

Marvin Kamps, *1834: Hendrik de Cock's Return to the True Church*, (Jenison, Michigan: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2014) Pp. xx+491.

Review by: Dr. Eugene Heideman, Former Dean of Western Theological Seminary

As the “Father of the Secession of 1834” in the Netherlands, Hendrik de Cock is a crucial figure not only in the history of Reformed churches in the Netherlands, but also on the history of Dutch Reformed denominations in North America. Marvin Kamps writes that “The significance of the Secession is that it restored to the Reformed believers in the Netherlands the gospel of salvation in Christ Jesus by faith through grace alone. The significance for us in North America is that through our fathers who immigrated to this continent, we are instructed in the same confession of faith on the basis of God’s word. All true Reformed believers [in North America—EPH] are the heirs of the saints of the Secession of 1834” (231-2).

Because Hendrik de Cock and his writings are largely unknown today by the majority of the members of the Dutch Reformed denominations in the English speaking world, this book is important for making available to English readers a brief biography of Hendrik de Cock and his role as a leader of the Secession of 1834. It is especially valuable because approximately one half of its pages consist of Kamps’ translations of key writings by De Cock and several of his defenders and opponents. He writes that the translations are included because “they will give the flavor of the controversy and testify to the serious nature of the apostasy in the state church, while describing the godly witness and pleas of the humble Secessionists” (xvii).

In his “Preface” Kamps evaluates the place of De Cock and the Secession of 1834 in the various Dutch Reformed denominations since 1834 and the present. He writes that each of his readers will have to answer for himself the question, “Am I truly a spiritual son of this reformer of the Reformed Church?” (xii). Although this book is published by the Reformed Free Publishing Association, Kamps intends it to be read by all those who in one way or another trace their roots back to De Cock as their spiritual father (xii).

This book is helpful in tracing De Cock’s conversion from the liberalism of the faculty in the University of Groningen to the Reformed orthodoxy of the Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic Confession and the Canons of Dort. Inclusion of a translation of the text of “Reformed Doctrine” by C. Baron van Zylén of Nyevelt frames De Cock’s conversion in the context of the theological defense of Reformed orthodoxy that others in the national Reformed church were fighting for after King William I promulgated the new church order in 1816 (82-93).

Kamps must be commended not only for informing his readers about the circumstances that brought De Cock to republish in 1833 the Canons of Dort and the Compendium that were being suppressed by the Directorate of the Netherlands Reformed Church. In same year he produced his notorious attack on the unorthodox teachings of the “two wolves,” G. Benthem Reddingius and L. Meijer Brouwer, pastors who had departed far from the faith as defended by the 1618-1619 Synod of Dort. Inclusion of De Cock’s introductions to the “Decisions of the National Synod of Dordrecht” (117-126) and the “Compendium of the Christian Religion” are conveniently available for the first time to English readers (129-133). Equally valuable for an understanding of the significance of the Secession of 1834 is Kamps’ translation of his defense of Reformed doctrine against the teachings of Reddingius and Brouwer (313-365).

The leaders of the Secession of 1834 maintained that the Formula of Subscription signed by ministers in the Netherlands Reformed Church had to be interpreted to mean that they were loyal to the doctrines in the three Confessions *because* they are fully in accord with Scripture,

not *in so far as* they are in accord. De Cock charged that pastors were breaking their oath when they openly deviated from the doctrines of the Trinity or original sin and taught an Arian Christology in place of the Christology of the Nicene Creed. Kamps enables his readers to judge whether De Cock was fair to the pastors when he includes both his translation of Groningen professor Pieter Hofstede de Groot's defense of the pastors and the Reveil attorney C. M. Van Der Kemp's response to the Hofstede de Groot (366-450). Along with the inclusion of Hofstede de Groot's defense of the pastors, Kamps' translation of the correspondence between De Cock and Hofstede de Groot who were close friends in the University and thereafter (De Cock succeeded Hofstede de Groot as pastor in Ulrum) until De Cock's conversion, adds much to the value of this book.

Kamps traces the growth of tension between De Cock and Hendrik Scholte about matters of church order, the baptism of children of non-communicant members of the church, and the relation of church and state. He sides with De Cock for being a strong defender of the old Church Order of Dort in opposition to Scholte who proposed a more radically congregational polity. De Cock opposed Scholte who insisted on restricting infant baptism to children of parents who had openly confessed their faith before the elders of the church. On this issue of infant baptism, Kamps sides with Scholte and Van Velzen against De Cock. He also takes the side of Scholte against De Cock on the separation of church and state. He criticizes De Cock for still holding to remnants of a "Volkskerk" tradition of church-state relationships, while Scholte is commended for his acceptance of the American distinction as understood at the time of the Secession.

In contrast to Hendrik Scholte who had secession in his blood and left the Netherlands Reformed Church without looking back, De Cock withdrew from it reluctantly. His "Act of Secession or Return" was written in the hope that the Netherlands Reformed Church, even though it was a false church, could still be brought to repentance and "return to the true service of the Lord" (240). On this point, Kamps stands closer to Scholte than to De Cock. As Miskotte pointed out in his 1934 centennial address on De Cock's role in the Secession of 1834, (K. Miskotte, *Korte Nabetrachting, 1834*, p. 83), De Cock still held high regard for God's faithfulness to his people unto the third and fourth generation, with the result he was ready to baptize children of non-communicant members and still retained remnants of hope that the term "false church" was not the last word for the national "volkskerk."

Kamps recognizes that there were ministers in the Netherlands Reformed Church who remained true to the faith and manifested true faith and godliness. One such was Dirk Molenaar, whose correspondence with De Cock is translated and included in the book. Scholte recognized the true witness of Molenaar, but accused him of cowardice when he bowed to the pressure of King William and the church Directorate to keep silent. Kamps uses a harsher term when he writes that Molenaar was "disobedient" by remaining in the Netherlands Reformed Church (251). Kamps is more positive toward the "Seven Gentlemen" in the Hague, including C. M. Van Der Kemp, who did not withdraw from the national church but remained within its fellowship and fought from within for the reform of the church (407-409).

We owe a great debt to Marvin Kamps for making available to English readers his biography of Hendrik de Cock in the context of the Separation of 1834. We have here in English a number of translations pertaining to the Secession that are essential for understanding what happened in the Netherlands in 1834 and in the emigration movement led by Hendrik Scholte and Albertus Christiaan Van Raalte beginning in 1847. It is unfortunate that no index is included in this important book.

