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While most contributions in this volume deal with Dutch clergy in North America before the American Revolution, it makes sense to conclude with an essay that extends that horizon and expands the definition of “colony.” Carrying the story into the nineteenth century and to a Dutch settlement in the Midwest, the *Kolonie*, as it was then known, provides a perspective that highlights some of the unique features and trends of the earlier history of Dutch clergy in North America. Such a perspective also sheds light on the consequences and outcomes of those earlier events and patterns and reconnects two stories that are often told without reference to each other.<sup>1</sup>

Specifically, the life of the Reverend Cornelius van der Meulen is relevant for five reasons. The first is that he represented a new type of colonial clergy. He was not only a pastor, but also an immigrant leader. This adds a new component to the category that has been investigated in the foregoing essays. He was one of the most visible immigrant leaders of the 1840s, and he sought to channel the Dutch immigrants into a new society. But he envisioned a role for them in that new setting that was firmly rooted in the past, seeking continuity with both the Pilgrims and the colonial Dutch.

In this respect, however, Van der Meulen is a better subject than his more illustrious colleagues, the Reverends Albertus van Raalte and Hendrik P. Scholte. They stand out as academically trained octogenarians, but they were the exceptions rather than the rule. Indispensable as the strategists of the new mass immigration and the main contacts with American society at large, they were not archetypes of the hundred or so Dutch ministers who came to serve congregations in America. Cornelius van der Meulen did play a part in these highly visible activities and was close to the leadership, but he was also a typical minister. As with most of his lesser known colleagues, his attention was more often focused inward rather than outward, tying the Dutch in the Midwest together. If Van Raalte acted as the Secretary of State of the *kolonie*, Van der Meulen was its Secretary of the Interior, attending to the vitality and cohesion of the settlement. His education likewise resembled that of the majority of Dutch ministers who served immigrant churches in America, such as the Reverends Marten Ypma and Seine Bolks—though the commonalities and patterns in the training and career paths of such men needs further study.

A second reason for selecting Van der Meulen is that he personally connected the recent immigrant Dutch to the descendants of the colonial Dutch. He sought the support of the established Dutch-American communities on the Atlantic seaboard and embraced their institutions and traditions. He sent his two sons to the East Coast to be educated and trained as ministers. This precedent was followed by scores of candidates who carried this American legacy into the midwestern churches. The Dutch-American subculture in the Midwest could only have been founded as a result of a joint effort.

He was the perfect team worker, who established and nurtured the connections necessary for the stability and survival of the *kolonie*.

A third argument for examining Cornelius' life was his success in laying the foundations for the vitality of Dutch settlements in two urban centers, Chicago, Illinois, and Grand Rapids, Michigan. While the career patterns of Dutch Reformed ministers in the early years revolved around rural places, the cities quickly emerged as the centers of growth after the Civil War. These proved to be indispensable links in the formation of a strong Dutch subculture, and Van der Meulen recognized their potential at an early stage.

A fourth reason for studying this man is that he was highly regarded as a spiritual authority, amply demonstrated by the fact that he was called the "Apostle of Zeeland" and later an "Aaron" to Van Raalte, the "American Moses" or the "Apostle of the Colonists." This reputation helped set a new standard in the New World. An understanding of his piety is the key to his life, as the source of his motivation, and the basis of the high regard in which he was held by his flock. Moreover, his brand of pietism provided a smooth link to American evangelical theology.

Finally, these qualities shaped his role as a constructive and unifying force rather than as a divisive one, which explains his unreserved loyalty to the Reformed Church in America. This last assessment could (justifiably) be met with a measure of surprise, since he was, after all, a Seceder who had helped split the powerful *Nederlands Hervormde Kerk* and had even separated himself from his native land. How can that be explained? How are these breaks harmonized with his reputation as a builder?<sup>2</sup>

To answer such questions, I will examine his spiritual formation, his view of the church, and his idea for a new community, and I will end by considering his own evaluation of his achievements upon his return to the Netherlands. This journey near the end of his life also offers the opportunity to assess Van der Meulen's life from a different vantage point, since it enables us to gauge his significance to the community he left behind in the Netherlands.

### *Personality*

Cornelius van der Meulen was a doer, not a writer. The key to understanding the choices he made is his life story. Our attention is immediately drawn to death, which hovered as a constant threat and frequent reality in his family life. Though he was far from unusual in having grieved the deaths of many loved ones, these experiences intensified his affection for his surviving family members and deepened his empathy for the people of his congregations. This, in turn, earned him much sympathy and admiration from his circle of church members.

When Cornelius was born on December 15, 1800, in the town of Middelharnis, on the island of Flakkee, close to Rotterdam, death had already taken its toll in his family. Cornelius's parents had nine children, but only he and his older brother Eliza, born in 1793, survived. Their mother died when Cornelius was five years old, and their father, who never remarried, died when Cornelius was twenty-six. One year later Cornelius married Elizabeth Geertrui van de Roovaard, a woman from the same region. The tragedy of early death repeated itself in the next generation. Though Cornelius was strong as an ox,

he had to bury nine of his twelve children, five in the old world and four in the new. These events were not unusual and could have made him bitter, but they made Cornelius a mellow man.<sup>3</sup>

Cornelius's father had a variety of jobs, beginning as a laborer and later working as a contractor for Middelharnis, a town with a population of three thousand. Almost all of its citizens belonged to the *Hervormde Kerk*, with small minorities of Jews (fifty) and Roman Catholics (one hundred). Most inhabitants made their living as farmers (growing wheat or potatoes) or as fishermen.<sup>4</sup>

Although he later described his father as a wise and pious man, Cornelius himself was originally not as interested in religion as he was in many other things. As a young man he never severed his ties with the church, though he preferred a comfortable life outside of it. This situation did not last long. His firstborn daughter died within six months of birth in 1828. An even greater tragedy happened in Rotterdam, where he had moved to work as a commissioner. His two infant sons succumbed to the city's first cholera epidemic. This blow made Cornelius return to his native town and re-evaluate his life. Although he had appreciated the gifted preachers in the *Hervormde kerk*, he found no comfort there. He turned to an informal group of pious people, which he joined and soon led. He presented his children to a traveling independent minister by the name of Budding for baptism. Thus he became part of the secession movement in its early phase, not as someone who declared the *Hervormde Kerk* bankrupt, but as a seeker who felt closer to God in a voluntaristic assembly of believers seeking an experiential knowledge of God than he did in the formal structure of the national church. It was his need for spiritual comfort that drew him back, and a comforter he would become.

Life did not become easier. As a practical man with experience in various occupations, Cornelius was soon elected an elder by the members of the seceded congregation in Middelharnis. He also preached in neighboring towns and was considered the leader of the local Secession. This came at a price. His neighbors rejected him as a troublemaker, and even people in his own seceded denomination were suspicious of his motives, fearing he was in it as a career path and not out of calling. Yet, his sense of calling was strong, and he decided to get more education before officially entering the ministry.<sup>5</sup>

Cornelius presented himself to the most learned of Seceders, Dominie Hendrik P. Scholte (1805-1868), the wealthy, Leyden-educated, cosmopolitan publicist, and visionary minister. His instructor, however, did not much care about his intellectual training and instead put him straight to preaching. When Van der Meulen studied, he did not so much devote his time to biblical exposition or the classical languages, but to church polity and church history. Later he realized that his doctrinal education had hardly surpassed that of a Sunday school student who had mastered his catechism.<sup>6</sup>

This odd specialization can be explained by the nature of the Secession, which blamed the *Hervormde Kerk* for not guarding the church against impure doctrines and practices. As other new religious groups, the Seceders struggled with the proper church order, the 1619 Dort Church Order or its more contemporary adaptation, which ironically turned them not only against the main church but also against each other. Van der Meulen tried to minimize the damage these sharp discussions could bring.

In these early years of the Secession, the leaders were grouped around three strands of thought that united them with some Seceders and divided them from others, depending on their views on spirituality, church organization, and the relationship between church and state.<sup>7</sup>

### *Ideals for the Church*

The first group had an experiential strand with roots in the Further Reformation of the seventeenth century and Reformed pietism of the eighteenth century. Dominies Hendrik De Cock and Simon van Velzen shared many of the experientialists' theological ideas, but they also insisted on Calvinist orthodoxy, strict adherence to the church order of Dordt, and a theocratic state. They trained about three quarters of all new Seceder ministers in the period between 1836 and 1846, who were rooted in conventicles and religious exercises.

A second group had a broader horizon. They were orthodox and confessional but did not place experiential religion at the core of their belief system. The leaders in this group were Dominies Anthony Brummelkamp and Albertus C. van Raalte. They advocated flexibility regarding the Church Order of Dordt and favored some distance to the state.

The third group was mainly inspired by the Dutch Awakening, the *Reveil*. Its main spokesman was Hendrik P. Scholte, whose purpose was not to restore the traditional church order but to establish Bible-believing congregations of confessing Christians, with an emphasis on personal faith, the spread of the kingdom of God, and the second coming. They were the most congregational in organization, resisting strong synodical authority and advocating separation between church and state.

The new church spent much time and energy defining the boundaries of the group of (true) believers, and they consequently disagreed about the core of the sermon: should it preach judgment or grace? Sermons that prodded listeners to grasp the buoy of faith were regarded as Arminian, because they ascribed the power of faith to people instead of to God alone. The middle ranks of Van Raalte and Brummelkamp joined Scholte in his refusal to limit the gospel to a passive resignation and supported his efforts to find or create common ground with other believers. The first group saw this attitude as a standing invitation to impurity in the church. Van der Meulen sided with Van Raalte and Scholte and regretted the strict policing of the boundaries, which led to bitter internal divisions.

For practical and theological reasons, the members of the second and third groups were most likely to emigrate. Their horizons were broad, they were more flexible about entering new arrangements, and they allowed for more individual freedom. Emigrants from the first group were suspicious of innovations. Proposals to introduce hymn singing, to open the Lord's table to outsiders, to abandon Christian holidays, or to make preaching from the Heidelberg Catechism optional, were red flags. Van der Meulen did not belong to this group of traditionalists. He decided not to wear the old costume or sing the sixteenth-century translations of the Psalms, fearing superstitious attachment. His theology was orthodox and conventional, but his practice was flexible when he saw traditions impeding the conversion of seekers.<sup>8</sup>

### *Building a Community*

After apprenticing in Rotterdam and his native Middelharnis, Van der Meulen's main mission field was in the province of Zeeland, where he began his ministry in the summer of 1841. As a kind of itinerant preacher he served the twelve seceded congregations in the province. After several of these had acquired their own ministers, he concentrated on the congregation in Goes but continued to travel around. His formative period as a preacher took place in depressed times: economically, politically, and spiritually. The first two were beyond his influence, but in the religious realm he found great satisfaction. His practical sermons found a welcome reception, and the apex of his ministry was a mass conversion following a sermon in Axel.<sup>9</sup> When disaster struck in 1845 — the potato blight hit Europe hard and droughts destroyed the other crops — he called for a public day of thanksgiving, fasting, and prayer to heed God's judgment, while blaming the government for being passive and lax. Though his horizons were broad—he explicitly listed the signs of revival elsewhere in Europe and as far away as China—he warned believers that they should not emigrate for the wrong, worldly, reasons, such as to escape God's judgment or to avoid helping others in greater need.<sup>10</sup> Van der Meulen's friends and colleagues convinced him that the best argument for emigration was the apparent inevitability of God's judgment. They saw emigration as a way out of the current spiritual and social depression, and they persuaded him to join the group that planned to leave for America. It was a providential escape.<sup>11</sup>

The story of the Zeeland departure in 1847, when 457 people left on three ships, has frequently been told. Important to note here, however, is that Van der Meulen functioned as the conscience of the group. He was perfect for the job, thanks to his many regional connections, his flexibility, his great social skills, and his humor. These qualities positioned him as a magnificent mediator in the many disputes that the emigration enterprise caused. He followed the Zeelanders who had decided to join Van Raalte in Michigan, where they arrived in the summer of 1847.

His irenic intent was evident in his suggestion to call the settlement “Brothertown” because all provincial groups had to live cordially together. This proved that though he had strong ties to the province of Zeeland, he was not a provincial chauvinist. The name Zeeland ultimately won out, simply because it proved a better advertisement, as subsequent years would confirm. The early history of Zeeland has been told elsewhere, so it is unnecessary to repeat it here. Suffice it to say that it took five years of hardship to establish a viable colony. Van der Meulen shared his meager means with his neighbors in order to prevent the first settlers from abandoning the colony. This personal commitment stole the hearts of his community, and he was elevated to saintly status as founding minister. After he had secured stability at home, his attention moved to the community at large. Thanks to his strong constitution, he could assist the other churches as well.<sup>12</sup>

### *Wider World*

By 1852 the Michigan *kolonie* had proved its viability, and Van der Meulen could spread his wings. In the spring of that year he asked the Board of Domestic Missions on behalf of Classis Holland for funds to travel to Pella to establish a Reformed church there after the Reverend Henry P. Scholte had alienated himself from his congregation. He was awarded \$25, but more urgent duties in Michigan prevented him from going. Instead he used the money to defray the costs he had incurred to

put the troubled churches in Rochester and Buffalo back on their feet.<sup>13</sup> Examples of similar problem-solving operations in the immigrant churches are numerous.

During his first decade in the United States Van der Meulen had strengthened the links between his constituency and a national support group, which led to full integration into the Reformed Church in America. With the founding farmer of Zeeland, Jannes van de Luyster, he attended the General Synod of the Reformed Church in June of 1855 to promote the Holland Academy and ensure that its graduates could enter the seminary at New Brunswick, New Jersey. His success inspired him to report favorably about the denomination.<sup>14</sup> He found the church to be reliable in doctrine, though its practices were not perfect (e.g., laxity regarding weekly sermons on the Heidelberg Catechism as well as church discipline). He concluded to his satisfaction that the students at the seminary were faithfully taught the traditional Reformed doctrines.<sup>15</sup> The next year he wrote a Dutch pamphlet with his colleagues Albertus Van Raalte and Pieter Oggel about the *Hollandsche Gereformeerde Kerk in Noord-Amerika* to introduce new immigrants to the history, doctrines, and government of this church. He used biblical metaphors to confirm its strengths: the church was as the glorious city Zion, and its mission boards and educational institutions were its palaces and towers.<sup>16</sup>

Education was a key concern for the colony, and Van der Meulen was one of its strongest supporters. This was not only so because the Dutch ban on parochial schools was one of the chief complaints of the Seceders, but also because most immigrants had left the Netherlands to improve the lives of their children.<sup>17</sup> Van der Meulen strongly supported Van Raalte's plan for a school and set out to find funds and support. He appealed to the churches with strong biblical pleas: Where should the "Elkanahs and Hannahs" who promised their Samuels to God's service go? What answer should they give to the question that Bathsheba posed for king David when he was old and his succession had not been arranged? The response to his appeal was positive. The Dutch immigrants recognized that there were openings in the U.S. for civil servants and that the Dutch could occupy these positions. Without proper education the mission "to spread the light of the gospel in the dark places of the earth" could not be accomplished. Therefore a school should serve the entire region and not only the town of Holland, and it ought not only provide for ministers, but for all kinds of civic functions.<sup>18</sup>

Since Van der Meulen belonged to the older generation, having emigrated in his forty-seventh year, his focus was clearly on the next generation. In 1852 his two sons were eighteen and fourteen years old and ready for more schooling. In September 1854 he accompanied his oldest son Jacob, with two other Dutch students, to New Brunswick, where they became part of the small student body of fifty in the preparatory school of Rutgers College and fifty at the seminary, taught by three professors.<sup>19</sup> The senior pastor had promised God his son for the ministry after his other four children had died.<sup>20</sup> Both sons served first the new immigrant communities in Wisconsin and later filled the most prestigious pulpits in Michigan—in Holland and Grand Rapids. They were shaped by the East and respected by the West. Their father remained interested in education, as is proven by the special attention (and appreciation) he had for the academic program and standards of the seminary in Kampen, the Netherlands, when he visited his old country in 1869.<sup>21</sup>

Van der Meulen always preached in the Dutch language. This was not a conscious rejection of English but was a result of his inability to use the language effectively. Rare testimony comparing the oratorical skills of Van Raalte and Van der Meulen in 1852 shows a preference for the latter: “Rev. VanderMeulen seems by far to be the best liked of the two... as well on as off the pulpit. The cause is that he quickly acquired the American manners and customs, which makes him speak freely, while the other is rather confused and thinks he knows everything and that every one must follow him.”<sup>22</sup> One should not attach too much weight to this personal judgment, since it might very well mean that the author disliked Van Raalte and preferred the impromptu style that Van der Meulen had acquired already in the Netherlands. It does, however, reveal why Van der Meulen made an easy transition to American-style behavior. He promoted the teaching of English early on and became an American citizen as soon as he could. He was not afraid of American influences, and he incorporated familiar ones while resisting those that were far beyond his experience.<sup>23</sup>

His gift for selecting relevant Bible passages and applying them to specific situations enabled Van der Meulen to touch hearts and souls. He used a variety of opportunities to make spiritual appeals. Audiences made donations readily after one of his moving addresses. The favorite stories told by his sons about their father included those of the conversions of young people.<sup>24</sup> The premature deaths of his two daughters in 1857 were followed by a revival in his church. This interest in revivals remained until the end of his life, and just before he died he went to listen to the revivalist Earle.<sup>25</sup> So, in his behavior he resembled the American revival preachers even though he was not theologically influenced by them.

Part of his appeal came from the fact that he took his own medicine: he applied these texts to himself as well. For example, he took the text of his 1859 New Year’s Eve sermon on Exodus 4:20b (about Moses who took his staff at hand to return to Egypt) as a sign; it prompted him to accept a call to Chicago. He had become deeply rooted in West Michigan, where he owned hundreds acres of land and his own homestead (which he did not sell until 1875). He was surrounded by friends and relatives and served a large congregation with three hundred full members, which had become fully self-supporting in 1856. Chicago, on the other hand, had only a small congregation of fifty members amidst a large number of unaffiliated Dutch immigrants. Van der Meulen realized the potential for growth and reasoned that if the fish were unwilling to come to the net, he would take the net to them. He set up a series of Thursday evening services that drew more people to the church, inspired the members to raise funds to build a new edifice, and collected a \$400 grant from the Board of Domestic Missions of the Reformed Church in America. Although his pastorate lasted only two years, it was sufficient to put the church back on its feet. This kind of activity was typical for the revered minister; before facilitating the Chicago edifice, he had dedicated seventeen others. This result was what he had in mind, and he could move on to the next hotspot.<sup>26</sup>

An urgent call from Grand Rapids brought him from the Windy City to the Furniture City in 1861. Van der Meulen had known Second Reformed Church from its beginning. A fellow student under Scholte, the Reverend H.G. Klijn, its first minister, had continued to serve the church as its main counsel, preaching there once every month for its first five years. In 1857 the church had split over the issues that led to the founding of the Christian Reformed Church, and the congregation felt very much discouraged

when the membership dwindled to eighty souls. Van der Meulen teamed up with his friend, the entrepreneur Frans van Driele, who was the leading elder. He evaluated the spirit of the younger generation, and they persuaded him that there was a future for that congregation, and it proved to be true during the decade of his ministry. In Grand Rapids Van der Meulen organized his first revival, which took place in January of 1870. It was adapted to suit congregational preferences and was limited to one week of prayer meetings and daily sermons. Despite the twenty recorded confessions of faith, he hesitated to continue, fearing it resembled a Methodist revival.<sup>27</sup> Nevertheless, it proved he had fully adapted to the style of American preachers.

#### *Return to the Netherlands and Evaluation of His Role*

Just before the event signaling the culmination of his adaptation to his adopted homeland, Van der Meulen had the opportunity to evaluate the immigration enterprise by returning to the land of his birth. Again a personal loss prepared him for this move, which he made as he approached his seventieth birthday. His wife died during a church service in February 1869. To help him recuperate from this loss, his consistory granted the old pastor a vacation of several weeks. The Classis of Holland had decided to reconnect with the seceded churches in the Netherlands, which would meet in June of 1869 in Middelburg, the capital of the province of Zeeland. The fact that it commissioned its own representative to the Dutch synod was a sign of the relative independence of the Holland Classis. Thanks to an official request from the Dutch Seceders to the Reformed Church in America, the Synod of Philadelphia cabled him that he could act as the official representative of the American church.<sup>28</sup>

The timing of this trip was important because both sides of the Atlantic had to assess the future of the relationship between the old country and the immigrants: would the next generation maintain these contacts?<sup>29</sup> The 1869 Middelburg Synod of the Seceders was crucial because it united the various seceded factions into one Christian Reformed Church. For Van der Meulen personally it was a time of celebration and reunion. From Rotterdam he traveled by steamboat with his former colleagues and friends Anthony Brummelkamp, Helenius De Cock, and Nicholas Dosker to the capital of Zeeland.

His own festive mood was matched by the warm and open atmosphere at the synod, which lacked all traces of sectarianism. He was so touched by the cordial spirit of the meeting that it struck him that the Millennium must have arrived. The flood of attention and invitations reassured him that he was fully recognized and accepted as their old pastor. Rumors of his alleged liberalism proved false. Thirty years earlier he had been alone in the Province of Zeeland, poorly trained, despised and fined by the authorities; and now he returned to an area served by sixteen seceded ministers, and the civil leaders all came to listen and talk to him. Twenty-two years after his emigration Van der Meulen announced that the new colony had matured. This contrast between the time of his departure and his present reception was a justification of his choices.

He deferred questions about the purity of the Reformed Church and turned the tables. He told the seceded believers in the Netherlands that his presence as the official representative of the Reformed Church represented a badge of honor for the Dutch church because it demonstrated that this new denomination was not sectarian but was true to its Calvinist character.<sup>30</sup> He confirmed that the Reformed Church in America and the Christian Seceded Church in the Netherlands were completely similar in

doctrine and church government.<sup>31</sup> He told his old church that this foreign recognition meant they were considered the true guardians of Calvinism in the Netherlands. Privately, he expected that the growth of the Seceders would help the Netherlands to return to its Calvinist moorings.

To the very end Van der Meulen proved himself to be a true immigrant leader. He joined a group of new immigrants on their sober trip overland via Canada to Michigan instead of taking a comfortable train ride. In September 1869 his cousin Willem, the only living son of Cornelius's brother Eliza, emigrated with his family to Grand Rapids, where he worked as a porter and in the furniture industry.<sup>32</sup>

Rejuvenated by this joyful reunion, Van der Meulen returned to Grand Rapids and soon married a widow, Frouke VanderPloeg, in February 1870. He continued to work until 1873, when he retired. In addition to hardships, he experienced many satisfying events in his life. He lived to see his two sons become respected ministers, as did a number of men from his flock in the old country: Adriaan Zwemer, James Moerdijke, Arie Cz. Kuiper, W.P. de Jong, Hendrik Uiterwijk, and James de Pree.<sup>33</sup> He loved his office and continued to preach until the very end. He died peacefully in Grand Rapids on August 30, 1876, and was mourned by the entire colony.

His funeral was a public event. His body was carried by train from Grand Rapids to Zeeland. In his home town all stores and factories closed, and many mourners came to pay tribute. That his death ended an era is illustrated by the fact that the classis decided to place a marker at his grave. Within a month after his death the two regional bodies to which the churches of Zeeland and Grand Rapids belonged began taking their minutes in English instead of Dutch. James de Press wrote in the *Christian Intelligencer*, the magazine of the Reformed Church in America, "With myself, many of those who then constituted the youth of Zeeland look upon the departed brother as their spiritual father."<sup>34</sup>

### *Conclusion*

Historian James Bratt, in an article in the year 2000, characterized the role of one of the leading Christian Reformed ministers: "The challenge of a religious *leader* is to deploy spiritual resources effectively in concrete situations."<sup>35</sup> This is exactly what Cornelius van der Meulen did. His prestige rested on a foundation of humble origins, hard labor, community service, patriarchal appearance, and successful efforts in maintaining personal links with his pre- and post-emigration circles. Van der Meulen was the prototype of a new minister needed for serving a new colony founded at a time of mass migration. His strong constitution, stable personality, emphatic manner, great mobility, and practicality prepared him for a pioneering role in the Midwest and earned authority built on reliability. During his leadership in Michigan he prepared the Protestant Dutch immigrants for the next phase, when the balance shifted from rural towns to emerging cities. Without his gifts the immigrant churches would have found it much more difficult to spread from the rural areas into the cities.<sup>36</sup>

His own conversion experience after dramatic family events made him turn to the Seceders as a source of spiritual nourishment instead of the established *Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk*, but he never totally rejected the old church. This experience helped him to seek cooperation with others wherever possible. The Secession coincided with his own spiritual awakening and drew him into a

pioneering role that would harmonize with key elements of American evangelicalism. His limited training was enough to prepare him for the pulpit. While he was a passionate preacher who delivered practical sermons, his real strength lay in his close identification with his parishioners. After he had shared his concerns about immigration taking place for the wrong reasons, he came to view the move as an opportunity for growth.

Van der Meulen's legacy is to be found chiefly in the United States, but not exclusively so. The irenic minister helped the early immigrants to regain their self-respect and self-confidence by creating stable communities. Only seceded ministers such as Van der Meulen could organize a viable Dutch church in the Midwest. They were used to harsh conditions, possessed a broad authority in religious and practical matters, and developed new networks. His contacts with both the East Coast and the old country kept the old sources of support open and offered havens for new immigrants. He was particularly effective in tying urban and rural settlements together, a connection that would prove crucial for the survival of the churches and the colonies. He promoted education as an instrument for further expansion, and he approached the issue of language as a practical matter. His return to the old country helped him to confirm the wisdom of his decision to emigrate. In turn, however, his success and that of his cohorts in the United States helped to strengthen the position of the Christian Reformed denomination in the Netherlands. He saw his endeavors in the United States as a promise that orthodoxy could be restored even in the Netherlands as it had happened in America.

When in late 1876 the last examples of this type of colonial minister, Van der Meulen and Van Raalte, died within a period of three months, it signaled the end of an era. At that point the basic infrastructure of the Dutch immigrant churches in the Midwest had been completed. The educational institutions were in place to train the new generation of leaders who would be responsible for the integration of later waves of immigrants.

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<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank my co-editors Leon Van den Broeke and Dirk Mouw for their critical reading of this essay and their many useful suggestions. I used parts of my earlier publication on Van der Meulen, "Forgotten Founding Father: Cornelius VanderMeulen as Immigrant Leader," *Documentatieblad voor de Geschiedenis van de Nederlandse zending en overzeese kerken* 5.2 (Fall 1998): 1-23.

<sup>2</sup> A brief note on the sources. Van der Meulen left few primary documents. In addition to church records at various levels, a unique collection of testimonies of relatives and close friends, called the "Remembrances," was published immediately after his death in 1876. Even though it was meant as an eulogy, this collection of careful and detailed observations helps us to document the key moments in his life as well as his standing in the community. No dissenting voice was heard except among the True Brethren in the later Christian Reformed Church. *Ter nagedachtenis van Rev. Cornelius van der Meulen* (Grand Rapids, MI: De Standaard Drukkerij, 1876). Although his official name was Cornelis, I use the anglicized form Cornelius as a matter of consistency.

<sup>3</sup> Julian H. VanderMeulen, "Genealogy VanderMeulen family," chart 1, Herrick Public Library, Holland, MI. This genealogy is not fully reliable and has some dates wrong, such as the birth date of Annetje Elizabeth (correct is February 20, 1828) and the death of Anna (correct is March 8, 1849). The wedding date of his parents Jacob and Anna is May 8, 1785.

<sup>4</sup> A.J. van der Aa, *Aardrijkskundig woordenboek der Nederlanden* 7 (Gorinchem 1846) 920-927.

<sup>5</sup> Fred A. van Lieburg, "Kleine professoren, halve dominees, fijne dokters. Oefenaars op de pastorale markt in de vroegmoderne tijd," *Documentatieblad Nadere Reformatie* 22 (1998): 1-26.

<sup>6</sup> *Nagedachtenis*, 142.

<sup>7</sup> Melis te Velde, "The Dutch Background of the American Secession from the RCA in 1857," in George Harinck and Hans Krabbendam, eds., *Breaches and Bridges: Reformed Subcultures in the Netherlands, Germany, and the United States* (Amsterdam: VU University Press, 2000), 85-100.

- <sup>8</sup> He published a letter describing a conversion experience of one of his Dutch parishioners, “Overlezenswaardige brief dien wij onze vrienden en geburen volstrekt moeten laten lezen,” *De Hollander*, 29 December 1852.
- <sup>9</sup> *Nagedachtenis*, 39-43.
- <sup>10</sup> C. van der Meulen, *Verneder u dan onder de krachtige hand Gods. Opwekking tot het houden van eenen algemeen dank- vast en bededag op Woensdag, den 25sten Februarij 1846* (Amsterdam: Hoogkamer & Comp., 1846) 4 and 8.
- <sup>11</sup> *Nagedachtenis*, 75.
- <sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 80 and 105. He was a physically strong man and not afraid to travel. According to his son he only missed two Sundays services in his active life, due to an accident with his horse and buggy. [How personality mattered is shown by his successor in the First Reformed Church in Zeeland, Herman Stobbelaar, who gave judgmental sermons and lacked self-criticism and sensitivity to the spiritual traditions of his parishioners. VandeLuyster recorded his version of the clash with Stobbelaar in a memo, Joint Archives of Holland, VandeLuyster Collection, box 1, folder “1861.” After Stobbelaar had accepted a call to Town Holland, Wisconsin, a sizeable minority of 14 proposed to call Van der Meulen back (minutes January 25, 1865).
- <sup>13</sup> New Brunswick Theological Seminary, Correspondence of the Board of Domestic Missions box 14, folder “Reports of Aided Churches.” Van der Meulen traveled to Pella in September 1857. The money was also used to cover his medical expenses after an accident
- <sup>14</sup> *The Acts and Proceedings of the General Synod of the Reformed Protestant Dutch Church in North America, convened at the City of New-Brunswick, June 1855* (New York: Board of Publication, 1855), 581-2.
- <sup>15</sup> *Classis Holland Minutes* 179 and 180; Johannis Marckii, *Christianae Theologiae Medulla* (Trajecti ad Rhenum 1742). See *Catalogue of the Theological Seminary and Rutgers College Libraries, New Brunswick, NJ* (New Brunswick, NJ: Press of J. Terhune and Son, 1854) shows no titles in Dutch. Howard Hageman, *Two Centuries Plus: The Story of New Brunswick Theological Seminary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1984), 64-73. The Zeeland church contributed \$ 18.70 to the furnishing of Hertzog Hall.
- <sup>16</sup> C. Van der Meulen, A.C. Van Raalte, and P.J. Oggel, *Beknopte verhandeling over de geschiedenis, leer en regering der Hollandsche gereformeerde Protestantsche kerk in Noord-Amerika* (New York 1857). *Nagedachtenis*, 89. The Board of Publication of the RCA commissioned one thousand copies. Van der Meulen’s enthusiasm for the RCA was not shared by everyone. He was reported to have said in 1855 that the fathers of the Secession of 1834 had been haughty when they announced that they were the only true church, and that members of other churches had joined in a communion service. Moreover, he persisted in the distribution of tracts, which suggested general atonement, though the classis had found them incompatible with the Calvinist tradition. Van der Meulen defended his act with the argument that the tract was useful to reach the unconverted, though not to teach the believers. According to a memoir of Jan Gelok documenting his departure from the Reformed Church, dated Winter 1864 and filed in the Minutes First CRC Grand Rapids, book 1, Heritage Hall, Calvin College. (Hereafter cited as HH). See also the Minutes of the Hollandsch Gereformeerde gemeente van Holland vol. 2, 31 August 1858: brother Wilterdink resigns his membership from the congregation because children of non-members are baptized and Van der Meulen preaches that these children are part of the covenant. *Classis Holland Minutes* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1950), 203.
- <sup>17</sup> *Classis Holland Minutes*, September 1, 1852, 100-107.
- <sup>18</sup> Hope College, Joint Archives of Holland, Minutes Classis Wisconsin RCA, April 9-10 and September 10, 1862.
- <sup>19</sup> Letter A.C. Van Raalte to Garretson 19 September 54. The first group of Dutch students were Jacob Vander Meulen, Rutgers, 1858, and New Brunswick Theological Seminary (NBTS), 1861; Christiaan Vander Veen, same year; John Vander Meulen, Rutgers, 1859 and NBTS, 1862; John H. Karsten and Egbert Winter, Rutgers, 1860 and NBTS, 1863, John Howard Raven comp., *Biographical Record of Theological Seminary New Brunswick 1784-1911* (New Brunswick, NJ, Printed for the Seminary by the Rev. Archibald Laidlie Memorial Fund, 1912), 146, 151, 154-55. These are the first five graduates from Rutgers and NBTS and who had graduated from Holland Academy. After theological education began at Hope College in 1866, few students of the colony went East for their seminary education.
- <sup>20</sup> *Nagedachtenis*, 25.
- <sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 144.
- <sup>22</sup> Argus from Grand Rapids in the *Sheboygan Nieuwsbode*, February 17, 1852.
- <sup>23</sup> Joint Archives of Holland, Van der Meulen Papers, file 6, Naturalization Record October 5, 1852.
- <sup>24</sup> *Nagedachtenis*, 82-84.
- <sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.
- <sup>26</sup> Zeeland Historical Society, Zeeland, Michigan, “Eerste kerkeradsboek Gereformeerde Kerk Zeeland, Michigan,” Minutes February 25, 1859. *De Hollander*, July 11, 1860. Letter Mrs. Budde to Wormser, late 1860 or early 1861 Johan Stellingwerff, Robert P. Swierenga, ed., and Walter Lagerwey, trans., *Iowa Letters: Dutch Immigrants on the American Frontier* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 482. Letters C. Van der Meulen to John Garretson, February 17 and May 9, 1859, Board of Domestic Missions. The correspondence of the Board of Domestic Missions, Reformed Church in America, New Brunswick, NJ, box 15, fldrs. Jan-Mar, Apr-Dec. 1859.
- <sup>27</sup> According to Frans Van Driele in *Nagedachtenis*, 126.

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<sup>28</sup> It had done something similar in 1866 when classis Holland had sent a letter which Van Raalte presented to the members the synod of the Seceders in Amsterdam.

<sup>29</sup> It also might have been prompted by the name change of 1867, when the word ‘Dutch’ was dropped and the denomination continued as the Reformed Church in America; W. van ‘t Spijker, “The Christian Reformed Church and the Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland,” in Peter De Klerk and Richard De Ridder, eds., *Perspectives on the Christian Reformed Church: Studies in Its History, Theology, and Ecumenicity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1983), 367; Gerald F. De Jong, “The Controversy over Dropping the Word Dutch from the Name of the Reformed Church,” *Reformed Review* 34 (Spring 1981): 158-70.

<sup>30</sup> *Nagedachtenis*, 140-2.

<sup>31</sup> *De Bazuin*, 27 August 1869. *Handelingen en verslagen van de Algemene Synoden van de Christelijk Afgescheidene Gereformeerde Kerk (1836-1869)* (Houten/Utrecht: Den Hertog, 1984), 986, 1021.

<sup>32</sup> Julian van der Meulen, “Genealogy,” VI 1 and VI 2. His children quickly assimilated and married outside the Dutch clan. *Nagedachtenis*, 147-8.

<sup>33</sup> Henry S. Lucas, ed., *Dutch Immigrant Memoirs and Related Writings* (rev. ed.; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), 2:413-14, 420-22, 447. *Nagedachtenis*, 93-4.

<sup>34</sup> *Classis Holland Minutes*, September 13, 1876; Joint Archives of Holland, Minutes Classis Grand River, September 20, 1876. James de Pree, “The Late Rev. C. Van der Meulen,” *Christian Intelligencer* September 28, 1876, 3-4. *Historical Souvenir of the Celebration of the Sixtieth Anniversary of the Colonization of the Hollanders in Western Michigan. Held in Zeeland, Michigan, August 21, 1907* (Executive Committee, 1908), 36.

<sup>35</sup> James D. Bratt, “Lammert J. Hulst: The Pastor as Leader in an Immigrant Community,” in Hans Krabbendam and Larry Wagenaar, eds., *The Dutch-American Experience: Essays in Honor of Robert P. Swierenga* (Amsterdam: VU University Press, 2000), 209-221, quotation on page 215.

<sup>36</sup> Charles Scott, “Its Missionary Work at Home,” in *Centennial Discourses: A Series of Sermons Delivered in the Year 1876, by the order of the General Synod of the Reformed (Dutch) Church in America* (New York: Board of Publication of the Reformed Church in America, 1877), 501-30, esp. 516.