CHRISTIANS IN THE NETHERLANDS

1940 TO 1945

When It Counted

What went right, what went wrong, and what God did

God is our refuge and strength,
a very present help in trouble.
Psalm 46:1

WIM KAMPHORST

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When It Counted. Christians in the Netherlands, 1940 to 1945

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Stichting (F)Luister Nederland

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The sources consulted are listed after each chapter. Stories known only from a person's own testimony or from later tradition, or that cannot be verified, are marked as such in the text and in the overview at the end of each chapter.

This book can be read and downloaded free of charge at whispermagazine.org.

Introduction: What Did the Christians Do?

In May 1940, Germany invaded the Netherlands. For five years the country was occupied. In those years more than a hundred thousand Dutch Jews were murdered. Thousands of other Dutch people died in camps, in the resistance, or from the hunger of the last winter.

The Netherlands was then a land of churches. Almost everyone belonged somewhere: Netherlands Reformed, Reformed, Catholic, Mennonite, Lutheran. On Sundays the churches were full. That raises a question I could not let go of. What did all those Christians do when it counted?

That is what this book is about. What went right? What went wrong? And what did people say afterward about what God had done in those years?

Eight Moments

This book does not follow eight people, but eight moments. Each chapter begins at one day or one place, and from there shows what happened.

We begin on Sunday, October 27, 1940, when in the Netherlands Reformed churches a protest against the first measures against the Jews was proclaimed. Then we go to Dachau, where in June 1942 four Dutch ministers arrived. To Sunday, July 26, 1942, when in the Catholic and Reformed churches a message was read from the pulpit, with consequences nobody had wanted to see.

Then follow the resistance newspaper Trouw, which in 1944 had to make an impossible choice. The village of Nieuwlande in Drenthe, where two Jewish boys sat under the pulpit of the church. And August 1944, when the Reformed Churches fell apart in the middle of the war.

The last two chapters are about what happened after the occupation and during the last winter. About the struggle over the Jewish children who had survived the war in hiding. And about the Hunger Winter, the soup kitchens of the churches, and the food that fell from the sky in April 1945.

Honest About What Went Wrong

There are many beautiful stories about Christians in the war. Some are true. But it is also true that most people in the church did nothing. That churches sometimes kept silent where they should have spoken. That Christians fought each other bitterly in those years. And that Jewish families after the war sometimes had to fight to get their own children back.

I have tried to show both sides. I take no side between Catholic and Protestant, or between the churches themselves. And I want to be careful with the Jewish victims. Their story is not a backdrop for Christian hero stories. It is their own story.

Testimonies

In this book you will also read testimonies. People who said that they prayed and were helped. People who said in a camp that they felt God close. I tell those stories as the people themselves told them, with the source given. I do not make them bigger than they were, and I do not argue them away.

Facts First

A great deal has been written about the war, and not all of it is correct. Numbers differ, and so do dates. Where the sources disagree, I say so. After each chapter there is a short overview of what is certain and what is not, and a list of sources. Under **Go There Yourself** you will find where you can still see the places in this book.

People about whom I already wrote a whole chapter in other books, such as Corrie ten Boom, Diet Eman, and Johannes Post, appear here only briefly.

October 27, 1940: The Announcement from the Pulpit

On Sunday, October 27, 1940, the congregations of the Dutch Reformed Church heard something they had not heard in five months of occupation. A short announcement came from the pulpit. The Protestant churches had sent a joint letter to Arthur Seyss-Inquart, the German Reich Commissioner who governed the occupied country. They asked him to withdraw the measures against the Jews.

The letter itself was not read aloud. It was a notice that the request had been submitted, with a brief summary, as the church historian Johan Snoek describes it. It reached many people. According to the historian Jacques Presser, many tens of thousands heard it.

In the Gereformeerde churches (the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands, a separate and strictly Calvinist denomination), it stayed quiet that Sunday. The same was true in the Christian Reformed churches. Their churches had signed the letter.

How did the churches come to write this letter, and why was it heard from one pulpit and not from another? To find out, you go back to the summer of 1940, to the first weeks of the occupation.

On the way you meet the people who are the heart of this chapter: a minister in the Jordaan, a minister in Rotterdam, a professor in Leiden, and a Jewish student who sat in the hall.

A Promise on May 29

On May 29, 1940, Seyss-Inquart gave his first speech as Reich Commissioner. He promised that he would not force a foreign ideology on the Dutch people. Many Dutch people clung to those words. In October the churches would come back to them in their letter.

In the meantime, the Protestant churches reached out to one another. On June 20, 1940, the General Synodal Commission of the Dutch Reformed Church sent out an invitation. On June 25, a new body met for the first time: the Convent of Churches. At this standing table the Protestant denominations could discuss what the occupation asked of them. Prof. J.R. Slotemaker de Bruïne was chairman, and Rev. K.H.E. Gravemeyer was secretary.

It began cautiously. The chairman called the first meeting unofficial, informational, and confidential. First everyone wanted to know how the others saw things.

A denomination is an independent church with its own governing body. The Netherlands had quite a few in 1940. The largest Protestant ones were the Dutch Reformed Church and the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands. Smaller ones included the Christian Reformed Church, the Remonstrant Brotherhood, and the Mennonites, the heirs of the early Anabaptists.

The Roman Catholic Church did not sit at this table. It was not invited, Snoek writes. Even before the war, its bishops had drawn a line against the NSB, the Dutch National Socialist party. In May 1936 they declared that anyone who gave the party significant sup-

port could not be admitted to the sacraments. I will return to those Catholics further on.

Form A and Form B

In the summer the occupier began with small steps. On August 28, 1940, the German senior official Wimmer gave the secretaries-general, the highest Dutch civil servants, a verbal order. Jews could no longer be appointed or promoted as civil servants. That order stayed secret. On September 30, a circular went out from The Hague that carried it out.

On October 3, 1940, came the circular that touched everyone. Every civil servant had to declare whether he or she was Jewish. That declaration went down in history as the Aryan declaration. The paper reached people on different days. In Amsterdam, the mayor and aldermen sent it to the heads of the public schools on October 18, with the order to hand everything in no later than October 26. In Leiden, university staff received the letter on October 23.

There were two forms. Form A was for those who called themselves Aryan, Form B for those who could not. Anyone with one or more Jewish grandparents had to fill in Form B. Every civil servant had to sign, down to the unpaid student teachers. The Jewish civil servants themselves had to sign too. So did the teachers at Christian schools.

Snoek points to something that is easy to overlook. For the first time the occupier asked for the cooperation of people who were not Jewish themselves, so that the Jews could be isolated and struck. All they had to do was sign. With that signature, they helped to make a list.

"They Are Going Out and They Are Going Under"

In Amsterdam, a young minister saw where this was heading. Jan Koopmans, born on May 26, 1905, in Sliedrecht, was a Reformed minister. At the start of the war he came to the Elthetokerk, and soon afterward to the Noorderkerk in the Jordaan. In October 1940 he wrote a pamphlet with a title like an alarm bell: *Bijna te laat!* (Almost Too Late!)

Koopmans addressed the secretaries-general, the mayors, the civil servants, and the boards of Christian schools. He called on them not to sign. He accused the churches, as Presser sums it up, of having behaved far too properly until then. He also addressed the Catholic episcopate, the bishops together, in strong language. According to Presser, some tens of thousands of copies circulated.

About the Jewish Dutch he wrote a sentence that reads as almost unbearable today: "They are going out and they are going under."

I had to read that sentence again several times. It was written in October 1940, when not one Jew had yet been deported from the Netherlands. Koopmans could not know what was coming. But he did see where a form could lead.

He did not stop at writing. Later in the war he gave Jewish people false baptismal certificates, a paper that gave them a chance to escape deportation.

On March 12, 1945, he stood at the window of his hiding place on the Stadhouderskade and looked out at the Weteringplantsoen. That day, thirty people were being shot there. A bullet from the firing squad flew over the victims and hit him in the head. He was taken to the Wilhelmina Gasthuis. His wife, who lay ill in Breukelen, came by ambulance and stayed with him for his last days.

His biographer G.W. Marchal describes how he prayed for healing in those days. He also said that it was God who was calling him, and not the bullet. Twelve days later, on Saturday evening, March 24, 1945, he died. He was thirty-nine. He is buried at Zorgvlied in Amsterdam.

His colleague K.H. Kroon wrote that this bullet, seen through the eyes of the antichrist, had struck truer than many another in the country. In 2020 the Noorderkerk wrote of a "stray bullet." Whether the shooter aimed at Koopmans is not recorded anywhere.

A Memorandum from Rev. Buskes

Within the Convent, it was another minister who put the subject on the table. Johannes Jacobus Buskes, born in 1899 in Utrecht, was in 1940 a minister in Rotterdam in the Reformed Churches (Restored), a small Reformed church alongside the large Reformed Churches in the Netherlands.

The minutes of the Convent of September 30, 1940, state that the subject of anti-Semitism would be prepared with a memorandum from Rev. Buskes. His memorandum left little room for doubt. Anti-Semitism, he wrote, is contrary to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, which the churches must proclaim. He proposed informing the Reich Commissioner of the churches' objections in principle.

Prof. Aalders saw it differently. His advice began with the claim that the church, in the first instance, had nothing to do with anti-Semitism as such. Buskes himself later looked back on much struggle and effort before a principled voice came.

The NSB press had already found him. Het Nieuwe Volk called him "the half-Jew Buskes" on November 2, 1940.

Ten Signatures

It became a request to Seyss-Inquart, dated October 24, 1940. It carried ten signatures, on behalf of six churches: the Dutch Reformed Church, the Reformed Churches, the Christian Reformed Church, the Reformed Churches (Restored), the Remonstrant Brotherhood, and the General Mennonite Society. The two Lutheran churches did not take part.

The churches wrote that the measures against the Jews were "contrary to Christian mercy." They pointed out that church members of Jewish descent were also affected, people who had become Christians in the last generations. They asked the Reich Commissioner to withdraw the regulations, and they reminded him of his promise of May 29.

For the first time in the occupation, the Protestant churches spoke together. H.C. Touw, whom Snoek often cites, called that Sunday a turning point: the churches testified together against anti-Semitism, on biblical grounds.

If you hold the letter up against the reality of those weeks, something is missing. The Aryan declaration was not mentioned in the protest, Snoek notes. Other measures were. Yet that was the measure at which their own members, as civil servants or teachers, had to make a choice that very month. Should you sign, or could you refuse? On that the churches said nothing.

To Announce or Not to Announce

Then came the question of whether the congregations were allowed to hear it. The Dutch Reformed churches announced the request on Sunday, October 27. The Reformed churches did not. Prof. H.H. Kuyper, who represented the Reformed Churches in the Convent, did not think it proper to give publicity to a request before an answer

had come. He had put his signature to it. His church members heard nothing of it that Sunday.

You can understand Kuyper's reasoning. A request to a government is not made public before that government can respond. That was how it went in peacetime. Whether it was still peacetime was something the men at the table disagreed about.

Seyss-Inquart never answered. The only newspaper that printed the announcement word for word was De Misthoorn, a paper on the side of the occupier, and it did so against the ban.

What would you have done, as a church council or as a minister, that Sunday? Read the letter aloud, at the risk that the occupier would crack down harder on the church? Or wait, in the hope that quiet negotiation would achieve more?

Little More Than a Week Later

The occupier's answer came by another route. On November 4, 1940, Wimmer gave the order to remove the Jewish civil servants from their positions immediately, with their salaries maintained. The secretaries-general first spoke of a provisional suspension. On November 18, the word provisional was dropped. By the end of November 1940, all Jewish civil servants in the Netherlands had lost their jobs, in government, in the courts, in the police, and in education.

Now it became visible what the forms were for. They told the bosses whom to send away. Nearly all civil servants had signed, writes the Anne Frank House. How many Jewish civil servants lost their jobs is not given as a number in Presser. He does pass on the estimate of the jurist Mr. Herzberg: barely one percent of a little under two hundred thousand civil servants.

The Convent was silent that month. On November 5, the subject of anti-Semitism came off the agenda. Buskes later wrote dryly that the Germans themselves made sure it came back. The next letter, to the secretaries-general, did not go out until March 5, 1941. It was not announced in the churches.

Those Who Did Not Sign

There were people and schools that refused. Presser names them. The Amsterdams Lyceum never handed in the declarations. Through a certain Ad Goede he knew of a Christian school in The Hague where the teachers refused to sign as a group. He does not say which school that was. At the Haags Christelijk Gymnasium the staff did sign, after deep hesitation and against their own wishes. Many thought back on that signature later, writes Presser.

In Leiden there was a plan. The professors would refuse together if twenty-five of them were left who were willing. Eighteen remained. In the end they signed too. Sixty professors did put their names to a protest drawn up by the jurist Ben Telders.

"I Belong"

With the dismissals in November, the Jewish legal scholar Eduard Meijers fell too. On November 26, 1940, at the hour when Meijers should have given his lecture, the dean of the law faculty took the floor. Rudolph Cleveringa spoke in the Great Auditorium of the Academy Building, which was packed full.

In the hall sat Hetty Koster, a Jewish law student of twenty-seven, later Hetty Cohen-Koster. On the way to the speech she told her future father-in-law that Cleveringa seemed a dull man to her. Wait until you have heard him, he replied. There is a lot burning in him.

In 1980 she wrote down what she experienced that day. She had heard a sixteen-year-old call the speech a limp story, and that was why she wrote it down. She describes how the anger was in every sentence. The words lashed, she wrote, and the contemptuous tone was worse than any insult. For her own doubting soul it was balm.

She experienced the hall as one silent bond. For her, a Jewish woman, that meant one thing: "I belong."

At the end Cleveringa spoke a closing sentence full of hope for the future. Thereupon the whole hall rose as one man and spontaneously sang the Wilhelmus, the Dutch national anthem. She called it the most beautiful time she ever heard it. She knew that everyone was living through a historic moment, and nobody could foresee what it would cost. She came home deeply moved.

The occupier reacted. The next day Cleveringa was arrested. He sat in the Scheveningen prison, nicknamed the Oranjehotel (the Orange Hotel), until the summer of 1941. Telders was picked up on December 18 and died in Bergen-Belsen in 1945.

Hetty Cohen-Koster later went into hiding and survived the war. She died in 1996. The speech, she wrote, was a great stimulus to resistance, even for those who read about it later. To the hidden work that grew out of it, she and many others ultimately owed their lives.

A Disgrace, Said the Theologian

In the theological faculty, too, a voice was heard that day. The Remonstrant professor Lambertus van Holk called the dismissal a disgrace in front of his students. He asked them to remain loyal to their Jewish friends and acquaintances. He also warned them not to protest too loudly, because he feared what might then happen to them.

A few hundred yards away, the anatomist Ton Barge gave a public lecture. He called the racial theory of the Nazis nonsense. He was arrested a year and a half later. Van Holk himself resigned his office in May 1942 and ended up in a Dutch hostage camp.

The students went on strike, in Leiden and also in Delft. Cleveringa had not called for that. The occupier closed Leiden University.

Presser later judged the civil servants harshly. For him the Aryan declaration was the test by which you could see who was willing to go along. He regretted that there had been no leadership that said clearly: do not sign.

"I Do Not Want to Be a Second Innitzer"

And the Catholics? Their archbishop in Utrecht, Johannes de Jong, had made clear early in the occupation where he stood. Some clergymen tried to persuade him to take an accommodating attitude toward the new regime. His answer, as his biographer Aukes passes it on: "What nonsense is this, gentlemen? I do not want to be a second Innitzer." Innitzer was the Austrian cardinal who had gone a long way to meet the Nazis.

Slotemaker de Bruïne had a copy of the Protestant request sent to the archbishop. Presser writes that De Jong wanted to protest to Seyss-Inquart at once and also to issue a pastoral letter, a letter from the bishops that is read aloud in all churches. According to Aukes, that met strong resistance, and there was uncertainty about the right moment. The bishops considered a testimony from the Catholic pulpits. Their opinions were divided, writes Snoek, and nothing came of it.

That also had to do with how the Catholic Church is organized. The archbishop was first among equals. Each bishop had a great deal of

freedom in his own diocese, and De Jong could impose nothing on the others. He had to consult and persuade.

On another point the bishops were united. On January 13, 1941, they extended the refusal of the sacraments to ordinary NSB members, sympathizers, and anyone who supported the party with money. On January 26 this was announced in the Catholic churches. For the Jews they did not speak publicly in those first months.

The Germans would come to know De Jong. His biographer Henk van Osch describes a man who openly opposed measures of the occupier, and who acted carefully because he knew what his words could mean for others. They said of him: "Mit dem Mann ist nicht zu reden." (There is no talking to that man.)

On October 31, 1941, the Amsterdam professor Paul Scholten visited the archbishop. After that, cooperation got under way. On February 17, 1942, Protestants and Catholics stood together before the Reich Commissioner. From 1942 the Convent continued as the Interchurch Consultation. That part of the story belongs to a later chapter.

Six Churches and One Form

Judging harshly in hindsight is easy. Presser did it. He found the joint church protests unimpressive, in scope and in content, although he acknowledged the courage of the people who set them in motion. Snoek, himself a Reformed minister, came after years of research to a conclusion he called astounding. Of all the churches, the Catholic one had held up best in open protest over the whole war. Dutch Reformed and Reformed Christians, he said, had taken turns letting it slip. In October 1940 it was the Reformed. In the fall of 1940 the Catholic pulpit also stayed silent.

Something good happened too. At a time when nearly everyone waited and watched, six churches wrote together that what was being done to the Jews was contrary to the mercy that Christ asks. A minister in Rotterdam wrote the memorandum that set the protest in motion, even when the NSB press abused him. A minister in Amsterdam called on civil servants not to sign. A theologian in Leiden called the dismissal a disgrace in front of his students. The teachers of a Christian school in The Hague refused their signature. And a Jewish student stood up with a hall full of people and knew: I belong.

Much also failed to happen. The churches did not mention the Aryan declaration. Civil servants and teachers in the pews were given no clear word. After the dismissal of their Jewish colleagues, the Convent stayed silent for months. The Jewish civil servants themselves, people with a name and a trade, lost their jobs without any church raising it in worship.

Eighty years later, on November 8, 2020, the Protestant Church in the Netherlands declared in the Rav Aron Schuster Synagogue in Amsterdam that the church had done too little for the Jews during and after the war. Leaders had often lacked the courage to stand up for their Jewish fellow citizens.

I do not write this to lecture the people of 1940. I do not know what I myself would have signed. What I do see is this: they were ordinary ministers and teachers who were the first to understand what a signature could mean.

Back to the Pulpit

On that Sunday, October 27, 1940, an announcement sounded in the Dutch Reformed churches that was shorter than the letter itself. The congregations heard that their churches had written to the man

who governed the country. In the Reformed church, sometimes a street away, the letter was not mentioned. In the Catholic church it was not either.

A day earlier, in Amsterdam, the deadline for the Aryan declarations had expired. The forms with the names were already lying on the desks of the bosses.

Go There Yourself

The Academy Building of Leiden University stands at Rapenburg 73. In the Great Auditorium Cleveringa spoke on November 26, 1940. A memorial to him hangs in the building. In the courtyard, since November 26, 2014, stands a lectern that recalls the protest speeches of that day. On the houses where Cleveringa, Van Holk, and Barge lived, wall plaques bear their names, the date, and the word protest speech. The building is still used for doctoral ceremonies and other formal occasions. Whether and when you can look inside is stated on the website of Leiden University.

In Amsterdam, the Noorderkerk stands on the Noordermarkt, in the middle of the Jordaan. Jan Koopmans preached here. The church was built between 1620 and 1623. Hendrick de Keyser designed it, and after his death in 1621 others finished the work. On the south side hangs a plaque for the February Strike of 1941: public gatherings were forbidden on the Noordermarkt at that time. In May 2020 the congregation still wrote a meditation on Jan Koopmans. For opening hours and church services, see the website of the Noorderkerk.

Koopmans is buried at the Zorgvlied cemetery in Amsterdam. The Weteringplantsoen, where he looked out on March 12, 1945, lies on the Stadhouderskade. In Sliedrecht, his birthplace, a memorial

to him was unveiled on May 26, 2025. Ask the municipality of Sliedrecht for the exact location.

What is certain and what is told

Certain (several independent sources): the founding of the Convent of Churches in June 1940; the circulars of September 30 and October 3, 1940, and the deadline of October 26; Forms A and B; that nearly all civil servants signed; the request to Seyss-Inquart of October 24, 1940, on behalf of six Protestant churches, without the Lutheran and Catholic churches; the announcement in the Dutch Reformed churches on October 27 and the silence in the Reformed and Christian Reformed churches; the lack of any answer; Koopmans' pamphlet *Bijna te laat!*; his wounding on March 12, 1945, at the executions at the Weteringplantsoen, his death on March 24, 1945, and his grave at Zorgvlied; the dismissal of the Jewish civil servants in November 1940; Cleveringa's speech on November 26, 1940, in the Great Auditorium and his arrest; the extension of the Catholic refusal of the sacraments in January 1941; the joint audience on February 17, 1942.

From own testimony or from people who were there: the memory of Hetty Cohen-Koster of Cleveringa's speech, written down in 1980 and published by Leiden University (the conversation with her future father-in-law, the anger and contempt in the speech, the feeling of belonging, the hall that sang the Wilhelmus); Buskes' own look back on the struggle within the Convent and his remark about the agenda; Koopmans' sickbed and his words about God and the bullet (via his biographer Marchal, as a newspaper reported it in 1985).

Only from tradition or from one source: the reasoning of Prof. H.H. Kuyper, as Snoek relates it; De Jong's remark about Innitzer and the resistance in the fall of 1940, both via his biographer Aukes.

Where the sources differ (in the story I have always chosen one reading):

- *The Aryan declaration.* Snoek gives September 20, 1940, as the date on which the occupier demanded the signing. That is before the circulars Presser describes, and Snoek gives no source for it. Presser and Yad Vashem do not mention that date. The story uses Presser's dates: September 30 and October 3.
- *The announcement in the churches.* Snoek also gives October 29 as the day of the announcement in all Dutch Reformed churches. October 29 was a Tuesday, the same paragraph speaks of "that Sunday," and Touw gives Sunday, October 27. It is probably a misprint.
- *The number of dismissed Jewish civil servants.* Presser gives no total. He only passes on the estimate of Mr. Herzberg: barely one percent of a little under two hundred thousand civil servants. The figure of over 2,500 is attributed to Peter Romijn in *The History of the Jews in the Netherlands* (2002), but that book was not consulted. The Dutch Wikipedia gives the same figure without a source.
- *The number of refusers.* De Waarheidsvriend speaks in 2020 of a handful and names N.H. de Graaf, and the Dutch Wikipedia of a few dozen out of about two hundred thousand, both without a source. The figure of fewer than ten refusers out of over two hundred thousand civil servants is therefore not in the story: it comes from an opinion piece with no source given.
- *The bullet.* The Noorderkerk (in quotation marks), De Waarheidsvriend, and the description of the memorial speak of a stray bullet. The 1985 review of Marchal's biography leaves the question open: an accident, or intent? No investigation into the shooter is known.

- *The address of Koopmans' hiding place.* A 1985 newspaper review gives Stadhouderskade 73, but also gives 24 instead of 30 people shot. I therefore do not give the house number in the story.

Unconfirmed: the name of the Christian school in The Hague (Presser names only his informant Ad Goede); the exact location of the memorial in Sliedrecht.

Interpretation: Presser's judgment on the weakness of the church protests and Snoek's conclusion about the Catholic Church are historians' judgments about the whole war, with 1940 as the beginning.

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Dachau, June 26, 1942: Four Ministers Behind the Gate

On June 26, 1942, four Dutch ministers entered the Dachau concentration camp, near Munich. All four had been held in Amersfoort Camp, and all four had left there on June 4, 1942. Rev. Jacobus Overduin of Arnhem and Dr. Kornelis Sietsma of Amsterdam, called Kees, were Reformed. Rev. G.J. de Geus of Almelo was Dutch Reformed. Rev. J.W. Tunderman, from Helpman near Groningen, was also Reformed.

Seventeen days later, on July 13, De Geus was dead. Sietsma died in September. Tunderman did not live to see Christmas: he died on December 26, 1942. Of the four, only Overduin came home, in the fall of 1943. In 1945 his book appeared about what he had seen. He called it *Hel en hemel van Dachau* (Hell and Heaven of Dachau).

On that same June 26, a telegram went to the Sicherheitsdienst in Arnhem, the German security service. It said that Father Jan Galama of 's-Heerenberg had died in Dachau on June 20. That report was almost certainly false. You will read why further on.

I keep coming back to the title of Overduin's book. Hell I understand. But heaven? This chapter is about the men behind the barbed wire: ministers, priests, curates. Why they were there, who died, and what they themselves or their fellow prisoners told about God in that place.

It began almost a year earlier, on a Sunday in 's-Heerenberg.

The Letter of Sunday, August 3, 1941

On Sunday, August 3, 1941, a pulpit message was read in the Roman Catholic churches. A pulpit message is a letter from the bishops that the priest reads aloud to the faithful from the pulpit. This letter, dated July 25, was the first in a series, issued under the responsibility of Archbishop De Jong of Utrecht, later cardinal.

In 's-Heerenberg, close to the German border, Jan IJsbrands Galama was pastor of the parish of St. Pancras. He was a Frisian, born on February 24, 1885, on a farm in Sensmeer, in the parish of Blauwhuis. Since January 1931 he had been in 's-Heerenberg.

At a commemoration on June 26, 2022, the celebrant in 's-Heerenberg told what happened after that Sunday. The curates had put the text of the letter on a stencil, and it was widely distributed. Local NSB members (the Dutch Nazi party) reported the priests to the Gestapo. On Monday, August 4, Galama was arrested. The next day his two curates were picked up as well, Marinus van Rooijen and Reinier Hegge. A curate is an assistant priest who works under the pastor in a parish.

Galama was first held in the jail in Arnhem. In mid-November he was moved to a police station in Düsseldorf. On November 28, 1941, he arrived in Dachau. He received number 28770 and a place in Block 28. Van Rooijen arrived on February 13, 1942, by way of the Sachsenhausen camp near Berlin.

Barbed Wire Around a Chapel

The Dachau concentration camp had existed since 1933. During the war the Nazis brought clergy there from all over occupied Europe. They were held in Blocks 26, 28, and 30. Block 26 was the international block, Block 28 that of the Polish priests. Soon this part of the camp was called the priest block.

A chapel was set up in Block 26. On January 20, 1941, the first Mass was celebrated there, the Catholic celebration of the Lord's Supper. Clergy in Dachau received privileges that others did not. Jews and Jehovah's Witnesses were not allowed to perform any religious act in the camp.

The chapel stood behind barbed wire. Ordinary prisoners were not allowed in. According to the history of the priest block, the German clergy of Block 26 kept strictly to that ban. The Polish priests in Block 28 did it differently. At first they were not allowed to practice religion at all. They held secret Masses before dawn, and let Christians of every nationality take part.

In March 1941 the clergy briefly received lighter work, time for meditation, access to newspapers and the library, and for a while even some wine and cocoa. It did not last long. In September 1941 the camp leadership separated the German clergy from the others, and the windows facing Block 28 were painted thick white.

The work was hard. In 1942 clergy had to work on the plantation, the SS herb farm next to the camp, or mend clothes. During 1942 they were allowed to receive food parcels from home. That also stirred resentment among prisoners who received no such parcels. Only from March 1943 were all priests allowed to celebrate Mass.

The first Dutch ministers died as early as the spring of 1942. A minister, or *dominee*, is the leader of a Protestant congregation. Dr. Jan

Ridderbos of Assen listed their names. His overview is kept at the Historical Documentation Center of the Vrije Universiteit.

Rev. A.R. Rutgers, a Dutch Reformed minister in Rotterdam, arrived in Dachau on November 28, 1941, the same day as Galama. He was fifty-eight. By April 2, 1942, he was dead. Rev. J.W.B. Cohen of Dokkum arrived on September 24, 1941. He died on May 23, 1942, thirty-seven years old.

In Amersfoort Camp, on the border of Leusden and Amersfoort, people died too. Rev. D.A. van den Bosch, a Dutch Reformed minister in The Hague, entered it on October 28, 1941. He died in the camp on March 20, 1942, the first Dutch minister to die in a concentration camp. After the war he was awarded the Resistance Cross.

How many ministers were imprisoned in all cannot be said exactly. Ridderbos counts 103 in Dutch camps, of whom five died there. Of the Dutch ministers in German and Polish camps, nearly half died by his count. In Dachau there were twenty-two. Eight did not return. For all clergy together there is a different count. According to the figures the historian Paul Berben used, there were 2,720 clergy in Dachau, of whom 1,034 died. Almost two thirds were Polish. From the Netherlands there were 63, of whom 17 died.

A Prayer Service for the Schools: Kapteyn

Johannes Kapteyn was a Reformed minister in Groningen. He was born on January 24, 1908, in Giessendam, on the Merwede. He had served in Kralingseveer and IJmuiden, and had started in Groningen in July 1941. He was married and had three children.

His son Kees, who also became a minister, wrote about him later. His father prayed for the queen in London in the service and spoke openly against National Socialism. When told that there were NSB members in the church, he answered that he would not preach any

differently because of that. In November 1941 he had to report to the SD. There he received a threatening warning and brushed it aside.

The Reformed community had its own schools, with their own boards. They considered it of great importance that they appoint their own teachers. When the occupier wanted to take those appointments into its own hands, Kapteyn spoke out clearly against it, after a prayer service of the Reformed School Association. On February 26, 1942, he was arrested. The Germans called him a "Hetzer," an agitator.

He was first held in the jail on the Hereweg in Groningen. A guard who meant well by him smuggled his letters to his wife. That guard also made sure that his brother could arrange a visit with his wife, who was then in the hospital, under the eye of a German soldier. It was the last time the couple saw each other.

In April 1942 Johannes came to Amersfoort Camp. He spent weeks there that his family later called hell. There he got to know the Carmelite Titus Brandsma, a professor in Nijmegen and nearly thirty years older than he. The Reformed minister from Groningen and the Catholic friar spent a lot of time together in the camp. Both went from Amersfoort to the prison in Kleve, just across the German border. According to his family, Kapteyn wrote there, on the flyleaf of his Bible, the first answer of the Heidelberg Catechism, about the only comfort in life and in death.

On June 13, 1942, they left Kleve together, so the family tells it, Kapteyn's right wrist chained to Brandsma's left wrist. The Titus Brandsma Museum in Bolsward devoted an exhibition to it in 2007. On June 19 they arrived in Dachau. In the camp register they received consecutive numbers: Brandsma 30492, Kapteyn 30493. Both would die that summer.

A Mighty Fortress in Arnhem

In Arnhem almost the same thing was happening. Jacobus Overduin, called Koos, was born in Leiden in 1902, the son of a wool merchant. He was a younger brother of Leendert Overduin, a minister in Enschede, who during the war sought shelter for hundreds of Jewish people in hiding. Koos had served in Sleen and Kampen. In Kampen he became known throughout the country for his radio talks. In 1939 he came to Arnhem.

What happened there we know mainly from his own book and from the lectures he gave all over the country after the liberation. At the Christian Van Löben Sels School in Arnhem worked a teacher who was an NSB member and wanted to become head of the school himself. The headmaster, J.M. Caspers, was arrested. When the board suspended the teacher, two board members were also picked up, and the NSB man was given the leadership of the school. Parents asked their minister what to do. Overduin advised them to keep the children at home.

The Convent of Churches, the consultation body of the Protestant churches, had designated Sunday, February 8, 1942, as a day of prayer for Christian education. Overduin preached that morning in the Oosterkerk on words of Jesus from the Sermon on the Mount, about people who are reviled and persecuted for His sake (Matthew 5). Beforehand he had asked his wife whether she was willing to bear the consequences of imprisonment. In the church he saw two Gestapo men sitting. He prayed briefly for strength and gave the sermon as he had prepared it. Afterward the congregation sang two verses of Luther's hymn "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God."

That is how he tells it himself, and that is how the paper Strijdend Nederland reported it on June 7, 1945, after one of his first lectures. Shortly afterward he was picked up. He spent four weeks in the jail

in Arnhem. According to Ridderbos he entered Amersfoort Camp on March 4, 1942. Prisons in Essen and Nuremberg followed, and on June 26 the gate of Dachau.

Holy Week in the Rain

In Holy Week of 1942, the week before Easter, Father Galama had been in Dachau for about four months. He had always had poor health. According to the 2022 memorial sermon, the prisoners were given a collective punishment then. From Palm Sunday through Easter Monday they had to march across the roll-call square all day, in cold and rain. Galama was fifty-seven. Afterward he lay weakened in the infirmary barracks.

On May 4, 1942, a so-called invalid transport of 118 prisoners left Dachau. According to the Dachau Memorial Site, such transports had been running since January of that year. Galama was number 62 on the list. The transport went to Hartheim Castle near Linz, in Austria, where the Nazis gassed the sick and disabled. The standard work by Eugen Weiler on the clergy in Dachau, from 1971, gives May 4, 1942, as his date of death, with the words "getötet auf Invalidentransport": killed on an invalid transport. Almost certainly he was murdered shortly after arriving in Hartheim.

And that telegram of June 26? It reported a date of death of June 20, in Dachau. In 1946 the municipality of Dachau drew up a death certificate with that date and a stroke as the cause. Next to the transport list, that cannot be right. A historian who researched the murders of priests in Hartheim describes how it worked. The certificate came from the camp where someone had been held. The writer chose the cause of death at will. People who were murdered at the same time were given different dates, so that it would not stand out.

His curate Marinus van Rooijen did not make it through the summer either. He died on June 16, 1942, in the Dachau infirmary barracks, forty-four years old. Officially it was heart failure. According to the journalist and historian Ad van Liempt, he succumbed to the effects of forced labor. Curate Reinier Hegge survived the deportation.

On July 26, 1942, Titus Brandsma also died in Dachau.

Fifty Days

Johannes Kapteyn lived in Dachau for fifty days. He died on August 8, 1942, thirty-four years old, of illness, privation, and exhaustion.

About those last weeks, one sentence has been preserved that will not let me go. A fellow prisoner later testified about him: "Spiritually he remained unbroken in his rock-solid and cheerful trust in God." So it stands in the in memoriam by his son, without the name of the fellow prisoner.

Cheerful. In Dachau, with a body that was giving up.

I wonder what you would want a fellow prisoner to say about you after your death, if your last weeks had looked like that.

A month later Dr. Kees Sietsma died, a Reformed minister in Amsterdam-Zuid. He was forty-six. He succumbed to dysentery on September 7, 1942. The Sicherheitsdienst had picked him up at home on the Valeriusplein on February 2, 1942. He left behind a wife, four sons, and a daughter.

A Sermon on April 19

In Enschede, the Dutch Reformed minister Nanne Zwiep preached on Sunday, April 19, 1942, against National Socialism and against

the persecution of the Jews. He was forty-seven and had been in Enschede since 1929. The next day he was arrested.

In the sources I read for this chapter, he is the only one of whom it is said that he spoke explicitly from the pulpit about the persecution of the Jews. Their suffering has a story of its own, which is told elsewhere.

After months of interrogations in Arnhem and Amersfoort, he arrived in Dachau on September 25, 1942. He died there on November 24, 1942, of exhaustion and malnutrition. In Oostzaan, where he had served earlier, a monument has stood since May 4, 1978: a bronze chair with a chained bird.

A Christmas Letter from the Camp

Not everyone reached Dachau. Rev. F.K. van Evert was a Dutch Reformed minister in Loosduinen. On August 22, 1942, he was arrested while helping Jewish members of his congregation to safety. In Amersfoort Camp he had to do heavy work and afterward fill straw mattresses.

At Christmas 1942 he wrote that the congregation should simply celebrate the feast. Around the turn of the year he went to Vught Camp, near 's-Hertogenbosch. Ridderbos writes that he supported fellow prisoners there spiritually, despite the harsh conditions. By January 31, 1943, he was dead. Two months later, on March 27, Rev. B.J. Aris of Amsterdam also died in Vught.

A Prayer Service on December 17

Shortly before that Christmas, Overduin in Dachau saw his own death before his eyes. He had slipped into what the prisoners called a "Muselmann." In his book he describes such a person as a pris-

oner who had lost the will to live through hunger and exhaustion. For weeks he lay in the infirmary.

On December 16, 1942, he received a letter from his wife. She wrote that there would be a prayer service in Arnhem the next day, and asked whether he, as a prisoner, would pray along on that day. So he told it in March 1946 at a lecture in Aalten.

On December 17, prayer was offered in his congregation in Arnhem, and on the same day in Dachau. According to the newspaper report of a lecture in Breda, Catholic and Protestant clergy prayed together there. Five things were asked: a different camp commandant, permission to receive parcels, a move from Block 28 to Block 26, more rest at night, and less heavy work.

According to his book, those improvements came all at once. Overduin saw them as a direct answer to prayer. In Aalten he told how the ministers were afterward even allowed to celebrate the Lord's Supper in a barracks. In his book he called the commandant of 1942 a beast and his successor a decent man. Until the end of 1942 it was hell, he said in Aalten, afterward it was like a sanatorium.

What was it like to live as a Protestant minister among hundreds of priests? In the 1930s, Reformed Protestants and Roman Catholics in the Netherlands stood far apart. They had their own schools, newspapers, broadcasters, and political parties. In Dachau they lived side by side.

Overduin wrote in his book with appreciation about the Roman Catholic fellow prisoners he got to know there. Two of them died, and he spoke of their going to heaven. The Reformatorisch Dagblad wrote in 2007, at the exhibition in Bolsward, that Titus Brandsma, shortly before his death, gave his last pipe tobacco to Overduin.

According to a description of the second printing, Overduin opens his book with the wish to let the facts speak. He acknowledges how hard that is after so much injustice. The book describes hunger, cold, abuse, and the medical experiments doctors performed on prisoners. It also tells of prisoners who shared food and comforted one another, and of the prayer that kept him standing. It appeared in 1945 in Kampen. In 1978 an English translation came out, *Faith and Victory in Dachau*. In Aalten he said in 1946 that he had already spoken about Dachau to about two hundred thousand people. He saw a danger in that too: the human being must not be allowed to take the center in such a story.

At the end of the English edition he hopes that the reader will above all say something about Christ: how great and good He is, how faithful and merciful.

"I Don't Know Exactly"

On October 8, 1943, he was released. How it came about, he did not know exactly himself, he wrote. His wife had heard that an order from Berlin to release him had already come during his transport, and she wrote this to the commandant of Dachau. A biography mentions repeated requests from church circles.

After the war something more came to light. From documents in the General State Archives it appeared that Kees van Geelkerken, the second man of the NSB, had pleaded for him with Heinrich Himmler. Van Geelkerken had been a member of the Reformed Church in Zeist and had been suspended there because of his political choice. He wrote in 1949 that a few weeks after that conversation he received word of the release. So a journalist summarized it in 2003 in De Waarheidsvriend. Overduin only heard of it after his book had appeared, and did not include it in later printings.

On his release he had had to sign that he would remain silent about the camp. The same journalist, as a boy of sixteen, was present when Overduin visited his father shortly after coming home, a fellow minister in Arnhem. He remembered that the minister wanted to tell almost nothing, except that he would write a book about it.

Later in the war Overduin had to go into hiding. After the liberation he became a minister in Amsterdam and later in Veenendaal, where he died on Sunday, June 5, 1983. When the Reformed Churches split in 1944, he did not join the Liberation (the *vrijmaking*). Kapteyn, who died in the same camp, is counted among the Liberated in one of the lists. That split is the subject of a later chapter of this book.

To the Last Spring

The dying continued to the end. Rev. G.Chr.H. Plantagie of Dieren died in Dachau on March 24, 1945, a month before the end. In Amersfoort Camp, Rev. Sj. Rijper died as late as November 28, 1944. In the last months of the war, many other Dutch ministers died in Neuengamme and Bergen-Belsen.

About two of them Ridderbos preserves small traces of their faith. Rev. A. du Croix, a Mennonite minister in Winschoten, was picked up in January 1944 during catechism, the faith class for young people, and released again after a few days. On May 14, 1944, he was arrested again, this time for illegal work. According to Ridderbos he supported many fellow prisoners with courage and faith, and the certainty that Christ remains the victor gave him strength. He died on March 10, 1945, in Bergen-Belsen.

Rev. M. Geertsema, a Reformed minister in Dwingeloo, preached on October 15, 1944, against working on German defenses. Four days later he was arrested. In the prison in Assen he read the Bible aloud to his fellow prisoners through the hatches of the cell doors,

and led them in prayer. He died on May 3, 1945, in the Lübeck Bay, on the German Baltic coast.

On April 29, 1945, Dachau was liberated. Of the 63 Dutch clergy who by Berben's count had been held there, 36 lived to see that day. Ten had been released earlier. Seventeen were dead.

Two Names in Glass

The former Dachau camp lies on the Alte Römerstraße. On an aerial photo from 1945 you see thirty-four barracks in tight rows. Of some, according to the memorial site, only traces remain. Where the camp leadership used to sit, there is now a convent of Carmelite nuns, Karmel Heilig Blut.

On that ground in 1942 stood a priest from 's-Heerenberg and a young minister from Groningen. They never met there: Galama had already been taken away more than six weeks when Kapteyn arrived. Both were picked up for what they said. Their names now stand in different books, in different churches.

In 's-Heerenberg a window of colored glass came in 1947, for the golden jubilee of the St. Pancras Church. The glass artist Alex Asperslagh made it. It shows how Jan Galama and Marinus van Rooijen were led away. On the Hofstraat, since November 2022, lie three stumbling stones, for Galama, Van Rooijen, and Hegge. Two of them did not return. Their being led away is now in the glass, in the church where their parish heard the bishops' letter in August 1941.

Go There Yourself

The National Monument Camp Amersfoort lies on the Loes van Overeemlaan in Leusden, on the border with Amersfoort. There is an underground museum with an introductory film and a wall

of photos of prisoners, and a large wooded outdoor site. On weekends there are guided tours. For opening hours see the website of the National Monument Camp Amersfoort. The National Monument Camp Vught lies on the Lunettenlaan in Vught, near 's-Hertogenbosch. You see a permanent exhibition about the camp, the former camp grounds with watchtowers, and Barracks 1B. For opening hours see the website of the National Monument Camp Vught.

The KZ-Gedenkstätte Dachau lies on the Alte Römerstraße in Dachau, north of Munich. On the grounds you find the exhibition, information boards, many memorials, and the Carmelite convent Karmel Heilig Blut. The memorial site sometimes organizes a tour about the clergy prisoners. For opening hours and tours see the website of the KZ-Gedenkstätte Dachau.

In 's-Heerenberg you find the window for Galama and Van Rooijen in the St. Pancras Church. Since 1992 the church also has a memorial chapel for them. On the Hofstraat lie the stumbling stones. I have not been able to find out when the church is open; ask the parish. In Blauwhuis in Friesland, where Galama celebrated his first Mass, he appears, according to the War Graves Foundation, together with Titus Brandsma on a window in the St. Vitus Church.

In Amsterdam-Zuid a stumbling stone lies in front of Valeriusplein 5 for Kees Sietsma. According to the War Graves Foundation there is also a memorial stone for him in the Willem de Zwijgerkerk on the Olympiaweg.

What is certain and what is told

Certain (several independent sources): the priest block in Dachau (Blocks 26, 28, and 30), the chapel in Block 26 from January 1941 and the privileges that Jews and Jehovah's Witnesses did not receive;

the arrival of Overduin, Sietsma, De Geus, and Tunderman on June 26, 1942, and the dates of death of the ministers (Ridderbos' register); the death of Sietsma on September 7, 1942 (War Graves Foundation, TracesOfWar); the arrest and death of Nanne Zwiep after his sermon of April 19, 1942; the arrest of Kapteyn on February 26, 1942, his death on August 8, 1942, and his transport with Brandsma from Kleve, with consecutive camp numbers (Titus Brandsma Museum, Kapteyn family); the arrest of Galama on August 4, 1941, after the pulpit message and his departure on May 4, 1942, with an invalid transport (2022 memorial sermon, Weiler, local history research in 's-Heerenberg); the death of Van Rooijen on June 16, 1942; the day of prayer of February 8, 1942, and the school struggle over the Van Löben Sels School (newspapers from 1945, 1946, 1983, and 2003); birth (1902, Leiden) and death of Overduin (Sunday, June 5, 1983, in Veenendaal according to the newspapers); the liberation of Dachau on April 29, 1945.

From own testimony (Overduin, *Hel en hemel van Dachau*, 1945, and his lectures of 1945 and 1946, via newspaper reports): the sermon with the Gestapo in the church, the question to his wife and the singing of "A Mighty Fortress"; the condition of "Muselmann"; the letter from his wife, the prayer service of December 17, 1942, and the improvements that he saw as an answer to prayer; his judgment of the two commandants; his wish that the reader would say something about Christ; the remarks about his Catholic fellow prisoners (only via a review of the English translation from 2020, the original text is not online).

From the memory of others or the family: Kapteyn's praying for the queen, his answer about the NSB members in his church, the warning from the SD, the last visit to his wife, his note in his Bible, and the handcuffs on the transport (family and museum); the testimony of an unknown fellow prisoner about Kapteyn; the declara-

tion of silence and Overduin's visit to a colleague (memory of the journalist who wrote in De Waarheidsvriend in 2003); Van Geelkerken's plea to Himmler (his own statement from 1949, via that same journalist); Brandsma's pipe tobacco (Reformatorisch Dagblad, 2007); the punishment march in Holy Week (memorial sermon); the pastoral work and Christmas letter of Van Evert (Ridderbos).

Where the sources differ (in the story I have always chosen one reading):

- *Arrest of Overduin.* February 8, 1942, the same Sunday, according to the newspapers of 1983; two days later according to a summary of his book. The story says only that he was picked up shortly after the sermon.
- *Release of Overduin.* October 8, 1943, according to his book, October 9 according to the newspapers of 1983, October 15 in Ridderbos.
- *Death of Sietsma.* Ridderbos gives September 7 or 9, the stumbling stone in front of his house August 7. TracesOfWar calls that an error on the stone.
- *Death of Overduin.* The newspapers give Sunday, June 5, 1983, reference sites June 4.
- *Place and date of death of Galama.* Hartheim on May 4, 1942, is almost certain on the basis of the transport list and Weiler. The War Graves Foundation keeps to June 20, 1942, in Dachau, expressly as a presumed date, and notes that his name is on the transport list. The article on the priest murders in Hartheim names no names. In a register the place is not recorded.
- *The commandant and the prayer service.* According to the Dachau Memorial Site, Martin Weiß had already been appointed on September 1, 1942, more than three months before the prayer service. A Bavarian exhibition notes that he carried out im-

provements that SS headquarters in Berlin had ordered, and also that he had prisoners who could no longer work murdered. Overduin places the change of commandant at the end of 1942. What happened for him is in his book.

- *Numbers.* Ridderbos and Berben count differently. Ridderbos himself writes that his overview may be incomplete.

Unconfirmed: what was decisive in Overduin's release (the letters from his wife, the request from church circles, or the plea of Van Geelkerken; Overduin himself wrote that he did not know exactly, and the historian Bart van der Boom saw no influence of the plea on his sentence).

Interpretation: whether the trust that fellow prisoners saw in these men came from God, and whether the improvements after the prayer service were an answer to prayer, is a question of faith. The sources describe what people saw and wrote, not what happened in their hearts. I believe with Overduin that his prayer was heard.

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Sunday, July 26, 1942: The Day the Pulpits Spoke

On Sunday, July 26, 1942, Catholics all over the Netherlands heard at Mass the Gospel for the ninth Sunday after Pentecost. It was a passage from Luke, about Jesus drawing near to the city of Jerusalem. *Now as He drew near, He saw the city and wept over it.* (Luke 19:41)

Then the priest read a letter from the bishops. It was a pastoral letter: a letter that the bishops write together to all the faithful, and that is read in every church from the pulpit. The letter named two needs of that summer. One was the persecution of the Jews, the other the fate of the men who were forced to work in Germany. In the middle of the letter stood the text of a telegram that the churches had sent to the German occupier two weeks earlier.

That same morning the telegram was also read aloud in Reformed churches and in churches of smaller denominations. In most Dutch Reformed churches, the largest Protestant church in the country, only a prayer was heard.

A week later, on Sunday, August 2, 1942, the police took Jews who had been baptized as Catholics out of their homes and convents

early in the morning. To the occupier they were Jews, whatever the baptismal registers said. Within three weeks, dozens of them had been murdered in Auschwitz.

What happened in those three weeks? And what did that one protest achieve? To find out, you go back to the beginning of the summer. On the way you meet two ministers who stood in Westerbork one morning, a synod secretary who said no to a German officer, and six members of religious orders with a Jewish name.

A Summons with the Extra Mail

At the end of June 1942, Generalkommissar Schmidt, one of the highest German administrators in the Netherlands, announced that the Jews would be deported. On Sunday, July 5, postmen delivered summonses with an extra round of mail. Jewish families had to report for what the occupier called *Arbeitseinsatz*, labor deployment. Behind that word lay deportation.

From July 14 to 17, four thousand Jews from Amsterdam had to report at Central Station. On July 14 there was a roundup in the city. On July 15 the first train left Westerbork camp for Auschwitz. So it stands in Johan Snoek, in his book on the Dutch churches and the Jews, and in a study by Annelies and Herman van Rens on the deportations from Limburg.

In this chapter I write about what Christians did and did not do. Whoever reads it must keep seeing those trains. The story of the people who were in them is bigger than the story of the churches.

Ten Churches, One Telegram

During the years of occupation the churches talked with one another in the Interchurch Consultation, IKO for short. At that table

Protestants and Catholics together decided what they would say to the occupier. The chairman was Dr. J.J.C. van Dijk, a former Minister of Defense, who represented the Reformed Churches there.

On Friday, July 10, 1942, the IKO met. A small committee was already working on a letter of objection about the measures against the Jews. On it sat the Dutch Reformed professor Kraemer, Mgr. Van de Loo, and Dr. Slotemaker de Bruïne. The document was not finished. After the news of that week, the committee proposed to send a telegram first. So Rev. H.C. Touw describes it, who in 1946 recorded the resistance of the Dutch Reformed Church from the minutes and letters. Kraemer insisted that the telegram should not replace the extended protest. He would write it himself. On July 13 he was arrested and held as a hostage, and the document never came.

On Saturday, July 11, the telegram went out. Ten denominations stood under it. Touw prints the text with all the names: the Dutch Reformed Church, the archbishop and bishops of the Roman Catholic Church, the Reformed Churches, the Christian Reformed Church, the General Mennonite Society, the Remonstrant Brotherhood, the Reformed Churches (Restored), the Reformed Congregations, the Evangelical Lutheran Church, and the Restored Evangelical Lutheran Church. For the Reformed Congregations, according to Snoek, Rev. G.H. Kersten signed.

The telegram went to four men at once: Reich Commissioner Seyss-Inquart, Rauter, Schmidt, and the German army commander F.C. Christiansen.

The churches wrote that they were already deeply shocked by the earlier measures against the Jews. Now they heard with dismay that men, women, children, and whole families would be carried off to German territory. They pointed to the suffering of tens of

thousands of people. They wrote that this went against the deepest moral sense of the Dutch people, and above all against what God asks as a "demand of justice and mercy." They urgently asked that the measures not be carried out. In a last paragraph they pointed to the Jews who were members of a Christian church and who would thus be cut off from church life.

Christiansen forwarded his copy to Seyss-Inquart, with the proposal to deport the signers as well. It never came to that.

The churches let the occupier know what else they planned. On Sunday, July 26, the telegram would be read in all churches, with a prayer.

A Beautiful Summer Day in Westerbork

Not everyone in the churches resigned themselves to that. In the IKO the Remonstrant Rev. Kleijn made a proposal that went far: make the Nieuwe Kerk in Amsterdam a refuge for Jews. The proposal was swept off the table. Only Rev. J.J. Buskes supported it fully, writes Snoek.

On Van Dijk's instructions, Buskes and Rev. Brink went to Westerbork camp in those days. They were to gather data for a new protest. They went separately and both got close to the transport. On July 21 they saw the third train depart.

The report they wrote afterward is included by Snoek in his book. It begins with a sentence written by two men who had seen something they could not shake: "We shall never forget what we saw on the morning of that beautiful summer day."

What they saw, they wrote down exactly. Cattle cars of about 21.5 square meters, with some sixty people in each car. Men, women, boys, and girls all together, with their luggage. The doors were

locked from the outside. The journey would last days and nights, without medical help. In each car stood two buckets, one for water and one as a toilet. Civilians had put them there. The Germans had not.

Van Dijk took the data to Schmidt and protested. It achieved nothing.

Exemption for the Baptized

Three days after the telegram, an answer came. On July 14, Schmidt let Rev. H.J. Dijckmeester know something. Dijckmeester was then acting secretary of the Dutch Reformed Synod, the highest governing body of the Dutch Reformed Church. Jews who had been baptized before January 1, 1941, would be exempted from deportation. Dijckmeester was to pass this on to the other churches. According to Touw, he replied that the churches were grateful, and that they stood by what was in their telegram. They had not asked for an exception for the baptized, writes Touw. It was offered, and it was not refused.

A few days later it became clear how shaky that promise was. On July 17, baptized Jews were carried off after all. The synod telephoned and telegraphed the German authorities, and the next day those deportations were stopped. Snoek found in the German documents that on July 17 the occupier internally had no intention of really keeping its promise. According to him, the assurance was meant to keep the churches quiet.

The Dutch Reformed Synod did not want to lose what it had achieved for a small group. It decided not to send a new protest. The telegram would only be mentioned in the introduction to a prayer.

Dijckmeester himself thought otherwise. How he thought about it, he said ten days later to a German officer, in words you can almost hear.

In 1946 Touw asked the question that runs through this whole chapter. Was it responsible to accept favors for one group of Jews? Had the synod, to save the lives of its own members, been unfaithful to its Lord? An exception for the baptized silently meant that the others were allowed to go.

"Prayer and Deed Cannot Be Separated"

On Thursday, July 23, the first letters with the announcement and the prayer went to the Dutch Reformed ministers. The occupier knew at once. On Friday, July 24, two days before the agreed Sunday, Dijckmeester was urgently summoned to Hauptmann Gruffke. Gruffke was Schmidt's deputy. On behalf of the Reich Commissioner he asked that the telegram not be read, because it was a confidential document. Touw and Presser report how it was put: "an urgent request, not an order."

Dijckmeester refused. Prayer and deed cannot be separated, he said. A believer who sees a drowning man in the water prays for him, and he also does something. The telegram was such a deed by the churches. Gruffke took over the image and turned it around: you cannot swim. Dijckmeester asked what it would cost the churches if they carried on. Gruffke said he was not allowed to say anything about that. So the conversation stands in Touw.

That same afternoon Dijckmeester put the question to the Dutch Reformed Synod, which happened to be meeting. He argued for going ahead. The synod decided otherwise and withdrew the reading of the telegram. Touw names two reasons. The synod held that you do not make a document public when the recipient objects to it. And it

feared that what had been achieved for the Christian Jews would be lost. For some congregations the message came too late, and there the telegram was read anyway. In the rest of the Dutch Reformed Church it stayed with the introduction and the prayer.

There was no more time that Friday afternoon for consultation with the other churches. They received only notice of the decision. Gruffke had not said a word that his request applied to them too, and Dijckmeester had spoken only on behalf of the Dutch Reformed Church. According to Touw, the occupier had not understood that difference.

Within the church itself, criticism came at once. Church members from Leiden, Oegstgeest, and Rotterdam wrote to the synod that the unity of the churches had been broken at a decisive point. Aalders had named as an argument that it was courteous to comply with the request. Buskes rejected that. Touw himself wrote in 1946 that in hindsight he could only marvel at the naïveté of the synod.

What would you have done, if you had sat at that synod table? On one side lay a promise for a small group of baptized people. On the other, a text about all the Jews, of which no one knew what it would accomplish. I ask that question without knowing the answer.

Van Dijk and De Jong Go Ahead

In the Reformed Churches the decision lay with Van Dijk. He decided at once: whatever the other churches did, in the Reformed churches the telegram would be read.

Archbishop Johannes de Jong of Utrecht did the same. He found it unacceptable that the secular authority should determine what was read in the churches. According to Snoek, he gave the order for the telegram to be heard in all Catholic churches, and informed the other bishops only afterward. His closest associate, Mgr. Van de

Loo, saw in the German request proof that the occupier was afraid of the power of such a reading in all churches at once.

The bishops had their own pastoral letter ready, dated July 20, 1942, and issued at Utrecht. The telegram was in it, and the promise about the baptized Jews as well. The letter set the events beside the Gospel of that Sunday, in which Jesus weeps over the city that does not see what awaits it. The faithful were called to repentance and to confess shared guilt.

Then followed the prayer intentions. The bishops asked for a just peace. They prayed that God would stand by the people of Israel, so bitterly tried, and bring them to true redemption in Jesus Christ. They prayed for the workers abroad and the families left behind, and for prisoners, hostages, and the many people threatened with death.

The Prayer on Sunday Morning

So the churches in the Netherlands sounded different on July 26. In Catholic churches the letter of the bishops was heard. In Reformed churches and some of the other churches the telegram was heard. In most Dutch Reformed churches only the prayer was heard. A German report to Berlin notes that one small Lutheran church community refused to take part from the start.

Snoek later read the Dutch Reformed prayer closely. It asked for preservation and for acceptance of God's punishment. It prayed for Israel and for the Christian Jews. Snoek found it too general. He missed the awareness that the church itself has the task of standing up for God's justice, whoever it concerns. He did note that the telegram, coming before it, determined how the prayer was heard.

In his final judgment Snoek is severe toward his own Protestant circle. The Catholic Church, according to him, held up best in these

years. Dutch Reformed and Reformed Christians, he says, "took turns letting it slip," one time the one, another time the other. In July 1942 it was the Dutch Reformed.

Monday, July 27

The day after the reading, Seyss-Inquart met with his staff. Snoek quotes from the minutes. Because the Catholic bishops had interfered, all Catholic Jews would be deported that same week. And if a majority of Protestant churches had read the telegram, the Protestant Jews would follow.

On July 31, Otto Bene, who reported on the Netherlands for the German Foreign Ministry, wrote a report. By then about six thousand Jews had already been deported from the Netherlands. According to Bene, the Protestant churches had heeded the Reich Commissioner's proposal and had not had any statements read. The Catholic Church had referred to the deportations the previous Sunday. Bene expected no further trouble from the churches.

On Tuesday an SS man came to the office of the Dutch Reformed Synod. He wanted to know how the telegram had been read in all kinds of churches after all, even in The Hague. The answer was that those had not been Dutch Reformed churches. The Sicherheitspolizei also asked many ministers what they had done. So Touw tells it.

That was how the occupier looked at it: the Protestants had kept to the agreement, the Catholics had not. That the Reformed had read the telegram is not in that report. Snoek suspects that with the promise and the punishment the occupier wanted to play the churches off against each other.

Sunday, August 2, Before the Light Came

In Oisterwijk the order came in the night of August 1 to 2, around two o'clock. That appears from a police report in the German and Dutch documents about that day, which the NIOD (the Dutch institute for war documentation) keeps. In the rest of the country it went the same way. On Sunday, August 2, at the crack of dawn, Jews baptized as Catholics were picked up, in The Hague, Maastricht, Nijmegen, Arnhem, and Amsterdam, and in convents and villages from Moerdijk to Echt.

The same day Schmidt spoke in Waubach, in South Limburg. He said that the Jew had to leave the west. Catholic Jews he called the worst enemies, and they would be taken east. It was the public answer to the bishops. Still on August 2, Archbishop De Jong sent a telegram to Seyss-Inquart and asked for mercy. He received no answer. According to Presser he made that attempt twice.

Six Members of a Religious Order in Berkel-Enschot

In Berkel-Enschot, near Tilburg, there were in 1942 two Trappist monasteries, a strict religious order that lives from prayer and manual labor. In the abbey of Koningshoeven lived three Löb brothers, in the convent of Koningsoord their sisters. They came from a family of Jewish descent from Bergen op Zoom, whose parents had become Catholic. This is how what happened that morning is told in Brabant, among others by Tjeu Cornet for Brabant Remembers.

At half past three the sisters were singing in choir. An hour later the police were at the door. The fellow sisters urged the two Löb sisters to flee. One of them refused: she was surrendering herself to her Lord, she said. Their youngest sister, Sister Veronica, was ill and stayed hidden. She was probably in the porter's room, according to Omroep Brabant, which relies on an expert on the family history.

The police drove the two to Koningshoeven, where the three brothers were picked up.

They too were advised to flee. One of the brothers said that was not possible, because there had been a threat to kill ten priests if they did not report. In the police van an SS man made a remark about the family reunion. One of the Löbs answered that he was only bringing them to heaven faster.

Brother Ignatius, George Löb, died, according to the Joods Monument (Jewish Monument), on August 19, 1942, in Auschwitz. His brothers and sisters from the monasteries also died there. For his brother Ernst the Joods Monument gives the same date, and for his sister Theodora, Sister Maria-Theresia, September 30, 1942. A brother who was not in the monastery was picked up later in August 1942 and died in February 1945 in Buchenwald.

Sister Veronica was summoned six more times after that. Each time she was released, once only after five days in Westerbork. She died on August 1, 1944, of tuberculosis in her convent.

A contemporary, Wielek, wrote that none of the baptized Jews who had become a priest or nun escaped this deportation. In Echt that day, Edith Stein and her sister Rosa were taken from their Carmelite convent. Their story is told elsewhere, in the series *What Do These Stones Mean?*

Who They Were

How many people there were differs by source. Snoek counts 213 arrests, the Joods Monument 212. That last figure also appears in the German reports of that day, for the people who were arrested outside Amsterdam and went to Amersfoort Camp. The same reports mention another 32 Catholic Jews in Amsterdam, who were

taken to Westerbork. Together that comes to about 245, the figure other sources also give.

The next day 44 people who were married to a non-Jewish partner were released again. On August 4, 97 prisoners went from Amersfoort to Westerbork, and on August 15 another nine. On August 7 a train left Westerbork for Auschwitz. According to Snoek and Van Rens, 92 Catholic Jews were murdered there, according to Van Rens on August 9. Among them were about ten Limburgers. Not everyone died in those first days. The Joods Monument gives a later date for some, such as August 19 for George Löb.

Each of those people had a name, a parish, a family. They were murdered because they were Jewish. That their bishops had spoken gave the occupier the reason to take them first among the baptized.

Barracks 73

The Protestant Christian Jews were spared that summer. Rauter wrote in September 1942 that their turn would come later. In the end they too landed in the camps, most of them via Vught Camp. In Westerbork they received a barracks of their own, number 73. Two ministers, Rev. Tabaksblatt and Rev. Enker, held services there. After a service that was filmed, they ended up in the punishment barracks. Twice they stood ready for transport, and twice they were brought back at the last moment.

How shaky the promise remained is shown by two letters from May 1943, printed after the war in the memorial book of the Reformed Churches. On May 12 the churches wrote to Schmidt that they had been waiting weeks for an answer. The Christian Jews in Vught Camp did not live separately and could not receive a minister. What did the promise still mean, they asked. Three days later Schmidt spoke with Dijckmeester, Slotemaker de Bruïne, and Dr. Koopmans.

Two of the five groups on the churches' list, he said, fell outside the promise. For the other three there would be a separate section in Westerbork.

On October 21, 1943, the occupier ordered about eleven hundred of them to be taken to Bergen-Belsen. On September 4, 1944, about five hundred left Westerbork in cattle cars for Theresienstadt. In 1945 about a hundred and fifty of them were able to go to Switzerland in an exchange transport. After the war, according to Snoek, more than four hundred returned to the Netherlands. Touw estimated that about four hundred baptized Jews had survived thanks to the church exemption.

In February 1944 Seyss-Inquart himself wrote about this group. He had kept the churches off his back, he wrote, by keeping the baptized Jews together in a closed camp. Snoek thought that this group too would almost certainly have been deported had Germany won the war.

A Tangle of Causes

What did the protest of July 1942 achieve? People are still writing about that, and the answers differ.

The telegram did not stop the great deportations. The study by Van Rens shows that the preparations began in June, before any church had said anything. Seyss-Inquart reported on July 31 that the deportations were continuing unhindered.

The arrest of the Catholic Jews is presented as punishment in the German documents themselves. The minutes of July 27 and Schmidt's speech say so openly. For those who later asked whether churches should have stayed silent, this became the example. In the debate over the silence of Pope Pius XII, the fate of these Dutch Catholics is cited as proof of what an open condemnation could

cost, for example in the foreword to Paul Hamans' book on Edith Stein and her companions. Others point out that the baptized who were spared in 1942 were also carried off later.

Presser saw little in those calculations. For the baptized themselves, he wrote, it cannot be established which factor was decisive. Even lawyers who pleaded for special groups, such as the Portuguese Jews, later saw their clients leave for the gas chambers anyway. Church effort increasingly focused on a small group.

And Touw's question does not let any church go completely. The promise applied to people who belonged to the church. The telegram was about all Jews. When it came to the test, the largest Protestant church chose the small group. The Catholic bishops and the Reformed let the text about all be heard. The occupier made the Catholic Jews pay for that. Neither choice stopped the trains.

A House on the Maliebaan

Archbishop De Jong suffered a stroke on November 10, 1942. Ad van Liempt connects it with the tensions of that year. De Jong died on September 8, 1955, two days before his seventieth birthday, and was buried in Utrecht.

In 2022 Yad Vashem, the Holocaust center in Jerusalem, recognized him as Righteous Among the Nations. The Archdiocese of Utrecht had applied for that recognition. Part of the grounds was that he had opposed the anti-Jewish measures and the deportations. In the safe of the bishop's palace lay, during the war, the hiding names of Jewish children in hiding.

That palace still stands on the Maliebaan in Utrecht, at number 40. It is a villa from 1868, bought in 1898 by one of De Jong's predecessors. In the house chapel, in use since 1901, the Eucharist is still celebrated. During the war, the Sicherheitsdienst, parts of the Ger-

man air force and army, and the NSB were also located on the same avenue. They are gone. The archbishop of Utrecht still lives there.

Go There Yourself

The Archbishop's Palace stands at Maliebaan 40 in Utrecht. It is an official residence and not a museum, so you see it from the outside; sometimes it is open on Open Monument Day. By the Maliebaan stands an information board about the history of the avenue. In 2022 the municipality of Utrecht decided that it should also cover the war years, when the Sicherheitsdienst and the NSB were housed there.

The National Monument Camp Amersfoort lies at Loes van Overeemlaan 19 in Leusden, near Amersfoort. The Catholic-baptized Jews from outside Amsterdam were first brought here in August 1942. There is an underground museum and you can walk the wooded outdoor site on a guided tour. For opening hours see the website of the National Monument Camp Amersfoort.

On Ameland, in Nes, stands a monument to Cardinal De Jong, on the Kardinaal de Jongweg. About Echt and Edith Stein the series *What Do These Stones Mean?* tells the story.

What is certain and what is told

Certain (several independent sources): the telegram of July 11, 1942, to the German leadership, with a protest against the deportations and a plea for Christian Jews; the assurance of July 14 that Jews baptized before January 1, 1941, were exempted; the request of July 24 not to read it aloud and the withdrawal by the Dutch Reformed Synod; the ten signers of the telegram (the full text with names in Touw, 1946); the reading on July 26 in Catholic and other churches, and the Catholic pastoral letter of July 20 with the Gospel

about Jerusalem and the prayer intentions; Schmidt's speech and the arrest of Catholic-baptized Jews on Sunday, August 2, 1942 (German telexes of that day, Snoek, Joods Monument), via Amersfoort and Westerbork to Auschwitz; 44 released mixed-married people; the later fate of the Protestant Christian Jews (Westerbork, Bergen-Belsen, Theresienstadt); the death of George Löb in Auschwitz on August 19, 1942, and of his sister Theodora on September 30, 1942 (Joods Monument); the death of Sister Veronica Löb of tuberculosis on August 1, 1944 (Brabant Remembers, Omroep Brabant); the Yad Vashem recognition of De Jong in 2022.

From own testimony or from people who were there: the report of Buskes and Brink on the transport of July 21 (their own testimony, via Snoek); what the Löb sisters and brothers said at their arrest, and the threat against ten priests (Brabant Remembers, no source given); Wielek's remark about the members of religious orders (a contemporary, via Snoek). In Touw (1946, based on the synod's minutes and letters) and later in Snoek appear: the role of Kraemer and his arrest on July 13, the conversation between Dijckmeester and Gruffke with the image of the drowning man, the synod's reasons, and the visit of the SS man. The letters of May 1943 about the promise are in the memorial book of the Reformed Churches (1949).

From one source (Snoek, based on archival documents): Christiansen's proposal to deport the signers; Van Dijk's decision; that De Jong informed the other bishops only afterward; the proposal about the Nieuwe Kerk; the content of the minutes of July 27; the statements of Rauter (1942) and Seyss-Inquart (1944); the events around Tabaksblatt and Enker in Barracks 73.

Where the sources differ (in the story I have always chosen one reading):

- *The signers.* A German copy, which the office of the Reich Commissioner sent to Berlin with a confidential letter on July 31, names only eight names. The Christian Reformed Church and the Evangelical Lutheran Church are missing there. Why is unknown. The story uses Touw's list.
- *The Lutheran refusal.* Snoek writes that both Lutheran churches signed the telegram. A German report mentions a small Lutheran church community that did not take part in the reading from the start. Signing and not reading can both be true. Which church it was has not been established.
- *The date of the roundup.* The German telexes of August 2 already report the arrests, so the date August 3 in Van Rens is a mistake.
- *The number arrested.* 212 or 213 outside Amsterdam, about 245 with Amsterdam. Paul Hamans speaks in his book on Edith Stein and her companions of about four hundred Catholic Jews. A review of that book sums it up this way: almost all were arrested, and about seventy percent were released again. How he arrives at his figure, I have not been able to check.
- *The number murdered.* 92 according to Snoek and Van Rens, 113 according to Hamans.
- *Sister Veronica.* Brabant Remembers says she evaded the summonses, Omroep Brabant that she was released each time. Neither names a written source. The Joods Monument names a Louise (1911-1944), presumably the same person.
- *The scene in the monasteries.* What was said that morning in Koningsoord and Koningshoeven is tradition; Tjeu Cornet names no written source for Brabant Remembers.

Unconfirmed or disputed: whether the occupier ever really wanted to keep the promise about the baptized (Snoek's reading of the German documents; the churches themselves asked that question al-

ready in May 1943); the story that Pope Pius XII burned a protest of his own after the Dutch reprisal (it comes from his housekeeper, Sister Pascalina Lehnert; whether he really wrote such a protest is disputed).

Interpretation: whether the protest cost lives or saved them cannot be established. The arrest of the Catholic Jews was presented by the occupier itself as punishment. The great deportations had been planned earlier and went on. Historians such as Presser and Snoek place different emphases.

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August 1944: The Note That Trouw Had to Answer

On Wednesday, August 9, 1944, the leadership of Trouw met in Amsterdam. Sieuwert Bruins Slot was there, a lawyer from Sauwerd in Groningen who went by the name Swarth in the resistance. Gezina van der Molen was there, the first woman to earn a doctorate at the Vrije Universiteit. And Wim Speelman, twenty-five years old, the man who led the network of distributors.

They had to answer a question from the German Sicherheitsdienst, the SD. In Vught Camp sat twenty-four men who had been sentenced to death because they had delivered their newspaper. If that paper ceased to exist, so the message went, the sentence would not be carried out. On a note it was stated briefly: "Trouw must make a choice."

They decided unanimously to carry on. According to the report, one of them said: "No concession whatsoever may be made to this enemy." That evening the first six men were shot in the woods near Vught. The next evening, seventeen more.

How did believing people end up at such a table? It began almost four years earlier, with a quarrel in another paper.

A Quarrel in the Family

On August 31, 1940, the first issue of the resistance newspaper Vrij Nederland appeared. In October 1941, H.M. van Randwijk gave the paper a clear course: socialist, with a strong Christian character. Gezina van der Molen sat on the editorial board with him in those years.

It went wrong. According to her biographer, she reproached Van Randwijk for pulling the paper toward himself, and she left, slamming doors. The biographical note in her archive at the Vrije Universiteit places that departure at the end of 1942. In that same year came a second conflict, over security. Many people had been arrested. Two distributors, Wim Speelman and H.P. Hos, demanded that editing and distribution be completely separated from each other. Whoever knew one side was not to know the other. Van Randwijk and his co-leader Van Namen wanted more central authority.

Beneath those two quarrels lay a difference in direction. Van der Molen and Speelman wanted a more conservative Christian paper, so the later editor-in-chief of Trouw said in 2018. A media historian later wrote that Vrij Nederland had become too left-wing for them. They came from the Reformed world. The Reformed Churches (the *Gereformeerde Kerken*) had arisen in the nineteenth century from splits away from the Dutch Reformed Church, the large Protestant national church. Politically, most Reformed people belonged to the Anti-Revolutionary Party, the ARP, which Abraham Kuyper had built.

Speelman was arrested at the end of 1942. He escaped. Bruins Slot later remembered how much vitality radiated from the young man. Speelman himself told his colleagues that he had not come out of prison "to do nothing."

A House in Aerdenhout

On January 30, 1943, a few people gathered in the house of Gezina van der Molen in Aerdenhout, where she lived with her friend Mies Nolte. Jan Schouten was there, the leader of the ARP, who had recently been released from captivity. So were the journalist Elbert van Ruller and Sieuwert Bruins Slot. The biographical note on Van der Molen names the same four names and the same month, and a meeting "at the home of the ladies Nolte and Van der Molen." Speelman was not there that day. He is counted among the founders nonetheless.

Bruins Slot had been mayor of Adorp, a village near Groningen, until February 1942. He was discharged at his own request. In Trouw's commemorative speech of 2018 this is called a protest against the occupier, and Trouw writes on its own history page that he refused to carry out the occupier's orders. From January 1943 he sat on the editorial board of the new paper, and from May 1943 he also led the underground ARP.

Gezina van der Molen was born in 1892 in Baflo, in Groningen. In 1924 she was the first woman admitted to the study of law at the Vrije Universiteit, and in 1937 she earned her doctorate there. Now she became one of the driving forces behind a paper that would come to be among the largest of the resistance.

The first issue was not yet called Trouw. On January 19, 1943, Princess Margriet had been born in Canada, the daughter of Princess Juliana. Soon afterward Speelman and a few comrades

put out a paper in Meppel called the Oranje-bode (Orange Messenger), so Trouw tells it itself on the site where the illegal issues can be read. The second issue, from mid-February 1943, bore the name Trouw (Faithful). Eighteen thousand were printed, the Algemeen Dagblad wrote when the paper turned twenty-five.

Jan Schouten proposed that name. So it stands in the history of the illegal paper that Hille de Vries wrote in 1968, and in the speech of 2018. In the second issue Schouten explained what he meant by it. Faithful to the faith. Faithful to the truth, to the fatherland, to the government in London and to the queen. Faithful to the principles on which the Dutch state rested.

Faith stood at the top of that list.

At that list I wonder what I would write myself. What would you want to remain faithful to, if it began to cost you something?

Paper, Lead, and Children with a Bag

Printing a newspaper was one thing. Getting it to the readers was the most dangerous part of the work. For that Speelman built a network that ran through churches, associations, and printers across the country. The paper came in part from the State Printing Office, where it was stolen. A group of eight Indonesian students from Leiden, the Amanoellahs, smuggled by train the lead to the printers with which the type was set.

In Laren a Trouw printing shop was running. When the first twelve hundred copies of a second collection of resistance songs, the Geuzenliedboek, were sold out, that printing shop printed another twenty thousand. Those were gone at once too.

The print run grew. In the last year of the war the national Trouw appeared in 145,000 copies. That figure is in the speech of 2018 and

in the newspapers that wrote about De Vries' book in 1968. The historian Peter Bak calculated in 1993 that the national edition came out about once every three weeks. In addition there were more than fifty regional editions across the country, together good for about half a million copies a week. In January 1945 news bulletins came out every day, up to 350,000 copies.

A fund hung on the paper as well. The Trouw Fund supported people in hiding and their families and cost 11,000 guilders a month. The money came from gifts and from raids on distribution offices and town halls. The brothers Johannes and Marinus Post played a role in that, from the armed Reformed resistance. Money that the government offered was refused.

Those who delivered that paper were often women and girls. Trouw looked into who they were and wrote about it in 2024. The paper found three hundred of whom the work is well documented. Their average age was twenty-seven. About one in ten was between twelve and eighteen years old, and a few were even younger. They carried the papers under their clothes. Children stood out less.

One of those women was Mies Bruijnen of Rotterdam, who had passed her medical exam in 1940. With Nel Spits she set up a distribution network in Limburg and went to the Achterhoek in early 1944. Her fiancé, Jan Penning of Deventer, arranged the printing and distribution of Trouw in the east of the country. On the way between Enschede and Utrecht they often stopped at the parsonage of Rev. Broek Roelofs in Geesteren.

A Day Nursery on the Plantage Middenlaan

In May 1943 Gezina van der Molen administered final exams at the Dutch Reformed Teacher Training College on the Plantage Middenlaan in Amsterdam. Next to that school was a day nursery. Jewish

children were taken in there whose parents were locked up across the street, in the Hollandsche Schouwburg. From that theater Jews were put on transport.

People from the Trouw group helped to find hiding places for children from that nursery. The Jewish Cultural Quarter names the group around Trouw as one of the resistance networks that supplied lists of addresses. By this route some six hundred children were saved. That figure applies to all networks together. How many went into hiding via Trouw, I have not been able to establish.

After the war Van der Molen became chair of the State Commission for War Foster Children, from 1945 to 1949. That commission decided on about four thousand children, most of them Jewish, who had gone into hiding mainly with Christian families. Under her chairmanship, Jewish relatives got a child back only if the parents had expressly wanted a Jewish upbringing. According to her biographer she thought most of the other children were better off in their Christian surroundings. A painful conflict followed that lasted years.

It belongs in this chapter. The same woman who in 1943 helped to save children made decisions after the war that meant a new loss for surviving Jewish families. The story of those children is their own story, with its own pain.

A Catholic with a Protestant Paper

Trouw was set up for Reformed readers. The people who distributed it came from all corners. Joost van de Mortel of Tilburg was the son of the mayor of that city and a practicing Catholic. He had helped pilots across the border, sheltered people in hiding, and handed out false identity cards. From 1943 he also delivered the Protestant Trouw.

Piet van Gils was a career soldier. He joined Trouw in early 1943 and distributed the paper in West Brabant. Frits Vogel had been a gardener and in the 1930s worked as a representative for a grain dealer in the Westland. He first delivered Vrij Nederland and later Trouw, and helped people in hiding to ration cards.

Hendrik Uittien of Deventer was a botanist and a teacher at the Middle Colonial Agricultural School. In June 1941 he gave a critical speech about the university and freedom of thought. He was suspended, dismissed, and fined. After that he helped people in hiding to addresses and delivered the illegal papers De Ploeg and Trouw. In a contribution on the site of the War Graves Foundation it says that he gave his faith a more liberal interpretation than most others in the group.

Louis Dijkman of Amsterdam studied law and was engaged to a sister of Wim Speelman. He worked first for Vrij Nederland, then for Trouw, and became one of the leaders of the organization. In an SD raid on the Ruysdaelstraat, at the end of 1943, he was shot and seriously wounded.

They were a student, a shop clerk, a soldier, a gardener, a bookseller, and a teacher. Johannes de Mildt of Zeist, a civil servant, was twenty. The oldest of the later twenty-three, Steven Bastiaans of Eext in Drenthe, was fifty-three.

A Bookshop on the Oudegracht

The network began to tear already in the fall of 1943. In 1941 Douwe Werkman of Groningen and his wife had opened a Christian bookshop on the Oudegracht in Utrecht. In 1943 the shop became a contact address and a meeting place for Trouw distributors. People in hiding also found shelter there.

At the end of September 1943 the SD picked up two top distributors on the Stationsplein in Utrecht who knew the address. Werkman went into hiding. On October 15 he came home for an appointment, and the SD was waiting for him there. Two months later his son was born. He never saw his father.

At the end of January 1944 a blow fell in Overijssel. Piet Fleurke, a soap manufacturer of twenty-three from Harderwijk, was arrested on January 27 in Wierden. A man from his group in Nijverdal later called him "our boss." Around the same days the SD arrested Hendrik Uittien, with six other distributors from the province.

In February Jan van der Laan was arrested, a shop clerk from Groningen and one of the leading distributors. He had still warned Piet van Gils about a suspicious address in Princenhage, near Breda. On March 13, Van Gils and his wife Emilie were arrested there anyway. She was released after about two weeks. On April 13 it was Joost van de Mortel's turn. In 1942 he had still been able to talk his way free in Belgium. Now that did not work.

Frits Vogel and Rudy van Baarle had made a plan to free a Trouw man, Kees Streef, from the hospital. Van Baarle would later be among the twenty-three too. A few days after that action the SD and Dutch police raided the house of Vogel's parents in Zwijndrecht. They found Vogel behind a cabinet. At the end of June Jan Penning was also arrested, in Epse near Deventer.

Haaren: a Molar, a Crown, and Two Teeth

So more than thirty distributors and printers ended up in Haaren, in North Brabant. The building was a former seminary, a training school for Catholic priests, which the occupier used as a prison. Uittien wrote to his family that through abuse he had lost "a molar, a crown, and two teeth."

A sister-in-law of Piet van Gils, Mientje Proost, was held there too. When the prisoners were aired in the courtyard, she could see him and sometimes exchange a few words. At the beginning of August she no longer saw him.

On July 6, 1944, Hitler had trials against resistance people stopped. Anyone caught in the act was to be shot at once. For the Trouw case, Rauter, the highest SS and police man in the occupied country, nevertheless got permission from Himmler in Berlin to continue. He wanted this case for his own police court at all costs.

Why, Trouw itself investigated in 1994 in the German and Dutch archives. For Rauter, Trouw was more than a newspaper. The SD had seen that the paper knew things about raids on distribution offices that could only have come from the perpetrators. The armed squads of the Post brothers had begun as Trouw teams. Rauter saw the organization as part of the armed resistance and wanted to use death sentences to scare the circle around it. On July 7 Seyss-Inquart decided that the case would go before Rauter's court. From that day on, according to the researchers, the fate of the prisoners was practically sealed.

In mid-June 1944, Trouw had reported in a column of short items that Rauter's family lived in a heavily guarded house in Arnhem. The street and house number were given. The 1994 study says that on the German side those lines were read as a threat to Rauter's family, precisely in the weeks when the case was being decided.

On July 28 the men were taken to Vught Camp. On Saturday, August 5, they stood before an SS court-martial. Of the thirty-nine suspects, twenty-four received the death penalty, all of them distributors. The printers were led away again that day. They did not get a trial, according to the 1994 study. They went to a concentration

camp, and only one of them came back. Louis Dijkman had turned exactly twenty-five that day.

"Trouw Must Make a Choice"

Then came the offer. An SD officer, Erich Gottschalk, proposed suspending the executions if Trouw would stop appearing. The ultimatum expired on Wednesday, August 9, before five o'clock in the afternoon.

The leadership of Trouw met and decided unanimously not to give in. They distrusted the occupier. They took into account that the men would be shot even if the paper stopped. And they felt that they would leave the people in the lurch if they gave in.

Not everyone thought that was a good decision. The younger sister of the distributor Lodewijk Noordermeer said later that there had been other ways. The paper could have continued under another name, or together with other resistance papers.

I do not want to pretend here that I know what I would have decided. At that table sat Speelman, whose sister was engaged to Louis Dijkman. His own life had six months left.

Two Evenings in the Woods

On the evening of August 9, 1944, six men were brought to the execution site in the woods near Vught Camp. Louis Dijkman and Lodewijk van Duuren, a student who was born in Tilburg and lived in Dordrecht. They both had their birthday on August 5, the day of the sentence. Dijkman had turned twenty-five, Van Duuren twenty-seven. Johannes de Mildt of Zeist. Willem Santema of Scharnegoutum in Friesland, forty-two. Douwe Werkman, the bookseller. Piet Fleurke of Harderwijk. They were shot.

The evening after, seventeen followed. Among them Piet van Gils, Jan van der Laan, Frits Vogel, Jan Penning, and Joost van de Mortel. Steven Bastiaans of Eext. Hendrik Uittien, forty-five. Two men with the surname Mooij, both born in Harderwijk, twenty-one and twenty-four years old. Johannes Spits and Arthur Martens, born in the Dutch East Indies. One of the twenty-four condemned received clemency. Seyss-Inquart chose him on August 8. In the German notice that the newspapers had to print, it says that his death sentence was changed to fifteen years of hard labor.

Of a few of them, what they said or wrote has been preserved. The day before his death Joost van de Mortel told a fellow prisoner that they had done their duty. They had fought for God, fatherland, and people. So it has been handed down, via that fellow prisoner.

From Hendrik Uittien something is known from a last letter. His colleague, the Utrecht botanist J. Lanjouw, wrote after the war in an obituary that this letter was above all cheerful, with humor in it. Uittien wrote that he "now expected to be home soon." What he meant by home is not stated.

There is more. The archive of Trouw keeps farewell letters of imprisoned staff from the years 1943 to 1945. What most of these men wrote in their last hours lies there, and is not yet in this book.

"Faithful Unto Death"

The news of the sentences got out through the ordinary newspapers. Rauter had the notice placed in the evening papers on August 9, according to the 1994 study. The condemned were called in it the instigators of numerous crimes against the occupier. At the end of August 1944, Trouw, second year, number 8, appeared. On the front page stood the names of the dead, under the heading "Trouw tot in den dood" (Faithful unto death). There were twenty-four. The

last was Hendrik Veldhuis of Meppel, twenty-two years old, alias Vosje. He had been shot when he defended himself at his arrest. For the other twenty-three the paper wrote that they had been shot on the morning of August 9. The editors knew no more at the time. Nothing was said about an ultimatum.

The editors announced that the work of the dead and of the paper would go on. They had been struck down, it wrote, but not defeated.

That heading sounds like a sentence from the last book of the Bible, where Jesus says to a persecuted congregation in Smyrna: *Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.* (Revelation 2:10). Readers who knew their Bibles could hear that echo. That the editors referred to it deliberately is nowhere stated. It is my own reading.

The executions were not over with that. On August 23, 1944, the Breda publisher and poet Cornelis Riezebos, who produced Trouw in Breda, was killed in Fort De Bilt near Utrecht. His Protestant paper had been banned in 1941. Breda was liberated at the end of October, two months after his death.

In Vught Camp, in the last months before the liberation, about four hundred resistance people were shot, so the historian Ad van Liempt calculated in 2024. The twenty-three of Trouw were a small group within that large series.

Was It a Choice at All?

Fifty years later, Trouw put a hard question to itself. A research team of the paper, with the historian Peter Bak and two former editors, reached a harsh conclusion in 1994. On August 6 it stood on the front page: “no ultimatum, fate of Trouw group was fixed.”

In the German documents the researchers found no trace of an ultimatum that expired on August 9. They did find that there had been talks at a low level in early July. Gottschalk was an SD official in Den Bosch, and the idea of negotiating came, according to the post-war interrogations, from a prisoner and from relatives who wanted to save their husbands and sons. No German ever said afterward that the plan was his. In early August, lawyers for the families tried again. One of them wrote a note on August 3 about a statement that Wim Speelman would have to sign. Only on August 8 did he learn from Gottschalk that the case had long been with Gottschalk's boss Schöngarth in The Hague. The researchers called what the leadership took on August 9 for a German ultimatum a desperate attempt by people who could not know how the case stood on the German side.

In the archive of Trouw lies an undated circular titled "Is carrying on responsible?" The answer in it is no to negotiating: "Whoever fights against the capitulation of consciences may never capitulate spiritually himself." Peter Bak thinks it was written before August 9. So the question had occupied the group for weeks.

Later research points the same way. Gottschalk was taken off the case, and SD commander Schöngarth took it over. That left the offer effectively empty. Bak took the material up again in 2014 and wrote in 2019 that the twenty-three had every appearance of having been marked for death for weeks. About what exactly happened in those weeks, much remains unclear, according to him.

If that is right, the question changes. Then the leaders on that day in Amsterdam made a choice that in reality was not there. Their decision could not have saved the men. It does say something about what they were prepared to bear. For the bereaved the question remained whether it could have been different. The son who had

never seen his father Douwe Werkman became a teacher of religion and for a long time questioned the ultimatum.

There is one more open wound. About how the men were arrested, rumors long went around about one of those arrested, who supposedly talked with the Germans. In 2025 the makers of the podcast Het Ultimatum, together with Vught Camp and Trouw, looked into it again in six episodes. According to the podcast, the Germans had penetrated the network as early as 1943. Het Parool wrote as early as 1968 that the arrests at the Utrecht station, in September 1943, came through betrayal. Who betrayed is not stated there. It remains, writes Vught Camp, something that still touches lives. I name no one here. What I have been able to read is too little to carry a judgment.

Halfweg, February 1945

Wim Speelman carried on. On January 29, 1945, he walked into a printing shop in Amsterdam where Trouw was being printed. The Germans were conducting a search there at that moment and had already arrested eight employees. He had a false identity card on him. According to Het Parool, which in 1968 followed De Vries' book, an SD man recognized him from before. He was arrested.

On February 9, five of the people arrested in that printing shop were shot in Zaandam, among them the printer Paul Bakker. It was a reprisal for an attack on a collaborating policeman. On February 19, 1945, Speelman was taken with nine others from the House of Detention on the Weteringschans to Halfweg, by the Spaarndammerdijk. They were shot as a reprisal for sabotage on the railway. Speelman was twenty-six. He is buried at the Honorary Cemetery in Bloemendaal.

How many people paid for the work for Trouw with their lives has never been established person by person. Hille de Vries arrived in 1968 at about one hundred and twenty. The Algemeen Dagblad wrote 123 that year. The political scientist Peter Bootsma, who described the history of the paper in 2018, counted about one hundred and thirty. Bruins Slot survived the war. In May 1945 he became editor-in-chief of the daily Trouw, which continued above ground. He remained so until 1971.

A Stone in the Woods

The Trouw Fund continued after the liberation as a foundation for the bereaved, with Gezina van der Molen as chair. In the group she was called Aunt Lien. In December 1945 she wrote in the magazine for former staff that 72 families of the fallen were registered, of whom 35 received money. The list was not yet complete. She asked everyone to help search, so that no family would be forgotten.

On August 9, 1946, two years after the first executions, the twenty-three were commemorated at the execution site near Vught. A simple wooden cross stood there then. Hundreds of former staff had come. Van der Molen addressed the bereaved. “The bullets that struck them have wounded you too,” she said, according to the report in Trouw. The father of Joost van de Mortel, former mayor of Tilburg, spoke there as well. He said that you honor the dead best by going on with your head held high and doing your duty again. A little over a year later, on December 20, 1947, Princess Juliana unveiled a stone memorial there with the names of the men who had been shot at that spot.

That stone is still there. You get to it by a signposted path through the woods. On the fence hangs a bronze poem, attached there in 1995 by an unknown person. Among the names of the more than

three hundred men are those of Louis Dijkman, Piet van Gils, Frits Vogel, and twenty others who delivered a newspaper called Trouw.

Go There Yourself

The former execution site of Vught Camp lies in the woods by the National Monument Camp Vught, on the edge of Vught near 's-Hertogenbosch. From the main entrance of the museum a signposted circular walk of about two and a half kilometers leads there, roughly half an hour on foot. The path is not suitable for wheelchairs. At the site stands the monument with the names of those shot. For opening hours see the website of the National Monument Camp Vught.

In Amsterdam, in the Oostpoort district, on the Oranje-Vrijstaatkade, stands a concrete column by the artist Martijn Sandberg from 2019. On the base is the heading from the August 1944 issue: "Trouw tot in den dood." In Amsterdam-Geuzenveld the Dijkmanpad is named after Louis Dijkman. A sign from Geef Straten Een Gezicht (Give Streets a Face) with his story hangs on that path.

Wim Speelman lies at the Honorary Cemetery in Bloemendaal, where the Post brothers are also buried.

What is certain and what is told

Certain (several independent sources): the conflict within Vrij Nederland in 1941 and 1942 and the departure of Speelman and Van der Molen; the founding of Trouw in January 1943 in the house of Van der Molen and Nolte, with among others Schouten, Bruins Slot, and Van Ruller (speech of 2018 and the biographical note in Van der Molen's archive; a review from 2018 speaks of early 1943); the first issue as Oranje-bode and the second as Trouw; the arrests from the fall of 1943 and the imprisonment in Haaren; the death

sentences on August 5, 1944; the offer of the SD and the refusal of the leadership; the execution of six men on August 9 and seventeen on August 10, 1944, in Vught; the heading "Trouw tot in den dood"; the death of Speelman on February 19, 1945, at Halfweg; the role of Van der Molen in the State Commission for War Foster Children and the conflict over it; the details of Piet Fleurke (born December 1, 1920, in Apeldoorn, soap manufacturer) according to the War Graves Foundation; daily bulletins up to 350,000 copies in January 1945 (speech of 2018 and NOS); the group around Trouw as one of the networks that supplied addresses for children from the nursery (biography of Van der Molen and Jewish Cultural Quarter); Van der Molen as the first woman to earn a doctorate at the Vrije Universiteit (Public History Amsterdam of the UvA; Wikipedia says the same with a reference to the Biografisch Woordenboek van Nederland); the print run of 145,000 for the national edition (speech of 2018, Het Parool and Algemeen Dagblad in 1968 following De Vries, Bak in 1993 via the Leeuwarder Courant); the names and birth dates of the twenty-four condemned and the clemency for one of them, converted to fifteen years of hard labor (the German notice in the newspapers of August 1944; I leave out that man's name); that Trouw reported in mid-June 1944 where Rauter's family lived (the issue itself, in Delpher); the death of Fleurke, Van Duuren, and Werkman on August 9 and of Uittien on August 10 (death certificates via Open Archives); the birth year 1917 of Lodewijk van Duuren (German notice of 1944 and death certificate; the list in Bak's excerpt gives 1919).

Only from tradition or own testimony: that Jan Schouten proposed the name Trouw (De Vries in 1968 and the speech of 2018, both from after the war); the words of Joost van de Mortel to a fellow prisoner; the words from the last letter of Hendrik Uittien (via Lanjouw's obituary); that Bruins Slot resigned because he did not want to carry out

the occupier's orders (speech of 2018 and the history page of Trouw, which goes back to a school edition of 1983); the cost of the Trouw Fund during the war, 11,000 guilders a month (only the speech of 2018); the number of dead around Trouw (about 120 in De Vries in 1968, 123 in the Algemeen Dagblad of 1968, about 130 in Bootsma in 2018; I have not seen a list with names, and the history page of Trouw gives twenty, which looks like a typo for 120); the words of Speelman about "doing nothing" and Bruins Slot's memory of his vitality (NOS); the words of Gezina van der Molen and of the father of Joost van de Mortel in 1946 (reports in Trouw and Het Parool of August 10, 1946).

Where the sources differ (in the story I have always chosen one reading):

- *The second issue.* Trouw itself gives February 16, 1943, the speech of 2018 gives February 18.
- *The hour and place of the meeting on August 9, 1944.* The NOS speaks of the afternoon, the 1994 study of the morning and an upstairs apartment on the Valeriusplein, Het Parool in 1968 of a canal house with fourteen present (three women and eleven men).
- *Santema.* Bak gives August 9 as the day of execution. His death certificate, in Friesland and in Brabant, gives August 10, as does the Resistance Cross register at TracesOfWar. The story follows Bak's list.
- *The printers.* A different court according to Bak and others, to a camp without a trial according to the 1994 study.
- *The day of the press release about the sentences.* The evening papers of August 9 (Van Kaam, 1994), Sunday August 6 according to the dating of the German notice in Trouw of 1994, printed in De Maasmonder of August 11, 1944.

Unconfirmed: whether the offer of the SD was ever meant seriously (Trouw's 1994 study and that of Peter Bak say it was not; no ultimatum was found in the German documents); how exactly the men were arrested and the rumors of betrayal (the podcast of 2025 also leaves that open; Het Parool in 1968 names betrayal at the arrests at the Utrecht station, without a name); whether the notice about Rauter's house weighed in his decision (the 1994 study says it was read as a threat, nothing more; a contribution on the site of the War Graves Foundation says Uittien was sentenced to death for that reason, but that appears nowhere else); how many of the roughly six hundred rescued children from the nursery went into hiding via the Trouw group; whether Speelman was recognized by an SD man on January 29, 1945 (only Het Parool, 1968). I have not been able to view the farewell letters in the archive of Trouw, and in the newspapers of 1944 to 1995 in Delpher I found no text of such a letter.

Interpretation: that the heading of August 1944 refers to Revelation 2:10 is the writer's reading, not an established intention of the editors.

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Nieuwlande, 1944: Two Boys Under the Pulpit

In 1944, two young Jewish men sat under the pulpit of the Reformed church in Nieuwlande. Their names were Lou Gans and Isidoor Davids, and they came from Amsterdam. Nobody in the village knew those names. There they were Herman and Peter, and that is what they called each other until the day they died.

A son of Isidoor described the place to the Dutch broadcaster NOS seventy-five years later: "It was cold and pitch dark, and all they could do was sit or lie there." They almost never went outside. On Sunday, when the sermon was being preached over their heads, they had to keep absolutely still. For a while they even shared the crawl space with a deserter from the SS.

In the dark, they worked. They forged identity cards. By candlelight, with news from the radio, they made a little resistance paper that was passed from house to house in Nieuwlande. It was called *De Duikelaar*, which means "The Tumbler" and also hints at diving out of sight. Later they drew cartoons, which were sold. The money went to the resistance.

The museum that Nieuwlande got in 2018 is also called De Duikelaar. A copy of the paper lies there. According to *NRC Handelsblad*, the two made about thirty issues. Two of them survive.

How did two Amsterdam boys end up under a Drenthe pulpit? To answer that, you have to go back to a village without a center, a farmer from Hollandscheveld, and a minister's son who never stayed anywhere for long.

A Village Along the Canals

Nieuwlande lies in the southeast of Drenthe, about thirty kilometers from the former Westerbork camp. It is a peat-colony village, born where peat was dug. In 1940 it was little more than a row of some one hundred and fifty farms along a road, far apart and separated by ditches. There was no real center. Water, woods, and scattered farms: for anyone who had to hide, this was good country.

The village had a Reformed church. In Dutch, *gereformeerd* and *hervormd* sound almost the same, but they were two different churches. The Netherlands Reformed Church (*Hervormde Kerk*) was the old national church. The Reformed Churches (*Gereformeerde Kerken*) had grown in the nineteenth century out of groups that broke away from it, because they felt the old church had drifted too far from the Bible and the confession of faith.

The Reformed church of Nieuwlande was formally founded on December 11, 1913. In 1914 the little church was built. It was named Eben Haëzer, stone of help, after the stone that Samuel set up with the words: *Thus far the LORD has helped us* (1 Samuel 7:12).

At first the congregation was led by an *oefenaar*, a lay preacher without ministerial training. On February 6, 1927, it received its first minister of its own: Fredrik Slomp, a farmer's son from Ruinerwold. He stayed until January 12, 1930, and then left for Heemse, near

Hardenberg. There, already in the 1930s, he warned his congregation against National Socialism. During the war the whole country would know him by a cover name: Frits de Zwerver, Frits the Wanderer.

In 1929, shortly before Slomp left, a young farmer came to live in Nieuwlande. His name was Johannes Post.

A Farmer from Hollandscheveld

Johannes Post was born in 1906 in Hollandscheveld, the youngest of eleven children. He was Reformed by upbringing. At sixteen he joined the Young Men's Association on a Reformed Basis, a church youth club where boys learned to speak about the Bible and society. In 1935 he became a councilman and alderman for the Anti-Revolutionary Party in the municipality of Oosterhesselen, to which part of Nieuwlande belonged. In church he was an elder. A regional paper reported in January 1940 that he had chaired, in the consistory room, the annual meeting of the Reformed boys' association De Jonge Samuel, Young Samuel.

Who Post was, and how he grew into one of the best-known resistance men in the Netherlands, I tell in another book. Here the subject is what he set in motion in Nieuwlande. In 1942 he brought Jewish people who were being hunted from Amsterdam to the village and placed them with family, friends, and acquaintances. In the winter of that year he and his brother Marinus looked for more hiding places.

In mid-1942, a man wanted by the German Security Police found shelter on Post's farm. Two memorial sites give his name. It was Arnold Douwes.

A Star on a Minister's Son's Coat

Arnold Douwes was the same age as Post. He was born in 1906, the son of a minister. A Canadian Christian magazine writes that his mother left the family of eight when he was ten. In 1926 he arrived in Halifax, and for about ten years he drifted through Canada and the United States. That emigration failed. Later he earned a diploma, with good grades, at a horticultural school. A historian who reviewed his diary describes a man who had trouble with authority from a young age.

On April 29, 1942, the newspapers announced that from May 3 Jews in the Netherlands had to wear a yellow star. According to NIOD, the Netherlands Institute for War, Holocaust and Genocide Studies, some non-Jews wore the star in solidarity. In Groningen two people were arrested for it. In Deventer twenty-three students were sent to Amersfoort camp for two weeks.

According to a biography on TracesOfWar, Douwes was one of those who wore it. In May 1942 he appeared in public with a Star of David. The Security Police wanted to arrest him for it, and he disappeared. This story comes from that one source, which rests among other things on a novel from 1948. What is certain is that Douwes ended up in Drenthe in the summer of 1942 and met Johannes Post there.

"Nieuwlande Can Shelter Everyone"

In December 1942, Post was invited to a meeting in the consistory room, the meeting room behind a church. A certain Elder Zanting was to come. When the man walked in, Post recognized him. It was Frits Slomp, his former minister. The cover name suits Slomp: his mother was named Grietje Zantinge.

Slomp was himself in hiding at that point. In July 1942 he had called on churchgoers in Zwolle to sabotage the labor service, and the Gestapo was looking for him. At the end of 1942 he came into contact with Helena Kuipers-Rietberg, who became known as Tante Riek, Aunt Riek. Together they set up the Landelijke Organisatie voor Hulp aan Onderduikers, the National Organization for Help to People in Hiding, the LO. Throughout the war that network would distribute people in hiding among addresses across the whole country.

Everywhere he went, Slomp said, according to the same biography, that Nieuwlande could shelter anyone. After that a steady stream of people in hiding came to the village. The village was later nicknamed the Drenthe Jerusalem, so many Jews were hidden there.

At the start of 1943, Post formed a resistance group in Nieuwlande. After that he was increasingly swallowed up by the armed resistance in the west. The work in the village fell to Douwes.

Notebooks in Jam Jars

From July 1943, Arnold Douwes led the rescue work in and around Nieuwlande. He did it with Max Léons, a young Jewish man who posed as a Protestant and was called Nico in the village. Together they cycled endlessly back and forth between Dedemsvaart, Hoogeveen, Coevorden, and Nieuwlande, sometimes with a child who had to be taken to a new address. Sometimes Douwes slept on a kitchen floor.

On July 3, 1943, Douwes began a diary. That went against every rule of the resistance. He named helpers and people in hiding, and he wrote down where people were staying. He knew his work was important, NIOD writes, and he wanted to record it. The scraps of paper and notebooks, about thirty-five of them, he hid in jam jars

and buried in parts in the gardens of acquaintances. After the war he dug them up again and worked them out.

Twice he tried to have the diary published, in the Netherlands and in Israel. It did not work. Only in 2018 did it appear, edited by the historians Johannes Houwink ten Cate and Bob Moore, under the title *Het geheime dagboek van Arnold Douwes* (*The Secret Diary of Arnold Douwes*). NIOD places it beside the diaries of Anne Frank and Etty Hillesum. As far as is known, it is the only extensive account from Western Europe by someone who hid Jews on this scale.

It is an uncomfortable book. Douwes complains, gets irritated, and writes a great deal about difficult people in hiding. I am glad to have it. This is what the work looked like up close, without the glow it later acquired.

The Saying Above the Door

Between February 25 and 28, 1944, Douwes wrote about a visit to a farmer named Berkhof, who lived in a remote spot. He was there together with a teacher named Otten, a man he asked for help again and again. Douwes wrote of him that he always makes everything possible. They were looking for a place for a Jewish couple.

Berkhof hesitated. Douwes and Otten pointed him to the saying carved into his doorframe: that faith in God is a firm staff to lean on. In the end the couple could stay, for one night, for one hundred guilders for their keep. Douwes and Otten turned it into two weeks. Two days later, after about five hours of talking, the family took the couple in for good, with a room of their own, for one hundred guilders a month.

I do not doubt the faith in that house. It stood there in wood. But it took an evening at the door to get it as far as the kitchen, and

money went with it. In the same passage is what Otten's wife said to Douwes: You know you always can come to us and rely on us.

What would you have done, if someone had knocked on your door and pointed to the text above your own door?

Who Kept the Door Shut

The museum in Nieuwlande has an exhibition called *Nooit iemand de deur wijzen*, "Never Turn Anyone Away." According to his diary, Douwes himself never refused anyone a safe place. His fellow villagers did. He writes about people who would not open the door, and about people who would not share anything. They were mostly not collaborators. They simply did not want to take part.

Neighbors complained to him about the people in hiding. Some sent him threatening letters: he had to stop bringing danger into the village. Douwes, for his part, was not gentle. He expected a great deal of his neighbors and pushed or shamed them until they said yes. Sometimes he got someone to agree for a night or two, and then did not manage to move the person in hiding on.

The people in hiding were ordinary people too. Some made demands, gave away addresses in letters, or kept company with Germans. Every address lost that way, Douwes bitterly regretted. Once he and his helpers discussed whether they should kill someone who threatened to betray them. It did not happen. That, too, is in the diary.

Douwes judged the Netherlands harshly. Most people he considered cowardly. When Radio Oranje from London praised the heroic attitude of the Dutch people, it made him sick: he thought it was a lie. Adult Jews were the hardest to place. Children and young men who wanted to escape the Arbeitseinsatz, the forced labor in Germany, found an address more quickly.

There was almost never enough money. Douwes hated asking for it. He preferred to sell the postcards of a talented man in hiding, who sat under the floor. In the late summer of 1944, cards showing Queen Wilhelmina were in such demand that they could hardly keep up.

What Happened in the Church

Where did the church stand in all of this? In the sources I found, it is less visible than you would expect, and it is everywhere.

Douwes went to church. In his diary he notes sermons that struck him, and also the illegal work of local ministers.

Who stood in the pulpit in those years, above the hiding place? The newspapers of the day give the answer. Since June 22, 1930, Rev. J.C. Borgdorff had been the minister of Nieuwlande. In 1938 his church had 673 members. On October 1, 1942, the papers reported that candidate J. Modderaar from Groningen had been appointed assistant preacher in Nieuwlande. As of September 1, 1943, Borgdorff was granted honorable retirement, "because of continuing ill health." In December 1943 the church called Rev. J.S. van den Bos from Warns in Friesland. In January 1944 he accepted the call, and in 1947 he was still minister in the village.

So in the year when the stream of people in hiding got going, the congregation had a sick minister, then an assistant preacher, and for a time no minister of its own. What Borgdorff, Modderaar, and Van den Bos knew about the people in hiding, and what they did, is not in any source I could open. A commemorative book of the congregation exists, *Een dozijn voorgangers in één eeuw* (A Dozen Ministers in One Century), from 2003. I was not able to see it.

Johannes Post was a young Reformed man, shaped in the church and its youth association. His former minister built the LO. And

under the pulpit of the Reformed church sat Lou Gans and Isidoor Davids. According to a church database, it was Post who hid people in hiding there. A church historian who described the Reformed churches of Drenthe knows how you got in: through a hatch in the floor, right in front of the pulpit stairs.

A survivor who went into hiding in Nieuwlande as a boy told the Jewish news agency JTA, in old age, that the rescuers were mostly religious people, some of them very religious. A Canadian Christian magazine connects the great amount of resistance in Drenthe with the strongly Reformed culture of the province, which was fiercely opposed to Nazism. That still does not explain why one Reformed farmer said yes and his neighbor, with the same church and the same Bible, kept the door shut.

At the end of 1944, Herman and Peter had to leave. Shortly afterward, the Germans discovered the crawl space under the pulpit. The two were taken to other addresses. Lou Gans was wanted in Drenthe. His son told later that he went back to Amsterdam by bicycle with forged papers, dressed as a girl. There he forged papers until the liberation.

Overveen and Assen

In the summer of 1944, the resistance in and around Nieuwlande came under heavy pressure. On July 15, 1944, Johannes Post was arrested in Amsterdam, during a raid on the House of Detention on the Weteringschans. A Dutch SS guard had betrayed the plan. The next day Post was shot with others in the dunes near Overveen. He was thirty-seven.

After the Battle of Arnhem, the roundups in the region became fiercer. Hiding places grew scarcer. Some host families wanted to be rid of their Jewish guests.

On October 19, 1944, Douwes himself was picked up, according to the Canadian magazine a day after his last diary entry. The magazine writes that he was at the end of his strength and felt the arrest almost as a relief. Dutch helpers of the occupier tortured him, but he did not break. In the prison in Assen he waited for his execution.

On December 11, 1944, the resistance took him out of there, together with about thirty other prisoners. It was the Knokploeg Noord-Drenthe, the North Drenthe armed resistance group. The men knew that every morning there was a short moment when only Dutch guards were on duty, between the departure of the German night shift and the arrival of the day shift. Shortly before half past seven they were inside. Six men carried out the raid, in German uniforms, with two vehicles that looked like German army trucks, so that it seemed like an ordinary prisoner transport. According to NOS, all the freed prisoners survived the war.

According to the Canadian magazine, Douwes had been interrogated the day before and had to be helped into the truck. He went into hiding until the liberation.

Even after that, it stayed dangerous. On February 7, 1945, a patrol saw a strange man walking near a farm in Nieuwlande. He was Szaja Reiner, a Jewish man from Amsterdam, born in Kraków in 1897. He was in hiding there with his wife Lea, their two teenage sons, and a nephew. Farmer Jan van der Helm tried to flee and was shot dead. He was thirty-three. Reiner was beaten to death while his family was there. The other four were taken to Westerbork camp. There they survived the war, because no more trains were running to the east.

That is how it stands on the Joods Monument, the online Jewish Monument. Reiner's death record was drawn up in Hoogeveen, and Van der Helm lies buried as a war victim in Hollandscheveld.

That day two men died, a Dutch farmer and a Jewish man in hiding. Their names belong in this chapter.

"A Village That Kept Silent"

When the liberation came, many people in hiding were glad the occupation was over. For the Jewish people in hiding, the waiting for news about family began. Some stayed in the village for months more, until they could go somewhere.

Isidoor Davids stayed in the area around Nieuwlande for about half a year and helped people who came back from the camps. Almost all his Jewish relatives had been murdered. His fiancée Lientje had been killed in Auschwitz. In Amsterdam, next to nothing was left of his possessions. He wrote down his memories for his sons, but he never talked about it. When he and Lou Gans saw each other, they sat down together in a corner and talked about the war. The children were not allowed to ask about it.

In 1947, Lou Gans received a call-up for military service in the Dutch East Indies. He refused, and went into hiding again. In 1948 he left for Israel.

Many resistance people and host families from Nieuwlande emigrated to Canada after the war. The village said little about what had happened. A fellow villager later founded a small museum with the title *Nieuwlande 1940-1945, een dorp dat zweeg* (Nieuwlande 1940-1945, a village that kept silent). His collection is now on long-term loan to the museum of people in hiding.

Arnold Douwes married Jet Reichenberger, a woman he had saved. They settled in Israel and had three daughters. He worked there as a landscape architect. In an interview from 1985, he said that he had done it all because he had no other choice. Near the end of his

life he returned to the Netherlands. He died in 1999, ninety-three years old.

The Canadian magazine writes that Douwes rejected the Christian faith for a long time, and that late in life he came to faith and was baptized again. Where and when is not stated. It would mean that the man who reminded a farmer of the saying in his doorframe came to that saying himself only at the very end.

A Certificate and a Stone in Jerusalem

Yad Vashem, the Israeli memorial center for the Holocaust, honors non-Jews who helped Jews with the title Righteous Among the Nations. Johannes Post and Arnold Douwes each received that recognition personally. Douwes in 1965, Yad Vashem itself writes. According to Yad Vashem he was responsible for the rescue of hundreds of Jews, among them about a hundred children.

Then came the village itself, in two steps. The newspapers of 1985 show how it went. On March 13, 1985, the Israeli ambassador Jaacov Nechushtan presented 212 Yad Vashem honors in Hoogeveen to people from Nieuwlande and surroundings, or to their surviving relatives. Half were posthumous. Arnold Douwes, seventy-nine years old, was there. According to the *Nieuwsblad van het Noorden*, the emotion sometimes became too much for him at the sight of all those old acquaintances.

A month later, on April 11, 1985, the ambassador came to Nieuwlande itself. It was exactly forty years to the day after the village was liberated. In the Reformed Bethel church (the *Hervormde* church of the village) he presented a certificate of honor to the whole village community. Yad Vashem had passed a special resolution for this, *NRC Handelsblad* wrote, because until then the honor had gone only to individuals. The initiative came from Max Léons. Mayor

A. Schipper of Oosterhesselen accepted the certificate and read it aloud. It speaks of the heroic deeds of the inhabitants of Nieuwlande.

On July 18, 1988, Prime Minister Ruud Lubbers and Max Léons unveiled a memorial stone for the village at Yad Vashem in Jerusalem. *De Telegraaf* wrote the next day that the names of 212 villagers are on it. The municipal council of Oosterhesselen had not been invited and had to find out from the newspaper. On the same avenue stands a memorial to Le Chambon-sur-Lignon, the French village around Pastor André Trocmé. They are the only two places in the world honored this way, as a community.

How many people were saved in Nieuwlande, nobody knows exactly. It is hundreds, on both sides: hundreds of people saved and more than a hundred honored rescuers.

A Hole in the Woods

On April 6, 2018, Max Léons opened the museum of people in hiding, De Duikelaar, in a former school in the village. The diary of his friend Arnold was presented that same day. Léons died in 2019.

In the woods along the Johannes Poststraat lies a hiding hole from the war, one of the many that were made in the area. Soldiers from the Johannes Post Barracks in Havelte restored it in 2014. Léons performed the opening together with his grandson. He had himself spent many nights in such a hole.

You walk there along a narrow forest path, about two hundred meters, over a little bridge. Then you stand among the trees at a hole in the ground. Village children play in its short tunnels. The street where the path begins bears the name of the farmer who started it here in 1942. On the same street stands the little church of 1914,

with under its pulpit the space where two boys by candlelight wrote a paper for a village that did not know their real names.

Go There Yourself

The Museum of People in Hiding De Duikelaar is at Julianalaan 3 in Nieuwlande, in the municipality of Hoogeveen. The museum tells about the people in hiding and about the families who took them in. There is a photo wall with more than a hundred photos of people who were in hiding in Nieuwlande and surroundings, an exhibition about Johannes and Marinus Post, a hiding house where you experience how people in hiding lived, and the original Yad Vashem certificate. There is also an audio tour. For opening hours, see the website of Onderduikersmuseum De Duikelaar.

The former Reformed church Eben Haëzer stands on the Johannes Poststraat. According to JTA, the building adjoins the museum. In 2017 the Reformed congregation put it up for sale. Villagers wanted to house the museum of people in hiding in it. The Hersteld Hervormde Gemeente (Restored Reformed Congregation) of Hollandscheveld and surroundings made the highest offer and signed the deed of purchase on January 11, 2018. The museum ended up in the school. According to the church database Religiana, the hiding place can still be seen there. Whether you can see the building from the inside, I have not been able to find out. Ask at the museum.

The restored hiding hole lies in the woods on the Johannes Poststraat, between house numbers 14 and 16. From the parking lot you walk about two hundred meters along a narrow forest path with a little bridge. The museum has bicycle and walking routes past places from the war, and also offers guided walks.

At Brugstraat 6 a copy of the Yad Vashem certificate hangs in a display case. The Westerbork Remembrance Centre lies about thirty kilometers away and fits well with a visit.

What is certain and what is told

Certain (multiple independent sources): Johannes Post (1906-1944), Reformed and an ARP alderman of Oosterhesselen, became a farmer in Nieuwlande in 1929 and from 1942 brought Jewish people who were being hunted to the village; Fredrik Slomp was the first Reformed minister of Nieuwlande from February 6, 1927 to January 12, 1930, and at the end of 1942 founded the LO with Helena Kuipers-Rietberg; the congregation was founded on December 11, 1913 and the little church built in 1914 (Religiana, G.J. Kok); Rev. J.C. Borgdorff (installed June 22, 1930) received emeritus status as of September 1, 1943 because of illness, in October 1942 candidate J. Modderaar became assistant preacher, and in January 1944 Rev. J.S. van den Bos accepted the call (newspapers from 1938 to 1947, via Delpher); the Jewish star was announced on April 29, 1942 and was mandatory from May 3; Arnold Douwes (1906-1999), a minister's son, was in 1942 the first person in hiding on Post's farm (TracesOfWar, WW2 Gravestone) and from July 1943 to October 1944 led the rescue work with Max Léons; his diary, buried in jam jars, appeared in 2018; Post was shot near Overveen on July 16, 1944; Douwes was arrested in October 1944 and on December 11, 1944 freed, with about thirty others, from the prison in Assen by six men of the Knokploeg Noord-Drenthe in German uniforms (TracesOfWar, NOS, Fietsnetwerk Drenthe); he was recognized as Righteous in 1965 (Yad Vashem, USHMM); on February 7, 1945 farmer Jan van der Helm and Szaja Reiner, a Jewish man in hiding, were killed and the four other people in hiding ended up in Westerbork (Joods Monument, JTA, war grave Hollandscheveld); Lou Gans and Isidoor Davids sat under

the pulpit in 1944 and made *De Duikelaar*; on March 13, 1985, 212 honors were presented in Hoogeveen and on April 11, 1985 the village received a collective certificate of honor in the Bethel church (*Nieuwsblad van het Noorden*, *NRC Handelsblad*, *De Telegraaf*); on July 18, 1988 Lubbers and Léons unveiled the memorial stone in Jerusalem (newspapers of July 19, 1988; the Yad Vashem site gives June 18); the church was sold in January 2018 to the Hersteld Hervormde Gemeente Hollandscheveld and the museum opened on April 6, 2018.

Only from tradition or own testimony: the hiding place under the pulpit, the SS deserter, the departure at the end of 1944, and Lou Gans's bicycle ride dressed as a girl (the sons of Davids and Gans, NOS 2020); the quote about the cold and dark place (a son of Davids, NOS 2020); Davids's silence and the corner with Gans (NOS); farmer Berkhof and the saying in his doorframe, teacher Otten and his wife (Douwes's diary, February 25 to 28, 1944); the refusals, threatening letters, and conflicts in the village, the Radio Oranje remark, and the postcards (diary, via reviews); Douwes's statement from 1985 that he had no other choice (JTA); the words of the survivor who went into hiding as a boy (JTA).

Unconfirmed (one source): from the biography on TracesOfWar, which rests on a novel from 1948 (Anne de Vries, *De levensroman van Johannes Post*): that Douwes wore a Star of David in May 1942, the meeting with "Elder Zanting" (though according to WW2 Gravestone Slomp appeared as "Elder Van Zanten" and his mother's name was Zantinge), and Slomp's statement that Nieuwlande could shelter everyone; from one Canadian magazine (Christian Courier): the departure of Douwes's mother, his wanderings, the date October 19, 1944, the torture, the interrogation the day before the liberation, and his conversion and rebaptism late in life; that Post hid people in hiding in the church and that

the hiding place can still be seen (Religiana); the hatch in front of the pulpit stairs and Post's eldership (G.J. Kok); the roughly thirty issues of *De Duikelaar* (*NRC Handelsblad*, 1985).

Disputed: who the perpetrators were on February 7, 1945: German soldiers (Joods Monument) or a Dutch SS unit (JTA).

Where the sources differ (in the story I have each time chosen one version or only said "hundreds"):

- *Number saved.* NOS gives about three hundred Jews. The Canadian magazine speaks of about three hundred and fifty, among them some one hundred children. A Jewish encyclopedia credits the network of Douwes with five hundred or more saved. Publisher Boom writes that more than 250 inhabitants hid Jews.
- *Number of honored rescuers.* 117 according to Yad Vashem's teaching materials, 202 according to the stone in Jerusalem and according to historian Bettine Siertsema (BMGN, 2021), 212 according to the newspapers of 1985 and 1988.
- *Year of the collective recognition.* Siertsema and the Canadian magazine give 1983 (with 202 people). Possibly that is the year of the decision; the presentations were in 1985. Wikipedia gives 1990.
- *Douwes's recognition.* 1965 according to Yad Vashem itself and USHMM, 1983 according to JTA.
- *First person in hiding with Post.* 1942 according to most sources, 1941 according to the *Nieuwsblad van het Noorden* in 1985.
- *End of the diary.* October 10, 1944 (BMGN), October 18 (Christian Courier).
- *Number freed in Assen.* 29 (Schoon, 1970), 31 (Fietsnetwerk Drenthe), 32 (NOS), about thirty (Christian Courier).

- *Church of Douwes's father.* Yad Vashem and USHMM write *Dutch Reformed*, which usually means *hervormd*, but a Dutch source is lacking.
- *Name of Douwes's wife.* Jet Reichenberger in most sources, "Judith" at USHMM.

Not found: what Borgdorff, Modderaar, and Van den Bos knew of the hiding or did about it.

Interpretation: that the great amount of resistance in Drenthe is connected with Reformed culture is an interpretation by the Canadian magazine.

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August 1944: The Split in an Occupied Land

On Friday, August 11, 1944, so many Reformed believers gathered in The Hague that the planned building was too small. According to Piet van Gurp, then a theology student, it was a hall of the Salvation Army. Just around the corner stood the much larger Evangelical Lutheran church on the Lutherse Burgwal, and the crowd went there. The *Nederlands Dagblad*, the newspaper from the Liberated circle, put the number fifty years later at about eleven hundred people.

Rev. H. Knoop of Rotterdam-Delfshaven opened the meeting. According to Van Gurp, he had been released from Dachau shortly before. Knoop himself wrote nine days earlier, in a letter, that he had been imprisoned for almost two years. He first had a verse of Psalm 106 sung, a confession of guilt, and said in his opening words that everyone shared the blame for what had gone wrong in the church. That is how two people who were present told it in 1994.

Then a man stood up who, until a few weeks earlier, had been in hiding from the Germans. It was his first public appearance since he had disappeared. Klaas Schilder, professor in Kampen, had been removed from office by the synod of his church eight days before.

Now he read a text with a long name: the *Acte van Vrijmaking of Wederkeer*, the Act of Liberation or Return. Whoever signed that act broke free from the decisions of the synod and returned, as they saw it, to the old foundation of the church. According to a Liberated look back, they sang Psalm 124. That psalm ends in the Bible with the words: *Our help is in the name of the LORD, Who made heaven and earth.* (Psalm 124:8)

It was the summer of 1944. The country had been occupied for four years. And the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands split apart.

How could it come to this? To find out, you have to go back to two roots and one baptismal font.

Two Roots Under One Roof

The Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (*Gereformeerde Kerken*) came into being in 1892 out of two movements. The first was the Secession (*Afscheiding*) of 1834, when small groups walked out of the Netherlands Reformed Church. The second was the *Doleantie* of 1886, led by Abraham Kuyper. These two groups joined together, and each brought along its own history and sensitivities.

A Reformed church was governed by a church council, the minister with elders and deacons. Local churches came together in larger assemblies, and the highest of these was the general synod. How much authority such a synod had over a local church was an old question. In 1944 it became a burning one.

There was more at play. Historian George Harinck and others point to the relationship between Amsterdam, where the Free University stood, and Kampen, with its Theological College. They mention new philosophical currents, relations with other churches, and personal polemics. Schilder was a sharp writer, and his opponents did not write gently either.

A Question at the Baptismal Font

The doctrinal dispute turned on infant baptism. Reformed believers baptize the children of believing parents. What does that baptism mean for a baby who cannot yet believe anything?

Kuyper had given an answer that gained great influence in the churches. Baptism rests on the presumption that the child has already been regenerated, that God has already made a new beginning in that small life. This is called the doctrine of presumptive regeneration. Schilder and his allies thought that a dangerous road. They stressed the promise that God gives at baptism. That promise always stands, they said, and whoever later rejects it in unbelief falls under the judgment of the covenant.

Both sides wanted to hold on to what God had promised. They differed on where you look for that certainty. Since 1905 there had been a compromise formula, an agreement by which both views could live side by side in the church. Theologian Th.J.S. van Staalduine shows in his dissertation on the Kampen professor G.M. den Hartogh that something else lay underneath: a difference in piety. One side sought assurance in self-examination, in the question whether your faith is real. The other side wanted to look outward, to the promise, and from there into the world.

In 1936 the dispute came onto the synod's agenda. Three years later a new synod began in Sneek that was to deal with it further. Shortly afterward war broke out in Europe. In May 1940 the Netherlands was occupied.

August 1940: The Pen Taken Away

Klaas Schilder was born on December 19, 1890, in Kampen. He served as a minister in Delft, Oegstgeest, and Rotterdam-Delfshaven, among other places. In 1933 he earned his doctorate

in Erlangen, Germany, and in January 1934 he became professor of dogmatics in Kampen. Dogmatics is the field that thinks through the doctrine of the faith as a whole.

He had seen Germany up close. From 1933 on he was a radical opponent of National Socialism, writes Harinck. In his weekly paper *De Reformatie* he was one of the first in the Dutch press to call for resistance against Nazi ideology.

On Thursday afternoon, August 22, 1940, three months after the invasion, he was arrested at his home in Kampen at about four o'clock. He was taken to the House of Detention in Arnhem and interrogated the next day by the Sicherheitspolizei, the German security police. He was now prisoner number 5-678. A formal charge never came, writes Harinck. According to the report that his brother A. Schilder kept later, he was threatened with a concentration camp. On December 6 or 7, 1940, he was released from what the Germans called *Schutzhaft*, custody without a sentence. He was given a paper forbidding him to carry out any "jede schriftstellerische oder journalistische Tätigkeit," any writing or journalistic activity. A man who lived by writing was no longer allowed to write.

After his death he was awarded the Resistance Memorial Cross.

June 1942: The Rulings

The synod of Sneek kept meeting, even after the invasion. According to Liberated sources, several churches asked for the struggle to be postponed until after the war. Those requests were rejected. The synod moved to Utrecht and met again in May 1942.

In June 1942 it adopted doctrinal rulings on baptism and the covenant. With that, Kuyper's line became the line of the church. In that same month Schilder gave his last lecture in Kampen. In the night of July 12 to 13, 1942, Germans tried to pick him up at his

house. According to later historians they wanted him as a hostage. A month later they came again. Schilder went into hiding, and stayed out of sight for almost two years.

So it came about that the man the church struggle was about could not fight a large part of that struggle in the meeting hall. Liberated writers have strongly emphasized this since.

At the start of 1943 the lectures in Kampen stopped. A number of students ended up in Groningen.

The synod that began in 1943 held to the rulings of 1942. Candidates who wanted to become ministers had to declare that they agreed with them. This was called the *kandidaatbinding*, the binding of candidates.

Here the second dispute surfaced, about church order. Seakle Greijdanus, professor of New Testament in Kampen, had written already in 1937 that a synod is an assembly of delegates, not an authority over the churches. A synod, in his view, may not suspend ministers, may not put items on the agenda that the churches have not submitted, and may not keep meeting endlessly. Whoever thought this way did not have to accept a synod decision until he himself found it in agreement with the Bible and the church order.

The synod and its supporters saw it the other way around. According to Van Staalduine, they believed they were protecting the church against forces pulling it apart. Their concern was that a church in which every decision first had to be approved by every church council would lose its unity. Den Hartogh, the church-law man in Kampen, stood on that side.

I am not going to decide who was right. Church historians on both sides have tried for decades. What I do see is that two groups of

Christians both believed they were preserving the church, and lost each other because of it.

"Suspended for 3 Months"

On Thursday, March 23, 1944, the synod decided to suspend Schilder. That date is in the decision itself, which Schilder later quoted in his defense, *Gehoord, ja of neen?* (*Heard, Yes or No?*). A day later he already knew. You can follow it in two short letters he wrote on March 24, from his hiding place, to his friend D.H.Th. Vollenhoven. Vollenhoven was a philosopher at the Free University. They had been writing to each other since 1927.

In the first letter Schilder writes that he has had one more telegram sent, "to do the utmost." About the words of that telegram he says that he saw "no possibility for a different text" "while keeping my honesty toward myself." The second letter begins matter-of-factly: "Suspended for 3 months." As professor and as emeritus minister of Delfshaven. He had received the news through his brother. An official text he did not yet have.

He was given three months to answer five questions, with yes or no. On June 23 the synod extended the suspension by a month. At the end of July Greijdanus was suspended too, who had been emeritus since 1943.

On Thursday, August 3, 1944, the synod decided to depose Schilder as minister and as professor. Six synod members voted against, writes Berend de Groot, who lived through the struggle as a young man. Harinck sums up the synod's accusation as mutiny. Van Staalduine establishes that nobody was suspended or deposed for false doctrine. It was about schism, about resistance to the church order. Greijdanus was deposed too.

A Letter from Zeist

Meanwhile Schilder was still in hiding. In June 1944 a German official contacted his brother. It was Professor Nelis of the Sicherheitspolizei, the German security service. On July 12, Nelis wrote a letter. The Sicherheitspolizei had no interest in the church dispute, it said. Schilder could publish on church matters, but not on politics. On July 21, the brother and Nelis met in Zeist. The next day Klaas Schilder sent the clerk of the synod, Dr. J. Hoek, a letter about that decision.

It is a strange picture. The occupier let it be known that he did not want to meddle in the quarrel in the church, and because of that the main figure of that quarrel could come out of hiding again. His brother's report of these conversations has been preserved.

A Student in the Pew

So Schilder stood in The Hague on August 11. What was said that day we know mainly from Liberated retrospectives, from the memories of Piet van Gurp, which appeared in 2020 as *Levensboek* (Book of Life), and from a newspaper piece of 1994 in which three people who had been there told their story. They remembered one moment of lightness. The small Knoop and the much taller Schilder stood together on the pulpit, and Knoop said: "You see, I stand beside Schilder in every respect." Beyond that, they said, there was no jubilant mood. Dejection hung in the air. Van Gurp had come with a fellow student. He hoped, he wrote later, that there would be no new church.

According to his memory, Greijdanus called on those present to have no more fellowship with anyone who upheld the synod's decisions. A few students personally expressed their support to Schilder. He told them that he saw no future for them in the

churches. He expected that few ministers and almost no congregations would follow. Another student of the time, later a minister in the Nederlands Gereformeerde Kerken, told the same in 1994: Schilder said honestly that he did not know whether they could still become ministers. That student found the act itself harsh. It shocked him. Van Gurp grew gloomy and thought about giving up his studies. His parents stopped him. His father sent him to an elder, A. Schilder, the professor's brother. He advised him to finish his degree first.

Van Gurp later came to the conviction that the Liberation was what the Lord asked of him. That is how he tells it. Others who sat in the church that day came to a different conclusion, and stayed.

Another Church Every Week

Schilder's gloomy expectation did not come true. On Friday, August 18, 1944, the church council of Rotterdam-Delfshaven decided on liberation: Rev. Knoop, twenty-two elders, and seven deacons. A day later Schilder explained the act in The Hague. After that he traveled around the country. He spoke in Bergschenhoek, Delft, Bilthoven, Rotterdam-Zuid, and the Koninginnekerk in Rotterdam. On September 2 he stood in the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam.

According to Van Gurp, in those weeks churches broke free every week. The Liberated congregations often had to meet somewhere else. He mentions barns, halls, a café, a showroom for washing machines, and a gymnasium.

The Liberated theologian J. Douma was a boy in 1944. Fifty years later he wrote down what he remembered. At home they listened to Radio London and looked for illegal newspapers. His father read what both sides wrote, and the family followed his choice for the Liberation. The services moved to classrooms of a school. Only a

third of their congregation broke free. Many stayed, wrote Douma, because of their husband or wife, their children, their family, their work, and an uncertain future.

Behind every decision of a church council was a kitchen table.

Mad Tuesday in Assen

On September 5, 1944, Schilder was to speak in Groningen. The evening before, his train got no further than Assen. It turned out to be the last train for the time being. The next day was Dolle Dinsdag, Mad Tuesday, when the rumor went around that liberation would come within days. The railway strike that followed made travel almost impossible.

Schilder stayed seven months in the North. On September 27, 1944, the Reformed church of Groningen decided on liberation. The church council asked him for a series of lectures on the doctrine of the faith. They were held on Thursday evenings at six o'clock, in the large hall behind the Noorderkerk. So early because at eight o'clock the curfew began and everyone had to be indoors. The hall filled up. A second course was added on Friday afternoon, for leaders of Bible clubs. Kampen students living in Groningen sat in as well.

Schilder always spoke standing and almost without books. Next to him stood a large candle. It kept going for eighteen evenings, until the circumstances of the war made it impossible. The notes of D. Deddens and his father were later published as *Cursus bij kaarslicht* (*Course by Candlelight*).

Two Sidewalks in Uithuizermeeden

How many Reformed believers went along? Harinck and Van Staalduine both give about ten percent. A PKN magazine and the *Canon*

van het Nederlandse protestantisme speak of some eighty thousand people. The publishers of De Groot's retrospective give a start of about ninety thousand members, of whom a fifth returned in the 1950s to the church they had left. In Kampen, Schilder's town, the census of 1947 showed 16 percent were Liberated, out of a total of 25.4 percent Reformed. The town got two Theological Colleges for Reformed ministers. The Liberated college began on the Broederweg.

Those ten percent lived among the others. The split ran through congregations, families, and the library of the college in Kampen. How that felt is told by the writer Hans Werkman. He was five and lived in Uithuizermeeden in Groningen. In December 1944 his church split too. The Synodical and the Liberated in the village used the same church building for the time being. "So they met each other on the way to church," Werkman wrote in 2019. "They chose sidewalks on opposite sides and hardly greeted each other, if at all."

"My mother cried over those painful walks." His father also found it hard, but could sometimes put it in perspective with a joke.

In 2009 the Historical Documentation Center for Dutch Protestantism took ten interviews with Reformed believers in Amersfoort who had lived through the split. Researchers collected more than twenty-two hundred letters from 1944 written by ordinary church members. I have not been able to read those myself. A minister wrote in 2019 about his grandfather, a shopkeeper in Nuis in Groningen who led the Liberation in his village. It had marked him, his grandson wrote, and he later emigrated to Canada.

"The Best Have Left Us"

From the Synodical side there was grief too. Vollenhoven, who stayed, said: "The best have left us." That is how it stands in a col-

lection on Liberated history. In November 1945 he wrote Schilder a warning: "Do be careful: churches grow apart more easily than toward each other."

Van Staalduine concludes that the Synodical line won a victory that yielded little. In the years that followed, many Reformed believers let go en masse of the piety of self-examination that the synod had fought for.

Did a confession of guilt ever come from the Synodical side? It came in steps, and it took forty-four years. Already in 1946 the synod stated that the churches themselves were not blameless in the fraternal quarrel. In 1959 a synod set the doctrinal rulings of 1942 aside. In 1965 the synod declared that the disciplinary measures against Schilder and Greijdanus would no longer count in a reunion. A proposal to name the guilt more concretely was rejected in 1969.

On Friday, November 25, 1988, the synod went further. It met in Lunteren and adopted a declaration, with 53 votes for, 13 against, and 3 blank. In it the synod regretted "most deeply" that the churches themselves were the occasion for brothers and sisters having had to bear the condemnation for causing schism. The churches had, said the declaration according to the *Nieuwsblad van het Noorden*, "paid too little attention to the distress of conscience of brothers and sisters." The rulings of 1942 should not have been maintained as binding once it became clear that they brought unrest instead of peace.

The occasion was a television series by the IKON about the heirs of Kuyper. In it G.C. Berkouwer, the well-known theologian of the Free University, said that he felt co-responsible. He had been chairman of the synod that deposed Schilder. Not everyone in the synod wanted this. A minister from Vlissingen thought the earlier state-

ments were enough, and said that a new declaration hurt those who in 1944 had voted for discipline with the best of intentions.

The *Nederlands Dagblad* called it an acknowledgment of guilt and found it honest. The paper did add that it could not close the gap of forty years: the two churches had grown too far apart in doctrine and life.

Hans Werkman looks back on it as a Liberated man. He writes: "Much later the Synodical churches saw that they had rushed ahead too hard. In a certain sense regret was expressed." He remembers how the ancient Berkouwer walked into the auditorium in 1990 for a congress on Schilder. "That presence meant that Berkouwer was sorry." That is how Werkman read the gesture.

On the Liberated side, self-criticism came as well. After 1944, a struggle arose within the Liberated churches over whether the Liberation had to carry through into politics, science, and education. Whoever did not go along lost cooperation. Harinck calls that approach, using a term of the time, the crowbar method. In 1967 a new split followed. Douma wrote in 1994 that his own churches had been narrow-minded, and that they had sometimes treated other churches as false. He kept defending the Liberation itself. Werkman, also Liberated, wrote: "It was also the fault of the Liberated that the chance of restoration was zero."

Berend de Groot experienced both sides from the inside. From 1945 to 1966 he was Liberated, then he went back to the Synodical churches. At the age of ninety he said, according to his publishers: "How we worked ourselves up in the churches over the wrong things, the dogmas."

In the Middle of the Hardest Year

Whoever reads this almost automatically asks the question that an article in a church history journal in 2019 chose as its title: did the Reformed believers have nothing better to do? In 1944, the hardest year of the war for the Netherlands, they fought over baptism and the authority of a synod. The author of that article shows that those involved knew very well how strange the timing was. They went on.

The old answer was that the church became a safe world under a glass dome, a place to forget the misery outside. The article proposes another picture: a beehive, where bees fly in and out. At Douma's home the war and the church struggle ran through the same house.

What would you have done, if your church council had to choose in September 1944 and your father was an elder on the other side?

An Open Door

After the liberation, *De Reformatie* appeared again, from July 6, 1945. Schilder used the paper to attack the church that had deposed him. The introduction to his collected works calls his polemic not mild.

In October 1950, Schilder and Vollenhoven wrote to each other one more time. Vollenhoven sent two new publications and a letter. Schilder answered from Kampen that Vollenhoven was one of the few whose contact he missed. "I am truly sorry." What kept the churches apart also stood between them, he said. Vollenhoven wrote back on November 14. He stuck to the view that the split should not have happened. And he wrote that his home was always open to Schilder. "But do not let me wait too long either: both our lives are not endless and the times are evil!"

Schilder died on March 23, 1952, in Kampen, of a heart attack. He was sixty-one. On May 1, 2023, the Reformed Churches (Liberated) and the Netherlands Reformed Churches (*Nederlands Gereformeerde Kerken*), which had come out of them in 1967, came together again. The new name was Dutch Reformed Churches (*Nederlandse Gereformeerde Kerken*).

In The Hague, on the Lutherse Burgwal, stands a brick church from 1761, plastered white inside. There are still services every week. The Lutheran congregation had only rented out its building in 1944. In its archive there is nothing about that day, one of its ministers said fifty years later, and most Lutherans in the city had never heard of it.

Go There Yourself

The Lutheran church stands at Lutherse Burgwal 7 in the center of The Hague, within walking distance of The Hague Central station and close to the Grote Markt. The building was constructed from 1759 to 1761 to a design by Pieter de Swart and is a national monument. Inside you see a white plastered interior, the Bätz organ of 1762, and the brass Jonah screens. There are services every week and regular concerts. For times, see the website of the Lutheran church or of Den Haag Marketing.

That it is this building is stated in two sources that are independent of each other. *Petrus*, the magazine of the Protestant Church, names the church on the Lutherse Burgwal in a photo caption. The *Nederlands Dagblad* visited in 1994, spoke with two Lutheran ministers of this church, and wrote that the act was read aloud here.

In Groningen, Schilder's lectures were held in the hall behind the Noorderkerk. How that place looks today, I have not been able to check.

What is certain and what is told

Certain (multiple independent sources): the founding of the Reformed Churches in 1892 out of the Secession and the Doleantie; the compromise formula of 1905; the doctrinal dispute over presumptive regeneration and the covenant and the church-order dispute over the authority of the synod; Schilder's resistance to National Socialism from 1933, his arrest on August 22, 1940, his imprisonment in Arnhem, his release in early December 1940, and the writing ban (Harinck 1993, Douma 1990); the doctrinal rulings of 1942; the attempted arrest in July 1942 and his going into hiding; the suspension decision of March 23, 1944 (the decision itself, quoted in *Gehoord, ja of neen?*, the edition of the letters, and VanOene) and the deposition on August 3, 1944 (De Groot, De Jong, VanOene); the suspension and deposition of Greijdanus; the ground for the disciplinary measures: schism, not heresy; the letter from Nelis of July 1944; the meeting of August 11, 1944 in the Evangelical Lutheran church on the Lutherse Burgwal, with the *Acte van Vrijmaking of Wederkeer* and the opening by Rev. Knoop (the address: *Petrus* 2024 and *Nederlands Dagblad* 1994); the decision of Delfshaven on August 18; Schilder's speaking tour and his stay in Groningen with the *Cursus bij kaarslicht*; that about ten percent of the members went along; the correspondence with Vollenhoven, also in 1945 and 1950 (DBNL); the posthumously awarded Resistance Memorial Cross; Schilder's death on March 23, 1952; the split of 1967; the synod declaration of November 25, 1988 in Lunteren, adopted with 53 against 13 votes and 3 blank (*Trouw*, *Nieuwsblad van het Noorden*, *Nederlands Dagblad*); the coming together on May 1, 2023.

From one source: the six votes against at the deposition and the extension of the suspension on June 23 (De Groot); the figures for Kampen in the census of 1947 (Canon van Nederland); the roughly ninety thousand members at the beginning, of whom a

fifth returned (publishers of De Groot); the synod statements of 1946, 1959, 1965, and 1969 (*Nieuwsblad van het Noorden*, 1988; 1946 and 1959 also *Nederlands Dagblad*); Knoop's sentence about almost two years of imprisonment (letter of August 2, 1944, DBNL).

Only from tradition or own testimony: the move to the Lutheran church, the words of Greijdanus and Schilder after the meeting, and Van Gurp's doubt (Van Gurp, *Levensboek*; Schilder's words to the students also from a second student, *Nederlands Dagblad* 1994); Psalm 106, Knoop's opening words about guilt, his joke about Schilder's height, and the dejected mood (three people present in the *Nederlands Dagblad*, 1994); the singing of Psalm 124; the services in barns, a café, a showroom, and a gymnasium; the memories of Douma; the two sidewalks in Uithuizermeeden and Werkman's interpretation of Berkouwer's presence in 1990 (Werkman, 2019); the grandfather from Nuis (family tradition); the statement of De Groot at ninety (via his publishers).

Where the sources differ (in the story I have each time chosen one version):

- *Day of the suspension decision.* The decision itself gives March 23. De Groot gives March 24.
- *Attendance on August 11.* Hundreds (VanOene, Bredenhof, Van Gurp), about eleven hundred (*Nederlands Dagblad*, 1994), or more than a thousand (Defence of the Truth).
- *The building first planned.* The Salvation Army according to Van Gurp and a second person present, a small Remonstrant church according to a third (Rev. Breen, *Nederlands Dagblad*, 1994). One of those present spoke of a Saturday morning, but August 11, 1944 was a Friday.
- *Knoop and Dachau.* That he had been released from Dachau shortly before is told only by Van Gurp. I have not found the date of his release.

- *Figures at the start.* About ten percent (Harinck, Van Staalduine), some eighty thousand (Canon of Dutch Protestantism), about ninety thousand (publishers of De Groot). The often-cited figures of 216 congregations, 152 ministers, and 77,000 members I have seen only on English-language Wikipedia, without year or source, and have not used.
- *The year of the synod's statements.* In 1946, according to De Groot, the synod regretted only an incorrect presentation in the case of one candidate; according to the newspaper reports of 1988, it then stated that the churches were not blameless.

Unconfirmed: whether anything about 1944 was said at the coming together of 2023; the present state of the hall behind the Noorderkerk.

Interpretation: who was right in 1944 is a doctrinal and church-order question on which this book gives no judgment. Most of the extensive accounts come from the Liberated side. From the Synodical side I have used the letters of Vollenhoven, the work of Van Staalduine and Harinck, and the retrospective by De Groot, who knew both churches from the inside. An extensive account from the circle of the synod itself I have not been able to consult.

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July 1946: The Struggle Over the Rescued Children

At number 27 on the Plantage Middenlaan in Amsterdam stands an old school building. It was the Reformed Teacher Training College (*Hervormde Kweekschool*), a school for teachers. Today it is the National Holocaust Museum. Next to the school, during the war, was a day nursery. The occupier used that nursery as an assembly and deportation point for Jewish children. The director, Henriëtte Pimentel, helped hundreds of children escape, also by way of the school next door.

For a time you could get into the nursery garden through the training college. That is how a Reformed lawyer went in several times and came out again with a child. Her name was Gezina van der Molen. The children went first to friends in Amsterdam. Couriers then took them to families in the countryside.

A year after the liberation, the same Gezina van der Molen was at the head of a government commission. It had to decide what happened to such children when their parents did not return. In July 1946, eleven of the fifteen Jewish members of that commission

walked out. The conflict was about the children that they and others had saved.

How could it come to this? That story begins with a woman who took children out of a garden, and with the churches she came from.

Aunt Lien

Gezina van der Molen was born on January 20, 1892, in Baflo, in Groningen. Her father was head of the Christian school in the village. She earned her teaching certificate at a Christian teacher training college. She never stood in front of a class, wrote the newspaper Trouw at her death. She worked a year and a half in nursing and then became a journalist. When women could begin studying at the Free University in 1924, she was the first to enroll, in law. In 1937 she earned her doctorate there, again as the first woman, with a dissertation on Alberico Gentili and international law. After the war she became the first woman professor there. In the resistance she was called Tante Lien, Aunt Lien.

For more than forty-five years she lived in Aerdenhout with her friend Mies Nolte, a teacher at the Catholic teacher training college in Amsterdam. It is Nolte who wrote her friend's obituary in 1975. That account lies in the archive of the Free University.

During the war, Gezina refused to sign the Aryan declaration, the statement that you had no Jewish ancestors. When the Germans found out late, she had to leave an examining board of the Christian Lyceum in Hilversum. She wrote a prayer of intercession for the Jews. In a few Reformed churches it was prayed once a month for a time. For branches of the Dutch Christian Women's League she gave lectures on the lives of women in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The application was an open call: take Jewish children

into your home. The board listened in fear, the obituary says. She was never betrayed.

In the summer of 1942, the Sicherheitsdienst, the German security service, raided the two women's summer house in Noordwijk. From June 29 to July 25 they were held in the house of detention in Arnhem. Then the Germans let them go. Later the SD realized that this had been a mistake. When the two had to be arrested again, they could not be found.

At the end of 1942, Gezina left the editorial board of the resistance paper Vrij Nederland, after a disagreement with Henk van Randwijk. In January 1943, the men and women who founded Trouw met at her house in Aerdenhout.

And then there was the garden. The work there stopped abruptly when the Germans closed the nursery. After the railway strike of September 1944, there were also no more trains to take children away. Most of the Jewish children who had gone into hiding this way spent the war in foster families that were mostly Christian.

A Letter Read Aloud in the Catholic Churches

Gezina came from a church that had already learned before the war how to speak to the NSB. The Catholic church did so too, in two steps.

On February 2, 1934, a *mandement* of the Dutch bishops about fascism and National Socialism appeared. A mandement is a pastoral letter that is read aloud in all Catholic churches. The National Socialist Movement of Anton Mussert, the NSB, had feared that letter. It turned out milder than it expected. Priests, church boards, and leaders of Catholic organizations were not allowed to become members or support the movement. For ordinary believers there was no ban.

In the provincial elections of April 1935, the NSB got its greatest support precisely in Catholic Limburg. Utrecht had meanwhile received a new archbishop, Johannes de Jong. His pastoral letter is dated May 6, 1936, and was read in the churches on Sunday, May 24, 1936. Now the tone was sharp. Anyone who gave the NSB "substantial support" could not be admitted to the sacraments. Sacraments are the holy acts of the church, such as communion and confession.

A church does not take such a measure for a handful of people. There were NSB members in the Catholic pews, and the bishops knew it.

Among the Reformed Churches it went faster. Their general synod, the national assembly of delegates of the churches, met from late August to early October 1936 in Amsterdam. The NSB had already been discussed in 1933. In the closing session of October 2, the ruling was read aloud: membership in the NSB was incompatible with membership in the church. Church councils had to admonish such members. A church council is the local board of minister and elders.

The minister Klaas Schilder was the rapporteur. That same month he defended the decision in a booklet titled *Geen duimbreed!* (*Not an Inch!*). In his view the NSB was more than a party. It wanted to bring the whole of society under one guiding principle, and that clashed with the confession of the church.

In 1941, in the middle of the occupation, the synod repeated that ruling. After the war, in 1947, Rev. Th. Delleman sent a questionnaire to 782 Reformed church councils for the memorial book *Opdat wij niet vergeten* (*So That We Do Not Forget*). From 521 a full answer came back. In those churches about 273 people were NSB members before 1940. After May 1940 that rose to about 493. Except for two, all 521 church councils had exercised discipline in the war

years. Discipline meant, for example, that someone was no longer allowed to take part in the Lord's Supper.

So the church held its ground. The Reformed Churches counted almost 641,000 members in 1940, so this was a small group. But that group existed, and after the German invasion it grew.

A Minister on the Radio

The Netherlands Reformed Church, the largest Protestant church, had no such ban. It also found it hard to pronounce one. The synod of that church, according to the church historian Touw, had no authority to take church decisions on doctrine and confession. The church order did not allow a joint, public witness. G.J. Kok, who keeps track of the history of the Reformed Churches, writes that before 1940 there was no Reformed church witness against National Socialism. During the war itself, he adds, it was precisely the Netherlands Reformed synod that took the lead in the joint protest.

Among the Netherlands Reformed ministers were men who openly chose National Socialism. The best known was Rev. Lodewijk Ekering. He began in 1913 in Woubrugge, went to Noordwijk aan Zee in 1916, and was in Amsterdam from 1921. From 1929 to 1939 he delivered the morning devotion on weekdays on the AVRO radio, from ten to a quarter past ten. Many Dutch people knew his voice.

On October 26, 1936, after a wreath-laying by the navy, he gave the Hitler salute at the grave of Michiel de Ruyter. On December 22 of that year he became a member of the NSB. During the war he also gave the Hitler salute at church blessings of marriages of National Socialists.

Historian Henk Tijssen wrote a book about him, and earlier about W.Th. Boissevain, another Netherlands Reformed minister in the NSB. Boissevain joined in 1935 and in January 1944 became

a personal adviser to Mussert. They were the two leading Reformed NSB ministers, but they were not the only ones. Research by Ewart Bosma shows that confessional Reformed ministers, conservative ministers within the Netherlands Reformed Church, supported the NSB relatively more often than ministers from the experiential-Reformed corner.

On September 5, 1945, the Netherlands Reformed Church suspended Ekering. The tribunal in Amsterdam found him on December 23, 1946 to be a National Socialist, but could not prove that he was a notorious traitor. He received four years of internment and lost his right to vote. The ban on holding any office was later lifted, after criticism from within the church itself.

I find this a hard story to tell. Ekering stood in the pulpit for more than thirty years. In Noordwijk he helped the families of seamen who died on mines in the First World War, and families struck by the Spanish flu. The same man gave the Hitler salute. How do you look at a minister who did so much good and chose so wrongly?

Protest on Paper

When the occupation began, the churches protested. On October 24, 1940, six Protestant churches together asked the Reich Commissioner to withdraw the first measures against Jewish civil servants. The Netherlands Reformed Church signed, as did the Reformed Churches, the Christian Reformed Church, the Reformed Churches in Restored Connection, the Remonstrants, and the Mennonites. The two Lutheran churches did not take part. One said it would then be stepping onto the territory of the state. Universities protested too. The occupier brushed it aside.

In the Netherlands Reformed churches, the protest was proclaimed. The Reformed heard nothing about it that Sunday.

Prof. H.H. Kuyper, adviser to their synod, thought the churches should first wait for the Reich Commissioner's answer. Historians differ on his role, and I come back to that at the bottom, in the box.

In July 1942 the churches sent a telegram to Reich Commissioner Seyss-Inquart against the deportation of the Jews. That too was not read aloud everywhere. In Marum, Lutjegast, Groningen, and Meppel, Reformed churchgoers did not hear it. There were believers who protested and believers who adapted. Sometimes they sat in the same church.

There is one more painful point. In the protest of October 1940 the churches named specifically the church members who "in the last generations have converted to Christianity." Historian Rob Bakker points out that church protests in various cases stood up more for baptized Jews than for unbaptized ones. The churches cared first for those who belonged to them.

Seventy-Five Percent

At the start of the war, about 140,000 Jews lived in the Netherlands. Some 104,000 of them did not survive the occupation. That is about seventy-five percent, the highest share in Western Europe. In Belgium about 25,000 of 65,000 Jews were killed. In France it was about a quarter.

A land full of churches, and so little rescue. How can that be?

Historians point to the perpetrators, the surroundings, and the victims. The Netherlands had a civil administration under Seyss-Inquart, with a large role for the SS. Belgium had a military administration, in which the SS at first had little say. Dutch civil servants carried out the German measures meticulously. And through *verzuiling*, Dutch people accepted a divided society more easily. That word means that Catholics, Protestants, socialists,

and liberals each had their own schools, newspapers, clubs, and parties. According to Rob Bakker, this meant Jews usually had no non-Jewish network to fall back on.

And the churches? Political scientist Marnix Croes and sociologist Peter Tammes studied survival chances per municipality. Nationally, twenty-seven percent of the Jews survived. Among the 306 municipalities where they could determine it, the differences were large. What their research says about Catholic and Protestant municipalities is rendered differently in different summaries. I explain that in the box.

The American sociologist Robert Braun looked at it differently in 2016. He laid the addresses of Jews next to the locations of churches. Jews who lived close to a church of a minority escaped more often. In Protestant regions that held for Catholic churches, and in Catholic regions for Protestant ones. Braun sees in that the strength of the local networks around such a church.

For the people who did help, their faith often made all the difference. But a church tower in the village guaranteed no hiding place.

Four Thousand Children

When the war was over, it turned out how many children had remained living with strange families. There were more than four thousand.

On May 8, 1945, a decree about these war foster children was issued, on the initiative of J.C. Tenkink of the Ministry of Justice. On May 14 an office opened. The text of the decree had been drafted by Gezina van der Molen and the lawyer B.W. van Houten. On August 13, 1945, the Decree on War Foster Children (*Besluit Oorlogspleegkinderen*) followed. This is how the Commission for War

Foster Children came into being, the OPK for short. Van der Molen became chair. She did the work without pay.

The commission looked after children whose parents had been taken prisoner or deported by the enemy. Foster parents were obliged to report children in hiding. They were allowed to hand a child over to others only with written permission. Guardianship, the question of who would legally care for the child, was decided by the court, on the commission's advice.

About 1,900 children returned to one or both parents. For many others, nobody came.

Two Convictions at One Table

With those children, two convictions collided.

Van der Molen thought that a Jewish child whose parents had not survived the war should stay with the foster parents. The child had a right to a place in Dutch society, she thought, and a bond that had grown in the war should not be broken. According to a review of her biography, she wanted to hand over to Jewish family only those orphans whose parents had expressly wanted a Jewish upbringing. The others, in her view, were better off in the Christian families that had hidden them. The same review reports that she had earlier proposed removing parental authority from parents who did return from the camps. She was reined in for it. That is in one source, and I could not find it anywhere else.

Part of the background can be checked. The decree of May 8, 1945, which she helped draft, was published in the Staatscourant that day. Article 5 stated that parental authority over children entrusted to the care of the commission was suspended. A father or mother who within a month cared for the child again themselves, or reported to the commission that they wanted to, was not covered. For the

others, the commission decided when the child came back under the authority of the parents. Anyone who disagreed could go to court. Suspending is less than removing.

The Jewish community saw it differently. It wanted the children to grow up in Jewish circles and to remain Jewish. It was a people that had almost been wiped out, and it asked for its children back. Already in August 1945, Jews who were dissatisfied with the OPK founded their own guardianship association: Le-Ezrath Ha-Jeled, "To the Aid of the Child." Van der Molen's position drew criticism, inside and outside the commission.

At the beginning the commission had twenty-four people from the resistance. Ten of them were Jewish. Later there were thirty-three, of whom fifteen had a Jewish background. One of the members was I. van Creveld. In 1946 his brochure appeared with a title that said it all: *De strijd om het Joodsche kind* (*The Struggle for the Jewish Child*).

What would you have done? A child who has slept, eaten, and prayed with you for three years, and who hardly remembers his father and mother. Or a people asking for its children back. I have no answer that does justice to both.

"The Bomb Burst in July 1946"

That is how the government portal on war victims puts it. Out of dissatisfaction, eleven of the fifteen Jewish members left the commission in July 1946. You can almost see the empty chairs, but how that day went exactly is not described in the sources I read. What is certain: a commission led by the jurist Eduard Meijers mediated, and the Jewish members returned.

The work went on. From 1945 to 1949 the OPK handled 1,363 guardianship cases. In the end 601 children came under Jewish guardianship and 403 under non-Jewish. On 359 children the

members could not agree. The Guardianship Council in Amsterdam decided on those, in about eighty percent of cases as the Jewish community wanted. When the commission was dissolved, it turned out the court had followed the commission's proposal almost every time.

Behind each of those numbers is a child, and a foster family or a relative, or both.

A Girl Across the Border

On February 24, 1949, a Jewish girl was taken across the border to a convent in Belgium. She had gone into hiding as a toddler with Catholic sisters in Hilversum. According to the American weekly Time, her parents were arrested in Amsterdam in June 1943 and murdered in Sobibor in July. The sisters assumed she would stay with them. The Jewish guardianship association thought she should go back to the Jewish community. The sisters refused. After that the authorities lost track of the child.

The case occupied the Netherlands for years. In October 1955, six Catholics stood trial, among them a former priest who had driven the child to a convent and two mothers superior. The other three were two of the sisters and a niece, according to the report in De Gooi- en Eemlander. The hearing in Amsterdam lasted ten hours. The public prosecutor said that the Catholic church leadership had not put pressure on the women, but had not given them guidance either. Nobody had pointed out to them their duty to obey the judge. "Ten years after the liberation, the Jewish girl is still not liberated," he said.

Archbishop Bernard Alfrink refused to intervene, Time wrote. Two of the sisters received prison sentences, JTA reported in November

1955: the eldest one year, in absentia, the youngest eight months. The latter fled the country after the verdict.

I do not name the girl or the women. It was her life, and how it went on I leave with her.

I do want to mention what Protestants said in those years. At the end of March 1955 came a joint statement from nine churches. They met in the Interkerkelijk Contact Israël (Interchurch Contact Israel): the Netherlands Reformed Church, the Reformed Churches, the Evangelical Lutheran Church, the Mennonites, the Remonstrants, the Christian Reformed Churches, the Free Evangelical Congregations, the Moravian Church, and the Baptists. The Nieuw Israëlietisch Weekblad printed the text on April 1. The Jewish news agency JTA had already reported on it on March 29.

Only the judge was competent to decide on guardianship, the churches wrote. Any church authority that became involved in the case had to help justice and police. It also had to say openly that anyone who refused and took the law into his own hands was acting unlawfully. Nobody could ask the Jewish guardianship institution to give up the guardianship. The churches did ask it to refrain from anything that would hinder the girl later, as an adult, from freely choosing her faith.

March 1949

A few weeks after that February day, in March 1949, the conflict in the OPK flared up again. The Jewish members left the commission again. This time there was no mediation anymore. In June the standing committee of the House of Representatives wrote that the work had lately been done by "a kind of rump commission." It appreciated what the OPK had done under difficult circumstances,

and regretted that the differences of opinion had not been bridged. On August 12, 1949, the commission was dissolved.

Gezina van der Molen remained chair of a fund that since April 28, 1947 had helped war foster children with their education. The files of that fund stayed closed until 1992. The archive of the OPK itself lies in the North Holland Archives in Haarlem. It can be consulted only with permission.

About what this cost her, we have mainly the word of Mies Nolte. In her obituary of 1975 she calls the chairmanship "the most difficult and heaviest task" that Gezina ever carried out. The tensions in the commission were often sharp, she writes. The responsibility cost Gezina many sleepless nights. Later, according to Nolte, she looked back on it with satisfaction.

A reviewer of her biography saw it differently. The chairmanship became her Waterloo, he wrote.

Between those two judgments stand the children it was about. Their own voice is missing in the documents I could open. I find that a lack in this story, and I do not want to hide it.

"We Fell Short"

It took a long time before the churches themselves said anything about their role.

On December 14, 1995, fifty years after the liberation, the Dutch Catholic bishops published a statement on their relationship to Judaism. They wrote that church institutions had made mistakes, and that a tradition of church anti-Judaism had contributed to the climate that made the Shoah possible. They rejected that tradition and deeply regretted its consequences. They also mentioned the attitude of Catholics when Jews in hiding and survivors of the camps

returned after the war. They also praised the courage of the college of bishops under Archbishop De Jong.

On November 8, 2020, René de Reuver, scribe of the Protestant Church in the Netherlands, stood in the synagogue on the Obrechtstraat in Amsterdam. It was the commemoration of Kristallnacht. The Protestant Church is, since 2004, the church in which the Netherlands Reformed, the Reformed, and the Lutherans have merged. De Reuver read a statement in which that church confessed guilt. "We fell short in speaking and in keeping silent, in doing and in leaving undone," he said. The church had helped prepare the soil in which antisemitism could grow. The statement also mentions the years after 1945, and the problems in the return of war foster children to the Jewish community. It remembers with gratitude those who came into resistance.

Eddo Verdoner, chairman of the Central Jewish Consultation, called it "a step toward reconciliation." There was also contradiction, from children of resistance people and from church historians, who felt that the resistance from within the churches was not done enough justice. De Reuver stuck by the statement.

What Is Left of a Rescue?

In 1998 Yad Vashem, the Israeli memorial center for the Holocaust, recognized Gezina van der Molen as Righteous Among the Nations, under the spelling Gesina. She did not live to see it. On October 9, 1978, she died in her home in Aerdenhout, eighty-six years old. Historian Gert van Klinken wrote her biography and gave it the title *Strijdbaar & omstreden* (*Combative and Controversial*). Elma Verhey wrote in 1991 *Om het joodse kind* (*For the Jewish Child*), about the same struggle.

I included this chapter in a book about Christians in the war because it belongs to that story. The same hands that carried a child out through a garden later signed advice about whom that child belonged to.

On the Plantage Middenlaan the old training college still stands. Inside, the permanent exhibition tells the story of the Jews in the Netherlands. At number 24 on the same street are drops on the walls of the old theater hall. Through the garden of the nursery next to the school, children were taken away. Where they ended up, and in the end to whom they belonged, is written in an archive in Haarlem that opens only with permission.

Go There Yourself

The National Holocaust Museum is at Plantage Middenlaan 27 in Amsterdam, in the building of the former Reformed Teacher Training College. Next to it lay the nursery from which children were rescued. In the museum you see the permanent exhibition *The Netherlands and the Shoah*. The museum also manages the Jewish Council Card Index (*Joodse Raad Cartotheek*), a card system from the war that is on the UNESCO Memory of the World list.

On the same street, at number 24, lies the Hollandsche Schouwburg. It is a place of remembrance for all victims of the Holocaust. You see an introductory film and walk on to the site of the former theater hall. Drops have been placed on the outer walls of that hall.

Both places belong to the Jewish Cultural Quarter. For opening hours, see the website of the Jewish Cultural Quarter.

What is certain and what is told

Certain (multiple independent sources): the mandement of the bishops of February 2, 1934 (ban for priests and Catholic leaders)

and the pastoral letter of May 6, 1936, read aloud on May 24, 1936, with refusal of the sacraments; the synod decision of the Reformed Churches (Amsterdam, October 2, 1936) and its repetition in 1941; the survey by Delleman from 1947 (782 church councils written to, 521 answers, about 273 NSB members before 1940 and about 493 after May 1940, two church councils without discipline), now checked in *Opdat wij niet vergeten* itself; that the Netherlands Reformed Church before 1940 made no church statement against National Socialism; the NSB membership of Rev. L.C.W. Ekering since December 22, 1936 and his suspension in 1945; the protest of six Protestant churches of October 24, 1940 (one source gives October 23); the scale of the murder of the Jews of the Netherlands (about 104,000 of 140,000); the founding, composition, and figures of the Commission for War Foster Children; the departure of eleven Jewish members in July 1946 and the break in March 1949; the dissolution on August 12, 1949; the resistance work of Gezina van der Molen, including taking children out of the nursery garden by way of the Netherlands Reformed Teacher Training College; the disappearance of a Jewish girl to Belgium on February 24, 1949, the trial in October 1955 of six defendants (two sisters, a niece, a former priest, and two mothers superior) and the prison sentences for two of the sisters; the statement of nine Protestant churches in the Interkerkelijk Contact Israël of late March 1955 (text in the Nieuw Israëlietisch Weekblad of April 1, 1955, report by JTA of March 29); the suspension of parental authority in article 5 of the decree of May 8, 1945 (Staatscourant); the death of Van der Molen on October 9, 1978 in Aerdenhout (Trouw and Leeuwarder Courant of October 10, 1978); the recognition of Van der Molen by Yad Vashem in 1998 (Yad Vashem list, as of January 1, 2024, file 8228); the statement of the Catholic bishops of December 14, 1995 and the confession of guilt of the Protestant Church of November 8, 2020, which also mentions the war foster children.

Only from tradition or own testimony: what is said about Van der Molen's chairmanship (heaviest task, sleepless nights, satisfaction afterward) comes from the obituary that her friend Mies Nolte wrote in 1975; the stories about the board's fear at her lectures, the arrest in Noordwijk, and the prayer for the Jews also come from that obituary and from the biography by Van Klinken, as the archive presents them; her position on children staying with foster parents I know through the archive of the Commission and through a review of her biography; the figures on NSB members and discipline rest on what church councils themselves reported to Delleman in 1947; that Van der Molen was the first woman to study at the VU, earn a doctorate, and become professor is in the newspapers at her death; that the Netherlands Reformed synod had no authority for a church statement I know through the quote from Touw in Snoek.

Where the sources differ (in the story I chose one version):

- *Kuyper and the Reformed leadership.* Jan Bank wrote in 2015 in *God in de oorlog* that the leadership of the Reformed Churches took a friendly stance toward the Germans and that Kuyper favored adaptation. G.J. Kok disputes that. According to him Kuyper saw that his role was played out and withdrew at the end of 1940, before the synod removed him. Kok also writes that the synod removed him from the Convent because of hardness of hearing, with J. Donner as successor, and that the classis of Rotterdam in December 1940 asked to remove him from the deputation. I know this only in Kok's presentation, and he is one of the parties in the debate.
- *The telegram of July 1942.* Bank wrote that almost all Reformed pulpits read it aloud. Kok names Marum, Lutjegast, Groningen, and Meppel, where that did not happen. In his reply Bank admitted that the telegram was far from read in all Re-

formed churches. On the other points he did not respond, according to Kok. A count is lacking.

- *Croes and Tammes.* Rob Bakker summarizes their research as showing no clear difference between more Catholic and more Protestant municipalities in the number of Jews murdered. The jury that gave their dissertation a prize from the Praemium Erasmianum Foundation in 2004 describes it differently: in predominantly Catholic municipalities the chance of survival was greatest, and where many Netherlands Reformed lived it was smaller. Historian Helen Grevers wrote something similar in 2015: according to Croes and Tammes, Jews in Roman Catholic municipalities had a better chance than in Reformed ones. The jury called the outcomes surprising. In the parts of their own text that I could open, I did not find the passage. Nationally 27 percent of the Jews survived; in the 306 municipalities on average 50 percent, with a wide spread.
- *Belgium.* J.C.H. Blom puts Belgium at about forty percent who perished, France at a quarter; Bakker gives thirty-two percent for Belgium.
- *The number of sisters with whom the girl was in hiding.* A historical handbook and Het Binnenhof of May 21, 1954 speak of three, Time wrote in 1955 of five. Two sisters and a niece stood trial. This is not settled.
- *End of the chairmanship.* The VU archive gives September 1, 1949; the commission was dissolved on August 12, 1949 according to the government portal.
- *The church in the statement of March 1955.* JTA names only "the Protestant church in Holland." The full text in the Nieuw Israëlietisch Weekblad makes clear it was a joint statement of nine churches.

Unconfirmed:

- *The proposal to remove parental authority from returned parents.* This comes from one review of the Van Klinken biography (Biografie Bulletin, 2007). The VU archive is silent about it. The decree of May 8, 1945 knows only suspension. In newspapers of 1945 and 1946 on Delpher I did not find the proposal. Whether the proposal went further than article 5, I do not know.
- *The remark that the chairmanship became her Waterloo.* One reviewer. Nolte's obituary says she looked back on it with satisfaction.
- *How the House judged the conflict in 1949.* I know it only from a newspaper report of the preliminary report of the standing committee (De Gooi- en Eemlander, June 18, 1949), with the telegram of Chief Rabbi Tal of April 1, 1949 and the figure of about 150 children under OPK guardianship.

Interpretation: why so few Jews in the Netherlands were rescued is still debated among historians. Administration, official cooperation, *verzuiling*, and the role of the SS are mentioned. Braun (2016) found a link with the nearness of a church of a minority. Whether the confession of guilt of 2020 does enough justice to the resistance from the churches has been discussed within the church itself. That Van der Molen's rescue in the war and her position after the war belong together is my reading of the facts. She herself did not put it that way.

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April 1945: Bread from the Sky Over a Starving Land

On Sunday, April 29, 1945, more than two hundred Lancasters flew low over the west of the country. A British navigator, Des Hawkins, looked down. He saw people standing on roofs and in the streets. They waved flags, sheets, or just their hands.

That day the bombers dropped more than five hundred tons of food, over the Duindigt racecourse near The Hague, the airfields of Ypenburg and Valkenburg, and Rotterdam's Waalhaven. In the sacks were flour, rusks, chocolate, tea, egg powder, and margarine. A bomber with engine trouble released its load more or less by accident over Haamstede. Three Dutchmen flew as pilots in a Lancaster: Wladimir Rudenko, Hans Heukensfeldt Jansen, and Harry Sinnema.

The operation was called Manna, after the bread that, according to the Bible, God gave in the desert. To understand what that bread meant, you have to go back to September.

A Prayer in a Diary

On September 17, 1944, the Dutch government in London called the railway strike. The strike was meant to hinder the Germans. On top of that came a German ban on food transport by barge.

The consequence came slowly and hard. In the Netherlands as a whole there was not too little food, historians write. It simply could no longer reach the cities in the west. The supplies there ran out before new ones came. Then came the frost, which held up the supply even further.

In January 1945 the official ration dropped below five hundred kilocalories a day. At its lowest point it was three hundred and sixty. People ate tulip bulbs and sugar beets. In Utrecht more than five thousand trees were cut down for firewood. At least twenty thousand people died of hunger.

On Friday, January 19, 1945, an engineer of twenty-nine sat at his diary in The Hague. The bread ration had been halved that week. He wrote down what was left: not even two slices of bread a day, a kilo of potatoes a week, or else half a liter of soup a day from the communal kitchen. He was cold and he was hungry, he wrote. It froze and snowed without a break. More than once he writes "My God" and "O Lord." He ends with a prayer: "God help the Netherlands, which is dear to us, with the saving hand."

His diary was printed in 1954 by the State Institute for War Documentation, without his name. For me that prayer is the question this chapter turns on. What did the people who prayed like that do when they themselves could also do something?

Eight Churches at One Table

In those years the churches had already learned to talk with each other. On June 25, 1940, six weeks after the capitulation, the Convent of Churches (*Convent van Kerken*) met for the first time. In it sat the Netherlands Reformed Church, the Reformed Churches, the Christian Reformed Church, the Reformed Churches in Restored Connection, the Remonstrants, the Mennonites, and two Lutheran churches. The Roman Catholic Church had not been invited.

At the end of 1941, the Catholic bishops agreed to cooperation. Monsignor F.J.E.H. van de Loo of the Archdiocese of Utrecht began attending the meetings. In 1942 the consultation got a new name: Interkerkelijk Overleg, Interchurch Consultation, IKO for short. That year Catholics and Protestants together signed the telegram of July 11 against the deportation of the Jews. Another chapter of this book is about that summer.

The Netherlands in those years was divided into circles: Catholic, Netherlands Reformed, Reformed, each with its own churches, schools, and associations. Historians call it *verzuiling*, pillarization. Now the leaders of those circles sat at one table.

In the autumn of 1944, the IKO set up a new office: the Interkerkelijk Bureau voor Noodvoedselvoorziening en Kinderuitzending, the Interchurch Bureau for Emergency Food Supply and Sending Away of Children, the IKB for short. At the beginning of December, Reich Commissioner Seyss-Inquart gave permission. He set one condition: the food must not end up with the resistance.

Half a Liter of Sauerkraut Mash

At the end of January 1945, after almost two months of preparation, the IKB began in Delft the fight against malnutrition in children. The first meal was half a liter of sauerkraut mash (*zuurkoolstamp-*

pot, mashed potatoes with sauerkraut). Children from six to fifteen years old qualified. A week earlier a group had been added: people over sixteen who were so malnourished that their lives were in danger. Toddlers got nothing yet.

The food was meant for everyone, of whatever church. Those who could, paid. Those who could not pay received their portion through the denominations, which were each assigned their share.

On paper it was a work of all the churches for everyone. In practice it did not go that way everywhere. The distribution lay with the local branches. In the inner city of Rotterdam, the organization Hulp voor ons Allen (Help for All of Us), despite that name, helped only the Reformed. There are also known Catholic distribution points where non-Catholics were sent away.

Historian Ingrid de Zwarte, who wrote a large book on the Hunger Winter in 2019, sees it more broadly. The churches, in her view, became the hub of food aid outside the ration coupons, partly as subcontractors of the government. In doing so they often gave priority to their own circle, and so pillarization in the hunger grew stronger rather than weaker.

I find that hard to read. The IKB saved lives. And in some places the help reached the church's own members first. I cannot strike out the one against the other.

"A Thick Layer of Straw"

The IKB did more than cook. It sent children away from the cities, to farmers in the north and east, where there was still milk and bread. In the big cities, doctors examined hundreds of children every day to decide who could go. According to the overview that NOS made for January 11, 1945, for the time being a thousand children would leave Amsterdam and seven hundred and fifty from The Hague and

Rotterdam together. The Nederlandse Volksdienst, a pro-German organization, also arranged transports.

The children traveled on foot, by bicycle, by car, by train, by horse and cart, or by boat. A boy of eleven from The Hague sailed with his younger brother and about a hundred and fifty other children to Friesland. He remembered "a thick layer of straw" on the floor and toilet buckets that tipped over.

In Schiedam you can see well how it worked. On January 27, 1945, a branch of the IKB began there. Every child had to have two things: a medical examination and the address of a foster family. A doctor, Dr. Jeanette van Haaften, did the examinations. Each child's religion was noted. Every transport had to reflect "as much as possible the proportions of the population groups," Catholic and Protestant in proportion.

That proved difficult. For Catholic children it was hard to find host families, because the Catholic south had already been liberated. Between February 15 and March 26, 1945, about fifteen transports left Schiedam with 626 children in all. Whoever came to a foster family in the Netherlands usually stayed away six weeks, at most three months. From Utrecht at least 3,720 went through the IKB. The IKB of The Hague counted in its report on the first quarter of 1945 already 3,196 children taken to the north and east. At the end of March, several thousand more were waiting their turn there.

In Utrecht, a Catholic chaplain, an assistant priest in a parish, also gave himself to the cause. Theo Egberts of the Gertrudis parish arranged housing for children with families in Overijssel. Writer Christa van Hees adapted his diary in 2021 into the book *Kapelaan in oorlogstijd* (*Chaplain in Wartime*). He did not stay stuck in just praying, she says of him.

How many children went in total, nobody knows exactly. Forty to fifty thousand is often cited, and Ingrid de Zwarte puts it at about forty thousand. After the war the story was often told this way: an interchurch organization brought the children to safety while the Germans obstructed it. According to De Zwarte, the occupier in fact supported the evacuations, and the story of German obstruction largely arose after the war. What made the difference was the cooperation of tens of thousands of ordinary Dutch people who took a child into their home, whatever their faith or political color.

Heit and Mem

In Friesland the city children had to get used to the countryside, to their foster family, and to Frisian. By the end of their stay many called their foster parents *heit* and *mem*, father and mother. The Frisian Resistance Museum said so in 2015 in an exhibition about these children.

A boy of seven from Delft arrived in Friesland after a long boat trip with 143 other children. At first there seemed to be no place for him. Then a village constable in Noordbergum took him in, with his wife. In the beginning he got only one slice of bread with butter and was still hungry. His foster parents followed the advice of the IKB: after long hunger, a child had to start eating again with small portions.

At home in Delft he had slept in the attic with three brothers. Now he had a room of his own. In mid-April, Canadian soldiers moved into Noordbergum. They handed out chocolate and chewing gum. He saved it to eat at home together with his mother. That is how he told it himself later, in the book *Hongerkind* (*Hunger Child*) by Mariska van Vondelen.

What would you do if, in a hunger winter, a strange child of seven stood on your doorstep? Thousands of families in the north and east were asked that question. Many said yes.

Not everyone in the countryside helped. Hungry city people went to the farms themselves and traded linen and silver for food. A testimony at the Resistance Museum puts it briefly: "I traded everything for food." Many farmers gave shelter to people who came walking along the road. Others, out of greed, asked far too much. Some farmers in the end no longer accepted linen. A sign said: "No more linen."

Two Ships in Delfzijl

On January 28, 1945, two Swedish ships sailed into the harbor of Delfzijl: the *Dagmar Bratt* and the *Noreg*. All other lights were out, but the ships were brightly lit, so that everyone could see the Red Cross on the deck. They came from neutral Sweden and brought flour, peas, margarine, barley, milk powder, dried vegetables, and cod liver oil.

It had taken long. Prime Minister Gerbrandy had repeatedly and urgently asked the Allies for help. They refused to drop food from the air, because it would hinder the conduct of the war. After that an agreement was reached with the Germans about a ship from Sweden under the leadership of the Red Cross. Because of the frost and paperwork it was delayed by about a month.

In Delfzijl, dockworkers unloaded day and night. On February 6 a first convoy of ten inland vessels left, three days later fourteen followed. They sailed through the canals to Harlingen and then across the IJsselmeer to the west. On February 13, posters went up: everyone could collect four hundred grams of bread free of charge. Selected bakeries received extra oil to fire their ovens.

On February 27, the first bread was handed out. In the cities everyone received half a Swedish white loaf and a small packet of margarine. For a moment the daily ration rose from 476 to 878 kilocalories.

On Sunday, March 4, a typist of twenty-nine in Amsterdam wrote in her diary that she wanted something savory for "the bread of the Swedish Red Cross." In the same diary it says that her family was going hungry. When those relatives came to visit, her mother gave them something to eat from the meager bit of beans they still had themselves.

According to the Liberation Route, the captain of the *Dagmar Bratt*, Nils Vesterling, took on the return trip a letter from two Amsterdam women to the Swedish king. They had written it in Swedish. What it said, I do not know.

The increase in the ration was a one-time thing, and the NOS retrospective puts it soberly: it was not enough. The hunger went on until the end of April.

A Plan in Ten Days

On April 17, 1945, Air Commodore Andrew Geddes received an assignment. He had to make a plan to feed three and a half million Dutch people from the air, and it had to start in ten days. There were no parachutes, so he chose free drops from very low. The crews practiced with sandbags.

The west was still in German hands. Without an agreement the bombers would be shot at. On April 26, Seyss-Inquart gave permission for the first drop zones, writes the Militaire Spectator. The Flemish broadcaster VRT also names that day as the moment when the Germans agreed to the droppings.

On Saturday, April 28, Allied officers met a German delegation in Achterveld, a village between Amersfoort and Barneveld, exactly between the front lines. They sat in the Catholic Saint Joseph School. The shot-out windows were covered with makeshift glass and black cloth, so that nobody could look in. The German negotiator, Ernst Schwebel, said he could promise nothing without his chief. A second talk was agreed, two days later.

The Lancasters did not wait for it. On April 29 they flew, while nothing had yet been signed.

On Monday, April 30, Seyss-Inquart himself came to the school in Achterveld. Facing him sat, among others, the Canadian general Charles Foulkes, Prince Bernhard, and Walter Bedell Smith, Eisenhower's chief of staff. They agreed that the aircraft could fly through fixed corridors without being shot at, that roads would be opened for trucks, and that the Germans would stay away from the dropped food. About a surrender Seyss-Inquart did not want to talk. One of the Dutch officials who had come with him saw butter and eggs on the table at lunch. "It was as if we were living in a dream," he said.

With that it was not settled yet. General Foulkes wrote fifteen years later in the Algemeen Handelsblad how it went on. After an hour and a half the delegations split up into small committees. He had a German general across from him who did not dare to decide anything. Only on May 1, at eleven o'clock in the morning, did Foulkes reach agreement with the chief of staff of General Blaskowitz, the German commander. A neutral strip came between the Arnhem-Utrecht railway line and the Waal. There the food convoys could drive freely and nobody would shoot.

Letting Bread Rain from Heaven

Churchgoers in the Netherlands knew the name Manna from the story of the exodus from Egypt. There God says to Moses: *Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you* (Exodus 16:4). The people had to go and gather it every day.

From May 1, the Americans also dropped, with B-17 bombers. That operation was called Chowhound. The packages fell on Schiphol, at Vogelenzang, at Bergen, Hilversum, and Utrecht. The British now also dropped at Terbregge and Gouda. The last flights were on May 8. In total the British dropped more than seven thousand tons, the Americans almost four thousand.

In Utrecht the packages fell on May 2 on the meadows at Lage Weide. Chaplain Egberts stood watching. In his diary he wrote: "It was a spectacle never to be forgotten." He also saw packages splash into the water, so that the water sprayed up as high as houses.

Not everything went well. In the processing at Utrecht factories there was theft, especially of cigarettes. In accidents three American B-17s and one Lancaster were lost. Twelve American airmen died.

Ingrid de Zwarte calls the droppings above all a signal: the Allies showed that they did not forget the west. They were not decisive in relieving the need. Most of the food came by road and by water. On May 2, 360 Canadian trucks drove into German-held territory, later followed by another 150. That operation was called Faust and brought almost seven thousand tons by May 9.

What People Saw in It

Many Dutch people said later that the roar of the bombers gave them hope back. On the ground they spelled out their thanks with white sheets, so that the crews could read it.

For believers it went further. A man who as a child lived in a half-rural area about twenty kilometers from Amsterdam, and now lives in Canada, wrote about it in 2021 in a devotional booklet of the Presbyterian Church in Canada. He remembered how Amsterdam people went from door to door and begged for something to eat, anything. His father kept a few goats, his mother six chickens. After the dropping the family also received cans and grain products.

He laid his memory next to the story of Israel in the desert, which by God's providence received what it needed. His meditation closes with a prayer. In it he thanks God for the Allies who fed the hungry.

There are also voices from the years themselves. The IKB of The Hague closed its report on the first months of 1945 with a sentence that the Nieuwe Haagsche Courant took over on May 16. If the bureau had done serving, blessed work, and perhaps saved lives, "then with humility the head bowed and the hands folded in a prayer of thanks." The bureau was then handing out fifty to sixty thousand portions of emergency food every day, with more than twenty-six hundred workers.

In Huizen stood an orphanage of a Christian association. During the war it had grown from nine to about forty children. In 1948 the secretary looked back in a church paper. He did not want to go on at length about the worries of getting food in the Hunger Winter. He preferred to tell how the inspectors and the police kept seizing black-market goods, and then called the orphanage to come and pick up eggs or cheeses. "That is how God provided for our charges," he wrote. In the same paragraph he thanks the orphanage father and his wife, who left nothing untried.

In Veen, Elder Hubertus Schreuders of the Reformed Congregation spoke on May 3, 1946 at the commemoration of the liberation. In the war there had been prayer and sighing under the hunger, he

said. When almost nobody dared hope anymore, the Germans had to surrender, while planes threw food from the air. "God had risen up to our help and the war had come to an end." He was also stern. People, he said, had mourned more over the consequences of their sins than over the sins themselves, and a year later he saw the country already absorbed again in sports and games.

In conservative churches another story circulates. A father had not a crumb of bread left in the Hunger Winter. He set the table, put out the empty plates, and prayed. After the amen he found a basket of food in the scullery. A church history staff member of the Reformatorisch Dagblad retold it in 2012, without name, place, or source. I pass it on as it is told.

I cannot prove that God sent those planes. I also cannot prove that He had nothing to do with it. The engineer in The Hague prayed in January for a saving hand. What came afterward were the hands of people: Swedish sailors, Frisian foster families, British and American airmen, Canadian drivers, and churchgoers in a Delft kitchen. How you interpret that, I leave to you.

"We Are Free"

On Friday, May 4, 1945, the news of the German surrender came. The next day, May 5, the west was free.

In Delft a teacher of thirty-eight kept his diary. On Saturday evening, May 5, there were lamps in many windows. At eight o'clock he went out on the street. Everywhere flags were being made ready, his own was already laid out too. On the Markt, people burned portraits of Mussert and Hitler near the statue of Hugo de Groot, taken from the NSB clubhouse. Rumors went around. At nine o'clock he crept under the covers.

On Sunday, May 6, it stormed, and squalls of rain beat against the windows. At four in the afternoon he heard the great bell ring. A neighbor across the street shouted that the flag was out. He walked to the Markt. On the steps of the town hall he saw the former mayor standing, with his wife. Much of the speech the teacher did not understand. He heard the opening, fellow citizens, and then three words: "We are free." After that the people sang the Wilhelmus.

He also wrote down what happened next. On that same Markt, two women had their heads shaved, because they were said to have kept company with Germans.

He looked back on the winter. They had suffered terribly from hunger in the west, he wrote. For one thing he thanked God: the west had not become a battlefield.

Back at the Noise Barrier

On May 8, the last bombers flew over. At the end of May, people in the west were eating about two thousand kilocalories a day again. The children in the north went home again.

At Terbregge, on the edge of Rotterdam, the northern ring road, the A20, runs behind a noise barrier. Here, in what is now the Nieuw Terbregge neighborhood, sacks and cans of food fell from British bombers. Thousands of people were needed to collect everything from the fields, because there was almost no transport left. A memorial website mentions four thousand men. Columnist Nico Scheepmaker wrote in 1979 of thirty-five hundred to four thousand volunteers a day, from eight in the morning into the evening. They carried the sacks to horse-drawn carts. These drove to the Rechter Rottekade, where vegetable barges and other ships brought the food to the city. Members of the Air Protection Service (*Luchtbeschermingsdienst*) hauled along too.

In that noise barrier is a strange structure of guardrails, steel, and asphalt, about twenty-five by fifteen meters. A pavilion goes with it, a garden of asphalt, and a walkway built into the barrier itself. The Rotterdam artists' collective Observatorium made it in 2001. Only later did it get another meaning. At the initiative of neighborhood residents it became a memorial, and since 2006 it has been called Operatie Manna. The path alongside bears the name of Air Commodore Andrew Geddes, the British officer who worked out the food droppings of 1945. For April 29, 2026, the neighborhood announced a small commemoration, with flowers and the flag at the top of the pole. That year residents also asked for information boards, so that passersby know what happened here.

Whoever walks along the Geddespad now hears the highway behind the barrier. You climb by steps of asphalt and yellow crates to a lookout over the highway and the roofs of Nieuw Terbregge. At that spot, in May 1945, the sacks of flour fell from the sky.

Go There Yourself

The Operatie Manna monument is in the noise barrier along the A20 at Nieuw Terbregge in Rotterdam, on the Air Commodore Geddespad. It is a work of guardrails, steel, and asphalt with a pavilion, an asphalt garden, and a walkway, and a lookout over the neighborhood and the highway. The municipality of Rotterdam is the owner. Around April 29 the neighborhood holds a small commemoration there.

In Delft you can stand on the Markt where liberation was proclaimed on May 6, 1945, in front of the town hall and by the statue of Hugo de Groot. On the Markt stands the Nieuwe Kerk, with the monumental tomb of William of Orange and a tower you can climb. The Oude Kerk, with the tower called Oude Jan, is close by.

The Nieuwe Kerk is being renovated. For opening hours, see the website of the Oude en Nieuwe Kerk Delft.

At Katwijk lay Valkenburg airfield, one of the first places where the food fell. The Stichting Historie Vliegveld Valkenburg mentions a visitor center on its website; look there for opening hours.

What is certain and what is told

Certain (multiple independent sources): the railway strike from September 17, 1944 and the German ban on food transport by water; rations under 500 kilocalories in January 1945 and at least 20,000 deaths; the founding of the Convent of Churches in 1940 and the later Interchurch Consultation with the Roman Catholic Church; the founding of the IKB by the IKO in the autumn of 1944, with German permission at the beginning of December; the meals for children from the end of January 1945 and the local examples of help only for one's own denomination; the sending away of children with examination and registration of religion, as in Schiedam (626 children) and Utrecht (at least 3,720); the arrival of the Swedish ships on January 28 and the distribution of the white bread from February 27, 1945; the talks in the Saint Joseph School in Achterveld on April 28 and 30, 1945 and the further agreements of May 1 (Foulkes in 1960, The Canadian Encyclopedia, and the Valkenburg foundation name that day); the operations Manna (from April 29), Chowhound (from May 1), and Faust (from May 2) and the losses in accidents; the liberation of the west on May 5, 1945; the Operatie Manna monument by Observatorium in the noise barrier at Terbregge, a memorial since 2006.

Only from tradition or own testimony: the prayer of the engineer from The Hague on January 19, 1945 and the diaries of the typist from Amsterdam and the teacher from Delft (published anonymously by the State Institute for War Documentation); the memo-

ries of the boy in the straw and of the Delft boy in Noordbergum (in the book *Hongerkind* by Mariska van Vondelen); the diary of Chaplain Egberts, as adapted by Christa van Hees (I read it through quotes in an article by DUIC); the memory of a man in Canada and his interpretation in the light of the manna; the words about butter and eggs in Achterveld; the letter of two Amsterdam women to the Swedish king (one source); the thousands of helpers at Terbregge (a memorial website and a column by Nico Scheepmaker from 1979, who does not name his source); the word of thanks in the IKB report of The Hague of 1945, the report of the orphanage in Huizen (Kerkblaadje, September 24, 1948), and the speech of Elder Schreuders in Veen (May 3, 1946, reprinted in 2005 and shortened by the editors); the story of the laid table and the basket, which is passed on without name, place, or source.

Where the sources differ (in the story I chose one version):

- *Number of aircraft on April 29.* 239 according to the RAF Museum and according to Foulkes, 242 in The Canadian Encyclopedia, about 250 at the Militaire Spectator, "more than 300" in an eyewitness account at the Bomber Command Museum of Canada.
- *Number of tons on April 29.* More than 500 tons in the story (the VRT puts it at 500 tons, Foulkes at 510); other sources give 534, 535, or 526.
- *The agreement.* Seyss-Inquart agreed on April 26 to the first drop zones according to the Militaire Spectator and the VRT. The agreements in Achterveld date from April 30 and May 1. Who exactly signed on May 1 differs: the Valkenburg foundation names Seyss-Inquart, Foulkes describes an agreement between himself and the German chief of staff Reichelt.

- *Number of children sent away.* Often 40,000 to 50,000; De Zwarte puts it in her book at about 40,000. A national final count by the IKB itself I have not found, only figures per city.
- *German obstruction of the child evacuations.* De Zwarte calls this picture largely a story from after the war.
- *Terbregge.* Scheepmaker has the droppings there begin on April 30, the Militaire Spectator on May 1.
- *The Geddespad.* The naming on April 28, 2007 in the presence of Geddes's son and grandson appears only on Wikipedia; the RAF biography of Geddes does not mention the path. In the story, therefore, only the name of the path appears.

Unconfirmed:

- *The letter to the Swedish king.* Only the Liberation Route; I do not know the content.
- *The number of four thousand helpers at Terbregge.* A memorial website and one column; I found no second source.
- *An answer to prayer with name, place, and date* that can be checked independently of the teller, I did not find. The stories from Huizen and Veen are testimonies of believers themselves, almost from the time, and I pass them on as they were written down.

Interpretation: whether the rescue in April and May 1945 was God's answer to prayer is a question of faith. The sources show who acted: churches, farmers, sailors, airmen, and drivers. Ingrid de Zwarte stresses that the droppings were above all symbolic and that most of the food came over land and water. In church papers and diaries I found how people prayed, thanked God, and saw His care in what happened, as in Huizen and Veen.

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Afterword

Eight moments, from a Sunday in October 1940 to fields full of flour sacks in April 1945, and the bitter years after. An announcement from the pulpit. Four ministers behind the gate of Dachau. A letter read aloud from the pulpits. A newspaper that had to choose. Two boys under the pulpit. A church that split. A struggle over rescued children. And bread from heaven.

When I began this book, I wanted to know what Christians did when it counted. The answer is not simple. Some did a great deal. They hid people, delivered newspapers, cooked soup for hungry children, and sometimes paid for it with their lives. Most did little or nothing. And sometimes Christians did things that shock you now.

I have to say that honestly. Faith did not make people brave automatically. A full church building did not protect the Jews in the street. What you do see, again and again in these stories, are ordinary people who at a certain moment said yes. A farmer in Drenthe. A boy of twenty with a stack of newspapers. A chaplain who looked for shelter for hungry children.

What would I have done? I do not know. Nobody knows that about himself. Perhaps that is the most important question this book leaves behind. Not what they did, but what we do when it counts for us.

God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. (Psalm 46:1)