

## 108. THE SECESSION OF 1834

The people of Ulrum were dismayed 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 was thinking of 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.

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



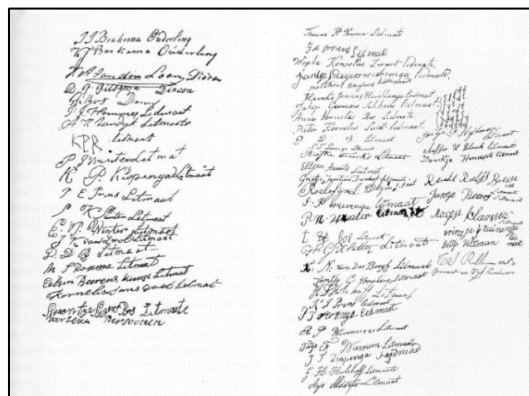
Rev H. de Cock  
1801 - 1842

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, apart from eight members, signed the 'Act of Secession or Return'.



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.

They now considered The Netherlands Reformed Church (The Church of the Reformation) to be a false church.

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

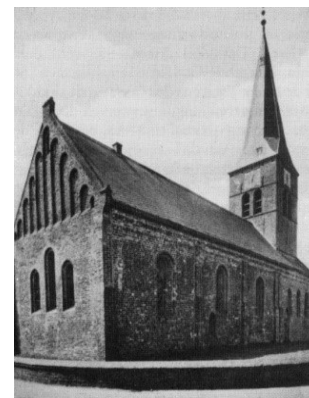
Rev de Cock and the consistory of Ulrum think that the church property, the church building, and the manse, will remain theirs.

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

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

The church is packed.

The liberal minister from the neighbouring congregation will preach that Sunday, but he cannot get through the crowd



Church in Ulrum. They thought it would remain theirs...

of people. The church members of Ulrum will not let him through! 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 instead, 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 is a clear message to the congregation that the authorities have confiscated their church building.

What to do next?

During the following week, they quickly clear a barn and make it ready for the congregation to meet in the next Sunday. They manage to get it ready 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.

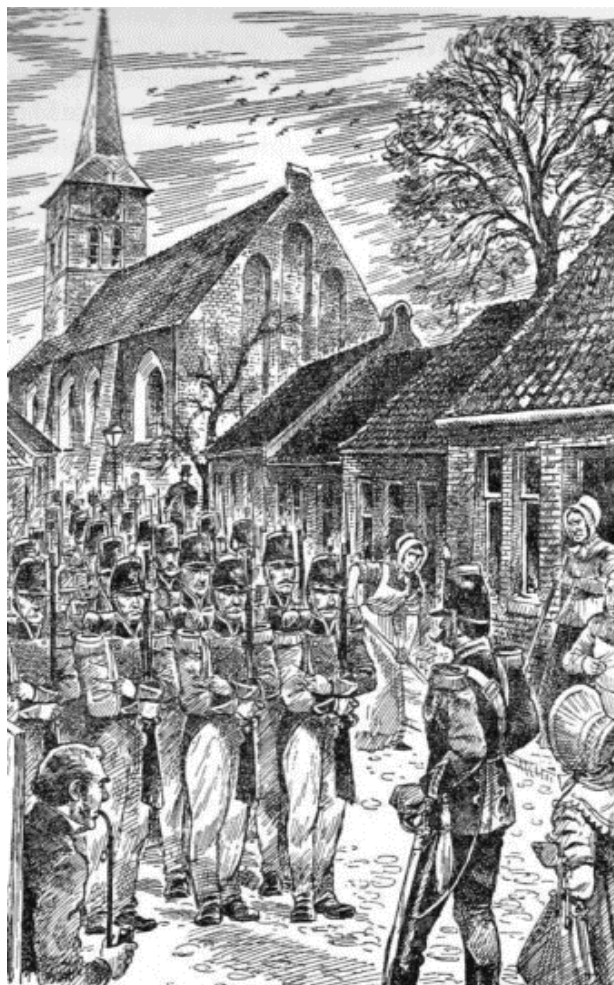
The manse receives twelve of them to care for.

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



*150 soldiers billeted in Ulrum.*

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!

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?

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.



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

Rev. de Cock is not the only one to suffer. In 1835 more ministers are suspended. The first one to follow Rev. de Cock is Rev. Scholte from Doeveren<sup>1</sup> who had visited his sorely tried friend at Ulrum. When Rev. Scholte returns from that visit, the classis immediately suspends him, for having the courage to preach at Ulrum. That is a big no-no!

It is not so much the sermon which bothers them but the fact that he has chosen the side of 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.

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

### **MORE MINISTERS SECEDE.**

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 by the name of Gezelle Van Meerburg. This minister is very mild and gentle. He tries to avoid

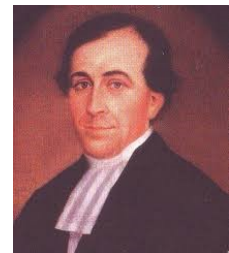
anything that could lead to trouble. To keep the peace, he occasionally has his congregation sing a hymn. Some of his church members strongly oppose singing those hymns. Whenever Rev. Van Meerburg announces a hymn, some of them walk out of church in protest. Others remain seated but kept their mouth shut. The hymn issue creates unrest in the church.



*Rev A.  
Brummelkamp  
1811-1888*

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

Rev. Gezelle Van Meerburg is suspended by the provincial church government of North Brabant because according to them he is 'unfit for the office of minister!' Same story here: any disobedience to the 'New Regulation' is not tolerated.



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

Another minister, Rev. Van Velzen, is suspended because he allows 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 Velsen  
1809-1896*

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

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

Result?

He is not ordained as a minister!  
He joins the Secession as well.  
That's how the synod tries  
to get rid of 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  
Dutch Reformed Church.  
Many of them 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  
ministers. Finally, they hear the faithful preaching  
of God's Word again! It's not surprising that those  
ordinary people, who thirsted after 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 a matter of simply 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. With that, they  
*forced* faithful people out of the church. *They*  
were the ones who broke the unity by deposing  
faithful ministers!

The deposed ministers travel throughout the  
country and institute congregations. In that same

year 1835, delegates from sixteen newly  
established congregations meet in Groningen and  
in 1836 the seceders hold 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; he also thinks that stern measures must  
be taken. Not surprising as the government was  
mostly liberal. One member of parliament even  
dares to say: "We must treat those seceders as  
'insane!'"

### PERSECUTION BY THE POPULATION

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

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 has 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 somewhere else, no-one 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 space of time that baker loses almost all his customers. Why?

Isn't his bread any 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 with his wife and children, into instant poverty. But *that* does not matter. It serves him right! He shouldn't have joined those 'fuss-pots'.

*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 regularly 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, at a farm, in a warehouse or in an attic. Anywhere where they can meet unhindered. How willing they are to make these sacrifices. Would we do the same?



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

## PERSECUTION BY THE RULERS

The growth of the Secession causes much

bitterness with both 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 which 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 sitting there listening attentively, several fellow villagers gather outside making nasty threats.

But the people inside are unaware.

Suddenly they are distracted by something unusual. The people inside hear the faint crackling of burning wood and flames. Choking smoke starts to fill their meeting room.

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

This forces the small group of seceders to 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. This time they are not discovered, and they 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 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 crockery 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. For, while the police are inside, they had quickly greased the pavement outside the shop entry with butter. When those 'fussy' seceders come outside, they slip and slide; some fall and others, stumbling, try to get away. 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 attack and beat the listeners. Many are wounded.

Every time the police punish the ministers with big fines, which, together, 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 was the country which fought for some eighty years to secure religious freedom. When King Willem I became king, he had *sworn an oath* to keep the country's constitution. That constitution 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 childish for words!

The stories above give a small picture of what happened during those years.

Did nobody stick up for those oppressed congregations?

Yes, there were a few who dared to frankly 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 Dutch Reformed Church, yet he sharply condemned what was happening throughout the entire nation.

Protests came even 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.



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 give in to the demands of the government.

But then....

Rev. Scholte, who now is a minister in Utrecht, 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 persecutions 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 the introduction of a new church order.

But they also disagreed about minor things which were not important, such as the sort of clothing ministers must wear, whether to have services for the second Christmas day, the second Easter day and the second Pentecost day. 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 in that, they tried to force their ideas on each other.

These issues caused further schisms and dissensions. Some became so tired of these arguments and endless quarrels that a group of them migrated to America under Rev. Van Raalte

and Rev. Scholte. We could write a separate chapter about this. 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) which printed many different articles from their own ministers.



*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.

In 1869, all, except 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.



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

### 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. DeCock 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 of the 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 evidence given in this chapter.