

111A. From Union 1892 till Liberation 1944 (1)

At the end of the previous chapter, we told you about the Union of 1892, when the Christian Reformed Churches from the first secession in 1834 and the Doleantie Churches from the second secession in 1886 united. After this Union, these two bonds of churches continued as 'The Reformed Churches in the Netherlands.'¹

But not every congregation joined this Union in 1892. Some churches from the First Secession remained as the Christian Reformed Churches. These congregations continued to grow and still exist today.

Hence, since 1892 there were two very closely related bonds of churches: The Reformed Churches of The Netherlands (1892) and the Christian Reformed Churches who declined to join the Union.

In this chapter, we continue our story and tell you something about the developments after 1892.

NEW PUBLICATIONS

The Lord provided some very learned and competent leaders to the Reformed Churches. One of them was dr. Abraham Kuyper; we read about him in previous chapters. Another one was dr. H. Bavinck.



A few weeks after the Union in 1892, dr. Kuyper published his commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism; eighteen months later his 'Encyclopedia of Sacred Theology' rolled off the press.

Only a few years later, prof dr. Bavinck published his 'Reformed Dogmatics'.

These publications were significant events at that time.

These three publications became standard theological works which had a significant influence on the preaching, discussions and the theological developments in the decades following 1892, as we will see.

PROF LINDEBOOM AND THE 5 THESES.

Not everybody was happy with these books. One of them was Prof Lindeboom. He wrote many articles in which he warned strongly against some of Prof Kuyper's ideas.

Together with 41 other leaders in the churches, Rev Lindeboom published five theses in which he took issue with the teachings of dr. Kuyper. These theses were published in January 1905, just before the important synod of Utrecht which was held that same year.



Prof Lucas
Lindeboom
1845-1933

Here are the four of the five theses² with a brief explanation of each one. Some of them are a little tricky, so read them carefully.

Thesis 1

When ministers and professors sign the Subscription Form, they promise not to teach anything contrary to God's Word.

This thesis speaks for itself. It is an introductory statement for the others. Most of you will have heard of the Subscription Form which office-bearers must sign before they enter the office. With it, they commit to remain faithful to Scripture, the confessions and the church order as adopted by all the FRCA churches.

Thesis 2

God's council is from eternity. Humans are creatures of time; we think in terms of a timeline. God is above time; He does not work according to timelines. It was not a big issue at the synod of Dordt. See also 'Patrimonium Profile', W.W.J. van Oene, pg 213-238.

¹ This chapter is written by H. Ballast. Mr Vreugdenhil's stories end with the union of 1892

² Thesis five deals with infra- and supra lapsarianism. See page 221 'Patrimonium Profile' W.W.J van Oene. Infra=below, lapsus = fall (into sin). Supra=above. Prof Schilder rightly pointed out that

The confessions do not speak of 'Justification from Eternity'—the confessions tell us that justification happens in time, through faith.

Dr Kuyper taught that believers *are* justified from eternity - before they are born, the Lord has already forgiven believers all their sins.

That is not true.

The Bible says that we are *elected* from before the foundation of this world; this means that all-knowing God knew who He would justify *in time*.

The Bible does not say that we are justified from *eternity* but teaches that we are justified by *faith*.

Believers need to *embrace the gospel to be saved*.

We may never blame God for not justifying us; God holds believers responsible to confirm their calling and election (2 Pet 1:10).

Thesis 3

The confessions do not speak of regeneration from eternity. It does not happen apart from the Word and without the Word, and this regeneration cannot be present for years without becoming visible.

Dr Kuyper taught that we are regenerated from *eternity*. Because he believed that God *only* made a covenant with the elect, regeneration was part of this covenant and 'deposited' as a seed in the baby. As the baby grew older, this seed of regeneration would also grow and develop.

This view is not correct.

The Bible teaches that 'regeneration' or 'rebirth' is the work of the Holy Spirit. This regeneration is worked in our hearts by the preaching of the Word. We need to keep studying the Bible to remain faithful and to keep that work of regeneration alive. Again, God holds believers responsible.

Thesis 4

The confessions do not teach that baptism seals the (presumed) regeneration in a baby.

Dr Kuyper taught that baptism signifies and seals this little seed of regeneration 'deposited' in the baby's heart. Because that tiny seed is hidden, we *presume* it's there, so babies are baptised on the *presumption* that this seed is 'implanted' in their heart.

The Heidelberg Catechism correctly teaches that baptism signifies, and seals God's covenant *promises*. These promises of forgiveness of sins and eternal life are spelled out in Scripture. See also Form for Baptism) The Lord will never take these promises away from a child if this child continues to embrace these promises in true faith and obedience. Christ says to the church in Philadelphia: '*Lo, I come soon, hold fast what you have, so that no one may seize your crown.*' Rev 3:11.

* * *

These five teachings caused much confusion in the churches. Understanding these theses will help us understand why The Liberation happened some 40 years later in 1944. Most of these theses, especially 2,3, and 4, were at the centre of that struggle for the truth. It started already in 1905.

SYNOD UTRECHT 1905

The synod of Utrecht was about to begin. The consistory of the Reformed Church in Hoorn (North of The Netherlands) submitted an appeal to the synod about the theses listed above. They requested that: '*your assembly decides to stop these theses from being preached and taught!*' They were not the only ones to speak against the five theses.

The consistory of the Reformed Church in



Prof
M. Noordtzij.
1840-1950
Gereformeerde
kerken info

Groningen tabled a proposal requesting to '*appoint a committee with the mandate to serve the churches with advice concerning these doctrinal differences. We propose that this advice is discussed at the next synod. This synod may even convene earlier to make a decision.*'

Synod agreed, and they decided to appoint a committee. The professors H.H Kuyper and M. Noordtzij were added to this committee as advisers.

The committee spent much time discussing these theses.

They formulated a set of *conclusions* which were accepted *unanimously!*

These conclusions agreed with prof Lindeboom's criticism and five theses. However, some committee members believed that the differences could be tolerated *within* the boundaries of the confessions. Others said that Kuyper's teachings went *beyond* the boundaries of the confessions. Because the *conclusions* were in line with the theses, prof Lindeboom went along with it. They voted on the *conclusions*; they did not vote on the *grounds for* these conclusions.



Prof H.H.
Kuyper. Son of
dr A. Kuyper
Vrijmaking-
Wederkeer pg 31

This decision of synod Utrecht is often referred to as the '*Pacifying Formula*'. For the time being, it restored the peace in the churches; it did not resolve the issues as the following years would show. Both lines of thought, Kuyper's teachings, and prof Lindeboom's theses opposing those teachings, were allowed in the churches. This ambiguous *Pacifying Formula* kept the peace within the churches for the next 20-30 years. This *Pacifying Formula* would become a bone of contention in the 1930s and lead to the Liberation in 1944. We'll keep that story for later, but for now, try to remember these events, this will help you understand what happened in 1944.

FROM SYNOD UTRECHT (1905) TO SYNOD ASSEN (1926)

Dr A Kuyper was a very learned man and a competent teacher. His lectures were structured and made sense. His students readily believed the things he taught. Often these students didn't realise that his ideas were not always scriptural.

One of his wrong teachings was about the doctrine of the church. Art 27-32 of the Belgic Confession summarises what the Bible teaches

about the church. Prof A Kuyper had quite a different view of the church.

He believed that the church was the sum of the elect.

He taught that true believers from any local church are part of the true, overarching invisible church of all the elect. He taught that it is not so important which church you belong to, for if you are a faithful believer, you belong to that invisible church!

This teaching is still extremely popular today. This theory is attractive but also dangerous.

Dr Kuyper agreed that one church was stricter than another one and that churches have different beliefs. He said, these differences make one church purer than the other church, but we may not condemn the less pure church for it³. Each church is still a manifestation of the universal, invisible church. This invisible church displays the multi-coloured wisdom of God! His students readily adopted these teachings, and when they became ministers, these theories soon spread through the churches.

REVEREND NETELENBOS.

One minister thought he should apply this wrong teaching.

Rev Netelenbos was a minister in Middelburg, a city in the South West of The Netherlands.

On Sunday, June 10, 1917, he decided to preach in the Netherlands Reformed Church, a very liberal church at that time. 'Look', he said, 'there are *believers* in this church, and wherever there are *believers*, there is a '*Christian Church*'.

Do you hear dr Kuyper's ideas coming through?

Immediately this act was condemned, and rightly so. He belonged to the church in Middelburg and was not allowed to place himself under the authority of a liberal church-council. If a minister can do this, members can do this as well and go to



Rev J.B. Netelenbos
1879-1934

³ The Westminster confession teaches this doctrine in Art 25 of the WC.

church wherever they 'feel at home'. This application was going too far. Rev Netelenbos wanted to show the unity of believers in different churches. He ignored the doctrinal differences between his church and the liberal church. His consistory did not approve! They decided to: *"only allow their ministers to preach in Reformed Churches."* They took no further action.

Three years later, in 1920, the consistory deposed Rev Netelenbos because he denied the inspiration of specific Bible passages: Genesis 2&3, the speaking of Balaam's donkey, and Jonah in the belly of a great fish. He denied that these were historical events. According to rev Netelenbos, they were *'an oriental way of presenting specific ideas.'* He was not the only who thought like that.

DR GEELKERKEN AND THE SYNOD OF ASSEN

Sunday evening, March 23, 1923.

As usual, Mr Marinus goes to church in Amsterdam South. His minister, dr Geelkerken, is in the pulpit this evening. He would preach on Lords Day 3 HC., about man's total depravity. 'Little did I think' he writes 'that dr Geelkerken would preach something which would compel me to lodge a complaint against him because of deviation from doctrine. Yet, that's what happened.'

LD 3 asks the question: 'From where, then, did man's depraved nature come? Answer: 'From the fall and disobedience of our first parents, Adam and Eve, in paradise...'

Mr Marinus listened very carefully...

Was the minister saying that the story about the fall into sin hadn't happened? He was hearing things which didn't seem right to him.



Dr J.G. Geelkerken

When the service was finished, Mr Marinus went home. The message he heard this evening bothered him, especially what the minister said about the first sin in Paradise. He decided to write a letter to the consistory.

Dear consistory,

According to Rev Geelkerken, the passage in Gen 3 about that first sin in Paradise should not be understood as factual truth...it is a symbolic presentation to show us how our first parents failed a test. The Reverend also said that man, in his depraved state, is not capable of understanding what happened in Paradise. It is like trying to explain colours to a blind person. Like a blind man does not understand colours, so sinful people don't comprehend what happened in Paradise.

Of course, Rev Geelkerken read this letter. He responded:

'We need to understand that God had to use language and imagery that sinful people can understand. Otherwise, His Word would be as useless to us as a description of colours to a blind person.'

Mr Marinus was not happy with that response. He felt that the minister was vague about something that is clear in the Bible.

He again writes to the consistory:

Dear consistory,

Rev Geelkerken calls into doubt and proclaims as unlikely, the truth of the clear message of Holy Scripture about the fall into sin.

It is downright dangerous; it undermines the truth and weakens and breaks down the reverence for it.

On April 3, 1924, the consistory dealt with the issue and rejected Mr Marinus' allegations.

Mr Marinus decided to follow the church-orderly route and appealed the decision of the consistory to classis.

At the end of his appeal, he wrote:

'I cannot agree with the decision of consistory, as I am firmly convinced that it is entirely wrong.

I advised consistory of this appeal.

I inform you that br J. Vree, 20 Baarstreet, agrees with me.'

What was the response from classis?

'We consider the objections of br H. Marinus unfounded. We think that his summary of that sermon is incorrect and that a brotherly discussion between the two parties ought to resolve this issue.'

Mr Marinus decided to appeal the decision to classis again. (He should have appealed to the regional synod, but he didn't). Classis passed the matter on to a committee. Six months later, he receives a letter saying that the case is suspended. Why?

Well, the committee from classis decided to talk to Rev Geelkerken's consistory. They asked the brothers in consistory if, for the sake of peace and harmony in the church, Rev Geelkerken could please write and sign a simple statement saying that the allegations of br. Marinus was neither meant nor stated by him.

Consistory refused to do this!

At their next classis meeting, they asked Rev Geelkerken again if he could please confirm that br. Marinus complaint was incorrect and misunderstood.

Rev Geelkerken refused again!

Classis passed the matter on to the deputies of the Regional Synod.

On April 1, 1925, classis met again. The deputies of the Regional Synod and Rev Geelkerken are present as well. Rev Geelkerken receives the opportunity to outline the reasons why he doesn't want to give that simple declaration.

He responds:

1. I have given my version and made a copy of the sermon available. That should be sufficient. (The written sermon was not identical to the spoken sermon!)
2. Br Marinus is only one person over against a minister and the 18 members of consistory

who heard the sermon in question; that is telling and should settle the matter.

3. Br Marinus is not willing to personally discuss the issue with me; he is part of a small but turbulent group of people who criticise me.
4. It is not a proper ecclesiastical procedure for classis to ask this declaration from me, just because I happen to be a delegate to this classis.
5. I should not have to give a declaration on what br. Marinus may or may not have heard.

It became more and more evident that Rev Geelkerken very cunningly tried to avoid further questioning of his views.

The deputies of the regional synod decided to draw up a simple statement saying:

'Dr Geelkerken declares that he accepts Gen 3 as an accurate, true and historical record of what happened when Adam and Eve fell into sin.'

Rev Geelkerken refused to sign it!

He believed that the declaration did not do justice to the case and his sermon on LD 3, of which the reference to Gen 3 was only a casual comment.

Classis could not come to a decision. The meeting was adjourned till April 22, 1925.

Classis then met again and decided to write Rev Geelkerken a letter and ask him some very pertinent questions about his view on Gen 3.

Rev Geelkerken sent his reply to the next classis of June 17, 1925. In this reply, he is vague and non-committal. He refuses to answer the questions put to him. Instead, he argues that classis has no authority to ask him those questions.

No surprise that classis is not happy with his response. They write to dr Geelkerken that he failed to answer the questions correctly.

Rev Geelkerken writes a second response. This time he writes a long letter in which he complains that the growing suspicion regarding his doctrinal integrity hurts him deeply and that he decides to appeal to the next Regional Synod.

Classis dealt with this letter at its meeting on July 8, 1925. They asked some professors from the

college in Kampen and the university in Amsterdam for advice. The professors suggest convening a synod to deal with this matter.

THE SYNOD OF ASSEN, JAN 1926

On Jan 26, 1926 the church in Assen convened an extra-ordinary synod to deal with the 'Geelkerken case'. A lot of things happened before and at this synod. Too much to relate here but briefly: on March 12, Synod decides to suspend Rev Geelkerken for three months.

Rev Geelkerken's consistory ignored this suspension-order and the following Sunday, March 14 they conducted a regular church service where Rev Geelkerken preached.

On March 17, 1926, synod decided to depose Rev Geelkerken because he ignored his suspension-order.

THE SEED FOR FUTURE TURMOIL.

What Synod Assen did was wrong. Church orderly, synods are not allowed to suspend or depose ministers. Although they made the right decision and upheld the issue of the historicity of Gen 3, the way they dealt with it was entirely against the church order.

Synod Assen chose the path of hierarchy!

This trend will have disastrous consequences for years to come as we will see in the Liberation of 1944.

QUESTIONS

1. What were some significant publications, and who were the authors?
2. Who responded to some of the wrong ideas in those books?
3. Explain thesis 2 in your own words.
4. Explain thesis 4 in your own words
5. What happened at the synod of Utrecht?
6. Who was Rev Netelenbos?
7. What did dr J.G. Geelkerken teach?
8. What mistake did Mr Marinus make when he appealed for the second time?

9. Mr Marinus didn't want to discuss the issue with dr Geelkerken personally. Any suggestions why not?

10. Do you think Rev Geelkerken's second response is valid?

FOR FURTHER STUDY

1. Place yourself in a situation like Mr Marinus when he first heard this sermon. How would you deal with it?