

1886—A YEAR TO REMEMBER

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James Hastings Nichols has provided us with a seminal work in his *History of Christianity, 1650-1950*. In it he describes what took place to change the face not only of the world but also of the church from the aspect of "the Secularization of the West." According to him it is

. . . . the most complicated and least generally known of the major divisions of church history. The long series of crises during this period can now be seen as a revolution in the relation of Christianity to Western culture. A knowledge of the events of these three hundred years and a clear grasp of their significance are of capital importance to the responsible Christian believer.¹

Without this we cannot understand the world in which we live or the church to which we belong. Here is inescapable interaction, for good or for ill. But far too often the influences are so subtle that their consequences are not realized until it is almost too late to recognize what has been happening. This, too, Nichols has signaled:

Even where doctrine and church life have remained very conservative, the place of Christian doctrine and church life in the minds and practice of Christians has radically changed. Even where confessions, liturgies, and institutions seem substantially what they were early in the seventeenth century, they do in fact represent something significantly different.²

All this brings up the issue whether, wherein and in how far the church can change without compromising the gospel. And answers to these questions are forged in the heat of controversies to which only the indifferent of heart remain cold.

This issue of the church's call to respond to the rapidly changing

life of the Netherlands dominated its history for almost a century. Anyone more than passingly interested in the Reformed or Calvinistic faith will not lightly dismiss this story. Under conditions which held out little hope for spiritual renewal and revival fresh winds did blow across a church seemingly stamped with all the marks of slow and certain death.

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Two movements for church reformation sprang up within the Reformed Church³ of that land within the space of some fifty years.

The first was the Secession of 1834.⁴ Small at its inception and persecuted for a season, it soon grew to such proportions that its impact on Dutch society could not be ignored.

The second was the "Doleantie,"⁵ a term coined from the Latin *dolere*, i.e. "to mourn." Much longer in preparation, it swept with it some 200,000 followers who left the Reformed Church and in 1892 joined with the descendants of the Seceders to constitute the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands.⁶ For some fifty years this united church set an indelible stamp on state and society. Much as in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, the Reformed faith—in its challenge to the secularization of the 19th century—was a force which could not be ignored by either friend or foe. And since the "Doleantie" took shape in 1886, this becomes a year which deserves to be remembered.

In both movements the Reformed faith challenged the spirit of the age, refusing to flinch in the face of misrepresentation, ridicule and abuse. Here were men and women, often with little formal education, who under the guidance of their leaders dared great things for Christ's cause. Their religion was no private opinion confessed in the churches and then cherished in the secrets of the heart. It was to be proclaimed and acted upon to change the course of the nation in which they lived. For them it was life lived under the liberating power of the gospel. Family life and education together with social reform, labor relations, politics and cultural activities of every kind were summoned to serve the glory of God who in Jesus Christ called believers into his kingdom. That light might not be hidden under a bushel. And the impetus to such life-transforming activities came, according to them, only through the pure preaching and teaching of the Word. Therefore the church, fallen

to its low estate, needed an ongoing and thorough reformation. "Ecclesia reformata semper reformanda."

To understand and evaluate what happened during this relatively long period of several decades the facts must be rehearsed. It may well be that Reformed believers in today's world can learn and again take heart.

That faith, despite occasional signs of another springtime, is hardly held in high esteem throughout the world. Ours is largely an age of doctrinal indifferentism; one wherein grace is frequently peddled cheaply and compromises with a secular world are rampant. Far too often the church's prophetic voice is stifled by catering to public opinion and taste. Among some the voice of weeping can still be heard; far too little concerted action summons the churches to an ongoing reformation of life obedient to the Word. We are a rootless people bearing little fruit for the generations to come. Well might the warning of Lord Macaulay, spoken in other circumstances and with a somewhat different aim, be taken to heart: "A people which takes no pride in the noble achievements of remote ancestors will never achieve anything worthy to be remembered by remote descendants."

To listen to and learn from the past, however, is never to idolize it as some golden age. It, too, was not without frustrations and failures. Any attempt to reconstruct it will prove as impossible as it is foolish. Yet those who see God's hand in history will want to remember and learn. It is heritage never to be taken lightly, as one recent writer has confidently affirmed:

The great asset of a tradition is its provision of a rich resource of accumulated wisdom that gives perspective to the present moment. Its wisdom has been tested and tried in the crucible of life, not once or twice, but many times over. Out of the wisdom and stability of a living tradition, it is possible to carry on dialogue or debate with all that is contemporary and new without being tossed about by every wind that blows. Thus traditions give both perspective and depth to the Christian community.⁷

How well leaders and followers in efforts for the reformation of church and society which climaxed in 1886 understood this! They learned from the past without trying to reproduce it. They recognized what had gone wrong and sought to right it. By calling people back to the foundations of life in Christ, they sought to build in the face of distress, disappointment and opposition a living

community of faith which would glorify God and bring strength and joy into lives which had largely lost their way in a rapidly changing and confused world.

This, then, is something of the story leading up to 1886.

Here acquaintance with what had happened in and to the Reformed Church in the Netherlands is necessary. Only so can we assess those developments which produced the final official conflict with ecclesiastical and political authorities as well as some of the fruits harvested in the decades which followed.

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The opening years of the nineteenth century were far from favorable for the pure gospel of God's grace in the Netherlands.

For more than a century the Reformed Church had suffered from spiritual lethargy and indifference. Nearly two thirds of the people were enrolled at that time in what was "the recognized religion of the land." Preachers, teachers and professors were supported by state funds. Schools were still nominally under the control of the church together with many social agencies. Large endowments were at its disposal. But control in church as well as state was almost exclusively in the hands of a cultured aristocracy aided by rich merchants and landowners.

In that church the confessional standards were still honored in name. Few, however, were acquainted with their teachings. Meanwhile preaching had degenerated for the most part into a sterile orthodoxy or a platitudinous morality. Respectability—which meant for the poorer classes "to serve their betters without complaint"—was the hallmark of most church membership.

All the ministers were trained by theological faculties at the state universities. And there began the decline and growing departure from the Reformed faith. By 1750 deistic philosophies, largely imported from England and France, were made to serve as the "key" to the interpretation of Scripture and theology. By most ministers only lip-service was paid to the doctrines of sin and grace. Many ignored man's need for regeneration by the Holy Spirit. The substitutionary atonement of Jesus Christ was often questioned. God indeed existed, according to professors and preachers, but at a remove from the exigencies of daily life. Man was called to create a new and better world by making use of more up-to-date ideas

undergirded by recent scientific discoveries. Such a vague supernaturalism left little room for the miraculous and mysterious attested to by the Bible. It, too, had to be subjected to critical examination and re-evaluation if the man-for-the-new-age was to regard himself as educated. Only here and there were sermons faithful to the Reformed creeds being preached.

On such a nation and church the French Revolution (1789-1795) fell with shattering blows to destroy the complacency in which Dutch society had wallowed for decades. Many welcomed its influence as a fresh breath which promised liberty, equality and fraternity. Soon the "stadholder"⁸ left for exile, while persons of influence welcomed Napoleon and his representatives as those who could insure peace and prosperity. Soon privileges were withdrawn from the Reformed Church by government edict. Ecclesiastical differences were relativized more than ever before. Economic dislocations resulting from the wars in which Napoleon was engaged became severe. The nation was even for a season incorporated into the French empire. Only a few voices were raised in protest to call for a return to those foundations which alone guarantee true liberty.

By 1813 the "stadholder" returned to the Netherlands, now to be crowned as King William I. Having suffered far more than they had anticipated, many looked to him as a restorer of order. Ambitious to strengthen his impoverished and disheartened land, he also imposed without ecclesiastical consent a new set of regulations on the Reformed Church. Now the church was placed under supervision and control of the state. Those few, including *classis* Amsterdam, who dared protest were dismissed without a fair hearing. Ministers, consistories and congregations were bound by the "Reglement"⁹ enforced by boards—classical, provincial and synodical—dependent on royal appointment and approval. Not until 1852 were the last vestiges of this caesaro-papism eliminated. But throughout this period and even later an elite so controlled those organizations that every attempt at reformation was consistently throttled.

By 1834 the heavy hand of these boards fell on several ministers and congregations who urged a return to the Reformed creeds which had never been set aside. This produced the Secession of 1834, many of whose adherents were punished with fines, imprisonment and the quartering of a rough soldiery in their homes. This intolerance of the liberals in control of church and state aroused a growing number of members who remained in the

Reformed Church to the need for reformation. Here began the long, complicated and often painful struggle for church renewal which produced the "Doleantie."

It began in a largely unobtrusive way. Its inception is owed to Willem Bilderdijk (1756-1831)¹⁰ who in his spiritual pilgrimage had been deeply influenced by the Swiss Reveil. Also in that country an anti-biblical liberalism controlled the pulpits of the Reformed churches, not the least in Geneva where John Calvin had labored so arduously and fruitfully. Bilderdijk had always been an ardent supporter of the House of Orange. For this he, too, had suffered exile for a time. Upon his return to the Netherlands he confidently expected a teaching position at one of the universities, for which he was eminently qualified. This, however, was cleverly resisted because of his uncompromising allegiance to the Reformed faith. Soon he became an isolated figure in the land which he loved and for the restoration of whose dignity among the nations of Europe he had labored without let. Having means at his disposal, he gave private instruction in history and the Scriptures to a small group of students enrolled in the Leiden university.

These men, largely drawn from aristocratic circles and stamped with Bilderdijk's convictions, sounded the call for renewal in both state and church.

Two deserve special mention.

Isaac da Costa (1798-1860), a convert from the Jewish faith and baptized in the Reformed Church in 1822, soon won wide recognition as a highly-gifted and an articulate pamphleteer. His *Objections against the Spirit of the Age* (1823)¹¹ stirred a largely slumbering populace. How could such a well-educated and talented young man, so many asked, defend views which professors, preachers and political leaders had denounced as hopelessly antiquated?

Far greater, however, became the influence of Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer (1801-1876),¹² the first Reformed believer of any prominence to enter the political arena and organize the Anti-revolutionary party. As early as 1837 he pleaded the cause of the persecuted Secessionists. By 1848, when Europe was passing through the throes of several revolutions, he penned his epoch-making work *Unbelief and Revolution*.¹³ Only a return to Scripture and the application of its principles to all of life, so he argued, could insure the health of the nation in an increasingly secularized and unchristian world. He, too, had been deeply influenced by

such leaders of the Swiss Reveil as Malan, Merle d'Aubigne and Gausson. Again and again, supported by his friends, he petitioned for the restoration of the Reformed Church in accordance with its historic creeds and church order. Without his life and labors the "Doleantie" would have been, humanly speaking, impossible.

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Before sketching the struggle for church renewal with its implications for state and society, we note the radical changes which took place within the Reformed Church as well as, briefly, within the Netherlands itself. The life of every church is always intertwined, for good or ill, with that of the land in which it lives.

The year of Napoleon's final defeat (1815) marked the beginning of a new era replete with contradictions and conflicts.

Liberated at last from French domination all of Europe experienced a resurgence of nationalism. For kings and their counsellors this demanded a restoration of the "old order" which the French Revolution had attempted to overthrow once and for all. To this end the Congress of Vienna labored but, as succeeding decades demonstrated, quite in vain. England had earlier experienced many of the effects of the Industrial Revolution, including the movement of the masses to its burgeoning cities. This now spread to the Continent. All the problems of urbanization, including economic and social dislocations, multiplied. Wages were kept at levels at which no family could be adequately fed. In countless cities beggars were seen on the streets daily. Large numbers of women were reduced to prostitution to keep themselves and their offspring alive. Children as young as five were chained to machines for twelve or more hours daily. These classes together with the landless field-workers had neither voice in nor recourse to the authorities for redress. As the rich became richer, the poor became increasingly destitute.

It comes as no surprise, therefore, that the nineteenth century while freed from French military power lay wide open to the professed aims of its Revolution. Only so can the repeated crises which afflicted much of Europe, including the Netherlands, in 1830 and again in 1848 be correctly appraised. In this maelstrom of conflicting aims and aspirations Karl Marx stirred the minds of many with his *Communist Manifesto* (1848) and his *Das Kapital* (1860).

Those who came under the bewitching spell of such and similar utopian ideals retained little knowledge of the Bible and far less

faith in God. Multitudes were estranged from the churches, usually because their leaders either kept a guilty silence or else connived with those who controlled industry and government. Theirs was a kind of liberalism—both in church and state—intent on maintaining (if need be by force) the status quo in the face of the suffering millions. Theirs was a “toleration” which allowed for any novel idea except a pattern for reform and renewal.

Yet this century so inauspiciously begun witnessed, as Kenneth Scott Latourette points out in *The Great Century 1800-1914 A.D.*, an unparalleled expansion of Christianity “due primarily to a new burst of religious life emanating from the Christian impulse.”¹⁴ The seeds sown by the Swiss Reveil gave promise of a far richer harvest in the Netherlands than in the land of its origin.

This harvest can only be evaluated rightly in the light also of the changes which affected the early liberalism of that century in the Dutch churches.

In matters of faith and practice it had always been chameleonlike but never so obvious as in that period. At least four or five trends, movements soon to align themselves as distinct parties within the Reformed Church developed.

The early deistic supernaturalism made way for what has become known as “the Groningen school.” Dissatisfied with what many deemed the barrenness of what had long been taught as philosophy and theology in the universities, its champions sought to infuse “a new feeling of life” into the religion of the land. Its first and most notable representative was Petrus Hofstede de Groot (1802-1886), for many years professor of theology at the university of Groningen. Deeply influenced by the Romantic movement as well as by the theology of Schleiermacher, he and his colleagues argued persuasively their new ideas. They confessed faith in a personal God who was love. At the same time they denied all the cardinal teachings of the Bible, beginning with that of the Trinity which they deemed an affront to man’s reason. Salvation was not by faith in Christ and his atoning sacrifice. Rather, it was experienced by following the noble example of Jesus. Here was no room for the miraculous, even though the stories in Scripture which recounted them might well furnish “spiritual lessons.” By employing old terms to which church members had long grown accustomed, preachers deceived many of the unsuspecting who esteemed them reasonably orthodox.

Only Hendrik de Cock (1801-1842), who had suffered at the

hands of Hofstede de Groot and become the father of the Secession, sounded alarm with his colleagues. But they were accounted even by some who claimed to be Reformed as out of step with times which gave promise of much progress. Such protesters were hopelessly narrow-minded and worse than useless in church, society and state!

No one has summarized the teachings of the Groningen school as succinctly as Jan J. van Oosterzee, later professor of theology at the university of Utrecht.

Its view of God was unitarian; its doctrine of sin semi-Pelagian; its Christology arian-apollinarian; its entire conception of the Gospel more paedagogically than soteriologically colored; while it lacked any place for a demonology and concluded its eschatology with the doctrine of the restoration of all things.¹⁵

Yet its champions insisted that they and they alone were true sons of the Reformation in the Netherlands by appealing not to Calvin, who always received from them a biased and bad press, but to the piety of the Brethren of the Common Life and the reasonableness of Erasmus.

This school, however, carried within it the seeds of its own decay. Soon it was criticized for inconsistency and half-heartedness. New voices were heard throughout the land championing a Modernism in which reason, rather than feeling, would reign supreme. Its headquarters were the university halls of Leiden.

A forerunner was Cornelis Willem Opzoomer (1821-1892) who taught philosophy at Utrecht and weaned many a student away from orthodoxy. He acknowledged the presence of sin and evil and some kind of immortality for the soul. But he differed radically from the Groningen school by denying to man a free will. Yet he claimed to be able on the basis of his reasoning to open up bright perspectives for the future. By the use of reason man could realize his full potential, this power distinguishing him from all other creatures.

No one developed these ideas more consistently and persuasively than Jan Hendrik Scholten (1811-1865) against all who like da Costa and others still clung tenaciously to "the outmoded ideas and ideals of the past." Teaching at Leiden from 1843 until his death, he urged a rethinking of every Reformed doctrine, insisting that the reformers together with leaders of the Reveil in his day corrupted especially the doctrine of predestination. His most influential work

was published in 1848 under the title *The Teaching of the Reformed Church set forth and evaluated in its basic Principles according to the Sources*.¹⁶ Eleven years later he penned his *On the Freedom of the Will*,¹⁷ claiming that thoroughgoing determinism alone was genuine Calvinism. Closely associated with him was Abraham Kuenen (1828-1891), widely hailed as a scholar in the fields of Old Testament, the Semitic languages and the history of religion. Not a few of his positions soon came to be associated with the school of Wellhausen.

Since Leiden was the most prestigious university in the land, students flocked to hear and believe what these men had to say. Those who entered the Reformed ministry took with them into their pulpits much of this modernistic leaven. Especially against those positions, soon tolerated by the boards in the Reformed Church, nearly everyone who still claimed to be in some sense orthodox felt compelled to protest.

About that same time a more mediating school developed strength in the university at Utrecht. Although resisting the new modernism, it refused full allegiance to the Reformed creeds.

Its leading exponent was Jan J. van Oosterzee (1811-1882). With evangelical fervor he taught that pastors should edify members of the church by instructing them in piety. He defended the reality of the miracles mentioned in the four gospels. Faith, however, was for him not so much a matter of right doctrine as a godly life which looked to the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. In his struggle against modernistic influences he was ably assisted by Jacobus I. Doedes (1817-1897) who had defended with zeal the views of da Costa. But this mediating position satisfied neither liberals nor orthodox. In the struggle for church renewal they remained more a hindrance than a help.

Meanwhile in this welter of conflicting theologies the "ethical" school also took shape. Its exponents were much closer to those who defended Reformed orthodoxy. Its outstanding leaders were Pierre D. Chantepie de la Saussaye (1818-1874) and Jan H. Gunning (1829-1905), for many years a friend who corresponded faithfully with Abraham Kuyper.

These men taught without apology that Holy Scripture as God's self-revelation provided the only answer to man's deepest and daily needs. They defended justification by faith only, insisting that its fruit was a godly walk. Often they showed great respect for the

Reformed confessions. But the break between them and the Reformed (with whom they for years associated in the struggle for church renewal) became inescapable when they refused to use the officially adopted creeds juridically as a touchstone for orthodoxy in the churches. Here they followed da Costa rather than Groen van Prinsterer. Their devotion to Jesus Christ inspired them to much personal and corporate activity to alleviate the sufferings of the poor, the sick and the rejected. All this was joined to vigorous evangelism among the unchurched. But they held out little hope for a reformation of church and state. Rather would they allow all the conflicting ideas and teachings to continue in the Reformed Church in order to be able to appreciate what still might be good in each. Because they pressed for peace at all costs, while maintaining their own convictions, they soon became known as the "ethical-irenicals."

Meanwhile the Reformed party also grew in size and strength. Especially under the leadership of Groen van Prinsterer it became increasingly aware of its distinctive position. Together with those who followed him he refused to yield the Reformed Church to liberalizing factions, arguing that title-deeds to its name, heritage and properties were legally theirs. Nor was reformation of the church their only goal. Together with new life in the congregations, stirred by vigorous preaching and teaching, both state and society in the Netherlands were to be reclaimed for the service of the sovereign God who would bless also a nation when it walked in his ways. Meanwhile all were to stay in the Reformed Church until its ecclesiastical authorities by imposing their regulations compelled them to sin against the Lord and his Word. In this painful struggle they were to remain true to their professed anti-revolutionary principles.

This position for several decades puzzled many of the Secessionists who had suffered expulsion from the Reformed Church but now were able as a "free church" to administer their own ecclesiastical affairs and to participate increasingly in education, social reform and politics. Yet eagerly they watched what was happening within the church which had disowned them. Often while living in ecclesiastical separation, contacts between the two groups of Reformed believers were maintained and strengthened. For decades they encouraged each other in word and deed as members of the same household of faith. And when at long last the "Doleantie" appeared to be inevitable, this common allegiance to the

Reformed faith sustained many who then were called to suffer for their convictions.

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Now the story of an intense struggle for church reformation and renewal can be rehearsed with a degree of brevity.

Soon after the Secession of 1834 voices began to be raised in the Reformed Church for a return to the creeds. Led by five pastors, no less than 8790 members forwarded a request in 1841 to the synodical Board for a stricter application of the *Form of Subscription*. This was directed chiefly against the growing influence of the Groningen school in the congregations. The ambiguous wording of the *Regulations* allowed a minister to sign agreement with the confessions either "because" (*quia*) or "in so far as" (*quatenus*) he believed them to be in full harmony with God's Word. The board declared that further explication was unnecessary, since agreement with those official documents was only "in principle and essence" (*in hoofdzaak en wezen*). On details one might differ.

This immediately produced reaction.

By the next year "The Seven Gentlemen of The Hague"¹⁸ forwarded their lengthy document. Its author was Groen van Prinsterer and all the signatories were men of great influence in the aristocratic circles of The Hague, followers of Bilderdijk.

The petition began with raising the question what the synodical board meant by "in principle and essence." It thereupon focused attention on four issues troubling the churches: (a) the authority of the creeds, (b) the relation of the elementary schools to the consistories, (c) the nature and quality of theological education which prospective ministers were receiving at the state universities and (d) the reorganization of church administration, urging that this be done in greater harmony with the *Church Order* of 1618-19 which had never been officially set aside.

When the document was made public, followers of the Groningen school were not slow to respond with counter-appeals. And before the synodical board could meet in 1843, no less than 137 ministers and some thousands of church members filed their appeals and grievances. None of these, however, were dealt with individually as the rules demanded. Instead, it simply declared that

“it would continue to abide, once and for all, with its declaration of 1841 on the binding authority of the creeds.”

Dissatisfied with such cavalier dismissal of their well-formulated appeal “The Seven Gentlemen” now published their *To the Reformed Congregation in the Netherlands*.¹⁹ Written by Groen van Prinsterer, this pamphlet consisted of no less than 164 pages. In it the sad condition of the church throughout the land was described in detail. Not only ministers but also elders and church members were urged to take steps against the high-handed action of the board and work diligently for the restoration of the Reformed faith in their own congregations. Instead of acquiescing passively in the deterioration of sound faith and godliness under the influence of false teaching, they were to use every means at their disposal to work towards church reformation.

Deeply disappointing, however, was the position on such renewal taken by da Costa in his *Account of Convictions*²⁰ published even before the board met to give its response. Instead of returning to the official creeds as the norm for orthodoxy in the churches, he argued for a new and fresh confession which would expose the heresies which were then developing and to which, so he believed, the official documents did not provide clear-cut answers. This, of course, was hailed with approval by men of the Groningen school who knew full well that the adoption of a new creed would be quite impossible. Thus they could, in the light of the decision of 1841, continue to interpret the Scriptures according to their own convictions.

All this activity in the Reformed Church was eagerly watched by the Secessionists. Should the synodical board in 1842 and in 1843 bind ministers to the original *Form of Subscription* the way might be opened for their return to the Reformed Church whose spiritual welfare still lay close to their hearts. Here especially the voice of elder J.A. Wormser, ably seconded by the Rev. Anthony Brummelkamp, encouraged struggling brothers and sisters in the old fellowship. One of the results was the organization of an informal association under the name “Christian Friends.” At its meetings not only were ecclesiastical issues warmly discussed, but a strong impetus was provided for engaging together in a variety of educational, evangelistic and philanthropic activities. By these they hoped to reach out to the poor and the unchurched.

Although this organization was discontinued after some years, its influence continued. Several other associations replaced it; first

that of "Friends of the Truth," then in 1859 the "Reformed Missions Society" and in 1868 the "Confessional Union." Also Reformed Ministerial Associations were organized in some of the provinces. Each in its own way contributed to the awakening of a stronger Reformed consciousness among preachers and people.

Meanwhile in 1852 by royal decree the king officially withdrew from exercising direct control over the affairs of the Reformed Church.

To many this seemed the dawn of a new day. Now the church would be able, so they thought, to manage its own affairs without interference. However the organization imposed in 1816 remained in force with all its regulations. Control was still in the hands of the liberalizing groups whose aim was to keep all the congregations, together with their members, in the Reformed Church. To this end they had to frame a new argument for its unique place in Dutch society. No longer, of course, could it be considered the State-approved church, since equal rights and privileges were now granted to the Roman Catholics, the Remonstrants and the Lutherans. Thus without any historical, legal or moral precedent the champions of a united Reformed Church—ready to tolerate every deviation from the confessional standards—argued that it was "the church of and for all the Dutch people." To such "a people's church" anyone who so desired might belong irrespective of doctrinal views. None might be refused permission to partake at the Lord's table or to present their children for the sacrament of Baptism, so long as he or she promised "to submit to the regulations and work for the welfare of church and society."

This view, persuasively and repeatedly articulated, soon barricaded the way to returning in practice to the Reformed confessions. And with the growing influence of modernistic professors and preachers throughout the land, the conflict soon intensified. The only hope for the orthodox as well as the Reformed lay in presenting individual issues and cases for adjudication to the several boards. Only if and when such boards would be willing to temper the application of certain regulations, could they still "in good conscience" obey and remain within the Reformed Church. To leave the organization without making strict and sustained use of the right to protest, so they firmly believed, was in conflict with the anti-revolutionary principles which were to be applied by them also in ecclesiastical affairs.

Several such issues soon arose. And one cannot but marvel at the

almost infinite patience with which especially the Reformed, at times assisted by the "ethical," went to work. Always they hoped, frequently without much hope in their hearts, that at some time the regulations would be superseded by a return to the *Church Order* which would safeguard Reformed preaching and practice at least in the local congregations.

Mention has already been made of subscription to the creeds, especially by the ministers. Here the ambiguity remained. Only in this way, so the argument ran, could the Reformed Church meet the religious needs of all the people who belonged to it.

In 1852 a far-reaching decision was taken by the synodical board. Now article 23 of the *Regulations* was revised to read,

The right of appointing elders and deacons and of calling ministers rests with the congregation.

Before this time such right was limited to consistories entirely controlled by a small group of aristocrats, wealthy merchants and landowners who perpetuated themselves and their friends in ecclesiastical office. Quite without exception they adhered to the regnant liberalism which prevailed among those classes. The modernists, of course, hailed this new rule as in harmony with the revolutionary spirit of those days and its appeal to popular sovereignty. This they saw as one more evidence of true progress in the land.

The confessionally Reformed, however, were much more hesitant in their endorsement. To them it seemed a denial of the authority with which Jesus Christ had endowed those who held office in his church. Since the implementation of this decision was left to the discretion of each local consistory, few of the orthodox and the Reformed carried it out at first. But in his first pastorate at Beesd Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920)²¹ wrote a pamphlet in its defense. After explaining with great care its implications, he argued for its implementation in view of the destitute state of the Reformed Church which had long allowed consistories to impose pastors on congregations contrary to the expressed desires and will of a majority of the membership. Within a few years his advice was followed, especially in several of the largest congregations, much to the amazement and chagrin of the modernists. Now first only elders and deacons and thereafter only ministers of pronounced orthodox convictions were being elected. Large numbers throughout the land uttered sighs of relief when such consistories began to call ministers faithful to the Scriptures. A new spirit seemed to be sweeping through the churches. Perhaps, so people thought, the

struggles for church renewal with all the pain and perplexity occasioned by synodical rulings had not been in vain. But such hopes soon were dashed.

Already before this the lines between orthodox and modernist were being drawn more sharply.

Repeatedly the question was raised how those who denied the Trinity, the substitutionary atonement and especially the resurrection of the Lord Jesus could be tolerated in the Reformed Church. The conflict intensified when first the Rev. L.S.P. Meyboom of the Groningen school was called and installed as one of the pastors of the Amsterdam congregation. Much more confusing was the ruling of the synodical board in the case of the Rev. J.C. Zaalberg of The Hague who was an outspoken modernist. He had served as pastor there, then resigned from office, and after a short while insisted on being again received as pastor there. He was mildly rebuked by that board for his actions, but consistory and congregation were ordered to allow him to continue in office.

Also the practice of preaching "the sum of doctrine contained in the *Heidelberg Catechism*" had to be faced.

As early as 1831 a classis in the province of Groningen had petitioned for the removal of this requirement from the *Regulations*. To this the synodical board had not consented. At Church Visitation it was therefore asked of every consistory whether this practice was faithfully carried out. Usually the question was answered in the affirmative even when done in desultory fashion. Thus the lie crept into consistories to continue for a long time. Aware of this but without any appeal from consistories the synodical board simply dropped the question from the list of those which such visitors had to ask. Protests were raised, especially because no explanation for this illegal action had been presented. But again in vain.

This led to a striking confrontation between the consistory of Utrecht, now largely in the hands of orthodox preachers and elders, and the Church Visitors. When the question was raised whether "the faith of the Reformed Church" was being preached from its pulpits, the chairman of consistory for that occasion, the Rev. G. Barger, asked what the visitors and the *Regulations* meant by that "faith." When no response was given, the consistory refused to answer any of the questions. For this it was soundly rebuked by the classical authorities. This continued for a few years until Kuyper became one of the pastors there. Having attended such a session, he

wrote his well-documented and persuasive pamphlet, *Church Visitation at Utrecht in 1868*.²² Soon it won acclaim for him throughout the land for its masterful defense of that consistory. He demonstrated clearly the impossibility of answering the questions in good conscience so long as the boards refused to make clear their import. Here the integrity not only of Utrecht's consistory but of the Reformed Church throughout the land was at stake. How could that church with its regulations of many kinds still claim to be Reformed, when it openly played fast and loose with the confessions which it officially was pledged to uphold? With his position, of course, not only the modernists but also those of the "mediating" school disagreed vehemently. Now what it actually meant to be "a people's church" began to come clear for many.

Not only was pure preaching at stake, but also the proper administration of the two sacraments. On such occasions appropriate *Forms* were to be read. But often these were modified, abbreviated and even upon occasion completely neglected.

Soon questions arose in connection with Baptism. Should this sacrament be administered to children whose parents did not believe the cardinal truths of Scripture and gave no evidence of a godly life? In a church for all the people anyone could claim this as one of the rights. Meanwhile strange things were happening at the time of its administration by modernistic ministers. Often they refused to baptize "into the Name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit," since they rejected the doctrine of the Trinity. Some baptized "unto faith and hope and love;" others "into the fellowship of the Christian community;" still others "into the Name of the Father and whatever may follow." When the synodical board received protests against such high-handed tactics, it set these aside. Such changes it regarded as irregular but since they were infrequent, so it judged, nothing further need be said about the matter.

An issue of far greater proportions, however, arose in connection with the Lord's Supper. In course of time, because in this matter the Amsterdam consistory refused to bow to synodical regulations, the "Doleantie" was precipitated.

As early as 1862 the true significance of this sacrament was openly attacked by the Rev. Van Gorkum, one of the several pastors serving the Leiden congregation. In an address at the table he boldly ridiculed its celebration.

I cannot understand that this meal is still being continued

after eighteen centuries. It must have some appeal to the human heart, despite what many have thought and written about it in a mysterious fashion. When one reads the writings of these authorities, our mind is enveloped in clouds and mists. No one can understand what they meant, since it is really no more than the remembrance of a friend whom we honor and love.²³

Not satisfied with so troubling the hearts of several parishioners, he stated that it was a remnant of Romish superstition which the reformers had failed to purge from their churches. While Rome believed that salvation could be purchased by indulgences, Luther—according to Van Gorkum—claimed that “God forgave sins *on the basis of the death of a man.*” To which he added: “Which is more blasphemous, the first or the last? It is pagan to affirm that that God would forgive sins for the sake of a mere man!” While the liberals rejoiced that at last a preacher in their congregation dared to speak his convictions, the orthodox were stricken with grief especially when none of Van Gorkum’s fellow ministers raised even the feeblest voice in protest. In “a people’s church” room should be allowed for doctrine of every kind!

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By the early 1870s, however, the lines which divided the several parties were sharpened. In politics and education as well as in the church the supremacy of the liberals no longer went unchallenged.

Groen van Prinsterer had already called attention to the need for schools where children and young people could receive instruction in full accord with Scripture. His efforts in establishing and seeking support for the Anti-revolutionary Party also bore fruit. Seceders as well as orthodox within the Reformed Church promoted a vigorous evangelism which reclaimed growing numbers for the faith of their forefathers. Christian schools without government aid were established in several cities. Institutions which provided care for the aged, the handicapped and the orphaned began to flourish. And as Groen van Prinsterer grew old and grey, his mantle fell on Kuyper. What the people needed above all, so he argued, was strong and sustained leadership. In 1870, Kuyper began a weekly devoted to the welfare of the churches. It was called “The Herald” (*De Heraut*). Two years later under his dynamic leadership a daily newspaper, “The Standard” (*De Standaard*) made its appearance. In it the application of Reformed principles to all of life was urged

in scintillating language which captured the minds and hearts of a steadily growing number of believers. And with this the Anti-revolutionary party gained a few more seats in the Dutch parliament. Kuyper also was elected to such a position. He resigned from his office as minister of the Amsterdam congregation but retained his position as ruling elder. Here together with the "ethicals" the Reformed began to constitute a majority in the largest and most influential church of the country.

With this majority the consistory repeatedly protested against sermons preached by its modernistic ministers but to no avail. Always these men were upheld in office by classical, provincial and synodical boards.

Yet the ruling elders refused to acquiesce. In 1872 seventeen officially declared that "from now on they would withdraw themselves, so far as their office allowed, from the religious activities of their modernistic pastors, would no longer listen to their sermons (*kerkredenen*) or serve with them at the time of the administration of the sacraments." ²⁴ Such a bold step could not go unchallenged by the opposition. Again and again the modernistic preachers protested and received support from the boards. But what they could not stop was the growing number of orthodox elders and pastors elected to serve that congregation. In all this the "ethicals" voted with the confessionally Reformed party to strengthen their influence in consistory and congregation.

This became very evident when a new crisis arose within that church. It involved receiving into full membership of the congregation young people who refused to confess faith in basic doctrines of the Christian religion yet claimed the right to attend the Lord's Supper. In a large church consisting of some 140,000 members with 30 or more ministers the task of interrogating prospective members in full consistory was quite impossible. Hence the church was divided into parishes, with a minister and several elders assigned to each. When the minister had instructed the catechumens, those who desired to profess their faith were questioned by him in the presence of one or two elders. If full approval was given, the matter was referred to the consistory for its endorsement.

Soon it happened, in accord with the official declaration of seventeen of the elders, that assisting elders refused to recommend young people who held ideas in conflict with the Reformed creeds. In 1879, however, a change had again been made by the synodical board in the regulations which left the judgment entirely in the

hands of the pastor who had catechized. The Amsterdam consistory, fully aware of the implications, insisted that it alone had final judgment in the matter so that the holiness of the Lord's table might be preserved. How could those young people, so it declared, who no longer believed in the atonement and resurrection of the Lord be allowed to partake? And when it refused to admit such, the modernistic preachers presented protests and appeals.²⁵ Thus began the long, painful and complex process of appeal and counter-appeal which produced the "Doleantie" in 1886, when no less than 80 members of that consistory were suspended.

Meanwhile the year 1876 was one of deep sorrow for those who championed the Reformed faith. Several of its outstanding leaders among the ministers and the elders died. Kuyper himself was forced to take a leave of absence for his health because he had worked night and day for far too long. Most of all was the passing of Groen van Prinsterer deeply mourned by the Reformed throughout the land. He had pointed the way faithfully for so long without seeing his goals realized.

With the return of Kuyper great things began to happen. In all these efforts he was ably assisted by scholars of great competence. The time had come for more positive action. No longer were the Reformed to content themselves with entering appeals and grievances, most of which were answered by the several ecclesiastical boards in ambiguous language. Conferences and rallies on the Reformed faith with the application of its principles to church, state and society were held throughout the land. Both *De Heraut* and *De Standaard* won a larger reading public. And the crown on all this activity was the establishment of the Free University at Amsterdam in 1880.

This was, especially at that time, an act of true spiritual heroism.

All who still had some appreciation for the Reformed creeds and desired faithfulness to the Bible in the pulpits and catechesal classes recognized its necessity.

For far too long Reformed and even orthodox men were excluded from teaching positions at the state universities. Control of appointments was entirely in the hands of the liberals. In consequence, many young people from orthodox homes lost the faith in which they had been nurtured by their parents and taught in the Christian schools. Under Kuyper's leadership an Association for the establishment and support of such a university, based on the Bi-

ble and the Reformed principles, was organized in 1878. Two years later its doors were opened. Three faculties—in the humanities, in law and in theology—were constituted. Five professors were appointed. It opened in a rented house until Elout van Soeterwoude gave 100,000 guilders for the purchase of modest but more adequate quarters. Only five students were enrolled that first year.

At the first convocation Kuyper delivered his masterful address on *Sovereignty each in its own Sphere*.²⁶ The time had more than come, so he affirmed in language which captivated Reformed believers, to break the stranglehold of an illegitimate liberalism on higher education in the Netherlands. But far more was at stake than freedom under Christ for the schools. Here the speaker enunciated principles for a consistently Christian life- and world-view able to challenge also on a scholarly level an increasingly secularized society. All of life, so he demonstrated, was to be understood as a response to the sovereign call of God. To this people inescapably answered by the witness of their words and deeds either affirmatively and negatively. Those who followed the divine will for every area and relationship of life lived to God's praise and experienced the freedom for which Christ had set them free. For much of this Kuyper drew on Calvin and other Reformed thinkers, couching his address in language directly applicable to the conflicts of his own time. Soon it was published in pamphlet form and widely distributed.

On its significance Robert D. Knudsen has commented aptly in his essay "Calvinism as a Cultural Force,"

It would remain for the great Dutch statesman and theologian to draw together the threads of Reformed teaching and to develop the idea of "sphere sovereignty," or as it has been called "sovereignty in the individual spheres of life," that God, whose absolute sovereignty extends over all of life, has ordained various spheres of society, each of which has a derived sovereignty within its own orbit According to Calvin, as well as Kuyper, one might serve according to his peculiar gifts, his special capacities, in his own place, and be graced with the knowledge that he was engaged in fulfilling a particular calling of God.²⁷

Thus the priesthood of all believers was once again clearly enunciated, broadened and deepened. In such obedient service there was no room for a divorce between "sacred" and "secular." Doctors, lawyers, professors, ministers, merchants, day-laborers and housewives were to see themselves in the discharge of their various

responsibilities as servants of King Jesus who claimed all of life for the glory of God and the extension of his kingdom.

In spite of its seemingly inauspicious beginnings the liberals realized that a new force would be let loose in the land, should this university begin to flourish. Upon it and especially upon Kuyper they heaped their vials of ridicule and vituperation. But hoping that it would die an untimely death, they failed to recognize how the "common people" (*de kleine luyden*) were rallying by hundreds and thousands to this cause.

With the establishment of this university the division especially within the church could no longer be dismissed lightly. Any further compromise, no matter in what ambiguous language decisions by the several ecclesiastical boards might be couched, would meet with stiff opposition from either the modernists or the Reformed.

Soon the question stirred in many congregations: How soon may and should we throw off the yoke of synodical regulations which bind our conscience? How can this be done while remaining true to our anti-revolutionary principles as consistories and church members? This led to intensive study of the principles of Reformed church polity and government in which Dr. F.L. Rutgers, now one of the professors at the Free University, played a leading role. At issue were the rights and responsibilities of every local consistory. Were they legally bound by regulations and decisions of the boards even when these would force them to act contrary to conscience and God's Word? Especially smaller and more isolated consistories needed encouragement and advice.

To meet this pressing need a conference was arranged under the auspices of the consistory of Amsterdam. It was scheduled for April 11, 1883.

Notices were sent throughout the land. Only those delegated by their local consistories and willing to subscribe to the Reformed confessions might participate. Here the issues which weighed so heavily on the hearts of many were to be discussed. The spontaneous response gladdened the Committee on arrangements, when no less than 250 ministers and elders presented their credentials.

In his devotional address the Rev. Kraayenbelt of Amsterdam spoke on Isaiah 54:10-17. Next followed addresses by several who had been asked to speak on issues which faced the churches. And after Kuyper urged that the time had come to take a united stand, the assembly unanimously adopted three resolutions by which all

pledged themselves to abide. These are worthy of note especially in the light of what happened within the next few years. It was decided:

- 1—that the consistories will no longer allow the ministry of the Word to be exercised in their congregations by anyone unwilling to subscribe wholeheartedly to the "Three Forms of Unity;"
- 2—that the ecclesiastical bond (*Kerkverband*) imposed in 1816 must be dissolved, if and when the Reformed are prevented from honoring king Jesus as sovereign in his church;
- 3—that Reformed believers who live under the authority of a consistory whose activity and attitude opposes the Jesus' kingship have the obligation, after earnest admonition, to unite in breaking fellowship with such a consistory and, as the Reformed had done in the seventeenth century, to manifest themselves as a "mourning" (*doleerende*) congregation.²⁸

Also decided was that, if and when urgency demanded this in view of actions which the boards might take against this stand, the Amsterdam consistory should call a similar conference.

Some months later in commemoration of the 400th anniversary of Luther's birth, Kuyper published his lengthy and well-documented *Tract on the Reformation of the Churches*.²⁹ Together with the writings of Rutgers and de Savornin Lohman on church government it pointed the way in which consistories, congregations and groups of faithful Reformed believers could liberate themselves "from the synodical yoke" without making themselves guilty of revolutionary actions.

Now the die was cast.

The crisis arose within the Amsterdam consistory in connection with some young people who desired to make public profession without believing the facts and mysteries of the Christian faith. For years this issue had created difficulties. At long last the synodical board supposed it had found a way out of the impasse which might, conceivably, satisfy both the Reformed and the modernists. If such a profession was not acceptable to a local consistory, let it provide the person involved with a letter of transfer to a neighboring consistory and congregation where such a profession would be allowed. Then the person, having made profession in a Reformed Church, could request transfer back to the consistory and con-

gregation in whose area he or she resided. In this way no one's conscience need be violated!

But the synodical board had failed to reckon with the convictions of the Amsterdam consistory. The majority of its members now were outspokenly Reformed. They refused, therefore, to transfer such young people to another congregation only to have them return later with the right to partake of the Lord's Supper.

Toward the close of 1884 two liberal pastors again presented some of their catechumens for profession of faith in spite of objections raised by elders who had assisted at the initial interrogations. The consistory refused. Appeals were registered with the classical board by the parents as well as the pastors involved. And this board declared that the consistory had acted in accord with the regulations.

Further appeal was made to the provincial board which upheld the request of those who objected. All this took time, especially when the consistory appealed to the synodical board for final adjudication. On November 24, 1885, it declared that the request for transfer of membership had to be honored on or before January 8, 1886. At all costs, so it judged, that regulation must be obeyed for the sake of peace in the churches.

The consistory on December 14 took its stand. To safeguard the holiness of the Lord's table it refused to acquiesce. Knowing full well that soon ecclesiastical boards would interfere in the work of the consistory, it further decided by majority vote that, in agreement with article 41 of the *Regulations*, the use of all church properties was to remain in the service of the legally constituted consistory.

As soon as the classical board heard rumors of this second decision, it took action. Without further ado, even before January 8 which was the time allotted by synodical decision, it suspended *en masse* five ministers, forty two elders and thirty three deacons who had voted in favor of the motion. Immediately it seized control of all the funds and properties of the congregation, arguing that in the absence of a full consistory this was required to preserve peace and unity. In response the suspended members appealed, involving themselves anew in a long and agonizing conflict with the ecclesiastical authorities from whom they could expect little help. The illegality of that classical action of wholesale suspension has been frequently demonstrated. And nothing grieved the hearts of those

who were suspended more than the fact that in the classical board ministers who had pledged themselves at conferences to break "the synodical yoke" when it imposed regulations contrary to Scripture and the confessions voted against them.

As long as appeals against this illegitimate action were pending none of the suspended office-holders engaged in official ecclesiastical activities. However the spiritual welfare of the congregation weighed heavily on their hearts. To provide this ministers and elders arranged for devotional services on the Lord's day and during the week for all who supported them in their cause for justice and truth. Here was neither official preaching of the Word nor administration of the sacraments. But halls rented for this purpose soon were crowded with standing room at a premium. The psalms were sung with new and richer meaning, fervent prayers for the renewal of the Reformed Church as a whole were offered, and messages which brought consolation and strength were delivered. For the sacraments the Reformed could still use the official ministry of the Rev. C. Renier who, because of unavoidable absence from the December 14 session of consistory, was not suspended. Meanwhile attendance at official services conducted by modernists and ethicals showed throughout that year a startling decline in attendance.

Only because the suspended consistory entered its appeals, could the Amsterdam consistory and congregation not become the first of the "Doleantie" churches. That honor of freeing itself from seventy years of bondage to man-made regulations would be accorded to another.

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All eyes were now focused on the dispute between the Amsterdam consistory and the ecclesiastical authorities. Could the church, so many asked, still be renewed from within? Were consistories to retain their right to safeguard the holiness of the Lord's table? Or had congregations together with ministers and consistories drifted so far that true reformation had become impossible?

By this time the issues had become complex indeed.

To be sure, the state no longer controlled the churches. Since 1852 elections to office had been returned increasingly to the consistories with congregational assistance. But every plea to return to

the spiritual liberty insured by the *Church Order* of 1618-19 had been refused directly or indirectly. The *Regulations* remained in force. The bureaucracy in power added repeatedly, always by majority vote, rule upon rule. Here "ethical-irenic" ministers together with some who claimed to be Reformed joined with the liberals to compel committed Reformed consistories to "submit to the synodical regulations or be suspended and deposed!" At all costs the unity of "a people's church" had to be maintained. Had all who claimed to honor Holy Scripture as the only rule for ecclesiastical life stood together, especially in voting, the "Doleantie" could have been prevented and the church renewed.

This was the first tragedy which produced the events of 1886. Synodical regulations in the minds of many took precedence over all else.

But before the suspension of the Amsterdam consistory in January 1886 was adjudicated on synodical level, no less than seven consistories with their congregations liberated themselves "for conscience' sake" from that tyranny.

These seven deserve mention. They led the way for more than two hundred others who followed within a few short years.

The first two were in the province of Gelderland—Kootwijk and Voorthuizen.

Kootwijk was an impoverished and isolated congregation on the sandy heath, far removed from the busy life of the cities. Since 1868 it had been without a pastor. Repeatedly calls had been extended but in vain. In the Reformed Church with some 300 vacant pulpits, what candidate or minister would serve such a small congregation when much more promising fields beckoned?

In 1880, however, the Free University had opened its doors. Its first theological student would graduate in 1884. At the suggestion of the Rev. Willem Vanden Bergh of Voorthuizen the consistory of Kootwijk decided to seek his services. It petitioned classis Harderwijk to allow the young man to exhort. This was granted. Delighted with the messages which he preached, it desired to extend the official call. Would now in the light of the long vacancy these authorities arrange for the necessary examinations before such could be effected? Soon the bitterness even of some of the Reformed against the Free University became apparent. No response was given to the official petition. Fully convinced that the synodical regulations would be used to prevent a godly and

eminently qualified man who had not graduated from the state universities from entering the ministry, two consistories—Voorthuizen and Nijkerk under Van den Bergh's leadership—arranged for an official examination at Utrecht. In this act they were assisted by several other Reformed pastors. The examination was successful. Kootwijk called candidate Houtzagers who accepted. And with this the conflict began in its final stages.

- Realizing in the light of action taken against the Amsterdam consistory that classical authorities would soon take similar steps, Van den Bergh and his consistory prepared an official declaration. In it they decided to "throw off the synodical yoke," breaking not with the Reformed Church (of which they considered themselves faithful members) but with its organization and administration. For a few weeks, awaiting further developments, it kept this decision secret. But when the authorities of classis Harderwyk moved to take action, the "Doleantie" as separation from synodical administration began.

On February 2 candidate Houtzagers was officially ordained with all the appropriate forms. The two assisting consistories were represented by their pastors. To prevent interference this service was scheduled at an earlier hour. When, then, the classical authorities together with some police arrived at 10 a.m. on that day to prevent the ordination, it was too late. Kootwijk's consistory had already taken official action to break with the organization.³⁰ Two weeks later this was ratified by the male members of the congregation.

Now the Voorthuizen consistory realized that its official position in classis was also in jeopardy. Full well they knew that within days suspension from office would be imposed on them. No longer would they be able to exercise their offices for the welfare of their congregation. Thus on February 4 it, too, broke with classical and synodical authorities.

Van den Bergh has often been called "the conscience of the Doleantie."³¹ A few comments on his life, therefore, are in order here.

Early in life he experienced a profound spiritual awakening. Instead of turning to law he determined to prepare himself for the ministry of the Word. Soon he became widely known as a preacher of great spiritual power. Again and again he called for personal repentance towards God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as the

all-sufficient Savior. With profound sorrow he called attention to low spiritual state into which the Reformed Church had fallen and for which, so he insisted, all true believers bore a share of the blame. For too long had also the Reformed, members as well as ministers, been silent. Only by acts of faith-obedience, performed in childlike dependence on the God of all grace, would spiritual life again flourish. Here was a persuasive voice which summoned everyone to a humble and a godly life.

While serving the congregation of Schaarsbergen he received numerous calls. Then came for a second time the call to Voorthuizen in 1884. He again reminded that consistory of those synodical regulations which robbed Christ's church of its loyalty to the Word and its freedom in Christ Jesus. Would they, if and when a situation arose in which the choice was between the crown rights of Christ and the synodical regulations, be willing with him to break with the synodical organization? When they expressed full willingness to take such a step, he accepted.

On January 15, 1886, such a crisis arose in the consistory of Voorthuizen. This was less than two weeks after the suspension of the Amsterdam consistory. A new regulation was now to be enforced on all the churches by that date. Drawn up by the synodical board, it opened every door to further desecration of both Word and sacraments. No longer was any minister bound by the official creeds. Also, anyone desiring to make profession of faith had to be accepted and given access to the Lord's table. Immediately the consistory of Voorthuizen drew up and adopted its declaration to be kept quiet for a few weeks awaiting classical decision on how this would be implemented. As soon as classis took action to impose its penalties, consistory and congregation by an overwhelming majority broke all ties with the ecclesiastical authorities. Voorthuizen, thus, became "the mother congregation of the Doleantie."

Reverberations of this soon reached as far north as the province of Friesland.

In that area the sharp cleavage between Reformed and modernist was more pronounced than anywhere else in the land. Earlier a Reformed Ministerial Conference had been organized to gain growing influence and credence among the people. Several leading ministers had also played a prominent role in the April 1883 conference. But when difficulties threatened to arise, not a few drew back also for fear of losing salary, housing and position.

One man, however, stood firm. He was the joyful preacher of God's rich grace in Christ Jesus, the Rev. J.J.A. Ploos van Amstel. For a second time he was serving the small congregation of Reitsum after having ministered to several larger churches in the land.

Often he has been called "the son of consolation." Few could match his gifts of explaining in language of the common man the rich promises of God in Christ for all who believed. Among his people he was deeply loved. But with the passing of time his conscience gave him no peace. Repeatedly he saw how Scripture with its demands for a faithful congregation were being ruthlessly trampled under foot by synodical regulations. Often parents from modernistic parishes would request that he baptize their infants. This he had hesitated to do, lest even in the largely orthodox classis Dokkum he and his consistory would be called to account. More pressing was his distress when required by classical appointment to serve the Lord's Supper in modernistic congregations. To be sure, he would plead earnestly against desecrating that ordinance by partaking without sincere faith in Jesus Christ as the only Savior. But the liberal membership laughed and partook with boldness.

As member of the classical board he was faced with another crisis of conscience. Could he in that capacity agree to signing the necessary letter of recommendation for a liberal minister leaving for a new field of labor? And what would his consistory do, should he be led by the Lord to leave Reitsum for another congregation? In 1884 his consistory officially decided, in harmony with the decisions of the April 1883 conference, that it would not allow any modernistic minister to conduct worship in van Amstel's absence. This, of course, was in direct violation of the synodical regulations. It was an open attack on the cherished principle of "a church for all the people" no matter what their professed convictions.

Soon this action became common knowledge. Several ministers and consistories of classis Dokkum met unofficially to discuss its implications for themselves. Van Amstel also published a small tract to inform Reformed believers of the sad state to which the church had fallen and urged the necessity of withdrawing support from unbiblical rules. After the action taken against the Amsterdam consistory he wrote in his simple style,

Our heart grieves with sorrow and pain. Those whom we regarded as sons of the house have played the part of the traitor. They have driven out the sons of the house and welcomed into it rebels against Christ. Members of the

classical board have in very truth performed a Cain's deed. It is as if they had murdered their own brothers³²

Four days after its appearance, on February 9, he, his consistory and most of the congregation broke with the synodical organization. They were fully aware that they would lose control of the extensive properties and rich endowments which had long been theirs. But on the following day van Amstel announced with beaming face to the Reformed Ministerial Conference of the province that he and his flock now walked in liberty under the guidance of the great Shepherd of the sheep. So profound was the impression which this made that within a year many other ministers, including Wagenaar and Fernhout and Sikkel with many of their members, joined the "Doleantie" movement.

Other congregations in classis Dokkum followed the example of Reitsum.

The first was the minister of Kollum with his consistory and congregation. Here all the 2,000 inhabitants except those belonging to the small Christian Reformed Church held membership in the Reformed Church. With few exceptions they were wholeheartedly committed to Scripture and the Reformed confessions. This consistory, too, had taken part in the April 1883 conference and fully endorsed its decisions. No longer would it permit anyone to partake of the Lord's Supper who did not without hesitation affirm the cardinal doctrines of the Christian faith.

Less than two years later trouble brewed. Burgomaster Witteveen presented in the name of his daughter a letter of transfer to the Kollum congregation. She, however, refused upon interrogation to express agreement with the creeds. The consistory decided that she could not be enrolled as a member and therefore was not permitted to partake of the Lord's Supper. Without delay the father appealed to the classical board. It upheld the consistory, since membership in a congregation according to synodical regulation was at the discretion of the consistory. He then appealed to the provincial board which reversed the decision of the classical board. What, now, would the consistory decide? While all this was pending, the pastor (the Rev. G.H. van Kasteel) addressed the Reformed Ministerial Conference in October 1885. He informed them of action pending against his consistory and closed poignantly with these words,

Seeing only from below, we can find no resolution to this case, since our opponents are powerful and the obstacles are

great. But among the people of Kollum who love the truth there is neither anxiety nor fear. God himself has strengthened many of the godly in the conviction that nothing other could or might have been done, come what may. The matter has been given into His hands, and in His hands we desire to leave it!³³

Repeatedly the provincial board, composed largely of orthodox ministers, sought to persuade the consistory of Kollum to yield. When such efforts proved fruitless, it decided to suspend van Kasteel and his consistory for four weeks on the grounds of "neglect in carrying out ecclesiastical decisions" and "resisting the ecclesiastical ordinances." This would be implemented on July 9, thus giving the consistory another four weeks for reconsideration.

On July 4 the pastor was to preach his last sermon before suspension would take effect. With unusual persuasion he bound on the hearts of the congregation the seriousness of the situation. Now classical authorities would seize control. The consistory still hesitated to take drastic action. But three days later, the consistory in session for a last time, received a missive signed by nearly all the male members of the congregation. It urged,

Liberate immediately, o consistory, the congregation from the chains of the Synodical Organization and let it be governed only by the mandates of its King Immanuel.³⁴

That same evening decisive action was taken. Notices were sent to the king as well as to the classical, provincial and synodical boards. Two weeks later synod ordered the classical board to take over in the Kollum congregation. Upon receiving these orders eight of the ten members of the classical board resigned with the declaration that they were "convinced in conscience that this official order was not only in conflict with the clear directives of ecclesiastical regulations but also and above all with the demands of God's holy Word."

While all this was pending, difficulties arose in the flourishing congregation of Leiderdorp, South Holland. This strong orthodox church bordered on modernistic Leiden. Because of his involvement in the ordination of candidate Houtzagers its pastor, the Rev. G. Vlug, was fearful that action would be taken against him. To escape he accepted the call to Leiderdorp.

Here, however, he was immediately confronted with another problem. Two young ladies of that church had received

catechetical instruction in the modernistic church of Voorhout. Knowing they would not be received by profession in Leiderdorp, they wanted to make this in Voorhout and then be transferred back to Leiderdorp. But the orthodox consistory refused to grant the necessary attestation. All consistorial discussions with the two on their deviations from sound doctrine proved fruitless. Aware that official action against its delay in the matter was pending, the consistory broke ties with the synodical organization on July 15. Now synod took action. At its request police together with infantry and cavalry rode into town and secured all church properties against use by consistory and congregation. Official protest against such illegal deeds, which involved the government, was made in the Second Chamber at The Hague by Prof. A.P. de Savornin Lohman.

Next to separate from synodical control was the congregation of Gerkesklooster on the border between Friesland and Groningen, belonging to classis Dokkum.

During April 1886 its pastor, fearing conflict with the ecclesiastical bodies, accepted a call elsewhere. The consistory realized that soon modernistic ministers would receive classical appointments to lead worship there. It together with church wardens and town council determined that this would not be allowed. And to escape the wrath of the boards which would soon impose suspension, it decided on October 19 to withdraw from their control. The synod, however, still imposed suspension and appointed a new consistory from among the few liberals who had not joined with the large majority.

Also Anjum, another congregation in classis Dokkum, broke the synodical fetters. For seven years it had flourished under the sound preaching of the Rev. J. Langhout. Twice each Lord's day the large church edifice was filled with standing room at a premium. Repeatedly in sermons he urged faithfulness to the Lord Jesus Christ on the part of young and old. They were exhorted to live under Christ's kingship in home and school, in church and society and state. Echoes of what had long been taught by Groen van Prinsterer and Kuyper stirred the people to activity.

Here the crisis broke out because of another issue. An outspoken liberal came to live in the village. He insisted on being enrolled as a member in good standing in the congregation. But he refused to acknowledge that the doctrine taught in Scripture, the creeds and the weekly sermons was the true and complete doctrine of salvation. When his transfer was not accepted, he appealed to the

classical board. Its membership had changed radically when the eight had resigned protesting action taken by synod against the Kollum consistory. On December 2 the new board insisted that the consistory enrol the protester within eight days. In the light of what had been happening elsewhere, it agreed that further protest would prove fruitless. Two days before the time for reconsideration expired, it joined those who insisted that God's truth took precedence over any synodical regulation or decision. No longer would the "lie" be tolerated in Anjum's congregation.

During all of 1886 Amsterdam's consistory faithfully registered its protests and appeals. In July the authorities, their "patience at an end," decided to depose 75 members of the consistory, five having withdrawn their support from the original motion which occasioned the conflict. Again the consistory protested to the synodical board against the injustice and the illegality of the procedures. But to no avail.³⁵ On December 1 synod spoke its last word. The case, so it argued to confuse many, did not involve doctrine and discipline required by Holy Scripture but rather deliberate insubordination to ecclesiastical regulations taken by majority vote. Soon this "myth" was widely propagated to soothe the consciences of ministers and members who still insisted that they were Reformed by conviction. Much more fruitful and surely less painful, so they opined, was a decision to stay within the organization, walk with due care and so work towards renewal of the church from within.

No one championed this position as fervently as did Dr. Ph. J. Hoedemaker. As one who loved the Reformed faith and proclaimed it with enthusiasm, he had cooperated for more than a decade with Kuyper and others in the struggle for church renewal.³⁶ Time and again he registered objections against new rules and regulations which threatened the integrity of the Reformed Church. Enthusiastic for Christian day schools, he helped organize the Free University and became one of the first five professors. Even as late as December 1886 it seemed that he might be ready to break with the synodical organization. But on "method," so he explained especially afterward, he differed with Kuyper and his friends. To him it seemed requisite that *all* the consistories and congregations would rise against the tyranny of ecclesiastical bureaucracy and regulation so that the entire Reformed Church would at one stroke be liberated; no consistory ought act independently of the others. When, then, the Amsterdam consistory broke with the synodical organization after exhausting every avenue of appeal, Hoedemaker

not long afterward resigned as professor and accepted a call to the Frisian church of Sneek, where a few years before he had challenged a large assembly,

You have an ancient and courageous proverb, viz. we Frisians kneel only before God, but now you are lying on your knees before the Synod

Many followed the example of Hoedemaker, so that fully as many who championed the Reformed confessions remained within the old establishment as left under protest and duress.

This was, without doubt, the second and perhaps most painful tragedy of the "Doleantie." Ties of long and strong and blessed friendship in the struggle for church renewal were ruptured, never again to be fully healed.

Meanwhile both the secular and the religious press castigated with almost unparalleled fury all who broke with the synodical organization. Here the vituperation, accompanied with slanderous and deceptive cartoons, exceeded that heaped on the early Secessionists. Always the focus of the attack was on Kuyper, despite the undeniable fact that in his work as well as his writings he acknowledged himself dependent on the scholarly theological and legal research of his colleagues. He, so the story went throughout the land, engineered the "Doleantie." He needed congregations for prospective graduates of the Free University. He championed not the old faith of the fathers but a "Neo-Calvinism" of his own fabrication which was a far cry from what Calvin had so zealously taught. He was willing, perhaps even eager, to destroy the peace and unity of the Reformed Church for personal pride and power. Even at this late date he remains the *bete noire* to large numbers within the Reformed Church where confessionals and liberals of every stripe still live together in an uneasy peace. And—so that the story may be told in full—also in the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands little more than lip-service is paid to convictions for which Kuyper with his colleagues and thousands of common folk prayed and worked so fervently.

Repeatedly those who defended the actions of consistories and congregations who "went in Doleantie" have been accused of being independentistic rather than Reformed in church polity and government. At issue was the relative autonomy of local consistories within the Reformed Church as a whole.

Much attention during the struggle for church renewal had been devoted to this question, especially by F.L. Rutgers and A.M. de Savornin Lohman. With cogency they appealed to positions stated and elaborated by that venerable Reformed canonist and theologian, Gijsbert Voetius. Each consistory, so he had affirmed, had its authority to serve the congregation directly delegated to it by Christ himself. But for the sake of its own welfare and that of other congregations it was in duty bound to affiliate with those holding similar confessions and church order as a federation of churches. Out of such federation arose classes of neighboring congregations as well as provincial and national synods. Hence, when broader assemblies imposed regulations and decisions contrary to the "official documents" upon which the union of congregations was based, a consistory had not only the right but also the duty to break with such tyranny.

This, however, was a far cry from complete independence of each local congregation. All decisions in harmony with the confessions and the church order, when adopted by a majority of those delegated to the broader assemblies, were to be enforced.

That the "Doleantie" congregations were not independentistic can be clearly demonstrated by the facts.

Already the first two churches consulted together. Soon the few Frisian churches followed their example and constituted themselves as classis Dokkum. When the Amsterdam and shortly afterward the Rotterdam churches officially broke ties with the synodical organization, broader assemblies were organized to gather at stated times. Month after month more congregations followed those who led the way until their number soon exceeded two hundred. All these broader assemblies declared themselves to be "provisional" (*voorloopig*) in character. To the unprejudiced reader the reasons for this are self-evident.

First of all, it was fervently hoped that perhaps even a majority of congregations together with groups of believers would join the movement. If "ethical-irenics" together with those of the mediating school who could still honestly subscribe to the Reformed creeds were to join with the Reformed in church renewal, then the tide might still be turned in favor of orthodoxy within the Reformed Church and the "breaks" healed throughout the land. Hence many decisions of such gatherings were restricted to implementation of the venerable *Church Order* of 1618-19. No boards were chosen; only such deputies and committees elected on a temporary basis to

carry out decisions of the assemblies. Meanwhile many "Doleantie" congregations were involved in legal procedures against them. While these were being processed, no final decisions could or should be reached.

None of the "Doleantie" leaders ever presented themselves and their followers as paragons of Christ-like faith and obedience. Far too often did they publicly acknowledge that for decades they, too, had been negligent in promoting a thoroughgoing reformation. Nor to their minds was outward reformation of church structure adequate. Again and again, in published sermons as well as in a flood of articles and pamphlets, they pleaded for an ongoing renewal of heart and life.³⁷ This alone could honor the Savior-King who had purchased them with his precious blood. But bitterness against them mounted by the month especially because as Reformed they claimed a legal right to the "title-deeds" of their church records, funds and properties.

To promote spiritual renewal gatherings of all kinds were held throughout the land. To awaken and encourage elders and deacons to their responsibilities this was deemed essential. In many congregations discipline had been neglected for decades. In others the diaconate no longer cared for the sick and indigent in accord with the demands of Scripture. Soon Reformed mission and evangelistic efforts were placed under direct supervision and control of local consistories to stimulate believers. Christian schools on all educational levels flourished as never before. Institutions of Christian mercy were established in several provinces. The Anti-revolutionary party gained many new members in both provincial and national legislatures. Organizations for laborers and for farmers, based on Reformed principles in obedience to the Word, enrolled thousands. Seldom had the land seen such committed, positive and enthusiastic responses to the gospel on the part of so many.

Nowhere was this more evident than in the churches themselves. Repeatedly court cases went against them. Now deprived of church edifices, parsonages and state funds for salaries, the members rallied much to the amazement of the Dutch populace. Few belonged to the wealthier classes. But within a few brief years churches, parsonages and schools were built and paid for. The stories of astounding financial sacrifices by these believers ought not be forgotten by those who even now enjoy the heritage which has been bequeathed by that generation.

In the city of Enschede, where the textile industry flourished but wages were exceedingly low, a sizeable number had joined the "Doleantie." Few could give more than a guilder or two in addition to their offerings for support of the pastor and his family. But then men and women, young as well as old, having no more money to give, brought silver and gold and family heirlooms of many kinds to help pay for the erection of a suitable church building. And this example was followed in other places.

Soon descendants of the Seceders of 1834 recognized in the followers of the "Doleantie" kindred spirits.³⁸ Official contact between the two groups who cherished the Reformed faith increased. Could they before the face of the Lord Jesus Christ, so many asked, remain ecclesiastically separated while professing allegiance to the same creeds and church order?

To answer that question, however, difficulties often occasioned by misunderstanding and suspicion had to be removed.

Christian Reformed ministers, consistories and people often wondered why those who suffered grievous injustice at the hands of the boards did not immediately leave to join their ranks. To which champions of the "Doleantie" responded that they had to await as congregations the outcome of legal procedures in the hope of being legally recognized as the true continuation of the Reformed Church.

Others within that now flourishing denomination took great offense—and not without justification—at what Kuyper at times had written about the Secession as untimely. Others were adamantly opposed to some of Kuyper's theological constructions, especially on the doctrine of God's covenant of grace which had earlier been a storm-center of debate within Christian Reformed congregations. To which defenders of the "Doleantie" responded that their leader was responsible for his own views. No congregation was bound to endorse them. The basis for eventual church union between the two groups would solely be Holy Scripture and subordinately the Reformed creeds and church order.

But some of the "Doleantie" had difficulties with the Christian Reformed Church. None doubted its loyalty to the Word and the confessions. But what about its conception of the relation between local consistories and broader assemblies? Were not its *Regulations*, officially adopted in 1869 when appealing to the king for legal recognition as a Reformed church, a dangerous infringement

on the rights and responsibilities of local consistories? Was not the adoption of the name "Christian Reformed Church" (here the singular) a denial of the freedom for which they as members of "Doleantie" had been made to suffer? To them it seemed as if that church was moving in the direction of a tightly synodically-controlled organization which, given time, might well act as illegally and unbiblically as the several boards in the Reformed Church.

All this made even the name, seemingly secondary to many in our day, a question of paramount importance.

Time and again the two synods took up official contact with each other in the hope of ecclesiastical union. This was a laborious task, also because of suspicions on both sides which did not melt away over night. But leaders in both churches were convinced that they were not permitted to go their separate ways. And by far the majority in both groups were persuaded of the same.

Concessions were therefore made over a period of some four years, until in 1892 the union was consummated on synodical level in the city of Amsterdam.

No longer would churches of the "Doleantie" be organized in places where there was already a church stemming from the 1834 movement. Where the two congregations existed side by side, this was to be allowed for a season but then with the intention of uniting under one consistory as soon as feasible. All congregations were to be integrated with the observance of geographical boundaries into unified classes and provincial synods. National synod would be convened, in accord with the *Church Order* of 1618-19, only once every three years. No permanent boards or committees were to be elected, lest there be infringement on the rights and responsibilities of local consistories. Returning as far as possible to the original name of past centuries, the united group would be legally registered as "The Reformed Churches in the Netherlands." Thus it was declared that congregations did not constitute one over-arching and all-embracing church, controlled by synodical legislation, but a federation of local bodies of believers bound by the same confessions and church order. And lest anyone consider them a kind of "people's church," the preposition *in* was deliberately selected in preference to *of*.

Greater difficulty arose in connection with theological education.³⁹ The churches of 1834 were deeply committed to such education sponsored and controlled by the churches themselves; Kuyper

with others had championed with weighty arguments such education given on university level free from direct interference by either church or state. For far too long had they witnessed how ecclesiastical authorities in the Reformed Church had prevented appointments of confessionally Reformed professors to the theological faculties in such institutions. Only the theological faculty of the Free University, and that especially at the insistence of Willem van den Bergh, was supervised by appointees of the churches. This issue could not be resolved at the time; hence both institutions were to continue with equal access to examinations for candidacy and ordination by the classes for their graduates. Perhaps most significant of all was the insistence that at broader assemblies only accredited pastors and elders of local congregations could make decisions.

By the summer of 1892 most of the questions which had to be faced were satisfactorily answered. Where disagreement still continued, the leaders counselled patience and prayer. The synods of both churches met in Amsterdam to take final action. When the proposal for unification was adopted by both, delegates met with many others who could crowd into the building for a service of praise and thanksgiving on June 17, 1892.

It was a day of celebration.⁴⁰

Leadership for that session was in the hands of the Rev. W.H. Gispen, president of the Christian Reformed synod of that year, and Dr. Kuyper who had presided at the most recent of the "Doleantie" synods. Stirred to the depths of their souls they first sang a Dutch versification of Psalm 126:

Dies hebt G', o God, hun last verlicht,
 Zelfs voor huns vijands aangezicht;
 Verlos ons ook, als onze vaad'ren
 Wil ons, nog overal verspreid,
 Genadig weer bijeen vergaad'ren,
 Zoo word' Uw Naam en roem verbreed.

Geloofd zij Isrels groote God!
 Zijn gunst schenk' ons dit heilgenot;
 Zoo willen wij Zijn goedheid danken.
 Dat al wat leeft Hem eeuwig eer',
 Al't volk zegg' Amen, op mijn klanken!
 Juich aarde, loof den Opperheer!⁴¹

Thereupon the resolutions adopted by the two synods were read. Some addresses followed. And most noteworthy among these were

two. First, a letter was read which the widow of the Rev. Hendrik de Cock, father of the Secession of 1834, had written for the occasion. She was far too frail to attend such a celebration. Thereupon, attention was drawn to the Rev. Simon Van Velzen, the last of the leaders of that movement; the Rev. A. Brummelkamp having passed away only a short time before. Van Velzen, carried into the assembly on a chair, was too weak to address the gathering. His son read a message from the father. To which Gispén then appropriately responded to Van Velzen:

I know not how it is in heaven, but if the blessed there speak together and show interest in the struggle and the joy of the Church on earth, then tell your venerable fellow-soldiers what you have witnessed here, and their joy will be great when you announce to them: They are one!⁴²

Only three congregations, two ministers and a few groups of believers belonging to the Christian Reformed Church were convinced that they could not agree with the decision of their own synod. Shortly afterward they constituted themselves a continuing church which still exists today. Also this action, quite insignificant in the light of the union of more than 700 congregations with a membership in excess of 400,000, gave its measure of pain and pause amid great rejoicing.

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With this the story of the "Doleantie" and its union with the descendants of the Secession of 1884 is at an end. What remains is a review of its fruits for the revival of the Reformed faith.

For nearly fifty years the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands flourished in that country and were influential for a revitalization and development of the Reformed faith in many parts of the world. Much of this was accomplished by the scholarly works written by its leaders, including professors of the Kampen Theological School as well as the Free University. For decades Herman Bavinck's *Reformed Dogmatics*⁴³ remained a standard, even a classic work for every Reformed seminary. He had addressed himself also to the issue of the relation between church and culture in a brief pamphlet. His stress on "common grace" was thoroughly worked out by Kuyper in a three-volume work entitled *Common Grace*⁴⁴ and supplemented by a more popular and practical three-volume work under the title *For the King*.⁴⁵ In 1898 he was introduced to the

American ecclesiastical world, when he delivered his lectures on *Calvinism* at Princeton University. Fully as important, however, for the revival of sound preaching and godly living were the commentaries, theological and historical studies, sermons, works on church government and meditations which literally poured from the Dutch presses. Avidly were these read in other countries, especially in South Africa where the Dutch language was no barrier.

Meanwhile relations with Reformed churches in other countries were eagerly pursued. Already the Christian Reformed Church had taken fruitful steps to strengthen those ties which ever since the days of the synod of Dordt 1618-19 had been all but dissolved. In this way churches in one country could render invaluable counsel, encouragement and assistance to those in another. But not until 1946—too late in the light of the disastrous rupture in the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands—did such efforts result in the organization of the Reformed Ecumenical Synod.

Far more fruitful, however, was the deepening of spiritual life among those who in the first decades belonged to this strong united church. To this the Rev. K. Fernhout, one of the early "Doleantie" pastors, has called attention in his contribution to *The Reformation of '86*.⁴⁶ Once again the believers understood what it meant in daily practice to belong to a true and faithful church. Here the Word was purely preached and discipline according to Holy Scripture exercised. Elders and deacons as well as pastors kept spiritual watch over those entrusted to their care. Once again both the consolations and the obligations of belonging to God's covenant, sealed with the Savior's blood, were understood. Love for each other together with love for a lost and lonely world came to vigorous expression. But with all this, warnings were repeatedly sounded against self-satisfaction and smugness. Until the demise of Kuyper and Bavinek within a half year of each other, despite weaknesses to which all Christians are heir, life as a close and careful walk with the Lord continued in most congregations.

But no church or federation of churches can rest on laurels won at the expense of struggle and suffering in the past. A church which does not continue to reform itself according to the Word, daily if need be, will inevitably lose its birthright. And painful as this is to write for one whose grandparents played more than minor roles in both the Secession of 1834 and the "Doleantie" of 1886, this we are convinced has been happening with almost unbelievable rapidity in recent decades to The Reformed Churches in the Netherlands.

Well may it be that this is the most profitable lesson to be drawn from the story of 1886.

A church is not truly and fruitfully Reformed simply because it officially has a Reformed creed and church order. Nor does it deserve to be so honored because its ecclesiastical machinery is well-oiled and operating smoothly. Even the most inspiring and consistently Reformed sermons do not guarantee that congregations are spiritually flourishing to God's glory under the kingship of Jesus Christ. What is needed is a deeply experiential and committed faith which confesses personal and corporate sins, seeks again and again cleansing through the Savior's blood and pleads for that daily grace which enables a walking in the ways of the Lord.

Such individuals and churches take seriously the words of the Savior, "I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown."

And knowing their weakness in the face of inescapable trial and temptation, they pray without ceasing for the Spirit's mighty working, "Awake, o north wind, and come, o south wind! Blow on my garden, that its fragrance may spread abroad." Only then will the Lord's favor rest upon a Reformed people from generation to generation.

NOTES

¹Nichols, *History of Christianity, 1650-1950* (New York: Ronald Press, 1956) iii.

²Nichols, iii.

³Reformed Church in this article always indicates "De Nederlandsche Hervormde Kerk" or "Kerkgenootschap," i.e. "ecclesiastical society."

⁴On the history, development and influence of the Secession cf. *The Reformation of 1834* (Orange City: Mid-America Reformed Seminary faculty, 1984).

"Doleantie" is one of those Dutch terms which defies precise translation into English. As originally employed it referred to those consistories and church members who, as members of the Reformed Church, sorrowed before God and complained to the ecclesiastical authorities because of defections in doctrine and discipline which were not merely tolerated but officially approved and enforced by those in power. When congregations and church members left the Reformed Church, as several writers have cogently pointed out, they could not rightly be called "doleerenden," since they had then freed themselves from "the synodical yoke." However the term continued to be applied to them by others as well as by themselves for several years.

⁶Reformed Churches in the Netherlands in this article always indicates "De Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland"

⁷John H. Leith, *Introduction to the Reformed Tradition* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1977), 30.

⁸"Stadholder," not to be confused with an absolute monarch. Rather, with and after Prince William the Silent the Netherlands acknowledged successive princes of the House of Orange as "head of the nation and defender of civil and religious liberties." They served and were served by those appointed or elected as members of the States General. Here was a balance of power within government quite without parallel in Europe during those years.

⁹"Reglement," hereafter Regulations, as the corpus of synodical rules which were repeatedly revised after their official adoption and imposition on all consistories and congregations in 1816. Such repeated changes wreaked havoc with the peace and stability of the churches and always played into the hands of the liberalizing element who refused to be bound by the creeds as the official position of the Reformed Church.

¹⁰On Bilderdijk cf. the voluminous literature on his life and work including: da Costa, *De Mensch en de Dichter Bilderdijk*; R.A. Kolléwijn, *Bilderdijk, Zijn Leven en Werken*; A. Kuyper's address given in 1906, commemorating the 150th anniversary of the man's birth, "Bilderdijk in Zijn Nationaale Beteekenis;" especially H. Bavinck, *Bilderdijk als Denker en Dichter*, also 1906. On his influence during the struggles for church renewal cf. H. Algra, *Het Wonder van de 19de Eeuw* (Franeker: T. Wever, 1966).

¹¹*Bezwaren tegen den Geest der Eeuw.*

¹²On Groen van Prinsterer and the influence of the Swiss Reveil on his life cf. H. Algra, *Het Wonder van de 19de Eeuw*, 83-94; for his activities as reformer within the church cf. the essay by H.H. Kuyper "Groen's Strijd voor Kerkherstel" in *De Reformatie van '86* (Kampen: J.H. Kok, 1936), 7-35.

¹³*Ongeloof en Revolutie.*

¹⁴Kenneth Scott Latourette, *The Great Century (1800-1914), Europe and the United States*, vol. IV in *A History of the Expansion of Christianity* (New York and London: Harper and Brothers, 1941), 4. His first chapter, together with the second, provides an illuminating survey of the responses of the church to the social, economic and political revolutions which characterized the 19th century, 1-8, 9-21.

¹⁵Quoted by J.C. Rullmann, *De Strijd voor Kerkherstel* (Amsterdam: W. Kirchner, 1915), 6.

¹⁶*De Leer der Hervormde Kerk in haar Grondbeginselen uit de Bronnen voorgesteld en beoordeeld.*

¹⁷*De Vrije Wil.*

¹⁸"De Zeven Haagsche Heeren" were D. van Hoogendorp, M.B.H.W. Grevers, A. Capadose, G. Groen van Prinsterer, P.J. Elout, J.A. Siegendonck and C.M. van der Kemp. All except one were trained and well-versed in law and could therefore ex-

pose with a relentless and accurate appeal to the laws of the Netherlands the illegality of the 1816 reorganization of the Reformed Church

¹⁹*Aan de Hervormde Gemeente in Nederland*

²⁰*Rekenschap van Gevoelens*

²¹The writings of and about Abraham Kuyper are so voluminous that mere mention would fill hundreds of pages. Invaluable as a reference work for the former is J C Rullmann, *Kuyper-bibliographie* in three volumes, listing and commenting briefly on his books and pamphlets. On his life and labors cf *Kuyper-Gedenkboek* (1937) written by several who knew him intimately, also an appreciative treatment by W J Aalders of the Reformed Church, *Dr Abraham Kuyper* (1921). The standard work in English is still Frank Vander Berg, *Abraham Kuyper* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1958).

²²*Kerkvisitatie in Utrecht in 1868 met het oog op den kritieken toestand onzer Kerken historisch toegelicht*. Already in the first chapter he spoke without apology about de Leugen in de Kerk. This was followed by *Verzameling van officieele bescheiden* which reproduced all the official documents of consistory, church visitors and classical board. That board warned the Utrecht consistory what the consequences might well be for the peace and unity of the Reformed Church if it persisted in its refusal to cooperate with the demands laid down in the Regulations. To which said consistory responded: "Here everything depends on the question whether at any price the society (*genootschap*) is maintained even with the loss of the Church (*kerk*)—or whether above all else the Church is to be rescued even though then the peace of the society does not remain unimpaired—and that it (i.e. the consistory) judges its recent behavior (*gedragsslijn*) to agree with the demand of duty and conscience." Rullmann, *De Strijd*, 170.

²³Rullmann, *De Strijd*, 136.

²⁴Rullmann, *De Strijd*, 175.

²⁵On change in the Regulations which resulted from several protests by modernistic ministers against the recalcitrance of orthodox elders to approve their catechumens for public profession of faith cf Rullmann, *De Strijd*, 207-210.

²⁶*Souvereiniteit in Eigen Kring*

²⁷Robert D Knudsen, "Calvinism as a Cultural Force" in *John Calvin His Influence in the Western World* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 25.

²⁸Quoted by J C Rullmann, "D'Mater Salem" in *De Reformatie van 86*, 57.

²⁹*Tractaat van de Reformatie der Kerken*. This expanded pamphlet together with that of de Savornin Lohmann and Rutgers on *De Rechtsbevoegdheid onzer plaatselijke Kerken* as well as many articles appearing in the religious periodicals of those few years instructed consistories how they, in full agreement with Holy Scripture and the principles of Reformed church polity, could and should break with the synodical organization. Against those views, especially after the "Doleantie" broke out, several in the Reformed Church wrote. Foremost among these were Ph J Hoedemaker, *Hoe oordeelt de Heilige Schrift en hoe oordeelen de Gereformeerde*

Vaderen over Afscheiding en Doleantie? (Sneek, 1888) and H G Klijn, *Algemeene Kerk en plaatselijke gemeente* (Dordrecht, 1888)

³⁰This declaration by the Kootwijk consistory is reproduced in full by J C Rullmann, *Doleantie-stemmen* (Kampen J H Kok, 1936), 94-96 It deserves to rank with the Acte van Separatie of Wederkeer drawn up and adopted by the consistory of Ulrum in October, 1834

³¹The deep spirituality and pathos of Van den Bergh which stimulated him to labor for church renewal and reformation is demonstrated nowhere more effectively than in his *Aan de Gereformeerde Kerkeraden van Hervormde Gemeenten*, written shortly after the Doleantie in his own congregation It is dated February 22, 1886 Cf Rullmann *Doleantie-stemmen*, 97-100 Afflicted with tuberculosis he left for Switzerland and died at an early age in 1890

³²J C Rullmann *Losgemaakte Kerken* in *De Reformatie van 86 85* To what has already been noted Ploos van Amstel added, But it remains painful that so-called brothers have accomplished this work of demolition Yet in this we recognize the hand of God, a righteous judgment because of our unfaithfulness in earlier and later times We have had too much patience with the preachers of unbelief And now ours (i e brothers) are cast out! Fully deserved each one of us may well say from the heart be it with deep shame The history of these days must produce in us profound humility and sincere return to the Lord For us it must be *God's voice* which reminds us that we must go our separate ways and may no longer stay together 86

³³J C Rullmann *Losgemaakte Kerken*, 89,90

³⁴J C Rullmann *Losgemaakte Kerken*, 91

³⁵Kuyper together with the Amsterdam consistory repeatedly appealed to the synodical board not to break the tie which bound said consistory and congregation to the Reformed Church by a final decision Even after its final decision was taken on December 1, 1886, by that board, Kuyper on December 4 published in *De Heraut* his *Laatste Woord tot de Conscientie van de Leden der Synode* Only those blinded with prejudice and accusing Kuyper of gross hypocrisy by judging his motives will perpetuate the myth that he deliberately engineered the Doleantie and knowingly misled his large following Cf J C Rullmann, *Doleantie-stemmen*, 138-144

³⁶Nothing grieved the heart of Kuyper and that of his friends and supporters more deeply than the break with Hoedemaker Its roots development and consequences are worthy of a doctoral dissertation, since the issues involved in that situation still disturb all those who yearn and work for church renewal Much, much more was at stake than some abstract principles of Reformed polity Here were crises of conscience deeply felt by many on both sides of the dispute on when and how ecclesiastical ties can may and should be broken

³ Often the piety of the 1834 Secession leaders and followers has been praised to the discredit of the spirituality of those who championed the Doleantie, as if the latter were no more than an attempt to reform ecclesiastical structures It is more than time that also this myth be exposed For the interested reader in this aspect of the Doleantie easy access to relevant material is provided again by J C Rullmann, *Doleantie-stemmen* Here are pertinent excerpts from such sermons and pamphlets

as Ploos van Amstel's "Een woord aan hen, die Jezus Christus erkennen als het eenig Hoofd der Kerk," 101-106; Kuyper's "Alzoo zal het onder U niet zijn" on Matt. 20:25-28, 107-112; also his "Een ziel die zich nederbuigt" on Ps. 42, 155-164; Rutgers' "Wacht uwzelven," 181-188; J.C. Sikkels' "Gij zijt van Christus," 189-194. Undoubtedly the chief reason why Kuyper captivated and captured the hearts of thousands of believers must be ascribed to his soul-searching and soul-stirring meditations. Several collections of these have also appeared in English translation. Those who have not steeped themselves in these writings do not know Kuyper the child-like believer.

³⁸Some of the most fascinating responses of Christian Reformed Church (*Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerk*) leaders to what was happening throughout the Reformed Church in 1886 are found in *De Bazuin* ("The Trumpet"). Each time another consistory and congregation "broke the synodical yoke" it received from Prof. A. Brummelkamp "a diploma of honor!" For example and comment cf. Rullmann, *Doleantie-stemmen*, 54,55.

³⁹The matter of theological education was never satisfactorily resolved by The Reformed Churches in the Netherlands. The decision of Prof. Dr. Herman Bavinck (1854-1921), himself a son of the Secession and its most brilliant and respected representative, to leave the Kampen Theological Seminary for the Theological Faculty of the Free University only served to aggravate the tensions. These rose to fever-pitch some three decades later when, largely because of the opposition of professors and supporters of the Free University, barriers were placed for a time to the desire of the Kampen school to offer a doctorate in theology. This together with "strange decisions" taken by the synod of 1936 so poisoned the atmosphere throughout the churches that the rupture, consequent upon synodical decisions, which broke out in 1944-45 was unavoidable. Once again a hierarchical elite forced upon congregations with their pastors and consistories decisions which plainly exceeded the demands of loyalty to the Reformed creeds.

⁴⁰A brief account of that memorable day is given by H. Algra, *Het Wonder van de 19de Eeuw*, 333-346; also by J.C. Rullmann, *De Doleantie* (Amsterdam: W. Kirchner, 1917), 343-348.

⁴¹This versification, which lends itself to an English translation only with great difficulty, is based on Psalm 146, vs. 7b-10.

⁴²Quoted by Algra, *Het Wonder van de 19de Eeuw*, 343, 344.

⁴³*Gereformeerde Dogmatiek*.

⁴⁴*De Gemeene Gratie*; note especially that this title, in order to prevent any misunderstanding and accusation of moving in an Arminian and Semi-Pelagian direction in dealing with the distinction between "common" and "special or saving" grace, uses the term *gratie* instead of *genade*.

⁴⁵*Pro Rege*.

⁴⁶K. Fernhout, "De Doleantie en het Godsdienstig Leven," in *De Reformatie van '86*, 269-294. On an interesting comparison between the movements of 1834 and 1886 cf. E.D. Kraan, "De Doleantie en de Afscheiding," 229-268, and for relations between the "doleerenden" and those who did not leave the Reformed Church cf. B. Wielenga, "De Doleantie en de Achtergeblevenen," 295-320 in the same volume.