

English Churchman Book Review

1834: Hendrik De Cock's Return to the True Church

Martin Kamps

Reformed Free Publishing Association; 490pp; Hbk; £27.31; ISBN: 978-1-936054-32-9

I first came across de Cock some years ago when I found an English translation of his work against hymns. Here at last is an excellent biography of the man, his life and legacy. It is a big book which it needs to be in order to present a comprehensive picture of De Cock.

In all there are 9 chapters followed by 7 Appendices and Bibliography. Regrettably there is no Index.

In Chapter one Kamps describes the background to De Cock's life under four headings - his National, Ecclesiastical, Social and Familial Circumstances. What surprised me, because I knew so little of the Ecclesiastical Dutch history was the usurping of the Reformed Church by the State in 1813-1816. As Kamps puts it, there was effectively a coup d'état. The outcome of this seizure of the Church was a rewriting



of the Formula of Subscription. No longer was there any reference to the historic creeds of the Church, rather ministers were merely to promote the 'interests of Christianity in general'. Subtlety and craft became the new ethos. Creedal confession was pushed into the background. The outcome was inevitable. As Kamps puts it, the Church acted dishonestly. Unsurprisingly there

were dissenters to all this - the Revell Movement and the Conventicles. Into all of this was De Cock, born in 1801.

Chapter 2 covers De Cock's ministry in the State Church. It is fascinating to see how liberals used, for example, the Belgic Confession (Art 7) to overthrow all Confessions. Their fundamental problem was a disbelief in the final authority of Scripture hence the dismissal of Creeds as worn out useless statements. With a sleight of hand the liberals constantly deflected focus from Scripture and Creeds to the more nebulous object of 'the spirit of Christianity'. Liberal attitudes ranged from studiously avoiding any debate with De Cock, tolerating him (presumably hoping he would go away), ignoring him but ultimately, they charged him with failing to understand that appeal to outdated creeds was no longer relevant. De Cock, according to liberals, was simply ignorant of what constituted true, living Christianity. Meanwhile De Cock continued to preach the old faith which was drawing a lot of attention from the people.

Chapter 3 examines De Cock's spiritual awakening. For many years in the State Church, liberalism was the main ideology espoused. The struggle over orthodoxy is exemplified in the debate over the First Table of the Law and God's revelation of himself. The liberals rejected Scripture (as the final revelation) and the miraculous. It was this that led to the Secession of 1834. In that year an exposition of the Belgic Confession by Reddingus was published which explicitly denied the core doctrines of the historic Christian Faith. It was also the year of De Cock's conversion. Kamps explains in detail the factors which brought that about.

In Chapter 4 & 5 Kamps outlines the contours of De Cock's theology, in particular his witness to the truth of Scripture, the Canons of Dort and the doctrine of God's sovereign grace in election and regeneration. Kamps gives an interesting evaluation of the issues of 1834 reminding us that it was more than hymns and baptism, rather at the core were the issues of sin, grace and salvation thus demonstrating that nothing less than the heart of the gospel was at stake underlining

the true significance of 1834 and therefore of vital importance to all who love these precious truths. In other words, the very essence of Christianity was in peril.

The climax of the struggle is dealt with in Chapter 6. Here we come to the cost of standing for truth. De Cock's witness brought upon him all kinds of charges, slander and misrepresentations. In due time De Cock was disciplined. It seemed that everything he did was a just cause for allegations, charges and discipline. After a long and tiresome process, without receiving any justice, the consistory adopted the Act of Secession on October 13, 1834.

Interestingly Kamps examines the rôle of De Cock's wife in Chapter 7. It is both fascinating and appreciated. Too often the sacrifice of wives is overlooked. Kamps has done the reader a service in presenting to us her faithfulness, support and courage in the face of the most dreadful slanders.

What happened after the Secession? That is dealt with in chapter 8. It is refreshing to note the growth and development of the Secession. Ministers from the State Church joined De Cock. Congregations sprang up. By April 1835 there were sixteen congregations represented at the first meeting of the Secession Ministers. The first Synod was held in March 1836. Kamps helpfully describes the discussion within the Secession over two issues (Church Membership and Baptism) that were to define the direction of the Secession. There was further discussion over Church Order that was equally significant for the new body.

De Cock in God's providence was to die in 1842 but he was preserved long enough to see a solid foundation laid and the beginnings of a return to a robust adherence to The Faith. By 1854 membership of the Secession stood at over 42,000, increasing by 10,000 in 1858. In 1870 membership reached 100,000 with 300 congregations and 270 ministers. This was the Lord's testimony to the truth of the Secession.

The significance of 1834 is described in detail in chapter 9. This is a vital part of the history without which 1834 would be meaningless. As Kamps states, "it restored to the Reformed believers in the Netherlands the gospel of salvation in Christ Jesus by faith through grace alone". That one statement is enough (though Kamps proceeds to spell out the full significance in some detail in a number of areas) to demonstrate that every Believer has an interest in this. It is not an abstract history but one that is continually repeated through time. This is the spiritual legacy that we are required to know, subscribe to and defend, and if necessary to suffer for.

What follows are a series of documents that are crucial to a full understanding of 1834. They should not be neglected but read carefully, besides they are full of fascinating details, arguments and insights that remain relevant to our day.

This is an excellent work and given one's interest in De Cock it is difficult to say anything negative. One suggested area that a future edition might revise is the use of polemical observation. It may of course be argued that they are essential to a fuller grasp of what is at stake.

Overall, an excellent book, worth getting and keeping. Here is a glorious history that will make every British believer rise up and give thanks to God. Further, it will encourage and embolden modern Christians that with such a legacy and heritage they can do no less that publicly adhere to the same truths that De Cock lived and suffered for. May this book be widely sold and read requiring further editions to be printed.

Rev. E. T. Kirkland

Modest Apparel & Modern Fashion

D. Lowden

Vision Solutions NI; Pbk; 94pp; ISBN: 978-0-9556218-8-8

Available from Raymond Stewart, 15 Lakeview Ave, Newtownabbey, Co. Antrim. BT36 5ZG - £4.95 (inc Post).

Anyone writing on the subject of clothing is risking a lot of opprobrium from numerous circles. First from those who think it is irrelevant. Second, from those who view any comment as insulting and finally from those who roll their eyes at such 'backwardness' of thought. And that before any reference is made to feminist ideology which has become embedded in Christian thought. As for fashion, or more particularly, how women dress for going to Church, cleavages are in and men would rather have it so. Lowden then is setting himself against the prevailing trend, and he does on Biblical grounds.

There are six sections in all.

Firstly, in the introduction Lowden sets out the biblical basis for what he intends to examine using the well known words of Paul in Romans 12:1-2. This is followed by Lowden's own experience as a Christian where he witnessed what he now sees as worldliness on a dreadful scale in the congregation he attended. His declared Aim is to warn against indecency and convince Believers of the need for modesty and decency. Lowden reminds us of the dramatic changes in society in dress and fashion that have impacted upon the Church at large. Looking back it all seems a world away, we forget that it is a mere generation.

Secondly, our responsibility before God. Here Lowden directly challenges the problem of hypocrisy on the basis of Matthew 23:25-26. The problem of the heart.

Thirdly, the responsibility of men. Lowden references this point to Matthew 5:27-28 and examines the issue of sexuality and its stimulus through fashion styles. It's a call to males to 'man up' and take a stand against the whole trend towards the sexualising of fashion.

Fourthly, the responsibility of women. Using the classic passage of 1 Timothy 2:9-10 Lowden examines the meaning, history and display of modesty and the contrary immodesty that is to be avoided.

Lowden considers the link between feminism and fashion with reference to prominent examples of contemporary immodesty. Lowden discusses the matter of unisex clothing and the decline of modesty. Fifthly, the heart of true biblical modesty according to 1 Peter 3:3-4 and how it relates to beauty, style and cost. It is here that Lowden makes what is perhaps his most significant argument, that immodesty brings the gospel into disrepute. If all else is forgotten this will remain.

There are many useful and helpful points made in this booklet and given its importance makes one hesitate to mention any negatives at all.

First, local references (12) may not mean much to others. A second edition should rework these references for a wider reading public.

Second, references to particular photographs (10,11) without their inclusion makes any reference to them meaningless.

Third, the most controversial part of the book will most likely be in the section under modern examples of immodesty (58ff). Lowden uses as a template Isaiah 3. Is it true that 'mincing' can be directly related to the use of stiletto heels (59)? Is it correct that 'bravery' relates to smug, arrogant etc and is modern fashion designed to do that? Is it helpful to make a connection to Nazi boots (61) as equivalent to ladies boots? Can we say that the way Christian women dress is with this in mind?

No doubt opinion will be divided but it is surely helpful to take a more critical look at fashion styles. If Lowden makes all do that then the section will be of great use. If however some of his comments cause the reader to be sidetracked then it might be better to rework his arguments without losing anything of their substance.

On a positive note, the booklet is easy to read, well laid out, thoughtful and sincere. It is gratifying that the text of the AV/KJV is used throughout. As for the subject, it is a matter of importance and concern where in many congregations it seems that the less women wear the better. A much needed trumpet blast on a touchy subject.

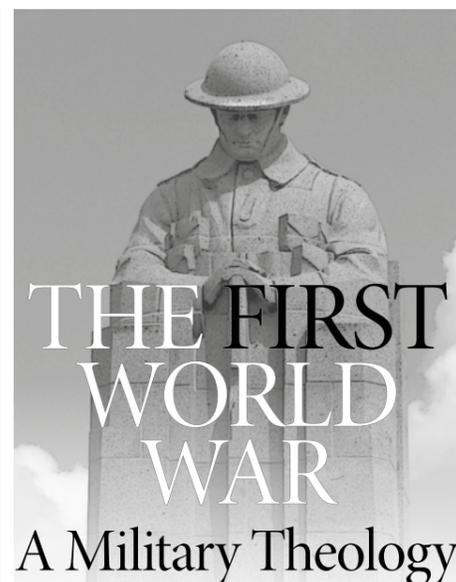
For further reading on the subject the following is very helpful.

Jeff Pollard. *Christian Modesty* (Chapel Library).

Free Grace Broadcaster Issue 216. *Modest Apparel*.

David Silversides. *Christian Modesty in Dress*.

Rev. E. T. Kirkland



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was 14 years old. He records the memorable event: "Jesus Christ, the Son of God, came into this world for the express purpose of giving his life so that He might bear, and pay the penalty of my sin so that I might go free. That night I accepted the Lord Jesus as my Saviour, my Companion, and my God - just by myself - there was nobody else in the room. That was the turning point of my life. The past, bad though it was in God's sight, was blotted out; Christ's presence and help were promised for the present, and the future was assured. I thank God more than I can say for that wonderful event in November 1893."

In summary



General Dobbie's thoughtful arguments for military service have encouraged many Christians, serving in the Armed Forces today:

(a) Nowhere in the whole of scripture is there the slightest hint that a soldier's calling is in itself unlawful.

(b) Throughout Scripture God envisages human rule as being ultimately based on force.

(c) The Christian life is likened by the Holy Spirit in Scripture to that of a soldier.

(d) War is not sin, it is without doubt, the result of sin.

(e) "Resist not evil" in Matthew 5:39 cannot be interpreted in isolation from Romans 13:1-5.

(f) Matthew 26:52, "for they that take the sword shall perish with the sword" cannot mean that all soldiers die violent deaths on the battlefield. There are survivors of all wars.

(g) It is noteworthy that the four (army) Centurions mentioned in the New Testament are all spoken of with a greater or lesser degree of commendation.

From what we have considered, it will be seen that the New Testament Scriptures indicate that the profession of arms is an honourable and lawful one; that the use of force and material weapons is not incompatible with faith in God; that God is a God of order and that in this present dispensation He has ordained that human governments shall maintain order by force; that the time is not yet, though it will surely come, when the government shall be upon our Lord Jesus Christ's shoulder, and man will then be able to beat his sword into a ploughshare.

REFERENCES:

1. J. Helgeland Christians and the Military p.1 1985 SCM London
2. J. Calvin The Institutes of the Christian Religion (Bk. 4) page 661 1962 James Clarke London
3. A. Barnes Notes on the New Testament p294 (not dated) Blackie London
4. H. Waddams A New Introduction to Moral Theology p.194 1964 SCM Lodon
5. L. Boettner The Christian Attitude toward War p.26 1985 Presbyterian & Reformed New Jersey USA