WILLIAM VAN DOODEWAARD, HUNTINGTON UNIVERSITY

A Transplanted Church: the Netherlandic Roots and Development of the Free Reformed Churches of North America

Introduction

The history of Dutch Reformed denominations in North America dates back almost 400 years to the time when The Netherlands was a major sea-power with colonial ambition. In 1609 the explorer Henry Hudson was sent out by the Dutch to examine possibilities for a colony in the New World. Dutch colonization began soon afterwards with the formation of New Netherland under the banner of the Dutch West India Company. The colony at its peak consisted of what today makes up the states of New York, New Jersey, and parts of Delaware and Connecticut.[1] With the colony came the establishment of the first Dutch Reformed church in 1628 in the wilderness village of New Amsterdam. This small beginning of a viable Dutch community set in motion centuries of Dutch migration to North America, forming a transatlantic development of the various streams and factions of Dutch Calvinism.[2]

The Canadian experience of Dutch influx would follow at a later time. Aside from a small number of immigrants to the Lunenberg, Nova Scotia area in the 1740s and 1750s,[3] the main tide of Dutch immigration and denominational development only came two hundred years later. These later arrivals reflected the intervening development of the church in the Netherlands, many now having a varied history of secession from the state church and ensuing union with or separation from other secession groups. Most of these immigrants settled into already established Christian Reformed Church congregations, some joined congregations of the Reformed Church in America, some chose existing Canadian Protestant denominations, and the remainder established new denominations corresponding to other Dutch Reformed denominations in the Netherlands.[4]

One of the new presences in the late 1940s and early 1950s was a quickly developing association of independent Dutch Reformed congregations sharing similar theological convictions and seceder roots. In their formation they drew upon both the great Dutch Reformed influx to Canada of the time and the earlier Dutch Reformed churches of the United States. Representing an early seceder strain of Dutch Reformed theology and tradition, primarily found in the *Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken* (CGK), they were not at home in either the Reformed Church or the Christian Reformed Church.[5] In time

these congregations would become the Free Reformed Churches of North America.

Netherlandic Roots

In order to accurately grasp the North American history of the Free Reformed churches as a transatlantic development, it is necessary to outline their European origins. The roots are found in the Netherlands, where the denomination began in 1834 as a result of a seceding movement out of the state church - the Netherlands Reformed Church.[6] This was the first movement of exodus from the state church of the Netherlands during the post-Reformation period, though it represented a long line of dissent within the state church.[7]

During the late 17th century, it was increasingly common for small groups of the pious, called 'conventicles', to meet for spiritual encouragement and prayer. These meetings were usually held during the week by those who felt the Dutch state church was becoming increasingly nominal and the preaching lifeless and abstract. Central to these groups was a focus on themes of human inability and sin, the centrality of the person and work of Christ in salvation, and the "vital, personal realization of such doctrines through heartfelt experience."[8] This movement of godly piety, often termed the Dutch Second Reformation,[9] focused not only on heart religion, but also on the crucial importance of orthodox doctrine faithful to Scripture and the heritage of the Reformation.[10]

In some congregations the conventicle movement soon encompassed the entire church, in others it remained "a church within a church."[11] Coexistence was maintained within the Dutch state church, despite increasing divergence. The general belief was that church members should strive to promote a return to orthodoxy within the established church.[12] The immediate impetus for secession came as the two diverging streams of the state church (liberal vs. pietistic (clashed in a local situation.[13]

In December of 1833, Hendrik DeCock, a fiery and popular evangelical preacher in Ulrum, Groningen was barred from preaching for challenging the official enlightenment ideology of the church.[14] Soon after, the congregation was barred from use of the church building. This led to a coalition of sympathetic ministers and church members signing the Act of Separation or Return on October 14, 1834,[15] outlining the reasons for secession: freedom of conscience in worship and the need to return to the Reformed confessional-ism, liturgy, and worship expressed by the Synod of Dordt.[16]

Despite persecution, the secession movement spread quickly across the Netherlands. Seceder delegates meeting in early synods soon realized that the relative isolation of various churches and regions, and the fact that there had been no national synod in the Netherlands for over 200 years, meant different emphases in doctrine and practice had developed. These differences would lead to divisions, forming different denominations from the 1834 secession, the mainstream of which, known as the Separated Churches, became the *Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken* (CGK).[17] However, these differences would also remain within both the CGK and their equivalent, the Free Reformed Churches in North America, at times creating renewed tensions and conflict.

Two main streams developed in the CGK during the 19th century, the Drenthe party and the Gelderland party.[18] The Drenthe party was steeped in the tradition of the Dutch Second Reformation.[19] Known for stern sobriety with ascetic tendencies, it emphasized the preaching of the law (the Ten Commandments, what God requires of mankind) as preparation for the gospel, distinguished between the presentation of the gospel and the offer of grace,[20] and stressed the necessity of the development of conviction (recognition) of sin prior to conversion. Hand in hand with this came a strong emphasis on the sovereignty of God in election: the fact that He chooses whom He will save. The preaching of the Drenthe men, of which Hendrik de Cock was a key representative, stressed an elaborate classification of hearers, with separate applications for the various categories.[21]

The Gelderland party, in contrast, was more oriented to Calvin(s theology and the heritage of the Reformation, rather than primarily the pietism of the Dutch Second Reformation.[22] Prominent representatives included H.P Scholte (prior to his move to America), and A. Brummelkamp, a "moderate Calvinist of cheerful and sunny disposition."[23] Preachers of this school emphasized the free offer of the gospel, and numbered the Erskines and Marrow men among their favorite authors. The Gelderland party preachers offered Christ to sinners as sinners, without qualifications. No elaborate classification of hearers was followed, rather it was seen that there were only two categories: believers and unbelievers.

These differences in theology between the Drenthe party and the Gelderland party were reflective of differing views of church and covenant. De Cock and the Drenthe party viewed as legitimate two kinds of church membership: communicant members, and adult baptized but non-communicant members.[24] Baptized but non-communicant members should have their children baptized. The Drenthe party, in line with their view of the church as a mixed body of believers and unbelievers, strongly stressed the requirements for worthy partaking of the sacrament of the Lord(s Supper, warning against the dangers of "easy believism."[25]

In contrast, the Gelderland party argued that the church was to be the body of true believers only, and all confessing members should partake of the Lord's Supper. There was to be only one kind of membership in the church, namely those who confessed Christ, and only the children of confessing members could be baptized. Adult baptized members were to be urged to make confession of faith. Confessing members who abstained from the Lord's Supper had to be brought under the discipline of the church. The Gelderland party argued that this was the biblically ordained model of the New Testament church.[26] The CGK would continue to be characterized by a roughly equal representation of both factions,[27] while the *Gereformeerde Gemeenten* (GG)[28] would follow more definitively in the line of the Drenthe party.

The final major event of church history in the Netherlands which influenced the development of the Free Reformed Churches in North America was the 1886 secession movement out of the Dutch state church led by Abraham Kuyper.[29] This exodus, known as the Doleantie,[30] was once again a confessional movement, and a rejection of state hierarchy. However, its key leaders, especially Kuyper, viewed the earlier secession of 1834

as sinful, arguing that it was premature and unjustified, as the state church even now was not false, but rather "sick."[31] A union movement in 1892 sought to draw the earlier CGK seceders into a unified secession church with the Doleantie, and succeeded in initially attracting the majority of the CGK into what became the *Gereformeerde Kerken* (GK).[32] A minority continued separately, citing concern with Kuyper(s theological direction in areas of covenant, common grace, and culture. The chief fear was that the teaching of Kuyper on covenant and election would lead to the view that the visible church was the elect, and as a result preaching would become focused primarily on sanctification, leading to a nominal church.[33] During the following two decades a large number of CGK congregations which had joined the union into the GK returned to the CGK, ensuring its continued history and influence as one of the main Reformed seceder denominations in the Netherlands.[34]

The Early American Immigrants - The 1900s to 1940s

The North American beginnings of the Free Reformed denomination date back to the 1920s, when a congregation of the Netherlands Reformed Congregations[35] deposed its minister in Clifton, New Jersey. Part of the congregation did not accept this action and began an independent congregation on November 7, 1921 around this minister, calling themselves the "Free Reformed Church."[36] The congregation was made up of Dutch immigrants, many of whom had arrived in New Jersey around the turn of the century and had belonged to the GG in the Netherlands. As a result, on arrival in America they formed their own Netherlands Reformed Congregations, rather than joining the RCA or CRC, neither of which were compatible with their "Drenthe faction" theology.

In Michigan, Dutch settlement had begun in the Grand Rapids area under the leadership of Albertus Van Raalte in 1846-47.[37] Around the turn of the century several Netherlands Reformed Congregations were founded there by Dutch immigrants.[38] In 1923, the Ottawa Avenue Church of the Netherlands Reformed Congregations was founded, made up of members from the others who favored the use of English in the church services. They called a teaching elder from New Jersey, James Wielhouwer, to pastor them. Very quickly controversy ensued, and Wielhouwer along with twelve families left to establish another congregation which would take the name Free Reformed. Wielhouwer was ordained as pastor of this congregation by another independent Reformed Congregation(s pastor, Rev. Locker of Kalamazoo, Michigan.[39]

In late 1943 to early 1944, a second group left the Ottawa Avenue Netherlands Reformed Congregation due to its reticence to call a minister in its vacancy. Rev. Benjamin Densel, at this time pastor of the Free Reformed Church of Clifton, NJ, met with this second group on a visit to Grand Rapids in November, 1943.[40] Soon afterwards the consistory of the Clifton congregation agreed to a request by the group to supervise their institution as a congregation, and an organizational meeting was held on June 28, 1944. This second group took the name Rehoboth Reformed Church.[41] On November 1, 1944 the two groups (Free and Rehoboth) united under the name of the latter congregation.[42]

The newly united congregation began the search for a pastor, leading to contact with

Rev. C. Smits, a pastor of the CGK in the Netherlands. Smits did not move to America permanently, but he came for two preaching stays, in 1946 and again in 1947. Through him the congregation began its correspondence with the CGK, establishing an official corresponding relationship in 1947, and broadening its search for a pastor in this Dutch denomination.[43] In 1948 a call was extended to, and accepted by Rev. G. Zijderveld of the CGK.

Schism, Expansion and New Connections - the 1950s

The late 1940s and 1950s saw nearly 200,000 Dutch emigrants moving to Canada, the nation from which their chief liberators had come.[44] Canada was seen as a land of economic opportunity, peace, freedom, and greater social conservatism than the Netherlands.[45] For some, the threat of Soviet expansion was a factor in the journey to Canada.[46] Canada was seen as the land of better opportunity and a brighter future.

In the Netherlands the CGK initially encouraged its emigrating members to affiliate with the CRC in Canada.[47] However as the CGK immigrants came to Canada they soon realized that the differences with the GK in the Netherlands carried over to their new home, although the CRC in America had had a somewhat different history.[48] This was especially true as many of the GK immigrants to Canada were strongly Kuyperian in their covenant theology.

Among the Dutch immigrants immediately following World War II came the family of Jetse Hamstra, who arrived in the area of Dundas, Ontario in 1948.[49] He had served as an exhorting elder in the CGK in Veenwouden, Friesland. In the spring of 1950 he was invited to Grand Rapids to the Rehoboth Reformed Church (which in the meantime had been renamed Rehoboth Old Christian Reformed Church to better identify with the CGK in the Netherlands,[50] while at the same time distinguishing itself from the Christian Reformed Churches of North America). He was interviewed to discuss the possibility of working among the growing numbers of Dutch immigrants in Canada, with the result that he was given official support for the task. In April 1950 an Old Christian Reformed Church was instituted at West Flamborough near Dundas, meeting in the Presbyterian Church in Canada at Christie(s Corners.

Around the same time, during the summer of 1950, the CGK in the Netherlands sent Rev. Jacob Tamminga, "a prominent minister in the Netherlands serving a large congregation,"[51] on a fact-finding and preaching mission to CGK immigrants in Canada and the USA. He found that CGK immigrants were dissatisfied with existing church options, missing the experiential preaching they were accustomed to in the Netherlands.[52] Groups were beginning to organize, at first holding worship services in private homes.[53] In the year following his return to the Netherlands, a church was instituted in Chatham, Ontario, on April 24, 1951.[54] Tamminga, seeing the need for a preaching ministry and organizational leadership in Canada, accepted their call to him as pastor and was installed on August 23, 1951.[55]

Church formation in southern Ontario now began in earnest. However, with the growth came an early clash and division. In 1951 an Old Christian Reformed Church was insti-

tuted in Smithville (east of Hamilton) under the lead of Jetse Hamstra and the Dundas consistory. In 1952, under the leadership of Jacob Tamminga and the Chatham consistory, a congregation was formed in St.Thomas. The five congregations of Grand Rapids, Dundas, Smithville, Chatham and St. Thomas together formed a classis (association of churches) in full correspondence with the CGK in the Netherlands. Despite the common ties, there were from inception two distinct theological roots of the churches. Grand Rapids, Dundas, and Smithville felt a closer affinity to the Drenthe party theology, shown in both the Grand Rapids roots in the Netherlands Reformed Congregations and in the leadership of G. Zijderveld[56] and Jetse Hamstra, while Chatham and St.Thomas were more reflective of the Gelderland party, with close ties to the mainstream of the CGK.

Once instituted, St.Thomas sought to call CGK pastors who shared their roots and ties in the Netherlands. A call was first extended to J.H. Velema,[57] arousing the reaction of Grand Rapids with the support of Dundas and Smithville. Grand Rapids argued that as "mother" church in North America it should have deciding authority over the calling of pastors by new congregations. At a meeting on April 22, 1953, the classis deposed the consistory of St.Thomas from office, a move not well received by St.Thomas and Chatham.[58] These events split the fledgling denomination in two: the "Old Christian Reformed Church" (Grand Rapids, Dundas, Smithville) and the "Free Christian Reformed Church" (Chatham and St.Thomas).

During the remainder of the decade, the Old Christian Reformed Churches remained largely static, while the Free Christian Reformed denomination continued to organize new congregations at a rapid pace. In 1953 a group of ten people came together to form the Free Christian Reformed Church of Hamilton.[59] A year later Free Christian Reformed congregations were established in Toronto and in Mitchell, Ontario (near Stratford), and in 1955 a congregation was instituted in Aldergrove, British Columbia, made up of families who had heard of the Free Christian Reformed Church in Ontario.[60] In 1958 a congregation was instituted in London, Ontario, made up of members who had belonged to the one in St.Thomas.[61]

The 1950s saw several new pastors coming to the two denominations. The Old Christian Reformed Church of Grand Rapids called Rev. C. Smits, who stayed for two years then returned to the Netherlands. In 1954 he ordained and installed Jetse Hamstra of Dundas as the pastor of that congregation. After Smits' departure the Grand Rapids congregation turned to a number of English preachers during the period 1956-1959 to supply their pulpit.[62] Contact was made with the Free Church of Scotland and Westminster Theological Seminary. Rev. J. MacSween of the Free Church in Toronto, and Rev. M. MacRitchie of the Free Church in Detroit, both preached in the congregation, as did Dr. William Young, Dr. David Freeman, Prof. John Murray, and Terence Atkinson, at the time a student at Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia.[63] Under the latter's preaching in 1956-57, the Grand Rapids congregation experienced a wave of revival.[64]

The same years marked the arrival of a number of CGK pastors called by the newly formed Free Christian Reformed congregations in Ontario. Rev. J. Overduin left Amelo

for St. Thomas in 1955, Rev. W.F. Laman left Rotterdam for Hamilton in 1956, and Rev. C. Noordegraaf left sGravendeel for Chatham in 1958.[65] The arrival of these pastors further solidified the transatlantic connection between the CGK and the Free Christian Reformed Churches in Canada.

Reunion, Growth and Missions (The 1960s and 1970s

In 1960 the division ended between the Old and Free Christian Reformed Churches. The reunification process began with Grand Rapids' call to J. Tamminga to pastor them, which he accepted in September 1960.[66] A month later, on October 13, 1960 a combined classis meeting of the Old and Free Christian Reformed Churches (with the exception of Dundas, which remained aloof) was held at which the "deposing of the consistory of the St.Thomas Free Reformed Church by the classis of the Old Christian Reformed Church was acknowledged to be an error."[67]

Half a year after the reunion, in April 1961, the first Synod of the Free and Old Christian Reformed Churches was held. After watching the developments of the new denomination, the independent Free Reformed Church of Clifton, New Jersey joined in 1965.[68] Synod records of 1968 indicate that the Old Christian Reformed congregation of Artesia, California, had been closed, since its membership had declined after the period of vacancy following the departure of G. Zijderveld to the Netherlands. Congregations in British Columbia such as Aldergrove and Pitt Meadows maintained a steady existence during this period, while two Alberta congregations appeared at Red Deer and Edmonton for a time, but were noted in 1967 as no longer being in the denomination.[69] On October 11, 1967, the West Flamborough (Dundas) Old Christian Reformed congregation rejoined the denomination, ending the schism, with (the first presence of Rev. Hamstra(noted in classis minutes.[70]

While some ebb and flow remained, the denomination was at this point firmly established on the Canadian scene. Congregational life, especially the development of men's and ladies' societies, catechism classes and young people's societies, was in evidence from the earliest days of each congregation, the new denomination transplanting an instant microcosm of church life in the Netherlands. Statistical records indicate that, aside from occasions of theological controversy and schism within congregations, growth during the 1960s and 1970s remained steady, though overwhelmingly by natural increase rather than new members.

These two decades also saw the development for the first time of a pastorate trained in North America. In 1967 A. Stehouwer was accepted as a ministry candidate, while Cornelius Pronk, a graduate of Calvin Theological Seminary, was ordained at Aldergrove in 1968. In 1971 L.W. Bilkes was examined and accepted as a candidate for the ministry, while in 1972 a *colloquium doctum* was held for G. Hamstra, a graduate of Westminster Theological Seminary and pastor of the Presbyterian Reformed Church in Toronto, who had accepted a call to the congregation of Dundas..[71] The Synod records of 1974 indicate that Carl Schouls and Pieter VanderMeyden were accepted as students, and sent to the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary in Grand Rapids;[72] in 1977 they were accepted as candidates for the pastoral

ministry in the churches. Theocharis Joannides, a Greek immigrant with English connections, was accepted as a student in 1978.[73] The men were trained in North America, guided in their development by a denominational Theological Education committee; the denomination did not establish its own seminary.[74]

The 1970s also mark other denominational developments: classical and synodical minutes were published fully in English for the first time in 1970. *The Messenger*, an official denominational magazine begun in the 1960s, became well established as a means of communication and education. Then came the denominational *Yearbook* in 1974, along with the unofficial *Youth Messenger* published by the Young People's League, all of which aided in development of a North American denominational identity.

A 1974 synodical decision decreed the King James Version of the Bible was the sole version to be used in the life of the church, a decision which would become grounds for heated debate in the following decades.[75] The tradition of exclusive psalmody, a heritage dating from the 1834 secession(s return to the decisions of the Synod of Dordt of 1618-19, would continue unchanged. In many ways, the 1970s proved to be a decade of solidification and tightening of identity (perhaps best identified in the Acts of Synod 1974, which included the new denominational name, Free Reformed Church of North America, which would be changed in 1993, with some struggle, to the Free Reformed Churches of North America.[76]

The 1970s also marked the beginnings of denominational missionary endeavor. A mission in Spain, initiated by Grand Rapids in the 1950s, ended in the late 1960s after the remaining missionary rejected infant baptism.[77] However, new opportunity arose in 1975 as the denomination agreed to send Rev. M. Rebel to Kwa Ndebele and Venda in South Africa.[78] This work flourished for some seventeen and a half years, until increasing violence and unrest forced the white mission workers to leave what was by then a well-established mission.[79]

Challenge and Change (The 1980s, 1990s and since

The 1980s and 1990s marked a period of challenge and change for the Free Reformed Churches of North America. Growth continued both by natural increase and by influx from other Dutch Reformed denominations, which suffered divisions over liberalizing tendencies. These factors led to the beginning of new congregations: Brantford, Ontario (1996), Chilliwack, British Columbia (1991), Monarch, Alberta (2000), Wellandport, Ontario (2002), and St. George, Ontario. New urban mission congregations were also begun in Seattle, Washington (1996) and in the Cowichan Valley of British Columbia (2000). There were also bitter church splits which were allowed to spawn new congregations: Langley, British Columbia (1980) and Bornholm, Ontario (2003).[80]

One example of the continuing historical tensions in the denomination during the 1980s and 1990s was that the Synod saw strong concern and debate over committee voting requirements for the acceptance of theological students. This was noted both in minutes and overtures from congregations, one of which stated that owing to the need for a

75% majority in a committee of ten, "over a period of time 3 men could have significant impact on the kind of men who are allowed to become ministers in our denomination."[81] The committee itself took the bold step of commenting that "since our committee is made up of 10 members, this means that 8 out of 10 votes are needed for acceptance. Three times we have had to reject an applicant who was deemed acceptable by 7 of your deputies. Your committee has struggled with this and is obviously not of one mind."[82] While the moderate side of the denomination pushed for change in this area,[83] the conservative side pushed for closer ties with the new Heritage Netherlands Reformed denomination, and especially the use of the Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary.[84]

Despite the continuing dissensions,[85] the 1990s also witnessed a new foreign mission which would prove to be a glowing chapter in the missionary history of the Free Reformed Churches. Beginning in the late 1980s a mission was established in Cubulco, Guatemala among Achi Indians. A missionary, Ken Herfst, was sent in 1991, along with a medical and linguistic team.[86]

Conclusion

The denomination called the Free Reformed Churches of North America has been firmly established during the past century in North America and particularly in Canada, though in many ways, being an ethnic body, it remains isolated from both Canadian society and surrounding denominations. With a rich Reformed heritage, unswerving commitment to its historic confessional orthodoxy, and stability in biblical worship, it has much to offer. In some local regions where Free Reformed Churches are found, former Free Reformed members are filling various other Presbyterian, Reformed and evangelical churches. This results partly from anglicization, but also in part from a history of dissension and compromise traceable in part to the dual Netherlandic streams of origin of this denomination.Yet positive growth is attested to, as this denomination is the nurturing ground for a growing and prosperous missionary movement, a growing number of congregations with a history of stability, continued natural increase and retention of youth, spiritual growth, increasingly active ministry in Canadian communities, and the export of able Reformed leaders to other North American denominations.

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Appendix : Dutch Reformed Church History Flowchart[87]

NOTES

[1] Gerald F. DeJong, *The Dutch Reformed Church in the American Colonies* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 9-12.

[2] For more on the development of Dutch Calvinism in the larger Dutch Reformed denominations see James D. Bratt's *Dutch Calvinism in Modern America* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), and his essays in *Reformed Theology in America* ed. David Wells (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998).

[3] It is interesting to note that these Dutch immigrants, who along with Germans and Swiss made up the foreign Protestant church at Lunenberg, Nova Scotia, gathered Presbyterian and Congregational men together and held a special presbytery (the first presbytery or classis meeting in Canada) to ordain a member of their congregation, a devout fisherman named Bruin Romcas Comingoe, as their minister. H. H. Walsh, *The Christian Church in Canada* (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1956, 96). Cf. also Gerrit Gerrits: "The Pastor and the Painter: two Members of the Camminga Family of early Lunenburg, Nova Scotia," *Canadian Journal of Netherlandic Studies*, 19-23.

[4] For a helpful overview of the complex history of secession and union during the 19th and 20th centuries among the Dutch Reformed in the Netherlands and in North America, see the flow chart in the Appendix.

[5] The Christian Reformed Church of North America (CRC) was the product of a later 19th century secession and union movement (1892) in the Netherlands, while the Reformed Church in America (RCA) was equivalent to the state church in the Netherlands.

[6] The state church of the Netherlands (not to be confused with the Netherlands Reformed Congregations, a Dutch seceder denomination.

[7] Bratt, 3.

[8] Bratt, 4.

[9] For a detailed study of the Dutch Second Reformation see Joel R. Beeke's "Appendix: The Dutch Second Reformation" in *The Quest for Full Assurance* (Carlisle: Banner of Truth, 1999), 286-309.

[10] The state church and its theological colleges were increasingly dominated by theology and philosophy ranging from Arminius to Descartes and Spinoza. Both deism and

German higher criticism were in vogue.

[11] Bratt, 3.

[12] Not surprisingly, as the Netherlands Reformed Church was the official church of the Netherlands.

[13] C. Pronk "Lectures on Dutch Secession Theology" [at Puritan Reformed Seminary] June 2000. I am indebted to Pronk's lectures for much of the material in this section.

[14] DeCock's conversion while in the ministry transformed his preaching, attracting increasing numbers of people from surrounding liberal parishes. This in turn attracted the ire of the dominant liberals who moved to bar DeCock from his pulpit. As the situation developed, the entire congregation found itself locked out of the local church by the moderator and police; congregational life continued in a local barn.

[15] "Acte vanAfscheiding of Wederkeering," in G. Keizer, *De Afscheiding van 1834: haar aanleiding, naar authentieke brieven en bescheiden beschreven* (Kampen: Kok, 1934), 575-576. Tr. J. Smith. The original document is dated 14 October 1834 with signatures of the elders, deacons, and members of the congregation at Ulrum. The result of the action was substantial persecution in the years prior to 1840: soldiers were billeted in seceders' homes, and ministers were fined, beaten and imprisoned. Seceders were forbidden to meet in groups of larger than twenty-four, became social outcasts, and often suffered economically for their stance. Full freedom of worship was finally granted in 1851.

[16] The last national synod of the Netherlands Reformed Church prior to 1834, held in 1618-19.

[17] The CGK is the equivalent denomination in the Netherlands to the Free Reformed Churches in North America. The other main denomination coming out of the 1834 secession took the name "Reformed Churches Under the Cross" in 1844, refusing fellowship with the Separated Churches over what they viewed as compromise with state authorities. In 1869 a union movement occurred in which a portion of the Reformed Churches Under the Cross rejoined the Separated Churches forming the CGK. The continuing Reformed Churches Under the Cross under the influential leadership of Rev. G.H. Kersten would join with another group, the Ledeboerians, in 1882, forming the *Gereformeerde Gemeenten* (GG), the equivalent of the Netherlands Reformed Congregations (NRC) in North America.

[18] Drenthe is a province in the northeastern Netherlands, Gelderland is in the east.

[19] The Dutch Second Reformation was a pietistic renewal movement within the state church which in many respects paralleled and cross-pollinated with English Puritanism. A number of the Dutch preachers and theologians of this period (late 17th and 18th centuries) would have a lasting influence both in the Netherlands as well as into the English speaking world: , Brakel, van Lodenstien, Schortinghuis, and Smijtergeld.

[20] The Drenthe party was opposed to the indiscriminate offering of the promises of the gospel to the congregation; it felt the gospel should be presented to all, but its promises only to repentant sinners. The result of this

type of preaching, stressing the necessity of conviction and the danger of self-deception, was that many 'seekers' remained in perpetual doubt as to their conversion, and because of this lack of assurance of salvation felt they could not make confession of faith.

[21] This classification system was rooted in the Dutch Second Reformation, where the state church was a gathering including many nominal Christians. Government interference restricted church discipline, and thus the godly increasingly emphasized true conversion evidenced by conviction of sin and holy living, along with discriminating preaching which also emphasized conversion and the marks of grace. A problem of some later Second Reformation writers was a confusion of the way of faith and the warrant of faith, conviction of sin becoming part of the warrant of faith - an error which some saw as characteristic of the Drenthe faction.

[22] Though not dismissive of the Second Reformation, seeing it as a broad and complex movement generally beneficial to Dutch Calvinism, the men of the Gelderland party were wary of the excessive introspection and tendency to hyper-Calvinism among certain Second Reformation writers and interpreters favoured by the Drenthe faction.

[23] Pronk, "Distinguishing Traits of Early Secession Preaching" in *Lectures on Dutch Secession Theology*.

[24] The view of de Cock and the "Drenthe faction" finds an interesting parallel in the halfway covenant pragmatism of Solomon Stoddard, and traces its roots to roughly the same era. Jacobus Koelman, a Dutch Second Reformation divine, held that the church was the *volkskerk* or people's church - one nation, one church. He taught that due to God's sovereign election one could not expect to require communicant status of national church members.

[25] This question is closely linked to concern with self-deception in the area of conviction of sin - conviction being seen by much of the Drenthe party as the warrant of faith (cf. note 21).

[26] Another interesting difference between the Drenthe party and the Gelderland party was the difference in view of church government - Drenthe men stressed tighter synodical authority, while the Gelderland men tended to leave more power to the individual congregation. Bratt, 7.

[27] While the tracing of streams is crucial for understanding, it must be noted that there were also those who stood in mediating positions. There still are today.

[28] See note 17.

[29] Kuyper was a profoundly influential theologian, church leader and statesman, leading the revival of Calvinism in the Netherlands in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

[30] Doleantie or Doleerende referred to having a complaint or grievance.

[31] Pronk, *Lectures on Dutch Secession Theology*. Pronk also notes that while Kuyper appreciated the writings of Second Reformation divines, his neo-Calvinist followers in the Netherlands "on the whole are quite antagonistic toward the Second Reformation. They see it as an other-worldly, anti-cultural and scholastic movement which has done the

church more harm than good." Beeke, 305.

[32] The Gereformeerde Kerken (GK) is the equivalent denomination to the CRC in North America.

[33] Kuyper's teaching was seen as equating God's promises at baptism with His election of individuals to salvation. Some people feared that this meant all baptized children would be viewed as already saved or believing Christians, and that as a result preachers would concentrate on sanctification (spiritual growth, Christian living) and neglect to call everyone to come to Christ for salvation. In time, more and more church members would assume they were Christians when they were simply leading a moral life without the heart of Christianity: a personal faith in Jesus Christ as their Saviour.

[34] Today the CGK has some 75,000 members in the Netherlands.

[35] The Netherlands Reformed Congregations, the equivalent of the Dutch GG, are rooted in the theology typified in the Drenthe party of the early secession.

[36] C.A. Schouls, "Origins and Development of the Free Reformed Churches" in *The Messenger* vol. xlviii no.7 (July/August 2001), 11-12.

[37] Bratt, 7.

[38] Robert Langerak Jr., "Brief History of the Old Christian Reformed Church of Grand Rapids, Michigan" in *1974 Yearbook of the Free and Old Christian Reformed Churches of Canada and the United States*. (Grand Rapids: Yearbook Committee, 1974), 26-31.

[39] Langerak refers to doctrinal emphasis as playing a role in this controversy, further clarifying that "the Netherlands Reformed ... seemed to place all the emphasis on the doctrine of election and man's inability [whereas] Rehoboth Reformed Church stressed these doctrines too, but not so one-sidedly, emphasizing more the well-meant Gospel offer." Langerak, 28-29. In another account of the events by a later pastor of the Grand Rapids Free Reformed Church, it is stated that "some felt that [Wielhouwer] preached the offer of grace too freely and placed too much stress on responsibility, while others were quite satisfied that he was bringing a message which biblically balanced both the sovereignty of God and the responsibility of man." Pieter VanderMeyden, "Free Reformed Church - Grand Rapids, Michigan 1944-1994" in *Yearbook of the Free Reformed Church of North America 1994* (Chilliwack: Yearbook Committee, 1994), 58.

[40] VanderMeyden, 59.

[41] *Ibid.*.

[42] In October of 1944 Rev. James Weilhouwer returned to the Netherlands Reformed Congregations. *Ibid.* 58.

[43] *Ibid.* 61.

[44] Schouls, 11.

[45] Land was cheaper and far more plentiful than in the crowded Netherlands - a reality attracting many Dutch farmers to Canada. The other main migrant categories were tradesmen and greenhouse operators, followed by businessmen and bankers, forming a strong and supportive ethnic community.

[46] A reality true of my own family, later immigrants who had seen the Soviet Union expand its power over one European nation after another.

[47] The RCA was not considered owing to both its stance on Masonic membership, and its corresponding affiliation with the Netherlands Reformed Church - the latter not being a viable option for those with a clear memory of secession history in the Netherlands.

[48] The Christian Reformed Churches in North America adopted the Conclusions of Utrecht (1905) in 1908. These statements promulgated a covenant position adhering to the doctrine of presumptive regeneration. Schouls, 11.

[49] Jetse Hamstra followed clearly in the Dutch Second Reformation tradition; his reading included "the writings of Theodorus VanderGroe, Justus Vermeer, Wilhelmus â Brakel, Bernardus Smytergelt, VanReenen, etc." M.DeGraaf, "In Memoriam: Rev. Jetse Hamstra (1900-1976)" in *Yearbook of the Free Reformed Church of North America 1977*. (Grand Rapids: Yearbook Committee, 1977), 50.

[50] The direct translation of *Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken* is Christian Reformed Churches.

[51] Tamminga was born in Friesland, ordained in 1931, and served the CGK congregation (numbering 1400 members) in the industrial city of Enschede during World War II and the years prior to his move to Canada. C. Pronk: "In Memoriam: Rev. J. Tamminga (1907-1984)" in *Yearbook of the Free Reformed Church of North America* (Grand Rapids: Yearbook Committee, 1985), 49-54.

[52] *Ibid.* 51.

[53] J. Koopman, "Brief History of the Free Reformed Church of Chatham, Ontario" in *Yearbook of the Free Reformed Church of North America 1977* (Grand Rapids: Yearbook Committee, 1977), 43-48.

[54] Rev. Zijderveld of the Old Christian Reformed Church of Grand Rapids officiated at the service, indicating connections between the fledgling churches.

[55] Koopman, 44.

[56] G. Zijderveld went from Grand Rapids to the Old Christian Reformed congregation of Artesia, California in 1954. From there he accepted a call back to the Netherlands, but into the GG, the equivalent of the Netherlands Reformed Congregations.

[57] J.H. Velema, a leading moderate of the mainstream of the CGK, would later write a definitive history of the CGK (*Wie Zijn Wij?*), outlining the theological differences that lay between the CGK and other Dutch Reformed denominations including the GG.

[58] "[The calling] had an adverse effect on the unity between us and some other congregations of the classis. However the consistory of St.Thomas knew this was well within her jurisdiction." Pieter Groeneweg, *To God be Praise: Report of the First 25 Years of the Free Christian Reformed Church of St. Thomas, Ontario (1952-1977)* (St.Thomas: Free Reformed Church of St.Thomas, 1977), 9. I consulted with Pieter Groeneweg and other elderly members of the St. Thomas congregation

who had memory of the occasion, and they stated that at the heart of the conflict were the distinctly different theological perspectives, mainstream/moderate CGK versus the more pietistic, hyper-Calvinistic GG, with the latter seeking to control the direction of the Old/Free Christian Reformed Churches.

[59] The dates and locations point to this being part of the fallout of the division in early denominational history. Hamilton formed with ten members, less than a month after the deposing of the St.Thomas consistory and the formation of the Old and Free CRC as two separate denominations. The location of the new Free CRC congregation of Hamilton was in Orkney, while the Old CRC Dundas congregation met nearby at Christie's Corners, both just outside Ancaster. The only comment in the official history published in the denominational yearbook is that "these early years, though often turbulent, were yet often blessed." Wayne and Jake Schoeman, "Brief History of the Free Reformed Church of Hamilton" in *Yearbook 1979* (Grand Rapids: Yearbook Committee, 1979), 49.

[60] G. Langbroek, "Brief History of the Church of Aldergrove, B.C." in *Yearbook 1975* (Grand Rapids: Yearbook Committee, 1975), 41.

[61] I. Gelderbloom, "Twenty-fifth Anniversary of the London Free Reformed Church: Brief History" in *Yearbook 1983* (Grand Rapids: Yearbook Committee, 1983), 41.

[62] During this period of separation from the Free Christian Reformed Church there was little contact between the two denominations in terms of pulpit supply, and little contact between the Old CRC and the CGK.

[63] VanderMeyden, 63-64.

[64] Terence Atkinson, a Yorkshireman, studied at Durham University prior to attending Westminster Seminary, and was greatly influenced by the ministry of Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones. He is noted for bringing the Dutch congregation into contact with the Banner of Truth Trust, Westminster Chapel, and English Puritan writings. Accounts indicate that a number were converted, while others opposed the preaching.

[65] J. Tamminga had moved to serve the Toronto congregation in 1957.

[66] VanderMeyden notes that Tamminga(s move to Grand Rapids was difficult for him to make, but it clearly was a factor precipitating the reunion of 1960. He also notes that the years 1956-1960 were difficult years for the Grand Rapids congregation, with the development of "various parties" in the congregation. Perhaps this was in part the result of the preaching and revival under Terence Atkinson, who shortly thereafter became a missionary in Spain. Interviewing Terry Atkinson, I learned that the opposition to his preaching stemmed from those who were of the Netherlands Reformed Congregation (GG) theological persuasion, a substantial number of whom withdrew their memberships under his preaching.

[67] Minutes of Classis East, 1960.

[68] This congregation dated back to the 1920s. Though it had had ties with the Grand Rapids Rehoboth Reformed Church since 1944, it remained independent, yet in regular contact with the developing denomination.

[69] Synod 1967.

[70] Minutes of Classis South and East of the Free Christian Reformed Church and the Old Christian Reformed Church held on June 1, 1967.

[71] Minutes of Classis South and East of the Free Christian Reformed Church and the Old Christian Reformed Church held on April 6, 1972.

[72] We see a careful oversight of prospective seminarians, both in the shift away from the use of Calvin Theological Seminary, and in the express choice of seminary for the prospective ministry student.

[73] T. Joannides came to Grand Rapids via England, having been involved in the Banner of Truth Trust and having sat under the ministry of Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones.

[74] This was Calvin Theological Seminary during the 1960s. The 1970s saw a transition to Protestant Reformed Seminary; in the 1980s to mid-1990s Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary was used, followed by Puritan Reformed Seminary to the present.

[75] A decision which from the late 1980s till the 2000s would be both debated and divisive, clearly resurfacing the historic differences between emphases earlier typified in the Drenthe and Gelderland factions, CGK and GG, and Old Christian Reformed and Free Christian Reformed. The more broadly Reformed sought to allow local congregations the option of using the New King James Bible (the version, in modernized English but conservative, published by American Baptists in 1975). After a decade of struggle this decision was made in 2003, but was appealed at an emergency synod (October 28, 2003) by several congregations with more strongly pietistic roots.

[76] It was a period of increased synodical decision-making and authority. Cf. Schouls, 12. The name change debate, like many, followed the old lines of division, though some congregations, such as Hamilton, with the loss of a number of more moderate members to the new congregation of Brantford (1994), continued a trend begun in previous decades, moving in a more Drenthe party (GG, Old Christian Reformed) direction, having close affinity with Dundas, Clifton and Grand Rapids.

[77] Terence Atkinson had resigned his mission post in Spain to move to other service in 1960. *Free Reformed Classis Minutes 1956-1961*.

[78] A mission work done in conjunction with the CGK. "Acts of Synod 1975" in *Free Reformed Acts of Synod 1968-1999*.

[79] "Acts of Synod 1987" *Ibid.*

[80] Langley was an exodus out of Aldergrove, and Bornholm out of Mitchell; both new congregations followed the "Old Christian Reformed" tradition, supported by Dundas, Hamilton, and Clifton.

[81] Chilliwack Overture on Theological Education, *Acts of Synod 1994*. This was echoed by another overture in 1997 from the St.Thomas congregation and reflected a growing reality.

[82] Report of the Theological Education Committee 1994, *Acts of Synod 1994*.

[83] The list of men who left to serve in other denominations in North America (most as a result of the difficulties in the Theological Education Committee) includes: 2 Associate Reformed Presbyterian pastors, 2 Orthodox Presbyterian pastors, 1 Orthodox Presbyterian licentiate/adjunct seminary professor, 1 Presbyterian Church of America pastor, 1 Reformed Church of Quebec licentiate/seminary lecturer. Six of the seven came from the St. Thomas and Chatham congregations. As of 2005 there are two other men from St. Thomas who have left the denomination to study for the ministry in Presbyterian churches, along with a former missionary who has become a seminary professor at the Evangelical Presbyterian Seminary of Guatemala. This is a total of 10 men at present, a substantial number in comparison to those serving in the ministry within the denomination.

[84] Again the same trends are clearly in evidence, the same debate between the emphases of the Drenthe party and the Gelderland party continues.

[85] Including the following: debate over the meaning of confession of faith, whether "thee and thou" should be used in addressing God in prayer and Scripture reading (the heart of the controversy over the choice of Bible version), regulations for acceptance of students for the ministry, content of denominational periodicals, and continued struggles over opening pulpits to men of other Reformed denominations. In the latter case, the St.Thomas congregation, being vacant in the 1990s, sought to have several Presbyterian men preach from their pulpit, a long and difficult process opposed with concern by Dundas, Hamilton and Clifton (echoing the situation of 1952.

[86] At the time of the Herfst family's return to Canada in 2002 to begin an urban mission on Vancouver Island, the Guatemalan church numbered some 400 members.

APPENDIX: Flow Chart of Dutch Reformed Church History

Modified from Pronk's *Lectures in Secession Theology.*