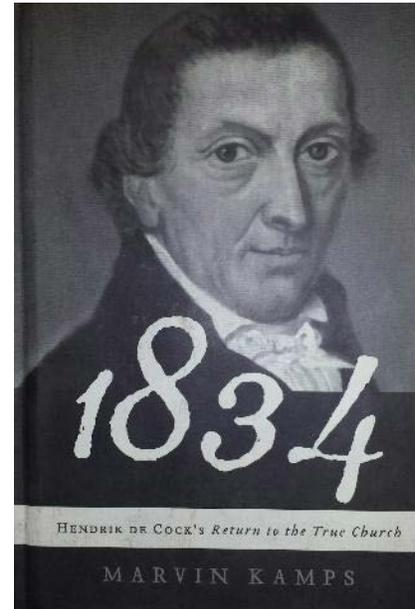


**Marvin Kamps, 1834: Hendrik de Cock's Return to the True Church, Jenison, MI, Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2014, 491 pp.**

Reviewed by: Rev. Pieter VanderMeyden, Pastor of the Vineland Free Reformed Church in Vineland, Ontario, Canada.

With this book we are receiving a very significant contribution to the study of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Dutch Reformation movement called the Secession (“de Afscheiding”). This is an area of study which is very much a part of our own heritage as Reformed churches whose lineage is rooted in the Secession of 1834.

The significance of this study of the Secession goes beyond making its history accessible in English. The author’s thesis takes a unique approach. A number of historians have focused on De Cock’s desire to return to the doctrines of grace, as represented in that document which many of his contemporaries in the state church had been avoiding, namely the Canons of Dort. While not denying this as being part of the significance of the Secession (p. 230-238), Kamps’ focus is different. In the preface he announces his thesis: “Often it is said that the significance of 1834 is that it constituted a return to the Canons of Dort. My thesis is that in 1834 De Cock and his congregation returned to the Bible and therefore to the Reformed Creed” (p. xv).



The author has put very much effort into defending his thesis. He explains the circumstances in the nation of the Netherlands and its religious climate to show the context into which De Cock was born (ch. 1). In the second chapter we read about the reasons why, according to the Secessionists, the institute of the state church was judged to be a false church. (ch. 2). Extensive evidence is documented to prove the apostasy of theologians and other leaders within the state church.

In a chapter about De Cock’s “Spiritual Awakening” (ch. 3) Kamps describes the role of Baron van Zuylen van Nijeveld, of Rev. Molenaar, Rev. Wormnest (who gave De Cock a copy of Calvin’s *Institutes*), and a widow who gave him a copy of the *Canons of Dort*. This chapter could have been enhanced by the inclusion of the role of his discussion with old Klaas Pieters Kuipenga.

In a section central to his argument Kamps gives a summary of De Cock’s witness (ch. 4 & 5), and explains the grounds upon which De Cock was suspended (ch. 6). Kamps also gives a description of how De Cock and his wife experienced this history in their personal and family life (ch. 7).

The history of the Secession as treated by Kamps ends with a chapter on the development of the Secession Reformed Congregations. The *Act of Secession* does make clear that a return to the Word of God is a central concern. It states: “Hereby we testify that in all things we hold to God’s holy word and to our old forms of unity in all things founded on that word, namely, the Confession of Faith, the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Canons of Dordrecht...” (p. 202). A desire to be faithful to the Word of God was indeed central to the Secession of 1834.

This book will prove to be enjoyable for the average reader. It was written in a well-organized format and uses clear language which avoids highly academic terms. It is also illustrated with several pictures.

This book will prove to be a very significant contribution for the benefit of North American readers from Reformed denominations, since it makes so much of the history of the Secession accessible to the English speaking reader. For the scholarly reader the work is thoroughly footnoted. The publication also includes a very extensive appendix—filling half of the book—consisting of translations of original documents (such as letters and tracts exchanged by De Cock and his contemporaries).

The author explains the grounds for the Secession in a very carefully reasoned, but also a very sympathetic manner. Kamps defends his thesis as one who also takes very seriously the marks of the true and false church as confessed in the Belgic Confession (Art. 29). He demonstrates that these marks were central in the mind of Hendrik De Cock. The Secession was a reformational movement calling believers back to the Scriptures and thus returning to be a true church. The assertion that the Secession was intended as a return to the Scriptures has been readily defended by Kamps. As we see departures from Scripture characterizing some of today's churches, this book is recommended to all students of our Reformed history who have a burden for Biblical faithfulness in our Reformed churches.

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