
Prairie Premillennialism: Dutch Calvinist Chiliasm in Iowa 1847-1900, or the Long Shadow of Hendrik Pieter Scholte

Earl Wm. Kennedy

Local history as an academic discipline has gained considerable respectability lately, as has the study of American ethnic groups. I am writing a book which compares the Reformed Church in America (RCA) and the Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRC) in the Midwest in the last decades of the nineteenth century and first decades of the twentieth century, with special reference to the churches of Orange City (and the surrounding area of Sioux County and Northwestern Iowa), against their background in the Netherlands and the larger church situation in the United States. My study will, I hope, contribute to knowledge of the life and thought of immigrant ethnic churches in our country about a century ago by examining the Orange City-area microcosm of the mini-macrocosm of the Dutch Reformed immigration to the American Midwest. Little has been published comparing the RCA and the CRC. One of my aims is to see how, when, and to what extent these denominations became "Americanized." I also see this work as a contribution to mutual understanding between the RCA and the CRC.

The present article is largely the forerunner of a proposed chapter on premillennialism, which will show that the midwestern, immigrant RCA, especially in Iowa, was receptive to premillenarian teaching, whereas the CRC was closed to it. This divergence reflects the fact that the two groups were formatively influenced by different branches of the 1834 pietist, Calvinist *Afscheiding* (Secession) in the Netherlands. The article's plan is to examine in succession, the old world setting, the Pella, Iowa immigrants, and Pella's daughter colony of Orange City, Iowa, after which some concluding interpretations will be offered.

Revival, Secession, Millennialism

Following the upheavals of the French Revolution and Napoleonic era, much of Western Europe, in a "romantic reaction," sought a return to "normalcy" and "the good old days." Related to this, religious revivals broke out in various countries. Thus, in the Protestant northern Netherlands a spiritual awakening accompanied by a renewal of the Calvinism of the Synod of Dort (1618-1619)

spawned sharp reaction against the rationalistic, moralistic, government-controlled public church.

There were two chief manifestations of this Dutch revival. The first was the *Reveil* (French for "awakening") among some of Amsterdam's cultured lay elite in the 1820s, e.g., Willem Bilderdijk, the poet, and two converts from Judaism, Isaac da Costa and Abraham Capadose. All three shared a pessimistic view of the present age and adopted a premillenarian eschatology, which held that the thousand-year reign of Christ mentioned in Revelation 20 would not begin until he returned to establish it. The *Reveil* adherents mostly remained within the official church.

The second chief manifestation of the Dutch revival was the *Afscheiding* of 1834. It was led by newly awakened, young pastors of churches in outlying areas, most of whom knew nothing of Amsterdam's salons. For them and their congregations, the new wine of the revival could not be held in the old wineskins of the official church. As in most protest movements, however, they found it easier to be unified in opposition than to maintain unity when developing and implementing a positive, practical program.

Thus the *Afscheiding* quickly broke apart into various factions. The most important for our purposes were the following. (1) The Northern "mentality" (*richting*; largely in the northern provinces of Friesland and Groningen), represented by Hendrik de Cock and Simon van Velzen, was made up of the strictest adherents of the Synod of Dort's doctrine and church order and favored ecclesiastical centralism. (2) The more moderate Gelderland mentality (mainly in Gelderland, Overijssel, and Zuid-Holland) whose spokesmen were Anthony Brummelkamp and Albertus C. van Raalte, was somewhat less strenuously principally Calvinistic, espousing experiential piety and the free offer of the gospel to all persons. (3) The Scholtian mentality, named after Hendrik Pieter Scholte (who influenced another *Afscheiding* pastor, Antonie J. Betten), was in most respects the extreme opposite of the Northern mentality, for it was committed to a "biblical" (rather than specifically Reformed) faith, congregationalism (a gathered, independent congregation of the converted), the separation of church and state, and dispensational premillennialism.

Regarding the history of millennialism, the usual (oversimplified) view is that the church moved from a pre-Constantinian, literal, premillennial interpretation of Revelation 20 (chiliasm) to a post-Constantinian, spiritual amillennialism (e.g., Augustine), which saw Christ as reigning now in his church. At the Reformation, Calvin and other Reformed theologians continued a form of the amillennial interpretation, avoiding the materialistic, "Jewish," pre-millennial "dreams" of certain Reformation sects. But some seventeenth-century Calvinist thinkers developed an historically optimistic postmillennialism (Christ would come after a long period of prosperity for the church), while others resurrected an historically pessimistic premillennialism. Thus, by the

nineteenth century, American Reformed theologians (including Presbyterians and Congregationalists) might be amillennial, postmillennial, or even premillennial (of various sorts); postmillennialism has been championed by such key thinkers as Jonathan Edwards, John Henry Livingston (the "father" of the RCA), and the Princeton "giants" Charles Hodge and Benjamin B. Warfield. (In the Netherlands, two prominent Reformed anti-chiliasts were Herman Bavinck, from an *Afscheiding* background, and Abraham Kuiper of the *Doleantie*). After the Civil War, premillennialism began to overtake postmillennialism and amillennialism in popularity, even (especially?) among "Calvinists." This position was usually associated with cultural pessimism, aggressive evangelism (to Jews as well as Gentiles), foreign missionary vision, and "the Great Reversal" (the disengagement of evangelical Protestants from social reform movements).

Dispensational premillennialism was put on the theological map by a founder of the Plymouth Brethren in the United Kingdom, John Nelson Darby, at just the same time (the 1820s) that the *Reveil* in the Netherlands was discovering premillennialism and its cultural pessimism. Both Darby and the *Reveil* were reacting against what they perceived as moribund ecclesiastical establishments. For his part, Darby returned, somewhat in the spirit of Luther, to an emphasis on the pure grace of the gospel--in the present (church) age--to be sharply distinguished from the law and from the legalism which he blamed for the sad condition of the state church. Darby's dispensational premillennialism included the following elements: Old Testament prophecy must be interpreted literally and not spiritualized (e.g., the promises to Israel), so that much of it will be fulfilled in the Millennium, which may come at any moment--i.e., when Christ returns; there will be a "secret rapture" of the church by Christ just before the great tribulation and the second coming of Christ to reign; there are two separate peoples of God (earthly [the Jews] and heavenly [the church]); the promises made to Israel in the Old Testament cannot be applied to the Christian church; the Jews will be restored to Palestine and play a large role in the millennial kingdom; because they rejected Jesus' offer of the kingdom during his first advent, he formed the church for the Gentiles (the church, being nowhere prophesied in the Old Testament, seems to have been something of an afterthought or second best [so dispensationalists have tended to a "low" view of the church, and sectarianism]); the history of God's dealings with the human race can be divided into distinct "dispensations." H. P. Scholte, who had been introduced to premillennialism by Bilderdijk and Da Costa, soon moved on to accept and ardently promote Darby's views. (The two corresponded in French!).

Returning to the story of the three mentalities among the Dutch seceders, all three were represented among those *Afscheiding* people who, beginning in 1847, came to the United States for religious and/or economic reasons. Although the seceders were a minority among the Dutch Reformed immigrants, they were an

influential minority, and their divisions were long perpetuated in the new world, including Orange City, Iowa (now!). The Northern mentality was represented largely by what would later be called the Christian Reformed Church. It began in Michigan in 1857 with a small secession from the larger body of Dutch Reformed immigrants (Classis Holland), which in 1850 had joined the Reformed Protestant Dutch Church (now the RCA; begun in New York in the 1600s). The Gelderland mentality came to the USA with A. C. van Raalte and his followers; he founded Holland, Michigan in 1847, and three years later led his people into the RPDC (RCA). The Scholtian mentality--in many ways the most "American" of the three--appeared in Iowa in 1847, when Scholte himself, aided by Antonie J. Betten and others, established the colony of Pella. Scholte never joined the RCA (not to mention the CRC) and tried to keep his people free from denominations.

Pella

The three mentalities lived uneasily side by side in Scholte's independent Christian congregation which was founded in 1847. Very soon internal disagreements resulted in the temporary formation of a few informal splinter groups. At last, A. C. van Raalte was invited from Michigan to set up the First Reformed Church of Pella in 1856 (in affiliation with the RPDC [RCA]). This move was backed by the majority of Scholte's congregation, who by that time had become fed up with him either ecclesiastically, theologically, or ethically (e.g., questioning his real estate practices)--or a combination of these three. (Even Antonie J. Betten, Scholte's disciple and ministerial co-laborer, deserted his mentor and negotiated for a Reformed church). The minority which continued to attend Scholte's independent church dwindled as time passed; his congregation largely evaporated not long after his death in 1868.

The newly organized First Reformed Church of Pella had a hard time finding a pastor. Van Raalte, its initial choice, declined both of its calls to him. It then successively called from the old country two *Afscheiding* ministers with a Gelderland mentality: Anthony Brummelkamp, Van Raalte's former cohort, and J. H. Donner, Brummelkamp's onetime pupil and a friend of Van Raalte. Both men preferred to stay where they were. Finally, in 1859 the Pella church succeeded in obtaining Pieter J. Oggel, Van Raalte's son-in-law, who had been trained by Brummelkamp and shared their Gelderland outlook. He managed to hold the congregation together for four years, after which he left for Michigan in poor health.

The church took three years to get another pastor (two declined calls being issued to a Van Raalte protégé, Roelof Pieters, and another one to Donner). That man was Egbert Winter, Dutch born, with early training by Van Raalte, but with degrees from Rutgers College and New Brunswick Theological Seminary as well as an American-born wife (albeit of Dutch descent). Rutgers

and New Brunswick were both institutions of the older, Americanized RPDC (RCA) in the East. The long period without a resident Reformed minister in Pella and the choice of this particular Americanized Dutchman apparently were enough to cause some of the Northern mentality, Pella sheep to stray from the fold. With a little encouragement from a Michigan pastor of the CRC, (then calling itself "the *True* Dutch Reformed Church," it had left the Union of 1850 because of objections to eastern RPDC "un-Reformed" practices), these people organized a new congregation in 1866, which became what is now the First Christian Reformed Church of Pella. Then, two years later (1868), the First Reformed Church hemorrhaged again, with a group of dissidents exiting to form the Third Reformed Church of Pella. (The Second Reformed Church had started in 1863 as an English language congregation; all of the other congregations mentioned here were Dutch speaking). The Third Church people complained that the First Church was not Calvinistic enough, i.e., that it was not sufficiently committed to the historic doctrinal standards of the Reformed Church. Evidently the new congregation shared the Northern mentality of the Christian Reformed but did not wish to be separatistic; it even got its first pastor from an Illinois Christian Reformed church.

That premillennialism was an issue in the foregoing developments is shown by the public declaration made by the Pella Christian Reformed Church in 1872, stating as its first reason for separate existence that it opposed "the teaching and introduction of Chiliasm, an opinion so commonly permeating the ministry and membership of the Dutch Reformed Church in America." Furthermore, Egbert Winter, the pastor of the First Reformed Church, Pella, 1866-1884, was presumably already the (moderate) premillennialist that he was in his later years, although he never seems to have been a dispensationalist. Also, none of those previously called by Pella's First Reformed Church were premillennialists. The coming of Winter to Pella thus helps to explain why the more confessionally oriented Dutch Reformed there felt obliged either to secede from the RCA or at least to start a new, more Calvinistic congregation (it is hard to reconcile chiliasm with the Reformed doctrinal standards; see below). This may also be a reason for Winter's unusually harsh tone when writing about the Christian Reformed.

During the winter of 1865 to 1866 a group met every Friday evening at a Pella home to study biblical prophecy. The chief leader of this gathering was Isaac Overkamp, successively an elder in the First and Second Reformed Churches. He translated as he read aloud in Dutch from the writings of the famous American Lutheran preacher, Joseph A. Seiss, editor of *The Prophetic Times* and a strong but temperate premillennialist (not a Darbyite). Since Seiss had just published his popular three-volume *Lectures on the Apocalypse* in 1865, it seems likely that these were the subject of the study in Pella. Members of the group included Koenraad de Jong (died 1866) and Huibert Muilenburg, the

former an elder in First Reformed Church (and father of future key elders at Orange City's First Reformed Church), and the latter a future elder and pillar of Orange City's First Reformed Church.

Orange City

Land had become scarce and expensive in the Pella area, so Henry Hospers, Pella's mayor, led many of its citizens to found a new colony in Sioux County in northwestern Iowa in 1870; its "urban center" was named Orange City (after the Dutch royal house). In May 1871, a year after the initial settlement, the First Reformed Church of Orange City was organized, with the First Christian Reformed Church of Orange City following two months later (like McDonalds and Burger King!). Within another year the First Reformed Church secured a dominie, namely, 58-year-old Seine Bolks of the big Reformed congregation in Zeeland, Michigan; he was a former pupil of Van Raalte but a premillenarian (like Winter) who preached this view openly and frequently. Bolks had come with his congregation to the United States in 1847 and settled in Michigan, not far from Van Raalte. Bolks represented the Gelderland mentality, had a good reputation (except among Northern-mentality stalwarts), and most of the Sioux County settlers were delighted to get him. The Dutch came pouring into Sioux County (from Michigan, Wisconsin, Illinois, and the Netherlands) in the 1870s, so that its Reformed church grew rapidly, aided by eastern RCA benefactions.

Meanwhile, Orange City's tiny Christian Reformed congregation was almost stillborn, because of Bolks' popularity and because its young mother church in Pella remained relatively small and struggling. The Orange City seceders were unable to attract a pastor--in spite of many attempts--until 1877, five years after Bolks came. And, their first minister, though a dedicated man, was easy to ridicule due to his odd looks, strange mannerisms, and impolitic utterances. (He was sent packing in 1884 when the congregation had outgrown him).

But two things happened in the 1880s to give a big impetus to the CRC's growth in Orange City and elsewhere. Dutch immigration to the United States increased, and a controversy about Freemasonry erupted in Michigan. The Dutch Reformed immigrants believed that Freemasonry and Christianity were incompatible, but the RCA in the East had many members and even some prominent ministers who were lodge members. The requests from the Midwest immigrant churches to ban Masons from the RCA fell on deaf ears in the general synods of the denomination between 1880 and 1882. This caused a small but significant defection of Michigan RCA members to the CRC. This had little direct effect in Sioux County, because there were few Masons here and the Sioux County Reformed needed the eastern RCA money for worthy projects like church extension and the founding (1882) of Northwestern Classical Academy (now Northwestern College). The local congregations simply barred Masons from membership. But the seceder church in the Netherlands, led by

Brummelkamp and others, upon hearing of the RCA's denomination's refusal to exclude lodge members, changed its policy and began recommending that its emigrating people join the CRC, not the RCA. This helped the CRC grow but it also kept it Dutch, which, on the whole, protected it from embracing premillennialism, which was more popular in this country than in the Netherlands; besides, the CRC's strict, "Dutch" adherence to its confessions would tend to rule out much if any "chiliasm," certainly of the dispensational sort.

Thus, in Sioux County's Christian Reformed Church we hear no millennial discussion. And this rarely appears in the pages of *De Wachter*, the Dutch language CRC denominational weekly published in Grand Rapids. The Reformed, on the other hand, in Sioux County and in the Midwest in general (in their weekly Dutch language newspaper *De Hope*) were much more open to the whole subject, partly because of their being more in tune with their American evangelical surroundings. There was frequent treatment of eschatological topics in *The Christian Intelligencer*, the organ of the eastern, Americanized RCA.

The best place to learn of the state of Sioux County thinking--or at least reading--is in the pages of the local weekly newspaper, *De Volksvriend* ("The People's Friend"), begun by Henry Hospers in 1874 to inform his colonists of the news but also to tell potential Sioux County immigrants of the opportunities awaiting them there. Although published in Orange City, it soon had a much wider readership, notably in the "Northwest" but also throughout the entire Dutch immigrant community and even in the mother country (as evidenced in its news-from-elsewhere columns). It was not a church publication like *De Hope* or *De Wachter*, so it tried on the whole (in good chamber-of-commerce fashion) to rise above sectarian squabbles despite its unashamedly Republican and Christian tone. In fact, it was RCA with a fair degree of tolerance, for that time, of the CRC and other Protestant groups. Each of *De Volksvriend's* successive editors (in our period, all members of the First Reformed Church) had his particular editorial emphases. Editorship of a newspaper can provide a "bully pulpit" for someone with a cause.

Thus, the fourth editor, Antonie J. Betten, Jr. (1885- 1891), a premillennialist, sometime mayor of Orange City, and former deacon of the First Reformed Church, shifted *De Volksvriend's* focus to missions and especially eschatology, a subject on which his aged father was expert and only too eager to write. Expanding the paper's size, the younger Betten brought in more regular contributors, most of whom were outspoken chiliasts. So, in addition to frequent articles from his father, he had columns from out-of-towners such as Jan van Andel, a Secession minister in the Netherlands, and John I. Fles. Both the elder Betten and Fles were mavericks--the one a dispensational RCA minister and the other a Jewish-Christian, premillennial CRC minister. They were unusual and significant enough to deserve special treatment.

John Isaac Fles (1842-1921) was born in Gelderland, the son of a converted Jewish rabbi (the turning of many Jews to Christianity in the nineteenth century whetted premillennial appetites) and a Reformed woman. Converted as a teenager, Fles at first planned to become an evangelist, came into the orbit of the chiliast Jan van Andel, attended the Seceder seminary at Kampen (1867-1873), and then came to the United States, where he served the Dutch Presbyterian congregation at Cedar Grove, Wisconsin, until 1880, when he became pastor of remnants of Scholte's former congregation in Pella; following Fles's advice, they soon joined the Presbyterian Church. After three years in Pella, he entered the CRC by accepting a call to its Zeeland, Michigan church. He later pastored CRC congregations in Muskegon and Pella, finally retiring to Muskegon, where his last years were clouded by the fracas over the dispensationalist book, *Maranatha*, published in 1917 by his pastor, Harry Bultema, who was deposed from the CRC ministry two years later. Fles tried to exercise a moderating influence in this controversy, although (or because) he had presumably paved the way for his successor's more extreme chiliastic views.

Fles's premillennialism had nearly prevented his move to the CRC in 1883, for the Pella CRC--which of course knew him--petitioned the denomination's synod to bar him because of some "unbiblical" views he had published on eschatology. After retracting statements of a chiliastic nature in conflict with the Reformed confessions, he was permitted to enter the CRC. Although he inclined to premillennialism, he avoided extremes. This is probably why, although Fles wrote many articles, particularly relating current events to eschatology, he rarely published in his own denomination's paper, *De Wachter*, which was strongly anti-chiliast, and in which he had been attacked in 1884.

The year that Fles came to serve the remnants of Scholte's former congregation in Pella (1880), Hendrik Pieter Oggel, M. D., younger brother of Pella's first Reformed pastor, started to publish a Christian weekly there, *De Christelijke Herald* ("The Christian Herald"), which lasted only a few years. Fles began to contribute articles to that paper, since he had found in Oggel a "soul brother" who shared his premillennial outlook. By the time Oggel moved to Orange City in 1886 to teach at the Northwestern Classical Academy, after his paper had failed, Fles had just found a new outlet for his pen in Betten's *De Volksvriend*. And when Oggel became that paper's editor in 1891, he continued to encourage his friend to contribute a column commenting on world, national, and church events, particularly from the perspective of (premillennial) prophecy (i.e., to the effect that things are getting worse). Not surprisingly, Fles's articles frequently encouraged evangelism of the Jews, believing as he did in their future mass conversion to Jesus Christ.

The second "outsider" to write for *De Volksvriend* in the late 1880s was Editor Betten's own father, Antonie Jan Betten, Sr. (1813-1900). Born in the city of Utrecht, trained by Scholte, he had pastored an *Afscheiding* congregation

in the Netherlands 1842-1847 and had led a company of Seceder immigrants to Pella in 1847, where he was deeply involved in the leadership (as a preaching "elder") in Scholte's church until the two had a falling out over the latter's business dealings. Not only did Betten serve on the Pella city council, but he also kept a store to support his Sunday ministry of preaching in Pella and nearby. His independent, Scholtian spirit explains his only intermittent involvement with the First Reformed Church of Pella and the RCA; he did supply preaching for the First Church on occasion and served two RCA preaching stations near Pella in the early 1870s. Betten's first wife having died, the tragedy of a bad second marriage (1851) hurt his ministry; he was not allowed to preach at the First Church in 1863 because his wife was under discipline there; also, she was barred from the Lord's table because of the bad relations in their home in 1870 (for which evidently she received most of the blame). His son (A. J., Jr.) moved to Orange City in 1871 and the father followed in 1875. But so did the dominie's wife and their sons, who by the 1880s were running a saloon in Orange City. (The elder Betten himself had had a license to sell liquor in his Pella business in the early 1870s). By 1880 the Bettens were divorced (presumably her "fault"). Still, he was recognized as a minister in the local RCA classis and allowed to preach to Reformed people in Sioux County country schoolhouses (he did the pioneer preaching for what became the Newkirk Reformed Church), as well as occasionally at the First Reformed Church in Orange City when the minister was away. The consistory questioned him in 1879 about possible schismatic preaching (which he denied) in a country schoolhouse, and he tried, unsuccessfully, to resign from classis in 1888. He was a maverick to the end.

The chief occupation of Betten's last years was the study of the prophetic Scriptures, in a manner reminiscent of the dispensationalism of his mentor, Scholte. It was almost as though the future were an area in which he could exercise mastery, unlike the "real world" of the present, i.e., his own life. Beginning in 1885 he published numerous articles from a premillennial, even dispensational perspective in *De Volksvriend*, first under his son's editorship and then under that of H. P. Oggel, who had already published pieces by him in Pella's *De Christelijke Heraut*. Betten had broken into print even earlier in 1876 in an article in *De Hope* in which he taught the clear distinction between Israel and the church; this article had been rebutted then by an RCA pastor. *De Volksvriend* had started to publish eschatological articles early in 1885, and controversy quickly erupted. An Orange City Reformed Church layman, J. H. Markus (formerly of Pella's First Reformed Church), contributed a (borrowed) premillennial article, which soon brought an answer from a theologically educated, anonymous party named "N." The elder Betten entered the fray to reply to "N." Soon the editor, Kasper Tietema, called a halt to the debate. The

younger Betten then became editor and initiated a policy of incorporating semi-regular articles from various premillennial correspondents.

Eventually, after nearly two years of pretty incessant chiliastic bombardment, one reader of *De Volksvriend* had had enough. His name was Ale Buursma, Bolks' popular successor as minister of the First Reformed Church of Orange City (thus pastor of Markus, both Bettens, and Oggel). He asked for and received "equal time" to present "the other side." This involved the contribution of a series of articles (a book) on Revelation by John C. Rankin, a Presbyterian postmillennialist (who had studied at Princeton Theological Seminary under Charles Hodge and others). These articles were translated into Dutch and given commentary by Buursma, whom one suspects was the anonymous "N" whom Betten had taken to task two years earlier. In any case, Betten again rose to the bait and sharply criticized Buursma and Rankin. This time he went too far. He said that not only do "these articles refute themselves if you study Scripture" but that no one has the right to spiritualize the Bible, so the interpretation of Rankin and Buursma is "nothing else than that of men." The consistory of the First Reformed Church voted to express its "earnest agreement" with the "indignation" of some congregational "brothers" (who had appeared before it) regarding Betten's "insulting writing" about Dominie Buursma's contributions in *De Volksvriend*; the consistory also directly condemned Betten's article.

Interestingly, several members (possibly a majority) of the consistory elders were themselves premillennarians who had come out of the Scholte-Betten-Winter chiliastic milieu in Pella. Among them was Huibert Muilenburg, the center of a very influential and numerous extended family. He had remained in Scholte's congregation for at least a couple of years after Pella's Reformed church had been organized in 1856 and had been in the Seiss study group of 1865-66. Furthermore, he would soon write joyfully in *De Volksvriend* (22 January 1891) that Buursma's pastoral successor (Harmen Van der Ploeg) had preached that Israel will be restored and brought to Palestine by God. As a matter of fact, the premillennial core of the congregation's consistory was composed not only of Pella veterans but of former members of the First Reformed Church there, not of the anti-chiliastic Third Reformed Church. Thus, the consistory's reprimand of Betten is significant in showing either Buursma's popularity (and Betten's unpopularity) or the relative moderation of the church leadership's advocacy of premillennialism--or both.

Another apparent indication of the relatively low priority given by Orange City's First Church to premillennialism is its request of Herman Bavinck, the strongly anti-chiliastic Reformed theologian of the Seceder theological school at Kampen, for suggestions of men to call as pastor when its premillennial pastor (Van der Ploeg) died in 1893. (Bavinck had visited Orange City and spoken in the First Church in 1892.) Finally, any church which could call and obtain

Nicholas M. Steffens--another strongly anti-chilistic friend of Abraham Kuyper--to be its pastor (1898), could not put too high a priority on premillennialism. The First Church was not a one-issue church--or at least chiliasm was not the issue.

In any case, Antonie J. Betten continued to write more articles into the 1890s on prophecy and the future, but there were no more major flare-ups in print. (Buursma had left Orange City in 1889.) Betten died at eighty-seven in 1900, the last of the original five or six pastors who had led the Seceders to the United States in 1847. Premillenarian Seine Bolks, the second to last to die (1894), had likewise ended his days in Orange City. In their later years these two pioneer dominies had occasionally cooperated in such activities as leading lecture series. But, whereas Bolks was widely revered, Betten, for obvious reasons, had a lesser reputation.

We have already met the fifth editor of *De Volksvriend*, Hendrik Pieter Oggel (1844-1926), as publisher of J. I. Fles' articles in Pella. Oggel succeeded the younger Betten as editor of the Orange City paper in 1891 and served in that position until his death. Oggel promoted RCA-CRC mutual understanding so that the gospel might be brought to the whole world; he too was deeply concerned about the fulfillment of prophecy and the premillennial return of Christ. A native of Axel in Zeeland and named for Hendrik Pieter Scholte, he came to the United States when he was eleven with his older brother, who soon became Pella's first Reformed pastor. The younger Oggel almost became a medical missionary but instead practiced medicine for a some years in Pella and edited *De Christelijke Heraut* before migrating to Orange City in 1886 to teach at the Northwestern Classical Academy, shifting to *De Volksvriend* five years later. Claiming busyness at the academy, he declined election as elder at the First Reformed Church, and in 1892 transferred his membership to the English-language American Reformed Church of Orange City. He was a militant prohibitionist and a dedicated but moderate premillenarian.

Oggel's zeal for missions coincided with the zenith of American "crusading internationalism" (e.g., the Student Volunteer Movement). Oggel sympathized with all sorts of Christian outreach, e.g., that of the (Wesleyan Arminian) Salvation Army, that of (the premillennialist) Dwight L. Moody, and so on. Accordingly, in 1896 he, along with Matthew Kolyn and Evert Breen, pastors respectively of the First Reformed and the First Christian Reformed Churches in Orange City, launched *De Heidenwereld* ("The Heathen World"), a monthly missionary magazine (which continues today as *Missionary Monthly*) with contributions from both RCA and CRC home and foreign missionaries and their supporters; its profits were to be divided equally between RCA and CRC missions. This was one of the few ways in which the RCA and the CRC joined hands in those days. (Another one was at funerals!).

Oggel's premillennialism, in contrast to Betten's, was closely tied to activity in this world, in particular the foreign missionary and prohibition movements. Is the fact that the CRC, unlike the RCA, had little room for premillennialism somehow related to its lack of a foreign missionary program until after World War I (although it was active in church extension, Indian missions, and even Jewish evangelism) or to its generally non-prohibitionist stance?

Concluding Questions

We may now ask some broader questions about the whole "scene" just reviewed. First, why did some of these midwestern Dutch immigrants accept premillennialism in one form or another? Second, why did some of them reject it? Third, did premillennialism make any practical difference? Fourth, what was the relationship of premillennialism to "Americanization?"

First, as to the appeal of premillennialism, the best way into the topic is through the "signs of the times," i.e., current events. During the latter part of the nineteenth century, Jews were returning to Palestine (and Jerusalem) in ever increasing numbers, driven by pogroms in Russia, Zionism, and other factors; Turkey, which ruled the Holy Land, was weak and unable to stop the influx. The secular and religious press, including the RCA's *De Hope* and *De Volksvriend*, and, to a lesser degree, even the CRC's *De Wachter*, reported regularly and extensively on this almost miraculous restoration, after so many centuries and so much persecution, of the children of Israel to the promised land. This suggested to many minds a literal fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy, and that other Old Testament prophecies about Israel should be interpreted literally, too, and not spiritualized and applied to the Christian church as had been the common practice. Besides, there had been some notable Jewish conversions to Christianity (e.g., among the Dutch, Da Costa, Capadose, the elder Fles), which might be the firstfruits of a great (millennial?) harvest.

Another "sign of the times" was the great work of God in the nineteenth-century Protestant foreign missionary movement, which was dominated by England and the United States, with some continental, including Dutch, help. Jesus had said that the end would come after the gospel had been preached throughout the whole world (Matt. 24:14), which seemed to undercut the postmillennial teaching that a long time would elapse before Jesus' return.

More somber "signs of the times" were present too, including a rising tide of unbelief and secularism in society at large (especially in Europe) and of heresies (e.g., biblical criticism and liberalism) and immorality in the churches. Furthermore, the growth of American cities brought almost limitless potential for temptation and evil, including industrial conflict, while immigration of southern and eastern non-Protestant Europeans, with their "continental Sabbath," threatened to shake the foundations of America's Christian civilization; Josiah Strong's *Our Country* (1885), warning of the alien peril, was a best-seller in

Dutch translation in Sioux County. The occasional economic depression at home and wars abroad also contributed to the gloom. Thus, the world seemed to be getting worse rather than better, no matter how well the Sioux County Zion might be doing spiritually and materially. And of course materialism was perceived as a spiritual threat to northwest Iowa as well.

Another factor in the chiliast appeal to some of the Dutch immigrants may well have been that it was "the latest thing"--the fashion--among the American-born evangelical Christians whom they sought to emulate. The "real" Americans were excited about such premillenarian "stars" as Dwight L. Moody and his song leader Ira D. Sankey. The latter composed Christian "hits" which were sung about as quickly in Orange City Sunday schools and youth groups as anywhere else. Besides, these American evangelists had the kind of spiritual zeal with which many of the immigrants identified. After all, these Dutch Calvinists had come out of a revival climate in the Netherlands; never mind that they might be unwitting participants in the Arminian "methodizing" of American Protestantism then occurring.

Finally, premillennialism, particularly in its dispensational form, offered a less humdrum, more supercharged, supernatural, apocalyptic Christianity, which could especially attract the young. Darbyism's detailed charting of the future might also attract those who, under the spell of the seemingly intellectual and scientific character of its biblical literalism, hungered to study the Bible "in depth."

Second, why did some Dutch Reformed immigrants resist chiliasm? One obvious reason is they came to the United States as non-millennialists, premillennialism being less popular in the Netherlands than here; the Seceder church had at one time forbidden premillennial preaching, while later both Bavinck and Kuyper opposed this eschatology. Furthermore, as persons suspicious of the "world," some immigrants were disinclined to embrace something just because it was American--or new (to them).

Of course the more theologically and confessionally oriented newcomers (e.g., the CRC in general and Pella's Third Reformed Church) rejected chiliasm because it was not consonant with its doctrinal standards, particularly the Belgic Confession, Article 37, which states that ". . . we believe . . . that when the time appointed by the Lord is come . . . and the number of the elect is complete, our Lord Jesus Christ will come from heaven . . . to declare himself judge of the living and the dead." Even if a thousand year reign of Christ could be inserted between his return and the judgment (which is an unnatural reading of the text), the big problem remains that there is no room for the premillennial belief that during the millennium people will be brought to Christ, since Article 37 says that the number of the elect is already complete before his return. Further problems arise in trying to fit such dispensationalist teachings as two separate peoples of God (Israel and the church), and seven different

dispensations, with the traditional Reformed emphasis upon the unity of the one covenant of grace (in Old and New Testaments) and upon the oneness of the church (e.g., the Belgic Confession, Article 27, asserts that "the church has existed from the beginning of the world and will last until the end"; see also the Heidelberg Catechism, Answer 54, on this and on Christ's present kingship, and Answer 19 on the preaching of the gospel in the Old Testament period).

Then as now, some were convinced that to interpret a symbolic book like Revelation (as well as Old Testament prophecies about Israel) literally strains belief because of the complexity of the resultant theological scheme.

Non-premillennial readings of "the signs of the times" were possible, especially for "possibility thinkers." One major fact which postmillennialists like Charles Hodge (who was read by RCA theologues) would adduce was the way the Christian faith was being spread as never before all over the world. The arguments as to whether premillennialism, postmillennialism, or amillennialism is the most "biblical" continue into the present without much sign of resolution.

Third, did premillennialism make any difference in the way people lived? There seems to be some correlation between it and the foreign missionary movement, at least at the turn of this century (but with notable exceptions, e.g., RCA Japan missionary Albertus Pieters, a strong anti-chilist). An important factor here may be that with a pessimistic outlook on society, attention turned from trying to reform it, to evangelism ("the great reversal"), since the latter would be the only useful thing to do until Christ's imminent return. Incidentally, starting in the 1890s, the non-premillennial Sioux County CRC held annual Fourth-of-July missionary rallies, but the denomination sent no foreign missionaries out until the 1920s.

Yet H. P. Oggel and some other RCA premillennarians in Sioux County at the turn of the century were ardent, vocal prohibitionists. Apparently these chilists had not entirely given up on the world. And politics in general continued to exercise Oggel and his cohorts greatly, while their love of their adopted land seemingly knew no bounds. The Sioux County Christian Reformed, on the other hand, were generally more restrained in their political involvement and patriotism, and mostly opposed total abstinence.

Fourth, did premillennialism among the Dutch Reformed have anything to do with "Americanization?" Although there was some chiliasm in the Netherlands, there was much more of it in the United States, where it had even made significant inroads among the Calvinistic Presbyterians. Thus, premillennialism along with other "American" religious influences (including "methodism") was waiting for the immigrants to adopt American manners and mores. In many respects the newcomers took on our ways quite quickly (e.g., diet, sports, attire, architecture, the "Glorious Fourth" and patriotism). But, usually keeping their worship services in Dutch, they were religiously perhaps

most open to "corrupting" influences through "the rising generation," i.e., their children. Their children learned English in school and quickly became involved in the local and regional branches of the YMCA, Christian Endeavor, and the Sunday school (which competed with the Dutch catechism and sermon). Through the lessons, speakers, and catchy gospel hymns (not Dutch Psalms!) of these American institutions, the children of the immigrants absorbed "non-sectarian" biblical teachings. The American evangelical, premillennial, methodistic Trojan horse had entered the Calvinist Zion in these forms within a very few years of the founding of the Dutch colony in Sioux County. American evangelicalism reached the RCA first but would eventually begin to penetrate even the CRC.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Constraints of space and time preclude the precise identification of sources. Primary sources include the consistory minutes of Orange City's First Reformed Church (extant 1879 on) and First Christian Reformed Church (extant 1897 on), the RCA Classis of Iowa minutes (1884 on) and the CRC Classis of Iowa minutes (1877 on), as well as the earliest records of Pella's First, Second, and Third Reformed, First Christian Reformed, and Scholte's Christian congregations. The following newspapers were used (with starting dates): *Sioux County Herald* (1872), *De Volksvriend* (1874), *De Hope* (1865), *De Wachter* (1868), *De Grondwet* (1871), *De Heidenwereld* (1896), *Pella's Weekblad* (only certain years extant, e.g., 1870-1874). I have found the preceding materials (some of which are also on microfilm) at the churches named or in the Calvin, Central, Dordt, and Northwestern College libraries, and the Holland (Michigan) Archives at Hope College. The preceding libraries have also provided me with church anniversary books, personal letters, files of clippings, family histories, census records, and the like. Secondary sources include K. Van Stigt's history of Pella (in Dutch) and C. L. Dyke's history of Sioux County, as well as the works of J. Van Hinte, H. S. Lucas, and R. P. Swierenga on the nineteenth-century Dutch in America. H. Beets (Dutch), D. H. and J. H. Kromminga, H. Zwaanstra, P. De Klerk/R. R. De Ridder, J. D. Bratt, and H. J. Brinks provide helpful publications on the CRC side. Some of the former together with G. J. ten Zythoff and books in Dutch by A. J. Rasker, A. de Groot/P. L. Schram, W. Bakker *et al.*, and Te Velde tell about the *Reveil*, the *Afscheiding*, and the various mentalities in the Netherlands. Also useful are the *Historical Directory of the RCA* (1978 and 1992 editions), the annual minutes of the RCA General Synod and of the CRC Synod, and, finally, writings on American religious history (e.g., millennialism) by G. M. Marsden, M. A. Noll, and T. P. Weber.

REVISED
EDITION

*"Scholarly essays as
enthralling as they are
indispensable."**

THE DAWN OF THE REFORMATION

Essays in Late Medieval
and Early Reformation Thought

HEIKO A. OBERMAN

ISBN 0-8028-0655-4 • Paper, \$29.99

"This collection of seminal articles written over the last twenty years has inspired a generation of late Medieval and Reformation scholars. Full of learning and good sense, these essays document the continuity between the later Middle Ages and Reformation Europe. Here is Oberman at his most provocative and creative, a scholar from whom one always learns something new."—**STEVEN E. OZMENT**

Harvard University

"This splendid volume includes essays ranging in time from the fourteenth century to Calvin. While all the essays are important, the greatest value will be found in the exploration of the background of fourteenth- and fifteenth-century theology."

—**GORDON RUPP***

University of Cambridge

273 REV



At your bookstore, or call 800-253-7521; FAX 616-459-6540

WM. B. EERDMANS PUBLISHING CO.

255 JEFFERSON AVE. S.E. / GRAND RAPIDS, MICHIGAN 49503

Book Reviews

- Baptism, Peace, and the State in the Reformed and Mennonite Traditions*, p. 170
- Calvin's Concept of the Law*, p. 170
- Centering On God: Method and Message in Luke-Acts*, p. 171
- Christian Ministries and the Law*, p.172
- Christian Parenting: Raising Children in the Real World*, p. 173
- Communicating Christ in Animistic Contexts*, p. 173
- The Craft of Theology: From Symbol to System*, p. 174
- Dirt, Greed and Sex: Sexual Ethics in the New Testament and Their Implications for Today*, p. 174
- Evangelistically Yours: Ecumenical Letters on Contemporary Evangelism*, p. 175
- Getting the Love You Want: A Guide for Couples*, p. 176
- God--The World's Future: Systematic Theology for a Postmodern Era*, p. 176
- The Great Angel: A Study of Israel's Second God*, p. 177
- The J. R. R. Tolkien Handbook: A Comprehensive Guide to His Life, Writings, and World of Middle-Earth*, p. 178
- Literary Forms in the New Testament: A Handbook*, p. 178
- Martin Luther: Shaping and Defining the Reformation 1521-1532*, p. 179
- No Other Name*, p. 180
- Planting Growing Churches for the 21st Century*, p. 181
- The Word of God and the Mind of Man*, p. 181