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There is a Report of the First Reformed Church in Holland in the Minutes of the Classis of Holland

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17-18 April 1867

Holland, Michigan

There is a report of the First Reformed Church in Holland in the *Minutes of the Classis of Holland*. Dr. E. Wm. Kennedy who has annotated these minutes believes that the report on the life of the congregation was written by the pastor, Dr. Albertus C. Van Raalte. The revival of 1866 was mentioned. Kennedy's pertinent remarks about the report are as follows: "This largely gloomy, emotional report of the Holland church contrasts sharply with the mainly happy tone of the previous year's statement, and, whether Van Raalte actually penned these words himself (which he almost certainly did, given the complex, florid style), they probably reflect his despondency about the C[hristian] R[eformed] C[hurch] attacks on him and the R[eformed] P[rotestant] D[utch] C[hurch], into which he had led his followers. Van Raalte would resign as pastor of the Holland congregation this same year."

The classis minutes are in the Joint Archives of Holland. The Kennedy annotations are located in the Van Raalte Institute.

and God-offending, neighbor-reviling, lifeless formalism, and to heart-strengthening under the judgments of God by fruitbearing-hope in God and his promises, who will for the sake of his name be glorified in his own work.¹²³

Kalamazoo - There are no particular things to report. Never before has the congregation dwelt in greater love and unity of feelings. We are also seeing the presence of the Spirit. Benevolent contributions this year are significantly higher. What we really need is a new outpouring of the Spirit.

Muskegon - We may well thank the Lord for his hand of grace stretched out over us this past year. Because of significant growth, it became necessary for the congregation to build a new church building. The Lord has blessed us in this endeavor. We may continue to rejoice in a good and faithful attendance at the preaching of the Word.

Although in recent times it has become necessary for us to wrestle with certain problems, the Lord has not withheld his Holy Spirit from us. In some hearts, the preaching of the Word has led to genuine conversion. Very clear evidence for this has become apparent. There are others who have become distressed because of their sins, and seem to desire the redemption which can be found in Christ Jesus.

In all of this, however, there is an urgent need for a more generous outpouring of the Holy Spirit, so that we may walk in genuine humility and tender piety before the face of God, fighting against sin and our own deeply depraved nature that so often misleads, and serving him in accordance with his good and holy will. May the Lord grants us this in his grace!

North Holland - We have reason for thanksgiving for the many blessings that the Lord has hitherto granted us. There is present in the congregation unity and mutual love. There seems to be a great desire to hear the proclamation of the gospel, so that we may rejoice in a great attendance from day of rest day to day of rest. We are happy to be able to report that the preaching is hallowed in the hearts of any and all, so that the promise is fulfilled among us, "My word shall not return to me void."¹²⁴

Our earnest prayer is that the Lord in a rich measure may pour out his Spirit so that sinners may be converted and believers be built up.

¹²³ This largely gloomy, emotional report of the Holland church contrasts sharply with the mainly happy tone of the previous year's statement, and, whether Van Raalte actually penned these words himself (which he almost certainly did, given the complex, florid style), they probably reflect his despondency about the CRC attacks on him and the RPDC, into which he had led his followers. Van Raalte would resign as pastor of the Holland congregation this same year.

¹²⁴ Isaiah 55:11.

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while, with an eye to the future, we pray with the poet Metrical Psalm 68:14¹¹³

→ Holland - We do not believe that the Lord, who walks in the midst of the golden candlesticks, finds our works perfect,¹¹⁴ in comparison with other congregations. Nevertheless, his grace assures us that he sees many good things, for he grants us many good things. The revival granted last year has left precious fruits: in the drawing [people] out of darkness then and in the revival of many children of God. Our Sabbath days are grassy¹¹⁵ places of rest in our journey through the wilderness; many enjoy the Word with hunger and are rooted more in Jesus; and for others it is a surprising to us, quietly working heaven.

Very pleasing was the cheerful building of a church in the south corner of our parish.¹¹⁶ Lack of room in the village church and the dispute flowing from it about whether or not to rent pews caused some families to be alienated or secede. They did this on the pretext that our pastors are not understandable or are pushers of universal grace¹¹⁷; or that discipline was not maintained concerning doctrine; or that the Dutch Reformed Church no longer stands in the truth.¹¹⁸

This schismatic spirit gives birth to groanings and should deeply humble us as a judgment on God's house. Besides, in this land of our alienship, may we well blush with shame that our own people can revile and slander such Christian churches in which men like the Alexanders, Hodge,¹¹⁹ et al., those pillars of the truth, are esteemed as influential leaders and as fathers. Moreover, it is to be deeply deplored that some preachers, under the banner of particular persuasion,¹²⁰ promote this schismatic spirit in the Netherlands;

¹¹³ This particular verse, in the standard 1773 version of the Psalter sung in the *Hervormde Kerk* (Reformed Church) and some of the churches which seceded from it, speaks of the the glorification and triumph of God in through his obedient people, while the kings of the earth must obey him too. The metrical psalm verses do not correspond with those in the Psalms, the former compressing two or more of the latter into one verse.

¹¹⁴ "These things saith he... who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks" (Revelation 2:1); "I have not found thy works perfect before God" (Revelation 3:2). In both instances it is the risen, glorified Christ who is speaking.

¹¹⁵ *Grazige* (grassy, green) is probably a reference to Psalm 23:2 ("green pastures").

¹¹⁶ What would be known as the Ebenezer Reformed Church, with the Rev. A. C. Kuiper as pastor.

¹¹⁷ The charge, presumably now leveled by CRC critics, that universal grace was being taught from Classis Holland pulpits, was not new. It first appeared in the 1853 complaint against the use of Richard Baxter's popular *Call to the Unconverted* (in Dutch translation). Baxter (1615-1691), an English Puritan theologian, taught election but also that Christ died for all rather than only for the elect; this latter teaching contradicted that of the Canons of Dort. *Classis Holland Minutes*, 144, 181; Beets, *De Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerk*, 90-91; O. G. Oliver, Jr., "Richard Baxter," in Elwell, ed., *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 129-130; 1862-1865 minutes, note 77.

¹¹⁸ These common accusations were presumably made by the relatively few persons who had been leaving Van Raalte's church to join the newly formed (1865) CRC congregation in town; see note 36 above; also 1859-1862 minutes, note 69.

¹¹⁹ The much-published Revs. Archibald Alexander (1772-1851), James Waddel Alexander (1804-1859), Joseph Addison Alexander (1809-1860), and Charles Hodge (1797-1878) all taught, for a combined total of about 125 years, at Princeton Theological Seminary in New Jersey, the bastion of Northern Old School Presbyterianism. The Princeton theologians long exercised an influence far beyond the confines of the Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A. Mark A. Noll, ed., *The Princeton Theology 1812-1921: Scripture, Science, and Theological Method from Archibald Alexander to Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield*, updated edition (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House Company, 2001), 11-48. Van Raalte's copy of Archibald Alexander's widely disseminated book on the canon of Scripture is preserved at the A. C. Van Raalte Institute, Holland, Michigan. The RPDC enjoyed perennial cordial, cooperative relations with their fellow Calvinists, the Presbyterians, in this country; a number of RPDC congregations and individuals (both English- and Dutch-speaking) went over to the Presbyterians in the nineteenth century; Corwin, *Digest*, 516-529; Van Koevering, *Legends of the Dutch*, 551, 571-573; Van Hinte, *Netherlanders in America*, 367, 387.

¹²⁰ *Bijzondere rigting* means literally "special" (particular) "direction, persuasion, creed, or orientation"; in the present context it refers to the mentalities or parties that had divided the 1834 secession movement

yes, that even preachers, although wholly unacquainted with the nurseries [educational institutions] and the synods of the Christian churches of this land, nevertheless persist in these abominations through their example and ministry, under the pretense of zeal for the truth and struggle against apostate churches. This dark sign of the times,¹²¹ the cooling of love, the schisms between confessors of the truth that cause God's name to be blasphemed and iniquities to be multiplied,¹²² and the power of the truth to be expelled from many consciences, is for us a matter of deep humbling before God. It is a strong incentive, watching and praying, to stay close to the Lord, to be preserved by the truth and love, to guard against carnal worldliness, blinding service of mammon

almost from the beginning. In particular, the stricter Calvinist Northern party (De Cock, Van Velzen) was suspicious of the milder Calvinist Gelderland party (Brummelkamp) that included Van Raalte. See 1858-1859 minutes, notes 144, 151, 155. Those who seceded beginning in 1857 to form the CRC had been increasingly active in the Netherlands press in "informing" the seceder churches there about the "errors" of the RPDC.

¹²¹ "Signs of the times"; Matthew 16:3.

¹²² Matthew 24:12: "And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold." Romans 2:24: "For the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you."