

An Anabaptist Artist: Jan Wouters Van Kuyk, 1572

Background: Jan Wouters van Kuyk, an Anabaptist artist and church leader in the city of Dordrecht, the Netherlands, was executed in 1572, leaving a legacy of 11 letters and a confession of faith that were published in 1579 and later incorporated into the *Martyrs Mirror*.

Requirements: Five persons

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Narrator: Jan Wouters van Kuyck [*Yaan Vouters fon Kowk*] was a citizen of the city of Dordrecht in Holland. According to a historian of the time, he was “a man of blameless life and conversation, a skillful painter and stained glass artist.” Jan Wouters was also an Anabaptist.

Early in 1572 there was a crackdown on Anabaptists in Dordrecht. Jan frequently moved from house to house so that he would not be easily recognized. But the bailiff learned where he was staying and came with his officers. Unexpectedly, without asking anything, the bailiff and his officers came up the stairs to Jan’s door. Responding to their knocks, Jan Wouters opened the door.

Bailiff: Does Jan Wouters live here?

Narrator: Jan Wouters was not willing to speak a lie even to the bailiff.

Jan: (*very loudly*) Yes, it’s me. I’m Jan Wouters van Kuyck.

Narrator: He spoke these words very loudly so that his wife, who was in the back room, could hear him and make her escape, which she did. But their only daughter, a child of seven, remained in the front room and saw her father arrested. The police ignored her. They immediately laid their hands upon Jan and forcibly tied him up.

Jan: O, my lords, you are binding me as if I were a wicked man. However, you are binding not me, but yourselves.

Narrator: Jan spent many weeks in the filthy Dordrecht jail. At times the officials treated him decently. One day the bailiff, who was still young and beardless, came up to Jan.

Bailiff: Jan, I’d like you to paint a portrait of me.

Jan: Oh?

Bailiff: I’d like you to paint me as if I were King Solomon where he pronounces his first sentence. You know the scene from 1 Kings 3:16-28.

Jan: All right, all right. You get me the brushes and paint.

Narrator: The clergy were angry at this. It was delaying things.

Priest: Isn't he disgusting, that bailiff? He's got that prisoner—that heretic—painting his portrait as *Solomon*. I think he arrested Jan only to have this portrait of himself painted.

Narrator: But sometimes Jan also received brutal treatment. He was placed on the rack and tortured terribly. The pain in his whole body was intense and especially in his hands. He struggled to use his hands—his painter's hands—to write a letter to his wife.

Jan: I wrote the first page just after I had been tortured so it is somewhat badly written. Now my hand is a little better, but I still have the marks of the sufferings of Christ. His name be praised forever.

Narrator: The officers racked him some more and beat him on his back. He was in great pain.

Torturer: How does this suit you? Who are your friends? Unless you tell us about your network, I will tear open your old wounds again.

Jan: Dear wife, it is hard to write this to you. After further threats, the torturer then let me down again and placed me before the lords upon the rack with my eyes blindfolded. You know the *Ecce Homo*, the work of art in which Christ is depicted appearing before Pilate? That's how I must have looked. And the officials asked me whether I would now tell them about my Anabaptist contacts. I said that I couldn't do it so he racked me again which caused me incredible pain. When he shook me and jerked the rope, the pain got even worse. When they could obtain nothing from me, they let me down.

Bailiff: Jan Wouters, your face is as sweet as that of an angel, but your heart is harder than Pharaoh's heart.

Jan: No, you know that this is not so. The Lord will make it clear to you all. I have simply sought my salvation.

Narrator: From prison Jan wrote letters not only to his wife but to his daughter.

Jan: Dear daughter, Jesus said, "If any want to become my disciples, let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me." (Luke 9:23). Remember, dear daughter, that he also said "If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you" (John 15:20). My beloved, I urge you to join the people who carry their crosses. That's the way to come to Christ. He bore the cross for us. We must follow in his footsteps and be like our Lord—the disciple like his master—and as we suffer with him so we shall forever rejoice with him.

Narrator: Jan then told his daughter what were the signs of the true, cross-bearing Christian.

Jan: They are not conformed to the world. They crucify their sinful flesh more and more every day. They strive after things that are honest and good. They do evil to no one. They pray for their enemies and do not resist them. Their word is their seal—their yes is yes and their no is no.

Narrator: On Palm Sunday in 1572, Jan and Adriaenken Jans [*Adri-en-ken Yans*], an Anabaptist woman leader, were gagged and led out to be executed. But Jan got the piece of wood out of his mouth.

Jan: (*loudly*) O Lord, strengthen your feeble servant and your poor handmaiden. It is for your name's sake that we have come to this for which we have willingly prepared ourselves.

Narrator: The hangman then strangled Adriaenken before burning her. Before Jan was burned, he saw in the crowd some fellow believers. He called out to them.

Jan: (*loudly*) Adieu, goodbye and farewell, my dear brothers and sisters. I commend you to the Lord—to the Lord who shed his blood for us.

Narrator: Then the fire was lit, and the Anabaptist artist was burned alive.

Source: *Martyrs Mirror*, 897-926. See the Jan Luyken engraving, *Martyrs Mirror*, 898.

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