

**REASSESSING 1857:  
OVERLOOKED CONSIDERATIONS  
CONCERNING THE BIRTH  
OF THE CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH**

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*Reassessing 1857:  
Overlooked Considerations Concerning the  
Birth of the Christian Reformed Church*

James A. De Jong

As 2007 approaches, having a fresh look at the generally acknowledged birth of the Christian Reformed Church in North America 150 years earlier invites understandable attention. This is especially so because the most prominent, prevailing, and substantially un-nuanced interpretations of that event, particularly in the popular mind, are straightforward. From the perspective of the Reformed Church in America, the exodus of segments of four congregations and of two ministers, one of whom came to his senses and penitently returned a half year later, was schismatic. From the perspective of the Christian Reformed apologists for 1857, that action was simply exercising the option promised in June 1850 when Rev. Isaac Wyckoff tendered the invitation to join the Reformed Church in America, noting that if the West Michigan colonists were dissatisfied with the arrangement, they would be free to withdraw from it and be on their own once again.<sup>1</sup>

While a number of historians have delved into the issue with attention to some of the contextual and theological considerations involved, their approach has been substantially one of passing judgment on the legitimacy or the illegitimacy of the birth. That is hardly an unimportant question. My interest is in deferring that issue, however, until looking more carefully at a number of overlooked considerations in understanding what happened in 1857. My thesis is that these considerations render the departure in 1857 more intelligible, suggesting its inevitability if not its defensibility.

Before launching into some of these considerations, I stress that this presentation reflects a project in process. Hence, I have entitled it “**Reassessing** 1857.” It is not a final or even complete reassessment. It is based on a three-month foray into some major RCA sources through the early 1880s, supported by a much appreciated fellowship from the Van Raalte Institute. The most fertile source was two decades of material in *De Hope*, the major religious and theological sounding board for the Western or immigrant RCA that commenced in December 1865. It was produced at the Holland Academy, or Hope College, and was written in the Dutch language. My investigation of it has suggested many of the “overlooked considerations” captured in the presentation title. I have also worked through the first decade of *De Hollander*, the Holland, Michigan, weekly newspaper, from its inception in 1850 through 1861. This is a much less fruitful source on religious and ecclesiastical matters since it concentrated on general news, as did its slightly earlier and very comparable counterpart, *De Sheboygan Nieuwsbode*, produced in Wisconsin. Unfortunately, copies of *De Hollander* from 1861 to 1871 do not seem to be extant, that portion of the run reportedly destroyed in the great Holland fire of 1871. The extant issues after 1871 contain even less on church matters than those before 1861. Until now, I have worked very little with *De Wachter*, the Christian Reformed counterpart of *De Hope* begun in 1868. Nor have I seen or even been able to locate in the U.S. some half dozen or more Dutch papers that were being received, quoted, and discussed by contributors to both *De Hope* and *De Wachter*.<sup>2</sup> Any definitive assessment of relations between the two churches into the 1880s should probably consider that material as well. A suggestion for both the Heritage Collection at Calvin and the Van Raalte Institute at Hope is that they acquire film copies of these common sources, if possible, so that they can be factored into a reassessment of 1857 and RCA-CRC relations.

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<sup>1</sup> Although both denominations have undergone name changes, I usually use their present names or the abbreviations CRC and RCA.

<sup>2</sup> These neglected sources frequently cited or referred to in both *De Hope* and *De Wachter* prior to the 1880s include *De Bazuin*, established in 1853 by Albertus Van Raalte’s brothers-in-law, Anthony Brummelkamp and Simon van Velzen. They made it the official organ of the theological school in Kampen founded a year later on whose faculty both served. It had an enormous influence on both American publications that began more than a decade later. It provided a common basis for interaction into the 1880s and even beyond. Unfortunately, I have been unable to locate this important source in West Michigan archives. Others are available. In 1871 Abraham Kuyper assumed editorship of a languishing journal called *De Heraut*, which had been aimed particularly at converting Israel, and he made it the weekly platform for his religious and theological agenda. A year later, he commenced publication of the anti-revolutionary daily newspaper called *De Standaard*. These two publications are cited with some regularity in the two Dutch-American religious journals. In 1876, another paper, a monthly called *De Vrije Kerk*, was started by leaders of the 1834 Secession, likely a foil to Kuyper’s initiatives, and was edited by Henricus Beuker until he immigrated and became the Christian Reformed minister in Muskegon in the 1890s. All three of the last cited journals are found in the Hekman Library at Calvin College and Seminary.

## A Methodological Consideration

Thus, the first “overlooked consideration” I posit is a methodological one. Important, original religious source material for the first forty years of the western Reformed immigrants needs to be gathered and adequately considered by historians from either church in assessing their common roots and journey. From the Christian Reformed side, D. H. Kromminga’s survey rests entirely on secondary sources.<sup>3</sup> John Kromminga’s review of the Christian Reformed Church during the period in question does include a review of *De Wachter*, but it does not reference the Dutch or RCA source material on 1857.<sup>4</sup> Henry Zwaanstra’s and James Bratt’s fine contributions deal with a later era.<sup>5</sup> Henry Beets’s early study is the only Christian Reformed study to consider both *De Hope* and *De Wachter* for this period, and his is easily the most helpful on the relationship of the two denominations prior to the second falling out in the early 1880s,<sup>6</sup> but his defense of 1857 has been subjected to rigorous critique that needs to be heard and reviewed. He misses important considerations with respect to the source material, and his assessment that the 1850 union of the Holland colonists with the RCA as merely “provisional” and the 1857 “return” to independence as “obligatory” is vulnerable.

M. Eugene Osterhaven’s rejection of Beets’s interpretation is understandable.<sup>7</sup> His extended essay “Saints and Sinners: Secession and the Christian Reformed Church” is the most extended, recent treatment from an RCA perspective of which I am aware. It is based on a careful reading of the minutes of Classis Holland and important secondary sources, primarily Henry E. Dosker’s biography of Albertus Van Raalte and William O. Van Eyck’s posthumously published papers on the events of 1850 and 1857.<sup>8</sup> But apart from the classis minutes, about which I will later raise some considerations, Osterhaven does not delve into the other primary sources for himself. A cursory review of essays on this era contained in various volumes in the Historical Series of the Reformed Church in America indicates that the journal material from 1847 to the 1880s has not been examined in preparing them. Van Eyck does—extensively—and I will return to his treatment shortly. Thus, Beets and Van Eyck were the last to look extensively into the sources I am reviewing, and that was eighty-five or more years ago.

I intend to continue the work I have begun in these materials. Then, it would be important to move into a rereading of the substantial literature of the 1880s and 1890s that was heavily polemical and apologetic from both sides in the wake of the Freemasonry issue. I anticipate some more surprises and finding greater complexities on the relationship of the two denominations than this paper suggests. So, I welcome and covet the critique and suggestions of others on what I offer here as some initial insights and questions at the beginning of what promises to be a much longer project.

## *De Hollander* and Ecclesiastical Blips

In the 16 October 1851 issue of *De Hollander*, in the regular column called “News from the Netherlands,” the editor reprinted the following account that ran in a Dutch paper two months earlier:

Recently, a funeral was conducted here in Nederhemert for an elderly Separatist woman and homemaker. Her husband and her son, who both belong to that fellowship, not only invited the minister of the Christian Seceders in the vicinity of Genderen, but also the preacher of the congregation there. Rev. C. H. Van Dam, to the ceremony. In addition to a number of relatives and friends, both ministers accompanied the body to the grave. Upon returning home, at the request of the head of the home, an elder among the Seceders, the opening prayer was offered by the minister from Nederhemert and closing prayer by the Seceder minister, and in the meantime both of them read chapters from God’s Word and spoke words of consolation to the grieving

<sup>3</sup> D. H. Kromminga, *The Christian Reformed Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1943), 155-56.

<sup>4</sup> John H. Kromminga, *The Christian Reformed Church: A Study in Orthodoxy* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1949).

<sup>5</sup> Henry Zwaanstra, *Reformed Thought and Experience in a New World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973); James D. Bratt, *Dutch Calvinism in Modern America* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984).

<sup>6</sup> Henry Beets, *De Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerk* (Grand Rapids: Grand Rapids Printing Co., 1918), especially pp. 26-50 and chapter 4, “De Terugkeer van 1857 met zijne Voorbereidselen en Wortelen.”

<sup>7</sup> M. Eugene Osterhaven, “Saints and Sinners: Secession and the Christian Reformed Church,” in *Word and World: Reformed Theology in America*, ed. James W. Van Hoesen, Historical Series of the Reformed Church in America, no. 16 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 45-74, n. 7.

<sup>8</sup> *Classis Holland Minutes, 1848-1858*, translated by a joint committee of the CRC and RCA (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1950); Henry E. Dosker, *Levensschets van Rev. A. C. Van Raalte, D.D.* (Nijkerk: C. C. Callenbach, 1893); and *The Union of 1850: A Collection of Papers by the Late Wm. O. Van Eyck, Esq.*, selected and edited by the Permanent Committee on History and Research of the General Synod of the RCA (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1950).

families and the friends present. This funeral service was conducted in a way that was satisfactory and uplifting to more than sixty both Reformed [*Hervormden*] and Separatist [*Afgescheidenen*] people present, and the two shepherds shook hands with each other with the assurance that they had spent a few hours in one another's presence not without benefit and enjoyment.

To this account, the editor adds: "May it be, that despite difference in emphasis and opinion, truth may be expressed with more love, particularly in our day."<sup>9</sup>

*De Hollander* first appeared on the scene just a year earlier, in the autumn of 1850. It had been started by an "American" in Allegan but was acquired and run by Hermanus Doesburg and sons and converted to an entirely Dutch-language weekly. At the time the piece cited was printed, Giles van de Wall, a bright young man in his twenties who had been shaped in Anthony Brummelkamp's Arnhem congregation before immigrating, was involved in selecting, translating, and editing the paper's content. He later studied for the ministry at New Brunswick Seminary and served briefly in the RCA before completing a long and distinguished career in South Africa. While the paper seems to have been under Van Raalte's strong influence, the historian Jacob Van Hinte speculates that Van Raalte paid less attention to it than Henry Dosker posits in his early biography of the founder of the Holland colony.<sup>10</sup> Dosker seems to me to have a better read on the issue than Van Hinte. The minutes of the 30 October 1850 meeting of Classis Holland, when Van Raalte announced the birth of the paper, indicate that he had proposed, and the original owner had accepted his proposal, that columns in the Dutch language, under Van Raalte's own supervision, be included in what was originally envisioned as an English language paper.<sup>11</sup> At that classis meeting, each minister was designated to submit news concerning his congregation and to encourage every head of household to subscribe to the paper. The newspaper was typical of early Dutch American newspapers originating in immigrant colonies in the second half of the nineteenth century. This one contained a heavy dose of U.S. political news, articles on local developments, announcements of ships' arrivals, anti-Roman Catholic editorializing, and, in the first decade, church news and religious devotions. The Civil War and the anti-slavery movement received attention in the last years of the first decade, when the paper also ran a series by the Dutch *Revél* figure Abraham Capadose on the intermediate state of the soul. By the 1870s, when the holdings in the Joint Archives of Holland continue, the paper has decidedly less church news and devotional material, no doubt due in part to the appearance on the scene in the meanwhile of papers devoted entirely to those matters.

The account just reproduced here is noteworthy for several reasons. First, its irenic tone is representative of the stance taken by the brothers-in-law Van Raalte and Anthony Brummelkamp, both major leaders in the 1834 Secession, or *Afscheiding*, in the Netherlands, toward members and leaders in the *Hervormde Kerk*, or state church, whom they judged still to be faithful to Scripture and Reformed doctrine and polity. These people were fellow believers in Christ with whom people of the Secession could and should have fellowship. But other leaders of the *Afscheiding*, including Simon van Velzen, a third brother-in-law, and Hendrik de Cock, father of the movement who died in 1842, took a harder or more principled line—depending on one's perspective—on spiritual compatibility with people in the state church, the use of hymns, and a number of other issues that we shall consider momentarily. Those differences were felt and expressed in the churches of West Michigan long before 1857. Second, the placement of this piece in a very early issue of *De Hollander* reflects an editorial perspective consistent with the Van Raalte-Brummelkamp emphasis. The editor's application by way of fervent petition and moral imperative among van Velzenites as Ted Kennedy's interrogation of Judge Alito did among unswerving Republicans, or as Rush Limbaugh's diatribes do among thoughtful, temperate Democrats. Van Raalte may not have directed day-to-day editorial decisions, but the paper was expected to reflect his emphases. When it did not, he intervened, as he did the year after our article appeared and Doesburg challenged the religious establishment. Van Raalte had him put under silent censure and barred from communion at the Pillar Church until he fell back in line. He did.

By the same token, the paper was decidedly supportive of the Secession movement. A half year earlier, a Dutch politician in the second house of parliament had bumbled into referring to the Secession as a "sect." A Utrecht newspaper had objected strenuously, and *De Hollander* disseminated the reaction with a comment. "The Seceders are not a **new** 'sect'; they are members of the **Reformed** family. As such, along with members of the *Hervormd* church

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<sup>9</sup> *De Hollander* 2, no. 1 (16 October 1851): 1. Translation mine.

<sup>10</sup> Jacob Van Hinte, *Netherlanders in America*, gen. ed. Robert P. Swierenga, trans. Adriaan de Wit (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985), 446. For some of the background on van de Wall, I am indebted to E. William Kennedy, who is researching and editing source materials from this period.

<sup>11</sup> *Classis Holland Minutes*, 40-41.

fellowship, they have access to the **same protections** as are accorded to all recognized faith communions.”<sup>12</sup> These constitutional guarantees have been made not on the basis of the organizational decisions of 1816, but on the basis of the 1815 recognition of the Reformed family of believers, the paper added. It need not be argued or demonstrated that the Seceders are Reformed, for that identity constituted the very basis of the Secession itself. By making the point with such emphasis, the paper appealed to a unity that was deeper than differences within the movement. It also reflects an ecclesiology holding that the Reformed church as a community of believers is a reality more important and more basic than organizational structures. This is an important principle in the Van Raalte-Brummelkamp ecclesiology that can be worked in another direction, namely applied to 1857. Assessments have not gone in this direction, and we should consider whether this overlooked consideration should be factored into evaluations of 1857.

The newspaper’s relatively accommodating posture served the community and ecclesiastical relations well. Based on the identified principle, it was logical that the paper also include contributions by and news about those who withdrew in 1857. And it did. By 1858, articles on the congregational life of the Graafschap group that left the RCA the year before were appearing, written by elder Abraham Krabshuis.<sup>13</sup> He had left Van Raalte’s church for the Graafschap congregation, subsequently was a founder of the CRC in Holland, and his name is prominent in the records of the 1857 group. If Van Raalte and his followers practiced Christian fellowship with Reformed brothers and sisters in Christ across organizational divisions, they could hardly deny space to them in the community newspaper. And they did not.

This editorial stance and the view of the church that lay behind it may help to explain why 1857 was barely a blip on the RCA screen. When the four infamous documents of secession were laid on the table of Classis Holland on 8 April 1857, reaction naturally was recorded. Rev. Koene Vanden Bosch, strident minister of Noordeloos who had arrived from the Netherlands less than a year earlier, tersely renounced fellowship with classis because it belonged to an unacceptably compromised denomination; his letter was addressed to the Zeeland consistory, under whose aegis he served. Rev. Hendrik G. Klyn of the Grand Rapids church, already in his fourth RCA congregation since immigrating, submitted a longer, sweeter missive reflecting his intense spiritual struggle over leaving; by that fall he was back in the RCA fold. The consistories of Polkton and Graafschap also submitted letters of secession, the latter explicitly listing a half dozen specific offenses behind its decision to leave.<sup>14</sup> Rev. Pieter Oggel, who was chairing the meeting at which the documents were received and considered, had arrived in the colony just the previous year to shepherd the Grand Haven congregation. He registered surprise and pain, not having been apprised of the sense of alienation among those leaving.

Van Raalte’s response was more resigned, noting that the actions were “the fruit of a lust for schism already for a long time manifested by a few leaders.”<sup>15</sup> He had in mind the wrenching episode in Drenthe several years earlier that led to the deposition of Rev. Roelof Smit, the differences of opinion over whether to hold worship services on Christian holidays and over the length of terms for the eldership, the turmoil occasioned by a group that had unilaterally constituted itself as a spin-off from Graafschap and had agitated to ordain Jan Schepers as pastor, suspicions about Arminian tendencies among pastors who were citing Richard Baxter’s *Call to the Unconverted*, and resentments over his own leadership in the colony. The classis had gone on record as opposing Freemasonry as early as 1853, which for the majority already then was an unacceptable compromise allowed in the RCA. While acknowledging the need to receive the letters as official communications, Van Raalte predicted that the withdrawal would do more damage within the community than beyond it and that it was a scandal based on ignorance, factiousness, and judgmentalism that tramples Christian unity. He did allow that should the seceders succeed in creating a purer, holier church than the Protestant Dutch Reformed Church in America, they would put those whom they had left to shame. It was more a cynical, skeptical challenge than a prayer.<sup>16</sup>

The 1857 communications were handled as a local matter, and they were de-emphasized in the broader RCA arena. The withdrawal received only a half-dozen lines in *De Hollander* that spring and none in the *Christian Intelligencer*, the English-language religious weekly of the RCA produced by the eastern establishment. *De Sheboygan Newsbode* recorded:

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<sup>12</sup> *De Hollander* 1, no. 24 (20 March 1851): I (emphasis *De Hollander*’s; translation mine). The distinction between withdrawing from a corrupt ecclesiastical governance structure imposed in 1816 while never seceding from the Reformed church in the Netherlands was reasserted in 1857 and included in the classical record in connection with the 1857 secession (*Classis Holland Minutes*, 244).

<sup>13</sup> *De Hollander* 8, no. 35 (4 August 1858): 3; 8, no. 38 (1 September 1858): 1.

<sup>14</sup> *Classis Holland Minutes*, 240-43, reproduces all four communications.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 244.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 239-49.

*De Hollander* reports that Rev. Van den Bosch of Noordeloos, Michigan, has followed his brother in office, H. G. Klyn, in separating from the Dutch Reformed Church of this country. And there is speculation that Rev. Smith in Drenthe and possibly also Rev. Schepers will unite with the aforementioned ministers. But then what? [Will they] establish a new church fellowship?<sup>17</sup>

The editorial observations about the possible affiliation of dissidents with one another and queries about what this might portend for a new church establishment went beyond what appeared in the Michigan paper. Although Van Raalte chaired the sessions of the particular synod of Chicago that met in the First Congregational Church in that city three weeks later, its record glosses over what had happened. The recorded report of Classis Holland virtually buries reference to the event in the Synodical record, stating:

The *Classis of Holland* report [*sic*] that the spirit of the Lord has been poured out on many of their churches, and many of their young people have been hopefully converted and added to the church. This blessing has been especially enjoyed at Zeeland and Overysse. Rev. H. G. Klein [Klyn] has seceded from this classis. Rev. P. J. Oggel has been received from the Netherlands, and Mr. J. Van Vleck has been examined and ordained.<sup>18</sup>

A year later, the succeeding report to the same assembly indicated that the churches were peaceful, which was “a great relief from the anxieties of the previous year.”<sup>19</sup> It also noted, without comment, that Klyn had meanwhile been installed as pastor in the Kalamazoo RCA. The acts of the general synod of the RCA reflect considerable interest in the emergence of the Holland Academy, but none in what happened in the spring of 1857.

At the time, then, the events in April 1857 occasioned passing local concern and interest, but little notice on the wider RCA scene. Even locally they were regarded as yet another in a series of skirmishes with a minority of difficult colonists, hardly a tenth of whom left in 1857. Their leaving was certainly not regarded at the time as the birth of a new, competing denomination or as a major threat to RCA stability nationally or even locally. Only later developments would imbue that date with that kind of prominence.

### **Different Takes on the Differences at Work**

The predominant reaction in the RCA at the time was rooted in the sense that the issues involved were doctrinally secondary and were largely matters of custom and preference. Osterhaven recognizes their rootedness in the 1834 Secession in the Netherlands when he says: “Spreading rapidly, the Secession soon had thousands of adherents throughout the country and these, although united in their loyalty to the Reformed faith, separated into a number of factions each with its own notions about church government, the Christian life, worship, or the education of ministers.”<sup>20</sup> He neither probes nor explains these differences further, probably because he relies so heavily on Van Eyck. Van Eyck’s nineteen essays published posthumously in the centennial commemoration of the union of 1850 repeatedly mention the points of contention. Appealing to John Calvin and Father à Brakel<sup>21</sup> on the distinction between primary and secondary doctrine and against schism, to the Covenant of Wessel on ecclesiastical solidarity, to the confessional integrity of the RCA, to the contentiousness and pettiness of those who left, and to the historical distortions and manipulation by many subsequent defenders of 1857, he identifies what were the stumbling blocks for the dissidents. He is particularly strident in exposing as subsequently contrived and as specious the claim that Isaac Wyckoff had promised the Michigan colonists, in proposing in 1849 their affiliation with the RCA, that if they were unhappy or felt compromised by the union, they could withdraw from it. His argumentation on this point is compelling. In fact, any attempt to justify that withdrawal, must finally address the meticulously researched and exhaustive case that he builds. Van Eyck has—simply stated—read and digested virtually everything said on both sides of the subject until the time he wrote. He is so thorough that Osterhaven obviously felt no need to repeat his

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<sup>17</sup> *De Sheboygan Nieuwsbode* 8, no. 11 (7 April 1857): 2 (translation mine).

<sup>18</sup> *Minutes of the Particular Synod of Chicago, Convened in Chicago, September 3, 1856, and April 22, 1857* (Chicago, 1857), 12. Van Vleck had just been appointed to teach at the Holland Academy.

<sup>19</sup> *Minutes of the Particular Synod of Chicago, Convened in Chicago, April 22, 1858* (Chicago, 1858), 7.

<sup>20</sup> Osterhaven, 49.

<sup>21</sup> Willem à Brakel (1635-1711) was a leader of the seventeenth-century Further Reformation, whose lengthy book *De Redlijke Godsdienst* (literally *Reasonable Religion*) went through numerous editions and was one of the most widely read theological and devotional sources by ministers and laymen of the 1834 Secession. The work has recently been translated as *The Christian’s Reasonable Service*, 4 vols., trans. Bartel Elshout, with introductory essays by W. Fieret on “Wilhelmus à Brakel” and Joel R. Beeke on “The Dutch Second Reformation” (Liogonier, Pa.: Soli Deo Gloria Pub., 1992-95).



work, only to appeal to it. The contributions of these two scholars on the matter are completely sympathetic to the Van Raalte-Brummelkamp tempera-ment that also dominated *De Hollander's* editorial perspective.

Henry Beets's 1918 study in the Dutch language, on the other hand, does more than list and refer to the offending practices found in the RCA by the seceding colonists. He probes them. He develops a fifteen-page summary of the several Secession, or *Afscheiding*, factions in the Netherlands and documents when and how the issues they carried with them to America surfaced and were handled at various Secession synods before they had even embarked for their new home.<sup>22</sup> The party of Hendrik P. Scholte, who established the Pella colony, held to an independent, virtually congregational polity. They had Darbyite, or premillennial, tendencies and dispensed with tradition and visible signs of ministerial authority like accepted clerical garb. Scholte's unilateral appeal to the Dutch government in the late 1830s for legitimization was considered by many to submit Christ's authority to a compromised, earthly authority and to ignore the unified deliberation of synod. At serious odds on these matters with Hendrik de Cock, Scholte had been suspended by the wider movement. Brummelkamp and Van Raalte reflected a moderate and socially polished approach. They fraternized with intellectual leaders like Isaac da Costa and Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer in the state church,<sup>23</sup> emphasized a university educated clergy, and accepted the role of hymns in spiritual formation and worship as long as it was understood that it was for their biblically defensible content, not because they had been imposed by the Crown. Their approach, inculcated in the students they trained for ministry, was known as the *Gelderse Richting*, after the province where they were prominent, and sometimes as the Southern Party. The Northern Party, or *Drenthse Richting*, or the de Cock, Hendrik Joffers, van Dort, Synodical unity and authority, use of theologically astute exhorters in ministry without university training as a necessary expedient, visible signs of authority in dress, obligatory observance of Christian holidays in worship, heavily doctrinal preaching, and, in general, a high degree of authority and conformity in their congregations. For twenty years these groups more or less co-existed in one movement, each training their own brand of new ministers and disseminating their values and emphases, until not without some difficulty and compromise, they established a common theological seminary in Kampen in 1854. Beets not only distills the essence of these groups into his narrative, he does a helpful demographic analysis that shows that numerically the northern group was the strongest and the most geographically dispersed. A reading of the minutes of Classis Holland prior to 1858 in light of Beets's background indicates that virtually all the points at issue among the Secessionist groups in the Netherlands found their way on to the floor of the American classis—both before and after the union of 1850—where they simmered until the flare-up of 1857.

Robert P. Swierenga provides a superb, recent review of the differences in emphasis between these groups.<sup>24</sup> His review is consistent with that of Beets, updates it based on some more recent research, and is the best available in English.

The northern emphasis is the influence, in an exaggerated form, that precipitated the 1857 movement, Beets implies and I suggest, consistent with Swierenga. In its less extreme form it continued to exercise considerable influence in the western RCA and contributed to rapport and movement between the two communions in succeeding decades, as an attentive reading of the sources establishes. By paying attention in some detail to these differences among the colonists, Beets and Swierenga see them as historically important in a way that Van Eyck does not. For Beets these differences, I suggest, psychologically and ecclesiastically legitimize the withdrawal of 1857.<sup>25</sup>

Had Beets adopted this line of argument, rather than defending 1857 on the basis of an allegedly anachronistic and/or decontextualized promise by Wyckoff, his case would have been much stronger. Do a common confessional and a church political legacy compel organizational solidarity? Or, are other, admittedly secondary, matters a legitimate basis for parting organizational company? Beets and Van Eyck provided different answers to these important questions—at least as far as 1857 is concerned.

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<sup>22</sup> Beets, 26-50. His later study in English is abbreviated and omits this material: Henry Beets, *The Christian Reformed Church: Its Roots, History, Schools and Mission Work, 1857-1946* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1946).

<sup>23</sup> Da Costa (1798-1860), from a Portuguese Jewish family, converted to Christianity in the 1820s and became a prolific poet and published theologian who advocated the evangelical faith of the European *Réveil* movement, Groen van Prinsterer (1801-76) was a high-ranking Dutch civil servant and published advocate of the Calvinistic legacy of the Netherlands. Both men were empathetic with the religious emphases and leaders of the 1834 Secession.

<sup>24</sup> Robert P. Swierenga and Elton J. Bruins, *Family Quarrels in the Dutch Reformed Churches in the Nineteenth Century*, Historical Series of the Reformed Church in America, no. 32 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 27-35. This paragraph and note were added subsequent to presenting the lecture.

<sup>25</sup> Our understanding of the character and contributions of the northerner Douwe J. Vander Werp, the real father of the CRC in my estimation, will be substantially enhanced by the fine study of Janet Sheeres, now in press, entitled *Son of Secession: Douwe J. Vander Werp*. This volume will appear in the Historical Series of the Reformed Church in America, edited by Donald Bruggink. I am very grateful to the author for allowing me to read and reference it.

## Van Raalte's Style

A consideration that I would like to inject at this point is to what extent Van Raalte's leadership style exacerbated the differences in the West Michigan colony and precipitated 1857. This is an important issue with enough basis in the record to raise here.

Van Eyck entitles one of his early essays, "What Van Raalte and the Immigrants Knew about the Ref. Dutch Church in 1850." In it he constructs the argument that they knew a great deal through printed material, visits, and extended stays among the Dutch Reformed in the East. Thoroughly informed, they took a unanimous and uncontested decision to join the RCA, he asserts. The author includes this account in his narrative:

Van Raalte reached what is now Holland, Michigan, late in December, 1846, but in April, 1847, he was back in New York. Mr. Stegink, in No. 140 of Van Schelven's Historical Papers, says Van Raalte visited him and the other immigrants at Albany in April, 1847; and it is believed that during this trip he made his celebrated pilgrimage to inspect the spiritual barometer of the Church, the School of the Prophets, "on the banks of the old Raritan." Dr. Chas. Scott, an intimate associate of Van Raalte from 1866 to 1876, and later president of Hope

College, remembered this visit of Van Raalte, but was not sure whether it was in 1847 or 1848. At the Centennial Celebration of the New Brunswick Seminary in 1884, Dr. Scott referred to it as follows: "Once I heard the venerable Dr. Van Raalte, in an evening conversation, relate the tearful history of the Holland immigration to this land in which they now dwell. He told how they left the loved homes of their fathers, and the fair surroundings of the Netherlands, and suffered in the forests of Michigan. I can almost repeat his very words, 'Our deepest anxiety was for ecclesiastical connections and the educational needs of these immigrants. Oh, it was upon my heart as a leaden weight, for so I felt my responsibility before God. One of my first missions was to the Theological Seminary at New Brunswick. I listened to the teachings and conversations of the professors, saw the workings of their hearts, and understood their love to God and their devotion to His truth. I blessed my God that I there found the faith, the faith of my fathers,—the historical church of the Netherlands,—and because I found it and loved it, I determined to bring the immigrants into intimate connection with the Dutch Reformed Church of America.'"<sup>26</sup>

This is a citation that also appears in Elton Eenigenburg's essay, "New York and Holland: Reformed Theology and the Second Dutch Immigration."<sup>27</sup> For me it raises far more profound issues than the controversial Wyckoff promise seized upon by the earliest Christian Reformed apologists for 1857 and by Henry Beets. It predates, or is at least contemporaneous with, the first recorded meeting of Classis Holland on 23 April 1848. It is compelling evidence that Van Raalte had determined to bring the churches of the colony into fellowship and organic union with the Dutch Reformed Church in America before the matter had been proposed or deliberated ecclesiastically. How would that approach play among a substantial contingent of colonists committed to the polity instilled by the northern leaders of the *Drenthse Richting*? It would be another sixteen months before Wyckoff appeared in the colony on behalf of the RCA committee on domestic missions to explore such a union. What transpired between Van Raalte and leaders in the East in those intervening months to facilitate his visit? Did it happen so spontaneously in June 1849 that it could not be announced and sanctioned in the April minutes of classis that year? Why were the June meeting and the lengthy document advocating union and signed by the colony's four ministers and by twenty elders, dated 10 July 1849, not acknowledged and endorsed at the following October meeting of classis? Are these procedures designed to foster trust and consensus? Why is the first entry in the official record concerning union only made in April 1850 when classis designated Van Raalte to attend the provincial synod of Albany's meeting that spring to gather information that "may facilitate the desired union?"<sup>28</sup> I may be missing something here, but if the consistories or faculties on which I have served operated on substantial issues the way in which union with the RCA unfolded between 1847 and 1851, I know what dissonance would have been generated.

That the minutes of classis in this first decade are, by the five translators' introductory acknowledgement, "mostly in the hand-writing of the Rev. A. C. Van Raalte" raises additional questions because of the nature of the

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<sup>26</sup> Van Eyck, 23.

<sup>27</sup> Elton M. Eenigenburg, "New York and Holland: Reformed Theology and the Second Dutch Immigration," in *Word and World: Reformed Theology in America*, ed. James W. Van Hoesen, Historical Series of the Reformed Church in America, no. 16 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 31-43. Eenigenburg, on p. 33, quotes from Van Eyck, although not word for word.

<sup>28</sup> *Classis Holland Minutes*, 37. See *Family Quarrels*, 52-56, on the June and July meetings. The composition of the June delegation and the July signatories raise questions about the way in which the 1850 union was processed and legitimized.

material.<sup>29</sup> As anyone knows who has worked with these materials, they are more in the nature of narrative, commentary, and at times verbatims than a succinct, objective record of decisions. As such they are out of character with the records of the RCA general synod, its provincial synods, and the minutes of the Dutch assemblies in which Van Raalte had participated.

The question arises, therefore, as to what extent the form of the record and the way in which decisions regarding the union of 1850 were reached may have contributed to the unrest in the churches. Can the classical minutes be used uncritically in constructing a credible historical interpretation of 1850 and 1857? This is a consideration on which I would dearly love to have heard the translation committee: Henry Beets, D. H. Kromminga, Lester Kuypers, Albertus Pieters, and Wynand Wichers. In their absence, it is a discussion worth having today.

Albertus Van Raalte deserves unparalleled recognition and thanks for all he has contributed to the Reformed churches here and even abroad. My observations and questions are not intended to detract from his importance or to question his integrity. Leaders must lead. In so doing, especially under unusual pressures and duress, they do not always foresee the implications of how they lead. On the other hand, astute leaders often do, and they make procedural adjustments accordingly. It is left to those who come later to assess all the facets of their leadership and their consequences.

### Predictable Continuities

In light of the considerations just raised, I turn briefly to some predictable continuities among the early leaders of both the RCA and CRC prior to the 1880s. This attention centers around those who were born in the Netherlands, then immigrated, especially those who were also trained in the Netherlands before emigrating. Herbert Brinks has covered the ministerial sons of the *Afscheiding* who were both born and trained in the Netherlands before emigrating carefully and helpfully in his essay, "Religious Continuities in Europe and the New World."<sup>30</sup> I summarize his findings and build on them.

First the summary. Brinks documents that his subjects who participated in the 1857 secession were trained in and sympathetic to the northern party of de Cock and his colleagues and successors. He shows that those who joined and stayed with the RCA were predominantly trained in and followed the more concessive and moderate line of Van Raalte and Brummelkamp, although several were trained in the northern tradition. Those trained under Scholte all ultimately sided with the latter, except for one who was independent in the U.S., and Klyn, who broke away in 1857 but returned to Classis Holland of the RCA within several months. The handful that was self-educated swung both ways. The conservative Presbyterian tradition became the avenue of ministry for two northerners, one independently educated and one Scholte-educated. Especially worth extrapolating from Brinks's study is how the ministers who had served, or endeavored to serve, in Classis Holland before April 1857 lined up as to training. Two had been trained by Van Raalte himself: Seine Bolks (ordained in 1841) had been minister in Overisel (1848-53), Grand Haven (1853-56), and Muskegon (1856- ); and Pieter J. Oggel (ordained in 1849) had recently begun serving in Grand Haven (1856- ). Several had been educated by Scholte: Cornelius Vander Meulen (ordained in 1839) had emigrated with a large contingent of his congregation from Zeeland in 1847, was serving the church in Zeeland, Michigan (1847- ), and was Van Raalte's staunch ally; Wynand Gardiner (ordained in 1842) had also served in Zeeland and had arrived in Kalamazoo (1835), only to die suddenly in 1855; and Hendrik G. Klyn (ordained in 1839) had been minister in Graafschap (1851-52), had the joint charge of Milwaukee and Franklin (1852-54), and was now in Grand Rapids (1854- ).

The northerners had had a substantially more checkered history with classis, Ypma excepted.<sup>31</sup> Martin Ypma (ordained in 1845) was one of the earliest ministers, had served in Vriesland (1847-52) and Graafschap (1852-55), and had moved out of the classis to High and Low Prairie, Illinois (1855- ). He had signed the communication of July 1850. Koene S. Verschuur (or Vander Schuur) (ordained in 1840) had served briefly in Graafschap (1849-50) and had moved to Oostburg, Wisconsin (1850- ). He had been seated at the October 1849 session of classis, when nothing about Wyckoff's visit or the July letter appears in the record, and at the April 1850 session, whose minutes have been lost and exist only as recalled and summarized by Van Raalte, including the directive that he go to Albany to explore the terms of anticipated union on behalf of classis. Is there any relationship between Vander Schuur's involvement in Classis Holland, the records of the two meeting and events related to an anticipated union with the

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<sup>29</sup> *Classis Holland Minutes*, 5.

<sup>30</sup> Herbert Brinks, "Religious Continuities in Europe and the New World," in *The Dutch in America: Immigration, Settlement, and Cultural Change*, ed. Robert P. Swierenga (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1985), 209-223.

<sup>31</sup> Robert P. Swierenga provides a masterful, definitive review of no less than five secession movements in the colony prior to 1857. See *Family Quarrels*, 63-82,

RCA? Jacob R. Schepers had studied under Wolter Kok before immigrating, been licensed by Classis Holland, then had illicitly—from Van Raalte’s perspective—served a dissident group from Graafschap, known as South Holland, leading to accusations of schismatic activity, and had led that group into the Associate Reformed Church; he later served several congregations that came into the CRC from outside.<sup>32</sup> Rev. Roelof Smith (ordained in 1847), had served the Drenthe congregation from 1852 to 1853, when he was deposed for contentiously objecting to the 1850 union and leading a group out of the congregation.<sup>33</sup> Jacob Duim, an exhorter without formal training, led a sizeable group out of the North Holland congregation after 1855, accusing Van Raalte of false teaching. Gysbert Haan, another unordained leader with extreme northern positions, took a group out of the Grand Rapids congregation in 1856 and was holding services independently. Koene Vanden Bosch (ordained in 1848) arrived as minister of the Noorderloos congregation in the second half of 1856 and submitted his terse and judgmental letter of secession the next April. Vander Schuur had studied under Hendrik de Cock. Schepers, Smit, and Vanden Bosch had all studied directly with Wolter Kok. Clearly, a significant contingent of immigrant leaders trained in the tradition of Hendrik de Cock and under the stern brothers Frederick A. and Wolter Kok felt stymied and frustrated with the leadership of Van Raalte and ministerial allies.

Of the immigrant *Afscheiding* ministers before 1880 that were trained and ordained in the Netherlands **before 1854**, the six educated by either Van Raalte or Scholte who began RCA stayed RCA. Of the six educated in the northern tradition, those who started with the CRC all stayed CRC. Of the five northerners who started RCA, two stayed RCA, two became CRC, and one switched to the CRC and then back to the RCA. The latter was Rev. Hendrik Koopman, who served the First CRC of Pella for several years before spending his last fourteen years in several RCA congregations. Of the six who were self-educated and ordained by virtue of special gifts, three completed their ministries in the RCA, three in the CRC—several among them were “switchers.” The point is this: of the twenty-seven in Brinks’s survey, exactly a third changed denominations during their American careers, five completing ministries as CRC and four as RCA. The earliest movement between the two churches was significant and proportionate. The most conflicted and transient groups were the immigrant ministers educated in the northern tradition that began their ministries in the RCA and those who were self-educated.

When we take Brinks’s model and extend it to those born in the Netherlands and educated **after 1854** in the newly founded *Afscheiding* seminary in Kampen, what do we find? First, a little background is needed.

Following twenty years of parsonage training by leading ministers of the *Afscheiding*’s several contingents and by an almost successful attempt by Anthony Brummelkamp to create a seminary representing his perspective in Amsterdam, the synod of the Secession churches founded their Theological School in Kampen. It opened in 1854 with four faculty members and forty students. The faculty represented both the northern and the southern emphases we have just reviewed. Tamme F. de Haan, the oldest, had been a *Hervormde* minister before joining the Secession movement in 1839. His specializations were Hebrew, Greek, dogmatics, and philosophy. He retired in 1860. Anthony Brummelkamp, who had taught students with Van Raalte while a minister in Arnhem, was appointed to teach New Testament and practical theology. Helenius de Cock, son of Hendrick and youngest of the four, had been taught by his father and by de Haan. He taught dogmatics. Simon van Velzen taught some modern languages and literature in the preparatory program, and he taught church history, ethics, and preaching in the theological disciplines. He had been instrumental in leading the move to suspend Scholte fifteen years before. The tensions and dynamics that had marked their relationship before the school opened continued afterwards, though tempered by their common educational mission and sublimated to their shared confessional Reformed commitment.

What is of special, initial interest for our topic is the composition of the board of curators or trustees.<sup>34</sup> Among them were men who would later emigrate and find their way into both the Christian Reformed Church and the Reformed Church in America. Representing the province of Groningen was Rev. Bernardus de Bey, who was substantially self-educated and who served for twenty-four years in the Netherlands before accepting a call in 1868 to the First RCA of Chicago, which flourished under his leadership, Secretary of the board was Rev. Pieter J. Oggel, who had been trained by Van Raalte and married his mentor’s daughter. Oggel had been on the short list for consideration as a faculty member. In 1856, he became pastor of the RCA in Grand Haven and subsequently served the RCA in Pella before being appointed to the Hope faculty, during which time he also edited *De Hope* until his

<sup>32</sup> *Classis Holland Minutes*, 91-93. The minutes identify him as J. J. Schepers, but Swierenga, Brinks, and CRC records as J. R. Schepers. He led the Dutch-speaking Presbyterian church of Lafayette, Indiana, into the CRC in 1865 and subsequently served congregations in Collendoorn (i.e., East Saugatuck [1870-75]) and Cincinnati, Ohio (1875-78).

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.* 122-38.

<sup>34</sup> W. de Graaf, *Een Monument der Afscheiding: De Geschiedenis van de Theologische Hogeschool van de Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland* (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1955), 38-39.

untimely death in 1869. Douwe J. Vander Werp was the curator from Friesland. A schoolmaster by initial training, he very early became an indispensable secretary for Hendrik de Cock and a widely traveled and effective exhorter of the northern *Afscheiding*. He for a time identified with the “churches under the cross,” those that refused to apply for government recognition and suffered reprisals on that account in the late 1830s; he was privately and controversially ordained in Zwolle in 1844. After serving seven congregations in the Netherlands, he immigrated to America in 1864 and successively ministered in the CRC churches of Graafschap and Muskegon. He was the first editor of *De Wachter* and for ten years—until he died of cancer in 1876, in the year that Calvin Seminary was established—taught the first CRC ministers educated in America.<sup>35</sup>

But to return to tracking ministers trained at the Kampen School after 1854 and before 1880, what do we find? The following accepted calls in the CRC: Francis Rederus (1873), Gerrit E. Boer (1874), Gerrit Hemkes (1877), and Jan Kremer (1878). Boer and Hemkes ended up on the Calvin Seminary faculty. After serving only two years as pastor of Central Avenue CRC in Holland, Michigan, Kremer switched to the RCA, where he completed his ministry in 1902. The following accepted calls in the RCA before 1875: Willem A. Houbolt (1859), Balster Van Ess (1868), William P. De Jonge (1871), Nicholas M. Steffens (1872), and Hermanus Stobbelaar (1858). Van Ess completed his training at Western Seminary and was ordained in 1870. All remained RCA. Steffens eventually became a professor at Western Seminary.

A couple of observations are worth making. Kampen provided ministers to both American churches. Its graduates who emigrated pretty much decided where they belonged before emigrating and stayed with their decision. The number of Kampen graduates who came was not large, but they were very formative for both churches. They brought a shared background and knew and respected one another, which boded well for both churches.

Of the ministers serving in the four immigrant, or Dutch-speaking, classes of the RCA who were not trained in Kampen and who were ordained between 1857 and 1875, fifteen were trained in Holland at what is now Western Seminary, twenty-one in New Brunswick, and a handful elsewhere. None switched to the CRC, except two who had been self-taught in the Netherlands. Of the seven ministers ordained in the CRC during those years who were trained by Douwe Vander Werp, none switched to the RCA. This suggests that after 1857 the situation stabilized and each church developed its own identity and sources of ministers. Both did continue to reflect their Dutch legacy, which in the RCA was blended with emphases and forces at work in their larger, wider ecclesiastical establishment.

### Subsequent Engagement

In the RCA, continuity in the western classes with their *Afscheiding* connections and emphases was reinforced by the appearance of the solid and substantive new journal *De Hope*. In the first number, dated 12 December 1865, editor Pieter Oggel stated its purpose. The endeavor was intended to serve the church by helping those whose primary language was Dutch to read the signs of the time by presenting and commenting on important events, particularly those involving the spread of Christ’s kingdom. This involves promoting a fuller understanding of Scripture, respect for parental authority, education at home and in the schools, and responsible citizenship. He promised that the paper would not be politically partisan and that when it addressed deficiencies in the church, both the RCA and more broadly, it would do so gently, faithfully, and without succumbing to contentiousness. He invited submissions by pastors and other readers. He hoped to allow open and cordial discussion of differences. He wanted it understood that doctrinally the paper stood on the Reformed confessions and that it was produced under the auspices of the leadership of Hope College.<sup>36</sup> It was a laudable endeavor that under his leadership and thereafter substantially met his expressed ideals.

Touching on some select issues that were handled on its pages over the next fifteen or twenty years will help us see how its leadership saw and engaged the CRC in the wake of 1857.

Understandably, Van Raalte was prominent in the paper. When he made his first trip back to the Netherlands in the late spring and summer of 1866, five letters containing his reflections on it were printed in the paper. Concerning his warm reception at the synod of the Secession churches, he writes as follows in the second installment:

Taken in its entirety, the opportunity to participate in the sessions of synod was one of the sweetest times of my life and the occasion for thanksgiving. What was especially gratifying to me was that, after investigating the historic Dutch Reformed Church in America, synod was convinced of its perseverance in doctrine, discipline

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<sup>35</sup> For details on him and an assessment of his contributions, see Sheeres, *Son of Secession* (in press).

<sup>36</sup> *De Hope* 1, no. 1 (12 December 1865): 1.

and worship and of its brotherly unity. It expressed recognition of having fellowship with us, as it does with the churches of Scotland.<sup>37</sup>

Much of the material updated readers on his travels, his preaching in various congregations, and his interchanges with people he met. He reflected on the social situation and on how it had changed, or remained unchanged, since he left twenty years earlier. In August he preached in Henricus Beuker's roomy, new church in Rotterdam and was impressed with the two "impressive" Christian schools he visited there. Visits to seminaries and universities prompted grateful reflection on the work of higher education he and the colonists had begun in Holland, Michigan. In October, the editor ran excerpts from Van Raalte's farewell comments and thanks, as published in *De Bazuin* and *De Wekstem*, the two leading papers of the Secession churches in the Netherlands. He asked for prayers and anticipated sustained ties through missionary endeavors.

Before Van Raalte disembarked on the return voyage, trouble had erupted in Pella. A long piece was printed, precipitated by a letter registering concern that the paper was saying nothing on the matter. "It is not our practice to comment here in *De Hope* concerning separation and separatists," stated the editor.<sup>38</sup> But he did, with reasons why separation was not the answer to problems faced, assurances that their students from New Brunswick "have given the clearest indications of their orthodoxy," reminders that "we have imported this plague with us from the Netherlands," and yet another appeal to à Brakel and the fathers against schism.

We regard those who are separated as our brothers, and we can say with total honesty that we love them and yearn for the day when they will no longer be capable of separation, but when with us and all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ they will live together in the sweetest harmony, united in our precious Head, in whom we all dwell already now and hope to do so for all eternity.<sup>39</sup>

It was a heartfelt Oggel at his most tender, pastoral best. But the leakage continued. The next month a painful letter from Rev. Arend Bechthold in Paterson, New Jersey, appeared detailing how Rev. Wilhelmus Van Leeuwen of the CRC was attacking his preaching, besmirching his integrity, and frightening his people out of his church. "Your estimate that we would lose 50 members to the schismatics is incorrect; 102 have left my congregation," he reported. Others are at the point of resigning, he added.<sup>40</sup>

For the next several years, in fact, for the next fifteen, the issue of the 1857 secession and continuing affiliation with its churches was revisited often in one form or another. Arguments for and against leaving the RCA were examined in March 1867. That summer the republication in Pella of 1822 materials justifying an earlier secession from the eastern RCA was reviewed in several articles, as was another piece on schism. When Frederick Hulst's credentials were not in order after he was installed as pastor of Central Avenue CRC in Holland, Michigan, the paper so reported. Articles on Van Raalte's negotiations with the *Afscheding* synod in 1868 concerning RCA-CRC relations received considerable attention. As the CRC gained membership in the late 1860s and as its credibility in the Netherlands was enhanced, the paper continued giving the movement critical attention.

The most inflammatory material was the articles written by Bernardus De Bey beginning in 1868, the year he became pastor of the RCA in Chicago with the objective of stanching the flow of members into the CRC. Citing at length a letter from an aggrieved RCA member that moved him deeply, he assailed the legitimacy of 1857 in his opening article. He regarded it as impossible for CRC leaders of the day to live up to the name of the denomination—"True Dutch Reformed Church" [*Ware Hollandse Gereformeerde Kerk*]-since the church had been founded on false premises. In his succeeding articles, he always followed the adjective "True" in his references with a question mark in brackets to sustain the point. "Ministers coming from the Netherlands, you have a higher calling than to serve that party and promote that division among your countrymen," he admonished.<sup>41</sup> Despite probable deficiencies, perhaps some substantial ones, he wrote, the RCA holds faithfully to the three forms of unity. Subsequent contributions engaged point by point articles by Vander Werp, his former colleague on the Kampen board, which appeared in *De Wachter*. "Ministers of the *Afscheiding*! Let us understand one another and find the unity that we had in the Fatherland," he appealed.<sup>42</sup> The exchanges intensified in late October and November, when disruption in the

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<sup>37</sup> *De Hope* 1, no. 17 (12 July 1866): 1 (translation mine).

<sup>38</sup> *De Hope* 1, no. 26 (13 September 1866): 1 (translation mine).

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.* (translation mine).

<sup>40</sup> *De Hope* 1, no. 31 (18 October 1866): 1 (translation mine).

<sup>41</sup> *De Hope* 3, no. 21 (19 August 1868): 1 (translation mine).

<sup>42</sup> *De Hope* 3, no. 27 (30 September 1868): 2 (translation mine).

Chicago constituency mounted. Roelof Pieters weighed in more irenically from his perspective on mounting concerns in Wisconsin, where he was serving. Troubles in Grand Rapids were reviewed. Discussion was intense, in fact, for the next two years—into 1870. Then attention to 1857 faded for a time.

References to the CRC resumed in response to a speech the aged Anthony Brummelkamp made at the time of the *Afscheiding* synod of 1875, attended by representatives of the CRC. He reminded hearers of how he and his compatriots had been forced out of the *Hervormde* church and that, if that establishment would allow room for them and their convictions, he would return. He also noted how he and leadership in his movement had refrained from taking sides between the RCA and the CRC. He hoped that these “two sisters” would be reunited. De Bey summarized the speech in *De Hope* in November 1875, but rejected the posture of neutrality on the separation as unacceptable.<sup>43</sup>

In an act of ecclesiastical statesmanship, Rev. Jacob Vander Meulen articulated a new attitude. The son of Cornelius, the first pastor in the Zeeland colony, he had come to the U.S. as a thirteen-year-old in 1847 and was one of the first sons of the new immigrants to graduate from Rutgers (1858) and New Brunswick Seminary (1861). The following February, he suggested that he was not the only reader of the magazine who desired to put contentions over 1857 behind them. Acknowledging that he had previously contributed to them, he expressed regret over doing so and offered apologies:

Upon further reflection, I now want to say that all that I have previously written against our brothers, the True Reformed, I would rather had been left unsaid. I say this especially because I believe that a new day has dawned. I harbor no hope and have not desire that ecclesiastical union will happen. . . This I do believe, however—that the time has come that we esteem and recognize, and that as one of their leading ministers so beautifully put it recently, that “we stand beside each other and not against each other.” And because my earlier writing could perhaps be a stumbling block to progress toward the mutual recognition that I desire, I herewith withdraw what I have previously written . . . and thus ask forgiveness from our brothers.<sup>44</sup>

Two weeks later, De Bey acknowledged that he expected his November article to get reaction, but not from the quarter from which it came. While not relinquishing the hope for reunion between the RCA and CRC, he acknowledged that “Rev. Jacob Vander Meulen does well to ask forgiveness for offensive statements against the separatists, and I am the first to follow him in this.”<sup>45</sup> The next month he observed with appreciation that the separated brothers had recently shown more approachability than before. Reflections in that vein continued into the summer.

Soon other issues assumed more prominence, however. Among them was an encouraging series of regular reports on joint RCA and CRC participation in young peoples’ meetings in the Grand Rapids area. Rev. Nicholas Dosker and Rev. Lambert J. Hulst from the RCA side and Rev. Gerrit E. Boer and Rev. Gerrit Hemkes from the CRC side were involved in these events.<sup>46</sup> Attention to the CRC establishment itself fades from the pages of *De Hope* for a time. The paper has no comment that I could find on the opening of the CRC theological school in 1876 or its leadership. It focuses a great deal of attention on Presbyterian matters, the preaching of Dwight Moody and Ira Sankey that was the evangelical rage. Foreign and national news received comment and interpretation. Discussions in *De Wachter*, which earlier had been read closely and critiqued roundly, disappear from its pages. Western RCA leadership was preoccupied with the shutting down of Hope’s theological training program in these years and with assessing Presbyterian seminaries in the Midwest. Missions, Sunday school materials and developments, revivals, and wider American denominational matters were covered with regularity. Clearly the RCA in the Midwest was moving beyond entanglement with *Afscheiding* issues and contention over them.

A few years later, however, tensions were rekindled over the Masonic lodge issues. Then, as is well covered in literature on the period, a new exodus into the CRC opened old wounds and added new ones. New and gifted *Afscheiding* leadership emigrated and joined the CRC: Jan H. Vos, Van Raalte’s contact Henricus Beuker, and a

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<sup>43</sup> *De Hope* 10, no. 12 (24 November 1876): 2.

<sup>44</sup> *De Hope* 10, no. 22 (9 February 1876): 2 (translation mine).

<sup>45</sup> *De Hope* 10, no. 24 (23 February 1876): 3 (translation mine).

<sup>46</sup> Dosker had been trained at the University of Groningen and had immigrated in 1873 to serve the Second RCA in Grand Rapids. His son Henry had attended high school in the Netherlands with Herman Bavinck, wrote the biography of Van Raalte, and served on the faculties of Western Theological Seminary and Louisville Presbyterian Seminary. L. J. Hulst had been trained by Wolter Kok, had immigrated in 1874, and was serving the Fourth RCA in Grand Rapids, a congregation whose majority he would lead into the CRC in 1882 over the Freemasonry issue. As previously noted, Boer and Hemkes were Kampen graduates.

young student named William Heyns, who a fellow student at Kampen who later immigrated and joined the RCA testified was one of the finest minds emerging in the Reformed churches. But we leave the complicated and voluminous material on CRC and RCA relations in the 1880s and 1890s for another time.

## **Conclusion**

An approaching anniversary affords the opportunity to have another look at old issues surrounding a significant and contro-versial event like 1857. If in so doing, we see things overlooked before or see them from new angles that help us come to clearer, healthier terms with them than may have been the case earlier, then the effort is worthwhile. The old, emotional debates about the justifiability of 1857 are undoubtedly better supplanted by asking how the RCA and the CRC in their sustained, subsequent contacts have enhanced one another and created avenues of fruitful, mutual ministry.



**Mission Statement**  
**A. C. Van Raalte Institute at Hope College**

The A. C. Van Raalte Institute is a department of Hope College. Hence, its mission relates directly to and supports the mission of Hope College, an undergraduate liberal arts institution offering academic programs in the context of the historic Christian faith. The Institute is closely related to another department of Hope College, the Joint Archives of Holland.

*The mission of the Institute is to honor the memory and the vision of the Reverend Dr. Albertus C. Van Raalte, the founder of Holland, by studying his life and work. From this mission also is derived the scholarly investigation and publication of materials concerned with the immigration and the contributions of the Dutch and their descendants in the United States of America. Furthermore, the Institute is dedicated to the study of the history of all segments of the community throughout its history.*

The Institute derives its vision from a letter dated 27 November 1846, by A. C. Van Raalte, written shortly after his party landed in New York. As he was headed westward, he declared, "I hope that a large colony can be established here in America which will focus its work on the Kingdom of God." His vision also extended far beyond the boundaries of Holland, Michigan, to other colonies and to immigrants throughout the United States. The bold Christian vision that he had for the church, education, and community continues to have an impact on the "colony" that he founded on 9 February 1847, and on the college which he helped to establish fifteen years later.

The Institute carries out its educational mission not only through research and publication, but also through the sponsorship of lectures and presentations by its members and its invited guests. Through liaison with scholars and educational and cultural institutions in the Netherlands and other countries, the Institute seeks to promote the understanding of the history of this community. From time to time, the Institute will host visiting scholars from these countries to enable them to engage in research in our local archives and to provide a broader perspective to our own endeavors.