

As I began to read this book, I must say that I increasingly looked forward to the time, after the house was quiet at night, when I could sit down and read it. Living in a world where good is called evil and evil is called good, where godliness of life and a sanctified walk are slandered, and where the place of the Reformed believer in this world gets smaller and smaller, it is good to sit down in the quiet of one's home, close the door on the world and read an account of church history like this. The experience of Hendrik De Cock was the same as all faithful saints of God throughout church history who boldly and without compromise confessed the truth. It is encouraging to read of the mighty work of God in His despised and persecuted saints so that they are able to confess,

"Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you" (Matt. 5:10-12).

Hendrik De Cock did not live to be an old man. In fact, De Cock led the Secession out of the apostate state Reformed church of the Netherlands when he was only in his young thirties. He was only forty-one years old when he died. When I read accounts of church history like this, I am amazed that God frequently uses rather young and inexperienced men to be leaders in returning the church to the truth. Names like Luther, de Bres, Hoeksema, and Ophoff come to mind. While the older, wiser, more learned men of the church sit comfortably in their respected positions, perhaps piously wringing their hands and mumbling about the ills in the church, God frequently works powerfully in the lives of young men, as He did in the lives of the leaders of the Afscheiding, to work reformation and a willingness to suffer for the sake of the truth. It seems that all too often, while the young men take the bullets and arrows, the older men watch from the sidelines studiously avoiding conflict, all too willing to compromise in order to retain their reputations, positions, and a carnal peace.

De Cock's willingness to suffer was a result of the **love of the truth** (II Thess. 3: 10-17), clearly set forth in the Reformed Confessions, especially the Canons of Dordt, that God worked powerfully in his heart. He loved the glorious truth of God's sovereign grace, the truth that reduces sinful man to nothing and makes God everything.

There is one aspect of the book that I would like to emphasize in this review. It is the author's insight into how false teachers and heresy soon come to dominate the church and how the false and apostatizing church works to threaten and intimidate the faithful into silence. This was the situation in De Cock's day and whenever there is apostasy in the church. In contrast to this, the author points out the only way that God preserves to Himself a remnant that continues

to confess the truth, and that is in the way of a sharp, uncompromising condemnation of the lie and a clear and zealous confession of the truth.

The author, Marvin Kamps, identifies one of the church's most dangerous enemies, the false church. He writes,

But the world of unbelievers is not the only enemy of the church of Christ; there is another who is far more dangerous for us and our children. He is more dangerous because of his method of opposition.

This enemy is not forthright. He comes to you and your children claiming to believe the Bible, with a warm handshake or a kiss. He shows himself to be a man of kindness and love. He is more treacherous because, though he hates Jehovah God and his Son and therefore also the church, he wears a smile, is friendly, and practices the art of jovial backslapping. He presents himself as devoutly Christian and God-fearing; but it is all a lie. He is a wolf in sheep's clothing, Jesus said (pp. 70,71).

Kamps continues,

These enemies are the false church. The Reformed fathers have identified them, on the basis of God's word, in the confessions. The false church wants to have and enjoy the friendship of the world. The men of the false church seek the honor, the wealth, the pleasure, and ease that cooperation with the world provides. In order to attain that, while remaining in the institute of the church and still identifying themselves as Christians, they must rid themselves of absolute truth (p. 71).

Throughout the book the author identifies some of the devious tactics of these unfaithful teachers and preachers. He writes,

De Cock was well aware of the unfaithful preachers' plea for toleration, love, and doctrinal freedom. The apostate church attempted to make each of God's people into an Eli who was incapable of holy indignation. They labored to make soft, weak, and cowardly men who knew their calling to be humble and loving in their witness, as if Christian humility precludes and forbids using the names Jesus and the apostles used (p. 171).

Another effective weapon that Satan uses against the church of God and faithful defenders of the truth is slander. We read on pages 182 and 183,

[T]he chief weapon of Satan against the church of Christ in general is always slander, and it was employed against the De Cocks. The character assassination of Mrs. De Cock and her husband was to be expected. Their son [Helenius De Cock] should have known

that; he did not need to defend them. One can attribute these attacks of slander to a lack of understanding, for the natural man does not receive the things of God. Slander is the weapon of choice of pious unbelievers who employ devilish instruments against the church of Christ.

P. Hofstede de Groot, professor at the University of Groningen, and De Cock's predecessor as pastor of the Ulrum church, was a master at employing deceit and slander in order to destroy the good name of De Cock and to discourage him in the work of reformation. In his final letter to Rev. De Cock, dated January 8, 1834, de Groot ends his correspondence with De Cock by writing,

Further, I cannot neglect to witness to you how deeply it pains me that your rash and un-Christian zeal has caused you to depart so far from the gospel of love and that my poor, poor congregation is with you brought into such misery. I pray that in this matter as well, God may bring good out of evil. I pray that he may teach you to understand and sense that hostility, wrangling, wrath, and bitter arguments are the works of the evil, corrupt flesh (Gal. 5:20,22); and that you learn that to the fruits of the reborn spirit belong also love, peace, longsuffering, and compassion (p. 311).

Rev. De Cock understood very well the evil tactics of the enemies of the godly who maintain sound doctrine. In his *Defense of the True Reformed Doctrine* De Cock writes,

Mr. Reddingus [a state church pastor critical of the saints of the conventicles, AJC] does his very best in these letters to preserve the appearance of moderation, toleration, and love, but whoever has eyes to see can indeed recognize the wolf in sheep's clothing. This wolf attacks the most noble of the flock, and he never fails to take the opportunity to protect the opponents and deceivers of the Lord's church and to promote interest in and sympathy for them. Nor does he fail to take the opportunity to inflame the world's hatred against believers who expose these adversaries and oppose them ( p. 346).

Later in his *Defense*, De Cock, referring to natural man's reaction to truth writes,

A certain hero of faith of an earlier century correctly said about that truth the following: Because men cannot tolerate earnest godliness, they will strongly denounce those members as Pharisees, as hypocrites, and as advocates of works-righteousness who are not satisfied with the common way of life but who seek to work out their salvation with fear and trembling (2 Peter 2:12). (After all, that is what the world does out of prejudice: slanders what it does not understand.)

In truth, people do not want to be judged regarding their misbehavior, and yet they will time after time condemn someone else for his godliness (pp. 360, 361).

Understanding the tactics of the enemies of truth he also anticipated the severe opposition he would face. In the building of his tower he first sat down and counted the cost (Luke 14:26-30). He writes very vividly of this awareness in his *Decisions of the National Synod of Dordrecht* in 1833,

You who love the Lord must show spiritual nobility in that you are afraid of nothing except sinning against God; you must show that you despise everything that would hinder you in this regard. Let the worldly, civil, and conforming (that is, adapting to everything in society) Christian, who is that lazy, lukewarm Reformed person, who is that Christian who treads softly, accommodates, and makes a fine display, who is the pious advocate of virtue, the spirit who deceives through sweet words -- let such people mock you and characterize you as intolerant, burdensome, impudent, haughty, and stubborn dictators. What does it matter? Jesus was called Beelzebub. Would his family members go unscathed? ***A Christian must be able to be despised and be able to despise*** [emphasis mine, AJC] (p. 125).

The *Act of Secession or Return* adopted by the consistory and congregation of Ulrum in 1834 showed that De Cock and his followers were not afraid to act on their convictions and face the consequences that would certainly come their way in leaving the apostate state church. Kamps writes about this decision,

This is a most significant statement by the Reformed Church of Ulrum. They clearly expressed that they did not desire to be isolationists, nor were they governed by a spirit of individualism and of superiority toward others. Yet if they were forced to live in social and ecclesiastical exile, they were willing to accept the bitter reality of life in Holland as the will of the Lord for them at that time, in order that their worship might be strictly governed by the Bible. To be ostracized and rejected, as the people of the conventicles and the Reformed believers within the state church, must have been a most painful, bitter reality for these saints. Their experience was persecution for the Lord's sake (p. 135).

There was indeed a high cost of discipleship for De Cock and his followers in 1834. "To be Reformed in 1834 meant to have their worship services interrupted and disturbed by the king's soldiers or the local police. It meant fines and imprisonment for the preachers and elders of the local congregations" (p. 136).

As stated earlier, there is much instruction in this book on the tactics of heretics and how they work to spread their lies in the church and intimidate those who oppose them into silence. The

present day true church does good to review these lessons and learn from Hendrik De Cock and his boldness in battle against the lie. Frequently De Cock was accused of using "strong, accusatory language" in his writings against state church office bearers and their views (p.168).

He [De Cock] did not hesitate to identify pastors who were admired by the people, who were in good standing with the administrators of the state church, and who spoke lovingly as hirelings, robbers, false prophets, wolves in sheep's clothing, deceivers, blind leaders of the blind, dogs, and so forth (p. 168).

What are we to think about this? Is this improper language for a servant of God? The author gives his answer, with which I heartily agree.

[T]he apostle Paul, another mere man, did not fail to use the same terms regarding the Pharisees and Sadducees who endlessly troubled the church and sought to lead many astray. Was Paul's use of these terms sinful revenge and ill will? He called false teachers who taught works-righteousness "dogs" and "evil workers" (Phil. 3:2)..... Consider his holy indignation in regard to the congregation of Corinth, when it failed to exercise Christian discipline against a man who had stolen his father's wife (1 Cor. 5:1-5)..... Consider the seven letters of the apostle John to the churches of Asia Minor, where the churches had within their membership or had removed men who were "liars", men who blasphemed, who said they were Jews and were not but were of the synagogue of Satan. .... In that light, there is no valid, biblical ground for rejecting De Cock's use of common biblical expressions to characterize the spiritual state of those who publicly and boldly taught false doctrine and led the nation and the state church through the wide gate and along the broad pathway of the perversion of the gospel. Would De Cock have been free *not* to use these terms to characterize those who led others in the way of man's reasoning and wisdom? Are only smiles and bland, imbecilic pleasantries to be the response of a faithful man of God when unfaithful men are guilty of public and impatient rejection of the truth of God's revelation and the infallibility of sacred scripture? (p. 169).

As the author points out repeatedly in the book and is clear from De Cock's writings, De Cock put the fear of God before his fear of man. De Cock writes in response to D. Molenaar, whom he had asked for advice,

However, you ask me to exercise caution with regard to my neighbors and fellow office bearers, even though they promote false doctrine. Yet there is a caution in God's servants that displeases him, namely, the carnal caution to which our nature and the devil constantly draw us and that fears man, who can kill the body, more than God,

who can destroy both soul and body in hell. I fear it is this caution that intrudes when we fail and forsake the church of the Lord because of love or fear of men (p. 262).

De Cock writes later in his letter to Molenaar,

[F]or a long time it has seemed to me that the best and most necessary way to answer people and to confront pastors from the very beginning is according to the sense and meaning of our creeds. But this does not give me peace of mind anymore, because this can go on indefinitely as long as we think well of one another and judge the good of each other in love. This has to stop if the other party clearly reveals himself to be an enemy of the truth and a servant of the devil (p. 263).

Today, those who insist on sound doctrine and strict adherence to the Reformed creeds hear the same accusations that De Cock heard. According to P. Hofstede de Groot, De Cock did not know *the spirit of Christianity*. On page 370 of *1834*, the author asks some questions of the reader which I believe in many ways summarize the book. They are the same questions De Cock had to answer. They also furnish the prospective reader with reasons to read the book.

How do we respond to these characterizations [that we do not know the *spirit of Christianity*] in our day? Are we able to defend the cause of the truth and the Reformation? We must know well the enemy in order to stand for the cause of Christ in the world. The same allegations are made today against Reformed believers who are devoted to the gospel of salvation as set forth in our Reformed creeds; the saints today as well hear that they are unloving, unbrotherly, and even un-Christian. Are we intimidated by these allegations? Is it true that our commitment to right doctrine and our rebuke of those who repudiate the truth of God's word evidence a lack of love and spirituality?