

THE HISTORICAL SERIES OF THE REFORMED CHURCH IN AMERICA
IN COOPERATION WITH THE
VAN RAALTE INSTITUTE
No.81

THE ENDURING LEGACY OF ALBERTUS C. VAN RAALTE as Leader and Liaison

Jacob E. Nyenhuis and George Harinck, Editors

VAN RAALTE PRESS
Holland, Michigan

WILLIAM B. EERDMANS PUBLISHING COMPANY
Grand Rapids, Michigan / Cambridge, UK

"The Area Beyond Hamse and Hardenberg": Van Raalte and Bentheim ¹

Gerrit Jan Beuker

Van Raalte as Founder of the First German Old Reformed Congregation

Albertus C. Van Raalte wrote a letter to his wife in Genemuiden on Thursday, 28 December 1837, but the letter was sealed at Zwolle on Saturday, the thirtieth of December. In this letter he wrote: "Tomorrow I hope to go to Den Ham to conduct family visitation, to 'confirm the faith of new members, and to preach there next Sunday. Then on Monday I plan to go to the area beyond Hamse and Hardenberg, and I plan to finish there on Tuesday or Wednesday. On Thursday I plan to leave for Dedemsvaart. I hope to come home on Friday or more likely on Saturday."² The Monday Van Raalte mentioned was 1 January 1838.

1 [This essay, written in a combination of Dutch and German, was translated by George Harinck and Sander de Haan, respectively, Harinck also restructured the essay, with the consent of the author.-Ed.]

2 Leonard Sweetman, ed., *From Heart to Heart. Letters from the Reo. Albertus Christiaan Van Raalte to his wife, Christinajohanna Van Raalte-De Moen, 1836-1847* (Grand Rapids: Heritage Hall Publications, 1997), 26, 63: "Morgen hoop ik naar den Ham te vertrekken om daar huisbezoek te doen en leeden te bevestigen en aanstaande

This day was the only time Van Raalte was in Germany. Maybe he went there to avoid being arrested.

On the morning of this day, forty people signed an "Act of Secession" in the house of *Albert Diek* in Uelsen, ten miles southeast of Hardenberg, across the Dutch border. This document did not survive, but the *Archiv vom Landeskirchenamt* (state church office) in Leer, Germany, possesses an undated copy of the Act of Secession of the congregation in Uelsen. This copy bears only fourteen signatures and dates with certainty from about 1865, at the time the Old Reformed could secede formally and in writing from the Reformed Church in Bentheim. Earlier secessions were never officially recognized by the authorities in the Kingdom of Hannover, since they were against the law.

The "Act of Secession" was handed over to the oldest Reformed pastor of Uelsen that same morning of 1 January 1838. The group then moved to Itterbeck, three miles to the northwest, in between Uelsen and Hardenberg. There, in the house of Gerd Huiskens, the first German Old Reformed congregation was founded that afternoon. It was Van Raalte who led its first service and installed the first office bearers, two elders and two deacons.³ This was three years and three months after the "Act of Secession" was signed in Ulrum on 13 October 1834 by Rev. Hendrik de Cock and his consistory.

Van Raalte left the place the same afternoon for the Netherlands, riding on a horse, the story tells. Later that afternoon of 1 January, the police arrived in Itterbeck, at the place where Van Raalte had gathered with the group of believers. By the time the police had arrived, however, everyone had gone. From this engagement and other contacts a kind of love-hate relationship developed between the Old Reformed in the county of Bentheim, just across the Dutch border, and Albertus C. Van Raalte.

Zondag te prediken: Maandag hoop ik te vertrekken naar de streken achter Hamse (Heemse) en Hardenberg en wensch aldaar dingsdag of woensdag klaar te krijgen om dan Donderdag te Dedemsvaart te zijn [*sic*] vertrekken en dus hoop ik om dan Vrijdag maar waarschijnlijker Zaterdag te huis te koomen."

3 Gerrit Jan Beuker, *Gemeinde unterwegs. Die evangelisch-altreformierte Kirchengemeinde Uelsen seit 1838* (Uelsen: Evangelisch-reformierte Kirche, 1983), 29. I am pretty sure that Jon J. Huiskens, moderator at the second session at Monday, 24 October 2011, of the Van Raalte Conference in Holland, MI, is a descendant of the Huiskens family of Itterbeck, in whose house the Uelsen congregation was founded this first of January 1838. To the present day Huiskens live at Itterbeck, but the old place and home are gone. The first picture of this place is from about 1900.

Hendrik de Cock banned from Germany in 1840

The first six children born within the Old Reformed congregation of Uelsen between March 1838 and March 1840 were baptized in a sheepfold in Itterbeck on 9 May 1840 by Rev. Hendrik de Cock from Groningen. Interestingly, the congregation had asked him to come over for the baptismal service and not Van Raalte. This may seem strange, but De Cock was around in Bentheim at that time. Two days before, on 7 May 1840, De Cock had founded a new congregation in the house of farmer Sandfort by installing elders and deacons in the Old Reformed congregation of Waldseite near Gildehaus, Bentheim. And about ten days before, on 28 April, he had baptized the child Dirk Sandfort in Sandfort's house. De Cock's activities were known to the authorities. As correspondence between Ministries of the Kingdom of Hannover and the Kingdom of the Netherlands in The Hague reveals, De Cock subsequently was banned from the country, and if he returned, he would be arrested.

Nevertheless, De Cock went on preaching on the German side of the border. After 1840 he traveled several times through Ostfriesland and preached around. In Ostfriesland he initially was in close contact with Reamt Weerts Duins, who then pastored a congregation in Veenhusen near Leer.⁴

German Old Reformed preachers also crossed the border and preached in the Netherlands. Before 1838 there were fifteen Seceder congregations in the Netherlands within a radius of thirty-five miles from Uelsen: in Overijssel: Heemse, Dalfsen, Dedemsvaart, Den Harn, Nieuwleusen, Ommen, Rouveen, and Staphorst; in Drenthe: Beilen, Dwingeloo, Hoogeveen, Meppel, Ruinerwold, Koekange, and Zuidwolde.⁵ Old Reformed preachers and *oefenaars* (lay preachers) who preached in the Netherlands on a regular basis – sometimes for from 1,500 to 2,000 attendants – were: Albert Diek, Gerd Broene, Harm Hindrik Schoemaker, and Klaas Ensink.

In 1839-40 Jan Berend Sundag (1819-1893) of Samern in the southern part of the county of Bentheim was among the first students of Hendrik de Cock in Groningen. He would become the archfather

4 See Hans-Georg Ulrichs, "'Wildes Zelotengeschrei,' oder: Der 'berüchtigte' Hendrik de Cock und der 'blödsinnige' Reemt Wiards Duin. Neue Perspektiven auf den kriminalisierten Anfang der altreformierten 'Afscheiding' in Deutschland," in: George Harinck and Mees te Velde, eds., *175jaar Afscheiding van 1834* (Barneveld: De Vuurbaak, 2012), 161-206.

5 Beuker, *Gemeinde unterwegs*, 48.

and leader of the Old Reformed in Bentheim. Until 1848 he was legally prevented from pastoring in the northern part of Bentheim County. In March 1847 Sundag was put in prison for a long time for violating this law. He was imprisoned for preaching and pastoring a total of thirtytwo times.

Given this influence from De Cock through preaching, baptizing, and teaching, it is no wonder that the Old Reformed were called in the vernacular *koksianen* (followers of De Cock) – they were never called *raaltianen* (followers of Van Raalte).

Albertus van Raalte's role and influence, 1838-1845

Albertus C. Van Raalte did not play a significant role in Ostfriesland or in Bentheim County: he only founded the congregation of Uelsen in 1838. His influence in these German regions is traceable only via his publications on emigration in the years 1846 and 1847. There are several reasons for this limited role of Van Raalte in the German borderlands. First, the northeast of the Netherlands with its border regions was the working field of Hendrik de Cock. Bentheim and especially Ostfriesland were out of reach for Van Raalte, who mainly worked in Overijssel and Gelderland. Added to this factor was the intense relationship of De Cock with Sundag.

Second, maybe the pointed preaching of De Cock, pressing for a decisive choice, was more appreciated than the meeker sermons of Van Raalte. Van Raalte may also have been too entrepreneurial and too action oriented for the Bentheimers. He was more open to the world and more worldly minded than De Cock and the Germans. Third, De Cock and the Bentheimers were staunch defenders of the Dordt church order, whereas Van Raalte wavered in his opinions on that order. His innovations in the church made him suspect. Especially Sundag was very much against Van Raalte. Sundag objected to all changes Van Raalte introduced in the church and was a hardliner in his opposition to emigration in the 1840s. Last but not least, Van Raalte, Anthony Brummelkamp, and Simon Van Velzen were brothers-in-law, and their wives were from the De Moen family in Leiden that were part of the "wealthy class belonging to those with influence (*begüterten Stand und zu den einflussreichen Kreisen*).⁶ There were objections in Seceder circles

6 Gerrit Jan Beuker, *Abgeschiedenes Streben nach Einheit. Leben und Wirken Henricus Beukers 1834-1900* (Kampen: Mondiss; Bad Bentheim: Hellendoorn, 1996), 43. Henricus Beuker (4 June 1834 - 18 May 1900) emigrated in 1893; he served as pastor of Allen Avenue CRC in Muskegon, MI, for one year before joining the faculty of Calvin Theological Seminary, where he served until his death.

to the preaching of Van Raalte and Brummelkamp and later on also to Henricus Beuker.⁷ Their preaching was too mild, offering grace too easily to the congregation.⁸

Old Reformed after the death of De Cock, 1842-1847

De Cock died in 1842. Did Van Raalte's position in Bentheim County then grow stronger? I for a long time presumed that Van Raalte had installed the first consistories of the congregations of Emlichheim and Hoogstede, both in Bentheim, on 25 May 1845 in the Drenthe town of Coevorden. This seemed likely in the light of the emigration of the members of both consistories in 1847. But an 1847 letter of Sundag from prison,⁹ in which he expresses himself very negatively on Van Raalte and on emigration, indicates that it is unlikely that Van Raalte installed these consistories in 1845. It is, however, remarkable and unique that both consistories and many members of their congregations joined the Van Raalte trek to Michigan. This suggests a close connection in these years. The large amount of emigrants from the county of Bentheim (they founded Graafschap, south of Holland, Michigan) has to be explained both by the serious persecutions of the Old Reformed and the resistance to their existence in the Kingdom of Hannover until 1848 and by the growing influence of Van Raalte in their region after 1845.

The influence of De Cock did not diminish in the years after his death. In the southern part of Bentheim, where Sundag was active as a pastor until 1893, hardly any Old Reformed congregation emigrated. In the meetings of Classis Emmen of the Dutch Seceder church, in which Klaas Ensink from Laar in Bentheim participated as a delegate of the Old Reformed Church, serious disputes repeatedly broke out over the issue of whether elders and deacons were allowed to lay down their office. Were not the persecutions in Bentheim sent from God as a test of faith? And was it allowed for an office bearer to lay down his office and emigrate? There were quite a few voices in these meetings that objected to laying down offices. The men had to suffer and persevere until God would grant better times to his church. It was not permissible to take the course of life in one's own hands and escape from hardships,

7 Richard H. Harms, *Historical Directory of the Christian Reformed Church in North America* (Grand Rapids: Historical Committee of the Christian Reformed Church in North America, 2004), 150.

8 Beuker, *Abgeschiedenes Streben*, 66.

9 See appendix.

especially not for office bearers. This attitude clearly reflects the spirit of Hendrik de Cock and his preaching. The aforementioned letter from Sunday of March 1847 points in the same direction of De Cock's ongoing influence.

Reasons for massive emigration from Bentheim

Between 1850 and 1900 about 20 percent of the population of the county of Bentheim emigrated to the United States. Among them were the complete consistories (minus one person) of the Old Reformed congregations of Emlichheim and Hoogstede and almost all the Old Reformed congregation of Hoogstede. I have tried in my previous writings to explain this exodus by suggesting several reasons. One of them is the state-imposed obligation to baptize all children, which prevailed until 1847. The baptism, however, had to be administered by an accredited minister. It was not until 1843 that, pressed by the state, the church officials in the Kingdom of Hannover recognized baptisms by Dutch Seceder pastors. As late as 1848, moreover, Old Reformed believers in Bentheim County were forbidden to act as an elder or *Kirchenvorsteher* (church officer). Their offices could not be recognized, since their church was not accredited, and elders of Old Reformed congregations were not allowed to present themselves as such.

The next three children within the Old Reformed congregation of Uelsen were born in 1841 and baptized in 1843 by Rev. H. De Vries of Vriezenveen, the Netherlands. In 1847 he baptized four more children. In 1848 no child was born, and in 1849 a newborn child was baptized by Rev. Jan Bavinck, whose wife was from Vriezenveen.¹⁰ From 1840 until 1847 a total of only thirteen children were baptized, about two a year. This amount is remarkably low compared to the many children born in wedlock in these decades. A reason for the low number may have been that baptism in the Old Reformed Church was not recognized by the state or the Reformed Church.

The consistory (*Oberkirchenrat*) of Bentheim County, following a lengthy debate, wrote on 15 April 1845 in a letter to the classis of Reformed preachers:

According to these [regulations] the baptisms performed by the Separatist Leaders of the County [of Bentheim]-which are not really known to us – could be considered invalid; nevertheless, the baptism performed by the ordained pastors of the Separatist

10 Beuker, *Gemeinde unterwegs*, 29.

churches in the Netherlands are to be considered valid, since these Separatists were recognized by the state as having organized legitimate churches.!

Until 1848 church officials, especially the *Oberkirchenrat* of the county of Bentheim, pressured the state authorities to proceed against the Old Reformed congregations with all available legal power. When these authorities began to resist this approach, the church officials still found alternative ways to harass the Old Reformed and make them suffer. Until at least 1865, they required from Old Reformed couples whom they married the confession that they would not consider themselves as being outside of the Reformed Church. Until the 1880s Old Reformed Church members had to pay a tax to the Reformed Church to which they did not belong, as well as support the budgets of their own Old Reformed churches. During this same period, this church tax was also levied on farmland and real estate. This climate of exclusion and discrimination resulted in a longing for change among the Old Reformed, especially in the mid 1840s, when there was no prospect of a change for the better. Most of the Bentheimers could read and understand Dutch. Around 1850 the Dutch language was regularly taught in the public schools, and Reformed and Old Reformed churches were almost exclusively Dutch-language churches. This made the Bentheimers susceptible to Dutch influences.

Following Van Raalte

The Bentheimers read Van Raalte's pamphlet on emigration. The German authorities did the same, and they considered Van Raalte in 1846 a threat to society, as state documents of the Kingdom of Hannover reveal. For example, a letter from the consistory (*Oberkirchenrat*) of the county of Bentheim to police officials in Osnabrück, then called the *Königlich Hannoversche Landdrostei* (Royal Hannover Bailiwick), says:

To the honorable decision of the Royal Bailiwick from the 13th of the month [13 January 1847], concerning the report of the Princely Office of Neuenhaus about the raging desire of the Separatists to join the emigration to America, which we hereby humbly return, we answer most modestly, that we cannot support dismissing the limitations of official rules governing the practice of religion or ignoring the modifications of such rules to prevent this action.

11 Ibid., 47. Königlich Hannoverscher Oberkirchenrat of the County of Bentheim to the classis of the County of Bentheim, Neuenhaus, 15 April 1845.

This movement toward emigration has been spawned by an appeal from the Pastor van Raalte at Ommen, a locality some six hours from here. This person had by means of a brochure, a copy of which we include here, encouraged not only the members of his own congregation but thousands of others to desire to emigrate to this worthy country, which he pictures as an Eldorado.

Initially he had proposed with a number of colleagues that a separatist congregation should settle down in Java, and thereby become fully independent of any religious regulation from the government. This, however, was denied him.

After that he proposed this emigration to America, with the response from a largely ignorant crowd of common people as noted above.

The primary reason for this step was not the persecution in trying to practice their religion, for in the Netherlands the Separatists are completely free, except for being excluded from teaching in the public schools; the main reasons were partly the rather heavy restrictions applied by the state, partly the meager income of the working classes, and principally the poverty of the members of the congregations. Most are part of the class lacking any real property.

In constituting their separating congregations they had to promise never again to request help from the state's resources to pay their pastors, or to expect help for their poor and destitute from the coffers of the state Reformed Church's benevolent funds.

Now they can understand that they cannot manage or maintain their independence with this increasing state of poverty. The instigators fear a return to the mother church. Thus the only way to avoid the destruction of their proposed building appears to be the emigration to America.

The Preacher Van Raalte and a few of his colleagues already travelled over there in October (1846), to check out a possible place for settlement and then to purchase a suitable site in preparation for the emigrants arriving in the spring. That it is the plan of this Preacher to establish himself there as landowner, is apparently not being considered.

Since the Separatists in the County are to some extent united with the Dutch brothers, they are following the advice of their clergy and some have decided to follow their brothers and sisters over there.

For the moment the number of those is very small. As far as we know, there are several among them whose possessions are so heavily indebted, that they leave with precious little, to cover the costs of the journey. It isn't really the limited religious freedom, but rather some kind of inner calling which is bringing them to emigration.

In our unofficial opinion, a modification of the 22 April 1843 announcement from the Royal High Ministry regarding the religious and educational disruptions occasioned by the current Separatists, which had excellent results, would not eliminate the evil, this desire to emigrate, which is actually dying out, but rather fan it into flames once again.

The Separatists would say: "now the government understands that it has made a mistake. We will therefore not allow ourselves to be dissuaded from our intent to emigrate to another part of the world, and all the more so as we see ourselves thereby escaping the judgment of God on our fatherland, where God's people are being repressed."

The desire to emigrate is apart of the spirit of the age, and cannot be quenched by regulations put forward by the authorities.

How many large landowners in the principality of Osnabrück and in the Tecklenburg County have sold their considerable holdings and settled in America? From our county two such wealthy landowners are leaving, even though they do not belong to the Separatists, and it is really just a matter of luck that such are among the emigrants.

In particular it is the Catholics who are emigrating, and to them no kind of restrictions on religious liberty apply.

We are therefore in full agreement with the Royal Bailiwick, that for those currently thinking of leaving, the limitations of their religious liberty is in no way to be seen as the reason for their interests in emigration¹²

The author of this letter was the civil servant *Oberkirchenratsdirektor* (chief church administrator) and lawyer Johann Georg Hoogklimmer, JD (born in Bentheim 3 March 1784, died 8 August 1853). He was responsible for the region Amt Neuenhaus and at the same time was president of the *Geistlichen Oberkirchenrat* (chief church administration) of the county of Bentheim.

12 Staatsarchiv Osnabrück, Rep 335, Nr. 12541, S. 259ff.

Slowing down emigration, problems until 1880

Especially Amt Neuenhaus tried for a long time to stop emigration by obliging the buyers of the farms of the emigrating Bentheimer to assume the name of the seller. But measures like this could not significantly stem the tide. Civil servant Brill from Emlichheim for example wrote on 31 December 1846 to the *Standesherrliche Fürstlich Bentheimische Amt Neuenhaus* (Royal Bentheim Neuenhaus Office):

Among the Separatists of the present region a movement toward emigration is spreading in response to an announcement from Dutch folks of similar orientation planning to establish a colony in America.

The affair has already gone so far, that in recent days six farms have been offered for sale to the undersigned, and the tenant Rötgers at Echteler has already sold his position, which is completely broken up.

Regarding this last matter, I will undertake reporting it faithfully to the Princely Office but therewith to submit also the question, whether one is permitted to split up such state sanctioned properties and bring them under local jurisdiction, if such actions cannot be halted by the intervention of state authorities, for what is to happen in the future with the taxes which should come to the state from these properties?

In my opinion this splitting up of properties, if allowed to continue, which is hardly avoidable, will effectively negate the order established for over a thousand years by the Court of Westphalia and lead to complications which will become a festering sore in these communities.

On this occasion I permit myself anew the question, whether buyers of farms or inheritances owing taxes to the state can attach their own names to the purchased properties, or should these continue to be managed under the original names.

In prior years the latter had to happen: in more recent times people have begun attaching the names of the new owners to such properties. But this clearly leads to complications in the character of the communities and leads to disorder in discharging the ancient charters, etc.¹³

13 Staatsarchiv Osnabrück, Rep. 335, Nr. 12541, SW. 254.

In 1848 the Kingdom of Hannover granted a larger freedom to assemble. The persecuted Old Reformed congregations were tolerated from then on. But the Reformed classis of ministers in the county of Bentheim and their consistories (*Oberkirchenrat*) kept on making trouble. They suggested for example that care for the poor in the Reformed Church imploded because the Seceders withdrew, or that the official birth register was made incomplete because of the withdrawing Seceders. The State Ministry in Hannover had to correct the *Oberkirchenrat* and the government officials in Amt Neuenhaus and remind them that the law had changed and that Old Reformed citizens had a right to organize their church.

The Amt Bentheim was more careful and modest on these issues, because it had fewer Old Reformed citizens to deal with. Less than 1 percent of the Bentheimers had joined the new church, compared to sometimes up to 20 percent of the population in the Amt Neuenhaus.

High rate of emigration among Old Reformed pastors, 1850-1900

Many Old Reformed pastors emigrated. In the congregation of Uelsen, four of the first eight ministers departed for the United States between 1860 and 1892. The emigrating pastors were: Jan Hindrik Vos (18 March 1826 - 17 February 1913; 1858-60 in Uelsen); Willem Roelof Smidt (12 December 1845 - 10 October 1931; 1866-82 in Uelsen); Hermann Johann Potgeter (11 October 1856 - 14 March 1931; 1884-85 in Uelsen); and Jan Harm Schulz (22 September 1852 - 23 December 1914; 1885-92 in Uelsen).¹⁴

At about 1890 almost a third of the pastors in the Christian Reformed Church in the United States originated from Old Reformed congregations, as Herbert Brinks has pointed out.¹⁵ They either had worked for a long time in Old Reformed congregations, or had grown up there. Of the professors before 1900 at the seminary of the Christian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids (the present Calvin Theological Seminary), three had an Old Reformed background: Gerrit Klaas Hemkes (6 May 1838 - 4 December 1920), who emigrated from Bunde in Ostfriesland in 1877,¹⁶ and Geerhardus Vos (1862-1949) and his successor, his uncle Henricus Beuker, who died in 1900. Prior to the

14 Beuker, *Gemeinde unterwegs*, 53; Richard H. Harms, *Historical Directory*, passim.

15 Herbert J. Brinks, "Ostfrisiens in Two Worlds," in Peter de Klerk and Richard R. De Ridder, eds., *Perspectives on the Christian Reformed Church: Studies in Its History, Theology, and Ecumenicity* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1983).

16 Harms, *Historical Directory*, 225.

seminary's founding in 1876, new pastors were trained from 1865 on by Douwe bJohannes Van der Werp (13 April 1811 - 1 April 1876), pastor of the Graafschap church from 1864 to 1872. He himself had been trained by Hendrik de Cock and Tamme Foppe de Haan.¹⁷

Many pastors came from Uelsen

The families Broene and Bode in the Old Reformed congregation of Uelsen produced several pastors in the Christian Reformed Church. The founder of the Broene family was a lay preacher (*oefenaar*) of the Old Reformed congregation of Uelsen who, like others, preached in Dutch on both sides of the border. From Uelsen stemmed the pastoral dynasty of the Schoemakers, with ministers in the Netherlands up to the present day. Also Jan Bavinck, father of Herman Bavinck and also founder of a dynasty of ministers, came in 1853 from Uelsen to Hoogeveen, the Netherlands. Jan Gülker, later on a pastor in the Christian Reformed Church, spent his youth in Uelsen, and Geerhardus Vos's father was a pastor in Uelsen until 1860.

Founding of the Christian Reformed Church in 1857

The founding of the Christian Reformed Church in 1857 was initiated in large part by the congregation of Graafschap (near Holland, Michigan). This congregation was one of the four founding congregations of this new denomination. Over the years, more and more emigrated members of the county of Bentheim set the tone of the consistory of Graafschap. In 1902 all of the elders of Graafschap Church except one had been born and raised in the German county of Bentheim. Only one elder and two deacons were Dutch.¹⁸ So forty-five years after the founding of the ruling body of Graafschap Church, more than 75 percent of the members were German born.

17 Henry Beets, *De ehr. Geref Kerk in N. A. Zestigjaren van strijd en zegen* (Grand Rapids: Grand Rapids Printing Co., 1918), 147-51. Harms, *Historical Directory*, 354. Van der Werp served as pastor at First CRC, Muskegon, MI, 1872-75. In 1873 and 1875 the CRC Synod called Jan Bavinck, an Oldreformed Church minister in the north of Bentheim who had moved thence to Ruinerwold and then Kampen to instruct students and to teach. After he had declined the call twice, the synod found the Rev. Gerrit Egberts Boer (1 March 1832 - 26 March 1904), pastor of First CRC, Grand Rapids, available: he later became the first professor at Calvin Theological Seminary (Harms, *Historical Directory*, 154).

18 In the Articles of Association of 9 December 1902, the Elders of Graafschap Church were Geert Boeve, Berend Kamps, Rieks Bouws, Hindrik J. Heerderks, Herman Tien, Lambertus Scholten, and Gerriet Rutgers.

Both Reformed and Old Reformed people coming from the county of Bentheim settled in Michigan next to each other. From 1847 to 1857 they were able to belong to one church, the Reformed Protestant Dutch Church (renamed the Reformed Church in America in 1867), the church Van Raalte adhered to all his life. From 1857 on, all the Old Reformed from the county of Bentheim and many from Ostfriesland joined the Christian Reformed Church.

Family connections and ethnic solidarity may help to explain this decision, but another strong factor was that the Old Reformed people in the county of Bentheim had suffered more extended and severe persecution by church and government than did the Dutch people. They clung more strongly to the church of the Secession and could not endure thinking that the Secession had been unnecessary. In the letter of secession sent 8 April 1857 from the Graafschap church to Classis of Holland, the consistory made it clear that they did not want hymns in the church, since they were contrary to Church Order of Dort. They also did not want open communion, but they did want more catechism preaching, catechetical teaching, and house visitation. One of the main points, however, is in this statement from that letter: "And what grieves our hearts most in all of this is that there are members among you who regard our secession in the Netherlands as not strictly necessary, or think that it was untimely."¹⁹

Between 1847 and 1900 about sixty-six ministers of the Christian Reformed Church in the Netherlands and the *Dolerende Kerken* went to the United States. Half of them became Christian Reformed; the other half joined the Reformed Church. At least ten of the sixty-six had been ministers in the county of Bentheim and in Ostfriesland, and after they arrived in the United States, all except one of these became ministers in the Christian Reformed Church.²⁰

In the Netherlands, the Christian Reformed Church in North America was not welcomed at first. The Dutch were not in favour of this new secession and hoped that the American Seceders would return to the Reformed Church. For many years the Christian Reformed Church in the Netherlands would give attestations only for the Reformed

19 John H. Kromminga, *The Christian Reformed Church: A Study in Orthodoxy* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949), 34.

20 Beuker, *Abgeschiedenes Streben*, 294. See also: Gerrit Jan Beuker, "German Oldreformed Emigration: Catastrophe or Blessing?" in: George Harinck & Hans Krabbendam, eds., *Breaches and Bridges: Reformed Subcultures in the Netherlands, Germany and the United States* (Amsterdam: VU Uitgeverij, 2000), 101-14. The exception was Nicolaus Martin Steffens (1839-1912).

Church in America and did not support the Christian Reformed Church in the United States. This church supported Van Raalte and his church, although it did work on a relationship with the Christian Reformed Church in the United States as well. When Van Raalte visited the Netherlands in 1866, he stayed for some days with the Beuker family in Rotterdam. He impressed Henricus Beuker and his wife, Aaltje van Duyn, with stories about American life.²¹ This was one of the last engagements of Van Raalte with people from Old Reformed descent. Beuker fully supported the new church (CRC) and was therefore roundly criticized when serving as chairman of the General Synod in 1878 and 1880.



2.1. Map of Emmen and Hoogeveen

The situation between the churches in the Netherlands and the United States changed in the late 1870s, when the issue of freemasonry popped up in the Reformed Church, and the Dutch got worried about the reluctance of this church to oppose this evil. In 1882 some congregations seceded from the Reformed Church for reasons of this reluctance, and then the sympathy of the Dutch shifted from the Reformed Church to the Christian Reformed Church, although the Dutch church tried to keep a relationship with both denominations. This attitude did not change after the *Doleantie* of 1886 and the merger of the *Dolerende* churches with most of the Dutch seceded churches in 1892, resulting in the *Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland*. Like Van Raalte in the United States, Abraham Kuyper in the Netherlands kept on trying to mitigate the differences between the two Dutch American denominations.²²

21 Beuker, *Abgeschiedenes Streben*, 291; *De Gereformeerde Amerikaan* (1897), 317.

22 Beuker, *Abgeschiedenes Streben*, 294; George Harinck, "Schuring die scheuring dreigt te worden." *De Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerk en de afscheiding in de Reformed Church in America vanwege de vrijmetselarij* (1882), in: Harinck and Te Velde, *175 jaar Afscheiding*, 95-131. Elton J. Bruins, "The Masonic Controversy in Holland, Michigan, 1879-1882," in De Klerk and De Ridder, *Perspectives* (1983), 71.

In conclusion, we may say that the relationship between Van Raalte and the Old Reformed in Bentheim and Ostfriesland was always quite complicated. He founded the first Old Reformed congregation in Bentheim, but it was Hendrik de Cock who most influenced the Old Reformed congregations. Van Raalte's emigration to the United States ignited a vast Old Reformed emigration to the new world, but there again he was confronted with former Old Reformed church members who had seceded from his church.

Appendix

When in prison in the castle of Bentheim, Jan Berend Sundag wrote a long letter on 18 March 1847. Here follow some long quotations from this letter. The original letter did not survive, but H. P. Scholte made a copy of the original. Sundag wrote in Dutch without punctuation and used German expressions; he also wrote in dialect. The headings were added by the author.

Your letter of 23 February (1847) came to us in good health, and to complete your efforts I compose this in reply. Your complaints about differing opinions in teachings and the divisions among you stemming from them bothered me.

Concerning the question of emigration

In regard to leaving for America, I want to inform you of the following:

As far as I know of the matter, of all the separatist pastors only Van Raalte has left. And at the moment a number of families from the southern part of Bentheim County are also getting ready to leave, but those living with us here up north are opposed to it. At least those who have the well-being of God's church at heart, with whom I have spoken, have declared their opposition, and I personally don't like it at all.

Not that I feel entitled to directly condemn the entire matter of itself. But that I should see it as a general command from God for God's people, as though God himself is planning to move from here and give the Europeans over to his wrath, as I have heard from some of them, who want to leave, that I cannot in good conscience condone, and diametrically oppose.

The Lord has given me 8 to 10 of his children in our community to pray for this area and for the well-being of his church in Europe. I stand ready to be corrected and be ashamed at a different outcome, for I agree that unless there is a general revival among the residents of Europe, they can expect God's most awful judgments. But there is also every reason to expect that according to God's Word the Lord wants to build his church here too.

And I remain convinced that those in America hoping to find more of the fruit of God and less godlessness or less immorality, will be sadly disappointed, for millions of precisely the worst sort of people have gone from Europe to America.

If it is different, which I do not believe, for then there would be less immorality, and those having gone over would have understood ...

Disagreement with Van Raalte

We simply cannot consider it a general revelation from God for all of his people when we note the reasons and the concerns we have regarding the person of the Teacher, who has left.

And in this respect it is in direct opposition to God's Word. The reasons revolve mostly around social complaints regarding taxation, the expectation of God's judgments, and the hopes of a better existence in the world, etc. The same seems to be expressed by Van Raalte in the brochure he published to promote the emigrarion.²³

There is, of course, no real opposition in the Bible for changing one's citizenship or place of residence. The actual question is more along these lines: do the circumstances of my life justify emigration, does God want it thus? Am I convinced in my conscience over against God, that He is calling me to do this? This is maintained in that booklet from Van Raalte, and is said to be the main point of consideration for each. It is also claimed in this document that the restrictions in worship gives them the right and the freedom to go.

Flight is against the Bible

By God's grace fleeing has not occurred to me, not even considering the fact that I am writing this from prison because of God's Word. That they purchased there their own piece of land and planned to live there separated from any contact with other people, that is surely based on questionable assumptions, as far as I am concerned. Moreover such thinking is not consistent with the Bible, as I have mentioned above.

One cannot escape God's Judgment

And those trying to escape God's judgment are totally wrong. Those cannot be escaped, whether one flees to one end of the world or the other (see Ps. 139:10), but through sincere

23 Anthony Brummelkamp and Albertus Christiaan van Raalte, *Landverhuizing, of waarom bevorderen wij de volksverhuizing en wel naar Noord-Amerika en niet naar Java?* (Amsterdam: Hoogkamer, 1846).

repentance, as taught on practically every page of God's Word and through accepting God's promises according to Psalm 91.

It is true, the Jews could not be contained in the encampment of the Babylonians in the time of Jeremiah. No, they had to flee to the Chaldeans, but there were found faithful men of God, who laid before them the Lord's ways. Unfortunately we have few such faithful men here.

Objections against Van Raalte

The reservations, that are held against the person of van Raalte and those who are with him in this matter, I shall simply layout for you here. Then each person can judge for himself. You are probably aware that from the beginning of the Separation there has been a good deal of disagreement among the various congregations of the Separation in the Netherlands.

Well, it is in truth like this, that for a long time already the Separatists can be divided into two groups. But for some time the Van Raalte group was the smaller one.

But it was from this group that repeatedly innovations were put forward, which not only disquieted the churches but also led to serious losses. It is worth noting that this is of significance, and this fact is born out in my experience.

When I attended a synod gathering of separatists in Groningen in 1846, a number of proposals, coming from the Van Raalte followers, were introduced. These were properly discussed and considered but one after another rejected. They were "Articles damaging to the faith, contrary to God's Word and the teaching of the reformed churches, etc." More than I can cite here.

These articles were noted in the letter of complaint from the brothers in North Holland. As far as I know, these were not openly taught by Van Raalte himself, but more likely by Scholten or his disciples.

Van Raalte supports Scholte"

But that Van Raalte sided more with Scholten, who in many respects had arguments with the other Separatists, I

24 [That is, Rev. Hendrik P. Scholte (1805-1868), who was one of the principal leaders of the *Afscheiding* (Secession or Separation) in the Netherlands. He led a group of immigrants to Marion County in central Iowa, where he founded the community of Pella. - Ed.]

heard from his own mouth, when I discussed the differences in the church with him at his home four years ago. He was often more in agreement with Scholten than with those who wished to stick with the traditional teachings and were opposed to his innovations. In fact, he often went further than Scholten.

Van Raalte was not at one with the church when it wanted to hold strictly to the church order of Dordt. He proved that to me with evidence of deeds at the synod of 1843 at Amsterdam. This synod refused to seat any members who were not willing to accept and follow the Dordt church order. [Van Raalte] left for that reason.

And that Van Raalte was not consistent, and had planned to deceive the church on purpose, is seen from his own signature and the introduction to the "Church Handbook." In this he declares that he and others to their shame had sinned against the congregations by rejecting the Dordt church order regulations by introducing new things. He promises and assures, under his signature, that he will abide by the Dordt church order from then on.

Still shortly after that, he once again rejected the same reasons and with innovations with capriciousness caused much unrest in the church and earned the world's scorn. By this, says the Saviour, the world will know that you are my disciples, that you love one another.

God grant that such people be corrected or that they be dismissed from the church. God will be glorified thereby, and his congregation will experience peace with joy.

Currently the innovations by Van Raalte and those associated with him find little support among the people.

And that Van Raalte lost most of this fortune setting up a clay factory,²⁵ and as it was related to me, the congregation at Arnhem, where he served most recently, wasn't able to come up with more than half of the promised contract, and that Van Raalte had serious financial difficulties, which became then the main reason or at least a very important reason for his departure. But each will need to make up his own mind on that issue.

25 For a full account of the Ommen factories which Van Raalte acquired to provide work for *unemployed Afgescheidenen* (Separatists), see Robert P. Swierenga, "Albertus C. Van Raalte as a Businessman," in Jacob E. Nyenhuis, ed., *A Goodly Heritage: Essays in Honour of the Reverend Dr. Elton J. Bruins at Eighty* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 282-84.

It appears suspicious to me, as I have noticed myself, but have also heard from others, that some people from Van Raalte's side convinced every one to leave for America. One can give his reasons for this to clarify the move to others, if one judges that to be necessary to discuss the matter with others, but then one should advise those interested in leaving to test their consciences before the Lord, to see if they feel God's calling. If not, one should advise again[st] leaving.

But those who now wish to maintain that God wants to build his church not here but rather in America, I want to hear the reasons for Van Raalte going there, when in general the other preachers, those holding to the teachings of Dordt and the old established order, are as far as I know opposed to this emigration. Was it that these folks heard that there was a hunger for God's Word over there, and that there had been a call from there similar to the call Paul heard from the man in Macedonia calling "Come over and help us"?²⁶ But there was no such call.

But as I saw in the books by Van Raalte and from some of the letters and comments by others in America written by separatists there, speaking of a rich earth, beautiful meadows, and that one can enjoy one's bread without repression, and that they invite us to join them in eating our bread free of repression, with expressions of praise for the government of that country, etc.

For those bad reasons there will be some who head over there, intent on change, seeking the field of Canaan and here dwell in oppression, even despised children of God.

But those who have as their daily food doing the will of God and those seeking a heavenly Canaan, and from the beginning have stood in God's will, such people wait for the clear calling of God. I remain convinced that if some people were as intent on God and his service as they are intent on America, one might well find them in the future world in heaven!

26 Acts 16:9.

Gerrit Jan Beuker, PhD, Theological University Kampen (Oudestraat); Pastor Evangelisch-reformierte und Evangelisch-altreformierte Kirche, Uelsen (1978), Hoogstede (1988), and Gemeinde Laar (2008); Sekretär der Synode der Ev.-altreformierten Kirche in Niedersachsen; author of, among others, *Umkehr und Erneuerung: Aus der Geschichte der Evangelisch-altreformierten Kirche in Niedersachsen 1838-1988* (1988), *Abgeschiedenes Streben nach Einheit: Leben und Wirken Henricus Beukers 1834-1900* (1996), *Aus der Grafschaft Bentheim: in die Neue Welt, 1640-2002* (2002), *Eben-Ezer: Altreformierte in Hoogstede und ihre Vorgeschichte; Kirche und Gemeinde 1953-2003* (2003), *Gemeinde unter dem Kreuz: Altreformierten Kirche in Niedersachsen* (2006); co-author of *Treue Zeugen: eine geistesgeschichtliche Lebenserzählung aus der Zeit zwischen 1860 und 1880* (1998), *Nederland en Bentheim: vijf eeuwen kerk aan de grens* (2003).