

1834: Hendrik de Cock's Return to the Truth Church, by Marvin Kamps. Jenison, Michigan: RFPA, 2014. 512 pages. (hardcover) [Reviewed by Clayton Spronk]

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1834, the title of the book, is the year sixty-eight members of the Reformed congregation in Ulrum signed a document entitled *Act of Secession or Return*. By this act these Reformed believers separated themselves from the government sanctioned Reformed Church in the Netherlands and formed a new congregation that was (re)committed to the principles of the sixteenth-century Protestant Reformation. In the first 239 pages Marvin Kamps deftly explains and analyzes the events that resulted in faithful Reformed believers' leaving a false church in order to begin a new true church of Jesus Christ. Kamps appropriately focuses on Hendrik de Cock, the pastor of the Ulrum congregation in 1834, whom God used almost single handedly to spark a momentous Reformation of the church commonly referred to as the *Afscheiding* in Dutch or Secession in English. The last 251 pages contain seven very valuable appendices, which would be worth purchasing and reading on their own. These appendices contain important historical documents that Kamps translated from Dutch into English.

The value of the first part of the book is that Kamps accurately explains the doctrinal significance of the Secession. In the preface Kamps explains that doctrine is his main concern. He writes, "In my recounting of the Secession of 1834 and the reformation of the Reformed church by Hendrik de Cock on the basis of the sole authority of the Bible, I will limit myself to the doctrinal issues of that reformation" (xvi). Because of this doctrinal concern Kamps does not focus on the historical question, how did the Secession come about? Rather the focus is on the weightier question, in what ways was the Session a true and necessary Reformation of the church of Jesus Christ? Kamps' explanation is that the Secession was a true and necessary Reformation because it involved a rejection of false doctrine and a return to right doctrine as set forth in the Reformed confessions.

Kamps implies that his analysis of the issues involved in the Session is controversial. He writes, “The reformation of 1834 is often viewed superficially as a controversy about the “hymn question” and the error of baptizing children whose parents were not members of De Cock’s church in Ulrum” (152). Kamps recognizes that De Cock ran afoul of the state Reformed Church’s officials because he vehemently opposed the hymns that the state church adopted and because he agreed to baptize the children of parents who were not members of the Ulrum congregation. Kamps admits that these two actions contributed to the state church’s decision to discipline De Cock and finally depose him; and the deposition of De Cock eventually convinced members of the Ulrum congregation to secede from the state church in 1834. But Kamps rightly explains that the Secession involved other more central doctrinal issues than the “hymn question” and De Cock’s act of baptizing the children of parents who belonged to other congregations.

The Secession of 1834, Kamps explains, was a true and necessary Reformation because of the deep doctrinal division that developed between the state church and De Cock and his followers. The division was not the fault of De Cock. The division was the fault of the state church that for decades prior to 1834 allowed doctrines to be taught that contradicted the Reformed confessions. This animosity towards the Reformed confessions resulted in a very sad and important decision by the state church’s synod in 1816 to replace the Formula of Subscription adopted by the Synod of Dordt in 1618–19, which when signed constituted an oath to uphold and defend the confessions, with a new Formula. With this new Formula the state Reformed church rejected the Canons of Dordt! It referred only to the Belgic Confession and the Heidelberg Catechism. But this new Formula used language that did *not* bind the signatories to uphold and defend these two confessions. The new form “opened the way for the approval of all manner of unfaithful preaching in the churches . . . so that in the state church preachers were permitted to deny total depravity, sovereign election, the eternal divinity of Christ, the reality of hell, and even the doctrine of the Trinity” (19).

The state church had fallen away from the Reformed confessions, and therefore from the truth of scripture which they set forth. The Arminianism that the denomination rejected at the Synod of Dordt as the enemy of Reformed truth had come to dominate the denomination. De Cock grew up and entered the ministry in the state church oblivious to its apostasy. Kamps provides an excellent account of De Cock's discovery and then heartfelt conviction of the Reformed faith.

Although it is true that De Cock is the central figure in the Secession's break from false doctrine and return to Reformed orthodoxy, you will find in Kamps' account a description of how God used many influences to help him along the way. Kamps explains how De Cock was helped by his wife, John Calvin (by reading his *Institutes* for the first time during his ministry), Rev. Dirk Molenaar, Rev. Cornelius Baron van Zuylen Nijeveld, and the faithful consistory members of the Ulrum congregation. God graciously opened De Cock's eyes so that he understood the truth and could see the apostasy of the state church.

Kamps highlights De Cock's witness to the Reformed truth, especially to the doctrines of election and regeneration. In the state church the doctrine of election was rarely taught. Those who did speak of it openly taught the Arminian view of election condemned by the Canons of Dordt. And at least one minister was bold enough to reject the doctrine of reprobation. Over against this De Cock witnessed to the truth of unconditional election and reprobation (139–45, 274, 289–90).

Many in the state church also denied the necessity of regeneration. This included a rejection of the doctrine of total depravity. Sinful man does not need the Holy Spirit to sovereignly regenerate him, many taught, because man has the natural ability through moral persuasion and encouragement to choose to believe. Over against this De Cock witnessed to the truth of man's natural total depravity and complete dependence on God to sovereignly bestow upon him new life in order to be saved (146-52).

Kamps, to his credit, is favorably disposed toward De Cock and portrays him as an imperfect sinner that God was pleased to use as a hero of the Reformed faith. After his conversion De Cock energetically promoted the truths of the Reformed faith in his preaching and writing. With his own money he published the Canons of Dordt for distribution. He was faithful not only to teach the truth but to condemn heresy. He was not afraid to name names and to use appropriately sharp language. He publicly charged Rev. Brouwer and Rev. Reddingius with the sin of oath breaking because these older pastors had signed the 1618–19 Formula of Subscription and failed to do anything to refute false doctrines that contradicted the Reformed confessions. De Cock willingly stood up for the truth against friends, which is evident in the correspondence between De Cock and P. Hofstede de Groot that Kamps provides in the appendices. De Cock defended the genuine faith of the poor and uneducated people who separated themselves from the state church after they were unfairly disparaged by the educated elites of the state church. Noteworthy too is De Cock's respect for church government. Even though he was unjustly suspended and then later deposed from office in the state church, De Cock submitted and patiently pursued every avenue of protest available to him in the state church where church government was thoroughly corrupt. And De Cock, along with his wife and many other saints, willingly suffered persecution for the truth's sake.

After all of the avenues of protest were closed and the state church had shut De Cock out of the office of the ministry, De Cock agreed that separation from the state church was necessary. Thus began, as Kamps explains, a reformation of immense significance (see especially chapter 9). For first, this was indeed a doctrinal reformation. Kamps explains this well throughout his explanation of the history and provides ample evidence of this in the appendices. De Cock and his followers started a church that would no longer allow denials of the Trinity, of the divinity of Jesus Christ, of the doctrine of predestination, of the necessity of regeneration, or of any other doctrine taught in the Reformed creeds. The binding authority of the Reformed confessions was reestablished, which created true unity in the truth. The

restoration of right doctrine helped bring about a restoration of the pure preaching of the gospel and the proper administration of the sacraments, two marks of the true church of Jesus Christ. And by breaking away from the state church the Secession restored proper church government, freeing the church from improper intrusions by the civil government, and establishing the proper rule of elders (the importance of this cannot be overstated, for this marks the first time that a Reformed Church in the Netherlands would be completely free of the intrusion of the civil government, at least regarding the spiritual rule of the church). Included in this restoration of church government was the exercise of Christian discipline, the third mark of the true church, that was so lacking in the state church that De Cock was advised that nothing could be done to discipline those who openly denied the truth or taught false doctrine opposed to the truth (see appendix B and compare 254 and 259).

We should thank God for De Cock and his role in the reformation of the church that began in 1834. As a true Reformed movement the Secession churches continued to grow and develop in the Reformed faith. And Kamps explains that De Cock received great help from other men in this work of continuing Reformation. Some of their names are probably familiar to you—Scholte, Van Velzen, Brummelkamp, Meerburg, and Van Raalte. Thankfully the Lord used these men even to prevent De Cock's wrong view of baptism from being adopted by the young Secession denomination. It is quite remarkable that these younger men stood up to the man most responsible for the formation of the denomination. It is probably even more remarkable that De Cock had the humility to admit his error and apologize in writing to the synod of the churches. But most importantly God ensured that the Secession denomination would uphold the right view of the sacrament of baptism. You can read about this fascinating and important history in chapter 8.

There are many reasons *1834* is worth the investment it takes to buy it and read it. It is written in a way that is accessible to most readers, including teenagers and maybe even preteens. For Reformed Christians who are the spiritual descendants of the Secession the

history is vitally important. Reading this book will make you appreciate anew the truths of the Reformed faith, especially the truth of salvation by God's sovereign grace. And reading this book will increase your gratitude to God for delivering our forefathers from apostasy and thus delivering us; and for returning them and us to the true church.

Finally, I would like to mention that the book is also available in both the epub and mobi digital formats. I read the hardcover edition but used the mobi format on my Kindle Fire tablet to write this review. The ability to search the book electronically is especially useful. For example, my tablet tells me that the word *election* appears 98 times in the book, and it allows me to scroll through a list of every use of the word within its context.

In either the hardcover or electronic format I highly recommend the book.