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PAST AND PRESENT OF THE REFORMED CHURCHES IN HOLLAND

I

At the National Synod of Dordrecht in 1618-19 three *Formularies of Unity* were agreed upon, to wit the Dutch Confession of Faith, the Heidelberg Catechism and the Tenets of Dort.

The *Dutch Confession of Faith*, drawn up by *Guido de Brès*, gives in thirty-seven articles a systematic exposition of the doctrine of salvation. It starts from the absolute authority of Holy Scripture. The *Heidelberg Catechism*, drawn up by *Zacharias Ursinus*, treats in fifty-two divisions—one for every Sunday and therefore called "Sundays"—of a Christian's one and only comfort in life and death. The youthful catechumens are instructed from this text-book, while every Sunday at evening service a division (or part of a division) is taken as the subject for the sermon. The *Tenets of Dort* are five articles in which the Synod of Dort with deep humility professed the truth of God's absolute sovereignty in the work of grace against the Remonstrants or Arminians.

The policy established by this *National Synod* is the *Presbyterian* system of church government. It starts from the *local church*, governed by a *consistory* which is made up of ministers and elders. This council is the only governing power in the church. Yet the principle of the Reformed Churches, as opposed to the system of the Independents, requires the different local churches to enter into close contact with one another. This contact between the churches is chiefly brought about by the meetings of the *Classes* (Presbyteries) and *Synods*, and by the visitation of the churches. The Provincial Synods are held every year, the General Assembly (Synod) every three years.

From the very beginning of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands, however, an active tendency revealed itself to oppose and check the manifestation of the church of Christ as it was founded on the Word of the Lord. This anti-reformed tendency took up the cudgels for the emancipation of human reason in the domain of the church, against the authority of the Word of God, the binding power of the Confession and the liberty of the churches.

It took the seats of office in the city-magistracies and in the States—the States-Provincial as well as the States-General. On the one hand it gave its support to the churches, was quite willing that the churches should sun themselves in its high influence, but endeavoured, on the other hand, to maintain ministers who were unfaithful to the Confession, to maintain them in the face of the unmistakable wish of the churches, or to obtrude ministers on the churches who wanted to serve this anti-reformed tendency. Unremittingly it strove, in the name of the worldly rulers, to impose on the churches a system of church government they did not want, or to prevent the polity of the churches from being carried out. In accordance with all this it sided openly with Arminianism, tried to bring about the triumph of the Remonstrants and the emancipation of the mind from the Word of God and the Confession, and claimed authority over the church and a right to decide in matters ecclesiastical. *Barneveldt* and all his party were the representatives of this anti-reformed tendency. And it was especially the princes of the House of Orange-Nassau, *Maurice* and *William Lewis*, who firmly resisted this tendency. Even in the fiercest struggle, when the "Doleerenden" (=Complainers) of the seventeenth century held out against this anti-reformed tendency, however high a hand it might carry against them, it was these princes of the House of Orange that mixed with the "Doleerenden," and who in the fear of the Lord raised the trampled rights of the church from under the feet of her adversaries.

But it was not long before this anti-reformed tendency again became strong among the rulers of the land; though there were other men in power now, they, too, threw obstacles in the way of the liberty of the churches; they prevented the church polity from being carried into effect, and denied all authority to it, unless it should derive that authority from themselves. This anti-reformed spirit checked the law of the Lord in its course, and suffered unbelief and libertinism to enter the Universities and the Church.

II

The Church had cast away her crown. She had basely forsaken the principle of faith for which once her martyrs had died. She was in league with the world and the temporal powers. She welcomed the worldly spirit within her pale. The preachers

of false doctrines were given influence and honour. And thus she stood at last an apostate and essentially corrupted Church, which offered stones instead of bread.

This naturally constrained the faithful whose spiritual life was deeper, to keep aloof from this degenerate Church. Hence as early as the close of the eighteenth century, they began to shun the services, they turned their backs upon the Church, and met in conventicles which without being decidedly hostile to the Church, unmistakably formed a certain spiritual opposition to the fossilised Church.

At first they did not go the length of cutting off all connection with the Church. They remonstrated with the ministers. They insisted on the restoration of discipline and a good system of church government. And wherever, in town or village, an eminent preacher raised his voice to urge his audience to penitence, all people flocked together to hear him.

This too, however, began to slacken, when in the early part of the nineteenth century the degeneration of the Church grew worse and worse, when the old foundations were rooted up more and more boldly, the ancient confession of the fathers first forsaken, presently contested, and at last the old system of church government forcibly violated by the *Royal Decree of January, 1816*. Under the spell of the spirit of the times, the temporal power put the Church of the Reformation in bonds. Altogether without the concurrence of the churches, this organisation was imposed on the churches by the government of the land. King William I exacted the recognition of this institution, as if Jesus Christ were not King of the Church, and as if He did not rule over His Church through His own Word and Spirit.

At the accession of King William I there still existed in Holland the Reformed Churches with their Reformed Confession and Liturgy, with their Reformed interrelation between the churches and with their Reformed church polity, through which the Reformed systems of church government and in that way the Reformed Confession and the Reformed Churches themselves were maintained. But in 1816 the Royal Government imposed an organisation upon the Reformed Churches, by which the *liberty* and the right of the consistories to maintain the Confession of the Church according to the Word of God, were put *in bonds*. Contrary to the rights of the Reformed Churches, and without having any authority to do so as king, William I instituted a system

of government by synod, which laid down statutes for the consistories, while the so-called "Higher Authoritative Councils" themselves would not hear of upholding the Confession in any way. Of the profession of the truth the Church was no longer allowed to judge; not even of the shepherding of the faithful. Only authoritative "Councils" were permitted to rule over her, and that merely to carry out and maintain the "Statute" that the King had drawn up for her.

By his attitude towards the Church, King William I then brought inexpressible disaster to the nation. Terrible sufferings were endured by the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands then. They were ill-treated and deceived. For since that time the body of the Church, as it really is, could no longer be done justice to. Nay, from that time the Reformed Churches themselves were obliged to concur in maintaining the anti-reformed system of Church Government and to elect the essentially anti-reformed Synod and other "higher authoritative councils."

The Reformed System of Church Government was done away with. The Reformed Confession was no longer maintained. The Reformed Formularies for administering Holy Baptism and the Lord's Supper, and for the induction of ministers and the ordination of elders and deacons, were no longer obligatory. They might or might not be used. This was left to the discretion of the ministers. The consistories had no say in this matter. And the "Statutory" Church Government did not concern itself about it. These Reformed Formularies of the Church had lost all legal validity. They had no longer any binding power in the Church, they did not bind anybody to anything there. In the affairs of the Church only the "Statutes" could be enforced. And the life of the Church was only considered to be orderly, if it were a life in accordance with the anti-reformed statutes of the essentially anti-reformed Church Government.

Thus there was now *liberty of doctrine* in the old Reformed Churches under an anti-reformed Church Government. And thus these churches were more and more resolved into a quite different kind of thing, an artificial *Church Association* in which no Confession bound the component parts together, but only a sheaf of Statutes, which regulated the communion of belief and unbelief, and enforced the same. The Word of God had no real authority in the Church any longer; any appeal to the Word of God was brushed aside; a condemnation by the Word of God

was a thing that was no longer possible in the Church ; the most heterogeneous doctrines were allowed full play ; all unbelieving spirits were welcome to pass in and out at their own sweet will ; only the faithful witnesses of the right of the Lord were forbidden to speak. Those who opposed the Statutes by appealing to the Reformed Confession and Formularies, in order thus to uphold the Reformed Church, were cast out. Their appeal to the Reformed Formularies of Holy Baptism and the Lord's Supper, was denied as being an altogether invalid legal argument, and they were deprived of their offices and cut off by the Statutes.

III

To this organisation of 1816 the name of " Dutch Reformed Church " was given, though it became the prison in which the ancient Reformed Churches were caged up. As this organisation stood up for the scorners of the Word of God, against the Word of God itself, it became an *anti-christian* instrument to oppose the anointed Son of God.

And just as before in Arminianism a philosophic-theological school of thought arose against the Reformed Confession, there were also philosophical and theological currents in the nineteenth century that tended to ruin the life of the Church. Modernism is sufficiently known. Therefore we need not speak of that here. But we do mention : the *Groningen School*, the *Ethical School* and the *Irenic School*.

The *Groningen School* gained a firm footing in Groningen University when *Hofstede de Groot* was a professor there ; it was represented by a group of men that gathered round him, and who worked the whole field of theology from his erroneous standpoint, published a series of scientific text-books in accordance with his principles, especially strove to force history into the framework of his views, and tried to obliterate the influence of Calvinism on the Reformation and the life that bore its stamp, in order to provide it with the effigy of Erasmus instead.

This *Groningen School* was not guided by Scripture, but by the natural wisdom of man. Its adherents did not bow unconditionally to Scripture, but deigned to strike an attitude of protection towards the Word of God. They denied the Godhead of Christ, and then exalted Him above the angels. They denounced the doctrine of atonement to the avenging justice of God as being a " blood-theology," but continued speaking of a

reconciliation with God through the death of Christ. They hated the true life of grace, but loved the most pious piety; and all the while this pious school loudly proclaimed that there is no devil.

Numbers of ministers spread these views with which they were imbued, all through the land; for many years they dominated the Church through their men in the governing church-councils, through their professors in the State Universities, and through the lead they gave to the consistories in the *Kerkelyke Courant*.

IV

However, at Ulrum (a little village in the province of Groningen) a reformatory action was started by the Reverend *Hendrik de Cock* in 1834. Seeing how much the true doctrine of salvation was undermined by the Groningen School in the Dutch Reformed Church, he began, not only in the pulpit, but also before the ministers of his district and in pamphlets, to stand up for the doctrine of the fathers. He defended the binding authority of the confession, and denounced the neglect of it as perjury. However, because of this defence of the Reformed faith, in accordance with his vow of office, the governing church councils, who pretended to maintain order in that way, suspended him from his work as a minister, and at last deprived him of his office altogether. After having in vain used all means in his power—in the Church by making his appeal to the ecclesiastical authorities, and further by petitions to the King—to obtain redress of his wrongs, he resolved on the 13th of October, 1834, to separate, together with his consistory and his flock, from the Dutch Reformed Church in so far as this organisation had become a false Church, consequently from the governing councils of the Dutch Reformed Church, such as they had become in 1816, and he and his flock reverted to the Reformed Confession and Church Polity. In their *Deed of Separation* they therefore rightly called their separation a return to the doctrine, discipline and liturgy of the reformed fathers. They did not mean schism but reformation. Hence their protestation: “the undersigned declare that by virtue of the office of all the faithful they separate from those who are not of the Church, and that therefore they no longer wish to have any communion with the Dutch Reformed Church, till the latter reverts to the true service of the Lord.”

In this *Separation* a momentous liberation in the domain

of the Church was effected, albeit in much travail. The church of Ulrum was the first of the liberated churches. But the movement spread over the whole country, when on account of their siding with De Cock, other ministers: *Scholte, Brummelkamp, van Velzen* and *Gezelle Meerburg*, and the candidate for the ministry, *van Raalte*, were also put under the ban of the Dutch Reformed Church. Nor was this all. More outrages were committed by official Holland upon the sacred rights of these "Separatists." Their meetings were broken up, they themselves ill-used, fined and put in prison, as if they had been criminal revolutionaries. Add to this that the prohibition of founding Christian schools prevented many parents from educating their children according to the dictates of their conscience, and it cannot be wondered at that some "Separatists" could not bear staying on in a country where they thus saw their most sacred rights violated and encroached upon, and that they looked forward to a new home, where they might find unhampered liberty and free scope for their activity.

Likewise in *Bentheim* and in *East-Friesland*, where a Separation similar to the Dutch one had been accomplished under the influence of such places on the frontier as *Coevorden* and *Heemse*, and where persecution did not rage less severely than in Holland, the idea of emigration began to be cherished. And thus many of the most sterling and pious children of the soil were forced to remove to America. When one of the emigrant ships, in which was also the dissenting minister, *C. van der Meulen*, was hailed by another ship at sea, and the captain was asked, what kind of cargo he had on board, the answer was: "False coin, no longer current in Holland"; an answer that only expressed the general feeling of the kind of Liberalism that prevailed in Holland at that time. In 1849 the new "Pilgrim Fathers" joined the *Reformed Church of America*. In 1857 a separation took place, and the *Christian Reformed Church* was instituted as an independent Church.

In Holland the Separated Churches had at first to pass through a difficult crisis. Many differences revealed themselves. But at last a union was earnestly sought and accomplished at the Synod of *Zwolle* in 1854. There, too, the founding of the *Theological College* of *Kampen* was resolved upon. And from that time the life of these churches became more and more vigorous and sound.

Meanwhile the liberty of doctrine in the Dutch Reformed Church knew no bounds. First the Liberalism of the Groningen School, and after that the Modernism that had sprung up in Leiden University, held undisputed sway in its pulpits. At first tentatively, but before long quite openly, a doctrine was expounded that cut to the heart of the Christian Religion, and eventually ended in a complete apostasy from the Christian faith and in a deliberate denial of Christ and His divine work of redemption.

The Synod cut loose all ties to the Confession and allowed full play to all manner of doctrine, so that *Groen van Prinsterer* might well write: "Not to have any special doctrine is the doctrine, I had almost said the $\delta\acute{o}\xi\alpha^1$, of the Dutch Reformed Church. Her creed is not to have any creed. She only professes that she does not profess anything at all."

The faithful in the Dutch Reformed Church who had not joined in the Separation because they wanted to maintain the right and the calling of the consistories under the statutory organisation, sighed much to God about the sad condition of their Church, and wearied themselves in all kinds of efforts to curb the evil and offer resistance to the injustice done. Long indeed would be the list, should we wish to recall to mind the interminable series of protests which thus year after year, were brought in by the confessors against all sorts of soul-destroying doctrines and various acts of the governing church councils. Resistance was offered whenever and wherever this was possible. Yet it never led to any success. Fatal was in all this the anti-confessional action of the *ethic-irenic* school.

V

The founders of the *ethic* school were *Chantepie de la Saussaye* and *Gunning*. From the very beginning they declared themselves to be at one with the faith of the Church. Yet even the earliest writings of this school show how kindly its representatives were inclined towards the unfaithful. The unfaithful, they said, had properly speaking to suffer for the confessors, to suffer, that is, in consequence of a falsely established antithesis between the natural and the supernatural, between the human and the divine. The *ethic* school wanted to resolve this antithesis and thus to

¹ Here taken in the sense of "glory."

reconcile the faith of the Church and human wisdom. Therefore the men of this school have since exerted themselves to adapt the Word of God to natural man and conversely to adapt the results of the "science falsely so called" to the faith of the Church, in which process Holy Scripture went to pieces. Here, too, just as in the Groningen School, there was a tendency to shield untruth against truth. Over the state universities, which had cut the very last strand of the tie between their scientific teaching and the Confession of the Church, the ethic school folded its protective wings; it refused to proceed against the unfaithful in the Church by applying any Church discipline; it wanted to keep quite different currents of religious thought in the same Church; it would not hear of a confession of the Church in which the truth was professed and error rejected.

And here the *ethic and irenic* schools met.

This *irenic* school did not begin by taking a special philosophic standpoint, like the Groningen and the ethic school, but was the result of practical considerations. It is a child of the Dutch Reformed Church itself. Many pious members of that organisation did not get to see the meaning of the local church as a revelation of the body of Christ, but continued in the mistaken idea of the Church which they found in King William's creation of 1816. That creation had usurped the name of Church which only the congregation of the faithful is entitled to. And this state organisation was *the* Church to the pious people above mentioned. That they were only of the congregation of Christ, and that they had only to reveal and to foster that congregation according to the Word of God in obedience to Christ their King, they did not understand. They kept entangled in the false principles of canon law which they found embodied in the creation of 1816, which has nothing to do with the Body of Christ. The Confession, which the fathers had elaborated so clearly and definitely against the Remonstrants, disgusted them. They were swayed by a certain love of a false kind of liberty, of deviation from the Confession. The aversion of the organisation of 1816 from that Confession, naturally contributed to this attitude in them. They wanted to be as "broad" as possible; it is true, they desired to exclude the Modernists—who repudiated Christ as the only Saviour—from their organisation, but for the rest they wished to be peaceable to believers, no matter what their special creed might be.

It was after 1870 that Dr. Abraham Kuyper, in accordance with the spirit of the Calvinistic Reformation, made a stand against the Ethic school in the field of dogmatics, and against the Irenic school in the domain of ecclesiastical law. In order to counteract the dechristianisation of the nation, he took the initiative in the founding of the *Free University* (1880), which, free from the State and free from the Church, and founded on the principles of the Calvinistic Reformation, was destined to become a blessing to the nation. And in order to lift the Church out of her deep degradation, he exposed the false pretences of the official organisation and stood up for the renewed revelation of the local Reformed Church as the Church of Christ, based on the Confession according to the Word of God.

That in the end this action was bound to lead to a conflict with the organisation of 1816, might be foreseen by any man and had already been predicted by *Groen van Prinsterer*, who had passed away in 1876. On the part of the Synod of the Dutch Reformed Church the principle of liberty of doctrine had been brought to a head by an alteration in the formula for candidates for the ministry, which *de facto* cut the last tie with the Confession, and by the provision that the pupils of modernist ministers were to be given a testimonial which qualified them to partake of the Lord's Supper. In order to keep the sacrament sacred, the consistory of Amsterdam exacted that all who expressed a desire to be permitted to partake of the Lord's Supper, should profess themselves at one with the Christian creed. And then the unscriptural government of the Church deliberately pushed on. It declared that for people who wanted to be admitted to the Lord's Supper it should be held sufficient if they just acknowledged the "Statutes." At the imminent conflict with the illegal powers that ruled in the Church and which wanted to force the consistory to obey Statutes made by man contrary to the Word of God, the consistory resolved in the autumn of 1885 to maintain the confessional character of the Church against the synodal organisation. With a view to the control of the Church property it was then provided by the consistory as being qualified to do so, that the Church property was to remain at the disposal of the consistory, even in the face of the illegal powers that were. But then and there these powers closed their grip and the members of the consistory who had been true to the Word of God, were suspended from their office (4th January, 1886).

VI

From all parts of the country, however, the suspended brethren got expressions of sympathy. Never was the Communion of Saints manifested more clearly, never was such a community of feeling, of suffering experienced and demonstrated as the Amsterdam consistory was held up by in those days. And above all, the unjust, despotic and tyrannical way in which the higher Church Councils acted, the manner in which they trampled upon the very primary principles of justice, and went on with bulls of suspension, letters of deprivation and anathemas against men whose doctrine and life could in no way be found fault with, who were held in the greatest esteem by the people, and who would have been ornaments of any Christian Church, clearly displayed how terrible the spirit of corruption had grown that lurked behind the Synodal hierarchy. It opened the eyes of the Calvinist people to all the evil and all the misery to which this hierarchy had reduced the Church, and kindled in many hearts a desire for the liberty to serve God according to His Word again.

The consistory of the obscure little village of Kootwĳk, which had been provisionally suspended, because they had called a candidate who was a pupil of the Free University, to the office of minister of their church, first of all broke with the Synodal Organisation (2nd February, 1886). This took place under the lead of *Dr. Willem van den Bergh*, minister of the neighbouring village of Voorthuizen, whose church presently threw off the yoke of the Synodal Organisation too. Then the *Rev. J. J. A. Ploos van Amstel* of Reitsum followed with his flock. Especially the fact that men like *Dr. van den Bergh* and *Rev. Ploos van Amstel*, men whose excellent piety, gripping preaching and wholehearted love of the Church of Christ commanded everybody's respect, led the way in the struggle against the Synodal organisation, inspired their brethren in the faith with holy enthusiasm. And before the year 1886 had passed away, the consistory of Amsterdam, after a long-drawn law-suit in which all rightful means had been used in order to obtain redress, but nevertheless the ban was maintained even in the highest instance, resolved to throw off the yoke of the unscriptural power that had oppressed the Church since 1816, and, taking the ancient Confession of the Reformed Churches as their basis of agreement, to revert to the Reformed System of Church Government. Thus, by the grace of God,

the liberation of the Church through the so-called *Doleantie* of 1886 was brought about.

And now it can be said that in 1886 and after, the churches that wanted to get rid of the unlawful organisation of 1816, took the same point of view as had been taken in 1834 and following years: only those churches, they protested, which held to the Confession and to the lawful Church polity of the Synod of Dort, which had never been abolished, were the lawful continuation of the ancient Reformed Churches in the Netherlands. So it was self-evident that all those who had been trusted with the management or possession of Church property, were not to resign that trust or to hand over any part of that property to others, unless they were compelled to do so by a sentence passed by the law-courts. As was to be expected, however, the powers that had been created in the Church by the royal mandate of 1816, did not scruple to use any means they saw within their reach, to hold the property of the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands. And they succeeded in this too. The law-courts dismissed any claim of the churches that broke with the Synodal organisation, to the said property, so that the men of 1886 were as absolutely stripped of everything as those of 1834. And although there may have been no persecutions, because the times and the laws had changed, yet there was as good an understanding between the Government and the Synod as during the persecution at the time of the Separation. Now, too, the rulers of the land supported the Synodal hierarchy, whenever it was at all possible, with their police and military force. In the outrages that were perpetrated at Leiderdorp, Wons and Serooskerke, the attitude of the Government and their officials towards the Reformed brethren was so utterly prejudiced and unjust, that "violation" of right is not too strong an expression for it. Nay, the disregard of right and justice were now even worse than during the Separation. For, in order to prevent the meetings of what were called the "Separatists" then, it was at least thought that it could be defended with an appeal to a provision of the law which was still considered as being valid. But in 1886 no magistrate could honestly think that in his action against the Reformed brethren, he could take his stand on the law. From a legal point of view, it was altogether indefensible, an unparalleled violation of right. When therefore, after throwing off the yoke of the Synodal hierarchy, the Amsterdam consistory resumed the old name of

“Nederduitsch”¹ Reformed Church, they added the announcement that they acted as “doleerende” (=complaining) church, because, after the treatment they had met with at the hands of the rulers, they did not for the present intend to assert their claims to the Church property, but wished to await the judgment of the civil courts. And when in June, 1887, the “Nederduitsche” Reformed Churches for the first time met in Synodal Convent at Rotterdam, they placed behind their name “*doleerende*,” explaining this as follows: “that all our churches, making their wail to God for the wrong done to His churches, at the same time *make their complaint* (= *doleeren*) to the rulers of the land, in so far as the latter maintain a false church government against us, though, as ruling by the grace of God, it is their duty to see justice done to God’s churches.”

There was also a deep gulf fixed then between the confessors of the Reformed Faith, according as they were ripe for the liberation of the Church, or still remained under the spell of the statutory organisation in the Dutch Reformed Church. Much grievous wrong was then suffered by the faithful confessors who, forsaken and reviled by many, found themselves obliged to leave the synodal organisation, bereaved of their right to the property of the local Reformed Church. Great sacrifices were then made, often by a very small flock, to institute and keep up a church community and divine service according to the Word of God again. But at the same time a rich blessing from the Lord was then enjoyed in His evident nearness and in the close communion of the saints. And the breath of the Word of God went over all their lives, and made all their labour for the good cause, to the service of which they had devoted themselves, bear fruit in the vigorous life and growth of the liberated churches.

Above all we can see a blessing of the Lord in the reunion of the brethren of 1886 with the sons of the same house who had lived separately since 1834. Though among the latter there were some who at first watched the new movement with a certain suspicion, before long a better understanding was established, and at the Synod of Amsterdam in 1892, the children of the *Separation* extended the hand of brotherhood to the fathers of the “*Doleantie*.” The last wall of partition was removed; it was now to be one Flock and one Shepherd. Each of them had in his own way been delivered from the Synodal organisation of 1816,

¹ Meaning: “of the Low Countries.”

and now the two church formations of 1834 and 1886, taking their stand on the confession and church polity they had in common, were united in one church community under the historic name of *The Reformed Churches in the Netherlands*, alongside which, alas, a small remnant constituted themselves separately as the *Christian Reformed Church*.

VII

On the basis of the ancient confession and ecclesiastical law, the house of the united churches was now further consolidated and extended. And it is in no small degree due to the skilful architects God gave to His church in men like *Kuyper*, *Rutgers* and *Bavinck*, that the restoration succeeded so eminently well. Severe of style, quite in accordance with the reformed principle, and yet not archaic but making allowance for the demands of modern life, the edifice of our Reformed Churches stands there, compelling admiration from all who have eyes to see.

The number of members has been steadily increasing. According to the latest statistics the members now number 570,959. The number of those who, by having openly and solemnly professed their faith in the midst of the congregation, are entitled to partake of the Lord's Supper, is 272,042; that of the churches is 754; and the ministers number 673. The ministers are trained at the Theological College at Kampen and in the Theological Faculty of the Free University of Amsterdam.

Without any support from the State the worldly wants of the Church are entirely met by free subscriptions and gifts. And a constantly increasing liberality of the members continually enables the churches to attain higher efforts. Notably the *Diaconate* has developed wonderfully. In the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands the destitute brethren and sisters receive *adequate* relief. Besides that, Christian charity abounds in numerous Institutions and Societies.

To the *Foreign Missions* the Synod of Middelburgh of 1896 gave a new departure by starting from the local church. The mission field in our colonies is *the south of Central Java* and *Soemba*. By means of large and small hospitals the confidence of the native population was won. Teaching at schools of various kinds established a contact with youth. Colportage of papers and books brought the Christian religion under the notice of a

continually extending circle of adults. Keuchenius school at Djocja provided for the training of young men who were wanted for that work. And all these paths did not only lead to a firm foothold in the East Indies, but a result was even attained which, as compared with the effect of the Mission in other Mahometan countries, bears a cheering aspect indeed. The number of missionary *stations* is at present 157; the total number of people who were *baptized* is 8,430.

For the *Jewish Missions* the churches of 's-Gravenhage and Amsterdam (aided by other churches) have appointed special ministers.

Then there is the *Evangelization*, which endeavours to bring the stray lambs in Holland itself back into the fold of the Church.

On the ground of the Presbyterian principle, which separates the power of State from that of the Church and denies that the State should have any right to interfere in Church matters, the Synod of Utrecht (1905) resolved to cancel a passage in Art. 36 of the Confession, where it said that it was a *function of the worldly power* "to prevent and exterminate all idolatry and false religion and to overthrow the rule of the Antichrist."

In November, 1914, under the influence of the terrible *World War*, the Synod of 's-Gravenhage called upon the churches and the world at large, to unite in more vigorous pleading for the restoration of peace and the maintenance of the same in the way of justice.

With a view to the difficulties the *Old Reformed Churches in Bentheim and East Friesland* had to cope with, the Synod of Utrecht of 1923 resolved to comply with the request that had come in from these churches to be *temporarily* admitted to the community of the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands.

How eager they were to maintain their Confession, the Reformed Churches manifested in their action against *deviating opinions in regard to the story of the fall of man, as related in Genesis*: in the year 1919 against *Dr. H. Jansen* of Eindhoven, in 1920 against *Rev. J. B. Netelenbos* of Middelburgh, and in 1926 against *Dr. J. G. Geelkerken* of Amsterdam South. The *special Synod of Assen* in 1926 judged that any conception of this story that does not take it in its literal and proper sense, is detrimental to the authority of Holy Scripture, and exacted submission to this confessional pronouncement. Refusal of submission entailed deprivation of office.

Meanwhile the Synod of Leeuwarden of 1920 urged the necessity of *unceasing reformation of the churches* by taking measures for preparing a new Church manual, for extending the Confession, and for reconstructing the Liturgy. But the same Synod also found it necessary to *protest* against the increasing worldly-mindedness among the members of the churches; and likewise in 1926 the Synod of Assen felt compelled to address a word of *exhortation* to the churches, urging them not to deviate from the unsophisticatedness of faith. For especially since the death of men like Kuyper, Rutgers and Bavinck, there has been a great danger notably for the younger people to be led astray by guides whose fervent word flashes up from the life of this time, but who tamper with the absolute authority of the Word of God.

May the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands, then, in the confession of their faith and in the preaching of the Gospel, more and more attentively and discriminatingly watch the signs of the times, in order to be able, according to the Word and decrees of God, to give a lead to this present generation, and that in co-operation with kindred churches in other countries.

The Reformed Churches in the Netherlands are in *correspondence* with the following *foreign* Churches :

1. The Church of Scotland.
2. The United Original Secession Church of Scotland.
3. The Free Church of Scotland.
4. The Welsh Presbyterian Church.
5. The Reformed Church of America.
6. The Christian Reformed Church of North America.
7. The Reformed Church of South Africa.
8. The "Nederduitsch" Reformed Church of South Africa.
9. Eglise Chrétienne Missionnaire Belge (=the Christian Missionary Church of Belgium).

Endeavours are also being made to get into closer contact with the feeble Reformed Churches in Silesia and Saxony and with the Calvinist movement in Hungary.

Then there is a *presbytery* of Buenos Aires of (Dutch) Reformed Churches in South America. Besides the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands are actively engaged in supplying the spiritual wants of the Calvinists in the Rhine Province of Prussia and in Westphalia, of the Calvinists "in dispersion" in Northern France, of the fishermen of Dieppe, of the patients in Davos and of the immigrants in Canada.

The General Synod (Assembly) of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands that was held at Groningen in 1927, appointed the following *deputies for the correspondence with the foreign churches*: Professor Dr. G. Ch. Aalders, Hilversum; Dr. A. J. L. van Beek Calkoen, 's-Gravenhage; Rev. A. Hoeneveld, Nijkerk; Dr. G. Keizer, De Steeg; Professor L. Lindeboom, Kampen; Rev. J. C. Rullmann, Wassenaar; Professor Dr. A. A. van Schelven, Haarlem.

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