

“WE LIVE PRESENTLY UNDER A WANING MOON”



Van Raalte Institute Visiting Research Fellows Lecture Series, no. 7

# “WE LIVE PRESENTLY UNDER A WANING MOON”

Nicolaus Martin Steffens as leader of the  
Reformed Church in America in the West  
in years of transition (1878–1895)

**George Harinck**

Netherland-America Foundation Visiting Research Fellow, 2008  
Van Raalte Institute, Hope College  
Holland, Michigan



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## Author's Biographical Note

Dr. George Harinck is professor of the history of Neo-Calvinism and the director of the Historical Documentation Center for Dutch Protestantism at the VU University Amsterdam; he is also special professor in church history at the Theological University Kampen (the Netherlands), an honorary research fellow of the Van Raalte Institute, Hope College, Holland, Michigan, and a member of the Kuyper Committee of Princeton Theological Seminary.

He specializes in the cultural history of Dutch Protestantism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and has published widely on this topic (see [www.hdc.vu.nl](http://www.hdc.vu.nl)). He has also published on the American trips of Abraham Kuyper (1898) and Herman Bavinck (1892), including their stays in West Michigan: *Mijn reis was geboden. Abraham Kuypers Amerikaanse tournee* (2009) and *H. Bavinck, Mijne reis naar Amerika*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (2010).

These books, and this current biography of Nicolaus M. Steffens, are part of a larger research project on Dutch American Protestant relations, which includes a monograph on the history of the Dutch connections of Princeton Theological Seminary (1880-1930) and a biography of the Dutch American theologian Geerhardus Vos.

Dr. Harinck delivered his lecture entitled "Nicholas Steffens and Trans-Atlantic Relationships within the Reformed Church" at Hope College on 4 September 2008.



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My research on Nicolaus Martin Steffens is part of a long-term project on international aspects of Neo-Calvinism. One of these aspects concerns the American connections of Dutch Neo-Calvinists. Together with other immigrant theologians like Henry E. Dosker and Geerhardus Vos, Steffens was very important in introducing Neo-Calvinism to late nineteenth-century America. Dosker and Vos were befriended by Herman Bavinck; they corresponded with him, and they and Steffens corresponded with Abraham Kuyper. Their letters were sent from the United States and have been preserved in the Bavinck Papers and Kuyper Papers in the collection of the Historical Documentation Center for Dutch Protestantism at VU University Amsterdam. I have worked at that center for more than twenty-five years, and that is where my research on Steffens started. In the Kuyper Papers I selected fifteen letters and postcards from Steffens—all in Dutch. It soon turned out these were about the only extant letters by Steffens. Steffens' personal papers including Kuyper's letters to him have been lost.

When I stayed at Princeton Theological Seminary as a visiting scholar in 2001, I found some letters from Steffens to Benjamin B.

Warfield in the Warfield Papers in the Special Collections of Luce Library. Those were the days when William O. Harris was curator of Special Collections, and he introduced me to his treasury. I will never forget how he dealt with visitors in Presbyterian style, his interest in my research, and his sympathetic personality.

In the academic years 2006-7 and 2008-9, I taught undergraduate history courses at VU University based on Steffens' epistolary legacy. My students learned the skills of transcribing and annotating, and they helped me in the preparation of these letters and postcards for publication. I thank the students Jan Admiraal, Maaïke van den Berg, Annemarie Bibo, Eefje Blokdijk, Adinda Bohte, Margreke Bol, Floor Borsboom, Adriaan Bronkhorst, Cynthia Groot, Egbert de Haan, Didi Haghuis, Willem Kater, Reinier Maljers, Kees Rotgans, Eva Schoobaar, Remco Terlouw, Mark van der Vegte, and Renate van Zalen for their work on Steffens. I would also like to thank John Halsey Wood Jr., an American graduate student in church history at VU University in the academic year 2006-7, who studied Dutch Neo-Calvinism and was eager to learn Dutch. He joined our class several times and assisted us in transcribing the letters. A special “thank you” to Pieter van den Boogaard, a theology student at VU University, who also transcribed and annotated the letters and postcards and in 2010 wrote his undergraduate paper on these letters.

My research on Steffens led me to pastor Dr. Gerrit Jan Beuker, church historian of the Reformed churches in Ostfriesland, where Steffens was born and raised. I thank him and the German theology student Berthold Bloemendal at the Protestant Theological University in Kampen, the Netherlands, for their help in providing me with information on the youth and student years of Steffens. I thank Rev. William D. Graham of the Free Church of Scotland for providing me with information regarding the Free Church's mission to the Jews, and Rev. Dr. Gerrit Jan Beuker of the *Evangelisch-Altreformierte Kirche in Niedersachsen* for checking my chapter on Ostfriesland.

My research led me also to the academic centers of the Dutch American community in the midwestern United States: Hope College in Holland, Michigan, and Calvin College in Grand Rapids, and their respective historical archives and research centers, the A. C. Van Raalte Institute and Heritage Hall. In the collections of Heritage Hall, I found an incomplete draft translation of Steffens' letters and postcards to Kuyper, which I used as starting point for my translation of these letters in this book. Dr. Richard H. Harms, curator of Heritage Hall, gave me

permission to use these translations for this purpose. I thank him, his staff members Wendy B. Blankespoor and Hendrina Van Spronsen, and other staff members and volunteers for their assistance and hospitality over the years.

Because so few letters and other information on Steffens has been preserved, I was very glad that at least the weekly paper that Steffens edited for years, *De Hope*, had not been lost but was available on microfilm at the Van Raalte Institute. If I ever wanted to know more about Steffens, I would have to research that paper.

In 2007 Robert P. Swierenga, Van Raalte Research Professor at the Van Raalte Institute, advised me to apply for the Netherland-America Foundation Visiting Research Fellowship. I sent in an application, and in February 2008, I was glad to hear that the fellowship had been awarded to me by the staff of the Van Raalte Institute. I spent the summer of that year in this institute. I cherish the memories of my weeks at the Van Raalte Institute and the Joint Archives of Holland, both housed in the Theil Research Center on the Hope College campus. I thank the director, Dr. Jacob E. Nyenhuis, and the learned staff of the Van Raalte Institute: Dr. Donald J. Bruggink., Dr. Elton J. Bruins, Nella Kennedy, Dr. Earl Wm. Kennedy, and the office manager Karen G. Schakel for their hospitality, support, and help, both academic and practical. Especially Karen Schakel's practical arrangements and care made these weeks in Holland for me and my family comfortable and unforgettable. I had known all the staff members for years, but living and working there on a daily basis in that small academic community made me realize that the combination found there of academic focus and personal harmony is a rare gift. Maybe the memories are all the more cherished because Karen passed away in December 2009. This emotional fact seems to have fixed that summer in Holland in my mind as a kind of Eden. But it certainly also had to do with the archives and archivists of the Joint Archives of Holland that assisted me aptly in my research with documents, suggestions, and photos: director Geoffrey Reynolds and office manager Lori Tretheway. With their help I read *De Hope* for weeks on microfilm, reel after reel. All in all it was a perfect context for my research on Steffens.

After having watched in August the political conventions that spectacularly nominated presidential candidates Barack Obama and John McCain, I went home with loads of photocopies and a lot of documents in my laptop. This book is the harvest of that summer. Thanks to JoHannah Smith, office manager and editorial assistant and

the successor of Karen, my manuscript has been turned into a book. Her down-to-earth approach to academics is refreshing. She keeps you sharp, for she usually is one step ahead.

This book appears in the year after Steffens died a hundred years ago—29 July 1912 to be precise. I hope I will not be the last to be intrigued by his person and work but that this book will stimulate others to reflect on Steffens and on the history of Dutch Americans in the United States of America.

Amersfoort, July 2012

## Preface

The text of this book is an extended version of my lecture “Nicholas Steffens and Trans-Atlantic Relationships within the Reformed Church,” which I gave in Maas Auditorium, Hope College, Holland, Michigan, on 4 September 2008, under the auspices of the Van Raalte Institute Research Fellows Program.





## CHAPTER 1

### Introduction

When we speak of the Reformed tradition, we usually refer to a specific branch of western Christianity that started with John Calvin and others in the sixteenth century and spread throughout Switzerland, France, Germany, the Netherlands, England, and Scotland, and in the early seventeenth century, some small vessels from England and the Netherlands sailed the oceans to bring this tradition to America. The Reformed tradition is more extended and more complicated of course than this outline and more varied than the singular “tradition” suggests. It has more founding fathers, Ulrich Zwingli for example, and it has reached more countries, like Poland in the early stages, South Africa in the seventeenth century, Korea in the nineteenth century, and China today. It is more diverse or differentiated in character, ranging from the theology and ecclesiology of the Pilgrim Fathers to that of the Anglican Church. Church governance differs from the Congregationalist model in the United States to the Hungarian Reformed church order with bishops. And since the Reformed tradition has never had a central authority, unity has always been a problem. Neither is there a singular formal principle that could have united the Reformed. Although

there is a range of Reformed confessions adopted by many churches and in many countries, there is not a set of confessions adopted by all Reformed churches.

This diversity, however, is not restricted to geographical differences, organizational principles, or theological accents. There is also diversity over time. This tradition has its cherished moments, like the Synod of Dort or the Westminster Synod, but nothing in this tradition was ever sacred. Some preferred to relate to Calvin, others stuck to Zwingli or to the Reformed Pietists of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and there were those who related to this tradition mainly via the interpretation of Abraham Kuyper. Many are reading and interpreting this tradition in their own way. One might even wonder if the word *Reformed* does not crumble and fall apart as soon as we start to reflect on it and question if it is a continuing tradition at all, since it seems to have been reinterpreted over and over again.<sup>1</sup> The Scottish common sense tradition in Reformed theology was a new and different way of dealing with Calvin’s insights, and the theology of Kuyper’s Neo-Calvinism was not the logical outcome of Calvin’s theology. It was Reformed theologians who each in their own individual way related to the beginnings of this tradition in the era of Reformations (plural!); it was Reformed churches that expressed their allegiance to sixteenth-century Reformed confessions—not *vice versa*. Time and again they created a relationship with the founding fathers of Reformed theology or the classic confessions that had not existed before.

So, if we deal in this book with one nineteenth-century Reformed theologian, Nicolaus Martin Steffens (1839-1912), we had better forget that he could walk a track already laid out by John Calvin three centuries before. There is always a tendency to think that John Calvin did the hard work: that he created Reformed theology and that all later generations had to do was plug in and that he was always on the Reformed theologian’s mind, until your and my Reformed generation, of course. To us, so we say, the Reformed tradition is often complicated, problematic, and we seem to be the first generation that has forgotten who Calvin was. It seems we are the first generation within the Reformed tradition that has taken a really critical look at this tradition and has had the initiative to ask the really hard questions no one has ever dared to ask before. But in view of the history of this tradition, this opinion of ours is the result of a lack of perspective or historical

<sup>1</sup> See for the Dutch case George Harinck, Herman Paul, and Bart Wallet, eds., *Het gereformeerde gebeugen. Protestantse herinneringsculturen in Nederland, 1850-2000* (Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, 2009).

knowledge. If history teaches us a lesson, it may be this one: the kinds of challenges we face are not unprecedented. Our religious problems are not larger, and our questions not are more radical, more important, or more complicated than those of former generations. This realization is helpful to us and makes it easier to relate to previous generations, to sympathize with people of the past. If we want to understand what was going on when Nicolaus Steffens was around, we should start by realizing that he had to face problems and challenges that he had not known before, that he had to define anew what it meant to be Reformed in a context that was unknown, without having the appropriate answers at hand, and in his case with few references to John Calvin.<sup>2</sup> At a time when the authority of both the Bible and the Reformed tradition were questioned, Steffens had to use all his energy and creativity to chart a course for the Reformed Church within American culture.

Steffens himself is a fine illustration of the discontinuous aspect of the Reformed tradition. He stood in this tradition like a Melchizedek, with no Reformed teachers at whose feet he could sit as preceptors and with no disciples, Reformed people who related their Reformed identity to him. He was a theologian who had no master he could rely on or refer to, who himself did not write books and who hardly left any papers as a legacy. He was a wanderer who decided to join the ministry while working among the Jews in Istanbul, a German who was a stranger among the Dutch in Michigan. But when he was in the Holland colony in West Michigan, he dominated church life there for about fifteen years. Then he left the scene, leaving hardly any traces in historiography. He was never president of an important synod; he did not found a new church, and he did not start a revival movement. But in years of transition within the Reformed community in the West, he took the lead and pointed out a way to the future.<sup>3</sup>

In order to introduce this historical figure and his impact on the Reformed in western Michigan and beyond in the years of transition from 1878 to 1895, I would like to discuss four aspects of Steffens' life: (1) I will give his biography up to his Michigan years, and then I will elaborate on some issues he had to deal with in his two decades in

<sup>2</sup> Eugene P. Heideman, *The Practice of Piety. The Theology of the Midwestern Reformed Church in America, 1866-1966* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 22-23.

<sup>3</sup> Gerrit Jan Beuker, "German Oldreformed Emigration: Catastrophe or Blessing?," in *Breaches and Bridges: Reformed Subcultures in the Netherlands, Germany, and the United States*, George Harinck and Hans Krabbendam, eds. (Amsterdam: VU Uitgeverij, 2000), 112: "Steffens deserves a full biography, which would describe the international links between seceded churches in Germany, the Netherlands, Scotland, and the U.S."

Michigan as a (2) churchman, (3) a professor, and (4) a journalist. The focus will be on the way he functioned as a leader within his community. I will pay special attention to Steffens' relationship to the most impressive renewal in Reformed theology of his days, Neo-Calvinism. This Dutch movement was transported across the Atlantic by emigrants from the Netherlands. This cultural transfer had “far-reaching consequences” for the Reformed Dutch American communities in the Midwest.<sup>4</sup> But what did it mean for Steffens and the specific Reformed community he belonged to?

As an appendix to this history, this book contains in English translation the collection of letters and postcards Steffens wrote to Abraham Kuyper. These documents offer Steffens' intimate view on American and Dutch issues in a more personal tone. Their content is intertwined closely with the history described in this book.

<sup>4</sup> James D. Bratt, *Dutch Calvinism in Modern America. A History of a Conservative Subculture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 14.

## CHAPTER 2

### “*Wanderlust* got hold of him” *In Ostfriesland and Beyond*

Nicolaus Martin<sup>1</sup> Steffens was born on 13 March 1839, in the city of Emden in the northwestern part of Germany, in a region called Ostfriesland.<sup>2</sup> Emden is situated close to the Dutch northeastern border and is a well-known city in the history of the Dutch Reformed Church. In 1571 the first synod of exiled Dutch Reformed congregations was held there, and this gathering is commonly regarded as the first “national” synod of Reformed churches in the Netherlands.<sup>3</sup> This synod adopted a constitution for the Reformed churches in the Low Countries, which introduced a Presbyterian style of church government.

At the time Steffens was born, Emden had about twelve thousand inhabitants, and there still was a Reformed Church. This church held its

<sup>1</sup> Due to the fact that Steffens lived in different countries during his life, his name was spelled in different ways, as Nicolaus, Nicholaus, Nicolaas, or Nicholas, and Marten or Martin. I follow the spelling of his name on the only official document bearing his name that I have found, the Kampen certificate of 1864.

<sup>2</sup> Ostfriesland is East Friesland; East as compared to the province of Friesland in the northern part of the Netherlands in the West.

<sup>3</sup> See: D. Nauta, J. P. van Dooren and Otto J. de Jong eds., *De synode van Emden, oktober 1571. Een bundel opstellen ter gelegenheid van de vierhonderdjarige herdenking* (Kampen: Kok, 1971).



Fig. 1. Reformed Church of Emden before World War II, location of the present Johannes à Lasco Bibliothek  
(courtesy Johannes à Lasco Bibliothek)

services in *de Grote Kerk* or *Moederkerk* (mother church) of the Ostfrian Reformed churches, though the history of the ground-laying work of the sixteenth-century synod, and the refugees had been somewhat forgotten. But until the early eighteen hundreds, there was still a Dutch connection. Students went to Groningen in the Netherlands to study theology, and the language in church was Dutch. More relevant, however, to the Ostfrian situation of 1839 than a Dutch connection, was that the region had been under Prussian rule since 1744.

In the nineteenth century, nation states became important cultural entities, and since the cultural relevance of the Dutch republic diminished in the course of the eighteenth century, the Ostfrian orientation on the Netherlands became weaker. At first the reverse seemed to happen. The Prussians in 1806 lost their territories west of the Elbe River to Napoleon, and in 1807 the region became part of the Kingdom of Holland, including an active policy of Dutchification,<sup>4</sup> until it came under French rule in 1810. The Congress of Vienna in 1815 decided to bring this Prussian part of Germany under the rule of the Kingdom of Hanover.

Hanover ruled over Ostfriesland until in 1866 both this kingdom and Ostfriesland were annexed by Prussia again. Under French rule Emden had lost its privileges as a city, and they were not restored in 1815, leaving the small town with a great history and a small future.

<sup>4</sup> See for some illustrations of this policy, Arie Jan Gelderblom, “Traveller in Occupied Territory: Hebelius Potter in East-Frisia, 1808,” in *Niederländisch-Deutsche Kulturbeziehungen, 1600-1830*, Jan Konst, Inger Leemans, Bettina Noak, eds. (Göttingen: V&R Unipress, 2009), 75-86.

The Reformed people in Ostfriesland were more strongly oriented toward the Netherlands than their co-inhabitants. They did not expect any good from the Hanoverian government and tried to strengthen and secure their relationship with the Netherlands, claiming the freedom to study with Reformed theologians at Dutch universities, the continued use the Dutch language in their worship services (in Emden Reformed preachers preached in Dutch, Lutherans in German) as well as the securing of an impartial attitude toward their confessional tradition.<sup>5</sup> Their reluctant attitude toward the new rulers was the effect of the process of “*Eindeutschung*,” the shift of cultural orientation in Ostfriesland as a whole, and also in the *Grafschaft* (county) of Bentheim, south of Ostfriesland, from the Netherlands to the German nation state in the making. While Prussia had been tolerant of minorities, Hanover held on to a more consistent policy of unification. The resistance of the church against this policy was too weak to stop or change this.

Emden was to be dominantly Reformed. Steffens’ parents Karel Martin Steffens and Frauke Aykens (1805-1886)<sup>6</sup> had inherited the Reformed tradition, and their son was baptized in the local Reformed Church on 31 March 1839.<sup>7</sup> We don’t know if Steffens in his younger days heard stories about the famous Emden Synod, but it is remarkable that throughout his life, church order would play a crucial role in determining the Reformed character of the church. The suppression of the Dutch language (which immediately affected the liberties of the Reformed church because of its Dutch orientation) in the first decades of Hanoverian rule, may also have influenced his preference for a free church.

Under Hanoverian rule, it was not allowed to separate from the official church and found a free church. But under influence of the Secession in the Netherlands of 1834 and subsequent years, and inspired by Seceded Dutch preachers who visited Ostfriesland, like Rev. C. van den Oever from Rotterdam, free churches were founded there in the 1850s.<sup>8</sup> By that time Hanoverian authorities still prohibited missionary

<sup>5</sup> Hans-Georg Ulrichs, *Volkstheologie oder von der Freiheit anders zu Denken. Der Unterricht in der christlichen Religion bei Helias Meder (1761-1825)* (Göttingen: V&R Unipress, 2009), 373-74, 376.

<sup>6</sup> She died in Holland, Michigan; her tombstone at Pilgrim Home Cemetery says she died in 1885, but according to *De Hope*, 14 April 1886, she died on 10 April 1886.

<sup>7</sup> G. J. Beuker, *Gemeinde unter dem Kreuz. Altreformierte in Emden, 1856–2006* (Emden, 2006), 80.

<sup>8</sup> 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 *175 jaar Afscheiding van 1834*, George Harinck & Mees te Velde, eds. (Barneveld: De Vuurbaak, 2012), 192n7.



activities, but religious persecution was obsolete.<sup>9</sup> In the spring of 1856, a *Gereformeerde Kerk onder het Kruis* (Reformed Church under the Cross) was founded in Emden. The authorities did not allow this church to have a minister from the Netherlands, and in 1860 the church joined the group of *Altreformierte Kirchen* (Old Reformed Churches) in Bentheim. It is not clear why and when Steffens and his family joined this free church, but in 1863 he was registered as a member of this church that had from 150 to 200 members at that time.<sup>10</sup>

In 1856 a railway connection between Emden and Münster was opened, a technical and economic hallmark in the “*Eindeutschung*” process of Ostfriesland. Steffens attended the Emden municipal gymnasium, where only German was spoken, and his generation of Ostfrisians was no longer oriented toward the Netherlands. The Secession movement in the Netherlands had a bad name among the Ostfrisian population because it was Dutch.<sup>11</sup> In 1857 Steffens, only eighteen years old, became a teacher at a girls’ high school in Oldenburg, a town in between Emden and Bremen. Forty years later, his daughter Fanny would do the same; in 1892, at the age of twenty-one, she became a teacher at Northwestern Classical Academy in Orange City, Iowa, and after 1894 at the newly founded Pleasant Prairie College in German Valley, Illinois, for German-speaking students. Both schools were institutions of the Reformed Church in America (RCA).<sup>12</sup>

After two years of teaching, the *Wanderlust* got ahold of him. Steffens left Oldenburg and made a very different move. His local church belonged to the *Altreformierte Kirchen*, a small group of German Free Reformed churches. The same kinds of churches were in Switzerland, the Netherlands, and Scotland, and they kept in touch with each other. Maybe via these contacts or via the Irish Presbyterian missionary among the Jews in Hamburg, James Craig (1818-1899),<sup>13</sup> or via Baptists

<sup>9</sup> Ulrichs, “Wildes Zelotengeschrei,” 180: “Die hannoverschen Behörden scheinen bei den auswärtigen Predigern im Ganzen zwar genau hingeschaut zu haben, aber ihnen doch den Aufenthalt in Deutschland nicht grundsätzlich verunmöglicht zu haben. Betreuung der Separierten wurde geduldet, weitere Missionsarbeit jedoch nicht. Ein Verbot in Sachen Religion wäre einfach nicht mehr zeitgemäß gewesen, die Begrenzung der sektiererischen Umtriebe war allerdings staatszweckgemäß.”

<sup>10</sup> Beuker, *Altreformierte in Emden*, 55.

<sup>11</sup> Ulrichs, “Wildes Zelotengeschrei,” par. 5.3 and 5.4.

<sup>12</sup> Steffens preached on 17 October 1894 (in German) at the inauguration of Pleasant Prairie College. His son Cornelius, having completed his studies at Western Seminary that summer, declined the call to become its president. *De Hope*, 13 September 1894.

<sup>13</sup> See Jane P. Craig, *The Gospel on the Continent. Incidents in the life of James Craig, M.A., D.D., Ph.D.* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1895). Craig had worked in Hamburg since 1845 (p. 30) and started a church in 1862 (p. 182).



in Ostfriesland, Steffens may have learned about the missionary work of the Free Church of Scotland among the Jews in Constantinople (Istanbul).<sup>14</sup> The Scots were among the first in modern history to realize the importance of mission: “There was a peculiar correlation between the fight for independence from state influence . . . and the emergence of Jewish mission.”<sup>15</sup>

In Scotland, mission was considered the task of the church and not, like in England and the Netherlands, voluntary societies. The first stations for Jewish missions of the Church of Scotland were founded in Jassy, Moldavia (1840), and in Pest, Hungary (1841). In 1857 James Craig convinced the Dutchman Adriaan van AnDEL (born 1823)<sup>16</sup> to join the Scottish missionary station in Pest. Later stations were founded in Amsterdam, Breslau, Constantinople, and Prague (where Van AnDEL worked from 1864 until 1871), but Pest was the largest one. The work in Constantinople was carried on under great difficulties, which arose from the climate, the exorbitant rents, and the poverty of the Jews. But the station was important because of the number of Jews in that city, a predominantly orthodox Sephardic community,<sup>17</sup> and because it was a kind of center for the migratory Jews from Eastern Europe.<sup>18</sup>

In 1839 the twenty-year-old Steffens traveled to Constantinople in Turkey and taught at the Free Church’s Italian School for Jews in Galata, Constantinople. He came into direct contact with Jews and Muslims and would keep a keen interest in their religions throughout his life. In Constantinople he met Jane Graham Sutherland (22 March 1836 - January 1917), a Scottish woman from Perth and a member of the missions team, who was three years older than he. From the 1840s on, women in the Church of Scotland and also in the Free Church

<sup>14</sup> “Miss Elizabeth Whittet,” *De Hope*, 9 November 1887: The Scotsman R. M. M’Cheyne in 1839 made a trip to Palestine and other countries in the Middle East. The result was that the Free Church of Scotland decided to set up mission work among the Jews in Pest and Constantinople. Elizabeth Whittet, Rev. W. [O.] Allen (later minister of the Dutch Reformed Church at St. Thomas [1878-82]), and Dr. Alex Thomson went as the first missionary team. Whittet taught English to Italians in order to learn Italian, spoken by many Jews.

<sup>15</sup> Abraham Kovacs, *The History of the Free Church of Scotland’s Mission to the Jews in Budapest and its Impact on the Reformed Church of Hungary, 1841-1914* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2006), 35.

<sup>16</sup> Adriaan van AnDEL in 1857 became minister of the German Reformed Church in Pest; in 1864 he became minister in Prague, and from 1871, he was related to the Scottish Mission Church in Amsterdam.

<sup>17</sup> John S. Ross, *Time for Favour. Scottish Mission to the Jews, 1838-1852* (Stoke-on-Trent: Tentmaker Publications, 2011), 187.

<sup>18</sup> *The Free Church of Scotland Monthly Record*, 1 July 1864, p. 556.

in Scotland had been actively involved in missions among the Jews. Ladies associations focused on Jewish women and on education.<sup>19</sup> Jane Graham was sent out to the missionary work in Turkey by students of a Free Church school in Edinburgh. They raised the money for her expenses while she was there. Like Steffens she taught at the Free Church's Italian School (many Jews spoke Italian), maintained by the Edinburgh Ladies Association.<sup>20</sup> Later on Steffens was transferred to the German language school. They fell in love and were married in the mission chapel on 14 April 1862 by Rev. Rudolph Koenig, a licentiate of the Prussian Reformed church. Koenig had been appointed a Free Church missionary to the Jewish people in 1845 and resigned in 1890, having served in Constantinople until December 1863 and in Budapest to a German-speaking congregation; he died in 1894.

During his four years of missions and teaching work, Steffens decided to enter the ministry. He may have studied theology in Constantinople as an autodidact or under supervision of Koenig or others. In the spring of 1863, the young couple traveled to Emden, where they were registered as members of the *Altreformierte Gemeinde* on 14 June.<sup>21</sup> By that time the small denomination of the Old Reformed Church in Germany counted five congregations in the county of Bentheim (Emlichheim, Wilsum, Uelsen, Veldhausen en Bentheim), and between 1854 and 1862, five other, more loosely organized, congregations had been founded in Ostfriesland.<sup>22</sup> While the Reformed Church under Hanoverian pressure severed its ties with the Netherlands, after 1845 no Ostfrisian students enrolled at Groningen State University to study theology;<sup>23</sup> they reoriented to the South (thanks to the railway connection between Emden and Münster) and the East, whose small free church kept a close relationship with the Seceder Church in the Netherlands (named *Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerk* from 1869 on). This meant that this minority of Old Reformed Church members dissented not only ecclesiastically but also culturally from the mainstream in Ostfriesland.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Ross, *Time for Favour*, 82-83.

<sup>20</sup> This information adds up to what is mentioned in Beatrice de Graaf en Gert van Klinken, *Geschiedenis van de Theologische Universiteit in Kampen, 1854-2002* (Kampen: Kok, 2005), 46.

<sup>21</sup> *Lidmatenboek der Oud Gereformeerde Gemeente Emden*, at <http://www.altreformiert.de/beuker/index.htm>.

<sup>22</sup> Beuker, “German Oldreformed Emigration,” 101-2, mentions eight churches, but Gerrit Jan Beuker amended this amount in an email to the author, 12 June 2013.

<sup>23</sup> Ulrichs, *Volkstheologie*, 408.

<sup>24</sup> Ulrichs, “Wildes Zelotengeschrei,” par. 5.3.

As a result of the ongoing Dutch orientation of his church, Steffens focused on the Netherlands for his academic studies. At the end of August 1863, Steffens and his wife moved to Kampen,<sup>25</sup> where he on 10 September enrolled at the Theological Seminary (*Theologische School*) of this church; he was the sixth German student to enroll in Kampen since the school started in 1854, but he was the first from Ostfriesland. Other German students, like J. H. Vos (1826-1913) and H. Beuker (1834-1900), who would also emigrate and become ministers in the Christian Reformed Church (CRC),<sup>26</sup> had come from Bentheim. The first five German students had all left seminary before Steffens arrived. Presumably he had started his theological studies with Rev. Koenig in Istanbul, but he actually was an autodidact, not the product of a certain school or professor. Given, however, his “Gymnasium” education and his level of theological knowledge, Steffens was allowed to start his studies in the final year of the curriculum. He studied with, among others, Douwe Klazes Wielenga (1841-1902), who in 1883 would become professor at Kampen Theological Seminary, and Gerrit Klaas Hemkes (1838-1920), who from 1883 on would educate theological students of the Christian Reformed Church at its theological seminary in Grand Rapids. Steffens took his literary exam and his theological exams in the same week and graduated within a year on 19 July 1864—*cum laude*, according to some.<sup>27</sup>

Steffens accepted a call from the Old Reformed Church of Neermoor, close to Emden in Ostfriesland, and was ordained and installed on 9 October 1864. After a year he moved to the congregation

<sup>25</sup> According to the *Lidmatenboek* (membership book), they both left with an attestation of their local church to Kampen on 27 August 1863.

<sup>26</sup> For practical reasons, I use this name for this denomination, although it had several other names before it took this one as its official name.

<sup>27</sup> Steffens did his Kampen literary exam in Dutch, Latin, Greek, and Hebrew (including an essay on Hebrew literature) on 15 July 1864. All 14 candidates were admitted to the study of theology, but only he and W. Raman were admitted to the theological exam of the next days. Part of his theological exam was a sermon, in his case on John 6:66-68. Seven of eleven theological candidates were admitted to the ministry on 19 July. *Handelingen der achttienden vergadering van curatoren der Theologische School der Christelijke Afgescheidene Gereformeerde Kerk in Nederland, gehouden te Kampen, den 13<sup>e</sup> julij en volgg. dagen* (Kampen, 1864), 9-16.

The *cum laude* is mentioned by Beuker, *Gemeinde unter dem Kreuz*, 80. This judgment is not on the official document of Steffens’ exam that has been preserved in the Joint Archives of Holland, Michigan. Beuker included the *cum laude* when he read in an article by B. H. Lankamp in *Der Grenzboten*, 6 May 1951, that Steffens had passed his exam “*mit Auszeichnung*” (with excellence). Lankamp may have found this qualification in the synodical archives of the Old Reformed Church. I thank Berthold Bloemendal for this information.

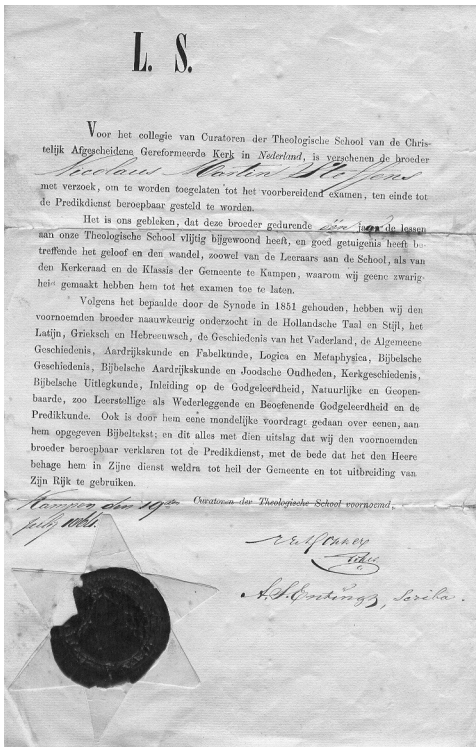


Fig. 2. Certificate of the preparatory exam by Steffens, from the board of superintendents of Kampen Theological Seminary, 19 July 1864 (Joint Archives of Holland, MI)

of Veldhausen in the German county of Bentheim, near Neuenhaus, where he was installed on 28 November 1865. A few months later he declined a call to the church of Amsterdam, not the least among the Dutch Seceder congregations.<sup>28</sup> But his heart was with the Old Reformed in Germany, and he accepted their calls. On 23 or 30 January 1870, he was installed as a minister in the *Altreformierte Kirche* in his native town Emden.

Being a bright man and having mastered several languages and traveled abroad, he in his church soon was the first in rank among his few fellow ministers. In the 1860s, he composed a church order for the Old Reformed Church, firmly based on the Dutch church order of Dordrecht, dating from the seventeenth century. This church order was adopted by the church in 1872.<sup>29</sup> In the introduction to this church order, the *Altreformierte Kirche* was presented as a free church, fully independent of the state. This presentation expressed Steffens' position

<sup>28</sup> *De Bazuin*, 16 March 1866.

<sup>29</sup> G. J. Beuker, *Umkehr und Erneuerung. Aus der Geschichte der Evangelisch-altreformierten Kirche in Niedersachsen, 1838-1988* (Uelsen: Synode der Evangelisch-altreformierten Kirche in Niedersachsen, 1988), 43.

and was adopted by his small church but was not undisputed among the larger Reformed community in Ostfriesland.<sup>30</sup>

From 1865 on, Steffens functioned as a theological teacher within his church and trained several young men for the ministry in his parsonages in Veldhausen and Emden. Two characteristics stand out in Steffens' early years as a minister: he strongly defended the separation of church and state, and in 1869, his church got exemption from taxation from the Prussian government. And secondly, he promoted a broad Reformed church and criticized secession on minor issues. These two characteristics found their expression in the name of the weekly he edited, *De Vrije Presbyteriaan* (the free presbyterian). He was outspoken in his opinions and was not afraid to confront a colleague, but he soon realized the Old Reformed platoon was too small to keep him, and he extended his contacts with other Reformed churches.

From the start of his pastorate in 1864, he reached out to congregations in Silesia<sup>31</sup> that he had visited prior to 1863. He founded a relationship between his Old Reformed Church and the Free Reformed congregations in Silesia, like Breslau, Görlitz, and Oderwitz, that had resulted from the mission to the Jews by the Scottish pastor Daniel Edwards.<sup>32</sup> In 1869 he attended the synod of the Dutch Seceder Church in Middelburg, the capital of the province of Zeeland, as an invited delegate of the Old Reformed Church. There the majority of the Dutch Seceder congregations that had been dissenting and quarreling since the late 1830s were united, and a new name for the denomination was adopted: *Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerk*. This was a development Steffens applauded, knowing from his own experience how important, but also how difficult it was to keep congregations tied together. Steffens addressed the synod and stressed the need of the Old Reformed Church for community and support.<sup>33</sup> He updated the synod on the congregations in Silesia and Rev. Hermann Matzke (1836-1887), who pastored the congregation of Görlitz, whereupon the synod decided to contact these churches.<sup>34</sup> His request to allow students without

<sup>30</sup> See F. M. A. Hölscher, *Die Altreformirte Kirche in der Grafschaft Bentheim und dem Fürstenthum Ostfriesland. Ihre Berechtigung oder Nichtberechtigung* (Lingen: Veldmann, 1883), 7-10.

<sup>31</sup> Beuker, *Altreformierte in Emden*, 155.

<sup>32</sup> From 1877 these two groups of churches issued a monthly, *Frohe Botschaft der Freien Evangelischen Kirche Deutschlands und der Altreformierten Kirche von Ostfriesland und Bentheim*. See Beuker, *Altreformierte in Emden*, 80.

<sup>33</sup> *Handelingen van de synode der Christelijke Afgescheidene Gereformeerde Kerk in Nederland, gehouden van den 16den tot den 23sten juni 1869 te Middelburg* (Kampen: Van Velzen, 1869), 11.

<sup>34</sup> *Handelingen*, 1869, 15.





Fig. 3. Synod of the *Christelijk Afscheidene Gereformeerde Kerk* at Middelburg, 16-23 June 1869. Steffens is seated on the first row, second from left. Sixth from left is Rev. C. van der Meulen.  
(Archives Protestantse Theologische Universiteit)

means from the Old Reformed Church to do their exams at Kampen Theological Seminary without the obligation to enroll was granted, as was his request to grant his church the right to consult the churches of the neighboring Dutch provinces Groningen, Drenthe, and Overijssel in cases it could not deal with independently.<sup>35</sup> At the synod meetings, Steffens met Rev. Cornelius Van der Meulen (1800-1876) from Zeeland, Michigan, who represented the Reformed Church that was affiliated with the *Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerk*.

Thanks to his experience in Constantinople and Kampen, Steffens could see clearly the context in which the small and fragile free churches in Germany had to operate. They would have a difficult time surviving on their own. He reached out to scattered Reformed congregations in Germany and tried to organize the Old Reformed Church, as well as to relate them to the much larger *Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerk* in the Netherlands and its seminary in Kampen.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 57-58. See on Steffens at the Middelburg Synod also H. van Veen, “Blikken . . . op verre van ons verwijderde oorden.’ De kerken van de Vereniging en haar buitenlandse contacten,” in *Vereniging in wederkeer. Opstellen over de Vereniging van 1892*, D. Deddens and M. te Velde, eds. (Barneveld: De Vuurbaak, 1992), 129-31.

## CHAPTER 3

“I knew what I did when I moved to America.”

*From Emden to Zeeland*

In the second half of the nineteenth century, many members of the Old Reformed Church immigrated to the United States, in total thirty percent of the congregation from Ostfriesland and fifteen percent from Bentheim.<sup>1</sup> And between 1854 and 1900, half of all the Ostfrisian pastors of the Old Reformed Church immigrated to America. It was hard to resist the exodus. Steffens' family was growing, and in 1871 their fifth child was born. Steffens' financial situation was weak, and the Old Reformed Church did not satisfy him. He decided to follow the emigrants, to the dismay of one of his elders: “He should bear his cross like others do. Therefore I see no reason for him to leave Emden.”<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Herbert J. Brinks, “Ostfrisians in two Worlds,” in *Perspectives on the Christian Reformed Church*, Peter De Klerk and Richard R. De Ridder, eds. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1983), 22-23.

<sup>2</sup> J. H. Schooneboom to Lankamp, n.d. [1872], “*Uns ist erzählt, das er [Steffens] aus verschiedenen Gründen den Ruf annehmen müsse oder werde. Erstens, weil er nur so wenig Früchte seiner Arbeit sehe. Das ist schmerzlich für den Pastor, der das Gute will aber keinen Segen sieht. Wer weiß, wie lange der Herr den Samen verbirgt in der guten Erde der Herzen, bevor er reiche Früchte trägt. Zweitens wäre sein Einkommen zu gering, um seinen Haushalt in Zukunft zu ernähren, der sich mit lieben Kindern vergrößert habe, die etwas lernen*”

Unlike the Dutch Seceders, most of Steffens' fellow emigrants from the Old Reformed Church joined the small denomination of the Christian Reformed Church, which had about eight thousand members in the early 1870s.<sup>3</sup> His emigrated colleagues J. B. De Beer (1819-1891, departed in 1866) and Klaas B. Weiland (1830-1917, departed in 1868) both started their American ministry in this denomination. But Steffens accepted a call from the German-speaking Reformed Church of Silver Creek, German Valley, on the prairies of northern Illinois.

The pulpit of the Reformed Church of Silver Creek, founded by Ostfrisians in 1851, became vacant in 1871. This church previously had made charges against the pastor of a neighboring congregation, and when these charges were refuted, the consistory had asked for counsel from the Classis Ostfriesland of the Old Reformed Church in Germany, with whom the congregation in Silver Creek was still associated. As a member of this classis, Steffens had sent the consistory his advice and counsel; in his letter, he had confirmed the charges and shown this formerly free congregation his appreciation for the Reformed Church in America. This is how Silver Creek came to know about Steffens and his positive attitude toward emigration. In the summer of 1871, consistory and congregation agreed to call Steffens to fill the upcoming vacancy. They offered him a salary of \$1,000, and they undertook the cost of his trip, some \$400. Steffens, fed up with the isolated character of his small denomination, accepted this call from a Reformed church. When a positive answer came in late December, the congregation expressed its happiness by ringing the church bell for an hour.<sup>4</sup>

In the early 1870s, the western branch of the Reformed Church, populated by Dutch and German immigrants, consisted of some eighty congregations and had close to twenty thousand members.<sup>5</sup> When Steffens migrated in 1872, about twenty Dutch Seceder ministers had preceded him in joining the Reformed Church, compared to twelve who joined the Christian Reformed Church. Steffens' choice of denomination was not remarkable.<sup>6</sup>

*(studieren) müssten. Ich weiß zwar nicht, wie viel er nötig hat, aber ich weiß: Der Mensch lebt nicht vom Brot allein. Pastor Steffens gehört auch zu den Menschen, die sich nicht zuviel versprechen dürfen von der Welt. Er muss wie andere sein Kreuz tragen. Deshalb sind das für mich keine Gründe, um Emden zu verlassen.*" The original letter was in Dutch and published in translation in Beuker, *Altreformierte in Emden*, 156.

<sup>3</sup> See "Appendix. Denominational statistics," in Bratt, *Dutch Calvinism in Modern America*, 222-23.

<sup>4</sup> George Schnucker, *The East Friesians in America. An illustrated history of their colonies in the present time* (Topeka, KS: Jostens, 1986), 138.

<sup>5</sup> Bratt, "Appendix," in *Dutch Calvinism in Modern America*, 222-23.

<sup>6</sup> George Harinck, "'Schuring die scheuring dreigt te worden.' De Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerk en de afscheiding in de Reformed Church in America vanwege



Steffens departed from his congregation in Emden on 11 April 1872.<sup>7</sup> The Steffens family, Nicolaus thirty-three years old and Jane thirty-six, with five children under ten,<sup>8</sup> traveled to Bremen that same week to cross the ocean on the steamer *Weser* (1867) of the *Norddeutscher Lloyd* carrying 657 emigrants and arriving at Castle Garden, New York, on 26 April.<sup>9</sup> It is not clear if members of his congregation joined him. Nicolaus and Jane Steffens and their children arrived in Silver Creek on 2 May, and he was installed as minister on 15 May. The first thing the congregation did was to build a large parsonage, a "little land castle," for the Steffens family.<sup>10</sup>

With a single exception his parishioners were all East Frisians, though he knew only a few of them personally. His pastorate activated the congregation, but he had a hard time combatting their pietism and vices, like beer drinking. He tried in vain to organize religious instruction of the youth. Overall he loved his East Frisians a lot. In 1873 he introduced annual mission fests, something new at that time in Reformed churches. From May until October 1875, he took a break from his pastorate in Silver Creek and worked in the Avenue B and Fifth Street German Reformed Church in New York, with Rev. Julius W. Geyer (1836-1914).<sup>11</sup> But he was glad to return to German Valley after six months. In 1878 he was called as pastor of the Reformed Church in Zeeland, Michigan. Zeeland at first had twice called Rev. Hendericus Beuker from the *Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerk* of Amsterdam in the Netherlands, but in vain. In June 1878 Steffens was called, and he

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de vrijmetselarij (1882)," in *175 jaar Afscheiding van 1834*, George Harinck and Mees te Velde, eds. (Barneveld: De Vuurbaak, 2012), 102-3.

<sup>7</sup> Beuker, *Altreformierte in Emden*, 160.

<sup>8</sup> Nicolaus and Jane Steffens had five children at that time: Karel (1863), Agnes Ewan (1864), Cornelius M. (1866), Mary E. (1868), and Fannie Aykens (1871). In the United States, they had three more children: Isabella G. (1874), John R. (c. 1877), and Jane C. (c. 1880). Jacob van Hinte, *Netherlanders in America: A Study of Emigration and Settlement in the 19th and 20th Centuries in the United States of America* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1985), on page 431 is mistaken in his statement that three sons of Steffens had fought in the Civil War in the third Dutch volunteers regiment.

<sup>9</sup> *New York Times*, 27 April 1872.

<sup>10</sup> Schnucker, *The East Friesians in America*, 139. In 1986 this house was still existent.

<sup>11</sup> It seems he went for some years to New York and then returned to Silver Creek, *De Hope*, 20 October 1875. Steffens of New York accepted the call of the Reformed Church of Silver Creek, IL, *De Hope*, 27 October 1875. Steffens' address was from now on: Baileyville, Ogle County, IL. Russell L. Gasero, ed., *Historical Directory of the Reformed Church in America, 1628-1992* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), gives as Steffens' congregations and dates: German Valley, IL—Silver Creek, 1872-78; New York, NY—Avenue B (German). Org. 1874; pas., 1877; Zeeland, MI, 1878-82; Holland, MI, 1883-84; supplied, 1884-91.

accepted. This was the beginning of a stay in western Michigan for seventeen years. He advised his Silver Creek congregation to call Rev. Hermann Matzke of the free congregation of Görlitz in Silesia, Germany. Steffens knew him from his Emden days, and he accepted the call that same year.<sup>12</sup>

Steffens' biography is marked by transitions, and he realized he had brought his children to a world entirely different from the world in which he had been born and had grown up, and where his family had lived for generations. In the summer of 1875, he wrote to someone in Ostfriesland: “Who knows if the Lord will open a way once more, so that I can work again in my fatherland. But maybe this is only a pious desire that will never be realized.”<sup>13</sup> He did stay in the United States, and in 1894 he reflected on the consequences of his decision more than two decades ago to emigrate:

I came to America when I was fully grown up. I knew what I did when I moved to America. I loved my fatherland, because my cradle had stood on its ground; I thank Germany for what I have become as a man. Moving with my family to America, I knew I transplanted my dynasty on new ground, uniting it with a new national life. I went to the country of my choice with melancholy, but convinced to be incorporated with my dynasty in that new people. I have never deplored my choice. But if I thus have become an American all over, so that I see only good over here, and only bad things in Germany? No, my friend. I have been a German for too long a time to become a fanatical American. My children are American; I am and stay till the end a German American.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>12</sup> On Matzke see Beuker, *Umkehr und Erneuerung*, 394 (his emigration is misdated on 1876).

<sup>13</sup> N. M. Steffens to N. N., n.d. (between May and October 1875). Archives of the Synod of the Evangelisch-altreformierten Kirche in Niedersachsen, Wilsum, quoted in Beuker, *Altreformierte in Emden*, 81: “Wer weiß, ob der Herr mir nicht noch einmal einen Weg öffnet, damit ich wieder in meinem Vaterland tätig sein darf. Aber vielleicht ist dies auch nur ein frommer Wunsch, der nie in Erfüllung gehen wird.”

<sup>14</sup> *De Hope*, 27 June 1894: “Ik kwam naar Amerika, toen ik volledig ontwikkeld was. Ik wist wat ik deed, toen ik naar Amerika verhuisde. Ik had mijn vaderland lief, want op zijn bodem had mijne wieg gestaan; Duitschland dank ik voor wat ik geworden ben als man. Met mijn huisgezin naar Amerika verhuizende, wist ik, dat ik mijn geslacht overplante op een nieuwen grond, hetzelfde vereenigende met een nieuw volksleven. Met weemoed ging ik naar het land mijner keuze, maar beslist, bij dat nieuwe volk met mijn geslacht ingelijfd te worden. Ik heb nooit berouw over die keuze gehad. Maar of ik dan in dien zin geheel en al Amerikaan geworden ben, dat ik hier niets dan goeds, in Duitschland niets dan kwaads ontdek? Neen, mijn vriend. Ik ben te lang Duitscher geweest om een dweepziek Amerikaan te worden. Mijn kinderen zijn Amerikaansch, ik ben en blijf tot aan het einde een Duitsch Amerikaan.” The translations are by the author and Nella and Earl Wm. Kennedy.

Steffens arrived in West Michigan some thirty years after the first Dutch settlers had founded the Holland colony. Dutch historian Hans Krabbendam has distinguished three phases in the nineteenth century development of the Dutch American immigrant communities in the Midwest. The first phase was dominated by the struggle to survive and ended about 1855. The second phase was one of development and growing confidence and ended at the time when important immigrant leaders died (in 1876 both Albertus C. Van Raalte [1811-1876] and Cornelius Van der Meulen), and Steffens in 1878 moved to Zeeland. Steffens was part of the third phase when limits of growth were experienced, and conservative attitudes grew stronger and were effective until the 1920s. This was the phase in which the Christian Reformed Church became more influential in the Dutch enclaves in the Midwest compared to the Reformed Church, differences or similarities between the American national culture and Dutch American immigrant culture were stressed, and aloofness or Americanization became part of the identities of these respective churches. This is the context in which Steffens operated during his years in Michigan.<sup>15</sup>

When Steffens started his work in Zeeland in the summer of 1878, he was thirty-nine years of age. The last of his eight children would be born two years later, when his wife Jane was forty-four years old. At that time there were about thirty-three thousand people in Ottawa County, and Zeeland had three thousand inhabitants. Zeeland was the largest town in the colony, but the town did not really grow in the next decades, and from 1885 on Holland would be the largest town in the neighborhood. Zeeland differed from Holland in that it was an all-Dutch community. With 230 families, the Reformed Church of Zeeland was the largest congregation of the Classis of Holland when Steffens arrived, representing about 15 percent of the classis as a whole.

Steffens started his ministry in the colony at a time of transition. One and a half years before, in November 1876, the acknowledged leader of the colony since 1847, Albertus Van Raalte, had died. Though Van Raalte's authority had been waning as the colony had grown in size and numbers, there was no one who officially claimed his position as leader and succeeded him, not during his life time, nor after 1876. The memory of Van Raalte was "a charm and a power"<sup>16</sup> among the

<sup>15</sup> Hans Krabbendam, "'Het is al heel veel als hij blijft, die hij was.' De relatie tussen behoudzucht en emigratie onder Nederlandse protestanten in het negentiende-eeuwse Amerika," *Religie en Samenleving* 6, no. 2 (September 2011), 180-81, about the third phase, esp. 184-86.

<sup>16</sup> *Acts and Proceedings of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America*, 14 June 1878-June 1881 (New York: Board of Publication of the RCA, 1881), 118.



Fig. 4. Nicolaus Martin Steffens  
(Joint Archives of Holland)

Dutch in the colony, and first steps were taken that would lead to a Van Raalte memorial cult.<sup>17</sup> In 1879 a black Van Raalte memorial stone was unveiled in his white Pillar Church in Holland. The question was: Now that Van Raalte has died, is there still such a position as “leader of the colony”? or had the colony already grown too large and become too diverse to have one leader? and was that the reason for the emergence of a cult of memory? How to proceed without Van Raalte.

There were more uncertainties. In 1878, in the month Steffens accepted the call to Zeeland, the General Synod of the Reformed Church requested the resignation of the theological professors at Hope College. A year before (the synod met annually in June), the synod had decided to suspend theological instruction at Hope College because of a lack of funds. Behind this financial reason was a conviction that the Reformed Church did not really need a second seminary besides New Brunswick Theological Seminary in New Jersey.

The decision of 1877 to suspend theological instruction at Hope College had already “passed like an electric shock”<sup>18</sup> through the Dutch congregations of the Particular Synod of Chicago, consisting of the classes Holland, Grand River, Michigan, Illinois, and Wisconsin, and

<sup>17</sup> *De Hope*, 30 April 1879. Michael J. Douma, “Memory and the Myth of Van Raalte: How Holland, Michigan, Remembers its Founding Father,” *Michigan Historical Review* 36, no. 2 (2010), 37-62.

<sup>18</sup> See Henry E. Dosker, quoted in Dennis N. Voskuil, “The Vexed Question: Hope College and Theological Education in the West,” in *A Goodly Heritage. Essays in honor of the Reverend Dr. Elton J. Bruins*, Jacob E. Nyenhuis, ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 359.

now this request for resignation seemed the final blow to the future of theological instruction in the West. The vast majority of the immigrant Hollanders believed a school of theological instruction of their own was a necessity for their survival as a group. Uncertainty crept in: Did they have to survive *as a group*? And distrust grew among them as well: Did the Eastern churches really care about the churches in the West? Hope College was still there, but it was clear that the education of ministers had been the primary motive behind the educational drive of Hollanders in the past decade: “It was intended and hoped that the college be a seminary of evangelical religion.” Rev. Isaac N. Wyckoff (1792-1869) had expressed this sentiment of the immigrants in his inaugural oration in 1866. How could the immigrants stay Reformed in the Dutch tradition when their ministers were trained at New Brunswick Theological Seminary, where no Dutch was spoken, and where the religious baggage of the fatherland—Dutch Reformed theologians like Wilhelmus à Brakel (1635-1711) and Bernard Smytegelt (1665-1739)—was fully unknown?<sup>19</sup>

The synodical decision had been made at an unfortunate moment. The small group of churches that had seceded from the Classis of Holland in 1857, and which would eventually be named the Christian Reformed Church, had started their own theological seminary in Grand Rapids in 1876; they had ten students at the time theological education at Hope College was suspended. In 1879 Kampen Theological Seminary in the Netherlands celebrated its twenty-fifth anniversary with thirty theological students enrolled, a strong reminder to many former members of the Dutch Seceder Church in the Reformed Church just how inspiring and unifying a seminary could be, as well as a real impetus to the well-being and unity of a church.

Another year later, in 1880, in Amsterdam, Vrije Universiteit (Free University), essentially a theological school in the early days, was founded, because the theological education at the state universities had gone astray, according to its Reformed founders. Three Reformed theological institutions, which were sister seminaries to the theological instruction at Hope College, were celebrating their freedom and stressing the importance of a vital church. It was at this time that theological education at Hope College was discontinued. This was a slap in the

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<sup>19</sup> See for the popularity of these theologians in the first decades of Dutch American emigration, George Harinck, “D. J. Doornink and the Early Years of the Dutch-American Book Selling Trade (1860 to 1880),” in *Across Borders: Dutch Migration to North America and Australia*, Jacob E. Nyenhuis, Suzanne M. Sinke, and Robert P. Swierenga, eds. (Holland: Van Raalte Press, 2010), 125-27.

face to the Reformed Church in the West. What could be done by these churches to reverse this unhappy course of events? Or was there no way back? Had the western branch of the Reformed Church given in to the next phase of Americanization and sent its pupils to New Brunswick Theological Seminary?

Steffens arrived in the midst of this turmoil with an outsider's perspective. He had started his career as a pastor in Germany in a church without a leader and which lacked a proper theological school. At the 1869 synod of the *Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerk* in Middelburg, he had opened the door for students from his denomination to Kampen Theological Seminary. But that was a decade ago, and in Germany. How would he act in this situation?

Steffens cherished educational institutions. He had founded a provisional theological school in Veldhausen, Germany, and he was one of the first in the United States to offer his support to the Dutch theologian Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920) and his initiative of Free (in 2005 VU) University in Amsterdam. Shortly after this institution had opened its doors, he wrote in his first letter to Kuyper: “For some time I have been thinking whether we could do something to help, especially in the matter of ‘the Free University,’ but the circumstances at the moment are so unfavorable, that we cannot get a start on that project.”<sup>20</sup> Reformed Michigan first had to mind its own ministerial education.

Steffens' main task was to pastor his congregation in Zeeland. He was appreciated as a solid Reformed preacher. A Dutch building contractor, Johannes van Dijk (1856-1945) from Ferwerderadeel, visited Zeeland in 1881 and went to Steffens' church. In his diary he gave an impression:

On Sunday 29 May, I for the first time could go to church with the coongregation. . . . In the village was a large stable, where everyone stalled his horse, and where I sometimes counted 60 horses. The Dutch Reformed Church is a wooden church and I guess it can keep 600 to 700 persons. Rev. Steffens preached in it, and he stood on a platform with a couch behind him. . . . I was very pleased with Rev. Steffens, and he preached in line with the Reformed teachings.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>20</sup> N. M. Steffens to A. Kuyper, 22 May 1882: “Reeds sedert geruimen tijd heb ik er aan gedacht, of wij niet iets konden doen om u te helpen vooral in zake ‘de Vrije Universiteit,’ maar de tijdsgelegenheid is voor het oogenblik zoo ongunstig, dat wij er niet mede kunnen beginnen,” *Abraham Kuyper Papers*, Historical Documentation Center for Dutch Protestantism, VU University Amsterdam (HDC).

<sup>21</sup> “Des Zondags 29 Mei kon ik dan weer voor het eerst met de gemeente opgaan na het kerkgebouw. Hoewel wij maar een half uur van Zeeland afwoonden, moesten





Fig. 5. Zeeland Reformed Church (*Joint Archives of Holland*)

He turned out to be an effective administrator as well. Steffens' star in the colony soon rose. The General Synod of the Reformed Church appointed Steffens in 1880 as a member of the Council of Hope College,<sup>22</sup> and this council elected him as president in 1883 and 1884.<sup>23</sup> In 1881 he was the president of the Particular Synod of Chicago. Far more visible to the average church member, however, was that when the editors of *De Hope* in 1879 asked for new contributors to their weekly church paper, Steffens turned up. He could write in Dutch (actually, he was a polyglot), and he had a clear style and well-grounded opinions. Steffens started contributing devotionals and theological articles to *De Hope* but soon turned to church politics as well. In the church, as well as in education and the press, Steffens assumed his responsibilities.

wij echter rijden. In het dorp was eene groote stal waar ieder zijn paard in zette, en waar ik soms wel 60 paarden telde. De kerk nl. de Dutch Reformed is van hout en kan na mijn taxatie pl. m. 600 a 700 personen bevatten. Ds. Steffens preekte er in, en stond op een platform waarachter een Canapé. . . . Ds. Steffens voldeed ons zeer goed, en verkondigde de waarheid volgens de Gereformeerde leer." Reisverslag van Johannes van Dijk, aannemer te Ferwerd, Friesland, transcript. Van Dijk traveled in the United States from May until November 1881. In 1886 he described his experiences in two notebooks. The original has been lost. Later on Johannes van Dijk was architect of the municipality of Ferwerderadeel in Friesland. I thank his great-grandson Cees J. van Dijk for sending me the transcript.

<sup>22</sup> *Acts 1880*, 462; *Acts 1881*, 740. Steffens was for the first time present at the consistory meeting of 22-24 June 1880. *De Hope*, 14 July 1880: "De Westersche leden waren, op twee na, allen tegenwoordig. Rev. N. M. Steffens, door de jongste synode aangesteld om de vacature aan te vullen, veroorzaakt door het bedanken van Rev. Dr. Duryea [William R. Duryee], was de vertegenwoordiger der Oostersche leden."

<sup>23</sup> *Acts 1884*, 510; *Acts 1885*, 720. On accepting his appointment to the chair of theology, Steffens resigned his position on the Council of Hope College.

He arrived in the heartland of the Dutch immigrants, and within a few years this German was at the helm. Twenty-nine sons of the Dutch immigrants in the Midwest had graduated as theologians from New Brunswick since 1850.<sup>24</sup> Would Steffens turn the tide and build a theological institution that would stand the vicissitudes of the times and supply ministers for the Reformed Church in the West?

<sup>24</sup> Elton J. Bruins, “The Contribution of the Theological Seminary in New Brunswick to the Church in the West, 1850-1884,” *Reformed Review* 13, no. 2 (September 1959): 45.



## CHAPTER 4

“He could work here with better effect than somewhere else.”

*The Masonic controversy and after*

Steffens was a German American, but he fully identified himself with the Dutch Reformed Church he served. And he proved his loyalty too. In 1882 his congregation in Zeeland was seriously damaged by an exodus of almost half the families. This was the final result of dissatisfaction over the way the General Synod had dealt with requests from the western classes to condemn membership in Masonic lodges and exclude these members (with a few exceptions all easterners, and especially ministers) from the church. In June 1879 this simmering discontent surfaced when ex-Mason Edmond Ronayne (1832-1911), author of several books against Freemasonry, gave a series of lectures against Freemasonry in Holland's First Reformed Church, the Pillar Church, that were well received: “Reaction in Holland was electrifying . . . and magazines and newspapers also dealt with the question, and thus it was kept alive in church and town.”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Michael De Vries and Harry Boonstra, *Pillar Church in the Van Raalte Era* (Holland: Pillar CRC, 2003), 128. In 1879 and 1880 two publications by Ronayne were translated and published in Dutch: *Handboek der vrijmetselarij. Bevattende eene volledige voorstelling van den eersten, tweeden en derden graad* (n.p., n.d.) translated by R. H. Joldersma and J. T. Kommers; and *Edmond Ronayne over vrijmetselarij. Drie*

When in the 1870s discontent with the Eastern churches had grown, quite a few members of the Reformed Church in the West became more appreciative of the Christian Reformed Church. This small church had more or less been overlooked within the Reformed Church after the split of 1857, but it had been growing fast in the 1870s,<sup>2</sup> and at about 1880 it became an attractive alternative to discontented members of the Reformed Church of the East. Impotent irritation over the way the synod had aborted theological instruction at Hope College found an escape route in ostracizing Masonry. In this context the Christian Reformed Church made a positive impression on some in the Reformed Church. While there was room for a more nuanced view on Freemasonry in the Reformed Church in the West, the Christian Reformed Church in general took a more confrontational stand against Freemasonry.<sup>3</sup> In the late 1870s, tensions in the West developed on this issue, as New Brunswick Seminary student Henry E. Dosker (1855-1926) wrote to his friend Herman Bavinck (1854-1921) in the Netherlands:

In the church we approach a battle on Freemasonry. More serious research guided me to a total rejection of this evil. [Rev. Roelof] Pieters, who was the leader of the movement, is dead. It is hard to convince the people, who only feel and do not reason, that moderation is the only successful way. Our seceded brothers [the CRC] of course hope for great things.<sup>4</sup>

When the General Synod in June 1880 did not declare lodge membership a reason for discipline, as the churches of the West had

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*lezingen* (Grand Rapids: De Standaard Drukkerij, [1880]). The last publication was based on three lectures delivered in Grand Rapids, 26-28 January 1880. See for this controversy in general: Harry Boonstra, *The Dutch Equation in the RCA Freemasonry Controversy, 1865-1885* (Holland: Van Raalte Press, 2008).

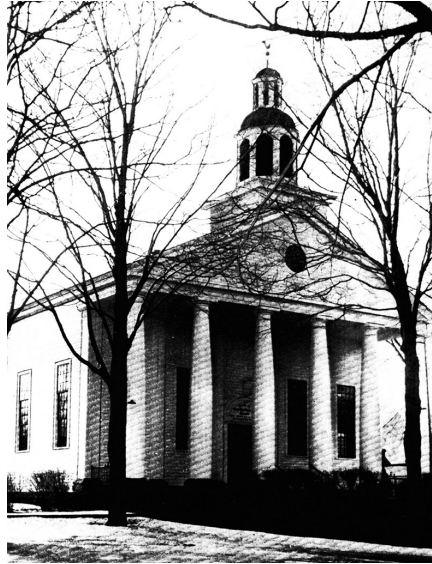
<sup>2</sup> The difference in cumulative growth rates of the CRC and immigrant classes of the RCA in the 1870s is striking. The rate of the CRC in the years 1873-75 and the years 1875-81 was 41 and 116, whereas the RCA rates in the same years were only 18 and 22. Elton J. Bruins and Robert P. Swierenga, *Family Quarrels in the Dutch Reformed Churches of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. The Pillar Church Sesquicentennial Lectures* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 104.

<sup>3</sup> Boonstra, *The Dutch Equation*, 23-24.

<sup>4</sup> Henry E. Dosker to Herman Bavinck, 27 March 1880: “Op kerkelijk gebied gaan wij hier een strijd tegemoet over vrijmetselarij. Door dieper onderzoek ben ik geleid om mij volmondig tegen dat kwaad te verklaren. Pieters, die de leider der beweging was, is dood. 't Valt moeilijk voor het volk, dat alleen voelt, niet redeneert, te overtuigen dat gematigdheid de eenige weg van succes is. Onze afgescheiden broeders hopen natuurlijk op groote dingen. Ik betwijfel echter zeer of zij die hoop verwerkelijkt zullen zien.” *Bavinck Papers*, HDC.

R. Pieters was the minister of First Reformed Church in Holland and had died a month before Dosker wrote this letter.

Fig. 6. Pillar Church, Holland, MI  
(Joint Archives of Holland)



requested, crisis broke out. Forty percent of the 245 families of Steffens' Zeeland Reformed Church left, most of them transferring to the local Christian Reformed Church.<sup>5</sup> The situation in the First Reformed Church of Holland was even worse: this church was vacant due to the death of Rev. Roelof Pieters (1825-1880), and without a minister present, the congregation in 1882 lost not only the vast majority of its forty families but also the Pillar Church building, which as mother church of the Reformed Church in Michigan was a structure with an iconic value. No more than a remnant was left (Isaiah 10:21).<sup>6</sup>

The Reformed Church was baffled. Steffens stayed calm amidst a storm of emotions and explained in *De Hope* that dissatisfaction with a single decision by a synod of a church that was Reformed in doctrine and government was no valid reason to secede from the denomination. He had already made his position clear in the meeting of the Classis of Holland of October 1880. This classis had been dissatisfied with the General Synod's resolution that "no communicant member, and no minister of the Reformed Church in America ought to unite with or to remain in any society or institution, whether secret or open, whose principles and practices are anti-Christian, or contrary to the faith and practice of the Church to which he belongs."<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup> See *De Hope*, 20 April 1881; 17 April 1883.

<sup>6</sup> *De Hope*, 15 April 1884.

<sup>7</sup> *Acts 1880*, 536.

The reason for the classis' dissatisfaction was that the synod also resolved that it “cannot properly give its official testimony for or against Free Masonry,” because “it holds as sacred the indefeasible right of all its ministers and members to their individual conscientious convictions and liberty of speech and action.” The synod therefore cautioned the consistories and classes “against setting up any new or unauthorized tests of communion in the Christian Church.” The synod required consistories and classes to be “strictly constitutional in their dealings with individuals on this subject.”<sup>8</sup> The churches in the West in general wanted the synod to discipline lodge members, but membership of a lodge as such could not be a reason for excommunication, as the synod's statements made clear. The western churches were disappointed, as a committee of the Classis of Holland expressed in the fall of 1880: “It grieves us greatly that Synod has added a warning against the adding of new stipulations of membership in the congregation. . . . This would mean that Freemasons must be tolerated in the Church.”<sup>9</sup> Steffens explained to his classis that the synod could never have decided as it had wanted to. It was a principle in Reformed church order that discipline was not common and general but rather individual and explicit. If the synod would have decided in such a general way as proposed by western churches, it would have added new criteria to membership of the Reformed Church. In that way there was no end to adding new criteria. Why then not also officially exclude socialists or anti-prohibitionists?

In the United States the conflict was monitored by fellow members of the Reformed tradition, like the Presbyterians. Rev. Talbot W. Chambers (1819-1896) of New York, a minister in the Reformed Church with Presbyterian leanings, covered the Masonic controversy in the *Presbyterian Review*. He sympathized with the decision of the Synod of 1880: “If Masonry be an evil, it belongs to that class of evils which the church must remove indirectly, by moral means, and not by formal process and censure.”<sup>10</sup> Though he predicted that agitation against this decision would produce harm rather than good, he sided with the members of the synod when western congregations left the Reformed Church: “It is not easy to see how they could do otherwise. A great principle was at stake, and it is better to suffer a conceivable loss than to make new terms of communion.”<sup>11</sup>

This issue is a classic case in Reformed church order, and it surfaced again for example in the 1930s in the Netherlands when the

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 535-36.

<sup>9</sup> Quoted in Boonstra, *The Dutch Equation*, 24.

<sup>10</sup> *Presbyterian Review* 1 (1880): 734.

<sup>11</sup> *Presbyterian Review* 3 (1882): 762.

issue had been raised if the General Synod of the Reformed Churches should speak out against membership of national socialist and pacifist political parties. Until then, the Dutch synod had been reluctant to speak out in general against membership of specific organizations, but this time, in 1936, the synod did. In the Reformed tradition, however, this was the exception to the rule.

Steffens was on firm ground within the tradition of Reformed church order when he in the classis meeting of October 1880 dissented from the classis committee's dissatisfaction with the synod's decision and handed in a minority committee report on his own. He defended his minority position by explaining that a synod of the Reformed Church would have the right to add new criteria to church membership only by changing its constitution. Steffens realistically pointed out, that in the case of Freemasonry, the church clearly was not ripe for such a decision and that, if the request of the classis to condemn Freemasonry would be adopted, this would erode instead of preserve the Reformed character of the church. Freemasonry should not be outlawed by stricter rules but rather by convincing the lodge members of the incompatibility of Freemasonry with the Christian faith. Steffens also expressed at this classis meeting of 1880 his opinion that opposition to the synod was nothing but preparation for separation of the Reformed Church. He suggested to issue brochures against Freemasonry instead and proposed to deal with Freemasonry only in individual cases of explicit misbehaving. But his minority report was rejected by a vast majority (17 to 5) of the classis.

In the end about ten percent of Reformed Church members in western Michigan joined the Christian Reformed Church in the early 1880s. Steffens and his defense of the General Synod's position may have restricted the loss of members, but indicators are lacking.<sup>12</sup> In 1885 the Reformed Church in the West—the Particular Synod of Chicago—and the Christian Reformed Church both had about twenty-one thousand members.<sup>13</sup> The Christian Reformed Church could no longer be overlooked, and the Reformed Church had lost its dominant role in the Dutch communities of the West, not only numerically but also, as would soon turn out, culturally. As an act of sympathy with the ailing western branch of the Reformed Church, the General Synod convened in Grand Rapids in 1884.

<sup>12</sup> Van Hinte, *Nederlanders in Amerika*, 1:409, suggests that strong action by educated ministers, led by Steffens, restricted the number of seceding congregations.

<sup>13</sup> Bratt, *Dutch Calvinism in Modern America*, 223. The Reformed Church as a whole counted 82,000 members in 1884.

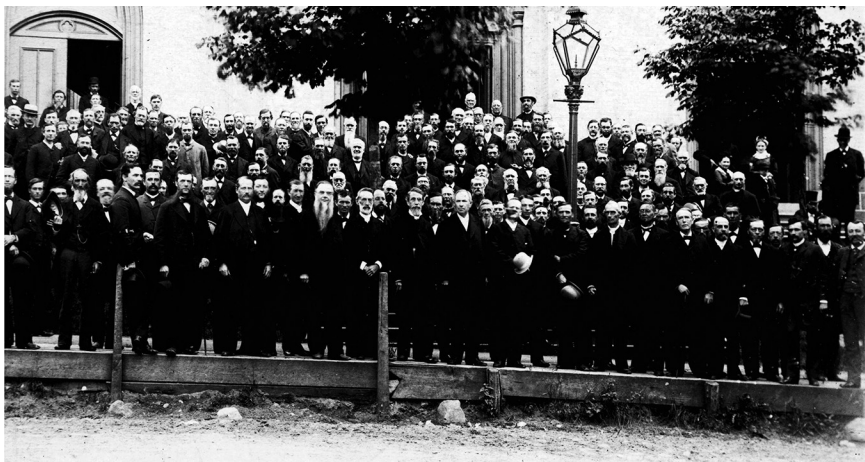


Fig. 7. Members of the 1884 General Synod of the RCA, during their visit to Hope College, June 1884 (*Joint Archives of Holland*)

The church split in Holland's first church was the most dramatic of all the splits in the early 1880s, not so much because of the extent, but because it happened in Van Raalte's Pillar Church, the mother church of the colony.<sup>14</sup> Because this church had been vacant since Rev. Pieters' untimely death in February 1880, the Classis of Holland had appointed Steffens as adviser to Pillar Church, and in this role, he was the eye of the storm in this congregation on the evening of Monday, 27 February 1882. In August 1880 the consistory of Pillar Church had decided "not to submit to the decisions of the Synod"<sup>15</sup> in the Freemasonry issue, and had since been considering the possibility to separate from the Reformed Church. That night, at a meeting of the congregation in Pillar Church, with Steffens as adviser, the congregation decided by a vote by the male members of eighty-six to eighteen (and 3 undecided) to break away from the Reformed Church. Right after this meeting was closed, Steffens raised his voice and asked the minority of loyal members to stay and together consider this new situation. Members of the majority objected, and with great difficulty the crowd was prevented from throwing Steffens out of the church. According to an eyewitness the shouting within the church was so loud that you could hear it on the next block.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>14</sup> See Bruins and Swierenga, *Family Quarrels*, 128-30.

<sup>15</sup> Consistory Minutes, 16 August 1880, quoted in De Vries and Boonstra, *Pillar Church*, 129.

<sup>16</sup> *De Hope*, 15 March 1882. The eyewitness was Hope College professor Dr. Gerrit Jan Kollen (1843-1915), who was married to Van Raalte's daughter Maria Wilhelmina. See also the account in De Vries and Boonstra, *Pillar Church*, 130-32,



Nonetheless Steffens succeeded amidst all the turmoil in meeting inside the building with the minority. This small group decided to act according to the rules of the church order and call on the classis. This classis convened the next week but was prevented by the majority group from gathering in the Pillar Church; they had to move out and convene in Third Reformed Church instead. This classis meeting could do nothing but face the facts: the mother congregation of the Reformed Church had split, and the building was in the hands of the majority. Pillar Church was lost to the rebels. In 1884 the majority group joined the Christian Reformed Church—including the iconic church building. This transition of the mother church to the Christian Reformed Church symbolized the tarnishing of the Reformed Church.

They were lost to the rebels, for rebels they were in Steffens' opinion. He was deeply disappointed over the secessions and decided to accept the call of the little flock in Holland in dire need and leave Zeeland. On 8 January 1883 he was installed as minister of the First Reformed Church in Holland, no longer gathering in the Pillar Church but in the Hope College chapel. This chapel was the provisional location of the congregation, where the sense of loss would be in the air for years to come.

Steffens moved to Holland. Now this German American was in Van Raalte's place; the robe of the leader had fallen around his shoulders at a critical moment in the colony's history. Would he stand up as leader, keep the Dutch American community from falling apart, and restore the self-confidence of the Reformed Church? The first signs were promising. In June 1883 the General Synod of the Reformed Church decided to restore theological instruction in Holland under strict financial conditions, and a year later this body appointed Steffens as the first professor of dogmatic and polemical theology at what he himself preferred to call "Hope Seminary," although the formal name was Western Theological Seminary. In his acceptance address at synod, Steffens recalled that in the synod's discussions about the seminary, one of the members said that a faculty with only one professor was "a caricature of an educational institution." But Steffens had been acquainted with such a situation since his days at the parsonage school in Veldhausen in Germany, and he accepted the call wholeheartedly. De Hope reported that he was "very grateful that he could work among the people, with whom he lived for several years now. He was a Western man and believed he could work here with better effect than somewhere else."<sup>17</sup> He assumed his teaching position in about the same year his

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<sup>17</sup> *De Hope*, 17 June 1884: He was "ten hoogste dankbaar, dat hij nu arbeiden kon

former fellow students in Kampen, Wielenga, and Hemkes, started their careers training Reformed ministers at the seminary of the Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerk in Kampen and at the theological seminary of the Christian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids respectively

onder het volk, onder wie hij eenige jaren gewoond had. Hij was een Westersch man, en geloofde dat hij hier met beter gevolg kon werken, dan ergens elders.”



## CHAPTER 5

### “No one may require from us that we leave *the East*.” *Free Churches and Reformed Fissures*

For the next eleven years Steffens taught at the seminary; preached in Reformed churches in Michigan, Illinois, and Iowa; published in *De Hope* and elsewhere; and acted as a part-time pastor to the small congregation of the First Reformed Church in Holland, until in 1891 Rev. Jacob Van Houte (1845-1919) accepted a call from this congregation. But when Van Houte fell ill, as was quite often the case, Steffens stepped in and preached in his place. The minister of Third Reformed Church in Holland, Rev. Henry Dosker, also had health problems on a regular basis, and he too could rely on Steffens to lead a service in his church in his place. We don't know much about Steffens' sermons,<sup>1</sup> but taking into consideration that he was invited to preach week in and week out, we trust he did a good job in the pulpit. If he did not love to preach, he did consider it a duty he had to fulfill Sunday after Sunday.

<sup>1</sup> Some have been printed, such as *De verhouding der kerk tegenover de tweede komst van Jezus. Leerrede over Matth. 25:1-13 uitgesproken door N.M. Steffens, bedienaar des Goddelijken woords te Veldhuizen, Nieuwenhuis* (Neuenhaus, 1866); *Een twaalfstal maandelijksche leerredenen* (Neuenhaus, 1868).

This sounds like a monotonous life in a forgotten corner in the Midwest. But was it? After having lived in cities and hamlets in Germany, Turkey, the Netherlands, and the United States, he felt at home in the town that, although it could not match New York or Veldhausen, may have reminded him of his native town, the predominantly Reformed harbor place Emden. And the monotony was dear to him; he gave Holland and Hope the best he had to offer. When in September 1889 his twenty-five years of service in the ministry were commemorated, he recalled he had not missed one Sunday in the pulpit in all these years—except for five times—but then he was at sea.<sup>2</sup>

In March 1892, however, he was in bed for several Sundays at a stretch because of a severe influenza that killed quite a few people in Holland. His health was strong, but in growing older over the years, his strength had weakened. First Church offered him a walking stick at the quarter centennial of his ministry. Its golden top could not conceal the fact that old age was on its way, Steffens being only fifty years old at the time.

He may have used the walking stick to cross his territory in Holland. The focal points in his world were his home at the southwest corner of Ninth Street and Columbia Avenue (at the location of the present Dykstra Hall); Oggel House of Hope College, right behind his home on the corner of Columbia Avenue and Tenth Street (at the location of the present Phelps Hall), where the seminary students had their classes; and Hope College Chapel, just south of Van Vleck Hall, which housed about twenty students and the college library, until Graves Hall opened in 1893.

Steffens liked to be in the classroom on weekdays and in one of the Reformed pulpits on Sunday, but his home was his castle. “It was in his home that he found his greatest happiness,” his son Cornelius M. (1866-1933) said.<sup>3</sup> He often wrote in *De Hope* about the importance of family life. This may have surprised the subscribers of *De Hope* who read week after week that Steffens preached in Kalamazoo, Grand Rapids, Muskegon, or elsewhere, and that he went on vacation to Wisconsin or Iowa on his own, especially when his children were young. But in his travel accounts in *De Hope*, he once complained about dining in restaurants and confessed his love for the simple dining room at home: “I know all the faces that gather with me round the table. And if I invite someone, who only now and then shares the table, he is not a stranger

<sup>2</sup> *De Hope*, 4 September 1889.

<sup>3</sup> *In memoriam. The Rev. Nicholas M. Steffens, DD., LL.D. Professor of Theology at the Western Theological Seminary Holland, Michigan* (n.p., n.d.)

and does not disturb the harmony of family life.”<sup>4</sup> The Steffens family used to spend their vacation with family in German Valley, Illinois. His family was dear to him. When he died, his son Cornelius wrote: “Each week he would write a letter to one of his children.”

Another sign of his thriving family life is the fact that his children loved to return home after they had left and lived in Chicago, Roseland, Orange City, or German Valley, and that they often brought friends with them. And Steffens opened his home to Frederik (1866-1933), a son of Abraham Kuyper, who lived some years in the United States from 1886 on and spent several holidays in Steffens’ home.<sup>5</sup> Often relatives stayed in Steffens’ house for the summer or at Christmas. His daughter Frances Aykens (Fanny) (1871-1954), who in the early 1890s lived with Henry Hospers’ (1830-1901) family in Iowa, regularly took two Hospers girls to her parents’ home. In 1890 his eldest daughter Agnes Ewan (1864-1929) married Peter Wallace Holleman (1860-1940), a medical doctor in Roseland, so a trip of Steffens to the West would include a stop of one or more days at their home.

To the Dutch in Holland, the Steffenses were a bit aloof, not familiar like family. When in the spring of 1895 two students of Kampen Theological Seminary, who studied at Princeton Theological Seminary in the academic year 1894-95, made a trip to Michigan and were looking for a place in Holland to stay, the Christian Reformed minister of Holland, Kornelis van Goor (1848-1914), advised them not to stay with the Steffens family, because the Steffenses would not have the same feeling for the Dutch as a Dutch American family would have and because the family was stiff in its manners.<sup>6</sup> The Steffenses were close friends with the managing director of *De Hope*, Rokus Kanters (1826-1899), but I don’t know of many other friends. Henry Dosker said that “comparatively few men knew him intimately.”<sup>7</sup> He also noted that Steffens’ judgment of other people and their work in general lacked appreciation and that he had difficulty accepting others’ criticism of him.<sup>8</sup> It seems that Steffens was in many aspects not an easy

<sup>4</sup> N. M. Steffens, “Eene mijmering in eene eetzaal,” *De Hope*, 20 July 1892.

<sup>5</sup> See Steffens to Kuyper, 7 May 1886, 4 January 1888, 27 October 1888, 1 December 1888, 25 January 1891, 25 April 1891, and 30 December 1892, *Kuyper Papers*.

<sup>6</sup> K. van Goor to G. Wielenga, 11 March 1895: “En nu kunt gij natuurlijk, als hij [Steffens] het u aanbiedt, wat van zelf is, ten zijnent logeeren. Maar, vergun het mij te zeggen, a. zij zijn oud; b. zij kunnen niet voor Nederlanders gevoelen als wij; en c. zij zijn meer verengelscht en stijf, terwijl hij bovendien zijn dagelijksche colleges heeft,” *G. Wielenga Papers*, HDC. In 1908 Herman Bavinck and his wife stayed with the Steffenses, see: V. Hepp, *Dr. Herman Bavinck* (Amsterdam: Ten Have, 1921), 302.

<sup>7</sup> H. E. Dosker, *In memoriam*.

<sup>8</sup> Dosker to Bavinck, 21 December 1892, “Voor het goede heeft St.[effens] weinig oog,

man. He had a harmonious family, but as a family not originating in the Netherlands, they lived somewhat secluded from the Dutch within the community of Hope College and the Reformed Church.

Let us return to Steffens' leadership in the Reformed Church of the West. Steffens started his work in the church in Holland and at Western Seminary in a divided community. The line of his argument against the church split was closely related to his view of the Reformed tradition. He stressed that the Reformed tradition was much wider and yet less defined than many people thought it was. Traditions change over time, and he warned his fellow believers against the idea of having discovered the archetypical way of governing the church. Depending on the political situation among other things, the government of the Reformed church differed per nation and per century.<sup>9</sup> He did defend the model of a free church as it had been developed over against the state church, but he did not condemn the way the church had been organized in former days. He had always lived and worked in free churches, and he himself for a time considered the free church as ideal. But “living in a country, where free churches flourish,” he wrote, “we have learned to know the sobering truth, that the free church is not the solution to all questions.”<sup>10</sup>

In the ecclesiastical crisis of the early 1880s, he experienced a serious weakness of the free church: there was no authority that could intervene or overrule, like the state in former days, and it was hardly possible to keep a free church unified. Reformed churches under the separation of church and state had misused their freedom by living out the tendency of theological and social specialization and of secession rather than striving for catholicity and community.

When Henry Dosker in *De Hope* reviewed Herman Bavinck's Kampen rectoral address of 1888 on the catholicity of the church, he drew attention to the sections in which Bavinck addressed the same weaknesses in the Dutch Seceder churches that Steffens complained about in the Reformed Church and in the Christian Reformed Church.<sup>11</sup>

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voor het kwade bijna uitsluitend. Ik weet niet dat er ooit waardeerende critiek van zijne lippen gehoord werd, die niet door een legio van ‘maars’ werd vermoord. En 't grappigste is (zooals steeds, meen ik, het geval is), dat hijzelf volstrekt geen critiek kan verdragen,” *Bavinck Papers*.

<sup>9</sup> *De Hope*, 15 August 1882.

<sup>10</sup> *De Hope*, 15 March 1882: “Levende in het land, waar vrije kerken bloeien, zijn wij met de ontnuchterende waarheid bekend geworden, dat ook de vrije kerk geenszins de oplossing van alle vragen medebrengt.”

<sup>11</sup> *De Hope*, 16 January 1889.

He wrote Bavinck that Steffens was very pleased with this address.<sup>12</sup> The tendency to separate was devastating to the idea of a church as a community that included different opinions and classes, according to Steffens, and to the acceptance of diversity as a mark of the Reformed tradition. Instead, secession was welcomed as a sign of purity. What to think of the ideal of the free church, Steffens wrote in 1881, when in a small village like Zeeland three churches were built, one by the Reformed church, one by the more Reformed church, and one by the most Reformed church. “A church is not a club,” he stated. “It ought to be a place for all, high and low, rich and poor. Some pastors, feeling this difficulty, have tried to change their churches into tabernacles for the use of all, for the common people as well as for the rich. Such efforts are commendable.”<sup>13</sup> He condemned this zeal for purity as sheer fanaticism<sup>14</sup> and defended the historical view of the Reformed tradition that took into account the danger that striving for the ideal church would end in ruining the church.

In *De Hope*, he often dwelt on the illegal character of the secession of the early 1880s, but when the cases against the seceded congregations in court were about to be lost, he rather abruptly stopped doing this. He was a staunch defender of his ecclesiastical position, but he was not a stubborn hardliner. By the end of 1883 he asked, “Are we, because of the stand we have taken, obliged to go on endlessly combating the opposite party? Can we never come to peace with our own position?” He stressed the importance of healing the wounds and of peace making, especially with those who harbored hard feelings toward the Reformed Church. “Because we love our people, we are able to change our mind, and to offer the hand of friendship to everyone who wants to follow the Lord, albeit it not together with us.”<sup>15</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Dosker to Bavinck, 23 March 1889: “Het heeft mij aan het denken gebracht, en vind hier de rijkste waardeering. Steffens was er zeer mee ingenomen,” *Bavinck Papers*. The address was published as: H. Bavinck, *De katholiciteit van christendom en kerk. Rede bij de overdracht van het rectoraat aan de Theol. School te Kampen op 18 dec. 1888* (Kampen: G.Ph. Zalsman, 1888).

<sup>13</sup> N. M. Steffens, “The work of our churches among the European immigrants,” in *Alliance of the Reformed Churches Holding the Presbyterian System. Proceedings of the Fifth General Council, Toronto 1892*, G. D. Matthews, ed. (Toronto: Hart & Riddell, 1892), 185.

<sup>14</sup> *De Hope*, 14 April 1882.

<sup>15</sup> *De Hope*, 17 November 1883: “Veroordeelt ons standpunt er ons toe, altijd met het bestrijden van anderen voort te gaan? Kunnen wij op ons standpunt nooit tot rust komen? . . . Juist daarom, omdat wij ons volk liefhebben, kunnen wij van richting veranderen, en aan allen, die den Heere Jezus wenschen te volgen, *al is het dan ook niet met ons*, de hand van vriendschap bieden.”



Fig. 8. Abraham Kuyper and his family, on the occasion of the departure of his son Frederik to the United States, 1886 (*Historical Documentation Center for Dutch Protestantism, VU University Amsterdam*)

Although he rejected the secessionist actions of 1882, he did approve of the *Doleantie* of 1886 and subsequent years in the Netherlands, where Abraham Kuyper and a group of about 180,000 souls left the *Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk*. Kuyper and others had been prevented from upholding the Reformed tradition in this church. According to Steffens, Kuyper was right to leave his church; he supported him and wrote, “I assent fully to your church order, the provisional view, the underlying principles.”<sup>16</sup> Steffens had experienced emotion and allegations in church conflicts, and he watched the Dutch developments closely. Steffens hoped sharp conflicts would be avoided. “I need hardly say that you and your brothers have my full sympathy and prayers in the fierce struggle,” he wrote Kuyper on 7 May 1886. “I read *De Heraut* [Kuyper’s religious weekly] with the greatest interest. I am glad that the brothers remain calm and courageous. With the exception of certain ‘*Ingezonden stukken*’ [letters to the editor], I have not yet read anything which deserves rejection by those who desire to follow Jesus also in their speech.”<sup>17</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Steffens to Kuyper, 4 January 1888, “Uwe kerkrechterlijke positie... de onderliggende beginselen beaam ik ten volle,” *Kuyper Papers*.

<sup>17</sup> “Dat Gij en Uwe broeders mijne volle sympathie en gebeden hebt in den fellen strijd, behoef ik nauwelijks te zeggen. Ik lees ‘De Heraut’ met de grootste belangstelling. Ik ben blij dat de broeders kalm en moedig blijven. Met uitzondering van enkele



When in 1892 two Reformed churches in the Netherlands merged, one originating in the *Afscheiding* of 1834 and the other in the *Doleantie* of 1886, hopes rose that the same might happen in the United States between the Reformed Church and the Christian Reformed Church.<sup>18</sup> The anger had gone, but Steffens stuck to the same position he had taken in the early 1880s: “As long as one does not prove that the Reformed Church is no longer the Reformed Church it confesses to be, no one may require from us that we leave *the East*, as the Reformed Church in America is usually called.”<sup>19</sup>

*De Hope* readers in general agreed with Steffens’ policy, but his conciliatory course did not interact well with sympathies and decisions on the other side of the Atlantic. Steffens’ colleague as a minister, Henry Dosker, followed the Dutch discussions about the American troubles closely and was worried about the sympathetic attitude of the *Christelijke Gereformeerden* to those who left the Reformed Church because of the Masonic issue. He therefore wrote to his Dutch friend Herman Bavinck: “If you knew the secession here, as we do, with all its unholiness of life, its Jesuitism of effort and propaganda, its narrowness of evangelical conception, you would no more than I, have patience with this intermeddling in our affairs. I know the ‘*Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerk*’ yonder is in sympathy with them, *but it is so at its own risk*.”<sup>20</sup>

It turned out that professor Anthony Brummelkamp (1811-1888), one of the leaders in the *Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerk* in the Netherlands, also sympathized with the secession of the 1880s in western Michigan, without wondering if disagreement was a sound reason for secession. His

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uitdrukkingen in de ‘Ingezonden stukken’ heb ik nog niets gelezen, dat de afkeuring van hen, die Jezus begeeren te volgen ook in hun spreken, verdient,” *Kuyper Papers*.

<sup>18</sup> See John. H. Kromminga, “Abandoned at the altar,” in *The Dutch and Their Faith. Immigrant Religious Experience in the 19th and 20th Centuries. Proceedings of the 8th Biennial Conference of the Association for the Advancement of Dutch American Studies, September 20 and 21, 1991* (Holland, MI, 1991), 71-84.

<sup>19</sup> *De Hope*, 14 September 1892, “Zoo lang als men niet bewijst, dat de Gereformeerde Kerk niet meer is, wat zij belijdt te zijn, mag men van ons niet vergen, dat wij *het Oosten*, zooals men gewoon is de Gereformeerde Kerk in Amerika te noemen, verlaten.”; Kromminga, “Abandoned at the altar,” 81: “In many quarters, and particularly in the Netherlands, some old wounds were being healed and unions were taking place which would have seemed impossible a few decades earlier. The only alternative to thinking that the likes of Steffens and Beuker and [D. J.] Vander Werp and [T. J.] Keppel were cynical, scheming, or utterly naive, is to give them the honor of concluding that they yearned for the unity of believers who belonged together, took heart from the union of *Afscheiding* and *Doleantie*, and hoped against hope that some miracle would occur which would resolve their differences and end their separation.”

<sup>20</sup> Dosker to Bavinck, 12 February 1881, *Bavinck Papers*.

taking sides with the American Seceders was decisive. Brummelkamp wrote about oppressed brothers and an oppressive church government.<sup>21</sup> Steffens complained passionately about Brummelkamp's misjudgment not only in *De Hope* but also in Brummelkamp's Dutch weekly *De Bazuin*: Had the professor ever wondered why these so-called oppressed brothers just walked out the door, instead of presenting and defending their case in the classis meeting?<sup>22</sup> If being a free church comes down to this kind of behavior, Steffens wrote bitterly, maybe the Roman Catholic Church is right to recognize no church outside of its jurisdiction.<sup>23</sup> The Synod of the *Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerk* of 1882, however, followed Brummelkamp's judgment and decided to advise the growing numbers of their members emigrating to the United States to join not the Reformed Church but the Christian Reformed Church instead.<sup>24</sup>

This decision was a severe blow to the Reformed Church in America. It was a huge disappointment to Steffens and also to Dosker. The *Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerk* in which he had been born and raised had made this decision without the facts of the American situation. Different from what Dosker alluded to in his letter to Bavinck, the effects of the decision of the Dutch synod to prefer the Christian Reformed Church would not be detrimental at all to the *Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerk*, but it would have an immense effect on both the Reformed Church and the Christian Reformed Church: the Reformed Church suffered, and the Christian Reformed Church benefitted from this situation.

The *Afscheiding* of 1834, the Masonic controversy of 1882, the *Doleantie* of 1886, and the union of Reformed churches in the Netherlands in 1892 were all interrelated, and they influenced each other. The far reaching synodical decision of the *Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerk* of 1882 especially illustrates the need to write the history of the Reformed Church in the West and the history of the Christian Reformed Church in the nineteenth century, not only in close relationship with the history of the various Reformed churches in the Netherlands but also as a matter of fact to consider the history of these churches as one history, especially when seen from the American side of the ocean. To restrict oneself to the ecclesiastical press: both *De Hope* and *De Wachter* (the weekly of the Christian Reformed Church) offered a lot of local

<sup>21</sup> *De Bazuin*, 3 February 1882.

<sup>22</sup> *De Hope*, 1 February 1882.

<sup>23</sup> *De Hope*, 12 April 1882.

<sup>24</sup> See Harinck, "Schuring die scheuring dreigt te worden."



Dutch news on accidents, social events, politics, and other events. Part of the Dutch Reformed immigrant mind continued to dwell on the Netherlands for many years after the migration. The immigrants lived in western Michigan, but in their minds the Netherlands continued to be a present reality—a reality that deeply influenced their religious life.



## CHAPTER 6

“We live presently under a waning moon.”

*Leading the Reformed Church in the West*

Steffens became a professor right after the Reformed Church split. The split was justified with reference to the Freemasonry issue but was rooted in discontent about the liaison with the churches of the East. There was hardly a Mason in the western congregations. It was the synod—dominated by Eastern congregations and ministers—that had discontinued the seminary in Holland. The anti-Eastern sentiment had been accelerated by that blow, and the General Synod’s decision to restore the theological school in Holland and Steffens’ appointment by the General Synod of 1884 came respectively one and two years too late to neutralize this negative mood. Now the restoration of theological education was more like a gift to the diminished western branch, or maybe more accurately, a necessity in order to survive: “the restoration of theological instruction became a question of life and death to the West.”<sup>1</sup>

Some Dutch ministers in the Reformed Church, who had been educated at New Brunswick in the pioneer years of the colony, felt at ease

<sup>1</sup> Charles E. Corwin, *A Manual of the Reformed Church in America, 1628-1922*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed. (New York: Board of Publication and Bible-School Work of the RCA, 1922), 157.

with the Eastern branch of the church and could live with the departure of 10 percent of the church members to (in their view) the sectarian Christian Reformed Church. But in general there was uneasiness—and rightly so—among the Hollanders who stayed in the Reformed Church with the atmosphere and developments in the East. It is hard to distinguish between doctrinal and cultural motives for this uneasiness (to Steffens the cultural differences were subjected to the doctrinal differences, and he did not detect the latter) or to decide which of the two was more important. But the *Christian Intelligencer* of the 1880s and *De Hope* of the same years show the differences, not only in style, or pace of Americanization, but also in content. The *Christian Intelligencer* did not have a staunch defender of Calvinism like Steffens among its contributors. But even so, if we don't take Steffens into account, the Dutch Reformed character of *De Hope* was quite different from the American character of the *Christian Intelligencer*. A critical book like *What is Inspiration?* (1893) by John De Witt (1821-1906), a former professor at New Brunswick Theological Seminary (1863-92), was welcomed in the *Christian Intelligencer*, but its content was alien and also heretical to the western churches.<sup>2</sup>

After 1882 Henry Dosker felt trapped between the Christian Reformed Church on the one side and the Reformed Church of the East on the other.<sup>3</sup> When Geerhardus Vos (1862-1949), the son of the Christian Reformed pastor Jan Hendrik Vos and a teacher at the theological seminary of the Christian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids since 1888, was appointed at Princeton Theological Seminary in 1893, Henry Dosker envied him. Church historian Elton J. Bruins recalls that Rev. John H. Karsten (1833-1914), the leader of the anti-Masonic faction of the Reformed Church, “and people like him stayed with the

<sup>2</sup> Dosker was shocked about DeWitt's book, as he wrote to B. B. Warfield, 14 September 1893, “You have undoubtedly read the book of our old emeritus-professor John DeWitt—‘*What is inspiration?*’ As I read, I was first bewildered, then amazed, then very angry at the man. You may know the character of our ordination vow, on entering the professorate. A professor solemnly binds himself to teach and defend the standards, by word and pen; and if ever he experiences a change of opinion, he contends never to publish such opinions before he has stated the same to the Gen. Synod, to whom he is responsible. Now here is a predicament. The man outbriggess [Charles] Briggs, whose indirect advocate he becomes; for in the introduction, it is plainly stated that the trial of this man has hastened the production of the book,” *Warfield Papers*, Special Collections, Princeton Theological Seminary Libraries. *De Hope*, 2 May 1893, published an article by Kuyper against De Witt's book.

<sup>3</sup> George Harinck, “Henry Dosker between Albertus C. Van Raalte and Abraham Kuyper,” in *Origins* 19, no. 2 (2001), 34-41.

Reformed Church grudgingly, for they could not see their way to foment schism.”<sup>4</sup> For quite a few of them this opposition to secession was the negative reason to stay in the Reformed Church, but in comparison to the Christian Reformed Church, it soon became difficult to think of a positive reason, especially after the Christian Reformed Church started to flourish in the 1880s and 1890s.

At first Steffens was not as disappointed as Dosker about the situation; Steffens compared Dosker with a barometer for his sensitivity for the prevailing opinions,<sup>5</sup> but he certainly deplored the departure of many members to the Christian Reformed Church. He differed with them on ecclesiology and complained about the narrow mindedness of this church, but in the end, he felt theologically more at home with the Christian Reformed Church.<sup>6</sup> Steffens, however, was a stronger and more independent personality than Dosker. He did not need as much approval and sympathy as Dosker, and he presented his opinions forcefully. This attitude made him fit as a leader of the Reformed Church in the West, but at the same time, this was his weakness. He was too independent to ever become a real leader in the church and bind people to his opinions and mentality. His colleagues respected him, and the people appreciated his solid sermons, but I don’t think he made many friends or supporters in his church.

In his letters to Kuyper, Steffens explained that the Reformed tradition in America could never have the same impact on church and society that it had achieved in the Netherlands. He described the task of a Reformed church toward new immigrants as follows: “To care for their further development until their Church life is on a level with our own is as necessary as the work of evangelisation. In a religious sense, it is our blessed duty not only to evangelise but also to Americanise them.”<sup>7</sup> His observation was that irenic and modern ideas got a hold of American Reformed and Presbyterian churches and of the United States in general. The small Reformed community of the Dutch in the West could not change this course of the nation. Also because of their cultural and religious orientation in the Reformed and Netherlandic traditions, they were still viewed as foreigners. He therefore did not see a bright future for the Reformed tradition in the United States and

<sup>4</sup> Bruins and Swierenga, *Family Quarrels*, 133.

<sup>5</sup> Steffens to Kuyper, 27 October 1888: “Onze goede vriend Dosker is—ik zeg u dit confidentieel—aan een barometer gelijk, die gevoelig is voor iedere verandering in de atmosfeer, die hem omringt,” *Kuyper Papers*.

<sup>6</sup> See Steffens to Kuyper, 25 January 1891, *Kuyper Papers*.

<sup>7</sup> Steffens, “The work of our churches,” 183.



Fig. 9. Henry E. Dosker  
(Joint Archives of Holland)

wondered if he should not warn Reformed people in the Netherlands not to emigrate but to stay home.<sup>8</sup> “They are either absorbed into the populace or they remain foreigners who, in protesting against everything American, consume themselves and become more narrow minded than the good people in the hinterlands of Gelderland or Groningen.”<sup>9</sup>

He did not have a general stance on Americanization of churches: “Americanisation is a grave problem, fraught with dangers. If you are too hasty in Americanising Churches of foreign origin, you destroy much good work; if you are too slow, you are in great danger of losing the young people. In some places we have tried. . . . I have come to the conclusion that it is impossible to Americanise our foreign churches after any general rule.”<sup>10</sup>

Steffens himself did try to communicate the Reformed tradition to an American audience, but editors on the East coast did not always publish his contributions. And within his own Reformed church, the opposition against his staunch Reformed opinions grew. “Most of our Western ministers are what I would call ‘*oud-liberalen*’ [old liberals], people who care very little about doctrine and therefore all the more for unhealthy relationships with all kinds of sects,” he wrote Kuyper. “In the struggle for the Reformed principle, I have very few supporters. My position is certainly not enviable. In the Netherlands there is at least

<sup>8</sup> Steffens to Kuyper, 25 January 1891, “Vaak komt de gedachte in mij op, of het niet goed zou zijn, indien de leiders in Nederland den stroom der emigratie in eene andere bedding trachten te leiden,” *Kuyper Papers*.

<sup>9</sup> Steffens to Kuyper, 7 May 1886, “Zij worden óf in de natie opgelost, óf zij blijven vreemdelingen, die in het protesteeren tegen al wat Amerikaansch is, zich zelven verteeren en bekrompener worden dan de goede menschen in den achterhoek van Gelderland of Groningen,” *Kuyper Papers*.

<sup>10</sup> Steffens, “The work of our churches,” 186-87.

a part of the people who hold to Reformed principles from the heart; here, however, we live presently under a waning moon.”<sup>11</sup>

In this “downward slope” context, and with diminishing support from his fellow ministers, Steffens had the task of developing the theological education of the Reformed Church in the West. He could not prevent the bulk of the new immigrants with a Reformed background from the Netherlands from joining the Christian Reformed Church, but in pressing his theological stamp on the Reformed Church, he did have an impact.

What can be said about the Reformed position he defended? When he arrived in West Michigan in 1878, the theology of the Dutch Reformed Church largely depended on the Utrecht apologetic school. In the 1850s and 1860s, the theological department of Utrecht University had opposed the Groningen theology, and especially the modern theology of J. H. Scholten (1811-1885) and A. Kuenen (1828-1891) at Leiden University, by defending the reliability of the witness of the apostles and prophets in the Bible.<sup>12</sup> Steffens was on their side in his insistence that the Bible does not merely contain but actually *is* the Word of God and in his defense of verbal inspiration.<sup>13</sup> As to the deity of Jesus, he stated that it “rests in his being sent as the Son of God into the world to make atonement for the sins of humankind. Only as such can he be worshiped as fully God rather than as a being a little lower than God such as in the Arian heresy, or as a mixed being, half God and half human.”<sup>14</sup> Over against the modern theologians he rejected any mediating position.

Of course the Dutch Reformed Church members, who in the Netherlands had been members of the *Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerk*, adhered to the seminary their church had founded in Kampen in 1854, but until the appointment of Herman Bavinck in 1882, this school also relied on the theology of apologetic Utrecht theologians like J. J. van

<sup>11</sup> Steffens to Kuiper, 12 February 1890: “Ook de meeste onzer westersche leeraars zijn, wat ik ‘oud-liberalen’ zou noemen, menschen, die van de leer ontzettend weinig houden, maar van ongezonde verbroedering van allerlei sekten des te meer. In den strijd voor het geref. beginsel heb ik weinige medestanders. Mijne positie is bepaald niet benijdenswaardig. In Nederland is er althans een gedeelte van het volk, dat de geref. beginselen van harte is toegedaan, hier echter leven wij tegenwoordig onder de afgaande maan,” *Kuiper Papers*.

<sup>12</sup> See George Harinck, “Twin sisters with a changing character. How Neo-Calvinists dealt with the modern discrepancy between Bible and natural sciences,” in *Nature and Scripture in the Abrahamic Religions: 1700-Present*, vol. 2, Jitse M. van der Meer and Scott Mandelbrote, eds. (Leiden/Boston: E. J. Brill, 2008), 319-25.

<sup>13</sup> Heideman, *The Practice of Piety*, 165. *De Hope*, 27 January 1892.

<sup>14</sup> Heideman, *The Practice of Piety*, 172.

Oosterzee (1817-1882) and J. I. Doedes (1817-1897). They were well known names in the Dutch Reformed enclaves in the Midwest. More than the classic Reformed writers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the Dutch Americans of the 1870s seemed to prefer present-day Dutch writers like W. H. Gispen (1833-1909), J. de Liefde (1814-1869), T. M. Looman (1816-1900), Van Oosterzee, and not to forget Nicolaas Beets (1814-1903).<sup>15</sup> From 1875 publications by Abraham Kuiper were sold in Michigan, but the professors of Kampen Seminary, of whom D. J. Doornink's *Hollandsche boekhandel* (Dutch bookstore) in Grand Rapids sold “illustrations”<sup>16</sup> and rectoral addresses, were better known authors in these days, as was Van Oosterzee. He was not read just among the Dutch. From 1862 on, his works were translated and published in Great Britain and the United States; his translated *Christian Dogmatics* went through five editions between 1874 and 1900. When in 1871 Joseph F. Berg (1812-1871) died, and the chair of systematic theology at New Brunswick Theological Seminary became vacant, there was a strong desire to have Van Oosterzee in that chair. The Dutch Reformed Church asked him, but already being an older man, he declined to be a candidate. He proposed Kuiper instead, and especially recommended the seminary's alumnus Philippus Jacobus Hoedemaker (1839-1910), although he would have hated to see him leave the Netherlands.<sup>17</sup> In the end, the American Abraham Brooks Van Zandt (1816-1881) was appointed, at the same age as Van Oosterzee. When Van Oosterzee died in 1882, his sermons in Dutch continued to sell quite well in the West, but it was a name to which Steffens hardly ever referred. The same counts for Nicolaas Beets, who had been a professor of theology in Utrecht since 1875. Poems of him were printed on the front page of *De Hope* on a regular basis, and his *Stichtelijke uren* and other devotionals were appreciated, but he did not have a theological standing in the colony. Of the Kampen theological professors, Steffens especially appreciated Helenius de Cock (1824-1894).<sup>18</sup>

Much more attention, however, was paid to Hoedemaker in the 1870s. He had the advantage of having lived in the United States as a boy and a young man. His family immigrated in 1851. Hoedemaker was twelve years old when he arrived in the new world, and he lived for ten years in Kalamazoo and other places. The Hoedemakers were members

<sup>15</sup> Harinck, “Early Years of the Dutch-American Book Selling Trade,” 125-27.

<sup>16</sup> *De Hope*, 26 May 1875.

<sup>17</sup> M. van Rhijn, *Gemeenschap en vereenzaming. Een studie over J.J. van Oosterzee* (Amsterdam: Paris, 1940), 121-24; J. J. van Oosterzee, *Uit mijn levensboek. Voor mijne vrienden* (Utrecht: Kemink, 1883<sup>2</sup>), 116-18.

<sup>18</sup> *De Hope*, 31 January 1894.



Fig. 10. Philippus J. Hoedemaker  
(Historical Documentation Center  
for Dutch Protestantism,  
VU University Amsterdam)



of the Reformed Church, and he studied from 1854 at Rutgers College, New Brunswick Seminary, and then elsewhere, before returning to Europe in 1861 to become a minister in the *Hervormde Kerk*.

When Hoedemaker in the 1870s became one of the leaders of the revival of the Reformed tradition in the Netherlands, he was the natural focal point in the Old Country for the Reformed Church in the West. When Free (now VU) University in 1880 started with him as one of the first professors, to *De Hope*, this was predominantly Hoedemaker's university, not Kuyper's.<sup>19</sup> Hoedemaker was the only Reformed Dutch theologian to invest actively in contacts with the emigrant communities in the United States,<sup>20</sup> promoting their cause, and donating books to the library of Western Seminary.<sup>21</sup> His visit to the western branch of the Reformed Church in 1882 was an event. He came not only to see his mother in Kalamazoo but also to look for possibilities for new settlements for Dutch immigrants, to get some understanding of the tensions between the Reformed Church and the Christian Reformed Church, and to promote Free University.<sup>22</sup> Besides Nicolaas Beets

<sup>19</sup> *De Hope*, 24 November 1880. It is Hoedemaker's opening speech that was covered in *De Hope*, not the famous speech of Kuyper on sphere sovereignty.

<sup>20</sup> Between 1882 and 1889, seven letters of Hoedemaker were published in *De Hope*. See George Harinck, "'Nederland is Amerika niet.' Zes brieven van Hoedemaker aan geestverwanten in de Verenigde Staten (1883-1889)," *Documentatieblad voor de Nederlandse Kerkgeschiedenis* 33, no. 73 (December 2010), 42-78.

<sup>21</sup> *De Hope*, 13-27 February 1883. He especially tried to provide less expensive shipping of Dutch books to the US. Gift of books: *De Hope*, 7 July 1886; 3 August 1887.

<sup>22</sup> *De Hope*, 19 September 1882. He collected \$452 for prospective students of Free University.

of Utrecht University and Brummelkamp of Kampen Theological Seminary, it was Hoedemaker and not Kuyper who contributed a congratulatory greeting to the centennial volume of New Brunswick Theological Seminary, published in 1884.<sup>23</sup>

Steffens was not influenced by Van Oosterzee or the Utrecht school. He kept a certain distance from Reformed theologians of Germany and from those of Kampen Seminary. He was an autodidact who had no favorite in theology. But this changed shortly after 1880, when he presented himself as an ardent supporter of Free University and of Hoedemaker and his colleague Abraham Kuyper. He praised them for not wanting to merely return to the Reformed orthodoxy of the seventeenth century but rather to aim at a theological renewal of this tradition. He was outspoken in his admiration, more so than the Seceders in the Netherlands. At first the *Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerk* was hesitant toward Hoedemaker, and Kuyper and did not expect there would be room for such an enterprise within the *Hervormde Kerk*. In the opinion of many *Christelijke Gereformeerden*, Kuyper and Hoedemaker should therefore leave the *Hervormde Kerk* and join their church. Steffens agreed with them that Kuyper might be too optimistic, but he appreciated Kuyper's aim of a broad Reformed church.<sup>24</sup> When in about 1880 the Reformed movement of Hoedemaker and Kuyper really started to make an impact on the *Hervormde Kerk*; some of the Reformed immigrants in the United States for the first time felt a kind of regret. They had left the Netherlands when the prospects for the Reformed tradition were not favorable compared to their new country. The future of the Reformed tradition would be in America, they had thought. But in the early 1880s, Dutch Americans were in serious trouble and experienced a church split, while in the Netherlands the Reformed did amazingly well and seemed to restore the Reformed tradition on a national level. Like many others, Rev. Henry Dosker really felt sorry that he was not part of this revival in the Netherlands.<sup>25</sup>

But while Americans like Steffens and Dosker became enthusiastic about what happened in the Netherlands, Hoedemaker started to doubt the aims of the revival. In a letter published in *De Hope*, 3 March 1884, he wrote to his American friends, “I am in a current with kindred spirits, but I have taken another stream and there have anchored. In

<sup>23</sup> *Centennial of the Theological Seminary of the Reformed Church in America (formerly Ref. Prot. Dutch Church): 1784-1884* (New York: Board of Publication of the RCA, 1885). See *De Hope*, 2 December 1884.

<sup>24</sup> *De Hope*, 31 October 1882.

<sup>25</sup> See Harinck, “Henry Dosker between Van Raalte and Kuyper.”

former days we were just anti-modernists, but now we see that the organization of the church is wrong.”<sup>26</sup> This new element made him wonder where the movement would lead to. He started hesitating about the way the church should be reorganized. When in 1886 dozens of Reformed elders in Amsterdam were suspended, and the *Doleantie* movement started by organizing alternative church services in the city, Hoedemaker decided not to join his fellow Reformed church members. He wanted to restore the organization of the *Hervormde Kerk*, not create a free church. Therefore he separated from Kuyper’s movement and resigned as a professor at Free University.

At this point Steffens started to disagree with Hoedemaker. He was not uncritical of the free church model, as we have seen, and he did not consider it the archetypical form of a church. But for his days he considered it the best possible model. He disagreed with Hoedemaker who now came to reject the free church and was convinced instead that the bureaucracy of the *Hervormde Kerk* had to be abandoned.<sup>27</sup> Steffens was embarrassed by Hoedemaker’s position and now stressed that this theologian had unjustly presumed a unity with Kuyper, while his position always had been a little bit foggy.<sup>28</sup> In 1894 Steffens concluded, “Dr Hoedemaker, who spent his youth in America, is—it is amazing to say—the defender of the full grown state church Christianity of former days. We cannot understand, that there are men up to the present day, who not only confess the faith of the fathers like we do, but also, so it seems, stick to their church-political principles in every detail.”<sup>29</sup>

While promoting some new developments in Dutch Reformed theology, Steffens criticized other new developments in theology within and outside of the United States. He soon realized that by stressing the Reformed dogmatic tradition, he was promoting and opposing the same developments as Benjamin B. Warfield (1851-1921), professor at Princeton Theological Seminary.

<sup>26</sup> Harinck, “Nederland is Amerika niet,” 61: “Ik zit in een stroom met mijn geestverwanten, maar heb een andere stroom gevat, en ben daarom voor anker gegaan. Vroeger was men alleen anti-modern, nu zien we in dat de kerkorganisatie niet deugt.”

<sup>27</sup> “Verschil van oordeel over de ‘vrije kerken,’” *De Hope*, 1 June 1887.

<sup>28</sup> “Dr. Hoedemaker en de doleerenden,” *De Hope*, 14 December 1887.

<sup>29</sup> *De Hope*, 17 January 1894: “Dr Hoedemaker, die zijne jeugd gesleten heeft in Amerika, is - het is verbazend om te zeggen - de verdediger van het klinkklare staatskerkendom van vroeger dagen. We kunnen het niet vatten, dat er nu nog mannen gevonden worden, die niet alleen het geloof der vaderen belijden wat wij ook doen, maar ook nog, zoo als het schijnt, in alle opzichten vasthouden aan hunne kerkelijk-politieke beginselen.”

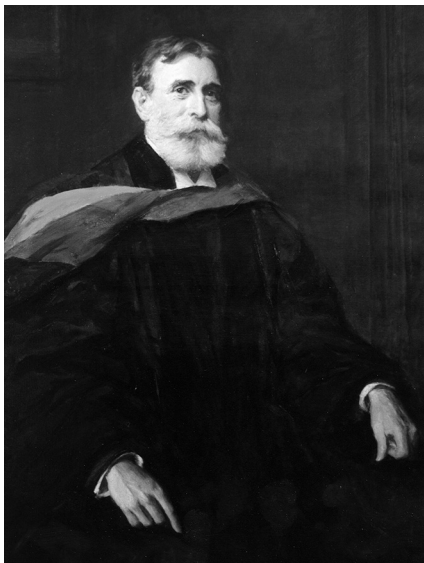


Fig. 11. Benjamin B. Warfield  
(Special Collections Luce Library,  
Princeton Theological Seminary)

As Eugene Heideman put it, “In 1875, when classical Reformed theology was still dominant in Presbyterian churches, Steffens favored moving forward in discussions looking toward church union. By 1886, when the ‘New Theology’ as taught at Andover Theological Seminary was making inroads in the Presbyterian churches, he was becoming cautious.”<sup>30</sup> This sentiment became stronger when biblical higher criticism was accepted at Presbyterian Union Theological Seminary. He applauded Princeton’s president Francis L. Patton (1843-1932) when he opposed modernist attempts to change the text of the Westminster Confession,<sup>31</sup> and in 1890 he welcomed the new periodical, *The Presbyterian and Reformed Review*, as “an academic defender and upholder of the Reformed principle.”<sup>32</sup> Steffens became one of its editors. Commenting on an article by Philip Schaff on Calvinism, he wrote: “The question is: Calvinism or Remonstrantism, the free grace of God or the free will of man. There is no third way. You have to choose.”<sup>33</sup> Steffens did not pay much attention to Princeton’s position in the struggle over modern theology within the Presbyterian world and did not organize

<sup>30</sup> Heideman, *The Practice of Piety*, 78.

<sup>31</sup> *De Hope*, 12 December 1889. In the same issue Dosker, who had been a pupil of Patton at McCormick Seminary in the 1878-79, showed his appreciation too.

<sup>32</sup> *De Hope*, 12 February 1890. He referred to articles in the *Presbyterian and Reformed Review* on a regular basis, e.g., in *De Hope*, 27 December 1893 and 25 July 1894.

<sup>33</sup> *De Hope*, 18 May 1892: “De vraag is: Calvinisme of Remonstrantisme, de vrije genade Gods of de vrije wil van den mensch. Een derde weg is niet open. Gij hebt te kiezen.”

ecclesiastical coalitions against modern theological influences. But the conflict between modernism and orthodoxy was his major theological theme, and he regularly paid attention to actual confrontations in Scotland, the Netherlands, and the United States. Regarding the conflict over modernist stands between Union Theological Seminary with its modernist professor Charles A. Briggs (1841-1913) and the presbytery of New York, he wrote with regard to the Reformed Church:

We hope we will not be exposed to such a conflict. But we fear that our hope is a pious wish with a minor chance to be realized. If history repeats itself, then all who promote the well being of church and school will have to prepare for a similar conflict. If we could keep the peace by a cautious preparation for a battle, all the better for us and our children. But if we cannot avoid the conflict, then we are ready to face the enemy. And no one can blame us that we, keeping the possibility and probability of this conflict in mind, stay alert.<sup>34</sup>

In his personal contacts with Warfield, he showed his appreciation for Princeton as a bulwark of orthodoxy:

I feel inclined to a certain extent to come to your help. I look upon the Presbyterian Church, notwithstanding the heretical elements it contains, as a church which is willing to stand for the truth and to do its duty to our glorious Head. Comparisons are odious, they say, but I cannot help saying that the P.[resbyterian] Church compares favorably unto ours, which seems to love peace better than truth.

The wrangle between our people and the Seceders in our immediate neighborhood is deplorable and alas! there is no end to it. I am between two millstones; I sympathize with the Seceded brethren in their love for the truth, but their ecclesiastical position I cannot share. I begin to feel that I am out of place here.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>34</sup> *De Hope*, 3 June 1891: 'Wij hopen niet, dat wij aan zulk een conflict zullen blootgesteld worden. Maar de vreeze bekruipt ons, dat onze hoop een vrome wensch is, die echter weinig kans heeft om verwezenlijkt te worden. Indien de geschiedenis zich herhaalt, dan moeten allen, die het wel meenen met Kerk en School, zich voorbereiden op zulk eenen strijd. Kunnen wij door eene zorgvuldige voorbereiding op den strijd den vrede bewaren, des te beter voor ons en onze kinderen; kunnen wij den strijd niet ontgaan, wij zijn dan voorbereid om den vijand te ontmoeten. En niemand kan het ons kwalijk duiden, dat wij, aan de mogelijkheid en waarschijnlijkheid van den strijd denkende, het oog in het zeil houden.' See also *De Hope*, 10 June 1891.

<sup>35</sup> Steffens to Warfield, November 16, 1894. *Warfield Papers*.

*De Hope*, November 4, 1891: Warfield kept Steffens informed of his struggle against revision of the confession in the presbytery of New Brunswick.

Over the years Steffens became more pessimistic about the American theological scene, as he wrote to Bavinck: “Education here is so bad. Van Oosterzee and Doedes taught that belief and knowledge are two different things, but over here they know this intuitively. A minister does not need theological knowledge. I shudder.”<sup>36</sup>

As a church leader Steffens did not succeed in keeping the Dutch American community in the West united. On the contrary, after a decade of leadership, he had to accept that the gap between the Reformed Church and the Christian Reformed Church had widened and that the latter church had grown in size and developed a bold identity. The *Doleantie* did not help to strengthen the identity of the Reformed Church in the West; it revealed new fissures. Steffens concluded that within his church, he was left alone in his defense of the Reformed tradition. After the mid-1880s, leading ministers in the Reformed Church did not focus on a relationship with the Christian Reformed Church anymore but became more oriented toward the American religious scene. Tired of the opposition of his colleagues against his staunch Reformed opinions, Steffens felt himself isolated within his own community and without prospect to make a change for the better; in 1895 he retreated and left Holland for a professorship at the German Presbyterian Dubuque Theological Seminary.

<sup>36</sup> Steffens to Bavinck, 17 October, 1910: ‘Ik wil studenten van hier naar Amsterdam [Free University] sturen, want het onderwijs is hier zo slecht. Geloof en weten zijn twee verschillende zaken, zo leerden Van Oosterzee en Doedes, maar hier weten ze het intuïtief. Een predikant heeft geen theologische kennis nodig. Ik sidder.’ *Bavinck Papers*.

## CHAPTER 7

“Don’t rest before all ministers have Dr.  
Kuyper’s Encyclopedia on their shelves.”

*Steffens and Neo-Calvinism*

Although Steffens after the *Doleantie* of 1886 drifted away from Hoedemaker, he did grow closer to Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavinck. He not only agreed with their views of the church and their aim of uniting the churches of the *Afscheiding* of 1834 and the *Doleantie* of 1886, but he also supported and partly adopted their Neo-Calvinist theology and world and life views. Essential for Neo-Calvinism were its democratic character, supported by the centrality of the sovereignty of God over all aspects of life; its culture-oriented attitude fostered by the concept of a common grace that preserved a knowledge to all of the creational order; and its stress on the plural character of society, underlined by the antithesis between Christians and non-Christians. In the Netherlands, Neo-Calvinism resulted in a revival of Reformed theology, a vision of the church as a community of true believers, a strong defense of the Christian school resulting in the legal equality of public and faith-based education, the mobilization of the Reformed for the common good via newspapers (1869, 1872), a permanent political action by organizing the Anti-revolutionary Party (1879), the development of a Christian view on science and the founding of Free



University (1880), and the impulse to a Christian social movement.<sup>1</sup> This Neo-Calvinist movement had a large impact on Dutch society in general and on Reformed life in particular and impressed adherents of the Reformed tradition abroad. Thanks to immigrants from the Netherlands and active propagators of Neo-Calvinism, this movement was introduced in the United States as well.

Kuyper became known within the circles of the Reformed Church from 1878 on, that is, from the time Steffens arrived in West Michigan. Kuyper's aim to renew Reformed theology was not well understood in the colony, and Steffens had to explain to his readers that the Reformed could not stick forever to the theology of the seventeenth century.<sup>2</sup> Over the years quite a few devotionals by Kuyper were published in *De Hope*, and these were appreciated as much by readers in the United States as by readers in the Netherlands.<sup>3</sup>

But Steffens went beyond this genre and especially appreciated Kuyper's dogmatic and ecclesiastical opinions. Steffens had always stressed that a Reformed church was a church with a Reformed doctrine and presbyterial government, and thus he fully agreed with Kuyper's all over rejection of the bureaucracy of the *Hervormde Kerk* when Reformed elders, deacons, and ministers were suspended and deposed. And he was especially pleased when Kuyper in 1892 wrote in his ecclesiastical weekly, *De Heraut*, that it was not true that any Christian who joined the lodge, denied Christ. In this article, Kuyper stressed the antithesis between Freemasonry and Christianity and argued that the church had to defend its confession over against heresy. At the same time he acknowledged that many church members didn't realize this antithesis and were devout Christians.<sup>4</sup> Therefore it was way too bold to say that “everyone who joined the Masonic lodge, or does not separate from it, denies Christ and should be banned by the church.”<sup>5</sup> Instead of disciplining them, the church should appeal to their conscience.

<sup>1</sup> For more on Neo-Calvinism see Bratt, *Dutch Calvinism in Modern America*, 14-33 (chapter 2).

<sup>2</sup> *De Hope*, 28 November 1882: “Dat er zulke stationnaire menschen zijn in de Gereformeerde Kerk, weten wij, maar dat de gereformeerde partij in de Nederlandsche Hervormde Kerk op dien onvruchtbaren grond van een versteend conservatisme bouwt, meenen wij met grond te mogen weerspreken.”

<sup>3</sup> See Clay Cooke, “Be Near Unto God: Restoring Abraham Kuyper's Call For Mysticism as a Balance to Neo-Calvinist Theology,” unpublished paper, Fuller Theological Seminary, 2009.

<sup>4</sup> Kuyper in *De Heraut*, 30 October 1892. See also *De Hope*, 23 November 1892; 29 March 1893.

<sup>5</sup> *De Heraut*, 30 October 1892: “Dat een iegelijk die zich bij de vrijmetselarij aansloot, of er niet mee breekt, den Christus verloochent en door de kerk gebannen moet worden, gaat veel te ver.”



The Christian Reformed Church was astonished at this position of Kuyper. To them his opinion was “like lightning in a clear sky,” as Steffens wrote to Bavinck.<sup>6</sup> Steffens celebrated Kuyper’s article as one of his finest moments.

The same can be said of Kuyper’s opinion that the *Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland* (born in 1892 out of a merger of the *dolerende* churches and almost all the congregations of the *Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerk*) in the American ecclesiastical conflict should not take sides with either the Reformed Church or the Christian Reformed Church but should aim at reconciling both parties. To Steffens, who did not speak out for either the Seceders or the *dolerenden* in the Netherlands (though his sympathies for Kuyper did show a certain preference),<sup>7</sup> this was a much wiser stand than the *Christelijke Gereformeerde Synod* of 1882 had taken.<sup>8</sup> In 1894 he enthusiastically welcomed the first volume of Kuyper’s *Encyclopaedie der heilige godgeleerdheid*, and he quoted from its preface the words that would become famous: Kuyper’s aim was “to waken up Reformed theology, that slept the sleep of the sluggish since the mid-eighteenth century, and to relate it again to human consciousness in its development at the end of the nineteenth century.”<sup>9</sup>

Steffens had been personally acquainted with Kuyper since 1886, when Kuyper asked him to look after his twenty-year-old son, Frederik, who would come to Michigan and stay there for some years. In the mid-1890s he assisted translators of Kuyper’s *Encyclopaedie*, and in early 1898 Steffens translated the Dutch text of the fourth Stone lecture on science that Kuyper had to deliver in October of that year at Princeton Theological Seminary. In 1903 he wrote an introduction to a German translation of one of Kuyper’s works. They met each other two times. The first time was in 1893 at the General Synod of the *Gereformeerde*

<sup>6</sup> Steffens to Bavinck, 25 November 1892. See also Dosker to Bavinck, 23 November 1892, *Bavinck Papers*.

<sup>7</sup> In the Netherlands *De Hope* was considered to be biased, see *De Hope*, 5 December 1888: “Nu en dan treffen we in verband tot de kerkelijke toestanden in Nederland, in de christelijke pers aldaar verwijzingen aan op die hier te lande. En komt alsdan *De Hope* ter sprake, dan wordt ze in den regel aangemerkt als een blad, ’t welk de Doleantie is toegedaan.”

<sup>8</sup> *De Hope*, 16 May 1894.

<sup>9</sup> *De Hope*, 31 January 1894. A. Kuyper, *Encyclopaedie der heilige godgeleerdheid* 1 (Amsterdam: J. A. Wormser, 1894), 6: “om de Gereformeerde theologie, die als zodanig reeds sinds het midden der vorige eeuw den slaap der tragen sliep, weer wakker te schudden en in rapport te brengen met het menschelijk bewustzijn, gelijk zich dit aan het einde der 19<sup>e</sup> eeuw ontwikkeld heeft.” This volume has been translated by J. H. De Vries as *Encyclopedia of Sacred Theology: Its Principles* (New York: Scribner’s Sons, 1898).

*Kerken* in Dordrecht, the Netherlands, where Steffens represented the Reformed Church. And when five years later Kuyper traveled from Princeton to the Dutch American communities in the West, Steffens met him in Orange City.<sup>10</sup>

Kuyper and Hoedemaker were his age, but Bavinck was the man of a younger generation. Bavinck was a close friend of Dosker and became a professor of dogmatics at Kampen Theological Seminary two years before Steffens was appointed at Western Seminary with almost the same task. Dosker visited Bavinck in the Netherlands in 1879 and 1888 and corresponded with him. He kept Steffens informed of the theological and ecclesiastical issues Bavinck was dealing with. Though the Bavincks came from Bentheim and the Steffens from Ostfriesland, he did not know the family. The first time Steffens was really enthusiastic about Bavinck was when he read the address Bavinck gave in Kampen in 1888 on the catholicity of Christianity and church. Steffens admired the broad perspective of Bavinck, and he introduced his summary of this lecture in *De Hope* as follows: “We do this because we so often hear narrow judgments in our midst regarding the position the Reformed should take over against those we disagree with. Some get the idea *seceded* and *narrow* have the same meaning. This summary clearly shows how distant well educated Seceders are from narrow-mindedness.”<sup>11</sup>

When Bavinck visited Michigan in the summer of 1892 (in Holland he stayed several weeks with the Dosker family), he and Steffens met for the first time. In 1908 they would meet again in Holland, and this time Bavinck stayed at Steffens’ house. Bavinck’s wife noted, “Herman finds him the only scholar, thus far, with whom he agrees.”<sup>12</sup> In 1893 Steffens quoted lengthy clauses from Bavinck’s article on the future of Calvinism to defend the solidity and the non-exclusive character of Calvinism.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>10</sup> See George Harinck, “A Triumphal Procession? The Reception of Kuyper in the USA (1900-1940),” in *Kuyper Reconsidered. Aspects of his Life and Work*, Cornelis van der Kooi and Jan de Bruijn, eds. (Amsterdam: VU Uitgeverij, 1999), 280.

<sup>11</sup> *De Hope*, 6 February 1889: “Wij doen dit omdat er in ons midden vaak bekrompene uitspraken vernomen worden aangaande de verhouding, die gereformeerden behooren intenemen tegenover andersdenkenden. Sommigen komen daardoor op de gedachte, dat *afgescheiden* en *bekrompen* hetzelfde beteekenen. Hoe ver echter goed opgevoede Afgescheidenen verwijderd zijn van bekrompenheid van geest, blijkt duidelijk uit het uittreksel.”

<sup>12</sup> Hepp, *Bavinck*, 221; quote on 302: “Herman vindt hem den eenigen wetenschappelijken man, waar hij tot dusver mede overeenstemt.”

<sup>13</sup> *De Hope*, 27 December 1893. Steffens referred to Bavinck’s article “The future of Calvinism,” *The Presbyterian and Reformed Review* 5 (1894): 1-24.

Steffens’ appreciation for the academic standing of the work of Bavinck was equaled by his appreciation for Geerhardus Vos, who since 1888 taught at the Christian Reformed theological seminary in Grand Rapids and lived as a bachelor in his parents’ house. Vos was also appreciative of Kuyper’s renewal of Reformed theology. He was criticized in concealed words for this sympathy for Kuyper by ministers in his Christian Reformed Church. Steffens realized this and wrote a favorable review in *De Hope* of Vos’ “excellent address” of 1891 on *De verbondsleer in de gereformeerde theologie* (The doctrine of the covenant of Reformed theology).<sup>14</sup>

But Kuyper towered above these two because of his masterly publications, which were very helpful to Steffens. He was an academic, but his manifold tasks burdened him. Writing for a larger audience and leading a community, as he wrote to Warfield, who had the same myriad of duties, was heavy: “You are right in saying that it is impossible for us, burdened with so many branches, to do much independent literary work. I often feel this as a great hardship. I do not shrink from work, but I desire the multum [much] and not the multa [many].”<sup>15</sup> The amazing thing was that Kuyper was able to lead a community and produce academic work at the same time.

Like Vos, Steffens was very active in introducing Neo-Calvinism to the western branch of the Reformed Church. New books, brochures, and articles by the Dutch Neo-Calvinists, especially Kuyper and Bavinck, were enthusiastically introduced by him without favoring one over the other.<sup>16</sup> Thanks to Steffens the names of Kuyper and Bavinck became well known among readers of *De Hope*, and Kuyper’s devotional volumes especially were advertised widely. The issue to Steffens was whether theology was developed in continuity with the Reformation or on a new foundation and along new ways that led astray. “In the development of theology the big question is if we proceed along the right line or not. We have to stay in relation with the past.” While all kinds of modern theological developments from Germany, the Netherlands, and the United States announced themselves from the mid-1870s on in Reformed immigrant circles, Steffens tried to preserve the Reformed tradition, and in this context he made a clear choice for the direction Kuyper and Bavinck were taking.

<sup>14</sup> *De Hope*, 27 January 1892.

<sup>15</sup> Steffens to Warfield, 8 July 1892, *Warfield Papers*.

<sup>16</sup> According to Heideman, *The Practice of Piety*, 143, 194, theologians in the RCA in general favored Bavinck over Kuyper. Heideman wrote a dissertation on Bavinck: *The Relation of Revelation and Reason in E. Brunner and H. Bavinck* (Assen: Van Gorcum, Prakke & Prakke, 1959).



Fig. 12. Geerhardus Vos  
(*Historical Documentation Center  
for Dutch Protestantism,  
VU University Amsterdam*)

Eugene Heideman put it correctly when he wrote: “Midwestern Reformed Church theologians defended their traditional theology successfully against the inroads of American liberalism and modernism.”<sup>17</sup> But according to Steffens, this traditional theology did not challenge modern theology. Mediating positions, like Van Oosterzee’s or those of the ethical theologians, were disapproved by him as a pitfall that would result in modernism in the end. In line with Kuypers the big divide to Steffens was between orthodoxy and modernism: “He who does not want to get entangled in the nets of sheer modernism, beware of Schleiermacher and the German *Vermittlung* theologians.”<sup>18</sup> And elsewhere: “Men like [the Dutch theologians] De la Saussaye, J. H. Gunning Jr. and others are, no doubt, excellent men, and we can not speak of them other than with appreciation, but their theology is unconvincing.”<sup>19</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Heideman, *The Practice of Piety*, 197.

<sup>18</sup> *De Hope*, 18 March 1891: “Wie niet in de netten van een volslagen modernisme verward wil raken, neme zich in acht voor Schleiermacher en de Duitsche Vermittlungstheologen.” Friedrich Daniel Ernst Schleiermacher (1768-1834) was a German theologian, philosopher, and biblical scholar known for his attempt to reconcile the criticisms of the Enlightenment with traditional Protestant Christianity.

<sup>19</sup> *De Hope*, 27 April 1892, “In de ontwikkeling der Godgeleerdheid is de groote vraag, of wij vooruitgaan langs de rechte lijn of niet. Wij moeten in betrekking blijven met het verleden.” And: “Mannen als De la Saussaye, J.H. Gunning en anderen zijn, zonder twijfel, uitnemende mannen, en wij kunnen van hen niet anders

Kuyper in the Netherlands followed the developments in the United States and applauded the activities of Steffens, Vos, and Warfield in *De Heraut*: “In America, like in all churches, one has been towed by *Vermittlung* [mediating] theology far too easily, and it is only in the last decade, that against this dubious theology a reaction came to the fore. We thank this reaction in the first place to the courageous acts of the theologians Warfield, Steffens, and Vos, whose influence is still rising.”<sup>20</sup>

Steffens applied the Neo-Calvinist insights mainly in the domain of theology and church. He did not copy its plea for Christian primary schools. These schools had also been the ideal of Van Raalte, but his initiative failed in the 1860s due to lack of financial resources.<sup>21</sup> Steffens did not adopt this Neo-Calvinist view because of the different situation in the United States. Dutchmen in America who promoted Christian schools over public schools were according to Steffens inspired by motives of Dutch tradition, not by Christian principles. He stressed, like Kuyper,<sup>22</sup> that immigrants had to become Americans and should not stand aside as Dutchmen. He wanted them to educate their children in a Christian and a national way. For this reason Steffens opposed Dutch parochial schools like he opposed the aloofness of the Christian Reformed Church. But he did not push American education:

Of one thing, however, I am convinced, that it is necessary to retard Americanisation until the second generation has enjoyed a Christian education under the paternal roof in the language of their parents. It is a proverbial saying, that the second generation of immigrants does not amount to much. The reason is that parents cannot control and educate their children on account of a too hasty process of Americanisation. And this hasty

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dan met waardering spreken, maar hunne godgeleerdheid houdt geen steek.” Daniël Chantepie de la Saussaye (1818-1874) and Johannes Hermanus Gunning Jr. (1829-1905) were the founders of the Dutch ethical (*Vermittlung*) theology.

<sup>20</sup> *De Heraut*, 8 November 1891, Men heeft zich “in Amerika, gelijk in alle kerken, veel te gemakkelijk door de Vermittlungs-theologen op sleeptouw laten nemen, en het is eerst in het laatste decennium, dat juist tegen deze bedenkelijke theologie zekere reactie openbaar werd; en aan deze reactie danken we in de eerste plaats het moedig optreden van de hoogleraren Warfield, Steffens en Vos, wier invloed steeds klimmende is.”

<sup>21</sup> See Earl Wm. Kennedy, “Van Raalte and Parochial Schools,” in *The Enduring Legacy of Albertus C. Van Raalte as Leader and Liaison*, Jacob E. Nyenhuis and George Harinck, eds. (Holland: Van Raalte Press; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, forthcoming), 171-95.

<sup>22</sup> See George Harinck, *Mijn reis was geboden. Abraham Kuypers Amerikaanse tournee* (Hilversum: Verloren, 2009), 132-48.

Americanisation is a sham. It does not form American citizens, and far less American Christians. To put on kid gloves, to use polite phrases, to swagger about “Our Free Institutions” is very easy, but to be transformed into Republicans, with genuine Republican virtues, and to be guided by the truly American spirit in Christian and Church life, is a different matter and must be naturally a slow process.<sup>23</sup>

In the 1880s the American public school in the Dutch enclaves had not been secularized yet but was in fact a Christian school, and Steffens believed that Dutchmen should send their children to these schools. “Can we have any influence on our environment, if we don’t get to love our new fatherland and sympathize with it?”<sup>24</sup> He did agree, however, that it was inconsistent to defend the Christian character of Hope College and at the same time oppose Christian primary schools. In 1894 he showed himself more favorable to the latter than in previous years, as long as it would be an American school, not a Dutch school, and a school founded by parents and not a church.<sup>25</sup> Later on he became an advocate for the Christian school.<sup>26</sup>

Neither did he apply Neo-Calvinist insights to American politics. Religion in the United States was not a civic issue but rather a private matter. Religion and politics were strictly separated, but society as a whole was not anti-Christian. For this reason Steffens was not in favor of an independent Christian or Protestant political party.<sup>27</sup> As to science, he sometimes mused about the possibility of a university with many departments, somewhat like Free University in Amsterdam, that Christians could support wholeheartedly, and where the churches could locate their seminaries. Theological students would profit from the contact with students of different disciplines. It would broaden the views of these students while they stayed in sympathy with their churches.<sup>28</sup> “Happy Netherlands!,” he wrote in *De Hope* of 15 August 1894: “You have a free university. Our people are not ripe for it yet. They are still satisfied with seminaries. Well, we thank the Lord we have seminaries. But our prayer is that soon the desire may be born for a

<sup>23</sup> Steffens, “The work of our churches,” 187.

<sup>24</sup> *De Hope*, 1 March 1893, “Kunnen wij eenigen invloed uitoefenen op onze omgeving, indien wij niet ons nieuw vaderland lief krijgen en met hetzelfde meeleven?”

<sup>25</sup> *De Hope*, 20 and 27 June 1894.

<sup>26</sup> See for example his propaganda for the Ebenezer school in Chicago, Robert P. Swierenga, *Dutch Chicago: A History of the Hollanders in the Windy City* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 157.

<sup>27</sup> *De Hope*, 1 July 1891.

<sup>28</sup> *De Hope*, 19 October 1892.



Fig. 13. Nicolaus Martin Steffens  
(Joint Archives of Holland)



free university with all its disciplines, a craving strong enough to be realized.”<sup>29</sup>

While he did not adopt the Neo-Calvinist position on education and politics,<sup>30</sup> he did promote the Neo-Calvinist stance on the relationship of science and religion by offending a separation of these two and defending that scientific work is rooted not in reason but in a world and life view.<sup>31</sup> He stressed this point in an article in the *Presbyterian and Reformed Review*:

Calvinism is not only a system of theology, it is also a Christian view of the universe and of life, a *Welt- und Lebensanschauung*, as the Germans call it. It is said that religion is a private affair. Indeed it is, but it is vastly more. It is an affair not only of the individual but also of the human race in all its relations. A Christian has a right to say: *Homo sum, et nihil humani a me alienum puto* [I am

<sup>29</sup> *De Hope*, 15 August 1894: “Gelukkig Nederland! Gij hebt eene vrije Universiteit. Ons volk is er nog niet rijp voor. Het stelt zich nog tevreden met Seminaries. Nu, wij danken den Heere, dat wij Seminaries hebben. Maar onze bede is, dat spoedig het verlangen naar eene vrije Universiteit, met alle faculteiten geboren worde, een verlangen, sterk genoeg om verwezenlijkt te worden.”

<sup>30</sup> Heideman, *The Practice of Piety*, 23: “Steffens probably stood closer to Kuyper’s Neo-Calvinism than did any of the other nineteenth-century leaders [in the RCA in the West], but he did not seek to implement Kuyper’s political or social programs in the American context.”

<sup>31</sup> ““Wetenschappelijk geloof” voor de derde keer,” *De Hope*, 7 September 1887.

human and regard nothing human as foreign to me]. Calvinism is in earnest when it says by the mouth of Thomas Chalmers: *Christianity is true humanity*. We can not and we will not separate the realm of nature from the realm of grace.<sup>32</sup>

An event in the theological contacts between the Dutch Neo-Calvinists and the Reformed Church in Steffens' days in Holland was Bavinck's visit to West Michigan and Chicago in August 1892. Bavinck paid a visit to Michigan on his way to the fifth General Council of the Presbyterian Alliance, in Cooke's Church, Toronto, and was accompanied by his Kampen colleague, Douwe K. Wielenga. The Presbyterian Alliance was founded in 1846 by churches in Europe and North America and was supported by the Reformed Church. Steffens also attended the Toronto meeting and lectured on "The work of our churches among the European immigrants,"<sup>33</sup> work he had been acquainted with during his months in New York in the mid-1870s. Bavinck's lecture, translated into English by Dosker, was well received,<sup>34</sup> but Steffens gave a critical review of the meeting in *De Hope*: He did not appreciate the inroads of modern theological opinions in the Alliance.<sup>35</sup> This was the first time this weekly wrote negatively about the Presbyterian Alliance and warned against modernist influences creeping in. Dosker in general found Steffens' opinions unappreciative, and this time he thought his opinion was too negative. But Kuyper sided with Steffens.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>32</sup> N. M. Steffens, "Calvinism and Theological Crisis," *The Presbyterian and Reformed Review* 12 (1901): 222.

<sup>33</sup> Steffens, "The work of our churches," 183-88.

<sup>34</sup> *Quarterly Register of the Alliance of Reformed Churches Holding the Presbyterian System* 3 (November 1892), nr. 4, 65-66, quoted from the *New York Observer*: "Some of the papers . . . were very able. Among those which attracted most were the papers of professor Lindsay on the spiritual character of the reformation and its fruits in individual life, of professor Bavinck on its influence on the moral conditions of nations, and of professor Moore on drifts of theological thought." Dosker to Kuyper, 3 January 1893, "Voor Bavinck vertaalde ik zijne lezing te Toronto, die zooals gij weet, hoog werd geroemd," *Kuyper Papers*.

<sup>35</sup> See his "Herinneringen aan Toronto, I-IV," *De Hope*, 12 October–2 November 1892. Kuyper was critical as well, *De Heraut*, 4 December 1892, "De ethische richting behaalde er een volkomen triomf. . . . De Gereformeerde Kerken hebben geen eigen theologie meer. Ze spelen leenbuur bij de Duitsche Vermittlungstheologen." (The ethical triumphed there completely. The Reformed churches don't have a theology of their own anymore. They draw on the German theologians of the *Vermittlung*.)

<sup>36</sup> Dosker to Bavinck, 21 December 1892, Dosker wrote about "de eenzijdige kritiek van dr. Steffens, om Toronto zoo donker te kleuren. Ik spreek nu niet van het recht of onrecht der kritiek. Zij was zeker tamelijk vinnig, en miste den gloed van het 'Werthurtheil,' dat elke ware kritiek behoort vooraf te gaan. Voor het goede heeft St.[effens] weinig oog, voor het kwade bijna uitsluitend. Ik weet niet dat er ooit



Fig. 14. Herman Bavinck  
(Historical Documentation Center  
for Dutch Protestantism,  
VU University Amsterdam)



Like other Seceded ministers, Wielenga had received several calls from congregations of the Reformed Church in the West and recently also from the Theological School of the Christian Reformed Church. First Reformed Church of Holland had called him twice in 1882, before calling Steffens. In a way the visit of Bavinck and Wielenga was comparable to the visit of Hoedemaker ten years before. They all preached in many churches and talked with ministers and opinion leaders in Holland, Grand Rapids, and Chicago. But the colony was in much better shape now economically. And because *De Hope* had kept its readers well informed on the dramatic events of the *Doleantie* and the union between the *afgescheiden* and *dolerende* churches (which was accomplished some weeks before the arrival of the two Dutch theologians), people were thrilled and wanted to see and hear Bavinck as one of the main actors in this process.

Bavinck preached Sunday, 21 August, in Holland in the Christian Reformed Church on Market Street (now Central Avenue) and in the Third Reformed Church, but both times the crowd was too large, and people had to stand outside to listen to “breathtaking beautiful sermons.”<sup>37</sup> The following week he preached in Zeeland and Grand

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*een waarderende critiek van zijn lippen gehoord werd, die niet door een legio van - “maars” - werd vermoord. En het grappigste is (zooals steeds, meen ik, het geval is) dat hij zelf volstrekt geen critiek kan verdragen . . . Ik voor mij ben zeker dat, had men te Toronto Steffens gelijk u geapplaudiseerd, hij een gansch anderen toon zou hebben aangeslagen,” Bavinck Papers.*

<sup>37</sup> *De Hope*, 24 and 31 August 1892.

Haven, the subsequent week in Roseland and Chicago, and in September again several times in West Michigan. In the days of Hoedemaker's visit, there was a reception in the house of one of the dignitaries of Holland, but this time there was a party for sixty people in the Macatawa Park Hotel which lasted until after twelve o'clock, with dinner in a hall with Dutch and American flags, a boat trip on the lake, many speeches, and the two national anthems. The program and the menu of that evening were printed in *De Hope*, to serve readers in this country and abroad, as the editor wrote.<sup>38</sup>

The Hollanders were proud to be able to receive their Dutch guests Bavinck and Wielenga in grand style. Dosker was the master of ceremonies; there was a dinner with *Kamper uien* (tomatoes, celery, and cucumber) and many dinner speeches. Steffens would have spoken on “*Herinneringen aan Kampen*” (Kampen reminiscences), but he had been out of town and could not return in time. As Rev. Van Houte wrote, “The ties between the Hollanders in America and the Dutchmen in the old fatherland were deeply felt again.”<sup>39</sup> Having these two Dutchmen in Michigan, who had accomplished a church union in the Netherlands and had preached in Reformed and Christian Reformed churches, made the longing for reunion of both Dutch immigrants churches grow stronger,<sup>40</sup> but nothing was accomplished.

Though Steffens as a German did not have deep emotional ties that bound him to the Netherlands, he was the one within the Reformed Church that kept in touch with developments in Dutch Reformed theology; he directed the attention of his *De Hope* readers to the rise of Neo-Calvinism in the Netherlands and presented this as a new development in Reformed theology with which the Reformed Church should align. What Steffens appreciated in Neo-Calvinism was the combination of staunch Reformed orthodoxy and catholicity.

In 1894 Steffens announced the release of Kuyper's *Encyclopaedie*; in 1898 the English translation would appear as *Encyclopaedia of Sacred Theology*. To Steffens this was a defining moment in the history of Reformed theology. Steffens was enthusiastic about this *Encyclopaedia* that was aimed at modern culture and modern issues and at the same time was strongly rooted in the Reformed tradition.<sup>41</sup> Kuyper's theological *magnum opus* was advertised widely by Dutch booksellers

<sup>38</sup> *De Hope*, 31 August 1892.

<sup>39</sup> J. van Houte, “Een onvergetelijk samenzijn,” *De Hope*, 31 August 1892.

<sup>40</sup> See A. de Boer, “Eene stem uit Grand Rapids uit de harten van vele broeders,” *De Hope*, 14 September 1892.

<sup>41</sup> *De Hope*, 25 April 1894.

all over the West. Steffens was in the last year of his stay at Western Seminary and no longer had the opportunity to introduce this book into the curriculum. He did, however, encourage local churches to provide their ministers with this book: "Don't rest before all ministers in our churches have Dr. Kuyper's *Encyclopaedia* on their shelves."<sup>42</sup>

Time and again he showed himself an advocate of Neo-Calvinism in the church and in educational institutions. "Our seminaries ought to enable our young men to form for themselves a correct view of the universe and of human life in harmony with the Calvinistic system," he wrote in 1901.

It is a tremendous task, for we lack unity of education. The instruction in our public schools and high schools is of a neutral character, and in our Christian colleges the education rests almost exclusively upon the theory of evolution. . . . Is it a wonder that many, after they have finished their theological course, look upon their seminary life as an episode, and they turn out to be modern theologians instead of loyal Calvinists?<sup>43</sup>

Charles Hodge (1797-1878) had proposed the term Augustinianism instead of Calvinism, but to Steffens this was an anachronism. "Let us cherish Calvinism and all it represents until the further development of truth and a more appropriate term commend themselves to the churches. Until then the old term will be the historically correct one for the system of theology which has found expression in our Standards."<sup>44</sup> The point of course was not the term as such, but its modern application by Kuyper and Bavinck. Dosker was also in favor of this new Reformed school of thinking, but he was more hesitant than Steffens in his use of *Calvinist* as a discriminating term.

Steffens promoted a direction the Reformed Church leaders appreciated to a certain extent but did not follow. To summarize, the difference between Steffens and his colleagues in the Reformed Church was contained in their hesitancy to use *Calvinist*. Calvin and Calvinism were not popular in nineteenth-century American culture.<sup>45</sup> Steffens

<sup>42</sup> *De Hope*, 19 September 1894: "Rust niet eerder, totdat alle leeraars onzer kerken Dr. Kuypers *Encyclopaedie* in hunnen boekenkast hebben."

<sup>43</sup> Steffens, "Calvinism and Theological Crisis," 223.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 214.

<sup>45</sup> Thomas J. Davis, "Images of Intolerance: John Calvin in Nineteenth-Century History Textbooks," *Church History* 65, no. 2 (June 1996): 246. In the United States Calvin was seen as "an authoritarian theocrat who preached an authoritarian and despotic God. This Calvin threatened the freedom. . . . Thus, Calvin became the very image of intolerance."

was different because he had no reservations at all: “Our principle is Biblical—we admit and we glory in it; but the emphasis we put upon it is truly Calvinistic, I think it is Dr. Kuyper—I quote from memory—who says: ‘All Christians sing *Deo gloria*, but Calvinists alone are bold enough to sing *Soli Deo gloria*.’”<sup>46</sup> When introduced in the United States Kuyper’s theology and world and life view were explicitly labeled as Calvinist, to distinguish these from the older Reformed or Presbyterian traditions in America. The same happened when Kuyper was introduced in South Africa.<sup>47</sup> Adding to this, Steffens’ colleagues were more strongly oriented toward American theological traditions than to Dutch Kuyperianism. Geerhardus Vos was right when he wrote Kuyper in 1890 that the Dutch *Christelijke Gereformeerde* weekly *De Roeper* “is mistaken when it thinks that Freemasonry is the only point of difference between us and the Reformed Church. The question at issue is much deeper. Our simple people have felt by a sort of instinct the seriousness of the trend in which the large American churches move.”<sup>48</sup> As Steffens wrote in 1891 in a letter to Kuyper: “Calvinism and Christianity are interchangeable concepts in many circles, and the one goes overboard with the other.”<sup>49</sup> To the Christian Reformed Church, the Reformed Church was not resisting this trend.

<sup>46</sup> N. M. Steffens, “The Principle of Reformed Protestantism and Foreign Missions,” *Presbyterian and Reformed Review* 5, no. 18 (April 1884): 246.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. R.M. Britz, “Die begrip ‘calvinisme’ in die Afrikaanse geskiedskrywing. ’n Oorsigtelike tipering,” *Skriften Kerk* 14, vol. 2 (1994): 196-218.

<sup>48</sup> Kuyper to G. Vos, 12 July 1890, *Kuyper Papers*. Translation in James T. Dennison Jr., ed., *The Letters of Geerhardus Vos* (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 2005), 142.

<sup>49</sup> Steffens to Kuyper, 25 January 1891: “Calvinisme en christendom zijn in vele kringen wisselbegrippen, en met het eerste gaat ook het laatste over boord.” *Kuyper Papers*.

## CHAPTER 8

“It seems as if our Seminary has been put in the corner.”

### *The Difficult Start of Western Theological Seminary*

In 1869 the Synod of the Reformed Church decided to organize the theological department of Hope College “with the same course of study established in the Theological School at New Brunswick.”<sup>1</sup> This explains why Steffens at the start of his professorship in 1884 did not rely on the Dutch pietistic “old writers” anymore, but used as a dogmatic textbook the *Analysis of Systematic Theology* by New Brunswick professor Samuel M. Woodbridge (1819-1905). This book, however, did not satisfy him, and in 1889, he switched to Charles Hodge’s *Systematic Theology* (2 vol., 1871-73), thus marking that he distanced himself from the Eastern tradition of the Reformed Church and instead preferred the orthodox position of Princeton. Free University in the 1880s also used Hodge’s *Systematic Theology* as a textbook, until there were lecture notes from Kuyper available.<sup>2</sup> Steffens made clear the reasons for his

<sup>1</sup> Acts 1869, 646.

<sup>2</sup> H. H. Kuyper in *De Heraut*, 12 May 1929. At VU University, Hodge’s *Systematic Theology* had been used “toen dr. A. Kuyper met zijn eigen dogmatische colleges nog niet gereed was en de dogmatiek van prof. Bavinck nog niet verschenen was. Het was op aanbeveling van dr. A. Kuyper, dat destijds Hodge als handboek gebruikt werd en de oudste generatie der studenten heeft aan dezen uitnemenden Amerikaanschen theoloog veel te danken.”

preference for Hodge in a comment in *De Hope* on the replacement of Hodge's *Systematic Theology* at the Seminary of the United Presbyterian Church in Edinburgh with I. A. Dorner's *A System of Christian Doctrine*:

This change is of great importance. We like Dorner very much, and students can learn a lot from him in many respects. He is maybe the most excellent of the newer speculative theologians. But he is a German *Vermittlung* [mediating] theologian, who carries the leaven of Schleiermacher's theological principles in the hems of his robe. Hodge is much healthier in his conception of the truth. But alas! It is true, and becomes clearer day by day, that the English speaking branch of the Protestant churches is influenced more and more by German theology. That is lamentable.<sup>3</sup>

He recognized this growing influence within American Presbyterianism as well; he complained about the neglect of dogmatic teaching at McCormick Theological Seminary<sup>4</sup> and about the opinions of Charles Briggs, who in the 1890s defended modern theology in Presbyterian circles.<sup>5</sup> He modeled his teachings at Western Seminary to his own theological insights. “With a conservative mentality that only abandons the historic if it is really needed, and only does this for the sake of the truth, the seminary teaches to bind in a pure catholicity those that confess the name of Christ. That is the note she strikes, or if you prefer, the school of thought she represents.”<sup>6</sup>

What did Steffens' efforts to keep and sustain Reformed theological education in the West lead to? He was appointed professor by the General Synod in June 1884 on the condition that the chair of didactic and polemic theology would not be installed until the churches in the

<sup>3</sup> *De Hope*, 27 February 1890, “Deze verandering is van groote beteekenis. Wij houden veel van Dorner, en studenten kunnen in menig opzicht veel van hem leeren. Hij is misschien de uitnemendste der nieuwere speculatieve godgeleerden. Hij is echter een Duitsche ‘Vermittlungs’-theoloog, die het zuurdeeg van Schleiermachers Godgeleerde beginselen in de zoomen van zijn kleed draagt. Hodge is veel gezonder in de opvatting der waarheid. Het is helaas! waar, en wordt met den dag duidelijker, dat het Engelsch sprekende gedeelte der Protestantsche kerken meer en meer onder den invloed der Duitsche theologie geraakt. Dit is te bejammeren.”

<sup>4</sup> *De Hope*, 17 April 1890.

<sup>5</sup> Steffens to Kuiper, 4 January 1888, “Theology seems to be absorbed by criticism, and criticism is no longer judgment but ‘destructionology,’” *Kuiper Papers*.

<sup>6</sup> *De Hope*, 14 May 1890, “Met de behoudensgezindheid, die het historisch ontwikkelde noode prijs geeft, en slechts dan daartoe overgaat, wanneer het ter wille der waarheid gedaan moet worden, leeren zij eene zuivere katholiciteit van geest verbinden, die den naam van Christus belijden. Dit is de toon, die in ons Seminarie aangeslagen wordt, of wilt ge liever, de richting, die zij vertegenwoordigt.”

West had completed the endowment of his chair to the sum of \$30,000. Thanks to the efforts of Revs. Peter Lepeltak (1842-1912), Henry Dosker, and Nicolaus Steffens, the amount for the endowment was reached in November of that same year. On 4 December 1884 Steffens was inaugurated in the Third Reformed Church in Holland, and the next day the theological department was formally reopened, after a suspension of seven years. The department became a seminary in 1885, separated from and independent of Hope College, with its own administrative board of superintendents, its own constituent faculty, and its own curriculum.<sup>7</sup> The synod provided Steffens with two part-time lecturers on a temporary basis who would assist him: Rev. Peter Moerdyke (1845-1923), who had been a professor in Hope's theological department from 1871 to 1873 for Greek, Exegesis, and Archeology, and Rev. Henry E. Dosker for Sacred and Church History.<sup>8</sup> Rev. Daniel Van Pelt (1853-1900) was appointed as a professor for Biblical Languages and Exegesis by the Synod of 1885, but he declined because the chair was not solidly funded.<sup>9</sup>

The financial situation was unstable, but in September 1885, the consistory of Third Reformed Church urged students to neither enroll at nor return to New Brunswick and other seminaries but to start or pursue their studies at Western Seminary.<sup>10</sup> Students would receive a degree at the end of a three-year course that was modeled in 1885 after the course in New Brunswick. The board of superintendents was installed by the General Synod, which now took full responsibility for Western Seminary. The board would examine the students after three years, and graduates would be made candidates for the ministry by a classis, after which congregations could call them as their minister.

Gerrit H. Hospers (1864-1949) was one of the first four students in 1884. He had been sent from Orange City to the East by his father but got stuck in Holland; he graduated from Hope College in 1884. With his father's permission he started private lessons in Steffens' house on October 27. After five weeks, classes were held in Van Vleck hall.<sup>11</sup> Some rooms there were assigned to the seminary by Hope College, until Oggel House, built in 1860 as a residence for Hope College teacher Giles Vande Wall (1828-1896), since 1864 the home of teacher Pieter J. Oggel (1829-

<sup>7</sup> Wynand Wichers, *A Century of Hope, 1866-1966* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1966), 112.

<sup>8</sup> Dosker used J. H. Kurtz, *Textbook of Church History* (Philadelphia: Lindsay & Blakiston, 1870).

<sup>9</sup> *De Hope*, 23 June 1886.

<sup>10</sup> *De Hope*, 23 September 1884.

<sup>11</sup> *De Hope*, 13 March 1895.





Fig. 15. Oggel House  
(*Joint Archives of Holland*)

1869), and torn down in 1942, had been redecorated in 1885. The house got two recitation rooms on the second floor for Steffens and the two lecturers.

Two years later Gerrit Hospers considered switching to Free University, but ultimately he stayed in Holland.<sup>12</sup> This devoted pupil of Steffens graduated in 1887 and became a minister in the Reformed Church. His younger brother Henry (1869-1937) did enroll at Free University in 1889, after he graduated from Hope College, but he failed in Amsterdam, and after one year returned to the United States in September 1890 and attended New Brunswick Seminary.<sup>13</sup>

It was vital to the future of Western Seminary that all graduates of Hope College who intended to study theology would enroll there. In 1885 New Brunswick Seminary started with seven new students, none of them alumni of Hope College, while Western Seminary started with five students. Dirk Scholten (1852-1922) had enrolled at New Brunswick after his graduation from Hope College in 1883 and returned when the theological department reopened, but four other New Brunswick students from the West did not.<sup>14</sup> The competition was keen. In 1886 three students from Hope College bypassed Western Seminary and enrolled at New Brunswick Seminary, and the next year Hope College graduate Samuel M. Zwemer (1867-1952) did the same. In 1888 again four Hope College graduates went to New Brunswick. The college in New Jersey was in need of students at that time. Its student enrollment had dropped in recent years by a third, leaving only twenty-six students in 1884. This “leaking,” as it was interpreted by *De Hope*, of students from the West to New Brunswick went on for the next several years,

<sup>12</sup> G. H. Hospers to W. Hovy, 20 August 1886, *Papers Directeuren*, VU University Amsterdam.

<sup>13</sup> *De Hope*, 3 September 1890; Steffens to Kuyper, 24 April 1891.

<sup>14</sup> E. J. Blekkink, J. Dijk, J. Oltmans, and G. W. Stapelkamp. They had graduated from Hope College in 1883.



only to stop after 1890. This trend undermined the position of Western Seminary and of Steffens as well.

The preference of students for New Brunswick shows that the start of Western Seminary was far from easy. It took months before the inaugural address of Steffens was printed, and it was published in English only, a language many of the supporters of the seminary did not master.<sup>15</sup> English was the classroom language at Western from the start. As if to mark the difference, New Brunswick published in early 1885 its voluminous *Centennial Memorial Volume*, nicely bound. Western Seminary started from scratch and had nothing. Prof. Albertus Pieters (1869-1955), who enrolled in 1888, recalled these early years: "Grounds, none; recitation hall, none; maps, none; library, none; periodicals, none."<sup>16</sup>

At the Synod of 1886 the western churches asked for a second professor, but all they got was one lector for another year—Henry Dosker. That same summer, the Theological School of the Christian Reformed Church, with twenty-one students, appointed Geerhardus Vos as its third professor. He had to teach in English, likewise at Western Seminary. A proposal to move this school to Holland was rejected by the Christian Reformed Church Synod by a majority of only three. It was clear Western needed an impulse or it would lose the competition with alternative seminaries close by and far away, let alone the competition with the level of American educational institutions. On ministers in immigrant churches Steffens said:

Neither can it be said of the ministers that they stand on the same level with their American brethren. The preparatory schools and seminaries, established for the benefit of young men who desire to serve immigrant churches, do not offer to the students the same advantages as do other schools. Ministers, entering upon the service of the church after their graduation from those schools, find out very soon, to their chagrin, that they are not equipped as carefully as their more favored brethren.<sup>17</sup>

So, a double effort was needed. The Reformed Church Synod of 1887 therefore approved the installation of a second chair, if an

<sup>15</sup> N. M. Steffens, *The Preponderance of the Formal Principle of the Reformation over any Material Principle in the Theology of the Reformed Church. Inaugural Address, delivered on the occasion of his installation as professor of didactic and polemic theology in the Western Seminary of the Reformed Church in America* (Grand Rapids: D. J. Doornink, 1885).

<sup>16</sup> Albertus Pieters, "Let us remember," *The Theolog* 9, no. 1 (October 1935): 17-18.

<sup>17</sup> Steffens, "The work of our churches," 187.

endowment of \$30,000 was collected by the churches. But it was hard to get the money. Steffens complained in the autumn of that year:

It seems as if our Seminary has been put in the corner. It seems, as if one thinks that now the Seminary has started it runs like clockwork, no help is needed anymore. I know that collections are taken . . . but no one ever hears about it. . . . Our work needs the support of systematic charity. . . . Around us there are seminaries that offer a lot we cannot give to the young men who prepare for the ministry. And our Eastern seminary has no reason to complain about lack of things that belong to a well-equipped seminary.<sup>18</sup>

On Steffens' proposal, a plan was made for systematic fundraising. Rev. James F. Zwemer (1850-1921), financial agent of Hope College, and Rev. Van Pelt were appointed in 1888 to raise an endowment of \$100,000 for the seminary. In September 1887, however, no new students had enrolled. With the seminary in rough waters, it seemed an almost impossible mission.<sup>19</sup> It seemed Steffens lacked support from some of the ministers, and without the wholehearted support of the leaders in the church, Western Seminary would have no future. Much depended on the question of whether new students would enroll the next September and if the synod would then appoint a second professor. The board of superintendents of the seminary backed its professor and rejected allegations that missing a junior class had to do with Steffens. The board's report to the synod on Steffens' work was complimentary, and this was the case year after year. When Steffens died, Warfield wrote in a private letter to W. O. Ruston, "I know of no man in the whole Church who seems to me better fitted for the work of a theological professor. Theologians of his caliber are rare men who know the currents of thought of the day and yet are able to navigate them and reach, despite them, the haven of truth."<sup>20</sup>

<sup>18</sup> "Stelselmatige liefdadigheid," *De Hope*, 30 November 1887: "Ons seminarie schijnt geheel in den hoek geplaatst te zijn. Het schijnt, alsof men meent, dat het seminarie als een uurwerk voor goed in gang gebracht is, en gene hulp meer noodig heeft." Also: "Ons werk heeft behoefte aan stelselmatige liefdadigheid. . . . Rondom ons heen zijn er seminaries, die aan jongelingen, die zich voorbereiden op het werk der bediening, veel bieden, dat wij hun niet kunnen geven. En ook ons Oostelijk seminarie heeft niet te klagen over gebrek aan dingen, die tot een goede inrichting van een seminarie behooren. Maar al die seminaries, hoe uitmuntend zij ook mogen zijn, hebben gene rechtstreeksche sympathie met de kweeking van leeraars, die in Hollandsche gemeenten kunnen dienen."

<sup>19</sup> *De Hope*, 2 May 1888.

<sup>20</sup> W. O. Ruston, *In memoriam*.

The Synod of 1888 was requested to supply scholarships to western young men on condition that they would attend Western Seminary.<sup>21</sup> The superintendents talked with three reluctant students in the senior class of Hope College, but to no avail; in September 1888, three alumni of Hope College enrolled at Western, but again four other Hope graduates, "blind or indifferent to their Providential duty,"<sup>22</sup> enrolled at New Brunswick. The positive news of the summer of 1888 was the election of the American John W. Beardslee (1837-1921) as professor of Biblical languages and literature. Dosker was disappointed, for he was passed by after having been lector for four years. "Of that work I need not speak," he wrote to the Congregationalist minister W. E. Griffis (1843-1928), who had served the Reformed Church until 1886 and still knew the church in the East quite well: "The unswerving and unanimous loyalty of all my pupils speaks for itself. In 1888, when I was in the Continent, the Synod, under the spur of a clique, consisting of the two Moerdyks—Zwemer and Karsten (in the main)—elected prof. Beardslee to the Exegetical chair, and my position was vacated, 'for lack of funds.'"<sup>23</sup> Dosker became pastor of the Third Reformed Church in Holland. His congregation was active and involved, but his heart was no longer with the ministry – he wanted to teach and research.<sup>24</sup>

Beardslee was from Troy, New York, but had always been a loyal supporter of theological education in the West. He was not a Dutchman, but according to Steffens, this was an advantage: the seminary should have an American character, not so much a Dutch character. "This is not a Dutch institution, nor is it a German or a French institution. It is an American school. Education is organized in the American way, and classes are given in the English language, that language of the country where we live."<sup>25</sup> Awaiting the sum of \$30,000 to secure his support, Beardslee's salary was guaranteed by several congregations

<sup>21</sup> In the *Catalogue of the Western Theological Seminary of the Reformed Church in America, Holland, Michigan, 1887-1888* (n.p., n.d.) it was stated explicitly, "All of the above students [five] are graduates (and have the degree of A.B.) from Hope College."

<sup>22</sup> *Acts* 1888, 532. Qualification of these students by the board of superintendents.

<sup>23</sup> Dosker to W. E. Griffis, 17 May 1894, *W. E. Griffis Papers*, Special Collections, Alexander Library, Rutgers University, New Brunswick. The two Moerdykes were the brothers William (1843-1914) and Peter (1845-1923), ministers in the Reformed Church.

<sup>24</sup> Dosker to Bavinck, 23 March 1889: "Ik werk zoo goed als ik kan – edoch mijn hart is er niet in. Ik zou o zoo veel liever willen studeeren en onderwijzen." *Bavinck Papers*.

<sup>25</sup> *De Hope*, 5 August 1891: "Het is evenmin eene Hollandsche, als eene Duitsche of Fransche inrichting. Het is eene Amerikaansche school. Zij is op een Amerikaanschen leest geschoeid, en het onderwijs wordt in de Engelsche taal, de taal des lands, waarin wij wonen, gegeven." To strengthen the fluency of the students, it was decided when Dosker was appointed professor in 1894, that he and Beardslee had to teach them English and Dutch.



Fig. 16. John W. Beardslee  
(Joint Archives of Holland)

and individuals for five years. Though the board requested the synod in 1892 to make arrangements for his installation, the synod refused to accede, except upon compliance with the monetary conditions of 1888. Through the untiring efforts of Rev. James F. Zwemer, this condition was fulfilled in 1893, and then Beardslee was installed.

In 1888 seven of the fourteen junior theological students from the West were enrolled at Western Theological Seminary.<sup>26</sup> In 1889 the negative trend was even stronger: only one alumnus of Hope College enrolled at Western, while one Western student after his first year switched to New Brunswick, and three other Hope College graduates went to New Brunswick directly. Thanks to the enrollment of two immigrating theological students from Kampen Theological Seminary, enrollment numbers didn't decrease.<sup>27</sup>

This time Steffens decided not to wait for action from the board; he openly confronted these reluctant western students in *De Hope*. He wrote that the majority of the young men were opposed to Western Seminary because the school was not good enough in their opinion.

<sup>26</sup> Five enrolled at New Brunswick (1887: S. M. Zwemer; 1888: W. J. Duiker, W. B. Lammers, M. Ossewaarde and J. Van Westenburg), one at Presbyterian McCormick Theological Seminary in Chicago (Henry Geerlings), and one at United Presbyterian Xenia Theological Seminary in Ohio. See *De Hope*, 26 September 1888.

<sup>27</sup> *De Hope*, 25 September 1889. Hope graduates that enrolled at New Brunswick: H. Harmeling and P. J. Zwemer of the class of 1888 and T. Muilenburg and W. Stegeman of the class of 1889. The two students from Kampen, J. M. Lumkes and P. Bouma, were placed in the senior class.

Steffens asked: How could they judge an institution they had not attended? And if Western lacked quality, what about Hope College? He stressed that Hope College had in large part been founded to educate young men for ministry in the Dutch churches in the West and condemned these students for undermining the position of Western Seminary. When the four students left for New Brunswick by the end of September, Karsten sneered in *De Hope*: "More than 1800 years ago the 'wise' men came from the *East*, but these times are over, nowadays they are also found in the *West*."<sup>28</sup> *De Hope* wondered who would fund the travel costs of the New Brunswick students from the West. When it turned out that the Reformed Church paid for them, a request of the western churches was sent to the Board of Education of the Reformed Church to stop funding these expenses in 1890.<sup>29</sup> This happened, and the drop of this financial support may have been decisive.

In 1891 all Hope College students who intended to study theology declared they would enroll at Western Seminary.<sup>30</sup> From 1890 on, it was rare that a young man from the West studied at New Brunswick Theological Seminary. In 1892 Western Theological Seminary for the first time had more than ten students; in 1894 it passed the number of twenty students.

**Students at Western Theological Seminary, 1884-94<sup>31</sup>**

Year	Total Students	No. of 1st-Year Students
1885	8	3
1886	9	2
1887	5	0
1888	6	4
1889	8	1
1890	8	3
1891	6	2
1892	13	8
1893	18	6
1894	22	7

<sup>28</sup> *De Hope*, 25 September 1889: "Ruim 1800 jaren geleden kwamen de 'wijzen' uit het *Oosten*, maar die tijd is voorbij, thans worden ze ook gevonden in het *Westen*."

<sup>29</sup> *De Hope*, 28 May 1890.

<sup>30</sup> So James Zwemer in *De Hope*, 1 July 1891.

<sup>31</sup> Numbers based on information in *De Hope*.

This change for the better was a big relief for the churches in the West, as the Particular Synod of Chicago reported: “The considerable number of theological students at our Western Theological School in Holland, Mich., is one of the gladdening signs of the times, and gives courage and hope for the waiting vacant congregations and for new fields.”<sup>32</sup> The positive development was honored by the board of superintendents by proposing the synod of 1894 to appoint a third professor. *De Hope* cheered: “The seriousness, enthusiasm, and unity of the members of the Board were remarkable, and a most advantageous sign for the future.”<sup>33</sup> Synod reacted positively and this time did not pass by Dosker, maybe thanks to his own canvassing,<sup>34</sup> and appointed him as third professor at Hope or Western Theological Seminary, to teach church history. Unlike Beardslee, he was installed that same year, on the condition that an endowment of \$30,000 would be in place within five years.

It is symbolic that Oggel House got a new roof that same summer;<sup>35</sup> that Dosker received an honorary degree from Rutgers College in New Brunswick, and that with the death of Seine Bolks (1814-1894),<sup>36</sup> all the first pioneer ministers from the Netherlands (Van Raalte, Van der Meulen, Martin A. Ypma [1810-1863], and H. P. Scholte [1805-1868]) had passed away. The pioneer years were definitively over, and better times were ahead. Now that western Michigan had an historical dimension, the preservation of Western Seminary was interpreted as loyalty to the “old settlers.”<sup>37</sup> In 1893, after twenty years of existence, this theological school had produced fifty ministers since 1869, and thirty-four of them worked in the area of the Particular Synod of Chicago. This meant that

<sup>32</sup> *De Hope*, 13 June 1894, “Het aanzienlijk getal van theologische studenten aan onze Westersche Theologische School te Holland, Mich., is een der verblijdende teekenen des tijds, en geeft ons moed en hope voor de wachtende vacante gemeente, en voor de nieuwe velden.”

<sup>33</sup> *De Hope*, 2 May 1894, “De ernst, geestdrift en eensgezindheid der leden van de Board waren merkwaardig en een allergunstigst teeken voor de toekomst.”

<sup>34</sup> Dosker had been uncertain about his candidacy, Dosker to Griffis, 17 May 1894, “Now *this* thing [a professorship at Western Seminary] comes up and, to my honor, I find that the old clique—ten years older today than in ’84 but not wiser is *at* it again; for fear that I shall be the logical candidate. . . . I allowed myself to be persuaded and must now overcome the opposition of the ‘Western clique.’ What I would ask of you is this. You *know* our men East and you read the *Intelligencer*; in which the *full list of synodical delegates is published*. Will I ask too much of you, if for the sake of past exchanges of love between us, I request you to write to one or more of those, whom you know, - *what you consider to be my claims and fitness for this work.*” *Griffis Papers*.

<sup>35</sup> *De Hope*, 20 June 1894.

<sup>36</sup> Obituaries in *De Hope*, 27 June and 1 August 1894.

<sup>37</sup> *De Hope*, 26 September 1894.

at that time, 30 percent of the ministers in the West had been educated at Western.

The history of the early years of the restart of the theological department at Hope does not reflect a general enthusiasm about having regained the theological instruction in the West. There was a segment in the Reformed Church that was not very positive about the reopening of the school, and there was an "old clique" that was critical of the seminary's personnel.<sup>38</sup> Therefore it was hard to raise funds in these early years, and several times the financial situation was problematic. The synod still owed salary to lector Moerdyke when his educational task was ended in 1887. The same was the case when Dosker had to stop lecturing in 1888 because of the appointment of Beardslee. Synod again owed quite a large amount of money to Steffens when he resigned in 1895, and because of the lack of enthusiasm in the western churches, it was hard to attract students. In 1894 *De Hope* still felt the need to stress that Hope students who went to Princeton Seminary made a mistake.<sup>39</sup> One of the few satisfying moments in these early years of Steffens' professorate was the honorary doctorate he received from the University of Jena in Germany in 1886. Geerhardus Vos' observation in 1890 that Steffens was in a rather isolated position and had to endure a lot of obstruction was accurate.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>38</sup> See also 50n23, 52n34, and 58.

<sup>39</sup> *De Hope*, 26 September 1894.

<sup>40</sup> Vos to Kuyper, 12 July 1890, "Dr. Steffens, who still sees the situation in the Reformed Church the clearest, is rather isolated and has heard much opposition already," *Kuyper Papers*. Translation in Dennison, *Letters of Vos*, 142.





## CHAPTER 9

“I consider it to be my task to defend Reformed doctrine against all attacks by whomsoever.”

*Steffens Editorship of De Hope*

To promote the cause of Hope College and Western Theological Seminary and to keep the Reformed Church in the West tied together within its confessional boundaries and informed about the well being of these educational institutions, the weekly *De Hope* was a vital instrument. This weekly was the property of the Hope College council, and therefore the property of the Reformed Church. *De Hope* was the main paper of the Reformed Church in the West, only to be matched by the *Christian Intelligencer* in the East or *De Wachter* in the Christian Reformed Church. Time and again new church periodicals were issued within the Reformed Church, sometimes local, sometimes regional, but it was *De Hope* that survived them all. When Steffens in 1879 started writing in *De Hope*, it was well equipped. In 1876 a new printing office had been built at Hope College precincts, and a new press had been installed, financed by William A. Hull of New York.<sup>1</sup>

But the newspaper lacked subscribers. *De Hope* at that time had a circulation of 1,700, and the General Synod concluded that this number

<sup>1</sup> *De Hope*, 5 July 1876. The printing office was relocated on Hope College grounds in the summer of 1894.



Fig. 17. *De Hope* printing office  
(Joint Archives of Holland)

had to be doubled in order to get a sound economic base.<sup>2</sup> Since this weekly was the most important press medium of the Reformed Church in the West, the editorship of *De Hope* functioned as a key leadership position within this community. As mentioned before, Steffens was a prolific writer, publishing articles almost every week. When he was appointed professor in 1884, he published fewer articles for about half a year. Maybe this reduction had to do with the fact that John H. Karsten had become the chief editor of *De Hope* in July 1884.

Karsten did not appreciate Steffens' solid and somewhat stubborn articles with strong dogmatic leanings. But it soon turned out Karsten was not the editor who would bring good times for *De Hope*; the proofreading was not accurate, and subscriptions decreased to as low as about fourteen hundred.<sup>3</sup> And being a full time minister in Wisconsin, Karsten did not have the time to take full care of *De Hope*. Therefore Steffens' contributions to *De Hope* could not be missed, and living in Holland, he was close to the shop as well. In January 1886 the editorship of *De Hope* was reorganized and its columns reshuffled. Karsten was then assisted by the journalist Gerrit Van Schelven (1842-1927) and Steffens' friend Rokus Kanters. Van Schelven also edited *De Hollander* and *Holland City News*. Neither were theologians, but they had the advantage of living in

<sup>2</sup> Acts 1879, Art. 8, 335.

<sup>3</sup> Guess, based on *De Hope*, 3 November 1886, when an increase of a hundred subscribers in the last year was reported and on *De Hope*, November 1889, when Kanters reported *De Hope* had 1,800 subscribers and had won 400 since he took the editorship in July 1886.

Fig. 18. John H. Karsten  
(Joint Archives of Holland)



Holland, where *De Hope* was printed. Van Schelven started a new regular feature, called "Wekelijksch overzicht" (weekly overview).

The editorial change was part of the change in the Dutch American reading culture and the cultural development of the immigrant community in general. The editors made clear that the reorganization also meant modernization. "If we understand public opinion rightly, then by and large, the time for reprinting the 'old writers' in newspapers is over. . . . One does not appreciate it when the old is dished up as new. . . . Readers want a present-day reflection of present-day men on present-day issues and situations."<sup>4</sup>

This statement reflects the dynamics the Reformed community was in, with immigrants coming in week after week, new churches opening, and new opinions coming in, especially those of Kuyper, the *Doleantie* movement and Neo-Calvinism, and also those of the American religious world. In this context Steffens flourished. Karsten left *De Hope* as an editor in July 1886. He remained the managing director for some time, but that position was more distanced from the weekly job of writing and editing. Soon Van Schelven became his successor as managing director. Steffens' journalistic production expanded from this year on. He not only sustained the weekly but also strongly influenced the character of *De Hope*. As in the reopened seminary, in this weekly,

<sup>4</sup> *De Hope*, 14 July 1886: "Als wij de publieke meening recht begrijpen, dan is de tijd voor den herdruk van 'oude schrijvers' in nieuwsbladen, grootendeels voorbij. . . . men wil niet, dat dit *oude* als *nieuw* zal worden opgedischt. . . . Men verlangt eene hedendaagsche beschouwing van hedendaagsche mannen over hedendaagsche vraagstukken en toestanden."

the transition was made from the pietistic “old writers,” like Brakel and Hellenbroek, and the mild religiosity of theologians like Van Oosterzee, to the staunch Presbyterians of Princeton and to the modern, up-to-date philosophical and antithetical school of Neo-Calvinism. Steffens was the key figure not only in both of these cases but also in the midst of controversies over the transformation to a more profiled Reformed position.

*De Hope* also became more modern in that it initiated discussions about theological and ecclesiastical issues. The Dutch American community had experienced years of development and growing confidence, and now that Krabbendam’s third phase had started, the time was ripe for reflection and debate. This weekly took its readers seriously, and openly dealt with old differences and new insights, focusing on opinions, not on persons. Conrad Bult wrote: *De Hope* was ‘free from polemics, especially while under the editorship of Dr. Nicholas M. Steffens, a Reformed minister and professor at Western Theological Seminary, who often tilted with the liberal Rev. F.W.N. Hugenholtz, editor and publiher of *De Stemmen uit de Vrije Hollandsche Gemeente* (1886-1890).’<sup>5</sup> The Reformed readers in the West appreciated its dynamics and won subscribers.<sup>6</sup> In November 1887 the financial position afforded the publisher to enlarge the paper format of *De Hope*.<sup>7</sup> It is not clear if these new readers had subscribed because they appreciated the modern course of the editors<sup>8</sup> or if this rise was the effect of the growing number of new immigrants that joined the Reformed Church in these years. Or was the popularity of *De Hope* due to its constructive, non-polemical character—as compared to other church weeklies?<sup>9</sup> Whatever the reason, not many complaints were heard at the disappearance of the religiosity of Van Oosterzee and his likes.

In the late 1880s Steffens’ role in *De Hope* became more prominent. Kanters had paved the way for Steffens to get a regular feature. First Steffens picked up his column “Aanteekeningen en Opmerkingen” (notes and remarks); he started it in 1882 but had to quit after some

<sup>5</sup> Conrad Bult, “Dutch-American Newspapers: Their History and Role,” in *The Dutch in America. Immigration, Settlement, and Cultural Change*, Robert P. Swierenga, ed. (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1985), 281.

<sup>6</sup> *De Hope*, 3 November 1886. In 1886 *De Hope* reported to have won about a hundred subscribers in the months after the editorial change.

<sup>7</sup> *De Hope*, 4 November 1887.

<sup>8</sup> There are reasons for this presumption: see, e.g., *De Hope*, 26 March 1890, “Men leest ook hier *De Hope* met groot genoegen. Publieke opinie is dat zij nog niet beter geweest is.”

<sup>9</sup> As suggested by Van Hinte, *Nederlanders in Amerika*, 1:489.

years. At the end of 1887, Van Schelven got a new job in Michigan's legal court in Lansing and left *De Hope*, after having edited the paper for almost two years. A year later, in January 1889, Kanters took over Van Schelven's position as managing director; Kanters stayed as a publisher. Kanters and Steffens worked well together, and for the next six-and-a-half years, they ran *De Hope* with great success.

In 1889 Steffens took over Van Schelven's weekly feature, “Wekelijksch Budget”<sup>10</sup> (weekly budget), and in this way, he contributed to almost every issue a theological article, an overview of the religious press, and his comments on present developments. He hardly ever missed any of the issues of *De Hope* in all these years. A reorganization of the editorship of *De Hope* took place at the time of Steffens' decision to stay at Western Seminary in the summer of 1891 (see below) and was finally announced in February 1892.<sup>11</sup> Kanters continued as publisher; Steffens, Dosker, and William Moerdyke acted as editorial commission, and Steffens was the chief editor. The paper had experienced considerable growth in recent years, and under Steffens' leadership, subscriptions rose to 3,100 in 1894. Moerdyke and Dosker left the editorial commission after a year and were replaced by Hope College professor Cornelius Doesburg (1829-1906) and Rev. Jacob Van Houte (1845-1919). Steffens enjoyed writing for *De Hope*, but the weekly editorial duties kept him from writing books, as he admitted to his fellow prolific writer Warfield. He deplored this, “But then it is true, that we do not shape our own ways, it is the Lord who guides us and gives us our place and our work to do. I thank you heartily for your cheering words with regard to *De Hope*.”<sup>12</sup>

Steffens was just about the only journalist within the Dutch community of western Michigan, both in the Reformed Church and the Christian Reformed Church, with a broad, international orientation. He was a polyglot; he read the Dutch and German religious press, as well as the Scottish and the French, and he also kept a close eye on developments in the American religious press. The avid reader of the “Wekelijksch Budget” was a well-informed person and received all sorts of ammunition for a good conversation at coffee time after church. Steffens usually gave some quotations and then added his often salty remarks. He was mainly interested in the identity of churches, their

<sup>10</sup> Steffens to Warfield, 8 July 1892: “Your guess is correct. I have given myself the pleasure of sending a copy of *De Hope* to your address. The ‘Wekelijksch Budget’ is written by me, although my name is not affixed to it,” *Warfield Papers*.

<sup>11</sup> *De Hope*, 3 February 1892.

<sup>12</sup> Steffens to Warfield, 8 July 1892, *Warfield Papers*.





Fig. 19. *De Hope*,  
25 October 1893  
(Joint Archives of Holland)

relationships, and the cause of Reformed theology amidst the rise of modern theology in Europe and the United States.

But it was the Dutch press that interested him most. He would read the international theological press at home. He especially appreciated Abraham Kuyper's contributions, as did his wife Jane, who like many others, was fond of Kuyper's devotionals and rejoiced in the revival of Calvinism in the Netherlands.<sup>13</sup> He often read Dutch articles to her.

The Dutch ecclesiastical and theological developments had such an impact on the American immigrant churches that it was as if these churches were still part of the ecclesiastical structure of the Netherlands. This impression was substantiated by the fact that the periodicals in the Netherlands regularly quoted from *De Hope* or commented on its articles. Hoedemaker published letters in *De Hope*, in which he commented on its appreciation of the *Doleantie*.<sup>14</sup> And according to Steffens, it was Kuyper who set the standards for the international Reformed community. Especially in the days of the *Doleantie* and the subsequent years until 1889, an issue of *De Hope* would regularly offer more news about the Netherlands than the United States. Steffens

<sup>13</sup> Steffens to Kuyper, 9 November 1897, *Kuyper Papers*.

<sup>14</sup> For example, *De Hope*, 3 August 1887; 21 September 1887; 7 December 1887; 13 March 1889.

Fig. 20. Jane Graham Sutherland  
(Joint Archives of Holland)



was deeply involved in the Dutch debates, and as the most important American commentator, his opinions were regularly discussed in the Dutch press.

This close attention to the developments in the Netherlands and Steffens' positive appreciation of Neo-Calvinism were not always well received in his circles. In 1890 he complained to Abraham Kuyper that the *Commissie van Toezicht* (board of supervisors) of *De Hope* had rejected many of his articles: "Among us turbulence in church matters is coming. The Reformed Church is 'honeycombed' with all kinds of 'half-baked' ideas and practices. The knowledge of Reformed principles has been lost. . . . Even our periodical, *De Hope*, is in the hands of a clique that prevents me in every possible way from discussing and defending Reformed principles."<sup>15</sup>

His consistent reasoning, always showing the courage of his convictions, could be especially abrasive, though this hardly ever surfaced in the years of his editorship of *De Hope*. Someone like the liberal Dutch theologian F.W.N. Hugenholtz (1839-1900), who pastored a congregation in Grand Rapids in the late 1880s and early 1890s that was affiliated with the Unitarians, increasingly learned to appreciate Steffens, even though he often was the object of Steffens' criticism.<sup>16</sup> But others did not. In the first months of 1890, he criticized Rev. John Van der Meulen (1838-1908), who had stressed the importance of the

<sup>15</sup> Steffens to Kuyper, 12 February 1890: "In ons midden wordt het gewoel op kerkelijk gebied. De Geref. Kerk is 'honeycombed' van allerlei ongezuuten denkbeelden en praktijken. De kennis van het geref. beginsel is te loor geraakt. . . . Zelfs ons blad *De Hope* is in handen van eene clique die mij op alle mogelijke wijze belet, de Geref. beginselen te bespreken en te verdedigen," *Kuyper Papers*.

<sup>16</sup> Jacob Van Hinte, *Netherlanders in America. A Study of Emigration and Settlement in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries in the United States of America* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1985), 456.

Apostle's Creed over other confessions; he qualified the canons of Dort as a Reformed distinctive and reserved for himself the right to differ from modern orthodoxy, that is, Neo-Calvinism. He opposed those who spoke on the doctrine of the church from a strictly Calvinistic point of view<sup>17</sup>

This was a clear critique of Neo-Calvinism and thus of Steffens. Steffens suspected depreciation of the Reformed confessions and of the catholic character of the Reformed Church and positioned himself strongly as the defender of orthodoxy. “I consider it to be my task to defend Reformed doctrine against all attacks by whomsoever.”<sup>18</sup> Van der Meulen made clear in his reply that he opposed Steffens' point of view (as laid down in his inaugural address and by many articles in *De Hope*) that “the Reformed church is bound to the Three Forms of Unity and in this way is distinct from all other churches, without any relation to these other churches.”<sup>19</sup> Steffens seemed to deviate from what was usually labeled as orthodoxy, Van der Meulen concluded. This debate was sharp, also because of the personal allegations Van der Meulen made, for example that Steffens sifted every letter and seemed to have reserved the word orthodox for himself alone.<sup>20</sup> Steffens complained about these personal attacks in a confronting way, “I am glad there is one, who sees more rightly, judges more righteously, and happily is also more merciful than other people are.”<sup>21</sup>

After the debate, the impression lingered that Van der Meulen did not stick to the Reformed doctrine in the loyal way Steffens required of Reformed ministers. The board of supervisors of *De Hope* had good reason to close the debate: in general the Reformed (RCA) community did not debate religious and church issues in a confrontational way in public, and if so, *De Hope* had always tried to avoid or moderate these open confrontations, and this outburst between Van der Meulen and Steffens should best be forgotten as soon as possible. Rev. Egbert Winter (1836-1906) voiced the discontent with this debate in a letter to the editor:

I have followed the conflict in *De Hope* with grief and indignation.  
 . . . [Rev. Van der Meulen] greatly exceeds the limits of decency.

<sup>17</sup> John Van der Meulen, “Staan alle symbolen op eene lijn?,” *De Hope*, 29 January and 5 February 1890.

<sup>18</sup> “Wat zegt gij er nu van?,” *De Hope*, 26 February 1890, “Dat ik het als mijne roeping beschouw de gereformeerde leer te verdedigen tegen alle aanvallen van wie ook.”

<sup>19</sup> “Antwoord van ds. Joh. Van der Meulen op de kritiek van dr. N. M. Steffens,” *De Hope*, 5 March 1890.

<sup>20</sup> *De Hope*, 5 February 1890.

<sup>21</sup> *De Hope*, 26 February 1890.



Bringing the orthodoxy of the professor under suspicion will not be understood by those who themselves can judge. Many find fault with what one might almost call the ultra-orthodoxy of the aforementioned professor. And Brother Van der Meulen *knows* very well, that the accusations brought up by him are without foundation. Must it come to this? In that case, I am done with *De Hope*.<sup>22</sup>

Others commented in the same way to Kanters: *De Hope* is better than ever, but “a couple of *insulting* pieces have, here and everywhere, failed to improve the authors’ reputations as your correspondent learned, but everyone trusts that *De Hope* will not accept such pieces any more. If not, then many over here are done with *De Hope*, even though it is appreciated highly.”<sup>23</sup> After having spent his holidays for several years in German Valley, Illinois (one of his former congregations), Steffens in 1890 headed for Pella, Iowa, when the seminary closed for the summer. It was clear that he had made a name for himself there. Many people came to hear him, and his preaching was highly appreciated.<sup>24</sup>

Returning home, Steffens realized that the irritation about his confrontation with Van der Meulen was not over yet. In the issue of 16 July 1890, Rev. John William Warnshuis (1840-1901) had stressed that *De Hope* should be open to everyone and not just professors, ministers, and learned people, thus hinting at the fact that *De Hope* should not become a scholarly weekly or a weekly dominated by one person, namely, Steffens. Others supported Warnshuis’ argument. “Long articles on ecclesiastical, theological, and dogmatic principles are in *general* not read by the people, they are usually just ‘glanced over,’ because most of them don’t understand or get such pieces.”<sup>25</sup>

<sup>22</sup> *De Hope*, 12 March 1890, “Met smart en verontwaardiging heb ik den strijd in *De Hope* nagegaan. . . . [Ds. John Van der Meulen] gaat dan toch wel de palen van de welgevoegelijkheid zeer ver te buiten. Om zoo maar verdenking te brengen over de orthodoxie van den professor zal wel niet vatten bij die zelve kunnen oordeelen. Velen vinden een fout met wat men haast zou noemen over-rechtzinnigheid van genoemden professor. En Br. V.d. M. *weet* wel, dat de door hem zoo te berde gebrachte beschuldigingen van allen grond ontbloomt zijn. Moet het er zoo naar toe? Dan heb ik het met *De Hope* gedaan.”

<sup>23</sup> *De Hope*, 26 March 1890: “Men leest ook hier *De Hope* met groot genoegen. Publieke opinie is dat zij nog niet beter geweest is. Een paar *beledigende* stukken evenwel hebben hier en overal, naar uw correspondent verneemt, de schrijvers in geen gunstiger reputatie gesteld, doch een ieder vertrouwt dat zij dergelijke stukken niet meer opnemen. Anders raakt het hier bij velen met haar gedaan, hoeveel prijs er ook op wordt gesteld.”

<sup>24</sup> *De Hope*, 16 July 1890, “Wij behoeven niet te zeggen, dat de verschillende leerredenen, door den bekwamen predikant geleverd, door zijn talrijke toehoorders op grooten prijs zijn gesteld worden.”

<sup>25</sup> K. Schaddelee, Hull, Iowa, in *De Hope*, 13 August 1890, “Lange artikelen aangaande kerkelijke, theologische, dogmatische leer begripen worden door het volk in het

The correspondent suggested creating a separate monthly for these kinds of articles. Steffens' opinion that *De Hope* was dominated by an anti-Steffens clique was not that of its readership. This was not an unclear reference to his contributions to *De Hope*. Back home, he indicated that he was willing to give up his position and make room for better contributors, but that in his opinion, *De Hope* was not in need of simple articles, but solid ones.<sup>26</sup> In January 1892, a new Dutch-language church periodical was announced by Rev. J. W. Poot (1851-1913) that was less oriented on Reformed orthodoxy: the *Evangeliebode*.<sup>27</sup> In a letter to Kuyper, Steffens gave his opinion on the difficulties he was in: "Generally it can be said that all the Reformed churches are imbued with all kinds of errors. People are ignorant of the doctrine of the Reformed Church and have a dislike for dogmatic definition of all kinds. They show interest only in religion, a religiosity that no longer takes into account the Word of God."<sup>28</sup>

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*algemeen* niet gelezen, zij worden gewoonlijk terloops eens 'ingezien', omdat de meesten zulke stukken niet kunnen vatten of begrijpen."

<sup>26</sup> *De Hope*, 20 August 1890.

<sup>27</sup> *De Hope*, 6 January 1892. The first issue of the *Evangeliebode* appeared in the fall of 1892. I haven't traced a copy of this periodical. Poot was labeled by *De Hope* as "not Reformed," *De Hope*, 23 November 1892. In 1899 he joined a Lutheran church.

<sup>28</sup> Steffens to Kuyper, 25 January 1891, "In het algemeen kan gezegd worden, dat alle geref kerken doortrokken zijn van allerlei dwalingen. Men is onbekend met de leer der geref. kerk en heeft een afkeer van dogmatische bepalingen van welken aard ook. Godsdienstigheid is alles waarvoor men belangstelling toont; eene godsdienstigheid, die niet meer rekent met het Woord van God," *Kuyper Papers*.

## CHAPTER 10

“I fear his departure is the ‘coup de grace’ for the school.”

### *A Crisis in Steffens’ Professorate*

Steffens was disappointed by the troubles around *De Hope*, and he must have felt that his days in Holland were numbered. Soon he received a call—with acclamation—from the First Reformed Church in Pella,<sup>1</sup> where his sermons had been received so well in the summer of 1890, and where he, no doubt, had left the impression that a seminary professor might as well pastor a congregation again. There were hints in *De Hope* that he might accept the call. On 3 September 1890, he wrote about the new academic year starting. Western Seminary was still at low ebb, he noted disappointedly. And there was *rumor in casa* (commotion in the house). Three “totally refractory” Hope College students (James Ossewaarde, Harry Kremers, and Herman S. Justema) had not received their degrees because they had not turned up at the commencement ceremony in May. The three young men denigrated the board in the local press. They had left Hope College while the issue was still unresolved, bypassed Western Seminary, and enrolled at Princeton Theological Seminary. Board member Dosker called in the help of Warfield to urge

<sup>1</sup> *De Hope*, 27 August 1890.



Fig. 21. Hope College campus, 1891  
(Joint Archives of Holland)

these students to fulfill their duties. In the same month “the acceptance of two of their classmates at New Brunswick Seminary caused friction with Hope College.”<sup>2</sup> Steffens faced the loss of five prospective students to other seminaries and was disappointed in Hope College, which did not prepare its students well for theological studies and did not promote Western Seminary ardently.

What Western Seminary needed most was ardent support from the western churches: “Where cooperation in faith and love is lacking, one cannot ask for God’s blessing, and even less expect it. A kingdom divided against itself cannot stand.”<sup>3</sup> He commented bitterly on the fact that the board of superintendents had requested him to recruit students:

From where? From Rutgers College maybe; or from Princeton and Yale? Western young men we need. . . . Hope College should send them. But they are not sent to us from Grand Rapids, Sheboygan, Dubuque. And if Hope sends the young men to Chicago, New Brunswick, and other schools, oh! Board of superintendents, tell us please, where shall we go to fill our recitation rooms?<sup>4</sup>

This year again three Hope graduates in total had enrolled in New Brunswick, contrasted to only two at Western Seminary.<sup>5</sup> The tension in Holland grew. On Sunday, 1 October, it was announced to the congregation in Pella that Steffens had accepted the call.<sup>6</sup> By next

<sup>2</sup> Dosker to Warfield, 6 October 1890, *Warfield Papers*.

<sup>3</sup> *De Hope*, 3 September 1890: “Waar die samenwerking in geloof en liefde ontbreekt, kan men den zegen des Heeren niet inroepen, veel minder nog verwachten. Een koninkrijk tegen zichzelf verdeeld, kan niet bestaan.”

<sup>4</sup> *De Hope*, 3 September 1890: “Van waar? Van Rutgers College misschien; of van Princeton en Yale? Westersche jongelingen hebben wij noodig . . . Hope College behoort ons die jongelingen te zenden. Uit Grand Rapids, Sheboygan, Dubuque worden ze ons niet gezonden. Indien Hope College de jongelingen zendt naar Chicago, New Brunswick of andere scholen, o! Board of Superintendents, zegt ons toch, waarheen zullen wij gaan om onze leerzalen te vullen.”

<sup>5</sup> The third student in the Junior Class of Western Seminary in 1890 was Peter Siegers, from the Municipal Gymnasium in Middelburg, the Netherlands.

<sup>6</sup> *De Hope*, 8 October 1890.

April his days as a professor would be over. Three weeks later Dosker informed Herman Bavinck:

He is demoralized. I miss him constantly. Our encounters are casual now and formal. The old "intimacy" is totally lacking. He alienated his friends and pushed his enemies to extremes. But *I did not say too much of him* in the Netherlands. He is one of the brightest minds I know, and I fear his departure is the "coup de grace" for the school. By his departure the anti-Steffens party wins the victory.<sup>7</sup>

No one reacted in the press, except for someone anonymous, who deplored Steffens' decision and hoped he would go on writing for *De Hope*.<sup>8</sup> Fundraiser James F. Zwemer tried to keep up good spirits: "Though our Western Seminary is suffering—purified we trust; we believe in her future. Even though some of our young friends withdraw, who in our opinion should have shown, that 'there are two parts [sides] in [to] every covenant.'" Steffens did not comment in the press, and spent Christmas time in Pella, without his family. In a letter to Kuyper of 25 January 1891, he reflected on his decision to leave the seminary:

My work at the Seminary is . . . coming to an end. It is impossible to tell you in a short letter all the reasons that persuade me to tender my resignation to the Synod this spring. I am alone in my surroundings [milieu]. I do have a few Christian friends, but as champion of Reformed principles I stand literally alone. Of course, there are still Reformed people in the congregations, but what can those poor sheep do when they find themselves in the hands of leaders who live in an entirely different world and think about nothing but syncretism and practical work.

Rev. Dosker has also mistreated me badly. He would like to be a supporter, but at the same time he wants to be on good terms with the men on the other side.

<sup>7</sup> Dosker to Bavinck, 21 October 1890: "Hij is ontmoedigd. Ik mis hem bestendig. Onze ontmoetingen zijn nu casueel en formeel. De oude 'intimacy' ontbreekt geheel. Hij vervreemde zijne vrienden en dreef zijne vijanden tot uitersten. Toch heb ik in Ned. *niet teveel van hem gezegd*. Hij is een der helderste koppen die ik ken, en zijn heengaan is voor de school, vrees ik, de 'coup de grace.' De anti-Steffenspartij behaalde door zijn vertrek de overwinning," *Bavinck Papers*.

<sup>8</sup> *De Hope*, 8 October 1890.

<sup>9</sup> *De Hope*, 10 December 1890, "Al wordt ons Westersch Seminarie door lijden beproefd – geheilgd vertrouwen wij; wij gelooven in haar toekomst. Al onttrekken zich sommigen onzer jeugdige vrienden, die naar onze meening dienden te toonen, dat 'in alle verbonden twee deelen begrepen zijn.'"



Fig. 22. James F. Zwemer  
(Joint Archives of Holland)

Rev. Winter of Grand Rapids is in many respects an excellent man, but he lives in a world that no longer exists and in a future which is still far distant. He stands dogmatically in a position that Reformed ministers held in the *Hervormde Kerk* about the year 1860, and to that he adds millennial expectations. He might be called a man of the [Dutch] *Réveil* Movement.<sup>10</sup>

The year 1891 started with good news for Steffens. He was appointed as a member of the American Institute of Christian Philosophy. Involved in a process of Americanization, occasions like these were celebrated by *De Hope*. In the 1890s several other alumni of Hope College, like the Republican politician Gerrit J. Diekema (1859-1930) and Oriental linguist and Kuyper translator Dr. Abel H. Huizinga (1859-1905), had been honored publicly by American institutions, and this was received

<sup>10</sup> “Met mijn werk aan ons seminarie spoedt het ook ten einde. Het is onmogelijk in een kort briefje u bekend te maken met al de gronden, die mij bewegen, dit voorjaar bij de synode mijn ontslag in te dienen. Ik sta in mijne omgeving alleen. Wel heb ik enkele christelijke vrienden, maar als voorstander der geref. beginselen sta ik letterlijk alleen. Wij hebben nog wel geref. menschen in de gemeenten, maar wat kunnen die arme schapen uitrichten, daar zij zich bevinden in de handen van leiders, die in eene geheel andere wereld leven, en aan niets anders denken dan aan syncretisme en praktisch werk. Ds. Dosker heeft ook mij op ergerlijke wijze mishandeld. Hij wil gaarne medestander zijn, maar tegelijkertijd wil hij goed aangeschreven staan bij de mannen op de andere zijde.

Ds. Winter van Grand Rapids is een in vele opzichten uitnemend man, maar hij leeft in eene wereld, die niet meer bestaat, en in eene toekomst, die nog verre in het verschiet ligt. Dogmatisch staat hij op het standpunt, waarop geref. leeraars in de Herv. Kerk stonden zegge in het jaar 1860, en daarmee vereenigt hij chiliastische verwachtingen. Men zou hem misschien kunnen noemen een man van het *réveil*,” *Kuyper Papers*.

by the Hollanders as a sign of recognition. "It seems as if the world of academia has cast an eye upon our Dutch 'learned men.'" <sup>11</sup>

In March Steffens promoted Western Seminary one more time. The Presbyterian Church was planning to open another seminary, besides Princeton, New York, Allegheny, Auburn, and Lane. One might wonder if this was not too much, Steffens mused, but a seminary represents not only the number of members of a church but also the ethnic background of its members, and one also has to take into account the distances between churches and seminaries. If you don't take these last two aspects into account, one seminary might have been sufficient for the Reformed Church. But immigrants would not be attracted to a church that treats them as "second class passengers in the church-train. And they are right. Is it accidental, that new churches have been organized after our Seminary reopened? Or do you think, there is no relationship between these two facts?" <sup>12</sup>

In April 1891 the first official reactions to Steffens' resignation were released. The Classes of Grand River, Holland, and Iowa considered Steffens' resignation a serious loss to the seminary and asked the synod to prevent him from leaving and offer him "suitable arrangements." <sup>13</sup> Steffens was surprised by these requests.

The same men that did everything possible to drive me away from here are now at the head of the line to keep me here. The people want me to stay and so even the men who hate me are forced to listen to public opinion. However, I have no desire to continue to work any longer in connection with this College where the young people are not at all prepared to begin their theological studies successfully. <sup>14</sup>

In reaction to the overtures of the three classes, the First Church of Pella announced it "rejoices in the prospect Rev. N. M. Steffens, DD, soon

<sup>11</sup> *De Hope*, 28 January 1891. See also *De Hope*, 16 January 1889: state representative G. J. Diekema; *De Hope*, 20 February 1889: Dosker appointed member of the American Institute of Christian Philosophy; *De Hope*, 10 July, 1889: this year Diekema was the speaker of the Michigan House of Representatives; *De Hope*, 31 December 1890: Abel H. Huizinga appointed member of the American Oriental Society. John W. Beardslee was appointed member of the American Institute of Christian Philosophy at the same time, see: *De Hope*, 4 February 1891.

<sup>12</sup> *De Hope*, 25 March 1891.

<sup>13</sup> *De Hope*, 15, 22, and 29 April 1891.

<sup>14</sup> Steffens to Kuyper, 25 April 1891: "Dezelfde mannen, die al het mogelijk gedaan hebben om mij van hier te verwijderen, staan nu voorop om mij hier te houden. Het volk begeert mij, vandaar zijn ook de mannen, die mij haten, gedwongen, naar die publieke opinie te luisteren. Ik heb echter geen lust langer te blijven arbeiden in gemeenschap met dit College, waar de jonge lui volstrekt niet voorbereid worden om met vrucht hunnen theol. studie te beginnen," *Kuyper Papers*.



filling in the empty place in the pulpit.”<sup>15</sup> Whatever would happen in the coming months, Steffens bade farewell to the First Holland Church he had served for almost a decade, and in April this church started to call a new minister.<sup>16</sup>

On 3 May 1891, Steffens for the last time preached his regular sermon in the First Church. At a farewell meeting, held the Friday night before, he received the Herzog-Plitt *Real Encyclopädie für protestantische Theologie und Kirche*.<sup>17</sup> Kanters reported on the Sunday evening service, “Although there always is a *silent hope*, that Steffens won’t leave this town, we would offend the truth, if we did not report, that many were moved by the thought: ‘this is the *last regular* sermon.’”<sup>18</sup>

Steffens went out of town as soon as possible, leaving his family behind. On Tuesday, 5 May, he departed for visits to his daughter and son-in-law, Peter and Agnes Holleman, in Roseland, and then to friends in Silver Creek, German Valley. In the week after his farewell sermon, the Particular Synod of Chicago convened on 6 and 7 May, coincidentally in Pella. This meeting dealt with the resignation of Steffens and the three classis overtures extensively; they decided to request Pella to allow Steffens to reconsider his decision to accept the call, and if Pella would decline this request, to request the General Synod that would convene in June not to accept Steffens’ resignation as a professor.<sup>19</sup>

The called pastor Steffens arrived ‘in good health’ in Pella on Saturday, 16 May, and in the evening enjoyed the performance of J. M. Cox’s Band in the first open air concert of the season in Central Park, illuminated by ‘electric light’.<sup>20</sup> The next day he preached twice in the First Reformed Church. On Memorial Day, 30 May, he gave the

<sup>15</sup> *De Hope*, 29 April 1891.

<sup>16</sup> *De Hope*, 22 April 1891, “Na de opening der [gemeente] vergadering gaf dr. N. M. Steffens, aan wien de leiding was opgedragen, duidelijk te kennen dat, welke wegen de voorzienigheid verder ook met hem mocht houden, ZEw. niet meer als tot heden bij de Eerste Geref. Gemeente zal kunnen voorgaan.”

<sup>17</sup> J. J. Herzog and G. L. Plitt, *Real-Encyclopädie für protestantische Theologie und Kirche*, second revised edition (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1877-88), 18 volumes.

<sup>18</sup> *De Hope*, 6 May 1891, “Hoewel er altijd een *stille hoop* bestaat, dat ZEw. deze plaats niet zal verlaten, zouden we toch de waarheid te kort doen, indien we niet melden, dat menig hart zichtbaar bewogen was bij de gedachte: ‘deze is de *laatste geregelde* preek.’”

<sup>19</sup> *Pella’s Weekblad*, 8 May 1891, copied in *De Hope*, 13 May 1891. I consulted this rare and not catalogued weekly in the Archives of Geisler Library of Central College, Pella, Iowa, that holds an incomplete volume from October 1886 until November 1895.

<sup>20</sup> *Pella’s Weekblad*, 21 May 1891, mentions the “*schitterende electrieke lichten*” (beautiful electric lights); also *De Volksvriend*, 21 May 1891. That same day engineering and electronics conglomerate Philips & Co. was founded in Eindhoven, the Netherlands, to meet the growing demand of electric light bulbs.

benediction at a public meeting in the Park. His family would arrive in Pella six weeks after him, as *Pella's Weekblad* assured, "As soon as the school exams are over in Holland, Mich., which will take place at the end of next month, and in which some children of Dr. Steffens have to participate, his wife and other members of his household will follow him." Kanters cited this information, and added, "Unless *accurate* measurements of the strength of the Eastern and Western currents make it *necessary* to shift the beacons of the waterway."<sup>21</sup> Kanters was right. Steffens' wife did travel West, but no further than Roseland, where she stayed with the Hollemans. In the first week of June, General Synod requested Steffens to withdraw his letter of resignation (the wording of which was not very diplomatic).<sup>22</sup> Steffens was willing to do that, but when Steffens informed the First Reformed Church about Synod's request, the consistory refused to let him go. Synod urged him to communicate with them in a more resolute way. This helped. Steffens now cabled, "If Synod orders me to stay, I will obey."<sup>23</sup> Geerhardus Vos had followed the drama, and being afraid to lose a companion, wrote Kuyper on 30 July. "To my joy Professor Steffens stays in his field of activity in Holland."<sup>24</sup>

On 14 June<sup>25</sup> Steffens returned to Holland to install his pupil Albertus Pieters in the First Church of Holland as a foreign missionary on 17 June, intending to return to Pella immediately after this ceremony, thus missing the graduation of his daughter Fanny from Hope College the next day and the graduation of his daughter Isabella from grammar school in the next week. In the meantime, however, Jan Spijkerman, who had donated the organ to Steffens' church, died, and Steffens was asked to lead the memorial service on 24 June. He therefore had to stay in Holland for a week, but he returned to Pella and preached in the First Reformed Church 'on a regular basis' from Sunday 28 June on.<sup>26</sup> But in the end he spent only two weeks in Pella; he returned to Holland

<sup>21</sup> *Pella's Weekblad*, 21 May 1891. *De Hope*, 27 May 1891, "'Zoodra de school examens te Holland, Mich., zullen zijn afgeloopen, die in het laatst der volgende maand zullen plaats hebben, en waar aan een paar kinderen van dr. Steffens moeten deelnemen, zullen zijne vrouw en overige huisgenooten volgen.' N.B. Indien door *nauwkeurige* peilingen den drang der Oostersche en Westersche stroomen, het niet *noodzakelijk* maken, de bakens van het vaarwater te moeten verzetten. – R. K."

<sup>22</sup> *De Hope*, 10 June 1891. Letter not found in the archives of General Synod; email Russell Gasero to the author, 27 August 2008.

<sup>23</sup> *De Hope*, 17 June 1891.

<sup>24</sup> *Kuyper Papers*, Translation in Dennison, *Letters of Vos*, 166.

<sup>25</sup> *Pella's Weekblad*, 12 June 1891.

<sup>26</sup> *Pella's Weekblad*, 26 June 1891, writes that from Sunday on, Steffens will "weder de geregelde godsdienst lijden [*sic*] in het kerkgebouw der 1st ger. Gemeente."

on July 10 to officiate at the wedding of Rev. Pieters and Emma Kollen on 21 July and to attend Pieters' farewell service in the First Church in Holland on 26 July. In the meantime the First Church of Pella had accepted the new situation and *Pella's Weekblad* of 10 July announced that it would call another minister as soon as possible. Some months later Rev. Peter de Pree accepted a call from Pella and filled the vacancy. The episode with Steffens disappeared in the mist of the past.<sup>27</sup>

When the students entered Western Seminary (now called Western Seminary by Steffens rather than Hope Seminary) in September, he was back at the seminary again. His daughter Isabella had left home for Downer College in Fox Lake, Wisconsin, a school that offered more subjects for girls than the curriculum of Hope College and was attended by several others from Holland. Fanny Steffens had left to teach at Northwestern Classical Academy in Orange City.<sup>28</sup> The Steffens house in Holland emptied.

In *De Hope* Steffens spent only a few personal words on his return; he had not expected to resume his work as a professor again.<sup>29</sup> In a contribution on the reopening of the lessons, he mainly asked two things: He asked the churches to stand united in moral and financial support of Western Seminary and to combat the evil of dividedness, especially a danger because of the individualistic character of American culture. And secondly, he urged the students not to expect everything from the teacher in class; they themselves had to study hard. What Hope College and Western Seminary needed most acutely, however, was a larger endowment (for many years now James Zwemer had been actively creating a \$100,000 endowment) and a library building.<sup>30</sup> And more students of course. Six students had enrolled at Western Seminary in 1891, but still some from the West enrolled at New Brunswick or

<sup>27</sup> 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, 1856-2006. *First Reformed Church Pella, Iowa* (n.p., n.d.), tells the heritage of faith and offers a few historical vignettes. It lists all the ministers except Steffens.

<sup>28</sup> Northwestern Academy had four professors and about 60 students in 1893.

<sup>29</sup> *De Hope*, 9 September 1891, "Hebben wij reeds weer een begin gemaakt met dat werk. Wat mij persoonlijk aangaat, had ik niet verwacht, dat ik op nieuw mij zou moeten aangorden tot aanvaarding er van."

<sup>30</sup> *De Hope*, 4 May 1892, \$30,000 was needed to build a new library. Gerrit J. Kollen was the major fundraiser for the library, and by May 1892, he had raised \$23,000. Mr. Garret E. Winants, Bergen Point, New Jersey, donated \$10,000 for the new library building, as did Nathan F. Graves, Syracuse, New York, plus 10,000 of his books (valued at \$20,000). The new building would be named after them: Graves Hall and Winants Chapel. A first drawing of the building is in *De Hope*, 12 October 1892. See also Elton J. Bruins, "A Step Forward for Hope College: Building Graves Hall and Winants Chapel," *The Joint Archives Quarterly* (Spring 2007): 1-7.



Fig. 23. Faculty and students of Hope College, 1894  
(Joint Archives of Holland)

at the “well equipped” Princeton Theological Seminary.<sup>31</sup> Steffens had decided to stay, but he was not satisfied. Some progress seemed to be made though. At the end of the year 1891-92, *De Hope* asked for a third professor. “And we think that our Church is abundantly able to provide for this need.”<sup>32</sup> Would this satisfy Steffens?

His dissatisfaction with the course the Reformed Church had taken was well known. In June 1892, the Synod of the Christian Reformed Church, with 103 out of 117 votes, called Steffens as a professor of systematic theology, a new chair, created on Vos’ advice, at their theological seminary in Grand Rapids.<sup>33</sup> This call may have been a surprise to the Reformed Church, but it underlines Steffens’ ambivalent position at Western Seminary, his marginal position within the Reformed Church, and his sympathy for his Christian Reformed brothers. “As he said himself more than once, he loved to dwell in our circles,” *De Wachter* wrote. He declined the call, and spent the summer in Pella among his sympathizers as a temporary pastor to the still vacant First Reformed Church.<sup>34</sup> The Christian Reformed Church called professor Douwe K. Wielenga from Kampen instead, who declined as

<sup>31</sup> Dosker to Warfield, 14 September 1893, “Quite a contingent of Dutch boys are to enjoy the privileges of your well equipped institution; some of them young men of undeniable merit and promise,” *Warfield Papers*.

<sup>32</sup> *De Hope*, 25 May 1892, “En ons dunkt, dat onze Kerk overvloediglijk in staat is, in die behoefte te voorzien.”

<sup>33</sup> See *Gedenkboek van het vijftigjarig jubileum der Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerk A.D., 1857-1907* (Grand Rapids: Semi-Centennial Committee, 1907), 102.

<sup>34</sup> *De Volksvriend*, 2 June 1892. He started his temporary pastorage in Pella at the end of May. When at the end of August 1892, Steffens left for Michigan again, “een prachtige wandelstok,” a beautiful walking stick was presented to him as a souvenir from his Pella sympathizers. *De Volksvriend*, 25 August 1892. This was the second walking stick he received in that same year.

well. Van Houte, Steffens successor as minister of the First Church in Holland, expressed his joy and gratitude for Steffens' decision in *De Hope*; he said he spoke in the name of many, but he was the only one who spoke out.<sup>35</sup> Steffens explained his decision to Warfield:

Your ideas about consolidating the two schools [the seminaries in Grand Rapids and Holland] are not foreign to me, although I have to add that it is impossible at the present to transform them into realities. The brethren of the Chr. Ref. Ch. are secessionists. They have separated themselves not only from the Dutch Ref. Ch., but also from all Protestant denominations. They believe that they – and perhaps the U.P. [United Presbyterian] and R.P. [Reformed Presbyterian] Churches – represent the visible church of Christ of the Reformed type. . . .

This is the reason why I have come to the conclusion to decline the call. I desire to be faithful to the Ref. principles and doctrines, but I cannot and will not for a moment harbor the idea as if we might expect to win the battle by leaving the battlefield and by avoiding any contact with the enemy. . . . I told the brethren, that, if their church and ours were sister churches, I might be found uniting to help them in their struggle, but knowing, that they unchurch our church, I could not think of considering this call. It is a pity that churches, one in doctrine and culture, are arrayed against each other. And that in our times, when we need every man, who is in sympathy with the Calvinistic type of Christianity.

I was in a sore plight. On the one side a church, giving me her full confidence, although I had more than once testified against her eccl. position, and on the other side some good friends among the clergy no doubt, and many warm followers among the laity, but, especially among the clergy a . . . suspicious crowd, bearing with me as an unavoidable nuisance. And yet I could not sacrifice my own position and principles on account of this strange condition of things.<sup>36</sup>

On paper, Vos and Steffens were a strong partnership in their agreement about the direction Reformed theology ought to take, and as colleagues, they might have given a boost to the seminary of the Christian Reformed Church and to Neo-Calvinism in the Midwest, but

<sup>35</sup> *De Hope*, 13 July 1892.

<sup>36</sup> Steffens to Warfield, 8 July 1892, *Warfield Papers*.

after Steffens' decline, the opposite happened. Vos left his seminary. In the spring of 1893, he accepted a call from Princeton Theological Seminary. His move caused discontent within the Christian Reformed Church. A writer in *De Wachter* "questioned whether it was theologically correct for a Christian Reformed scholar to accept a position in a Presbyterian seminary, since the Presbyterian Church, like the Reformed Church in America, was viewed as a 'false church,' lacking the mark of discipline."<sup>37</sup> Vos' departure from Grand Rapids also caused irritation between the Christian Reformed Church and the Reformed Church, because the move was appreciated by *De Hope*. The paper wrote that Vos was of more value for the Reformed cause in America in one of the centers of Presbyterianism than in the aloofness of the Christian Reformed Church.<sup>38</sup>

There were a lot of skirmishes between the Reformed Church and Christian Reformed press in these years. Closer contacts were encouraged by the successful merger of two Reformed churches in the Netherlands, by the more equal position in numbers of both churches since the growth of the Christian Reformed Church after 1882, and by the stronger orientation of the Christian Reformed Church on the Neo-Calvinist revival in the Netherlands. The contacts did not lead to any result, but as such they underlined how close both churches were to each other in these years. Steffens' appointment at Grand Rapids and the appreciation for Vos in *De Hope* illustrated this, as well as small signs like the presence of Christian Reformed students Henry Beets and Louis Berkhof at the 1894 commencement of Western Seminary. They were signs of hope to Steffens, but without result.

<sup>37</sup> Heideman, *The Practice of Piety*, 192n97.

<sup>38</sup> *De Hope*, 2 August 1893.





## CHAPTER 11

“I am between two millstones.”

*Steffens’ Departure from West Michigan*

In the summer of 1892 a proposal for a merger with the German Reformed Church in the United States was postponed by the midwestern classes of the Reformed Church and defeated in the next year. Karsten, Peter Moerdyke, and Winter were in favor of the proposal, but Steffens strongly opposed this merger because he distrusted the theology of the German Reformed. Their theology was influenced by the New Theology taught at Andover Theological Seminary and by higher criticism of the Bible.<sup>1</sup> He wrote to Warfield:

Federal union with the Ger. Ref. Church has been postponed for a year. I wish it were buried never to rise again. Why do we not unite with the Presbyterian Church? I have no local or provincial patriotism. To have one grand Reformed Presbyterian Church, full of the power of the Spirit, faithful to the standards of the 16th and 17th centuries, is my ideal. Some seem to fear absorption. I do not care, if only the truth as it is in Jesus is preserved and preached and practiced.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Heideman, *The Practice of Piety*, 70-77.

<sup>2</sup> Steffens to Warfield, 8 July 1892, *Warfield Papers*.

At first, Steffens was in favor of a merger with Reformed churches with a European continental background. But because of the inroads of modern theology, confessional revision, and higher criticism in some of these churches, the theological fronts changed in about 1890, and theology turned out to be decisive for the relationships into which the Reformed Church entered. From then on he favored a union with the Presbyterian Church, notwithstanding its non-continental background. It was an ideal that was not accomplished, but Steffens put a lot of energy into restoring and strengthening relations between churches of the Reformed and Presbyterian confession. His stance in the debate on a merger with the German Reformed Church brought the Reformed Church "more within the Presbyterian orbit."<sup>3</sup>

In 1893 Steffens and Rev. Rense H. Joldersma (1854-1913) were sent to the General Synod of the newly created *Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland* as delegates of the Reformed Church. This was the second time Steffens attended a Dutch synod as a delegate. The first time was in 1869, when he represented the German Old Reformed Church at the Synod of the *Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerk*, held in Middelburg. Steffens was back in Europe after more than twenty years. On his travels in 1893 he paid a visit to Kampen Seminary, where he in mid-July attended the exams,<sup>4</sup> the northern provinces and the Ostfrisian country where he was born, before he traveled to Dordrecht, where the synod was held. During these weeks he published a travel diary in *De Hope*; some installments were also published in the Dutch press.<sup>5</sup> He did not mention names and dates and did not describe what he saw and heard. He preferred to give some general thoughts, on traveling, on the landscape, on preaching, etc.

Rev. Jan Hendrik Vos (father of Geerhardus Vos, who left that summer for Princeton), the delegate of the Christian Reformed Church at this synod, openly defended the right of his church over against the Reformed Church and reproached the Reformed Church. "Arminius would feel at home there."<sup>6</sup> This confrontational way of doing was in line with the attitude of the Christian Reformed Church since 1857 but was not appreciated by the members of the synod. In his address to the Synod of Dordrecht, Steffens refrained from saying that this synod was not a court that had to decide about the dispute between the Reformed Church and the Christian Reformed Church or whether the Christian

<sup>3</sup> Heideman, *The Practice of Piety*, 77.

<sup>4</sup> *De Heraut*, 23 July 1893.

<sup>5</sup> For example the installment on Kampen in *De Bazuin*, 16 August 1893.

<sup>6</sup> *De Heraut*, 24 September 1893.

Reformed Church should have seceded.<sup>7</sup> But he did say that Van Raalte by joining the Reformed Church had not violated the principles of the Secession of 1834. Vos' remarks were left out of the proceedings of the synod, and when the Christian Reformed minister repeated his allegations in *De Bazuin*, Kuyper in *De Heraut* protested against his disgraceful behavior.<sup>8</sup>

The Reformed Church was appreciated at this synod. The committee on correspondence with foreign churches reported, "It seems that the Calvinistic current in this church grows in importance and influence. . . . Our churches should try to lead this current in the right channel."<sup>9</sup> This did not mean that the *Gereformeerde Kerken* chose sides with the Reformed Church. The synod hoped that the Christian Reformed Church and Reformed Church would overcome their antagonism, but they did not. As a matter of fact, although Van Raalte in 1866 was the first representative of the Reformed Church to visit a synod of one of the Reformed churches in the Netherlands, Steffens in 1893 was the last one for a long time.

Although Steffens refrained from opening discussions on a merger between the Reformed Church and the Christian Reformed Church in 1892, when many wondered if a union like that in the Netherlands could be achieved in the United States, Dosker and others had discussed this issue in the press with several Christian Reformed pastors. Steffens in the end decided to address this issue in the fall of 1893, after his return from the Dutch synod and especially in reply to the brochure of G. K. Hemkes, "*Het rechtsbestaan der Holl. Chr. Geref. Kerk in Amerika*."<sup>10</sup> When Rev. W. H. Gispén wrote in the Dutch weekly *De Bazuin* about the reserved attitude of the American synodical delegates toward each other, *De Hope* replied that Steffens and Joldersma had been friendly toward Vos at the Dordrecht synod. The issue at stake was: Were the splits of 1857 and 1882 rightful secessions, or were they unjustified?<sup>11</sup>

Steffens explained in a series of articles in *De Hope* that something like a conditional union, as was the future Christian Reformed

<sup>7</sup> He explained why he restrained himself in *De Hope*, 18 October 1893.

<sup>8</sup> *De Heraut*, 24 September 1893.

<sup>9</sup> *Acta der generale synode van de Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland, gehouden te Middelburg, van 11 aug. tot 4 sept. 1896* (Leiden: J. H. Donner, 1897), 86: "In die kerk [the Reformed Church] neemt blijkbaar de calvinistische strooming in betekenis en invloed toe. . . . Onze kerken moeten trachten die calvinistische strooming in goede bedding te leiden."

<sup>10</sup> Grand Rapids: Langereis & Hemkes, 1893.

<sup>11</sup> *De Hope*, 1 November 1893.

provision of the joining of the Seceders as the Classis of Holland to the Reformed Church in 1849, did not exist in Reformed church polity, and that the wording of the 1849 agreement that the Seceders could always return to their independent position in a brotherly way, was included to underscore the fact that the Seceders did not join a hierarchal church, but a Reformed church.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, in 1857 and 1882, some congregations did not regain their independence in a brotherly way but in a judgmental way, by denouncing the Reformed Church as a false church. Steffens rejected all the arguments given for their judgment and defended the Reformed character of the Reformed Church. With a reference to Bavinck he defended the Calvinistic tradition as non-exclusive.<sup>13</sup>

Steffens' articles, written as letters to a friend, were well received. When the issues of *De Hope* with his letters were sold out, Kanters had them printed as a brochure.<sup>14</sup> Steffens liked the format of the letter for his articles and continued to write them on other issues, but he returned to the topic of the Christian Reformed Church, the Reformed Church, and the *Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland* on a regular basis.

Whatever may have changed after Steffens' attempted departure from Holland and Western Seminary, his stamp on the character of *De Hope* did not weaken. Topics on differences between Reformed churches were dominant, as were polemical articles (though not in the bitter and personal tone of his confrontation with Van der Meulen in 1890), and subscription numbers proved that this was appreciated. But opposition surfaced again. In the summer of 1894, Peter Moerdyke, Rev. Samuel Streng (1851-1900), and Dr. Hendrik Pieter Oggel (1844-1926), editor of *De Volksvriend* (Orange City, Iowa), protested the "ecclesiastical squabbling" and "name calling, fencing, and fighting" of *De Hope*.<sup>15</sup> The editors of *De Hope* reacted strongly to this reproach of squabbling by what they ironically called "irenical" men. If they had used the wrong words, they were open for comments, but the course *De Hope* had taken in the debates about the Reformed Church and the Christian Reformed Church "was as precious as our life" and would not be abandoned:

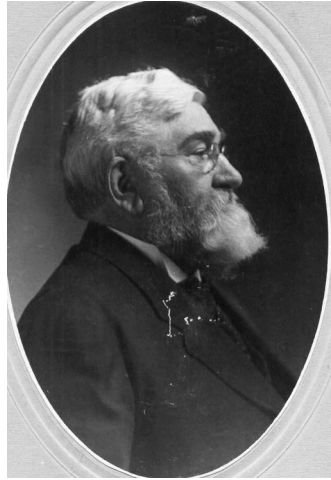
<sup>12</sup> *De Hope*, 22 November 1893.

<sup>13</sup> *De Hope*, 27 December 1893. Steffens referred to Bavinck's article, "The Future of Calvinism," *The Presbyterian and Reformed Review* 5, no. 17 (January 1894): 1-24.

<sup>14</sup> N. M. Steffens, *Gedachten over het rechtbestaan der Holl. Chr. Geref. Kerk in Amerika in vijf brieven. Op veler verzoek uitgegeven door R. Kanters* (Holland: Kanters, 1894). This publication has been translated into English by Egbert Roelof Post and David F. Van Vliet and published as *Reflections concerning the right of existence of the Holland Chr. Ref. Church in America* (Grand Rapids: Calvin College, 1980).

<sup>15</sup> *De Hope*, 22 August 1894, "kerkgenootschappelijke kibbelarij," "schelden, schermen en strijden."

Fig. 24. Nicolaus Martin Steffens  
(Joint Archives of Holland)



To testify against the apostasy that increases everywhere in our days, notwithstanding all the outward ecclesiastical glory, to point to dangers that threaten us from all sides, to mend, if possible schisms between churches of the same confession, to oppose false ecclesiastical unions with honest words, all this is not allowed, but to polemicize against *De Hope* and to make the demanding work of the editors more difficult by hurting personal attacks, that *is* allowed. . . . Readers, raise with us a Miserere!<sup>16</sup>

The critics were invited to publish their opinions in *De Hope*, instead of complaining from afar about the character of this periodical. The incident showed not much had changed in Reformed circles in the West, and the issue was: How much longer would Steffens stand this?

Meanwhile with Dosker the seminary got its third professor. Dosker dreamt of a position in the Presbyterian Church but for the moment was satisfied with his professorship at Western Seminary.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>16</sup> *De Hope*, 22 August 1894, "Tegen den afval te getuigen, die in onze dagen overal toeneemt niettegenstaande alle uitwendige kerkelijke heerlijkheid, te wijzen op de gevaren, die ons van alle zijden dreigen, scheuringen in kerken van dezelfde belijdenis heelen, indien mogelijk, valsche kerkelijke vereenigingen tegen te werken door middel van het eerlijke woord, dat mag niet, maar tegen *De Hope* te polemiseeren en der redactie haar moeilijker werk nog moeilijker te maken door grievende persoonlijke aanvallen, dat mag wel. . . . Lezers, heft met ons een Miserere aan!"

<sup>17</sup> Dosker to Bavinck, 19 February 1894, "Soms sla ik verlangend het oog naar buiten en opende God mij een weg in den boezem der presb. kerken, dan zou ik dien weg volgen." Dosker to Bavinck, 28 February 1896, "Warfield blijft steeds mijn trouwe vriend en schijnt ernstig te begeeren dat ik den eenen of anderen dag in de Presbytersche Kerk zal werkzaam zijn. We zullen zien," *Bavinck Papers*.

The same issue of *De Hope* that reported on the ceremony of Dosker's inauguration on 14 November 1894, announced that someone (it was Peter Semelink [1828-1922]) had donated money for a new seminary building. Semelink Family Hall would be built "on the ground of the deceased Dr. Van Raalte,"<sup>18</sup> (at the south side of Twelfth Street on the site of the old Orphan House and the so-called Zwemer House), and it was officially opened on 30 October 1895.

Western Seminary started to flourish, but in the same week this news was announced, the German Presbyterian Theological Seminary at Dubuque, Iowa, called Steffens as a professor.

This call had been prepared for some months. There had been a vacant chair at this seminary since the summer of 1894. Warfield was eager to provide this seminary a future; he had known about Steffens' dissatisfaction with the situation in his church and had suggested him in Dubuque as a candidate. Acting president Adam McClelland (1833-1916) replied, "The name of doctor Steffens was already before us, and your hearty commendation will doubtless increase our interest in his appointment to the vacant chair. I shall place your letter where it is likely to do the most good in the line indicated by you."<sup>19</sup>

Steffens visited the school founded in 1852 at the end of November, and as *De Hope* wrote, "The Reformed Church in this country, East and West, looks forward anxiously to the decision his reverence will make."<sup>20</sup> Steffens accepted the call. Hospers, one of his first pupils, protested. "Letting him go, who certainly by the largest part of our people is viewed with unconditional trust, and with whom we felt so content in that chair—*that* is too much of a sacrifice!"<sup>21</sup> The Classes of Iowa and Wisconsin rejected Steffens' resignation request. But Steffens was more determined than in 1891, and the protests did not help. He did not feel at home anymore in the Reformed Church in its present condition, as he wrote to Warfield:

Comparisons are odious, they say, but I cannot help saying that the Presbyterian Church compares favorably unto ours, which

<sup>18</sup> *De Hope*, 29 May 1895.

<sup>19</sup> A. McClelland to Warfield, 3 September 1894, "As always so now I have received and read your letter with great pleasure, the more because it expresses and manifests such interest in our seminary," *Warfield Papers*.

<sup>20</sup> *De Hope*, 5 December 1894, "Dat de Gereformeerde Kerk in dit land, Oost en West, angstvallig uitziet welk besluit ZEw. in dezen zal nemen, zal wel niet behoeven te worden gezegd."

<sup>21</sup> *De Hope*, 13 March 1895, "Hem te laten gaan, die zeker door het overgroot deel van ons volk met onvoorwaardelijk vertrouwen wordt aangezien, en met wien in dien stoel wij ons zoo gerust gevoelen – *dat* is een te dure opoffering!"

seems to love peace better than truth. The wrangle between our people and the Seceders in our immediate neighbourhood is deplorable and alas! there is no end to it. I am between two millstones; I sympathize with the seceded brethren in their love for the truth, but their ecclesiastical position I cannot share. I begin to feel that I am out of place here.<sup>22</sup>

It is difficult to give one specific reason for Steffens' departure; it was more of an accumulation of disappointments. There was the opposition by the Moerdykes and Karsten, who vocalized the lack of sympathy in the Reformed Church for his "principal analysis of 'the spirit of the age' for any Kuyperian tool," as Bratt summarized.<sup>23</sup> It was the expression of this antipathy in the lack of support for Western Seminary, the devastating effect of the Masonic controversy on the ecclesiastical relations within the Dutch American community, and more generally, what Vos called the "deeper" issue—the trend by which the large American churches moved to Modernism.<sup>24</sup> None of these reasons was decisive, but together they substantiated Steffens' decision to leave.

On 24 April 1895, he attended Western Seminary commencement for the last time. In the meeting of the board of superintendents of 23 and 24 April, it was "decided that the service offered by Steffens to the Seminary is appreciated and that it is regretted that he plans to leave the school. That, if he goes, our best wishes and earnest prayers will accompany him, and if he can stay, this would give us great pleasure."<sup>25</sup> The board had given in to Steffens' determination. In a farewell article in *De Hope*, Steffens explained that a definite yes to Dubuque Seminary had been given by him only after some issues had been decided by the meeting of the board of superintendents in a way that was satisfactory for him; one of the issues may have been the arrears of the payment of Steffens' salary, especially regarding the first five years of his professorship.<sup>26</sup> He did not want any action to make the synod decline

<sup>22</sup> Steffens to Warfield, 16 November 1894, *Warfield Papers*.

<sup>23</sup> Bratt, *Dutch Calvinism in Modern America*, 46.

<sup>24</sup> Vos to Kuyper, 12 July 1890, *Kuyper Papers*. Translation in Dennison, *Letters of Vos*, 142.

<sup>25</sup> Public proceedings of the meeting of the board of superintendents, *De Hope*, 15 May 1895, "Besloten dat wij den dienst, door Rev. Dr. Steffens aan deze Seminarie bewezen, waardeeren, en tot onzen spijt vernemen dat hij voornemens is de School te verlaten; dat, als hij gaat, onze beste wenschen en ernstige gebeden hem zullen volgen, en kan hij blijven, het zal ons groot genoegen geven."

<sup>26</sup> *De Hope*, 15 May 1895. Dubuque offered him \$1,200, which was not enough for a man without means like Steffens. See Steffens to Warfield, 16 November 1894, *Warfield Papers*.



his resignation. "I am fully convinced that my work here is finished. Other men have to take up the work that I lay down. . . . Don't search for the secondary causes that moved me to take such a decision."<sup>27</sup>

On 16 May he installed his son Cornelius as minister of the Reformed Church of Rochester, New York. Early June he preached a last time in his former congregations in Holland and Zeeland, his last official act in the Reformed Church before he transferred in Dubuque to the German wing of the Presbyterian Church. He now laid down his chief editorship of *De Hope*. The editors thanked him gratefully. "Seldom was there a more proficient pen in service of a richer mind. Reformed in head and heart, his trumpet gave anything but an uncertain sound."<sup>28</sup> From now on Dosker wrote the "Wekelijksch Budget." In Dubuque new tasks awaited him as editor of *Der Presbyterianer*. During their last days in Holland, the Steffenses stayed at Kanters' home. On 11 June the General Synod paid a visit to Western Seminary, which Steffens had just left. The synod appointed Winter as Steffens' successor at Western Seminary: "No change for the better, but it could have been worse," commented Vos.<sup>29</sup> On 12 June Steffens and his wife, with their daughters Mary and Isabella, left Holland<sup>30</sup> by boat, waved farewell to a crowd of more than a hundred people, and traveled to the Holleman family in Roseland (where their youngest daughter Jenny already was), to Silver Creek and then seventy miles West, to Dubuque.

While traveling West, Steffens read the first volume of Bavinck's *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek*, recently published.<sup>31</sup> The theology of Princeton and of Neo-Calvinism had been his beacon of hope in the West, and Dosker, looking back on the last decade, admitted in 1896, "With Steffens we lost quite a lot. Dr. Winter is a solid man and is adored by his students, but he is not as sharply delineated as Steffens, and here in America, we are in need of *clear* deliniations."<sup>32</sup>

<sup>27</sup> *De Hope*, 8 May 1895, "Mijn werk hier is, ik ben er beslist van overtuigd, gedaan. Andere mannen moeten opvatten het werk, dat ik neerleg. . . . Men zoek niet naar de tweede oorzaken, die mij tot het nemen van zulk een besluit bewogen hebben." Since I did not find proceedings of the board of superintendents, I don't know what these issues were. Interestingly, in the board meeting of April 1895, the secretary of the faculty, John W. Beardslee, was requested and authorized to take care for the safety of all documents, proceedings, and other important papers related to the history of the school.

<sup>28</sup> *De Hope*, 10 July 1895, "Zelden was daar vaardiger pen in dienst van rijker geest. Gereformeerd in hoofd en hart, gaf zijn bazuin allesbehalve een onzeker geluid."

<sup>29</sup> Vos to Bavinck, 6 July 1895, *Bavinck Papers*.

<sup>30</sup> What he left in Holland was the grave of his mother, who died on 10 April 1886 at 81 years of age.

<sup>31</sup> *De Hope*, 12 June 1895.

<sup>32</sup> Dosker to Bavinck, 28 February 1896, "In Steffens hebben wij heel wat verloren. Dr. Winter is een degelijk man en wordt door de studenten zeer bemind, maar hij

Fig. 25. Egbert Winter  
(Joint Archives of Holland)



At Dubuque Steffens kept in touch with the "rabbis" in Princeton and with the Neo-Calvinists. Kuyper saluted him by publishing his inaugural address "Christianity: Re-Creation" at Dubuque *in extenso* in *De Heraut*.<sup>33</sup> He enjoyed being among the Presbyterians, but he did not leave the Reformed Church. In 1898 Steffens helped Kuyper in the preparation of his Stone Lectures, which he delivered in October of that year; Steffens very carefully translated the Dutch text of the fourth lecture on Calvinism and science: "I have done what I could to present Dr. Kuyper as well as I could to our American public in English."<sup>34</sup> Well known for his proficiency in many languages, he was critical of other Kuyper translations in English, and in 1903 he introduced a German translation of Kuyper's *De vleeschwording des Woords* (The incarnation of the word) (1887).<sup>35</sup>

In 1898 Steffens accepted a call of the Reformed Church in Orange City. His qualities were still respected, and when in 1901, Samuel Woodbridge retired from New Brunswick Theological Seminary after a professorship of more than forty years, Steffens was a candidate for the

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is niet zoo scherp belijnd als Steffens, en aan *vaste* lijnen hebben we hier in Amerika behoefte,' *Bavinck Papers*.

<sup>33</sup> *De Heraut*, 13 September 1896. Kuyper published the address under the title "Het christendom, herschepping."

<sup>34</sup> Steffens to Kuyper, 30 June 1898, *Kuyper Papers*.

<sup>35</sup> *Die Fleischwerdung des Worts, von Dr. A. Kuyper. Vom Verfasser autorisierte Übersetzung nebst Vorwort von N. M. Steffens, D.D.* (Dubuque: Western Publishing Co., 1903). In the preface Steffens complains that Kuyper's *Encyclopedia of Sacred Theology* (1898) and *The Work of the Holy Spirit* (1900) had been translated in a clumsy way.

chair of ecclesiastical history and church government, over against the much younger Dr. William H. S. Demarest (1863-1956). A bitter fight developed at the synod. The classes of the West were holding out for Steffens. The *New York Times* commented that he represented "the old and conservative factions" and that he had "always been a stumbling block in the way of those who stand for newer ideas in religion."<sup>36</sup> In the end, the synod elected Demarest, who later became president of Rutgers and turned it over to the state of New Jersey, finishing its secularization.

In 1903 Steffens "returned to the old stall," as he himself expressed it,<sup>37</sup> to Western Seminary and the Reformed Church. He got Dosker's position as professor in historical theology; Dosker had left for Presbyterian Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky to teach church history. In 1911 Steffens was transferred to the chair of didactic theology, the same chair he had held from 1884 to 1895, until his sudden death on 29 July 1912. "It would almost seem, as if in harmony with his life, no time was to be lost in his passing over from the seen into the unseen."<sup>38</sup>

<sup>36</sup> *The New York Times*, 9 June 1901.

<sup>37</sup> Dosker, in *In memoriam*.

<sup>38</sup> G. J. Kollen, in *In memoriam*.

## CHAPTER 12

### Conclusion

This history of Nicolaus Steffens and his role in the Reformed community in western Michigan is focused on his first stay in the colony, from 1878 until 1895, his longest and most dramatic one. In 1903 he would return to Holland and to Western Seminary and stay there until he died in 1912, but then he was no longer on the frontlines. During his first stay in Michigan, he was in the eye of the storm of the Masonic controversy and had to lead the Reformed Church of the West through this crisis and the difficult years thereafter, when the Reformed Church lost the support of the *Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerk* in the Netherlands. The Christian Reformed Church profited largely from this change and took the initiative in church life among the Dutch Americans in the Midwest, a role the Reformed Church had played for almost four decades.<sup>1</sup>

There was no official leadership in the church, but as a minister of Van Raalte's congregation in Holland since 1882, as a professor at Western Seminary since 1884, and as the foremost editor of *De Hope* since the early 1880s, Steffens was de facto the successor of Van

<sup>1</sup> See Harinck, "Schuring die scheuring dreigt te worden," 95-131.

Raalte in the Reformed Church in the West. His stance in the Masonic controversy resembled Van Raalte's, as did his devotion to the future of Western Theological Seminary and Hope College and his promotion of Americanization. Different from Van Raalte was that Steffens' leadership was restricted to church and higher education and that his church lost the leading role it had played in the Midwest under Van Raalte's supervision. Steffens as a leader also had the disadvantage of not being Dutch. He was a German and did not socialize as easily as Van Raalte, nor did he share the same Dutch religious and ecclesiastical background. Intellectually he had a broader orientation than Van Raalte and a more systematic theological mind. Dogmatically he was more outspoken. He had a more explicit, historically-grounded view, and he more eloquently than Van Raalte made the case for a broad Reformed church. He was also more worried than his predecessor that the Reformed Church would lose its distinct Reformed character. In Van Raalte's days the Reformed tradition in the Midwest had not yet been challenged by modernist ideas, but Steffens had to redefine the Reformed character of his church in the face of modernist challenges.

This redefining process was strongly influenced by his appreciation of the revival of the Reformed tradition in the Netherlands in the 1880s, led by Kuyper and Bavinck, and labeled as Neo-Calvinism. He liked its dogmatic leanings, its bold church polity, and its openness to modern society. This stance resulted in a self-confident confrontation with modern theology and a critical attitude toward the dominating theology within the Reformed Church in the Netherlands. Steffens developed sympathy for the Neo-Calvinist movement in the Netherlands, for the strict Reformed position of the Christian Reformed Church, and for conservative Presbyterians in the United States like Warfield. He desired perspective in the Reformed tradition in his own church and was inspired by the Old World, where this tradition with Kuyper's revival had started a new episode. This appreciation made him critical of theological orientations in his own church. The more he promoted the Neo-Calvinist position, the more he got out of tune with his own denomination. That is why his leadership in the Reformed Church ended in discontent and in a somewhat isolated position, from which he escaped by accepting the call to Dubuque seminary. After his departure no one else assumed the leadership role or promoted Neo-Calvinism in the Reformed Church in his place.

James D. Bratt's conclusion that "His was the only hint of Neo-Calvinism in the Reformed Church"<sup>2</sup> may be overdone—think of Dosker

<sup>2</sup> Bratt, *Dutch Calvinism in Modern America*, 46.

and of the enthusiastic translators of Kuyper's work within the Reformed Church, like Rev. G. H. Hospers, Rev. Abel H. Huizenga, and the Dutch-born brothers Rev. John H. De Vries and Rev. Henri De Vries—but the lack of response to his opinions, and the lukewarm support from the ministry discouraged Steffens. The clergy did not want to update the Reformed tradition in a Neo-Calvinist way, and they preferred to avoid the confrontation with modern theology that Kuyper had been after. They basically stuck to the apologetic position of Beets, Doedes, and Van Oosterzee that they had inherited: reject modernist theological positions, embrace the Reformed tradition, and promote a pious life, but try not to compete with or defeat modern theology or to develop a cultural program for education, social life, and politics. After all, the religious situation in the United States in the 1890s resembled the pre-Kuyperian world of Europe and the Netherlands. Christianity was the public religion, and atheism and secularization seemed extremist positions at the edge of society that you need not really have to worry about.

Neo-Calvinism found a better reception in Christian Reformed circles, where new immigrants introduced modern mindsets and a new, more self-centered and distinctive mentality. The change in the relationship between the Reformed Church and the Christian Reformed Church did not have to do with numbers only but also with religious and cultural differences. Inasmuch as the Reformed Church became oriented to American religious culture in these years of transition, the Christian Reformed Church avoided this Americanization by focusing on its specific Dutch Reformed character. In this divergence Steffens fell between two stools.

As pointed out in the introduction, the episode of the Dutch Reformed in Michigan in the last quarter of the nineteenth century shows the vicissitudes of a tradition that has to be reinvented and reconfigured by every next generation and in new circumstances. The continuity that the use of the name Reformed and the adherence to classic dogmas suggests, may distract the attention from the actual struggle of the Dutch immigrants to define their Reformed identity in a new historical context, intensified by the fact that they started from scratch in a new geographical context.<sup>3</sup>

As a professor, Steffens was the founding father and designer of Western Theological Seminary. The reopening of theological graduate

<sup>3</sup> Heideman, *The Practice of Piety*, is an example of a story of the RCA that stresses the historical continuity of church and theology.

education in Holland in 1884 would have turned into a failure had he not been adamant in his view that the Reformed Church of the West needed a theological institution of its own. After starting his teaching in the theological tradition of the sister institution at New Brunswick, Steffens some years later shifted to the orthodox Presbyterian (Princeton) and Neo-Calvinist position (Free University). The support for this shift was weak in the 1880s, and the seminary in the West lost student after student to New Brunswick Theological Seminary and to Presbyterian seminaries.

Although he was the *primus inter pares* among Western Seminary professors, leading ministers in the Reformed Church refrained from backing him. They hardly ever questioned in public the function and outlook of Western Seminary, but the institution met silent opposition and concealed obstruction. Though he knew that this was the reason for the lack of financial support for Western, he did not change his opinion. When he left Western Seminary, it had overcome the first difficult decade, the student population had started to grow, and a new building was erected. But his theological position had not firmly taken root in the Reformed Church, and soon his traces were obliterated. With the exception of Gerrit H. Hospers, he had no disciples who kept his insights or memory alive.<sup>4</sup>

Nevertheless Steffens stuck to his opinions and wrote in 1901:

Let us return to Dort and Westminster in order that we may begin an era of progressive Calvinistic theology. We do not speak of a mere repristination of the Calvinism of the sixteenth century, but a diligent study of the principles of this magnificent system, in order to adjust them to the needs of our time and to bring the system itself into closer harmony with its principles than ever before. We turn to our seminaries and expect that they will rally around the old flag and carry it to new positions.<sup>5</sup>

Seen in retrospect, his professorate was an intermezzo of strict Calvinism in a tradition that was developing in a genial Reformed direction. Despite Steffens' critique of Van Oosterzee, it was the mild orthodox tradition of this Utrecht professor and of the Dutch *Réveil*

<sup>4</sup> G. H. Hospers dedicated his book *The Reformed Principle of Authority. The Scripture Principle of the Reformation Set Forth in the Light of our Times* (Grand Rapids: The Reformed Press, 1924), with an abridged translation of Kuyper's pamphlet *Modernism, A Fata Morgana* (1871), 15-35, in reverent memory to Steffens.

<sup>5</sup> Steffens, "Calvinism and Theological Crisis," 213-14.



movement within the *Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk* that accommodated the mainline Reformed spirituality.<sup>6</sup>

With a few exceptions, the opposition to Steffens was silent and concealed. He himself was like Kuyper and liked confrontation and public debate. He polemicized regularly in *De Hope*, but this was not the practice of *Réveil*-like church members and would not become a characteristic of the genial Reformed tradition of the Reformed Church. Nevertheless, the number of subscriptions to *De Hope* was on the rise in the years of Steffens' editorship. Together with his friend Kanters, he turned this weekly into the largest of the Dutch American church periodicals in his day. His journalism was not very personal but opinion-oriented and outspoken, and his style was clear and convincing. His writing was informative on a wide range of theological and ecclesiastical topics and news, especially on Reformed churches elsewhere in the world. *De Hope* was appreciated for its staunch defense, mainly by Steffens, of the position of the Reformed Church, especially in the Masonic controversy. Steffens was appreciated for it, but due to his theological position and his stiff personality, he did not win the sympathy of the Reformed community. When he left in 1895, he was not missed.<sup>7</sup>

All three aspects we dealt with—church, seminary, and journalism—were in transition during Steffens' first era in West Michigan from 1878 until 1895. The Reformed Church lost its leading position, the reopened Western Seminary missed the self-evident support its predecessor had enjoyed in the 1860s and 1870s, and *De Hope* met with opposition when it introduced public debate. Overarching these transitions was Steffens' opinion that he lived "under a waning moon," as far as the future of the Reformed tradition in the United States was concerned. This opinion did not reflect the general mood of the Reformed Church in the West, but it did reflect at least partially the changing position of the Reformed Church and the Reformed tradition in the years Steffens assumed leadership there.

<sup>6</sup> Bratt, *Dutch Calvinism in Modern America*, 44.

<sup>7</sup> When he died in 1912, the Christian press in the United States and the Netherlands paid tribute to him, and the Amsterdam Liberal daily *Algemeen Handelsblad*, 19 August 1912, and the Liberal newspaper *Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad*, 20 August 1912, each published an obituary.



Fig. 26. Tombstone of Steffens at Pilgrim Home Cemetery in Holland  
(photo by author)

## Steffens' Letters to Abraham Kuyper

### **Original Letters in Dutch**

Fifteen original letters and postcards Nicolaus Martin Steffens sent to Abraham Kuyper between 1882 and 1899 are preserved in the Kuyper Archives in the Historical Documentation Center for Dutch Protestantism, VU University Amsterdam. Steffens had written more letters to Kuyper, but they are no longer extant, as is the case with all of the letters Kuyper wrote to Steffens. The fifteen extant letters and postcards Steffens sent to Kuyper are published here in the original language for the first time. The transcript is literal, though most abbreviated words have been written in full now, and the use of the upper case and spaces has been adapted to the present Dutch style. To avoid misunderstanding, wrong spelling and punctuation marks are added between brackets, as is the case with missing words. The words Steffens underlined are in italics.

**English Translation of Dutch Letters**

There is an incomplete translation of these letters and postcards by an unknown author kept in Heritage Hall of Hekman Library, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan, but this author has completed the translation of these fifteen documents, making corrections where the original Dutch was misread. This completed translation is literal, though abbreviated words are written in full, and the punctuation has been adapted to the American style. Words Steffens underlined and words in foreign languages (except Greek) are in italics. The footnote annotations are by the author, with the help of students of VU University.

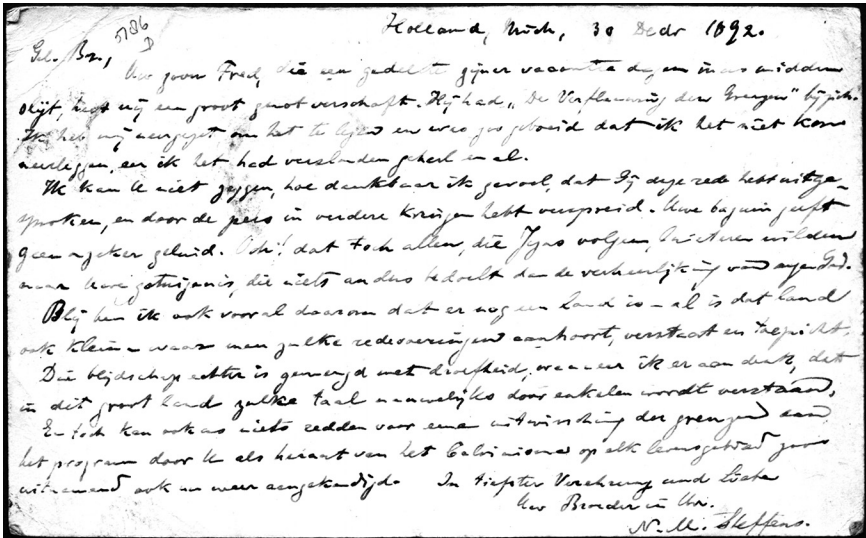
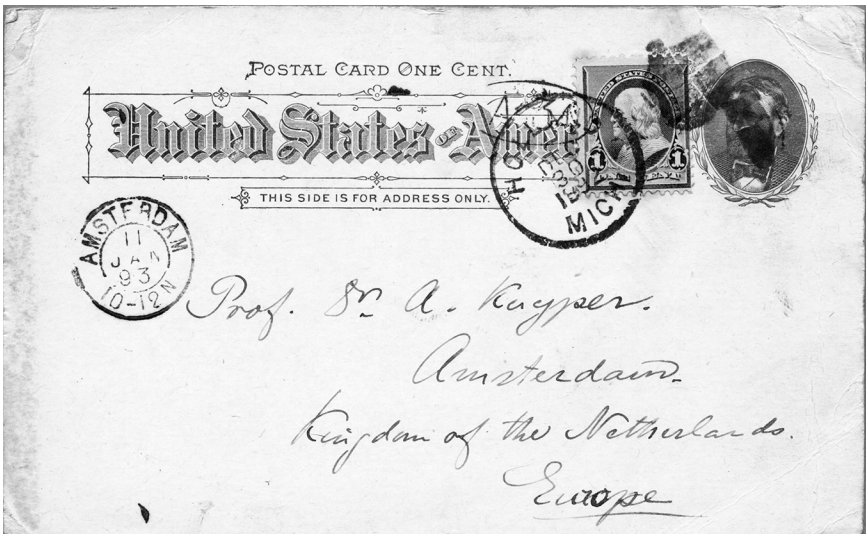


Fig. 27. Postcard from Steffens to Abraham Kuyper,  
 30 December 1892

(Historical Documentation Center  
 for Dutch Protestantism,  
 VU University Amsterdam)



1. Zeeland, 22 mei 1882

Veel geachte heer en broeder in Christus,

Hopende dat gij het niet als onbescheiden in mij zult aanzien, dat ik het waag u eenen brief te schrijven, hoewel ik u persoonlijk onbekend ben, begin ik nu uit te voeren, waartoe ik reeds lang gedrongen mij gevoelde.

Met de grootste belangstelling sla ik uw werk voor het koninkrijk Gods, en bepaaldelijk voor de historische gereformeerde kerk van Nederland gade. Ik geloof, dat de Heere u tot een heerlijk werk heeft geroepen. Sedert ik kennis gemaakt heb met verscheidene uwer geschriften dank ik God van harte, dat Hij u aan Nederland gegeven heeft.

Het spijt mij slechts, dat gij in dit werk zoo veel tegenstand vindt van de zijde der afgescheidene broeders. De wijze hoe A. V. in de Wekstem u bestrijdt is beneden alle kritiek. Het is daarom ook bepaald mijn doel met deze letteren, u te zeggen, dat er zelfs in Amerika mannen zijn, die, hoewel zij in Nederland met de Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerk verbonden waren, en ook nog voor het streven dier kerk de hoogste achting koesteren, uw werk waardeeren en uw persoon liefhebben.

Reeds sedert geruimen tijd heb ik er aan gedacht, of wij niet iets konden doen om u te helpen vooral in zake "de Vrije Universiteit", maar de tijdsgelegenheid is voor het oogenblik zoo ongunstig, dat wij er niet mede kunnen beginnen. Ik juich uw plan toe, en *indien het een succes zou worden* – verschoon s.v.p. deze Amerikaansche uitdrukking – dan zou ik mij zeer verblijden. Want kerkelijk leven, afgescheiden van het nationale leven, en ook van de universitas litterarum, zou op den duur noodlottig werken. Seminaries kunnen niets meer zijn dan een provisorium. Ik begrijp niet, hoe onze vrienden te Kampen dit niet zien.

Ik zeide dat de tijdsgelegenheid voor het oogenblik ongunstig [is] ten onzent. Wij hebben helaas! ook eene kwestie. Er is een partij onder de Nederlandsche emigranten, die zich in de Reformed Church niet te huis gevoelt. Hieruit is eene beweging geworden tegen de vrijmetselarij. Deze anti-vrijmetselarij-kwestie is echter niet anders dan een middel tot bereiking van het doel – afscheiding van de Reformed Church. De Afscheiding van 1834 heeft zonder twijfel veel goeds uitgewerkt, zij heeft echter ook in de Gereformeerde Hollanders eene zucht tot separatie doen geboren worden, die geene andere dan treurige gevolgen moet hebben ook voor de toekomst. Ik vrees dat er geen grootere tegenstanders der Dordtsche beginselen zijn dan zij, die het meest er

op roemen, echte zonen van Dordrecht te zijn. Hier althans werkt men de verspreiding van het sektewezen in de hand door al dit geweld[d]dadige breken met historische toestanden. God beware ons volk voor geestelijken hoogmoed, en leere het de rechte bescheidenheid. Dan eerst zal het vasthouden van de historisch-gereformeerde beginselen eene gezegende uitwerking kunnen hebben.

Ik vrees echter, dat ik te lang word en de grenzen der beleefdheid te buiten ga u zoo lang met het lezen van mijn schrijven op te houden, daar ik weet, dat uw tijd kostbaar is.

Ontvang derhalve nog eens de verzekering van mijne hartelijke sympathie in uw werk. Zoodra de omstandigheden het toelaten, zal ik zien of de belangstelling in de Vrije Universiteit niet kan opgewekt worden in den boezem der Reformed Church.

Geloof mij, met de meeste hoogachting, uw u liefhebbende broeder in Christus

N. M. Steffens



1. Zeeland, May 22, 1882

Highly Esteemed Sir and Brother in Christ,

Hoping that you will not find it immodest in me that I dare to write you a letter even though I am personally unknown to you. I am beginning to carry into action that which I have long felt compelled to do.

With greatest interest I observe your work for the kingdom of God and particularly for the historic Reformed church of the Netherlands. I believe that the Lord has called you to a glorious work. Since I have become familiar with various of your writings, I thank God from my heart that He has given you to the Netherlands.

However, I regret that you find so much opposition from the side of the seceded brothers.<sup>1</sup> The manner in which A.V.<sup>2</sup> disputes with you in the *Wekstem* is beneath criticism.<sup>3</sup> Therefore it is also my specific purpose to say to you by means of this letter that even in America there are men who, although they were associated with the *Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerk* in the Netherlands, and even yet cherish the highest opinion of the endeavors of that church, value your work and have affection for you.

For some time I have been thinking whether we could do something to help, especially in the matter of “the Free University,” but the circumstances at the moment are so unfavorable, that we cannot get a start on that project. I applaud your plan, and *in case it becomes a success*—please forgive the American expression—I should be most happy. For ecclesiastical life, cut off from national life and from the *universitas litterarium*,<sup>4</sup> would eventually cause death. Seminaries can be only a *provisorium*.<sup>5</sup> I cannot understand why our friends at Kampen<sup>6</sup> cannot see this.

I said that the circumstances at the moment are unfavorable with us. We have, alas, a quarrel. There is a party among the Dutch emigrants that does not feel at home in the Reformed Church. Out of this has

<sup>1</sup> Members of the *Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerk*.

<sup>2</sup> “A.V.” stands for *Amicus Veritatis*: friend of the truth; pseudonym of W. Diemer.

<sup>3</sup> *Wekstem. Getuigenissen uit de Christelijke Afgesch. Geref. Kerk in Nederland*, issued from 1865 until 1882 and edited by W. Diemer and J. H. Donner. In *Wekstem*, 6 April 1882, Diemer doubted if the Reformed party led by Kuyper would ever leave the *Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk*.

<sup>4</sup> *Universitas litterarium*: the world of letters.

<sup>5</sup> *Provisorium*: temporary organization.

<sup>6</sup> Kampen was the location of the theological seminary of the *Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerk*.

developed a movement against Freemasonry. This anti-Freemasonry quarrel is, however, nothing more than a means to achieve their end—secession from the Reformed Church. The Secession of 1834 without doubt effected much good; however, among Reformed Hollanders, it also gave birth to a desire for separation which can have no other but unhappy consequences, also in the future. I believe that there are no greater opponents of the principles of Dort than they who boast most loudly that they are the true sons of Dordrecht. Anyway, here they effect the spread of sectarianism by means of a violent break with historical circumstances. God save our people from spiritual pride and teach them true modesty. Only then will loyalty to the historic Reformed principles have a blessed effect.

I fear, however, that I keep on too long and that I am overstepping the boundaries of good manners by making you spend so much time reading my letter, when I know that your time is valuable.

Accept again assurances of my cordial sympathy with your work. As soon as circumstances permit, I will see if an interest in the Free University can be awakened in the bosom of the Reformed Church.

Believe me, with highest esteem, your loving Brother in Christ,

N. M. Steffens

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2. *Holland, 7 mei 1886*

Geliefde broeder,

In antwoord op uw brief van 22 april j.l., herhaal ik, wat ik vroeger geschreven [heb], dat ik voor uwen zoon doen zal (D.V.) wat ik kan. De tijd, door u bepaald, is mij goed. Schrijf mij s.v.p. een kaartje voor dat hij vertrekt, en ik zal aan een vriend in New York City, Rev. J. Geyer 78 Second Street, vragen dat hij voor den jongeling zorg drage. Ik deel het adres mede om door uw zoon gebruikt te worden, indien Mr. Geyer misschien niet tijd of gelegenheid zou hebben om bij de aankomst der boot tegenwoordig te zijn. Indien u echter andere betrekkingen in New York heeft, dan is natuurlijk mijn voorzorg-maatregel niet noodig. Laat mij het dan s.v.p. weten. Indien u uwen zoon van een goed aantal pakken kleëren en schoenen voorziet, dan doet u wel, want die artikelen zijn hier slecht en duur. Hollandsche boeken zijn hier ook zeer hoog in prijs wegens ingaande rechten en ruime percenten van commissie. Indien uw zoon dus een goed aantal goede boeken en muziekstukken meëbrengt, zoo zal hij er later voordeel van hebben. Zoodra ik een weinig met uw zoon bekend geworden ben, zal ik u mededeelen, wat voor hem hier in Amerika het beste is, om in overleg met u te handelen.

Dat gij en uwe broeders mijne volle sympathie en gebeden hebt in den fellen strijd, behoef ik nauwelijks te zeggen. Ik lees “De Heraut” met de grootste belangstelling. Ik ben blij dat de broeders kalm en moedig blijven. Met uitzondering van enkele uitdrukkingen in de “Ingezonden stukken” heb ik nog niets gelezen, dat de afkeuring van hen, die Jezus begeeren te volgen ook in hun spreken, verdient.

Ik hoop slechts, dat de lange procedure, die nu volgen zal, indien God niet eenen anderen weg met u inslaat, die buiten uwe berekening ligt, niet het gevolg zal hebben om eene reactie in irenischen geest in de hand werken.

Ik kan begrijpen, hoe de gedachte in u opkomt of het niet beter ware met het gereformeerde volk te verhuizen òf naar Afrika òf naar Amerika. Laat die gedachte varen. Wat althans Amerika aangaat, zou ik er niet veel heil in zien, hoe gaarne ik persoonlijk u en de uwen in ons midden zou hebben. Het is waar, de strijd is fel, maar gij hebt in Nederland in de toekomst beter kans voor de ontwikkeling der gereformeerde beginselen dan wij hier. *Wij zijn op weg* naar die toestanden, aan welke gij nu *ontworstelt*. In vertrouwen zij het gezegd, maar het is waar, dat in de presbyteriaansche en gereformeerde kerken van Amerika de moderne en irenische geest vele veroveringen maakt. En wil men zijne stem er

tegen verheffen, dan vindt men de kolommen der bladen gesloten. Nog onlangs beproefde ik in de New York Observer een woord te zeggen tegen de verkrachting der leer der rechtvaardiging door de nieuwerwetsche evangelisatie-methode, maar ik vond de poort gesloten. De lucht van Europa waait over, en Amerika, dat in industrie enz. zulke vorderingen heeft gemaakt, is in de ontwikkeling der theologie 50 jaren ten achter.

Daarbij komt dat Hollanders als “foreigners” geen invloed kunnen uitoefenen op de godsdienstige ontwikkeling der *natie*. Zij worden òf in de natie opgelost, òf zij blijven vreemdelingen, die in het protesteeren tegen al wat Amerikaansch is, zich zelve verteeren en bekrompener worden dan de goede menschen in den achterhoek van Gelderland of Groningen. Ik dank God, dat Hij u heeft verwekt om in Nederland getuigenis af te leggen voor de zaak, mij en allen, die het echte calvinisme waardeeren, zoo dierbaar. Die zaak in Nederland te versterken is *de zaak κατ' ἐξοχήν*. “Zijt standvastig, onbewegelijk, altijd overvloedig zijnde in het werk des Heeren, als die *weet, dat uw arbeid niet ijdel is i den Heere*.[”]

Het verwondert mij niet, dat u dit jaar niet komt. Maar ik geef daarom de hoop niet op om u vroeger of later eens te ontmoeten. In Iowa zag ik verleden jaar een portret van u[,] “a cabinet photo”. Is het te veel gevegd, indien ik u verzoek, mij er een toe te zenden?

Uw boodschap aan ds. Dosker heb ik uitgericht.

Mij aanbevolen houdende in uwe gebeden en christelijke liefde ben ik uw u liefhebbende broeder en dienstwillige dienaar

N. M. Steffens

2. *Holland, May 7, 1886*

Dear Brother,

In answer to your letter of last April 22,<sup>7</sup> I repeat what I have written you previously, that I will do (*D.V.*) what I can for your son.<sup>8</sup> The time appointed by you is satisfactory to me. Please drop me a card before he leaves, and I will ask a friend in New York City, Rev. J. Geijer,<sup>9</sup> 78 Second Street, to take care for the young man. I give you the address for your son to use in case Mr. Geijer should be unable to meet the boat upon its arrival. If, however, you have other connections in New York, then naturally my precautionary measure would be unnecessary. Please let me know. You do well to provide your son with a good supply of suits and shoes, because here those things are of poor quality and expensive. Dutch books are also very expensive here because of the import duties and the generous percentages of commission. Thus, if your son brings along a large number of books and pieces of music, it will be an advantage to him later. As soon as I have become somewhat acquainted with your son, I will inform you what is best for him here in America, in order to act in consultation with you.

I need hardly say that you and your brothers have my full sympathy and prayers in the fierce struggle.<sup>10</sup> I read "*De Heraut*"<sup>11</sup> with the greatest interest. I am glad that the brothers remain calm and courageous. With the exception of certain "Letters to the Editor," I have not yet read anything which deserves rejection by those who desire to follow Jesus even in their speech.

I hope, however, that the long process which will now ensue, if God does not take a direction with you that you have not foreseen, will not have as its effect an irenic reaction.

I can understand how the thought arises that it might be better to emigrate with the Reformed people to Africa or America. You should drop that idea. At least as far as America is concerned, I can see little good in it, although personally I would be most happy to have you amongst us. It is true that the struggle is fierce, but in the future you

<sup>7</sup> Kuyper's letters to Steffens have not been traced.

<sup>8</sup> Jan Frederik Hendrik Kuyper (1866-1933), Kuyper's second son.

<sup>9</sup> Julius William Geyer (1836-1914), minister in the RCA, pastor of the German Evangelical Mission in New York City (1863-1914).

<sup>10</sup> Steffens referred to the ecclesiastical tensions leading to the *Doleantie* of 1886, a secession of the *Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk*, led by Kuyper.

<sup>11</sup> *De Heraut van de Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland*, issued from 1877 until 1945, and edited by Kuyper (1877-1920).

have a better chance to develop the Reformed principles than we do here. We are now approaching those circumstances from which you now are escaping. I say this with confidence, but it is still true that the modern and irenic spirit of the Presbyterian and Reformed churches is making many conquests. And if one wishes to raise his voice against it, he finds the columns of the periodicals closed to him. Just recently I attempted to say a word in the *New York Observer*<sup>12</sup> against the violation of the doctrine of justification by the new evangelistic method, but I found the port closed. The winds of Europe blow over, and America, which in industry, etc., has made such progress, is 50 years behind in the development of theology.

Adding to this, the Hollanders as “foreigners” can exert no influence on the religious development of the nation. They are either absorbed into the populace, or they remain strangers, who, in protesting against everything American, consume themselves and become more narrow-minded than the good people in the hinterlands of Gelderland or Groningen. I thank God that He has raised you up to bear witness to the matter that is so dear to me and all those who value true Calvinism. To strengthen that case in the Netherlands is the matter κατ’ ἐξοχήν.<sup>13</sup> “Be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.”<sup>14</sup>

I am not surprised that you are not coming this year. But I do not therefore give up the hope of meeting you sooner or later. Last year in Iowa I saw a picture of you, “a cabinet photo.” Would it be asking too much if I request that you send me one?

I have delivered your message to Rev. Dosker.<sup>15</sup>

Recommending me in your prayers and Christian love, I am your affectionate brother and willing servant

N. M. Steffens

<sup>12</sup> *New York Observer*, weekly issued from 1823 until 1912. It had been the largest of the (conservative) Presbyterian weeklies, but by the 1880s was practically undenominational.

<sup>13</sup> κατ’ ἐξοχήν: *par excellence*.

<sup>14</sup> 1 Cor. 15:58 (KJV).

<sup>15</sup> Henry Elias Dosker (1855–1926) studied at Hope College and New Brunswick Theological Seminary, minister in the Reformed Church (1879–1903) and professor at Western Theological Seminary (1884–88, 1894–1903) and Presbyterian Theological Seminary in Kentucky (1903–1926).

3. *Holland, 4 januari 1888*

Geliefde broeder in Jezus Christus,

Bij de intrede van een nieuw jaar begeer ik u een hartelijk "de Heere zegene u en make u voorspoedig" toe te roepen.

Met belangstelling en met hartelijke gebeden volg ik de ontwikkelingen der reformatie, die de Heere op wonderbare wijze begonnen heeft in Nederland, en waartoe Hij u wil gebruiken als een middel in Zijne hand.

Ik verblijd mij met u over al hetgeen de Heere reeds heeft gedaan. Wanneer ik niet uit het oog verlies de eigenaardige omstandigheden, den invloed der historische ontwikkeling en - verschoon het, dat ik er aan toevoeg - de gebreken van het Hollandsch volkskarakter, is het een wonder in mijn oog, dat de Heere u zoo voorspoedig heeft gemaakt als het is ten dezen dage. Soli Deo gloria! En de Heere, die als door wateren en woestijnen eenen weg heeft gebaad, zal u zonder twijfel ook het gewenschte doel laten bereiken.

Het calvinisme heeft eene schuilplaats nodig. De gereformeerde kerken verliezen bijkans overal haar gereformeerd karakter. Hoe diep is Schotland reeds gezonken! Ik las onlangs "The Kingdom of God" geschreven door den bekenden prof. Candlish. Hoe arm aan geest en leven is dat boek! Hoe ver beneden de degelijke werken van zijnen vader! Het kenmerkende gereformeerde karakter vindt men er nergens. Gisteren las ik een opstel van dr. Briggs van Union Seminary te New York, waarin hij zegt: "The apologist has been relieved of the peril of resting the whole doctrine of inspiration upon the adjective *verbal*, and the critics have led Christian scholars back to the sounder question of the great Protestant Reformers." Zulke groote woorden zonder historischen grond, steunende op het ipse dixit hoort men tegenwoordig overal. En dat in vrije kerken! Theologie schijnt op te gaan in critiek, en critiek is niet langer oordeelkunde, maar "verwoestingskunde".

Ik kan u niet zeggen, hoe verblijd ik ben, dat God u heeft geroepen om het calvinisme, niet alleen als leerstelsel, maar ook als beginsel op maatschappelijk en staatkundig gebied te rehabiliteeren.

Hoe smartelijk het moest zijn voor u, dr. Hoedemaker eenen anderen weg te zien opgaan, kan ik mij voorstellen. In dezen sympathiseer ik volledig met u. Dr. Hoedemaker zendt mij welwillend al de brochures die hij in het licht geeft, maar met den besten wil kan ik niet het geringste vinden dat hem recht zou geven tot zijne wijze van handelen. Hij spreekt veel van beginsel, maar het is een treurig iets,



indien iemand een beginsel heeft, dat hem overlevert in de handen van de vijanden der reformatie. Het spijt mij, dat dr. Hoedemaker niet schijnt in te zien, dat dit waarlijk "Principien-Reiterer" is.

De uitoefening der "christelijke discipline"(?) in de "Synodale Genootschapskerk" zou belachelijk zijn, indien de zaak niet te ernstig ware. Uit de verte aangezien is het niets anders als eene parodie. Houbolt c.s. (is dat de Amerikaansche Houbolt of unsavory memory?) gaan geheel buiten alle palen, daar zij zelfs juristische vormen op zij zetten, en op alle mogelijke wijze hunne onwetendheid ten toon stellen, maar zelfs daar, waar geleerde heeren de rechtsvormen in acht nemen, is en blijft de behandeling der doleerenden eene onverantwoordelijke. Of indien dat het vigeerende recht is in de Synodale Genootschapskerk, vind ik er in de beste apologie voor de reformatie. Maar het is misschien slechts een hulpmiddel tot bereiking van het doel: Behoud der rechten en der goederen, die eigenlijk het eigendom zijn der doleerenden. Van daar het *afmaken*.

In uwe opvatting van de waarheid ben ik geheel en al met u verenigd. Uwe zienswijze betrekkelijk den doop is keurig, mij uit het hart gesproken.

Uwe kerkrechterlijke positie, het provisioneel standpunt, de onderliggende beginselen enz. beaam ik ten volle. Slechts eene vraag rijst in mij op. Hebben diakenen het recht als afgevaardigden naar de classis gezonden te worden? Indien ik mij niet vergis, heb ik eenigen tijd geleden in De Heraut gelezen, dat de classis Amsterdam der Nederduitsch Gereformeerde Kerken zulks toelaat. Ben ik in het onrecht, wanneer ik beweer, dat dit in strijd is met de beginselen van het gereformeerd kerkrecht? Hoe, indien zaken van geestelijken aard bij wijze van appèl of klacht voor de classis komen? Is het niet eene soort van allsirie ipiskopein indien diakenen het werk van ouderlingen doen? Komt u nog misschien op dit punt in uwe artikelen over het kerkelijke ambt? Gaarne zou ik daarover eens uw gevoel vernemen. Het is niet uit begeerte tot criticasterij, maar uit belang in het gereformeerde kerkrecht, dat ik deze vraag doe.

Is het niet treurig, dat de gereformeerde kerken in Duitschland zoo weinig kracht ontwikkelen? Maar wat kan men ook van een kerk verwachten, die slechts in naam gereformeerd is? Het was slim van het kerkbestuur in Oost-Friesland den vroegeren officieelen naam "Nederduitsch-Gereformeerde Kerk" te veranderen in "Hoogduitsch-Gereformeerde Kerk" en dan te beweren, dat Hoogduitsch-gereformeerd iets anders zij als Nederduitsch-gereformeerd. Helias Meder in zijne verklaring van den Emders katechismus schijnt er in geslaagd te zijn, de

Oostfriesche gereformeerden te overtuigen, dat hunne kerken eigenlijk geen geloofsbelijdenis hebben. Uwe kritiek van Böhl's Dogmatik is juist. In zijne christologie schijnt hij Gottfr. Menkens denkbeelden op te warmen. Zahn schrijft in De Heraut zoo als ik zie. Hij is een getrouw verdediger van de gereformeerde waarheid. Jammer dat hij zijne kleuren altijd zoo donker mengt. Eenige heldere, vriendelijke tinten zouden zijn invloed verhoogen, dunkt mij. Ebrard is een paradox. Beck teekent hem met korte woorden, wanneer hij zegt: "Ebrard ist kein Systematiker, aber öfters auch willkürlich." De Gereformeerde Bond schijnt niet veel uit te werken. Voor niets dan een naam kan met toch ook niet ijveren.

Uw zoon heeft ons verleden herfst een bezoek gebracht. Wij houden veel van hem. Hij heeft vele goede hoedanigheden. Het spijt mij slechts, dat er in deze kleine plaats geen werk voor hem is. Ik heb hem trachten te bewegen, ergens een kerkelijk tehuis te zoeken, maar tot dus ver ben ik er niet in geslaagd. Hij is in dit opzicht in eene moeielijke positie juist als andere jongelingen van zijnen stand, die naar Amerika komen. De Hollandsche emigranten zijn niet naar hun smaak, daar deze wat opvoeding en maatschappelijke positie aangaat, niet in harmonie zijn met hen. De Amerikaansche invloeden echter zijn in godsdienstig opzicht niet goed voor hen. De revival methodes van evangelisten zijn voor hen niet berekend, en de meer fatsoenlijke kringen zijn even aristocratisch als in Nederland, zoodat het voor uw zoon eene moeilijke taak is, zich eenen weg te banen. Maar hij is echt Amerikaansch, met Gods hulp zal het hem gelukken. Wij blijven zijner gedenken in onze gebeden.

Mij aanbevelende in uwe christelijke vriendschap en liefde ben ik met geheel mijn hart uw u liefhebbende broeder in Christus

N. M. Steffens

## 3. Holland, January 4, 1888

Dear Brother in Jesus Christ,

At the beginning of a new year I wish to extend to you a hearty "The Lord bless you and give you prosperity."

I follow with interest and cordial prayers the development of the Reformation<sup>16</sup> which the Lord in a wonderful way has begun in the Netherlands and in which He will use you as a means in His hand.

I rejoice with you in what the Lord has already done. When I keep in mind the peculiar circumstances, the influence of the historical development and—forgive me that I add this—the weakness of the Dutch national character, I perceive it to be a wonder that the Lord has made you as successful as you presently are. *Soli Deo gloria!* And the Lord who has cleared a way through water and wilderness will undoubtedly allow you to achieve your desired goal.

Calvinism needs a place of refuge. Reformed churches almost everywhere are losing their Reformed character. How deep Scotland has already sunk! Recently I read "The Kingdom of God"<sup>17</sup> by the well known Prof. Candlish.<sup>18</sup> How poor that book is respecting spirit and life! How far beneath the sterling works of his father! Nowhere in it does one find the distinguishing Reformed character. Yesterday I read an essay by Dr. Briggs<sup>19</sup> of Union Seminary<sup>20</sup> in New York in which he says: "The apologist has been relieved of the peril of resting the whole doctrine of inspiration upon the adjective *verbal*, and the critics have led Christian scholars back to the sounder position of the great Protestant Reformers."<sup>21</sup> Such resounding words without historical basis, relying on the *ipse dixit*<sup>22</sup> are heard everywhere. And this happens in free churches! Theology seems to be absorbed by criticism, and criticism is no longer judgment but "destructionology."

<sup>16</sup> The *Doleantie*.

<sup>17</sup> James S. Candlish, *The Kingdom of God Biblically and Historically Considered* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1884).

<sup>18</sup> James Stuart Candlish (1835-1897), professor in systematic theology at Free Church College, Glasgow.

<sup>19</sup> Charles Augustus Briggs (1841-1913), professor of Hebrew and cognate languages in Union Theological Seminary (1874), of Biblical theology (1891), and of theological encyclopaedia and symbolics (1904).

<sup>20</sup> Union Theological Seminary in New York, founded in 1836 by the Presbyterian Church (New School), and by the end of the nineteenth century, one of the leading centers of liberal Christianity in the United States.

<sup>21</sup> Charles A. Briggs, "The Christian Evidences: How Affected by Recent Criticisms?," no. 1, in *The Homiletic Review*, vol. 15 (Jan. 1888), 12.

<sup>22</sup> *Ipse dixit*: because he says so.

I cannot tell you how glad I am that God has called you to rehabilitate Calvinism, not only as a doctrine but also as a principle in the social and political sphere.

I can imagine how painful it must be for you to see Dr. Hoedemaker<sup>23</sup> taking another track. In this I fully sympathize with you. Dr. Hoedemaker kindly sends me all the brochures which he publishes, but try as I will, I cannot find the slightest reason that would give him the right to act as he does. He speaks much of principles, but it is a sorrowful business when one holds to a principle that would deliver him into the hands of the enemies of the Reformation. I am sorry that Dr. Hoedemaker seems unable to see that this is actually "*Principien-Reiterei*."<sup>24</sup>

The exercise of "Christian discipline" in the "Synodical Society Church"<sup>25</sup> would be laughable if it were not so serious. Viewed from afar, this is nothing but a parody. Houbolt c.s. (is that the American Houbolt<sup>26</sup> of unsavory memory?) go beyond all limits because they even turn aside the juridical formalities and in every possible way display their ignorance, but even where educated men respect legal formalities, the treatment of the Dolerenden is and remains irresponsible. Or if this is the ruling law of the "Synodical Society Church," I find it the best apology for the Reformation. But it is maybe merely a means for achieving the purpose: preservation of the rights and possessions which are actually the property of the Dolerenden. Hence the *eliminating*.

I completely agree with you in your conception of the truth. Your view regarding baptism is impeccable, as though spoken from my own heart.

I assent fully to your church order, the provisional view, the underlying principles, etc. I have only one question. Do deacons have the right to attend classis as delegates? If I do not mistake, I read in *De Heraut* some time ago that this was permitted by Classis Amsterdam of the *Nederduitsch Gereformeerde Kerken*.<sup>27</sup> Am I wrong when I assert

<sup>23</sup> Philippus Jacobus Hoedemaker (1839-1910), minister of the *Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk* (1868-80; 1887-1909) and professor at Free University Amsterdam (1880-87). Hoedemaker did not join the *Doleantie* and therefore left Free University to become a pastor again.

<sup>24</sup> *Principien-Reiterei*: pedantry.

<sup>25</sup> Synodical Society Church was the nickname of the *Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk*, used by members of the *Doleantie* churches.

<sup>26</sup> Willem Allart Houbolt (1831-1890) studied at Kampen Theological Seminary (1854-58) and was a minister in the Reformed Church (1859-79) and the *Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk* (1880-90).

<sup>27</sup> *Nederduitsch Gereformeerde Kerken* is the official name of the *Dolerende* churches. See, e.g., the proceedings of the classis meeting of the *Dolerende* churches in Overijssel and Drenthe of 9 August 1887 in Zwartsluis, *De Heraut*, 21 August 1887.

that this is contrary to the principles of Reformed church order? What if matters of a spiritual nature come before the classis by appeal or complaint? Is it not a kind of *allsirio ipiskopein*<sup>28</sup> if the deacons do the work of the elders? Will you perhaps deal with this point in your articles on church offices? I would very much like to have your feelings about this. I ask you this not because I wish to criticize but for the sake of Reformed church order.

Is it not too bad that the Reformed churches in Germany develop so little vigor? But what can one expect from a church that is only nominally Reformed? It was crafty of the church government of Ostfriesland to change the former official name of "*Nederduitsch Gereformeerde Kerk*" to "*Hoogduitsche Gereformeerde Kerk*" and then to claim that high Reformed is something different than low Reformed. Helias Meder<sup>29</sup> in his explanation of the Emden Catechism<sup>30</sup> seems to have succeeded in convincing the Ostfrisian Reformed that their churches actually have no confessions of faith. Your criticism of Böhl's Dogmatics is right.<sup>31</sup> In his Christology he seems to be warming over Gottfried Menken's<sup>32</sup> ideas. Zahn<sup>33</sup> writes in *De Heraut* as I see.<sup>34</sup> He is a faithful defender of the Reformed truth. Too bad that he always mixes his colors so dark. A few brighter, friendlier tints would increase his influence, I feel. Ebrard<sup>35</sup> is a paradox. Beck<sup>36</sup> portrays him briefly

<sup>28</sup> *allsirio ipiskopein*: intrusion in some else's office.

<sup>29</sup> Helias Meder (1761-1825) studied theology at Groningen University, was a Reformed pastor in Emden, and was the most important Ost-Frisian theologian in the post-Enlightenment era.

<sup>30</sup> *De openlijke kerk-leer der Evangelisch-Gereformeerde Gemeente in Emden en Oostfriesland, eniglijk en onbepaaldelijk, rustende op de geopenbaarde godlijke leer in de schriften des O. en N.T., en overeenkomstig den geest der Zwingliaansche Kerk-hervorming, vervat in den Oostfriesschen Katechismus. Eerst uit oude schrijvers en gedenkstukken opgemaakt, en vervolgens nader ontwikkeld en opengelegd in eene doorgaande verklaring van alle de XLIX zondagen van dezen katechismus*, I-III (Emden: C. Wenthin, 1804-7).

<sup>31</sup> Eduard Böhl (1836-1903), German Reformed theologian, professor in dogmatics in Vienna (1864-99). Steffens referred to his *Dogmatik. Darstellung der christlichen Glaubenslehre auf Reformirt-kirchlicher Grundlage* (Amsterdam: Von Scheffer, 1887).

<sup>32</sup> Gottfried Menken (1768-1831), German theologian and pastor, studied at the University of Jena and was the founder of *Erweckungstheologie* (Revival Theology).

<sup>33</sup> Theodor Zahn (1838-1933), German theologian, professor of New Testament at the universities of Göttingen (1865-77), Kiel (1877-78), Erlangen (1878-88 and 1892-1909), and Leipzig (1888-92).

<sup>34</sup> Theodor Zahn, "Tegen de vervalsching der gereformeerde belijdenis": *De Heraut*, 16 October, 30 October, 6 November, 4 December, 11 December 1887.

<sup>35</sup> Johann Heinrich August Ebrard (1818-1888), German theologian professor at the universities of Zürich and Erlangen (1847-1853). Zahn mentioned Ebrard in *De Heraut*; see previous note.

<sup>36</sup> Johann Tobias Beck (1804-1878), German theologian, professor in Basel (1836) and Tübingen (1843).

when he says: "*Ebrard ist kein Systematiker, aber öfters auch willkürlich.*"<sup>37</sup> The Reformed Confederation seems not very effectual. One cannot be zealous for naught but a name.

Your son visited us last fall. We like him a lot. He has many good qualities. But I am sorry that there is no work for him in this place. I have tried to persuade him to find himself at home in a church somewhere, but so far I have not been successful. In this respect he is in a difficult position just like other young men of his social level who come to America. The Dutch emigrants are not to their taste because they are not compatible in respect to rearing and social position. The American influences are not good for them religiously, however. The revival methods of the Evangelists are not aimed at them, and the more sophisticated circles are just as aristocratic as in the Netherlands, so that it is difficult for your son to find his way. But he is genuinely American; with God's help he will succeed. We continue to remember him in our prayers.

Commending myself to your Christian friendship and love, I am with all my heart your affectionate brother in Christ,

N. M. Steffens

<sup>37</sup> Ebrard is not a systematician, but often also capricious.

## 4. Holland, 27 oktober 1888

Geliefde broeder,

Hoewel ik er geen bewijs voor heb, dat mijne brieven u aangenaam zijn, gevoel ik nogtans, alsof het mijne roeping ware, u te zeggen, hoe zeer het mij smart, dat ds. Dosker's brief, oorspronkelijk geplaatst in "The Christian Intelligencer", eenen weg gevonden heeft naar Nederland, om aldaar door indiscreete lieden gebruikt te worden als een middel tegen "de Doleantie".

Onze goede vriend Dosker is – ik zeg u dit confidentieel- aan een barometer gelijk, die gevoelig is voor iedere verandering in de atmosfeer, die hem omringt. In brieven, die ik van hem ontving tijdens zijn verblijf in Nederland, merkte ik reeds zijne verandering van front. Het spijt mij, dat het zoo is, want ik ben geheel en al buiten sympathie met hem. Wel geloof ik, dat er elementen zijn in "de Doleantie", die ook mij niet al te sympatisch zouden zijn, maar een man als Dosker zou zich toch dubbel in acht moeten nemen, zich te laten leiden in zijne beoordeeling van kerkelijke bewegingen door sommige verschijnselen, die, van nabij bezien, niet zoo glansrijk schijnen als wel op een afstand. "Distance lends enchantment to the view."

Wat Dosker, De Hope, de vreeselijke Roeper en andere bladen ook mogen zeggen, laat mij toe, u te verzekeren van mijne hartelijke sympathie en voorbede. Wel zijn er eenige kleine punten, waarin ik meen van u te verschillen in mijne beschouwing van kerkrechtelijke vraagstukken, maar wat de grondbeginselen van uw leven en streven aangaat, ben ik het volledig met u en uwe medestrijders eens. Beuker is een vreeselijke kampvechter, en is het altijd geweest. Maar is het niet singulier, dat Engelberts, hoofdredacteur van "De Roeper"[.] op hetzelfde aambeeld slaat? Hij was het immers, die korten tijd voor de synode van Middelburg, A.D. 1869, een verweerschrift uitgaf tegen de toenmalige "Christelijke Afscheidene Gereformeerde Kerk", waarin hij de beginselen der oudgereformeerden verdedigde tegen het "afscheidings-beginsel". *Tempi passati!*

Uit de bladen verneem ik, dat dr. Hoedemaker het getal tijdschriften in Nederland met een gaat vermeerderen, in gemeenschap met Van Ronkel en Felix. "De Gereformeerde Kerk" is de paradoxe titel van dit nieuwe tijdschrift. Waar mag die Gereformeerde Kerk wel liggen? Zekerlijk in Wolkenkukukshiem. Die mannen der abstractie zullen zekerlijk geenen grooten invloed meer kunnen uitoefenen op den gang der gebeurtenissen.



Hoe moeielijk is het toch in onze dagen, kerkelijke vereeniging te weeg te brengen. Eenige jaren geleden, toen men in Schotland beproefde, de verschillende “disestablished churches” onder een dak te brengen, zeide Spurgeon bij eene zekere gelegenheid: “Indien ik een microscoop te hulp neem, is het mij nog onmogelijk, een onderscheid op te merken tusschen de verschillende presbyteriaansche kerken.” De presbyterianen echter zagen wat Spurgeon niet zien kon, en de eenheid is nog heden een pium desiderium. Alas! historical development is a power. Geschiedenis laat zich niet maken, zij groeit.

Union is misschien onmogelijk, unity echter moest bewaard blijven tusschen hen, die des Heeren zijn.

Gaarne zou ik willen weten, wat er uit uw zoon Frederik geworden is. Toen ik de laatste keer in Chicago was, en mij naar hem informeerde, vernam ik, dat hij naar Nederland vertrokken was. Indien hij ten uwen huize is, groet hem s.v.p. van de mijnen en van mij.

Nog eens u verzekerende van mijne volle sympathie in de vele moeielijkheden en onaangenaamheden, die u als leider van het gereformeerde volk van Nederland ondervindt, noem ik mij hoogachtend uw u liefhebbende broeder in Christus,

N. M. Steffens

## 4. Holland, October 27, 1888

Dear Brother,

Although I have no evidence that my letters<sup>38</sup> please you, I do feel as if it were my duty to tell you how deeply it grieves me that Rev. Dosker's letter<sup>39</sup> originally printed in *The Christian Intelligencer*<sup>40</sup> has found its way to the Netherlands and is being used there by indiscrete people as a means against "the Doleantie."

Our good friend Dosker is—I tell you this in confidence—like a barometer which is sensitive to every change in the atmosphere which surrounds him. In letters which I received from him during his stay in the Netherlands, I already noticed his change of face. I am sorry that this is so, for I am completely out of sympathy with him. I certainly believe that there are elements in "the Doleantie" which I, too, could find uncongenial, but a man like Dosker should be doubly on his guard lest in his judgment of ecclesiastical movements he be led by some appearances which, viewed from nearby do not appear as they do from a distance. "Distance lends enchantment to the view."

Whatever Dosker, *De Hope*,<sup>41</sup> the awful *Roeper*<sup>42</sup> and other periodicals may say, allow me to reassure you of my hearty agreement and prayers. There may be some small matters in which I may differ with you in my view of issues of church polity, but as concerns the principles of your life and aspirations, I am in complete agreement with you and your confederates. Beuker<sup>43</sup> is a fierce champion and always has been. But is it not strange that Engelberts,<sup>44</sup> editor-in-chief of *De Roeper*, follows the same example? It was he, certainly, who a short time before the Synod of Middelburg, A.D. 1869,<sup>45</sup> published a defense against the

<sup>38</sup> I presume not all the letters from Steffens to Kuyper survived.

<sup>39</sup> Dosker's letter was published in *De Heraut*, 14 October 1888, as a Dutch translation of the text originally published in the *Christian Intelligencer*, 1 August 1888.

<sup>40</sup> The *Christian Intelligencer* was the English language weekly of the RCA in the East, issued since 1829.

<sup>41</sup> *De Hope. Weekblad in het belang van maatschappij, school en kerk*, issued since 1865.

<sup>42</sup> *De Roeper. Een getuige voor de eere Gods, in kerk, maatschappij en staat*, issued from 1886 until 1899.

<sup>43</sup> Henricus Beuker (1834–1900) studied at Kampen Theological Seminary, minister in the *Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerk* (1862–93), in the *Altreformierte Kirche* (1881–84), in the CRC (1893–94), and professor at Calvin Theological Seminary (1894). He criticized Kuyper's proposal for a union between the *Nederduitsch Gereformeerde Kerken* and the *Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerk* in the periodical *De Vrije Kerk* (monthly 1875–98).

<sup>44</sup> Nicolaas Jakobus Engelberts (1831–1918) was minister in the *Gereformeerde Kerk onder het Kruis* (1860–69) and the *Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerk* (1869–97).

<sup>45</sup> Steffens represented the *Altreformierte Kirche* at this synod, where the *Christelijke Afscheidene Gereformeerde Kerk* and most of the *Gereformeerde Kerk onder het Kruis* united.

"*Christelijke Afscheidene Gereformeerde Kerk*"<sup>46</sup> of that time, in which he defended the principles of the Old Reformed against the "secession principle."<sup>47</sup> *Tempi passati*!<sup>48</sup>

I notice by the papers that Dr. Hoedemaker is about to increase the number of Dutch periodicals by one in partnership with Van Ronkel<sup>49</sup> and Felix.<sup>50</sup> "*De Gereformeerde Kerk*"<sup>51</sup> is the paradoxical name of the new periodical. Where may this Reformed Church be? Very likely in *Wolkenkukusheim*.<sup>52</sup> These men of abstraction can certainly not exert much influence on the course of events.

How difficult it is in our day to get church union under way. Some years ago, when there was an attempt in Scotland to bring the various "disestablished churches" under one roof, Spurgeon<sup>53</sup> remarked on a certain occasion: "Unless I use a microscope, it is impossible for me to observe any difference between the various Presbyterian churches." The Presbyterians, however, saw that which Spurgeon could not see, and unity is still today a *pium desiderium*.<sup>54</sup> Alas! historical development is a power. History does not permit itself to be made; it grows.

Union is perhaps impossible, but unity must be preserved between those who are the Lord's.

I would very much like to know what has become of your son Frederik. The last time I was in Chicago and inquired about him, I learned that he had departed for the Netherlands. If he is at home with you, please give him greetings from my family and me. Once again assuring you of my complete sympathy amidst the many troubles and unpleasantness which you experience as leader of the Reformed people of the Netherlands, I call myself, with high esteem, your loving brother in Christ,

N. M. Steffens

<sup>46</sup> This was the name of the *Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerk* before 1869.

<sup>47</sup> N. J. Engelberts, *De Gereformeerde Kerk in Nederland. Haar recht verdedigd en haar standpunt geschetst. Op last der algemeene synode uitgegeven* (Zwolle: J. Vlaanderen Oldenzeel, 1869).

<sup>48</sup> *Tempi passati* [It.]: times past, bygone days.

<sup>49</sup> Philippus Samuel van Ronkel (1829–1890), converted Jew, minister in the *Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk* (1861–90). He sided with Kuyper until the early 1880s.

<sup>50</sup> Jan Wouter Felix (1824–1904), minister in the *Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk*, who sided with Kuyper and the *Vrije Universiteit* until the *Doleantie*.

<sup>51</sup> *De Gereformeerde kerk. Christelijk weekblad*, issued by the *Confessioneele Vereeniging* since 1888. Hoedemaker was editor-in-chief.

<sup>52</sup> *Wolkenkukusheim*: Cloud Cuckoo Land.

<sup>53</sup> Charles Haddon Spurgeon (1834–1892), famous English Calvinistic Baptist preacher.

<sup>54</sup> *Pium desiderium*: pious desire.

5. Holland, 1 december 1888

Zeer geliefde broeder in Christus,

De Doleantie begint ook aan deze zijde van den oceaan gevoeld te worden. Uw artikel in N<sup>o</sup> 569 van *De Heraut* over Dosker's positie heeft mij het vuur aan de voeten gelegd. Nauwelijks had onze vriend Dosker dat artikel gelezen, of mij werd door hem de vraag voorgelegd: Hebt gij aan dr. Kuyper aangaande deze zaak geschreven? Op de directe vraag kon ik natuurlijk niet anders dan met een beslist ja antwoorden. Het overige van de daarop volgende samenspraak wil ik maar niet neerschrijven. Het gevolg is dat er helaas! eene aanmerkelijke koelheid ontstaan is tusschen ons. Hoe die breuk te heelen is weet ik waarlijk niet. Terugnemen van hetgeen ik aangaande de limitatie van zijn karakter aan u geschreven heb kan ik niet, en hij meent, dat ik achter zijn rug kwaad van hem gesproken heb. Wat ik eigenlijk geschreven heb, weet hij natuurlijk niet, hij vermoedt echter, dat het vreeselijk moet zijn.

Ik kan het goed verstaan, hoe u er toe kwam om den inhoud van mijn schrijven, zonder mijnen naam te noemen, te gebruiken, maar het spijt mij toch, dat het gebeurd is.

Wat den verderen inhoud van uw artikel aangaat, geloof ik, dat u te veel maakt van Dosker's zending tot de Nederduitsch Gereformeerde Kerken. Wij zenden nooit tot andere kerken deputaten, om deel te nemen in de kerkelijke verhandelingen van lichamen, die tot ons in geene *huishoudelijke* betrekking staan. "Correspondeerende leden" (corresponding members) zijn leden van andere kerkelijke denominaties, die de groete van hunne respectievelijke kerkelijke synoden overbrengen, en hun last uitgevoerd hebben, wanneer zij die taak hebben verricht.

Volgens mijne bescheidene meening zou het daarom ook de beste gedragslijn zijn in de Dosker affaire, de zaak op uwe synodale vergadering geheel niet ter sprake te brengen. Eene klacht bij onze synode zou niet alleen niets baten, maar daarenboven ook nog eenen slechten indruk maken, daar men ze hier aan deze zijde van den oceaan niet zou begrijpen. Mij dunkt, de N.G. Kerken zijn sterk genoeg om zulke aanvallen als die van Dosker met kalme waardigheid te verduren, en met zwijgen te beantwoorden. Ik ben van meening, dat "Vrije Kerk", "Roeper", "Gideon" en last but not least "De Gereformeerde Kerk" (Ph. J. H. en V. R.) veel te veel vreugde gehad hebben over de irritatie, die zij in u, met recht of met onrecht, hebben opgemerkt. Dosker, dat weet ik van nabij, is er bedroefd over, dat hij de oorzaak geweest is van dat

leedvermaak in die bewuste kringen, al ziet hij nog niet, dat zijn doen zoo leelijk is, als het in Nederland in de kringen der Doleantie wordt aangezien.

De volle sympathie van ware vrienden der gereformeerde kerk zal er echter niet minder door worden, dat uw streven het calvinisme in al zijne betrekkingen tot staat, kerk en maatschappij in zijne eer te herstellen door vriend en vijand wordt aangevallen. Het goud moet worden beproefd. Het goud in de beweging, Doleantie genoemd, moet wel echt zijn, daar God er voor zorgt, dat het vuur der beproeving niet uitdooft. En die God, die u en uwe medestrijders aan dat vuur blootstelt, is getrouw en teeder in Zijne liefde jegens Zijn volk. In het schoone Duitsche lied: *Herre meine Seele*, is ééne gedachte, die mij altijd dierbaar is. Zij luidt: *Groesser als der Helfer ist die Not ja nicht*. Die litotes is reeds meer dan eens van bijzondere kracht geweest voor mij. God weegt op tegen onze nooden en beproevingen. Mijn hart is oprecht met u, en mijne bede voor u rijst op tot den Heere, dat Hij u dagelijks ondersteune met Zijnen machtigen arm, en u genade geve om er in te berusten, wanneer Hij tot den een of anderen Simeï zegt: Vloek David.

Van dr. Vos hoor en zie ik niets. In augustus l.l. bracht hij mij een bezoek, en in september zag ik hem in Grand Rapids bij gelegenheid van zijne installatie. Sedert dien tijd is hij mij geheel uit het oog verdwenen. Of hij op de rechte plaats is, weet ik niet. Ware wetenschap wordt in onze Hollandsch-Amerikaansche kringen niet gewaardeerd. De menschen zijn niet op de hoogte om ze te kunnen waardeeren. Hij schijnt echter, wat het kerkelijke standpunt den Amerikaansche afgescheidenen aangaat, goed meê te kunnen gaan.

Uw Fred zond heden aan een mijner kinderen eene felicitatie. Hij had niet vergeten dat onze Agnes morgen verjaart. Ik hoop, dat ds. Oggel eenen invloed ten goede op hem uitoefene. Ik zal gedurig naar hem informeerden.

Na minzame groete en heilbede, uw u liefhebbende broeder in Christus

N. M. Steffens

## 5. Holland, December 1, 1888

Dearly Beloved Brother in Christ,

The Doleantie is beginning to be felt on this side of the ocean also. Your article in N° 569 of *De Heraut* concerning Dosker's position has stirred me into action.<sup>55</sup> As soon as our friend Dosker had read the article he asked me: Have you written Dr. Kuyper about this matter? To such a direct question I could do no other than answer a firm yes. The rest of the ensuing conversation I had better not record. The result is that, alas, a noticeable coolness has risen between us. I truly do not know how to heal this breach. I cannot retract what I have written you about the short-comings of his character, and he thinks that I have spoken evil of him behind his back. What I actually wrote he, naturally, does not know, but he imagines that it must be terrible.

I well understand how you came to use the contents of my letter without divulging my name, but I am still sorry that it happened.

Concerning the other contents of your article, I believe you put too much emphasis on Dosker's deputation to the Nederduitsch Reformed Churches. We never sent deputations to other churches to take part in the ecclesiastical business of bodies that do not stand in a *family* relationship to us. Corresponding members are members of other ecclesiastical denominations who bring greetings from their respective ecclesiastical Synods. And they have discharged their duty when they have accomplished that task.

In my humble opinion, it would therefore be the best line of action in the Dosker affair not to raise the matter at all in your synodical gathering. A complaint to our synod would not only be of no avail but also create a bad impression, because it would not be understood on this side of the ocean. I think that the *Nederduitsch Gereformeerde Kerken* are strong enough to endure attacks such as Dosker's with calm dignity and answer with silence. I am of the opinion that *Vrije Kerk*,<sup>56</sup> *Roeper*, *Gideon*,<sup>57</sup> and last but not least, *De Gereformeerde Kerk* (Ph. J. H.

<sup>55</sup> In *De Heraut*, 18 November 1888, Kuyper criticized Dosker with use of Steffens' description of his character (see letter 4). He blamed him for not being sympathetic to the *Dolerenden* when in the Netherlands and criticizing them in the American press. See also: *De Heraut*, 9 December 1888.

<sup>56</sup> *De Vrije Kerk. Vereeniging van christelijke gereformeerde stemmen*, issued from 1875 until 1898. Editors were, among others, Beuker and H. Bavinck.

<sup>57</sup> *Gideon. Zondagsblad voor het volk, door het volk*, issued from 1875 until 1903.

and V. R.<sup>58</sup>) have had much too much enjoyment over the irritation which they, rightly or wrongly, have observed in you. I know at first hand that Dosker is sad that he has been the cause of the enjoyment of others' unhappiness in those circles in question although he does not yet see that his doings are as ugly as they are considered to be in the Netherlands in the circles of the Doleantie.

The full sympathy of true friends of the Reformed church will, however, not be diminished by the fact that your struggle to restore Calvinism in all its relationships to state, church, and society in all its honor is being attacked by friend and foe. The gold must be refined. The gold in the movement called the Doleantie must be genuine if God sees to it that the refining fire is not extinguished. And the God who exposes you and your fellow combatants to that fire is faithful and tender in His love for His people. In the beautiful German song: *Harre meine Seele*, there is one thought that is always precious to me. It goes: *Groesser als der Helfer ist die Not ja nicht* [the need is (certainly) not greater than the Helper].<sup>59</sup> More than once the *litotes*<sup>60</sup> has been one of more than usual power for me. God weighs up to our needs and afflictions. My heart is upright with you, and my prayer for you rises to the Lord, that He will daily support you with His mighty arm and give you grace to rest in it whenever He says to one or other Shimei: curse David.<sup>61</sup>

I see or hear nothing of Dr. Vos.<sup>62</sup> Last August he visited me, and in September I saw him in Grand Rapids on the occasion of his installation.<sup>63</sup> Since that time I have lost sight of him. Whether or not he is in the right place, I do not know. True learning is not valued in our Holland-American circles. The people are not sufficiently informed to value it. It seems, however, as far as the ecclesiastical point of view of the American Seceders is concerned, that he gets along well.

<sup>58</sup> The editors Philippus J. Hoedemaker and Philippus S. van Ronkel.

<sup>59</sup> "Harre, meine Seele" (1845) is a German hymn, written by Friedrich Räder (1815-1872), translated in Dutch as "Als g' in nood gezeten" and in English as "Trust patiently, my soul." Literal translation by Earl Wm. Kennedy, Van Raalte Institute, Holland, MI.

<sup>60</sup> *Litotes* is a figure of speech in which a certain statement is expressed by denying its opposite.

<sup>61</sup> Reference to 2 Sam. 16, where God ordered Shimei to curse David, who was escaping from Saul.

<sup>62</sup> Geerhardus Vos (1862-1949), Dutch American Biblical theologian, professor at Calvin Theological Seminary (1888-93) and Princeton Theological Seminary (1893-1932).

<sup>63</sup> 4 September 1888.



Today your Fred sent his congratulations to one of my children. He had not forgotten that tomorrow is our Agnes's birthday. I hope that Rev. Oggel<sup>64</sup> has a good influence on him. I will ask after him constantly.

With friendly greetings and prayers for your well-being, your affectionate brother in Christ,

N. M. Steffens

<sup>64</sup> Engelbert Christiaan Oggel (1841-1910), minister in the RCA (1866-77; 1890-1908). From 1887 until 1890, he was the pastor of Pullman Presbyterian Church in Chicago, where Frederik stayed.

6. Holland, 12 februari 1890

Geliefde broeder,

In XVII van uwe opstellen over "Collegiaal stelsel" lees ik: "En wat ook veel afdeed, men had het voorbeeld van de Vrije Kerk van Schotland voor zich, die immers gelijken weg was ingeslagen."

Of die opmerking wel nauwkeurig is betwijfel ik. De Vrije Kerk van Schotland heeft altijd staande gehouden, inzonderheid tegen over het "voluntary principle" van de United Presbyterian Church dat zij de historische voortzetting was van de Gereformeerde Kerk Schotlands. Dit komt vooral uit in the "Claim of Rights". Indien ik mij niet vergis, vertegenwoordigt de United Presbyterian Church het Afgescheiden standpunt, terwijl de Free Church meer overeenstemt met - sit venia verbo - de Doleantie, dit is natuurlijk mutatis mutandis.

In ons midden wordt het gewoel op kerkelijk gebied. De Gereformeerde Kerk is "honeycombed" van allerlei ongezouten denkbeelden en praktijken. De kennis van het gereformeerde beginsel is te loor geraakt. Ook de meeste onzer Westersche leeraars zijn, wat ik "oud-liberalen" zou noemen, menschen, die van de leer ontzettend weinig houden, maar van *ongezonde* verbroedering van allerlei sekten des te meer. In den strijd voor het gereformeerde beginsel heb ik weinige medestanders. Mijne positie is bepaald niet benijdenswaardig. In Nederland is er althans een gedeelte van het volk, dat de gereformeerde beginselen van harte is toegedaan, hier echter leven wij tegenwoordig onder de afgaande maan.

Zelfs ons blad De Hope is in handen van eene clique, die mij op alle mogelijke wijze belet, de gereformeerde beginselen te bespreken en te verdedigen. Ik heb in mijne portefeuille eene menigte van artikelen, die door de Commissie van Toezicht verworpen zijn. Ik weet soms niet wat ik doen moet.

Hieruit blijkt, dat men zelfs in het "vrije" Amerika tyrannen vindt, die des Heeren zaak tegenstaan. Wanneer ik ds. Gispén's loftuitingen hoor in het belang van vrije kerken, komt telkens een glimlach op mijn gelaat. Niets dan het geloof kan de kerken voor afval bewaren.

Met de debatten in De Presbyteriaansche Kerk is u zeker op de hoogte. "A short creed" schijnt de leus te worden. In de verloochening der historie en in de verguizing van het werk des Heeren, verricht in de 16<sup>e</sup> eeuw, kan ik niet meedoen.

Mij in uwe voorbede en sympathie aanbevelende ben ik hoogachtend de uwe in Christus

N. M. Steffens

6. Holland, February 12, 1890

Dear Brother,

In XVII of your essays on "*Collegiaal stelsel*" I read: "*En wat ook veel afdeed, men had het voorbeeld van de Vrije Kerk van Schotland voor zich, die immers gelijken weg was ingeslagen.*"<sup>65</sup>

I doubt that that remark is accurate. The Free Church of Scotland<sup>66</sup> has always maintained, especially over against the "voluntary principle" of the United Presbyterian Church,<sup>67</sup> that it was the historical continuation of the Reformed Church of Scotland. This is especially evident in the "Claim of Right."<sup>68</sup> Unless I am mistaken, the U. P. Church represents the Seceder's point of view while the Free Church agrees more with—*sit venia verbo*<sup>69</sup>—the Doleantie, this, naturally, *mutatis mutandis*.<sup>70</sup>

Among us turbulence in church matters is coming. The Reformed Church is "honeycombed" with all kinds of blunt examples and practices. The knowledge of Reformed principles has been lost. Also most of our Western preachers are what I would call "*oud-liberalen*," people who care very little about doctrine and therefore all the more for *unhealthy* relationships with all kinds of sects. In the struggle for the Reformed principle, I have very few supporters. My position is certainly not enviable. In the Netherlands there is at least a part of the people who hold to Reformed principles from the heart, here, however, we live presently under a waning moon.

Even our periodical, *De Hope*,<sup>71</sup> is in the hands of a clique that prevents me in every possible way from discussing and defending

<sup>65</sup> *De Heraut*, 2 February 1890: "And what was very conclusive was that people had before them the example of the Free Church of Scotland which had chosen the same direction." What the *collegiaal stelsel* or collegiate system in church polity meant in this context was that local churches are departments of one large association, and that someone is member of both this association and of the department where he lives.

<sup>66</sup> The Free Church of Scotland was founded after the Disruption of 1843, a schism that resulted in about 450 ministers led by Thomas Chalmers leaving the established Church of Scotland.

<sup>67</sup> The United Presbyterian Church of Scotland was the result of a union in 1847 of the United Secession Church and the Relief Church.

<sup>68</sup> The Claim of Right abolished prelaty and brought to an end royal and parliamentary interference in the order and worship of the church, and was passed by the Parliament of Scotland in April 1689. The next year Presbyterianism was established. The Free Church of Scotland in 1843 returned to that position.

<sup>69</sup> *Sit venia verbo*: if you allow me to use the word.

<sup>70</sup> *Mutatis mutandis*: by changing those things which need to be changed.

<sup>71</sup> *De Hope*. *Weekblad in het belang van maatschappij, school en kerk*, issued 1865-1933. Steffens was one of the editors of this Dutch-language weekly of the RCA.

Reformed principles. I have in my files many articles that have been rejected by the *Commissie van Toezicht*.<sup>72</sup> Sometimes I don't know what to do.

And so it is evident that even in “free” America there are tyrants who oppose the Lord's business. Whenever I hear Rev. Gispen's<sup>73</sup> praises in the interest of the free church, a smile crosses my face. Nothing but faith can preserve the churches from apostasy.

You are certainly keeping up with the debates in the Presbyterian Church.<sup>74</sup> “A short creed” seems to have become the watchword. I cannot be a party to the forsaking of history and the revilement of the work of the Lord accomplished in the 16th century.

Recommending me in your prayers and sympathy I am, with high esteem, yours in Christ,

N. M. Steffens

<sup>72</sup> *Commissie van Toezicht*: committee of oversight.

<sup>73</sup> Willem Hendrik Gispen (1833-1909) was a minister in the *Gereformeerde Kerk onder het Kruis* (1856-60), the *Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerk* (1860-1909), and chief editor of *De Bazuin* from 1888 until 1899. In 1898 he received an honorary degree in Divinity from Hope College.

<sup>74</sup> The Presbyterian Church in the US.

7. Holland, 25 januari 1891

Hooggeachte en geliefde broeder in Christus,

Ik had bijna vergeten, dat ik u eenige regelen geschreven had over het ecclesiastico-politiek standpunt der Vrije Kerk van Schotland. Met verlangen zal ik uwe artikelen over deze zaak tegemoet zien.

Gij hebt recht; onze toestanden worden van dag tot dage ellenderiger. Wij zijn “on the downward grade”. En op die hellende vlakte, waarop wij ons thans bevinden, is geen stilstaan mogelijk, geene reactie te verwachten. Het schijnt dat wij eerst het dal der ellende moeten bereiken, eer er hoop op verandering kan rijpen in de harten van hen, die het groote werk der hervorming in de 16<sup>e</sup> eeuw als een werk Gods aanzien, dat niet opzij gedrongen worden mag.

Dr. Vos heeft eene meer conservatieve omgeving dan ik; maar hij wordt in zijnen kring niet verstaan, daar hij te doen heeft met welmeenende, maar onopgevoede en bekrompene menschen. In “De Wachter” wordt hij tegenwoordig van alle kanten bestookt wegens zijn supra-lapsarisch standpunt. Het is waar, ds. Hulst heeft den strijd niet tegen hem, maar tegen u aangeboden, maar “the initiated” verstaan, dat hij gemeend is. Het is jammer, dat die jonge man zijne krachten verspilt in die kringen. In Nederland zou hij, indien ik niet mistast in mijn oordeel, veel meer werk kunnen doen. Het is waar, hij is niet een leider in publieke zaken, maar hij is een consciëntieus geleerde, die met groote acribie werkt. En op zijne beginselen valt niets te zeggen. Ik heb hem lief.

Met mijn werk aan ons Seminarie spoedt het ook ten einde. Het is onmogelijk in een kort briefje u bekend te maken met al de gronden, die mij bewegen, dit voorjaar bij de synode mijn ontslag in te dienen.

Ik sta in mijne omgeving alleen. Wel heb ik enkele christelijke vrienden, maar als voorstander der gereformeerde beginselen sta ik letterlijk alleen. Wij hebben nog wel gereformeerde menschen in de gemeenten, maar wat kunnen die arme schapen uitrichten, daar zij zich bevinden in de handen van leiders, die in eene geheel andere wereld leven, en aan niets anders denken dan aan syncretisme en praktisch werk.

Ds. Dosker heeft ook mij op ergerlijke wijze mishandeld. Hij wil gaarne medestander zijn, maar tegelijkertijd wil hij goed aangeschreven staan bij de mannen op de andere zijde.

Ds. Winter van Grand Rapids is een in vele opzichten uitnemend man, maar hij leeft in eene wereld, die niet meer bestaat, en in eene

toekomst, die nog verre in het verschiet ligt. Dogmatisch staat hij op het standpunt, waarop gereformeerde leeraars in de Hervormde Kerk stonden zegge in het jaar 1860, en daarmee vereenigt hij chiliastische verwachtingen. Men zou hem misschien kunnen noemen een man van het Réveil.

In het algemeen kan gezegd worden, dat alle gereformeerde kerken doortrokken zijn van allerlei dwalingen. Men is onbekend met de leer der gereformeerde kerk, en heeft een afkeer van dogmatische bepalingen van welken aard ook. Godsdienstigheid is alles waarvoor men belangstelling toont; eene godsdienstigheid, die niet meer rekent met het Woord van God. *Fides qua creditur* niet *fides quae creditur* is de zaak waarvoor men zich warm maakt.

Het is om te schreien, wanneer men ziet welke afmetingen de afval aanneemt. Calvinisme en christendom zijn in vele kringen wisselbegrippen, en met het eerste gaat ook het laatste over boord. Niet lang geleden vond ik in een veel gelezen courant de aankondiging: "Calvinism triumphant". Ik las, en stond verbaasd, het bericht van eene methodische vergadering vóór mij te hebben. Zoo veel verstaat men van godsdienstige vraagstukken!

En ons Hollandsch volk gaat in dien maalstroom onder! Vaak komt de gedachte in mij op, of het niet goed zou zijn, indien de leiders in Nederland den stroom der emigratie in eene andere bedding trachtten te leiden. Maar misschien is het onmogelijk.

Ik feliciteer U met de promoveering en het huwelijk van Uwen zoon dr. H. H. Kuyper. Ruste 's Heeren zegen rijkelijk op hem. Uw zoon Frederik, die nog al veel in aanraking komt met mijne kinderen, die in Chicago wonen, gedraagt zich tegenwoordig aardig goed. Niet lang geleden heb ook ik hem gezien. Hij zag er gezonder en meer "gentlemanly" uit dan verleden zomer.

Als steeds met de meeste hoogachting, uw u liefhebbende broeder

N. M. Steffens

## 7. Holland, January 25, 1891

Highly Esteemed and Beloved Brother in Christ,

I had almost forgotten that I had written you some lines about the ecclesiastical-political view of the Free Church of Scotland.<sup>75</sup> I will be eagerly anticipating your articles on this subject.

You are right; our circumstances grow worse from day to day. We are "on the downward grade." And on the slippery slope on which we now find ourselves no standstill is possible, no return is to be expected. It looks as though we must first descend into the valley of wretchedness before hope can rise in the hearts of those who look upon the great work of the reformation in the 16th century as the work of God that may not be pushed aside.

Dr. Vos has a more conservative environment than I,<sup>76</sup> but he is not understood in his circles because he deals with well-meaning but uneducated and narrow-minded people. Presently he is being harassed from all sides in *De Wachter*<sup>77</sup> because of his supralapsarian view. It is true, Rev. Hulst<sup>78</sup> has no quarrel with him but with you, but "the initiated" understand that he is the one. It is too bad that that young man wastes his powers in those circles. If I am not wrong in my judgment, he would be able to accomplish much more work in the Netherlands. It is true that he is not a leader in public affairs, but he is a conscientious scholar who works with great exactness. One can say nothing against his principles. I love him.

My work at the Seminary<sup>79</sup> is also coming to an end. It is impossible to tell you in a short letter all the reasons that persuade me to tender my resignation to the Synod this spring.

In my situation I stand alone. I do have a few Christian friends, but as champion of Reformed principles, I stand literally alone. Of course, there are still Reformed people in the congregations, but what can those poor sheep do when they find themselves in the hands of leaders who live in an entirely different world and think about nothing but syncretism and practical work.

Rev. Dosker has also mistreated me in an annoying way. He would like to be a supporter, but at the same time he wants to be on good terms with the men on the other side.

<sup>75</sup> See letter 6.

<sup>76</sup> Vos was a member of the CRC.

<sup>77</sup> *De Wachter: Christelijk weekblad*, weekly of the CRC, issued 1868-1985.

<sup>78</sup> Lammert Jan Hulst (1825-1922), minister in the *Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerk* (1849-74), the RCA (1874-82), and the CRC (1882-1910).

<sup>79</sup> Western Theological Seminary.



Rev. Winter<sup>80</sup> of Grand Rapids is in many respects an excellent man, but he lives in a world that no longer exists and in a future which is still far distant. He stands dogmatically in a position that Reformed ministers held in the *Hervormde Kerk* in the year 1860, and to that he adds millennial expectations. He might be called a man of the *Réveil*.<sup>81</sup>

Generally it can be said that all the Reformed churches are imbued with all kinds of errors. People are ignorant of the doctrine of the Reformed church and have a dislike for dogmatic definition of all kinds. They show interest only in piety, a piety that no longer takes into account the Word of God. *Fides qua creditur*, not *fides quae creditur*<sup>82</sup> is the matter they get excited about.

It is enough to make one weep to see the dimension of the apostasy. Calvinism and Christianity are interchangeable concepts in many circles, and the one goes overboard with the other. Not long ago I read in a popular periodical the announcement: "Calvinism triumphant."<sup>83</sup> I read and stood amazed to find that I had before me a message from a Methodist assembly. That shows to what extent religious problems are understood!

And our Dutch people are being sucked into that maelstrom! I often think that it would be a good thing if the leaders in the Netherlands tried to turn the course of the stream of emigration. But that is perhaps impossible.

I congratulate you upon the graduation and marriage of your son, Dr. H. H. Kuyper.<sup>84</sup> May the Lord's blessing richly rest upon them. Your son Frederik, who rather frequently meets my children who live in Chicago, is behaving himself rather well lately. Not long ago I saw him, too. He looked more healthy and "gentlemanly" than last summer.

As always with highest esteem, your loving Brother,

N. M. Steffens

<sup>80</sup> Egbert Winter (1836-1906) was a minister of the RCA (1863-95) and a professor at Western Theological Seminary (1895-1904).

<sup>81</sup> The Dutch *Réveil*, a religious movement, aimed at conversion, piety, and philanthropy.

<sup>82</sup> *Fides qua creditor*: the faith by which it is believed, the personal faith which apprehends; *fides quae creditor*: the faith which is believed, the content of the faith. Terminology derived from Augustine (*De Trinitate*, XIII.2.5).

<sup>83</sup> Not traced.

<sup>84</sup> Herman Huber Kuyper (1864-1945), Kuyper's eldest son, received his doctoral degree *magna cum laude* from Free University on 6 January 1891. On 20 January 1891, he married Cornelia Maria Johanna Heyblom.

8. Holland, 25 april 1891

Geliefde en hooggeachte broeder,

Ik had juist het voornemen opgevat om u eenige letteren te schrijven, toen ik uw brief ontving. Hartelijk dank voor denzelven.

Het hoofddoel van mijn tegenwoordig schrijven heeft betrekking op uwe zoon Frederik. De berichten, die ik nu en dan ontvang aangaande zijn persoon en werk, luiden voortdurend goed. Maar gisteren hoorde ik, dat hij van plan is om dezen zomer naar Nederland te gaan. Indien het zijne begeerte is Amerikaan te worden en vooruit te gaan in zijn werk, moet er niet aan denken zulk een plan uit te voeren. Iedere reis, die hij doet, voor dat hij wel gevestigd is, zet hem op nieuw achteruit. Ik ga u derhalve raden, hem van zulk voornemen af te manen.

Verder heb ik ook gehoord, dat hij gaarne een klein kapitaal zou willen hebben om eene affaire op eigen hand te beginnen. Ik acht den tijd daarvoor nog niet gekomen. Indien Hij geld van u vraagt, of door uwe tusschenkomst zoekt te krijgen, wees hem nog niet ter wille. Het mag hard schijnen, maar het is beter voor hem, dat hij zich nog een weinig oefent in de discipline der subordinatie.

Gaarne zou ik meer voor hem doen, maar persoonlijke invloed gaat in dit land niet ver, wanneer het "business" aangaat. "Help yourself" is hier regel. Slechts in politieke kringen geldt "favoritism."

Uw artikel in De Heraut over de Vrije Kerk van Schotland heb ik gelezen. Ik ben dankbaar, maar niet voldaan. Ik meen, dat de Presbyteriaansche Kerk van Schotland door "The Barrier Act" hiërarchische overheersching door de General Assembly onmogelijk gemaakt heeft. En dat men in Schotland de General Assembly "the highest court" noemt, komt daarvandaan, dat die court (niet = bestuur, in het Engelsch board, maar gerechtshof) de hoogste instantie is in tuchtzaken. En dit is immers ook het geval met de generale synode der Nederduitsch Gereformeerde Kerken. Of men moest appelleren aan de synodus male informata ad synodum melior informandam, maar dat is immers geen nieuwe instantie.

Zoo ver echter ben ik tot Uwe kerkrechterlijke zienswijze bekeerd dat confederatie de eenige veilige weg is ter bewaring van eenheid en vrijheid in volle harmonie. Dat echter deze theorie reeds in het verleden zuiver door gevoerd is wil er bij mij nog niet recht in. De historische bewijsvoering is mij nog niet duidelijk. In zulke kwesties gevoel ik, hoe weinig wij in Amerika kunnen doen aan eigenlijke studie, waarbij de bronnen geraadpleegd worden moeten.

Niet lang geleden stelde ik er prijs op den oorsprong van de uitdrukking "cor ecclesiae" voor de leer der praedestinatie te weten te

komen. Tot nog toe is het mij niet gelukt. Dr. Vos kon mij ook niet uithelpen. Zou u mij kunnen dienen met eenige citaties, waaruit blijkt de historische oorsprong van die uitdrukking? Ik zou er zeer dankbaar voor zijn, daar er hier zijn, die beweren, dat zij eene uitvinding zij van lateren datum.

De tijd nadert, wanneer ik mij de taak opgelegd zie, mijn ontslag als professor bij de algemene synode in te dienen. Verscheidene classes echter gaan met memories tot de synode om haar te verzoeken, mij mijn ontslag niet te geven. Welk een ommekeer van zaken. Dezelfde mannen, die al het mogelijke gedaan hebben om mij van hier te verwijderen, staan nu voorop om mij hier te houden. Het volk begeert mij, vandaar zijn ook de mannen, die mij haten, gedwongen, naar die publieke opinie te luisteren. Ik heb echter geen lust langer te blijven arbeiden in gemeenschap met een College, waar de jonge lui volstrekt niet voorbereid worden om met vrucht hunne theologische studien te beginnen. Gij hebt Hospers gehad, en weet dus, hoe gebrekkig het middelbaar onderwijs hier is. Die jongeling had 8 jaar op school gelegen. Hij heeft echter niet geleerd wat het beteekent te studeeren. En Hospers is volstrekt niet "below the average" van onze jongelui.

Uw Heraut is een uitnemend blad voor menschen, die zulke kost weten te waardeeren. Ons volk echter - emigranten behooren immers, uitzonderingen daargelaten, tot de minst ontwikkelde lieden - is niet op de hoogte om u in alles te volgen. De "leaders" verstaan de meesten volstrekt niet. Uwe meditaties worden nog het meest geprezen.

Uwe artikelen over den Heiligen Geest herlezende- en ik houd van dat werk o! zoo veel - werd mijn aandacht getrokken tot hetgeen u zegt over het apostolaat. De ontwikkeling is uitnemend. Er blijft echter een rest, dat, dunkt mij, niet geheel past in den gang der ontwikkeling. Hetgeen u zegt aangaande Matthias, dat hij de eer gehad had voor een tijd apostel te zijn, totdat Paulus die plaats in nam, is eigenaardig en nieuw voor mij. Ik kan niet zeggen, dat mij uwe oplossing bevredigt. Ik heb altijd gemeend, dat Paulus' plaats in de gewijde geschiedenis sui generis is, dat hij niet tot het twaalfstal behoorde, maar aan de heidenen als hun apostel gegeven was.

Gaarne zou ik u dr. Vos sturen, indien ik zooveel macht over hem had. Ik denk, zoo lang zijne ouders leven en hij ongehuwd blijft, is er weinig kans, dat hij naar Nederland vertrekt. Hij is gehecht aan zijne ouders en naïef in zijne onderdanigheid aan hen.

Ik zal er over denken, of eene vereeniging tot verspreiding van christelijke litteratuur practicabel is.

Als steeds de uwe in hoogachtende liefde

N. M. Steffens

## 8. Holland, April 25, 1891

Dear and Highly Esteemed brother,

I was about to write you some words when I received your letter. Hearty thanks for it.

The main purpose of my present writing concerns your son Frederik. The news which I get about him and his work now and then is all good. But yesterday I heard that he was planning to go to the Netherlands this summer. If he wishes to become an American and progress in his work, he must not consider carrying out such a plan. Every trip he makes before he is well established sets him back. So I would advise you to discourage such intentions.

I have also heard that he would very much like a little capital with which to begin his own independent business. I think that the time for that has not yet come. In case he asks you for money or asks you to help him get it, do not oblige him yet. This may seem heartless, but it is better for him to get a little more training in the discipline of subordination.

I would like to do more for him, but personal influence does not go very far in this country where business is concerned. "Help yourself" is the rule here. "Favoritism" counts only in political circles.

I have read your article in *De Heraut* about the Free Church of Scotland.<sup>85</sup> I am thankful but not satisfied. I think that the Presbyterian Church of Scotland has rendered hierarchical domination by the general assembly impossible through "the Barrier Act."<sup>86</sup> And the fact that in Scotland the general assembly is called "the highest court" (not = administration, in English: board, but a court of justice) is because it is the last resort in discipline cases. And this is for certain also the case with the general synod of the *Nederduitsch Gereformeerde Kerken*. Otherwise one would have to appeal from the *synodus male informata ad synodum melior informandam*,<sup>87</sup> but that is certainly not a new resort.

Nevertheless, I am sufficiently converted to your ecclesiastical view to believe that confederation is the only way to preserve unity and freedom in full harmony. However, I am not yet completely convinced that this theory was already practiced purely in former days. The

<sup>85</sup> *De Heraut*, 1 March 1891.

<sup>86</sup> The Barrier Act is an ecclesiastical law of the Church of Scotland which prevents the General Assembly from making decisions which might profoundly affect the polity of the church without first referring these to the presbyteries.

<sup>87</sup> *Synodus male informata ad synodum melior informandam*: from a badly informed synod to a synod that has to be informed better.

historical origin is not yet clear to me. In such matters I feel how little we in America can do in the way of real study in which the sources must be consulted.

Not long ago I was eager to know the origin of the expression “*cor ecclesiae*”<sup>88</sup> for the doctrine of predestination. So far I have not succeeded. Dr. Vos cannot help me out either. Could you help me to some citations which show the historical origin of that expression? I would be very thankful for them since here there are those who assert that it is of later origin.

The time approaches when I have the task of presenting my resignation as professor to the general synod. Several classes are going to the synod with memorials to request not to grant my resignation. What a change of business. The same men who did everything possible to drive me away from here are now at the head of the line to keep me here. The people want me to stay and so even the men who hate me are forced to listen to public opinion. However, I have no desire to continue to work in connection with this College where the young people are not at all prepared to begin their theological studies successfully. You have had Hospers<sup>89</sup> and therefore know how defective secondary education is here. That young man had attended school for eight years. But he has not learned what it means to study. And Hospers is by no means “below the average” of our young people.

Your *Heraut* is an outstanding periodical for people who can appreciate such fare. However, our people—emigrants usually belong, with certain exceptions, to the least educated folk—are not sufficiently informed to follow you in everything. The “leaders” are not understood at all by most of the people. Your meditations receive the most praise.

Rereading your articles on the Holy Spirit<sup>90</sup>—and I like that series oh! so much—my attention was drawn to what you say about the apostleship.<sup>91</sup> The development of your thoughts is outstanding. However, there remains something, which, I think, does not fit properly into your development. That which you say concerning Matthias, that he had the honor to be an Apostle for a time until Paul took that place strikes me as curious and new. I cannot say that your explanation

<sup>88</sup> *Cor ecclesiae*: the heart of the church.

<sup>89</sup> Henry Hospers (1869-1937) graduated from Hope College and studied theology, 1889-90, at Free University.

<sup>90</sup> Between 1883 and 1886, Kuyper wrote a series on the Holy Spirit in *De Heraut* that ended with five closing articles in 1889 and was published in three volumes (in Dutch) as *Het werk van den Heiligen Geest* (Amsterdam: J. A. Wormser, 1888-89). In English, Abraham Kuyper, *The Work of the Holy Spirit* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1900).

<sup>91</sup> Chapter 8 of *Het werk van den Heiligen Geest*, vol. 1, is devoted to the apostleship.

satisfies me. I always thought that Paul's place in sacred history was *sui generis*,<sup>92</sup> that he did not belong to the twelve but rather was given to the heathen as their apostle.

I would very much like to send Dr. Vos to you if I had such authority over him.<sup>93</sup> I think that as long as his parents live and he is unmarried that there is little chance that he will move to the Netherlands. He is attached to his parents and naive in his submissiveness to them.

I will give some thought to whether or not a society for the dissemination of Christian literature is practical.

As always yours in faithful love

N. M. Steffens

<sup>92</sup> *Sui generis*: of its own kind, in a class by itself, unique.

<sup>93</sup> The theological department of Free University had several vacancies, and Kuyper was looking for eligible theologians.

9. *Holland, 30 december 1892[briefkaart]*

Geliefde broeder,

Uw zoon Fred, die een gedeelte zijner vakantie dagen in ons midden slijt, heeft mij een groot genot verschaft. Hij had "De verflauwing der grenzen" bij zich. Ik heb mij neergezet om het te lezen en was zoo geboeid dat ik het niet kon neerleggen eer ik het had verslonden geheel en al.

Ik kan u niet zeggen, hoe dankbaar ik gevoel, dat gij deze rede hebt uitgesproken, en door de pers in verdere kringen hebt verspreid. Uwe bazuin geeft geen onzeker geluid. Och! dat toch allen, die Jezus volgen, luisteren wilden naar uwe getuigenis, die niets anders bedoelt dan de verheerlijking van onzen God.

Blij ben ik ook vooral daarom dat er nog een land is - al is dat land ook klein - waar men zulke redevoeringen aanhoort, verstaat en toejuicht.

Die blijdschap echter is gemengd met droefheid, wanneer ik er aan denk, dat in dit groot land zulke taal nauwelijks door enkelen wordt verstaan.

En toch kan ook ons niets redden voor eene uitwissching der grenzen dan het program door u als heraut van het calvinisme op elk levensgebied zoo uitnemend ook nu weer aangekondigd.

In tiefster Verehrung und Liebe, uw broeder in Christus

N. M. Steffens



9. Holland, December 30, 1892 [postcard]

Dear Brother,

Your son Fred, who spent part of his vacation with us, has given me a great deal of pleasure. He had *De verflauwing der grenzen* (blurring of the boundaries)<sup>94</sup> with him. I sat down to read it and was so captivated that I could not put it down until I had entirely devoured it.

I cannot tell you how thankful I feel that you have delivered this speech and have disseminated it in writing to wider circles. Your trumpet gives no uncertain sound. Oh! that all who follow Jesus would listen to your testimony which has no other purpose than the glorification of our God.

I am also especially glad that there is still a country—although a small one—where people hear, understand and applaud such speeches.

That joy, however, is mixed with sadness when I reflect that in this great country such speech is understood by only the very few.

And still nothing other can save us from a blurring of the boundaries than the program again so excellently announced by you as the herald of Calvinism in all spheres of life.

*In tiefster Verehrung und Liebe*,<sup>95</sup> your Brother in Christ,

N. M. Steffens

<sup>94</sup> A. Kuyper, *De verflauwing der grenzen. Rede bij de overdracht van het rectoraat aan de Vrije Universiteit op 20 oktober 1892 gehouden* (Amsterdam: J. A. Wormser, 1892).

<sup>95</sup> *In tiefster Verehrung und Liebe*: in deepest admiration and love.

10. Holland, 18 januari 1894

Geliefde broeder en zeer geachte professor,

Vergun mij u hartelijk dank te zeggen voor de toezending van deel een uwer Encyclopaedie. Ik was verrast en blij toen ik het in handen kreeg. Ik leef in het vertrouwen, dat God u in staat zal stellen tot voltooiing niet alleen van dit werk, maar dat de Dogmatiek ook nog zal volgen, eer de tijd ook voor u zal komen tot verwisseling van de theologia viatorum met de theologia patriae.

Wat de theologische antagonisten ook mogen te zeggen hebben aangaande de richting door u vertegenwoordigd, ik dank er God voor, dat Hij u ons geschonken heeft, en dat het u gegeven is, zoo krachtig als nauwkeurig de beginselen der calvinistische theologie uit een te zetten. Hoofdstuk I heb ik zorgvuldig nagegaan. Gaarne geef ik de getuigenis, dat "de Encyclopaedie" op eene wijze in het licht gesteld is, zoo als men ze elders te vergeefs zoekt.

Ook kon ik niet nalaten te lezen wat u over Schaff's "Propaedeutic" zegt. Ik denk, u heeft hun "glimpflich" behandeld. De laatste pennevruchten van dr. Schaff zijn, dunkt mij, niet veel waard. Hij schreef te veel in den stijl van een "handwerker."

Heden ontving ik N° 1 van De Heraut. Zijn nieuw kleed bevalt mij. Met belangstelling heb ik uw eerste artikel gelezen over "Theologische opleiding." Ik stem hartelijk in met de beginselen door u neergelegd. Het gaat mij met hetgeen u schrijft als dien man, die uit de preek komende zegt: De dominé heeft uit mijn hart gepreekt. Ik hoop slechts, dat het u en uwen medestanders gegeven zal worden het doctrinaire Afscheidingsbeginsel te overwinnen. Ik zie duidelijker in dan ooit te voren, hoe groot het onderscheid is tusschen de Doleantie en de Afscheiding.

De malaise in ons land duurt voor. Het is moeielijk, de menschen te "begeistern" voor de vraagstukken, die ons hart bewegen.

Wil[t] u s.v.p. mevrouw en uwe kinderen van mij groeten? Gaarne zou ik ook prof. Rutgers de hand willen drukken.

Laten wij maar, leunende op den machtigen arm des Heeren, de toekomst tegemoet gaan. (Ps 9:11) Hij zal ons begeven noch verlaten.

Als steeds uw liefhebbende & hoogachtende broeder in Christus

N. M. Steffens

10. Holland, January 18, 1894

Dear Brother and Highly Esteemed Professor,

Allow me to extend my hearty thanks for sending me volume one of your *Encyclopaedie*.<sup>96</sup> I was surprised and glad when I had it in my hands. I live in the confidence that God will enable you to bring to completion not just this work, but that your Dogmatics<sup>97</sup> will follow as well, before the time comes for you to exchange the *theologia viatorum* for the *theologia patriae*.<sup>98</sup>

Whatever the theological antagonists may have to say about the ideas which you present, I thank God that He has given you to us and that you have been enabled to explicate the principles of Calvinistic theology so powerfully and accurately. I have checked chapter 1 carefully. I am glad to assert that the *Encyclopaedie* is presented in a way that is not found elsewhere.

And I could not withhold myself either from reading what you say about Schaff's "*Propaedeutic*."<sup>99</sup> I think you have handled him "*glimpflich*."<sup>100</sup> The latest writings of Dr. Schaff are, I think, not worth much. He wrote too much in the style of a "*handwerker*."<sup>101</sup>

Today I received N° 1 of *De Heraut*. Its new layout pleases me.<sup>102</sup> I read the first article about theological education<sup>103</sup> with interest. I agree heartily with the principles which you lay down. I react to your writings just as the man, who, coming from church says: the minister preached what was in my heart. I hope, however, that you and your supporters

<sup>96</sup> Abraham Kuyper, *Encyclopaedie der heilige godgeleerdheid. Deel een: inleidend deel* (Amsterdam: J. A. Wormser, 1894). In English, Abraham Kuyper, *Encyclopedia of Sacred Theology: Its Principles* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1898).

<sup>97</sup> Kuyper did not publish a dogmatics, but student notes of his dogmatic courses were published from 1896 on; from 1901 titled as *Dictaten dogmatiek van A. Kuyper*.

<sup>98</sup> *Theologia viatorum*: theology of the pilgrim; *theologica patriae*: theology of the fatherland, both references to the earthly and the heavenly life.

<sup>99</sup> Philip Schaff (1819-1893) was a Swiss-born, German-educated Protestant theologian and a professor at Union Theological Seminary, New York (1870-1893). Steffens referred to Philip Schaff, *Theological propaedeutic. A general introduction to the study of theology: exegetical, historical, systematic, and practical including encyclopaedia, methodology, and bibliography, pt.1, a manual for students* (New York: The Christian Literature Co., 1892). Kuyper dealt with Schaff's *Propaedeutic* in his *Encyclopaedie*, 440-45.

<sup>100</sup> *Glimpflich*: mildly.

<sup>101</sup> *Handwerker*: manual laborer.

<sup>102</sup> *De Heraut* had a slightly different layout beginning with the issue of 7 January 1894.

<sup>103</sup> A. Kuyper, "Wetenschappelijke opleiding," *De Heraut*, 7 January 1894. This was the first article of a series.

may overcome the doctrinaire secession principle. I see more clearly than ever before how great a difference there is between the *Doleantie* and the *Afscheiding*.

The malaise in our country continues to prevail. It is difficult to "begeistern"<sup>104</sup> the people about the problems that move our hearts.

Please greet your wife<sup>105</sup> and children for me. I would also very much like to shake hands with Prof. Rutgers.<sup>106</sup>

Leaning on the mighty arm of the Lord, let us march forth to meet the future. (Ps. 9:11) He will not forsake or abandon us.

As ever your loving and respectful Brother in Christ,

N. M. Steffens

<sup>104</sup> *Begeistern*: inspire.

<sup>105</sup> Johanna Hendrika Schaay (1842-1899).

<sup>106</sup> Frederik Lodewijk Rutgers (1836-1917) was a minister in the *Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk* (1860-79) and professor at Free University (1879-1910). He was a specialist in church polity. He was an editor of *De Heraut* and a close friend to Kuyper.

## 11. Holland, z.d. [voorjaar 1894]

Geliefde broeder,

Ik begrijp wel, dat het niet veel beteekent, maar nogthans gevoel ik mij er toe gerdrongen, u van mijne sympathie te verzekeren in de moeilijke omstandigheden, waarin gij u geplaatst vindt. Ik weet bij eigen ondervinding, hoe het hart soms ineenkrimpt, wanneer onze vrienden zich tegen ons verklaren en het gevoel zich aan ons opdringt, dat men meer en meer geïsoleerd wordt. Immers omdat ik in beperkten kring op mijne eigene wijze eenen soortgelijken strijd te strijden heb moet ik bijna alleen staan. Ik *kan* met u sympathiseeren, en ik *doe* het ook. Het spijt mij, dat de verdeeldheid onder de voorstanders van het calvinisme in Nederland zoo groot is en van dag tot dag grooter wordt. Velen willen in u den man niet erkennen, dien God hun gegeven heeft. Kleine zielen!

Ik vertrouw echter, hoe smartelijk deze beproeving voor u moge zijn, dat gij persoonlijk rijpe vruchten moogt plukken en genieten. God moge het in Zijne wijsheid goed voor ons oordeelen, in een gloeiende oven geworpen te worden, maar Hij is met ons. Het is een harde weg dien wij hebben te gaan, willen wij aan den Heere genoeg hebben; maar het doel is heerlijk.

Uwe richting op politiek gebied, ik behoef het nauwelijks te zeggen, erken ik als de alleen gezonde. De democratische beginselen mogen ons aangenaam zijn of niet, de wereld wordt democratisch. En gelukkig, onze calvinistische wereld- en levensbeschouwing is elastiek genoeg om in die nieuwe vormen hare heerlijkheid te toonen.

Ps. 73: 25. 26 zij uwe sterkte.

Mij aan uw vriendschap aanbevelende en u met de uwen hartelijk groetende, geloof mij, oprecht en hoogachtend de uwe in Christus

N. M. Steffens

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WESTERN THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY  
OF THE REFORMED (DUTCH) CHURCH IN AMERICA  
HOLLAND MICHIGAN

DEPARTMENT OF THEOLOGY  
N. M. STEFFENS

Steffens, N. M.

1884?

Prof. Dr. A. Kuyper  
Amsterdam.

Geliefde Broeder,

Ik begrijp wel, dat het u niet veel betrekent, maar nochtan gevoel ik mij er toe geroepen, ik van mijne sympathie te verklaren in de verschillende omstandigheden, waarin zij u geplaatst vindt. Ik weet bij mijn afdwining, hoe het hart soms inkerkingst, wanneer onze vrienden zich tegen ons verklaren en het gevoel zich aan ons opdringt, dat men maar en maar geïsoleerd wordt. Immers omdat ik in beperkter kring zo mijne eigene wijze een soortgelijke strijd te strijden het weet ik bijna alleen staan. Ik ken niet de sympathieën, en ik doe het ook. Het spijt mij, dat de onduidelijkheid onder de voorstanders van het Calvinisme in Nederland zoo groot is en van dag tot dag groter wordt. Velen willen in ik dan maar niet erkennen, dat het hun gezegd heeft. Kleine zijden!

Ik vertrouw echter, hoe ernstig de beproeving voor u en de zijnen, dat zij persoonlijk zijne omstandigheden mogt gelukken en versterken. God en de zijnen in zijne wijsheid goed voor ons oordeelen, in een glorieus en overtuigend te worden, maar het is niet ons. Het is een harde weg die wij hebben te gaan, willen wij aan den Heere gevege hebben; maar het doel is heerlijk.

Deze richting op politiek gebied, ik behoeft het aan te wijzen, en ik als de alleenzeggende. De Democratische beginselen en de aanpak van de zijnen of niet, de wereld wordt democratisch. In de politiek, onze Calvinistische wereld, en de democratie is slechts een gey en in die richting om een heere te worden.

Op 23:25:26 zij deze stukke.

Ik aan den windstap van de hand en ik met de heer hartelijk groeten

Geliefde en  
Gedacht en in de hand  
De Heere in Eer.  
N. M. Steffens

Fig. 28. Letter from Steffens to Abraham Kuyper, spring 1884  
(Historical Documentation Center for Dutch Protestantism,  
VU University Amsterdam)

## 11. Holland, n.d. [Spring 1894]

Dear Brother,

I understand that it does not mean much, but still I feel compelled to reassure you of my sympathy in the difficult circumstances in which you find yourself.<sup>107</sup> I know by my own experience how the heart may cringe when our friends testify against us and the feeling that we are more and more isolated forces itself upon us. For I must stand almost alone, because I had to fight a similar fight in my own way in certain circles. I *can* sympathize with you, and I *do*. I am sorry that the disunity is so great among the champions of Calvinism and that it becomes greater daily. Many will not recognize you as the man given them by God. Small souls!

I believe that however painful this trial may be, that you personally may pluck and enjoy ripe fruit. God in His wisdom may judge it good for us to be cast into a fiery furnace, but He is with us. It is a hard way which we must go if we wish to be satisfied in the Lord; but the purpose is glorious.

I recognize your political persuasion—I hardly need say it—as the only proper one. We may or may not approve of democratic principles, but the world *is becoming* democratic. And luckily our Calvinistic world and life view is sufficiently elastic to exhibit their perfections in the new forms.

May Ps. 73:25-26<sup>108</sup> be your strength.

I commend myself to your friendship and greet you and your house cordially, believe me, truly and respectfully yours in Christ,

N. M. Steffens

<sup>107</sup> Steffens seems to refer to the tension between the democratic and the aristocratic wings in the Anti-Revolutionary Party about the extension of the suffrage in 1894.

<sup>108</sup> Psalm 73:25-26: "Whom have I in heaven but thee? And there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee. My flesh and my heart faileth; but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever." (KJV)



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12. *Dubuque, February 24, 1897[briefkaart]*

Geliefde broeder,

Na het lezen van uw artikel XX gevoel ik mij gedrongen, u te zeggen hoe goed het mij deed die heerlijke gedachten, die u uit de pen gevloeid zijn, te vernemen. Zij hebben jaren lang reeds gesluimerd in mijn hart, ook in mijne lessen over de eschatologie te Holland Mich. heb ik ze uitgesproken, maar ik deed het altijd schoorvoetend, omdat ik mij voorkwam als een "pathfinder", die voorzichtig moest zijn in het voortgaan op zijnen weg. Het onderscheid tusschen de scheppingsorde and de ordening der vrije genade in Christus gaf mij wel moed om voort te gaan, maar ik ben er den Heere dankbaar voor, dat gij de zaak zoo duidelijk uiteenzet. Ik hoop dat uwe artikelen later in boekvorm zullen verschijnen. In al die artikelen, die nu reeds over die zaak verschenen zijn, is er slechts één punt, waarin ik u nog niet recht volgen kan, namelijk uwe opvatting van den dood, waarmede het menschedom bedreigd werd in geval van ongehoorzaamheid. Misschien echter zal ik op andere gedachten komen bij het herlezen van hetgeen u er over zegt. Als steeds de uwe in Christus

N. M. Steffens

## 12. Dubuque, February 24, 1897[postcard]

Dear Brother,

After reading your Article XX,<sup>109</sup> I feel compelled to tell you how good it was to experience those excellent thoughts that flowed from your pen. For years they have slumbered in my own heart, and I have expressed them in my lessons on Eschatology in Holland, Michigan, although I always did it hesitantly, because I considered myself a pathfinder, who had to be careful about proceeding along his way. The distinction between the order of creation and the order of free grace in Christ gave me the courage to continue, but I thank the Lord that you have expounded the matter so clearly. I hope that your articles will appear later in book form.<sup>110</sup> In all the articles on that subject that have already appeared, there is still one item in which I cannot quite follow you, namely, your understanding of the death, by which humanity was threatened in case of disobedience. However, it is possible that I may discover other ideas by re-reading what you say about it. As always yours in Christ,

N. M. Steffens

<sup>109</sup> A. Kuyper, "Van de gemeene gratie XX," *De Heraut*, 14 February 1897.

<sup>110</sup> Kuyper's articles on common grace were published in three volumes: *De gemeene gratie. Eerste deel. Het geschiedkundig gedeelte* (Leiden: D. Donner, 1902); *De gemeene gratie. Tweede deel. Het leerstellig gedeelte* (Amsterdam/Pretoria: Höveker & Wormser, 1903); *De gemeene gratie. Derde deel. Het practische gedeelte* (Amsterdam/Pretoria: Höveker & Wormser, 1904 [1905]).

13. *Dubuque, 9 november 1897*

Hooggeachte en geliefde broeder in Christus,

Ik behoeft u niet te zeggen, dat ik met onverminderde belangstelling uwe gezegende werkzaamheid gade sla. Met dank jegens God verblijd ik mij hoe langs hoe meer in den voorspoed, dien de Heere u geeft. Waarlijk, Hij geeft schijnsel op uw werk. Ook mijne vrouw verheugt zich met mij in de wederopleving van het echte, niet van het verminkte - waartegen gij uwe stem verheft in uwe beoordeeling van Smith's Wat is calvinisme? - calvinisme in Nederland. Zij leest met veel genot uwe opstellen over de gemeene gratie en uwe stichtelijke artikelen, en zij is blij, dat, hoewel zij gaarne zulke heerlijke stukken in hare moedertaal wenschte te lezen, het haar vergund is, de waarheid Gods naar calvinistische opvatting, in het Hollandsch te vernemen.

Gij zijt in Nederland gezegend boven mate. Onze misère duurt noch voort. Wij zien verlangend uit naar eene gezonde reactie, maar zij blijft nog uit. De richting, vertegenwoordigd door het Parlement van Godsdiensten voert nog den boventoon, en de godsdienstig gezinden zoeken nog altijd hun summum bonus met eenen Drummond in de liefde. En het denkbeeld *liefde* rukt zich hoe langs hoe meer los van God. En dit geschiedt in het land der vrije kerken! Uw artikel: "De prijs onzer vrijheid" deed mij weemoedig aan. Ik kan begrijpen dat men in Nederland het vrije kerkwezen prijst als een heerlijk iets. Men kent het niet, zoo als het zich in ons midden ontwikkeld heeft. Vrijheid is goed, mits het de ware vrijheid is.

Onze vrije kerken worden langzamerhand godsdienstige genootschappen, die door alle mogelijke middelen behalve het eene ons door God aangewezen, in het leven zoeken te blijven in the great struggle for life of in de scherpe concurrentie. Ik ontken niet, dat er in Amerika nog vele lokale kerken gevonden worden, die zich verheugen in het bezit van gezonde prediking en kerkelijk leven, maar ik beweer, dat in het algemeen de vrije kerken losbandige genootschappen worden. Het genootschap (in den zin waarin men dit woord ten uwent gebruikt voor het ensemble der verschillende kerken, tot de denominatie behorende) wordt meer en meer eene macht die het geheel zoekt te beheerschen, terwijl de enkele kerken zich geheel en al zoeken te onttrekken aan tucht en orde. Twee uitersten, niet waar? Maar zij raken elkander. In de Presbyteriaansche Kerk bijvoorbeeld zoekt het presbyterie (classis) alle macht in handen te krijgen. Het ordent leeraars, evangelisten enz. zonder hen in te leiden bij eene kerk. Men houdt er zelfs *pastors*

*at large* op na, die overal in vacante kerken optreden als herders en leeraars, zonder ergens door het volk beroepen te zijn enz. In de lokale kerken daarentegen doet men wat men wil. Tucht wordt geheel niet uitgeoefend. De preek kort meer en meer in en maakt plaats – waarvoor? Voor de liturgie? Hadden we slechts maar eene gezonde liturgie. Zij kan een tegengif zijn tegen den invloed van wereldschen zin. Neen, het is niet eene echt kerkelijke liturgie, maar eene wereldsche godsdienstige tentoonstelling, een amusement religieux, waardoor men de menigte, die men niet meent met het Woord Gods te kunnen bereiken, ter kerk zoekt te lokken. Gisteren nog las ik in een krant, die te Dubuque wordt uitgegeven: “The service at Dr. Hopkins’ Church was exceptionally fine. Miss Wheeler sang a glorious solo, and also Mr. White, formerly of the Opera more than fulfilled the expectations of the congregation.” Het is niet vreemd Ave Maria[']s te hooren zingen in protestantsche kerken, en vaak zingt men ad majorem Dei gloriam in de Italiaansche taal. Ik kan niet in bijzonderheden afdalen, maar het is ongelooflijk, hoe ver de vrije kerken afgeweken zijn in allerlei opzicht.

Nooit echter was niettegenstaande dit alles de kerkelijke wereld zoo vol van godsdienstige werkzaamheid als thans. De associaties vermeerderen bij den dag als paddestoelen op vochtigen grond. De machinerie wordt zoo zeer vermenigvuldigd, dat sommigen, die anders oog noch oor hebben voor de breuke Jozefs, beginnen te zeggen: We are organized to death. De toestand herinnert mij levendig de tijden der middeleeuwen, toen de monnikenorden vermenigvuldigden en men bijna geen dagen genoeg had in het jaar voor al de feestdagen, die men invoerde. Van *openbare eeredienst*, - uitnemend[e] Hollandsche term voor eene echt christelijke zaak – weet men niet veel meer. Kinderen ziet men nauwelijks hier en daar in de kerken. Zij hebben hunne zondagschool, hun Junior Endeavor en “King[']s daughters” meetings. Het zal vreemd klinken, indien men in onze kerken wilde zingen: “Hoe vroolijk gaan de stammen op.” Bij ons komen slechts individuen ter kerk, en dat slechts nu en dan.

Neem het mij niet kwalijk, dat ik tot u spreek op zulk een schijnbaar pessimistischen toon. Ik ben geen pessimist met het oog op de verdere toekomst. Ik geloof met geheel mijn hart in Jezus Christus triumphator. Maar onze tegenwoordige toestand in onze vrije kerken is allerhachelijkst. Ik versta beter dan ooit te voren, waarom op Engelschen grond het irvingianisme en het darbyisme ontstaan zijn. Ontbraken mij de Bijbel en de historie, ik zou licht roomsch of darbystisch kunnen worden. Op het oogenblik is er voor het calvinisme weinig uitzicht in ons midden. De godsdienst heeft geen fundament in het Woord van

God en de kennis der waarheid. Men onderstelt dat allen, die in de kerken zijn de wedergeboorte en al de gaven der genade bezitten. “Stand up, stand up for Jesus,” zie daar al wat zij te doen hebben.

Deze gedachten werden in mij opgewekt onder het lezen van “de prijs onzer vrijheid.” Ik stel belang in uwen ijver voor eene gezonde ontwikkeling der presbyterische kerkregeering en voor den opbouw der kerken op zuiveren grondslag. En toch wil het mij voorkomen, dat wij en ook gij in Nederland behoefte hebben aan iets meer dan een vrij kerkwezen en een wetenschappelijk calvinisme, hoe heerlijk deze dingen ook mogen zijn. De vrije calvinistische kerk kan alleen bloeien, wanneer de leden der kerken en de ambtsdragers geregeerd worden door den Geest des Heeren. Versteent de orthodoxie tot orthodoxisme, zoo als de Duitschers de valsche orthodoxie noemen, en ondergaat de vrijheid de transsubstantiatie in losbandigheid, dan mogen de kerken nog veel uiterlijke vertooning maken, het echt leven uit God is er dan niet.

Ik hoop echter, dat gij in Nederland in de nieuwere ontwikkeling van het calvinisme niet de droevige ondervinding zult maken, die thans ons deel is.

Met genot en instemming heb ik gelezen Biesterveld's Calvijn etc. Ook ben ik bezig met het lezen van dr. Bavinck's Gereformeerde dogmatiek II[<sup>e</sup>] deel. Onze Kamper vriend is “ein gelehrter Hans”. Zijn boek is een verbazing wekkend repertorium van dogmengeschiedenis en wijsgeerige informatie. De hoofdzakelijke aanmerking, die ik heb, bestaat hierin, dat het objectieve element zoo sterk voorheerscht, dat het subjectieve soms nauwelijks opgemerkt wordt. Maar - nos omnes non possumus omnia. Ieder heeft zijne sterke, maar ook zijne zwakke zijde. Bavinck's aanleg schijnt zeer receptief te zijn. Remember me to mrs. Kuyper, and to the young ladies and gentlemen, your daughters & sons.

Geloof mij, uw liefhebbende broeder in Christus

N. M. Steffens

## 13. Dubuque, November 9, 1897

Highly Esteemed and Beloved Brother in Christ,

I need not tell you that I observe your blessed activities with undiminished interest. With thanks to God I rejoice more and more in the success which the Lord grants you. Truly, He casts light upon your work. My wife<sup>111</sup> also is happy with me in the revival of the genuine, not the distorted—to which you have raised your voice in your criticisms of Smith's *What is Calvinism?*<sup>112</sup>—Calvinism in the Netherlands. She reads your essays on common grace and your edifying articles with pleasure, and she is glad that, though she would dearly love to read such excellent pieces in her own language, she has the opportunity to learn the truth of God according to the Calvinistic interpretation in Dutch.

You are blessed beyond measure in the Netherlands. Our misery continues. We long for a healthy reaction, but it has not yet come. The tendency represented by the parliament of religions is still dominant, and religious-minded people continue to seek their *summum bonus*<sup>113</sup> with a Drummond<sup>114</sup> in love. And the idea of *love* is more and more separated from God. And this happens in the land of free churches! Your article, "De prijs onzer vrijheid"<sup>115</sup> (the cost of our freedom) made me sad. I can understand that in the Netherlands one esteems the free church as something fine. They do not know it as it has developed among us. Freedom is good provided that it is true freedom.

Our free churches are gradually becoming religious societies that seek by all means, except the one appointed by God, to stay alive in the great struggle for life and in the keen competition. I am aware that there are still many local churches in America that rejoice in healthy preaching and church life, but I assert that generally the free churches are becoming disorderly societies. The society (in the sense in which this

<sup>111</sup> Jane Graham Sutherland (1836-1917).

<sup>112</sup> Wiliam D. Smith, *Wat is calvinisme? Eene samenspraak tusschen een jeugdig bekeerde en een presbyteriaansch leeraar* (Harderwijk: Wuestman, 1897). Originally published as: *What is Calvinism? Or the Confession of Faith, in Harmony with the Bible and Common Sense, in a Series of Dialogues Between a Presbyterian Minister and a Young Convert* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1854). In his review of the Dutch translation in *De Heraut*, 31 October 1897, Kuyper qualified this English Calvinism as distorted and Anabaptist and called Spurgeon (Calvinist Baptist) its representative.

<sup>113</sup> *Summum bonus* [bonum]: the supreme good.

<sup>114</sup> Henry Drummond (1851-1897) was a Scottish evangelist, writer, and lecturer. He became famous with his book *Natural Law in the Spiritual World* (1883), the argument of which is that the scientific principle of continuity extends from the physical world to the spiritual.

<sup>115</sup> A. Kuyper, "De prijs onzer vrijheid," *De Heraut*, 24 October 1897.

word is used amongst you to mean the assembly of several congregations belonging to the denomination) is becoming more and more a power that seeks to rule the whole while the individual congregations try to withdraw themselves totally from discipline and order. Two extremes, not so? But they touch one another. In the Presbyterian Church, for example, the presbytery (classis) tries to achieve all the power. It ordains ministers, evangelists, etc., without relating them to a particular church. They even have *pastors-at-large* who appear all over in vacant churches as pastors and teachers without ever having been called by the people, etc. In the local churches, on the contrary, people do as they wish. Discipline is not practiced at all. The sermon becomes shorter and shorter and makes room for—what? For the liturgy? If only we had a healthy liturgy. It could be an antidote to the worldly influences. No, it is not a real ecclesiastical liturgy but a worldly religious spectacle, an *amusement religieux*,<sup>116</sup> by means of which the populace that cannot, they think, be reached by the Gospel are lured to church. Just yesterday I read in the paper published in Dubuque: "The sermon at Dr. Hopkins' church was exceptionally fine. Miss Wheeler sang a glorious solo, and Mr. White, formerly of the Opera, also more than fulfilled the expectations of the congregation."<sup>117</sup> It is not unusual to hear *Ave Maria's* being sung in Protestant churches, and the people often sing *ad majorem Dei gloriam*<sup>118</sup> in Italian. I cannot give you specific details, but it is incredible to what extent the free churches have wandered away in all respects.

Notwithstanding all this, the ecclesiastical world was never so full of religious activities as now. Associations increase daily like toadstools on damp soil. The machinery is multiplying so rapidly that some who otherwise have neither eye nor ear for Joseph's fraction<sup>119</sup> begin to say: We are organized to death. The circumstances remind me vividly of the Middle Ages when the monastic orders multiplied, and there were hardly enough days in the year for all the feast days that were introduced. Concerning *openbare eeredienst*<sup>120</sup>—excellent Dutch term for a genuinely Christian matter—there is little knowledge left. Scattered children are seldom seen in churches. They have their Sunday school, their Junior Endeavor<sup>121</sup> and their King's

<sup>116</sup> *Amusement religieux*: religious amusement.

<sup>117</sup> Rev. Frederick E. Hopkins, D. D. (1857-1925), ordained Presbyterian pastor, First Congregational Church, Dubuque, IA.

<sup>118</sup> *Ad majorem Dei gloriam*: to the greater glory of God.

<sup>119</sup> Joseph's fraction refers to the separation of Joseph from the family of his father Jacob, the nucleus of the people of Israel, Gen. 39.

<sup>120</sup> *Openbare eeredienst*: public worship service.

<sup>121</sup> The Young People's Society of Christian Endeavor was a nondenominational evangelical society founded in 1881. Its object was "to promote an earnest Christian



Daughters'<sup>122</sup> meetings. It would sound strange in our churches if we would sing "*Hoe vrolijk gaan de stammen op*."<sup>123</sup> Here only individuals come to church, and that only now and then.

Do not take it ill of me that I speak in such a seemingly pessimistic way. I am no pessimist as concerns the more distant future. I believe with all my heart in Jesus Christ triumphant. But our present circumstance in our free churches is most perilous. I understand better than ever before why Irvingism<sup>124</sup> and Darbyism<sup>125</sup> originated in English soil. In the absence of the Bible and history, I could easily become a Catholic or Darbist. At the moment there is little future for Calvinism among us. Religion has no basis in the Word of God and the knowledge of the truth. It is assumed that all present in church have been born again and possess the gifts of grace. "Stand up, stand up for Jesus," is all they have to do.

These thoughts were aroused in me when I read *De prijs onzer vrijheid* (The cost of our freedom). I am interested in your zeal for a healthy development of Presbyterian church government and for raising churches on a pure foundation. And yet it occurs to me that we, and you also in the Netherlands, require something more than a free church and an academic Calvinism, however splendid these may be. The free Calvinistic church can blossom only when the members and officers of the church are ruled by the Spirit of the Lord. If orthodoxy is petrified into orthodoxism, as the Germans call false orthodoxy, and if freedom is transubstantiated into libertinism, then the churches may show much outward dispersion, but then the true life of God does not exist in them.

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life among its members, to increase their mutual acquaintanceship, and to make them more useful in the service of God."

<sup>122</sup> The International Order of The King's Daughters and Sons was an international and interdenominational organization of Christian men and women, founded in 1886. Its object was the development of spiritual life and the stimulation of Christian activities.

<sup>123</sup> *Hoe vrolijk gaan de stammen op*: how joyfully the tribes go up, quote from Psalm 68:13 (Dutch rhymed version of 1773).

<sup>124</sup> The teachings of Edward Irving (1792–1834), a Scottish clergyman, who was the forerunner of the Catholic Apostolic Church. At about 1830, he became influential in England and Scotland with his stress on prophecy (millenarianism) and healing. In 1833 he was deposed as a minister in the Church of Scotland on the charge of heresy.

<sup>125</sup> The teachings of John Nelson Darby (1800–1882), an Anglo-Irish evangelist, who came to reject the institutional church and its offices about 1830, left the Church of England in Ireland, and founded an interdenominational community, later called the Plymouth Brethren, and became known in the theological world as the father of dispensationalism.

I hope that you in the Netherlands, with the newer development of Calvinism, will not have the mournful experience, which is now our portion.

I have read Biesterveld's *Calvijn* etc.<sup>126</sup> with pleasure and approval. I am also busy reading Dr. Bavinck's *Gereformeerde dogmatiek*, part II.<sup>127</sup> Our friend from Kampen is "*ein gelehrter Hans*."<sup>128</sup> His book is an amazing repertorium of dogmatic and philosophical information. The main observation I have is this: that the objective element is so strongly dominant, that the subjective is sometimes scarcely recognized. But—*nos omnes non possumus omnia*.<sup>129</sup> Each has his strong and his weak side. Bavinck's talent seems very receptive. Remember me to Mrs. Kuyper and to the young ladies and gentlemen, your daughters & sons.

Believe me, your loving brother in Christ,

N. M. Steffens

<sup>126</sup> Petrus Biesterveld (1863-1908) was a minister in the *Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerk/Gereformeerde Kerken* (1883-94) and professor at Kampen Theological Seminary (1894-1902) and Free University (1902-8). Steffens had read P. Biesterveld, *Calvijn als bedienaar des Woords* (Kampen: J. H. Bos, 1897).

<sup>127</sup> Herman Bavinck (1854-1921) was a minister in the *Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerk* (1880-82) and a professor at Kampen Theological Seminary (1882-1902) and Free University (1902-21). Steffens referred to H. Bavinck, *Gereformeerde dogmatiek*, II (Kampen: J. H. Bos, 1897).

<sup>128</sup> *Ein gelehrter Hans*: a clever guy.

<sup>129</sup> *Nos omnes non possumus omnia*: all of us cannot do everything (Virgil).

## 14. Dubuque, 30 juni 1898

Zeer geliefde broeder in Christus,

Ingesloten vindt gij s.v.p. de vertaling van uwe vierde lezing, die mij toevertrouwd [was]. Ik heb het werk er aan verbonden met blijdschap verricht. Ik vind toch hoe langs hoe meer uit hoe heerlijk gij de gedachten, die ook in mij leven, en het grootste genot van mijn leven uitmaken, weet te vertolken. Ik heb sedert eenigen tijd twee opstellen voor de *Presbyterian and Reformed Review* klaar gemaakt en opgezonden, 1. De rehabilitatie van het calvinisme, en 2. De ethiek van den natuurlijken mensch, waarin ik op mijne manier soortgelijke denkbeelden ontwikkeld heb als gij in de lezing, die ik de eer had te vertalen, zoo schoon en veelzijdig voorgesteld hebt. Ik heb nog niet veel invloed kunnen uitoefenen met mijne opstellen. Ons publiek is niet rijp voor les idéés calviniennes. Gij zult veel moeite hebben het oor van het publiek te winnen voor uwe opvatting van wetenschap. De geschiedenis der wetenschappen in Engeland en Amerika is onder den invloed van Bacon en anderen op een verkeerd pad geraakt. De tweespalt tusschen het wetenschappelijk en het godsdienstig gebied wordt geduldig aanvaard als een noodzakelijk kwaad. Men meent een goed christen en een normalist - het zij mij vergund uw term te gebruiken - op het gebied der wetenschap te kunnen zijn. Geen wonder dat het wetenschappelijk jargon vreemd klinkt in het oor van een Europeesch geleerde. Ik heb mij gewend aan die Asdodische taal, hoewel ik mij in acht neem ze zelf te gebruiken. Ik hoop, dat men u niet alleen een oor zal lenen, maar dat men zal gaan denken over hetgeen gij zegt. Het is mijne ernstige bede, dat de halfslachtigheid op wetenschappelijk en geestelijk gebied in ons midden moge ophouden. Ook uw begrip van vrijheid zal door velen in twijfel getrokken worden. Doch - qui vivra verra.

Wat mijne vertaling aangaat vond ik het werk er aan verbonden wel een weinig moeielijk in sommige gedeelten. Hoe waar is het toch wat Buffon zegt: *Le style c'est l'homme*. En vergun mij het te zeggen: Gij zijt zoo vreeselijk orgineel, zoo sterk geprononceerd individueel. Ik heb gedaan wat ik kon om dr. Kuyper zoo goed als ik kon in het Engelsch aan ons Amerikaansch publiek voortestellen. Zie hier hoe ik mijn werk heb verricht. Eerst heb ik het origineel verscheidene keeren gelezen; daarna heb ik eene letterlijke vertaling er van gemaakt; vervolgens heb ik getracht de vertaling van de Hollandsche idiomata te zuiveren; in de eindelijke uitkomst heb ik getracht getrouw te blijven aan het orgineel, duidelijk te zijn in de mededeeling uwer gedachten, en eindelijk het

Engelsch zoo goed als mogelijk te maken, wat dictie en stijl aangaat. Daarna heb ik het manuscript in handen gesteld van mijn vriend, dr. W. O. Ruston, een goed ontwikkeld Amerikaansch predikant, die het mij terugzond met zijne opmerkingen, waarvan ik gebruik gemaakt heb, en ten slotte heb ik om te vernemen of de vertaling zich aan een gehoor zou aanbevelen, mijne vertaling voorgelezen aan een Duitsch-Amerikaan, pastor Ficke, die als letterkundige op de hoogte is, en aan dr. McClelland, mijn collega, die beide een gunstig oordeel velden over mijn werk.

Mag ik u vriendelijk verzoeken, mij, al is het ook maar met een enkel woord mede te deelen, dat u het toegezondene in goede conditie ontvangen hebt?

Komt u ook naar het westen van Amerika? Of liever naar het centrum, waar de Hollanders hunne koloniën hebben? Gaarne zou ik u nog eens aan deze zijde van het graf willen zien.

Na hartelijke groete, ook aan vrouwe Kuyper en uwe kinderen noem ik mij uw liefhebbende broeder in Christus

N. M. Steffens

14. Dubuque, June 30, 1898

Dearly Beloved Brother in Christ,

Enclosed please find the translation of your fourth lecture,<sup>130</sup> which was entrusted to me. I have discharged the work connected with it with joy. I find more and more how excellently you are able to interpret the ideas that are important in my life and constitute the greatest joy of my life. I have recently finished and sent in two essays for the *Presbyterian and Reformed Review*:<sup>131</sup> 1. The rehabilitation of Calvinism;<sup>132</sup> and 2. The Ethics of the natural man,<sup>133</sup> in which I in my own way developed similar ideas as you presented so beautifully and completely in your lecture, which I had the honor to translate. I have not yet been able to exert much influence with my essays. Our public is not yet ripe for *les idées Calviniennes*.<sup>134</sup> You will have much difficulty in getting public attention for your ideas and learning. The history of science in England and America, under the influence of Bacon<sup>135</sup> and others, has gone astray on the wrong path. The discord between science and religion is patiently accepted as a necessary evil. It is thought that a person can be a good Christian and a Normalist—allow me to use your term<sup>136</sup>—in the area of science. No wonder that the scientific jargon sounds strange to the educated European. I have accustomed myself to that Ashdodic language,<sup>137</sup> although I beware of using it myself. I hope that people will not only listen to you but that they will think about what you say. It is my earnest prayer that the half-heartedness in scientific and spiritual matters may be brought to an end among us. Your understanding of freedom will also be called into question by many. Yet—*qui vivra verra*.<sup>138</sup>

<sup>130</sup> Steffens translated into English the fourth of Kuyper's six Stone lectures, held at Princeton Theological Seminary in October 1898. Abraham Kuyper, *Calvinism* (The L. P. Stone Lectures for 1898-99) New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1899).

<sup>131</sup> *The Presbyterian and Reformed Review*, issued from 1890 until 1902. B. B. Warfield was one of its editors.

<sup>132</sup> Possibly published as: N. M. Steffens, "Calvinism and Theological Crisis," *The Presbyterian and Reformed Review* 12 (1901): 211-25.

<sup>133</sup> N. M. Steffens, "The Ethics of the Natural Man," *The Presbyterian and Reformed Review* 11 (1900): 461-80.

<sup>134</sup> *Les idées Calviniennes*: Calvinistic ideas.

<sup>135</sup> Francis Bacon (1561-1626) was an English philosopher, lawyer, and statesman. His works established and popularized inductive methodologies for scientific inquiry.

<sup>136</sup> In his fourth Stone lecture (on Calvinism and science) Kuyper distinguished between normalists (non-Christians) and abnormalists (Christians).

<sup>137</sup> Reference to Nehemiah 13:24: "And their children spake half in the speech of Ashdod, and could not speak in the Jews' language, but according to the language of each people."

<sup>138</sup> *Qui vivra verra* [Fr.]: time will tell.

So far as my translation is concerned, I found my work connected with it a bit difficult in some passages. How true is what Buffon says: *Le style c'est l'homme*.<sup>139</sup> And allow me to say: you are so terribly original, such a pronounced individual. I have done what I could to present Dr. Kuyper as well as I could to our American public in English. This is how I performed my task. First I read the original several times; next I made a literal translation; then I attempted to remove the Dutch idioms from the translation; in the final product I have tried to remain true to the original, to be clear in communicating your thoughts, and finally to make the English as good as possible in diction and style. After that I turned the manuscript over to my friend, Dr. W. O. Ruston,<sup>140</sup> a mature American preacher, who returned it to me with his comments, which I incorporated, and finally, to determine whether or not the translation would commend itself to an audience. I read my translation to a German American, pastor Ficke,<sup>141</sup> an eminent man of letters, and to Dr. McClelland,<sup>142</sup> his colleague, both of whom gave a favorable judgment of my work.

May I kindly request that you let me know, if only with a simple word, that you have received the manuscript in good condition?

Will you be coming to western America?<sup>143</sup> Or are you rather going to the middle section where the Dutch have their colonies? I would gladly see you once again on this side of the grave.

After my hearty greetings, also to Mrs. Kuyper and your children, I call myself your loving brother in Christ,

N. M. Steffens

<sup>139</sup> Georges-Louis Leclerc, Comte de Buffon (1707-1788), French naturalist, mathematician, cosmologist, and encyclopedic author; *Le style c'est l'homme*: the style is the man.

<sup>140</sup> William Otis Ruston (1852-1922), pastor of the First Presbyterian Church, Dubuque (1886-1903), and professor at German Presbyterian Theological School of the Northwest, Dubuque (1903-22).

<sup>141</sup> Hermann Ficke (1838-1911), pastor of Emmanuel German Congregational Church, Dubuque (1868-1911), and librarian of the German Presbyterian Theological School of the Northwest, Dubuque.

<sup>142</sup> Adam McClelland (1833-1916), professor at German Presbyterian Theological School of the Northwest, Dubuque (1883-1904).

<sup>143</sup> Kuyper would visit the United States in the second half of 1898 and meet Steffens in Orange City, IA.

15. Orange City, November 6, 1899

Zeer geliefde Broeder in Christus,

Vergun mij u hartelijk dank te zeggen voor de toezending uwer oratie: Evolutie. Wanneer ik zeg, dat ik ze met klimmende belangstelling en volledige instemming gelezen heb, dan is dit zacht uitgedrukt. Ik heb ze verslonden en mij verheugd, dat uwe stem zoo duidelijk en krachtig zich verheft tegen de mode-philosophie onzer dagen. Dank den Heere er voor, broeder, dat Hij u gaven geschonken en middelen aan de hand gegeven heeft, uwe gaven te besteden in Zijn dienst.

Agitatie ter wille van den naam des Heeren tegen die verderfelijke, valsch beroemde wetenschap is niets meer dan een eenvoudige plichtsbetrachting. De last is ons opgelegd.

Hoe gaarne zou ik hier in Amerika het oor willen hebben van het publiek voor de question brûlante van onzen tijd: De christelijke, de calvinistische wereld- en levensbeschouwing. Ik heb het beproefd en beproef het nog waar ik slechts eene opening zie. Ik vind het echter eene hoogst moeilijke taak. U, als beroemd vreemdeling, kondt wel er in slagen, voor een korten tijd althans, de menschen te dwingen om te luisteren naar calvinisme, symbolisme enz., maar een eenvoudig man, levende in het midden van dit groote volk, moet nog al sterk en herhaald roepen om hier of daar iemand te vinden, die gewillig is naar hem te hooren. Twee artikelen van mijne hand "The rehabilitation of Calvinism," "the ethic of the natural man" liggen reeds sedert langen tijd - een er van reeds twee jaren - in het portefeuille van the *Presbyterian and Reformed Review*, een ander over the salient points of the Westminster Confession was sent back, because I had ventured to criticize the article on "Effectual calling" - criticizing it of course not as a high-critic, but on behalf of a more consistent Calvinism. Ik heb het ook beproefd artikelen te schrijven voor meer populaire bladen. The *Christian Intelligencer* is een blad zonder beginsel. Het verwondert mij, dat de redactie nog toestaat, dat uwe stem in de kolommen van haar blad gehoord wordt. Niet lang geleden beproefde ik het met de *Herald & Presbyter*, een in vele opzichten goed blad. Ik zond een artikel over "The dangerous character of modern theology", maar ik wacht tot nog toe nog vergeefs op antwoord.

Gij moogt mij een pessimist noemen, maar het is de eenvoudige waarheid, dat de Engelsch sprekende volken in grooter gevaar zich bevinden met het oog op de moderne wereld- en levensbeschouwing dan Nederlanders of Duitschers. Zoo als door u terecht is opgemerkt,



de meest consequente discipelen van Darwin zijn op het vaste land van Europa. In Groot-Britanje & Amerika houdt men er een religieus en een seculair departement op na. En dat heeft men gedaan sedert Bacon, Newton, Faraday en andere korypheeën. Met Jacobi meent men met het hoofd een heiden en met het hart een christen te kunnen zijn. De diepe(?) staatkundige theorie van een half + een doet zich ook gelden op godsdienstig-wetenschappelijk gebied. Het meest geliefkoosde argument tegen de moderne atheïstische wetenschap (science) is nog altijd: Wij hebben nog veel meer groote namen op onze zijde dan onze tegenstanders.

Sedert eenigen tijd heb ik correspondentie aangeknoopt met dr. Paul Carus, redacteur van *The Open Court* en *the Monist*. Hij is de grootste vertegenwoordiger in Amerika van de "religion of science". Ik hoop dat hij mij vroeger of later eens gelegenheid zal geven, de christelijke wereld- en levensbeschouwing aan de lezers van zijne bladen aan te bevelen. Ik hoop het, ben er echter niet zeker van.

Dringend verzoek ik u mij nog een exemplaar van uwe oratie te zenden. Ik zou gaarne zien, dat dr. Carus haar las. Als geboren Plattdeutscher is het Hollandsch hem volstrekt niet vreemd. Ik heb hem reeds bekend gemaakt met uw "normalisme & abnormalisme". Gaarne maakte ik hem verder bekend met uwe opeischung der wetenschap voor het christelijk geloof.

Hopende, dat de wonde, die de Heere u geslagen heeft, hoewel nog bloedende, verzacht word door Hem, die olie en wijn in haar gieten kan verblijf ik met de meeste hoogachting en christelijke liefde getrouwelijk de uwe

N. M. Steffens

15. Orange City, November 6, 1899

Dearly Beloved Brother in Christ,

Please accept my hearty thanks for sending me your oration: *Evolutie*.<sup>144</sup> When I say that I have read it with mounting interest and complete agreement, I am making an understatement. I have devoured it and have rejoiced that your voice has been raised so clearly and powerfully against the fashionable philosophy of our day. Thank the Lord, Brother, that he has given you gifts and means to use your talents in His service.

Agitation against destructive, falsely renowned science in the name of the Lord is nothing more than simple devotion to duty. The burden is laid upon us.

How dearly I would love to have the attention of the public here in America to the *question brulânte*<sup>145</sup> of our time: the Christian, the Calvinistic world and life view. I have attempted it and still attempt it wherever I see an opportunity. However, I find it a very difficult task. You, as a famous stranger, have succeeded for a short time in compelling the people to listen to Calvinism, Symbolism, etc., but a simple man living in the midst of this great people must shout loudly and repeatedly to find someone here and there who is willing to listen to him. Two of my articles, "The rehabilitation of Calvinism" and "The ethic of the natural man" have been in the files of the *Presbyterian and Reformed Review* for a long time<sup>146</sup>—one of them already for two years—another about the salient points of the Westminster Confession was sent back because I had ventured to criticize the article on "Effectual Calling"—criticizing it of course not as a higher-critic but on behalf of a more consistent Calvinism. I have also tried to write articles for more popular papers. The *Christian Intelligencer* is a paper without principle. I am surprised that the editors still allow your voice to be heard in the columns of their publication.<sup>147</sup> Not long ago I tried the *Herald and Presbyterian*,<sup>148</sup> a

<sup>144</sup> A. Kuyper, *Evolutie. Rede bij de overdracht van het rectoraat aan de Vrije Universiteit op 20 oktober 1899* (Amsterdam: Höveker & Wormser, 1899).

<sup>145</sup> *question brulânte*: hot topic.

<sup>146</sup> See 123nn131-32.

<sup>147</sup> See Tjitze Kuipers (ed.), *Abraham Kuyper. An Annotated Bibliography 1857–2009* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2011), 299: "In the 1898 Christmas issue of *The Christian Intelligencer*, the editors announced that in the new year 'Dr. A. Kuyper, whose presence and addresses in this country have awakened so much interest, will furnish a frequent, if not a regular contribution.' His contributions to the *The Christian Intelligencer*, translated by Rev. J. H. De Vries, ran until December 1908.

<sup>148</sup> *Herald and Presbyterian* was a Presbyterian family paper, issued from 1830 until 1925.

good paper in many respects. I sent in an article on "The dangerous character of modern theology,"<sup>149</sup> but until now I have waited in vain for a response.

You may call me a pessimist, but [it] is the plain truth that, regarding the modern world and life view, the English speaking peoples find themselves in greater danger than the Dutch or the Germans. As you have observed rightly, the most consequential disciples of Darwin are found in the mainland of Europe. In Great Britain & America one maintains a religious compartment and a secular compartment. And that has happened since Bacon, Newton,<sup>150</sup> Faraday,<sup>151</sup> and other coryphées. With Jacobi<sup>152</sup> they suppose that one can be a heathen with his head and a Christian with his heart. The profound (?) political theory of a half + one asserts itself also in religious-scientific matters. The most favorite argument against modern atheistic science is always: we have way more important names on our side than do our adversaries.

Some time ago I entered into correspondence with Dr. Paul Carus, editor of *The Open Court* and the *Monist*.<sup>153</sup> He is the most important representative in America of the "religion of science."<sup>154</sup> I hope that sooner or later he will give me an opportunity to recommend the Christian world and life view to the readers of his publications. I hope so, but I am not certain that it will happen.

I earnestly request you to send me another copy of your oration. I would like to see that Dr. Carus gets to read it. As a native *Plattdeutscher*,<sup>155</sup>

<sup>149</sup> *The Literary Digest* 20 (1900): 278.

<sup>150</sup> Isaac Newton (1643-1727) was an English physicist and theologian. His 1687 publication of the *Philosophiæ Naturalis Principia Mathematica* laid the groundwork for most of classical mechanics.

<sup>151</sup> Michael Faraday (1791-1867) was an English physicist who contributed to the fields of electromagnetism and electrochemistry.

<sup>152</sup> Carl Gustav Jacob Jacobi (1804-1851) was a Prussian Jew who converted to Christianity and is one of the greatest mathematicians of all time.

<sup>153</sup> Paul Carus (1852-1919) was editor-in-chief of the Open Court Publishing Company, founded in 1887. He was a pioneer in the promotion of interfaith dialogue, explored the relationship of science and religion, and was instrumental in introducing Eastern traditions and ideas to the West. He edited *The Open Court*, magazine issued from 1897 until 1936; *The Monist. An International Quarterly Journal of General Philosophical Inquiry*, issued from 1890 until 1936.

<sup>154</sup> Carus' religion of science was based on his opinion that Western thought had fallen into error early in its development in accepting the distinctions between body and mind and the material and the spiritual. He rejected such dualisms and wanted a monism in which science re-established the unity of knowledge.

<sup>155</sup> *Plattdeutscher*: a speaker of low German, related to Dutch.

the Dutch language is not strange to him at all. I have already acquainted him with your “normalism & abnormalism.”<sup>156</sup> I very much want him to understand better your claim of science for the Christian faith.

Hoping that the wound which the Lord has inflicted on you,<sup>157</sup> though still bleeding, may be assuaged by Him, who can pour into it both wine and oil, I remain with highest regard and Christian love, faithfully yours,

N. M. Steffens

<sup>156</sup> See 123n135.

<sup>157</sup> On 25 August 1899, Kuyper's wife died in Meiringen, Switzerland.



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## English Translation of Dutch Footnotes<sup>1</sup>

### ***Chapter 2***

*p. 8, n. 9*

“The Hanoverian authorities appear generally to have given sufficient attention to their examination of these foreign preachers but did not make their residence in Germany essentially impossible. Acceptance of the Separatists was tolerated, but additional mission work was not. Issuing a ban in matters of religion would have been out of step for the time, but limitation of sectarian activities was certainly in keeping with existing state laws.”

### ***Chapter 3***

*p. 15, n. 2*

J. H. Schooneboom to Lankamp, n.d. [1872]: We have been told that he [Steffens] for various reasons must or will accept the call. First, because he sees so little fruit of his labors. That is painful for the pastor who only wants the good but does not see this blessed. Who knows how long the Lord hides seeds in the good earth of the heart before they

<sup>1</sup> By Nella and Earl Wm. Kennedy.



bear rich fruit. Second, his salary was too small to support his family in the future which has been enlarged with precious children who have to study. I really don't know how much he needs to have, but I do know: man cannot live by bread alone. Pastor Steffens also belongs to those people who ought not to expect too much of the world. Like others he needs to bear his cross. Therefore, for me, these present no grounds [for him] to leave Emden."

*p. 18, n. 14*

*De Hope*, 2 June 1894: "I came to America when I was a mature adult. I knew what I did when I moved to America. I loved my fatherland, for my cradle had stood on that ground; I am indebted to Germany for what I have become as a man. In moving to America with my family, I knew that I transplanted my offspring into new ground, integrating us into a new kind of life. I went to the country of my choice with melancholy but determined to be incorporated with my family into the life of that new people. I have never regretted that choice. But whether I have thereby become completely American, so that I discovered nothing but good here and nothing but bad in Germany? No, my friend, I was a German too long to become a fanatical American. My children are American; I am and will remain a German American until the end."

*p. 23, n. 22*

*De Hope*, 14 July 1880: "Members representing the West were all there, except for two. Rev. N. M. Steffens, appointed at the last synod to fill the vacancy caused by the resignation of Rev. Dr. Duryea [William R. Duryee], represented the Eastern members."

## ***Chapter 5***

*p. 35, n. 6*

K. van Goor to G. Wielenga, 11 March 1895: "And of course you may stay at his [Steffens'] house if he offers it to you out of courtesy. But, permit me to say, a. they are old; b. they cannot have the same feelings for Dutch people as we do; and c. they are more anglicized and stiff, and besides, he has his daily lectures."

*p. 35, n. 8*

Dosker to Bavinck, 21 December 1892, "St[effens] has little eye for the good, [but] for evil almost exclusively. I do not know if any positive critique has ever been heard from his lips which had not been smothered by a legion of 'buts.' And the funny thing is (as I think is generally the case) that he himself could absolutely not bear any criticism."

p. 37, n. 12

Dosker to Bavinck, 23 March 1889: "It made me think, and find here the richest appreciation. Steffens was very pleased."

p. 37, n. 15

*De Hope*, 17 November 1883: "Does our standpoint condemn us always to continue to combat others? Can we never (simply) rest on our standpoint? It is exactly because we love our people that we can change direction, to offer to all who wish to follow the Lord Jesus the hand of friendship, *even if they are not on our side.*"

## Chapter 6

p. 45, n. 5

Steffens to Kuyper, 27 October 1888: "Our good friend Dosker—I am telling you this in confidence—is like a barometer, sensitive to every change in the atmosphere surrounding him."

p. 46, n. 8

Steffens to Kuyper, 25 January 1891, "The thought comes to me often whether it would not be good for the leaders in the Netherlands to guide the flood of emigration into another channel."

p. 54, n. 36

Steffens to Bavinck, 17 October 1910: "I would like to send students from here to Amsterdam [Free University], for the education is so poor here. Faith and knowledge are two different matters, that is what Van Oosterzee and Doedes taught, but they know it intuitively here. A pastor does not need theological knowledge. I shudder."

## Chapter 7

p. 56, n. 2

*De Hope*, 28 November 1882: "We certainly know that there are such immovable people in the Reformed Church [in America], but that the *gereformeerde* party in the *Nederlandsche Hervormde Kerk* [Reformed Church in the Netherlands] builds on that infertile soil of a calcified conservatism, we can counter factually."

p. 57, n. 7

"With regard to the church situations in the Netherlands, we come across references from time to time in the Christian press there about those in our country. If *De Hope* is mentioned, it is generally evaluated as a paper which is sympathetic to the *Doleantie.*"

p. 60, n. 19

*De Hope*, 27 April 1892: "The great question in the development of theology is whether we advance on a correct line or not. We must continue to relate to the past." And: "Men such as De la Saussaye, J. H. Gunning and others are, no doubt, excellent men, and we cannot speak of them other than with appreciation, but their theology does not hold up."

p. 64, n. 36

Dosker to Bavinck, 21 December 1892, Dosker wrote about "the one-sided criticism of Dr. Steffens to color Toronto so darkly. I am not speaking now of the correct or incorrect critique. It was certainly rather sharp, and missed the glow of the '*Werthurtheil*,' [value judgment] which needs to precede every true criticism. St.[effens] has little eye for good, for evil almost exclusively. I do not know that there ever has come a *positive* critique from his lips which had not been smothered first by a legion of 'buts.' And the funny thing is (as, I think, is generally the case), that he himself cannot bear criticism at all . . . I myself am sure that, had people *applauded* him as well as they did you, he would have struck another tone completely."

## Chapter 8

p. 69, n. 2

H. H. Kuyper in *De Heraut*, 12 May 1929. At VU University, Hodge's *Systematic Theology* had been used "when Dr. A. Kuyper was not yet ready with his own lectures on dogmatics, and the dogmatics of Prof. Bavinck had not appeared either. It was Dr. A. Kuyper's recommendation that Hodge be used then as a handbook, and the oldest generation of students is indebted much to this excellent American theologian."

p. 74, n. 18

"Stelselmatige liefdadigheid," *De Hope*, 30 November 1887: [the remainder of the translated footnote in text] But all those seminaries, however excellent they may be, do not have direct sympathy with the education of ministers who can serve in Dutch congregations."

p. 75, n. 24

Dosker to Bavinck, 23 March 1889: "I work as well as I can—but my heart is not in it. I would oh so much rather want to study and teach."

**Chapter 9***p. 89, n. 23*

*De Hope*, 26 March 1890: "People here read *De Hope* with great pleasure. Public opinion indicates that it has never been better. A couple of *insulting* pieces, however, did not do much to give the writers a more favorable reputation here, and elsewhere, as your correspondent has heard. But everyone trusts that such pieces will not be included anymore. Otherwise it would be the end of the paper, however much it is appreciated."

*p. 89, n. 24*

*De Hope*, 16 July 1890, "We do not need to say that the various sermons delivered by the able preacher, are appreciated very much by his numerous listeners."

*p. 89, n. 25*

K. Schaddelee, Hull, Iowa, in *De Hope*, 13 August 1890, "Long articles concerning ecclesiastical, theological or dogmatic concepts are not read by the people *in general*; they are normally only glanced at, because the majority cannot grasp or understand such pieces."

**Chapter 10***p. 96, n. 18*

*De Hope*, 22 April 1891, "After the opening of the [congregational] meeting, Dr. N. M. Steffens, who had been mandated to preside, clearly made known that, whatever paths providence had prepared for him, he would not be able to minister to the First Reformed Church anymore."

*p. 98, n. 29*

*De Hope*, 9 September 1891, "Once again we made a beginning with that work. As far as it concerns me personally, I had not expected that I would have to gird myself anew to accept it."

**Chapter 11***p. 107, n. 17*

Dosker to Bavinck, 19 February 1894, "Sometimes I cast my eyes elsewhere and, were God to open a way for me to the bosom of the Presbyterian churches, I would follow that path." Dosker to Bavinck, 28 February 1896, "Warfield continues to be my faithful friend and seems earnestly to desire that one day or another I will labor in the Presbyterian Church. We will see."



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