

BOOK REVIEW

By Neil (Cornelis) Pronk

Marvin Kamps. *1834: Hendrik De Cock's Return to the True Church*. Jenison, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2014, 512 pp., hardcover.

With this book Marvin Kamps, a minister in the Protestant Reformed Churches, has made a major contribution to our understanding of the Secession of 1834 and of the man used by God to spearhead this mighty movement of the Spirit in the Netherlands during the early nineteenth century. Hendrik De Cock, the father of the Secession, led his congregation at Ulrum, Groningen, out of the Dutch Reformed Church, which had departed from her doctrinal, and confessional moorings as formulated by the Synod of Dort 1618-19. Kamps' thesis is that by leaving the Church of their fathers De Cock and his congregation “returned to the Bible and therefore to the Reformed creeds.” In doing so they regarded the Dutch Reformed Church as an apostate and false church according to Article 29 of the Belgic Confession. Realizing that many within the Reformed community today disagree with this assessment, the author challenges his readers to ask themselves whether or not they still look to De Cock as their spiritual father.

Various North American Reformed denominations have their roots in the Secession, although in varying degrees. Whether it is the Christian Reformed Church, Protestant Reformed Church, the United Reformed Churches or the American and Canadian Reformed churches—these all claim to be spiritual descendants of De Cock. Several more Reformed denominations would consider themselves heirs of the Secession but these are not mentioned by Kamps because in his view the aforementioned denominations are its most direct spiritual descendants. (Preface, p. xiii) This is debatable. The denominations Kamps mentions are descendants of the Secession, but they view this movement through the prism of the Doleantie, which was a Neo-Calvinist movement; whereas the Secession represents the older traditional Calvinism, rooted in the First and Second Reformation.

The Netherlands Reformed Congregations and the Heritage Reformed Churches, as well as some smaller conservative Reformed denominations, have as close or even closer connections with the Secession. Their roots are in the “churches under the cross,” which despite their separation from the Secession Church in 1840, maintained good relations with De Cock but not with Scholte, whose views on covenant and church membership had been a major reason for leaving the Christian Seceded Church. This leaves the Free Reformed Church of North America as the only direct heirs to the Secession. They did not join the Union between the Doleantie churches and the majority of the Secession churches in 1892, but continued as Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken (Christian Reformed Churches) of the Netherlands, the mother church of the Free Reformed Churches of North America.

If it is granted that all the denominations referred to above can trace their roots to the Secession, be it in varying degrees, there was a time both in the Netherlands and in North America, when doctrinal differences were discussed and debated within the parameters of Scripture and the Reformed Confessions. One could always count on a willingness to submit conflicting views to the test of the infallible Word of God and the authority of the Three Forms of Unity. This is no longer the practice followed in all sectors of the Reformed community. Increasingly, appeals to

Scripture, let alone creeds and confessions, are viewed as insufficient means to settle disputes. And who still dares to suggest that any church or denomination could be false? This is why Kamps asks whether his readers are still willing to be called spiritual children of father De Cock.

In bold colors he paints a picture of a man who is totally consumed with zeal for the cause of the Reformed faith. De Cock emerges on the pages of Kamp's book as a fearless, uncompromising and immovable contender for the truth of God's Word and the Confessions in which the Scriptures are summarized and explained. The Dutch Reformed Church of 1816 is convincingly exposed as an apostate and false church because it denies all the cardinal truths of Scripture, such as total depravity, human inability, the need of regeneration and absolute dependence on God's sovereign electing grace. In condemning the State Church De Cock does not imply that there are no believers left in her. He knows there are still many children of God and faithful ministers to be found in her midst, but the church as a whole, as an organic body of true Christian believers (Belgic Conf., Art. 27), had become false.

Kamps points to three basic factors on which De Cock bases his charge of falseness:

1. The decisions of the national Synod of 1816 being public policy, had been approved by all the ministers by their silence, if not by expressed agreement. Although some ministers complained (e.g., Molenaar), they were ignored and cowed into silence. (p. 65)
2. The imposition of an unbiblical form of church government which abolished the presbyterian form of government, destroying the local autonomy of the congregations and relieving the elders of their God-given right to rule on doctrinal matters. A centralized, administrative, synodical system was introduced, which not only subjected the church to the whims of the King as far as its administrative and organizational affairs were concerned, but which also determined what should be the doctrinal position of the church.
3. The revision of the Form of Subscription, which candidates for the ministry had to sign. Prior to 1816, they were required to subscribe to the Three Forms of Unity. But soon after the takeover of the Church by King William, the new board appointed by him set aside the Canons of Dort, the third one of the official statements of faith in the Reformed Churches since 1618-19, while the other two, the Belgic Confession and the Heidelberg Catechism, were retained as creedal formularies that needed to be signed. By this revision of the Form of Subscription a loophole was provided for those who had mental reservations on some points of doctrine as taught by the creeds. One could either subscribe to the doctrinal standards *because (quia)* they conformed to God's Word *or in so far (quatenus)* they did.

The result of these decisions and innovations was that the nature and ministry of the church was fundamentally changed. For the first time in its history, the Reformed Church allowed complete doctrinal freedom (leervrijheid). Truth and error were given equal status in the church. Jesus could be preached as the way, the truth and the life, but what these concepts entailed was subject to various interpretations, all of which had equal status and legitimacy. As Kamps sums it up: "The state church chose this path of toleration and broadmindedness because it wished to serve man, not God." (p. 67)

This was the situation in the Dutch Reformed Church when De Cock entered the ministry in the congregation of Eppenhuisen. Well educated, happily married, financially secure, and “delighted to begin his life's work in the service of Christ Jesus,” he had everything one could wish for, but as Kamps puts it, “in large measure De Cock was spiritually sleeping due to the narcotic of false doctrines he had been taught in seminary. He believed, “but his understanding of God's word was perverted by the training he had received at the university.” He goes on to describe De Cock's preaching as “the gospel of self-help, of spiritual growth through human endeavour...the doctrine of Pelagianism... Jesus the assistant saviour and our example to follow.” (p. 78)

Throughout his ministry in Eppenhuisen and also later in Noordlaren this was his basic message delivered with great earnestness, tenderness and zeal. But it was not scriptural. Though many regarded it as orthodox, it was a false gospel. His wife who was far ahead of him in spiritual knowledge and discernment at that time, sensed there was something lacking in her husband's preaching. “She was of the opinion that in every sermon the three parts of misery, redemption, and thankfulness were to be faithfully preached...[and] she encouraged him to lay the emphasis on the necessity of *regeneration*. (p. 78)

But how could he preach the new birth to others while he himself was unregenerate? Kamps describes De Cock as a believer and dreamer and his preaching as dreaming. Perhaps it is better to just say that De Cock was lost, dead in trespasses and sins, as dedicated, serious and well-meaning as he undoubtedly was. What he needed was to be quickened by God who is rich in mercy (Eph. 2:1-4). And that is what happened when he was serving his third congregation, Ulrum. There, the preacher of morality and self-help was awakened and converted to the truth through several men who witnessed to the truth: Baron van Zuylen, Rev. Molenaar and several members of his congregation.

Baron van Zuylen van Nijeveld had written several pamphlets in which he distinguished between the Reformed truth and the lies being preached in the state church. It was especially the pamphlet, *De Hervormde Leer* (Reformed Doctrine) that was used by the Lord to enlighten De Cock. In this brief pamphlet, translated by Kamps into English, van Zuylen explains how the Reformed Church in the Netherlands degenerated from a soundly biblical and confessional church to a church where false doctrine is tolerated and promoted. His focus is on the biblical way of salvation as set forth in the Reformed creeds.

A second person whose writings made an impact on De Cock was Rev. Molenaar who exposed the deception surrounding the revision of the Formula of Subscription. A third man of influence was a local Reformed pastor who gave a copy of Calvin's *Institutes* to De Cock in 1831. The following year a widow in the congregation of Ulrum gave him a copy of the *Canons of Dort*. There was also a catechism student, Klaas Kuypenga, who did not dare call himself a believer but his sincerity and godly demeanor made a deep and indelible impression on his pastor.

While immersing himself in van Zuylen's *Reformed Doctrine*, the *Institutes* of Calvin and the *Canons of Dort*, plus contact with godly parishioners, the Lord was pleased to open De Cock's eyes with the result that he was soundly converted to Christ and the Reformed faith.

The Ulrum congregation soon became aware of the change that had taken place. Especially in his sermons a new emphasis was recognized. The pastor now spoke directly to the needs of his

hearers. He emphasized man's deep fall in Adam and the necessity of the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit, as well as the all-sufficiency of Christ's substitutionary atonement.

While their reborn minister edified God's people, it soon became evident that the enemy was also stirred up. Ministers from other congregations, as well as church members in general, began to speak evil of the true witness of Christ in Ulrum. A serious conflict was bound to come.

Matters came to a head when De Cock began to baptize children of parents belonging to other congregations. He also wrote a booklet against two ministers in the area, Brouwer and Reddingius, who had written heretical things whereby many were deceived. In the title of his book he referred to them as "two wolves attacking the sheepfold of Christ." (p. 167) It was especially by this "trumpet blast" that he so aroused the enmity of his colleagues that they decided to bring charges against him at the Classis of Middelstum, which summoned him to appear before this body on December 19, 1833 to answer several charges. He was declared guilty on three counts: baptizing two infants of parents not belonging to his congregation; giving religious instruction to persons residing in areas outside his jurisdiction; and especially his "loveless condemnation of two pastors who were worthy of esteem." (pp. 172-173) Classis suspended De Cock from his ministerial duties for a period of three months without loss of salary.

Convinced that his suspension was unjust, De Cock appealed to the Provincial Church Board, asking that the suspension be lifted on the grounds that in writing against his colleagues he was merely defending the Word of God and the Forms of Unity from their abuse. This appeal was rejected on the ground that he had not been suspended because of his public defense of what he considered to be Reformed teaching but because of his vicious attack on his worthy colleagues. At a subsequent hearing the original charges were repeated with an additional charge that he had published and written an introductory recommendation to a book entitled *Evangelical Hymns Tested* by a certain Jacob Klok. In his preface, De Cock had charged that these heretical hymns had been unlawfully introduced into the church and had greatly contributed to the decline of sound doctrine.

The General Synod, at its meeting on July 16, 1834, ratified De Cock's deposition from his office as minister of the Gospel. The synod had given him six months to consider to recant. If he did not recant he would be permanently deposed from the ministry. This action of the Reformed Church boards, while refusing to discuss the dogmatic and confessional matters brought forward by De Cock, forced him to begin thinking of separation as a way to bring the Church he loved back to her biblical and confessional foundation.

Even at this point in the process of appeal De Cock did not take any deliberate steps toward secession. He was resolved to test every avenue of appeal open to him. His intention was to write to the King and to the synodical committee. However, things did not happen as he had planned. Matters progressed more quickly toward secession as a result of the visit of Rev. Scholte who came to show his support for his colleague. Although De Cock was barred from his pulpit, there was no legal objection to having Scholte preach, which he did on a Friday evening. When the following Sunday he planned to do so again, he found the pulpit occupied by the church's moderator, a liberal, so that he was forced to preach in the pasture behind the parsonage.

From here on things moved fast. The next day, the Ulrum consistory met to consider what to do

now. They decided to separate from the Dutch Reformed Church dominated by the state, bound by organization, foreign to its original government and ruined by apostate preachers. For these reasons the office bearers of the Ulrum consistory considered the Dutch Reformed Church a false church. They based this on Articles 28 and 29 of the Belgic Confession. De Cock presented a document and asked the elders and deacons to sign it, which they all did. The next day the congregation met and was asked to sign the document as well. Nearly all of the members signed what has become known as the *Act of Separation or Return*.

The phrase “*Separation or Return*” has often been misinterpreted as if it meant that the seceders would return to the Dutch Reformed Church as soon as she would repent of her errors and become a true church again. But Kamps correctly states that by seceding from the false state church of their day the seceders *returned* to the confession of the true Reformed church of Christ. (p. 98)

The confession in view here is the one shared by the Church of all ages and places. The Reformed Church of 1816 had adopted as her confession the vague notion called, *the spirit of Christianity* which Kamps rightly characterizes as “diametrically opposed to the witness of the church of Christ throughout the new dispensation.” De Cock, by returning to the Reformed church's witness of Dort 1618-19, returned to the ancient confession of the post-apostolic fathers mentioned in Article 7 of the Belgic Confession which states that “we reject with all our hearts whatsoever does not agree with this infallible rule, which the Apostles have taught us.”

De Cock strongly emphasized the importance of the Reformed creeds; so much so that his opponents used these very creeds to show how wrong he was in charging them with violating their oath to teach and defend the Reformed faith as stated in the Three Forms of Unity. They threw in his face what is also stated in Article 7, namely that we may not compare any writings of men, though ever so holy, with those divine Scriptures. They charged him with elevating mere words of men above the Word of God. But the real reason for doing so was that they wanted to justify their abandonment of the creeds. As if they were so concerned about the superior authority of the Bible.

The real reason was that they despised the doctrines set forth in the creeds. This was especially true of the Canons of Dort, which by this time had fallen into disuse and were almost forgotten. De Cock held to the creeds because he held to the Scriptures and he firmly believed that the doctrines set forth in all the Reformed creeds, including the Canons of Dort, were drawn from God's infallible Word. He republished the Canons and was immediately accused by De Groot, leading spokesman for the liberal Groningen School of Theology, of setting forth ideas that contradicted “the whole gentle, lovely *spirit* of Christianity” and that not the apostles and Christ were his masters, but Calvin and Augustine.

To De Groot, who was especially disturbed by the doctrine of predestination, both election and reprobation, calling them human inventions, De Cock wrote:

No, De Groot, not Augustine nor the reformers nor the fathers of Dordt must bear the guilt for this doctrine of election, but God's word must have the blame for that hated doctrine, if any guilt must be assigned... However, that one does not accept this doctrine is because none rest in God's word other than by the operation of the Spirit of God; and because it

must be given to us to understand the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven; and because the natural man stumbles 'at that stumblingstone, As it is written, Behold, I lay in Sion a stumbling stone and rock of offence' (Rom. 9:32-33). (p. 108)

According to Kamps, De Cock's motive in witnessing to the truth of God's word as recorded in the confessions was the salvation of the members of his flock and the people of the Netherlands. Many of his pamphlets therefore, were addressed to the public at large, because he sought the salvation of the citizenry. (p. 111) De Cock was convinced that the Reformed faith was the true and complete Christian faith.

Here Kamps makes a very bold and seemingly arrogant observation:

Some religious fellowships hold to certain fundamental biblical truths but do not allow them authoritatively to influence other doctrines. For example, in the judgment of a Reformed believer, the Arminian lie of free will corrupts the doctrine of the work of the Holy Spirit because it makes the truth of regeneration unnecessary. The doctrine of universal atonement for sin requires that atonement be an indefinite nonpayment of debt, that is, if any man eventually perishes in hell. Third, Roman Catholicism denies the 'it is finished,' which Jesus uttered from the cross, by its insistence on the repetition of Christ's sacrifice by its priests in the mass as necessary for salvation. (p. 112)

For De Cock, says Kamps "the truth of the gospel is not segmented and fragmented but organic, that is, one whole body of divinely revealed truth...all the lines of truth converge harmoniously in the God of revelation... by one false doctrine other doctrines of salvation are threatened" (Ibid).

This puts restrictions on what preachers are allowed to proclaim from the pulpit. The Reformed preacher, Kamps asserts, is not only obliged to have the right motive in his preaching, namely the salvation of sinners, but also to use the God-given, official means of grace for their salvation (2 Tim. 4:1-2). Those means are the preaching of the word and the administration of the sacraments (Heidelberg Catechism (Lord's Day 25). (p. 113)

De Cock's opponents were of a different mind. They did not wish to be limited to these two means, but "they employed the witness of history, of which in their judgment the Bible was only a fallible part... They sought a merging of humanism and Christianity." (p. 113) De Cock by contrast,

was determined to preach and defend the Reformed faith and to make it known again... In his soul and mind, salvation from the power of sin and Satan, fellowship with God in the covenant of grace, and the longing for the glory of heaven as promised in God's word-- was inseparably joined to faith in God's word and the revelation of Christ Jesus. The salvation preached by the false church in 1834 was earthly, carnal, and attainable for all by human reason and good works according to man's standard of morality and ethics... For De Cock, the Reformed faith, as the only true interpretation of God's word, might not be trampled underfoot, ignored, or set aside as merely the witness of unenlightened church fathers. (p. 114)

When De Cock and those who followed him insisted that the Reformed faith is the only saving faith, they were laughed at and scorned by many. When ridicule failed to silence the seceders, the

enemy resorted to harassment and finally persecution.

What about the Reformed community today? How are we looked upon by the world and an increasingly worldly church? Kamps' question at the beginning of his book needs to be asked again: Is De Cock still the spiritual father of Reformed believers today? Do the heirs of the Secession of 1834 have the same convictions in the 21st century?

Although this reviewer is in basic agreement with the author's interpretation of De Cock's ministry and significance, there are nevertheless some views expressed in this book that need to be challenged. The reference here is to Kamps' discussion of the differences between De Cock and Scholte regarding their views on church membership and baptism. It is clear that Kamps takes Scholte's side in the debates that took place in the years following the Secession. In his view, De Cock was wrong in condoning the baptism of children of unconverted persons because it was an unwitting attack on the sacrament itself. It was bad theology leading to bad pastoral care in that it showed De Cock “did not see that these persons who failed to confess Christ's name for their own salvation were guilty of disobedience to the command of the gospel to believe.” (p. 215) Kamps even characterizes De Cock's error in this connection as “gross.” This characterization is neither fair nor accurate.

As mentioned above, at issue here was the difference between De Cock and Scholte regarding the nature of the church and membership in it. De Cock saw the Secession as a return to the doctrines of the Reformed Church at the time of Dort. That is why those members of the Reformed congregation of Ulrum who voted for secession were accepted as members of the Christian Separated Church. But also the adults who had not yet made confession of faith, the baptized members, were registered as members of the newly re-organized church, provided they were prepared to testify that they believed the Reformed faith to be the true doctrine of salvation and they were willing to submit to the teaching, admonition and discipline of the church. De Cock viewed the latter also as members of the congregation, even though they could not yet be given access to the Lord's Supper. Consequently, he recognized two categories of church members: communicant members and adult (baptized) members who for various reasons had not yet made confession of faith. The latter he viewed as adult children who had been incorporated into the church by baptism.

Scholte was of a different mind. With reference to the Ulrum congregation leaving the Dutch Reformed Church, he reasoned that those who signed the Act of Secession indicated thereby that they were confessing members of a Reformed church, not that they still had to become such members. Those, on the other hand, who had not yet made confession of faith indicated by signing the same document that they desired to join the true church of God and therefore should have been urged to make confession of their faith soon afterwards.

De Cock and Scholte also held different views on the administration and the subjects of baptism. Basic to De Cock's view of baptism is his distinction between members and adherents (*leden en ledematen*); the former being members who could speak of a saving work of the Spirit in their lives, while the latter could say no more than that they agreed with the truth as taught in their church and that they were willing to submit to its oversight. Based on this twofold church membership, De Cock insisted that all the children of the congregation ought to be baptized, including the children of parents who themselves had not made profession of their faith.

Scholte disagreed. He would baptize only those children whose parents were members of the church by confession, or at least where one parent was a confessing member. Scholte failed to see how De Cock could allow the baptism of the children of those who were not able to confess faith in Christ as their Lord and Saviour. Such a baptism, he felt, compromised the nature of the church. The church included only such as professed faith in Christ and manifested it in their walk. Only they and their children were part of the church and none other could receive the administration of the sacraments.

Very important in this connection is the term “sanctified in Christ” as found in the Form for the Administration of Baptism. How should this phrase, referring to 1 Corinthians 7:14, be interpreted? De Cock held that the reference here was not to inward sanctification, but to outward covenantal holiness. Our children are to be distinguished from the children of pagans and unbelievers because they are under the outward administration of the covenant and in the “household of God.” Scholte, on the other hand, believed that the passage in 1 Corinthians 7:15 refers to inward holiness, although he admitted that not all covenant children are sanctified in this saving sense. Nevertheless, since we have no access to God’s secret counsel, all children of professing believers ought to be viewed as elect and sanctified in Christ.” This comes close to Kuyper’s doctrine of presumptive regeneration into which it indeed was to evolve later after some modifications.

De Cock admitted only confessing members to the Lord’s table, stressing the biblical requirements as outlined in the Lord’s Supper Form, warning those lacking such requirements not to attend. Scholte, however, insisted that all confessing members should partake of the Lord’s Supper, that weak believers be encouraged to attend and that abstainers be warned that church discipline should be applied if they persisted in their disobedience to Christ’s command.

Scholte viewed the church as the body of true believers. All who had made confession of faith, together with their children, were to be regarded and pastorally dealt with as living members of the body of Christ. Only children of parents who manifest the marks of true Christians may receive the sacrament of baptism; and those who do not show these marks must, together with their children, be denied the sacraments until they are converted. Here Scholte reflects the influence of Jean de Labadie whose focus is on man and his subjective experiences rather than the objective truth of the Gospel.

De Cock wanted to stay with the historic Reformed line of thinking about the covenant and church, which holds to a realistic, rather than an idealistic view of the congregation. He knew from experience and observation that there were many church members whose religion was only formal and outward without any evidence of spiritual life. He also knew there were those in the congregation who were truly seeking the Lord but lacked the assurance of salvation. To De Cock it seemed that Scholte had no message for that category of believers known as the *bekommerden* or the concerned or seekers. De Cock was afraid that pressing people to confess Christ and to drive them to the Lord’s table would only lead to “easy believism.” For that reason he would rather preach the whole counsel of God and leave it to the Holy Spirit to bring people to faith.

We see here that De Cock's view starts with God rather than man and is shaped by his understanding of the covenant of grace. This covenant was established by God with His people as a whole and includes not only believers and their children but also those who are still

unconverted and their children.

Thus for De Cock the church and the covenant are broader in scope than for Scholte. Part of the reason for this was that his thinking at this stage of his theological development was still shaped by the Second Reformation concept of the “people’s church” (Volkskerk idee) and its practice of baptizing all the children within the Reformed “parish,” including children of baptized members who had not made confession of faith.

Kamps points out that this helps to explain De Cock's views on the issues at hand. But there was more involved here than the influence of the “people's church” idea. The real reason why De Cock viewed the covenant, church and baptism more inclusively than Scholte was that he recognized the distinction between the visible and invisible church.

Scholte insisted that all who make confession of faith and walk accordingly, must together with their children be acknowledged to be members of the church of Christ. De Cock disagreed. He believed it was more scriptural and in harmony with the Reformed Confessions to say that all who have made confession of faith in the church of the Lord Jesus Christ, must together with their children be recognized as members of the *visible* church of Christ, which is broader and more inclusive than the *invisible* church of Christ, as defined in Lord’s Day 21 of the Heidelberg Catechism. When the Catechism there speaks of “a church chosen to everlasting life,” the reference is clearly to the invisible church made up of the elect only, and not, as many think, to the visible church which is a mixed assembly made up of regenerate and unregenerate.

For support of this view he appealed to Calvin and Ursinus. For Calvin, the visible and invisible church are not co-extensive. They are closely related, but they need to be distinguished from each other because not all members of the visible church are members of the invisible church. (Calvin, Institutes, IV.1.7.9) As for Ursinus, the visible church is

an assembly of persons who embrace and profess the entire and uncorrupted doctrine of the law and gospel, and who use the sacraments according to the appointment of Christ, and profess obedience to the teachings of God’s Word. The visible church consists of many who are regenerated by the Holy Spirit through the word unto eternal life, and many also who are hypocrites and unregenerated, but who nevertheless consent to the doctrine and conform to the external rites of the church. (Ursinus, *Commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism*, pp. 286-287)

De Cock writes:

I recognize all members as such to be members of the true visible church of the Lord, as long as they are not excommunicated, though some of these are converted and some unconverted; the promises of God come to all of them, either offered to them, or applied to them; not acknowledging them all to have the same rights, since some of them are partakers of the Tree of Life and others are appointed to an eternal condemnation. Neither do I ever present the same duty to all, but to some I declare that they ought to examine themselves and as they have received the Lord Jesus Christ, that they also walk in Him; while to others I declare and preach that, unless they repent and turn to the Lord from their dead works, they will be lost forever, and that their condemnation will be worse than that of Tyre and Sidon; finally, calling for the same fruit, namely, fruit worthy of

repentance and faith, in order that they might be saved. (Helenius De Cock, *Leven en Werkzaamheid*, pp. 263-264)

After a long drawn-out debated between De Cock and Scholte and their supporters, the Synod of Utrecht finally adopted to following statement:

That the Elders and Pastors shall apply every diligent effort in dependence on the Lord to awaken the beginnings of the work of the Lord and see to it that the weak and tender shoots do not become trodden down or crushed, but rather the Elders and Pastors shall seek to encourage such to acknowledge and confess what the Lord has done in them, so that by such acknowledgment and confession of faith, as members of the Congregation of Christ, they may be acknowledged by the congregation and can be admitted to the Holy Sacraments, the signs and seals of the Covenant of Grace, admonishing everyone that no one may be acknowledged to be a member of the Church of Christ, except upon *confession of faith*, and in no wise as a result of the external knowledge of certain truths. Synod furthermore declared that the danger of hypocrisy and self-deception called for constant exposition from the pulpit of the marks of spiritual life and also for constant exhortation to self-examination, but that this danger did not justify the making of the distinction, in practice, between converted and unconverted members and that the Church's inability to judge of the heart excluded all possibility of ecclesiastical action with respect to the latter." (*Acts of Synod*, Art. 59, pp. 49-50.; Art. 131, p. 147)

De Cock reluctantly yielded to this synodical decision. As he himself testified afterwards, he gave in only for the sake of peace and unity, but with a heavy heart. Even though he shook hands with those with whom he differed, he did not hide the fact that he still disagreed with Scholte's position. He cited the well-known rule, 'In things necessary unity, in things indifferent liberty, and in all things charity.'

But as Helenius De Cock wrote in his biography of his father, "for father the objection had not been taken away, namely that many sought to institute a pure church." (Hendrik De Cock, *Leven en Werkzaamheid*, p. 272).

Kamps' assessment of De Cock's reaction to the synodical decision is much more positive: "De Cock had his finest hour at the Synod of 1837. He recanted his erroneous position. He conquered his strong leanings toward suspicion and distrust. He learned to listen and be corrected." (p. 218) Perhaps. But while it is true that he accepted the compromise of the Synod, he did so for the sake of peace and harmony in the church; not out of the conviction that he was wrong.

There is much evidence that his concerns remained and that eventually his views prevailed in the Secession churches until 1892, when the majority of these churches united with the Doleantie churches led by Dr. Abraham Kuyper whose theology was markedly different from De Cock's. For that reason the union was accomplished with much difficulty. As Herman Hanko (emeritus professor at the Protestant Reformed Seminary) writes in his book, *Portraits of Faithful Saints*:

In some respects, the marriage was a forced one. The doctrinal differences were many and significant, although the basic difference had to do with God's covenant. The co-existence of these two denominations in one church structure resulted in a great deal of tension. The people distinguished between the two by speaking of the churches of the Secession as the

A-churches, and the churches of the Kuyperian group as the B-churches. It often happened in various cities and villages that neither the people nor the ministers of the one group would want to appear in the company or church buildings of the other. (p. 368)

This tension would not have been there if Scholte's views had been the majority one in the Secession church. It was there all along, but it remained the minority view, although it did help to prepare the Secession church for the union because his views on the covenant, church and baptism were not all that different from Kuyper's.

The above critique does not detract from the admiration this reviewer has for the work of Kamps. The book is not just interesting, informative and educational, but it is also convicting, challenging and thought-provoking. Anyone who reads this book will be impressed with the thoroughness with which the author has done his research to produce this 490-page volume and for translating several heretofore unknown articles from the Dutch, which greatly add to our knowledge of Hendrik De Cock and the Secession of 1834.