disperse them with clubs.

Another incident happens to Rev Scholte. He is conducting a service somewhere in an open field, standing on a farmer's wagon. They are betrayed,

and suddenly, a detachment of soldiers arrives and attacks and beats the listeners. Many are wounded.

Every time, the police punish the ministers with hefty fines, which runs into thousands of dollars. If they can't pay, they are sent to prison instead. The seceding congregations try to raise the money to pay those fines.

PROTESTS FROM IN AND OUTSIDE THE COUNTRY

It is hard to imagine that The Netherlands experienced persecution, as that country fought for some eighty years to secure religious freedom. When King Willem I became king, he swore an oath to uphold the country's constitution, which states that all religions in the kingdom would receive equal protection. Therefore, the persecutions, fines, imprisonments, and billeting of soldiers are against the Constitution!

"Yes," said the liberals, "but the seceded congregations did not yet exist then, so the constitution does not apply to them." Everybody understands that this excuse is too silly for words!

The stories above give a brief picture of some incidents during those years.

Did nobody stick up for those oppressed congregations?

Yes, a few frankly dared to say that those persecutions are scandalous.

Do you know who also defended the Seceders? The well-known Groen Van Prinsterer. He did not belong to the seceders but remained a member of The Netherlands Reformed Church, yet he sharply condemned what was happening throughout the country. Protests even came from abroad.

The king received a letter from Switzerland, which was signed by no less than one hundred and seventy-three Swiss ministers, asking: "How can a descendant of the House of Orange, those staunch defenders of the faith, do that?" How humiliating for King Willem I!



'How humiliating for King Willem I'.

A ministers' conference in London also sent a signed protest.

But these protests were simply ignored! Hatred ruled: the Secession had to be crushed!

But they did not succeed!

They *could* not succeed because the *truth* was at stake! God gave strength to His persecuted children to endure the hour of temptation.

TROUBLESOME DEVELOPMENTS

The leaders of the Secession claimed that the seceded congregations were the continuation of the Church of the Reformation. They signed the 'Act of Secession or Return'. They repeatedly asked the king and the government for recognition and protection, but this was denied every time. Sure, the government was willing to recognise them, but only on the following conditions:

1. Hand over all church properties.
2. Retract the claim that they are the continuation of the Church of the Reformation and admit that the 'Secession' was illegal.
3. Agree that they formed a new society.

Only on those terms would they receive the freedom to meet. Of course, the seceders could not submit to those conditions. Then, they must declare that all their struggles for the truth and their fight to defend the sound confession are 'unlawful'. They *cannot* and *are not allowed* to do that.

They fight this demand for five years. For five years, they suffer revilement, contempt, persecution and oppression. They persevere for five years and refuse to comply with the government's demands.

But then....

Now a minister in Utrecht, Rev Scholte suddenly gives in to government demands. He has become tired of being persecuted and oppressed. He finally capitulates and gives up the good fight.

The government grants him the requested freedom to meet without persecution, but... at what a price! He may no longer carry the name of 'Reformed'. From now on, his congregation will be called: 'The Christian Seceded Congregation'. Rev Scholte should *never* have done that. By doing

this, he relinquishes his right to be called the 'Church of the Reformation'. What a pity that was!

Rev Scholte made a great mistake in accepting 'freedom' on government terms. Although understandable, considering the persecution and harassment to which they were continually exposed, it cannot be approved.

He should have *continued* to obey God rather than man. The fathers suffered and endured persecution for more than *forty* years while the stakes smoked and the scaffolds claimed their thousands.

Rev Scholte's mistake had far-reaching consequences for the other seceders. Quarrels and disunity developed within the congregations, and some followed Rev Scholte's wrong example. Sadly, the seceders did not agree with each other on many issues...

They argued about essentials, such as giving in to government demands and introducing a new church order.

However, they also argued about minor matters, such as the clothing ministers must wear and whether to have services on Boxing Day and Easter Monday. Some wanted to abolish those extra services; others opposed that. They quarrelled about which version of the rhymed psalms to sing. Instead of leaving each other free, they all tried to force their *own* ideas onto each other.

These issues caused further schisms and dissensions. Some became so tired of these arguments and endless quarrels that they migrated to America under Rev van Raalte and Rev Scholte. We could write a separate chapter about how those immigrants suffered sickness and death, crop failures causing bitter poverty and want. But enough about that.

THEOLOGICAL COLLEGE

However, some positive developments also occurred.

They established a theological college in Kampen where the future ministers of the seceded congregations would receive training. They published a weekly magazine called 'De Bazuin' (The Trumpet), encouraging stability in church-life.



The Theological College in Kampen and the four ministers who taught at this college: T.F de Haan, S. van Velzen, A. Brummelkamp, Helenius de Cock.



These two developments had a positive and unifying influence on the embattled people.



De Bazuin, (The Trumpet) first published in 1864.

In 1869, all but three congregations finally united as the Christian Reformed Church. The other three congregations continued as 'Reformed Congregations under the Cross'. You will hear more about that later.

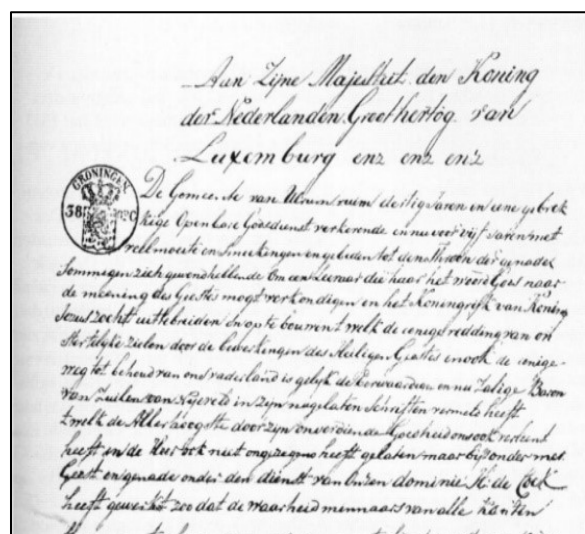
QUESTIONS

1. Why was Rev de Cock hesitant about seceding?
2. Mention two individuals or a group of individuals who urged him to secede.
3. What did the document, 'Act of Secession or Return,' mean?
4. Why did the seceders lose their church property?
5. What does it mean to be placed under martial law?

6. Why did Rev de Cock spend time in prison?
7. Why was Rev Scholte suspended?
8. Why was Rev Brummelkamp suspended?
9. Why was Rev van Meerburg suspended?
10. Identify Rev van Velzen and the reason for his suspension.
11. Why does the author state that people were driven out of the church?
12. Mention two examples of how society rejected the seceders.
13. How were the Seceders hindered in their worship services?
14. Why was this persecution illegal according to the Constitution?
15. Why did some ministers give in and apply for freedom to meet?
16. What were some of the consequences of this action?
17. What did the Seceders argue about amongst each other?
18. Mention two positive developments which emerged from the endeavours of the Seceders.
19. Under what name did most of the seceding congregations join in 1869?

FOR FURTHER STUDY

1. What dangers do you see in a close church-state relationship? Base your answer on the evidence given in this chapter.



Part of a letter which the congregation of Ulrum wrote to King William I