The West India Company and the Reformed Church: Neglect or Concern?

Willem Frijhoff

The West India Company's neglect of the Reformed religion in New Netherland is an old commonplace in American historiography. It has found its counterpart in the claim that many of the ministers sent across the ocean were of inferior intellectual or moral quality. This presumed neglect contrasts sharply with the equally old archetype depicting the basically religious concerns of godly New England. Almost from the very beginning early New Netherland history has been read as, to quote George L. Smith, "first and foremost a commercial enterprise to which the Reformed faith was appended as a godly afterthought." Oliver Rink, in turn, asserts that "indifference characterized the Company's attitude toward religion" and that "the directors never have shown much enthusiasm for supporting a colonial ministry." Recent studies, such as that of Dennis J. Maika (1995), tend to reinforce that picture: commercial gain is identified as the major motive for early American colonization and the spirit of economic enterprise as its virtually unique feature. According to this historical image, the immigrants of New Netherland and the authorities at home — the directors of the West India Company, the patroons, and the individual settlers — would have had barely any concern other than material profit.

Certainly, other voices can be heard. In their still essential monographs on the Reformed Church in New Netherland, both Albert Eekhof and Frederick Zwierlein started from the assumption that the Reformed Church determined to a large extent the religious experience and the color of culture in the North American colony. But there were some biases. Eekhof, who put the church ministers in the center of his analysis, did not really comfort Bastiaen Krol's life course, and he decidedly abhorred dominie Evertardus Bogardus. This dislike greatly affected his appreciation of religious affairs. In his eyes, a church official had to be pious, zealous, fashionable, of irreplaceable morals and civilized manners, and a devout follower of the church's directives — just like a minister of his own time. Eekhof's standards were high and respectable, but we may well wonder whether they always applied to the century he was studying.

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The same can be said of Oliver Rink's statements quoted above. Did he not unconsciously apply the norms of our secular society and present-day standards of spiritual service to a pre-industrial colonial enterprise, without asking exactly how the religious life of New Netherland was articulated with the mentality of the time and the conditions of the Dutch colonial empire? George Smith has more acutely recognized the importance, both in patria and overseas, of the "Kulturkampf between predikanten and merchants for control of Dutch society." In his opinion, a "Reformed" state was normal policy for the West India Company, but when commercial interests or problems of authority were at stake, this concern was put in second place.

In fact, the image of spiritual neglect has very old roots. It bears features of the general stereotype of the Dutch in seventeenth-century Europe as a commercially skilled people but in foreign affairs destitute of moral inhibitions and religious principles. Besides, two historical factors may be mentioned with regard to New Netherland. On the issue of the great conflict between the Company and the free colonists, embodied in the struggle between the faction of director Willem Kieft and that of minister Bogardus, for example, the spokesman of the commonality, Adriaen van der Donck, has, in his Remonstrance of New Netherland (1650), formally charged the directors of the Company and the director-general of New Netherland with neglect of matters of the church and religious affairs.

But criticism came not only from within. The English colonists of New England have often stressed the ungodliness of the Dutch society next door. In August 1642 they asserted, for example, in a political statement that the Dutch in New


6 Smith, Religion and Trade, 125.

Netherland lived without any rule, in a state of ungodliness which was not becoming to believers in the Gospel of Christ. Their virtuous indignation was meant to serve, of course, a political goal. Yet the permanent tension between the two colonies favored a competition in which the mutual stereotypes of the godly and the ungodly were pushed to such extremes that they would leave durable marks on the image that each territory cherished of its neighbor and were to play a role somehow in the political events of later decades.

Since the old image of the godliness of New England has been challenged recently, there is room to take a fresh look at early New Netherland too. I shall limit myself to the period prior to the inauguration of Pieter Stuyvesant as director-general in 1647, since this faithful minister’s son was the first director to interfere actively and with full conviction in religious matters. On his arrival, something changed in the relationship between society and religion. Indeed, it may well be argued that on the religious level too, the short history of New Netherland should be divided into at least two periods. The dividing line is, in this case, the year 1646/47. After a physically and morally devastating war and the splitting of New Amsterdam society into two factions which were no longer on speaking terms, both authorities of the colony, the director and the minister, were finally replaced by new Company servants.

Of course, there is no reason to present New Netherland society as more religious than it was. One may basically agree with George L. Smith’s analysis as related above. However, there is room for some shading. The principal point of my reassessment is to argue that one should not oppose commercial interest to religious concern. For seventeenth-century men and women commerce and religion were two equally necessary dimensions of the same reality which had to be articulated together and, indeed, received different expressions according to the circumstances. Great merchants could be pious believers, and intelligent ministers would try to propose useful articulations between religion and commerce, as did the pietist minister Godfried Udemans in his influential treatise ‘t Geestelyck Roer van ‘t Coopmans Schip (The spiritual rudder of the merchant-vessel, 1636), which tried to reconcile the requirements of religion with the changing necessities of international commerce, including slavery.

My argument can be broken apart into three elements, but I will deal with them indistinctly, in the chronological order suggested by the succession of Company officials.

First, we should more carefully observe the personalities and the life courses of the ecclesiastical officials sent to New Netherland and try to discover exactly what links them together. It may well be necessary to go back to the Netherlands to find such links which remain concealed in the American sources but can explain some hidden conditions, relations, or causalities.

Second, we should try to establish the precise nature of the church officials’ relations with the New Netherland committee within the board of directors of the West India Company and with the members of the Amsterdam consistory and the clasis who sent them overseas. Indeed, early modern society was a community built up by networks of patronage and protection. Any real understanding of such a society should start from a reconstruction of these networks.

Finally, we should carefully analyze the general character of the West India Company as a pre-industrial organization with a delegated sovereignty, and of its commercial and religious policy, which reflected the global Dutch society. More specifically, there is still much to discover about the members and the policy of the New Netherland committee which prepared the measures taken for the colony and may be considered as the responsible agency on its behalf.

One has opposed the policy of the West India Company to that of the patroons, especially Kiliaen van Rensselaer. This is to forget that van Rensselaer had been himself an influential member of the New Netherland committee within the Company. Both as a committee member and as a patroon, van Rensselaer looked for faithful ministers and pious collaborators. His opinion of the ministers played an important role in his assessments of the colony’s situation, hence his interventions in favor of godly persons who would be able to foster a tight collaboration between secular and spiritual interests. Clearly, he had recognized such a man in dominie Johannes Megapolensis: pious, learned, orthodox, and strong and inflexible as far as Christian doctrine was concerned but with enough flexibility in social life and in pastoral matters to make him fit as a leader of the already multiconfessional and multicolored colony overseas. Another such person was Lucas Smit, a devout and honest young fellow from Courland who, in the

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**Image Description:** Satirical representation of the Synod of Dordrecht, 1618-1619, establishing Reformed orthodoxy, by an unknown etcher of Remonstrant feelings, who added the name of Simon Goulart, a well known orthodox Reformed minister (Rijksmuseum Amsterdam).
autumn of 1641, crossed the ocean at the service of van Rensselaer. At his arrival in New Amsterdam, minister Bogardus met him, of course. He was so stricken by Smit’s piety that he kept him in his own service until, nine months later, on the initiative of the newly sent minister Megapolensis, the Rensselaerswijk assistant Anthony de Hooges took him away from Bogardus in spite of his proposal to indemnify van Rensselaer and sent the young Smit as a farmhand and clerk to the patroonship.9

One of the pitfalls of social history is a too hasty generalization. Indeed, it is not difficult to reduce the image of the first spiritual leaders of New Netherland, sent out by the West India Company on proposal of the consistory or the classis of Amsterdam, to a commonplace picture of ordained ministers, very much resembling their colleagues in patria.10 However, too little attention has been paid to their personal backgrounds and to the religious color of those with whom they remained in contact. The choice of the comforters of the sick and the ministers was not totally haphazard but obeyed certain considerations of fitness for such tasks as were required aboard ship or overseas. Hence, it may express a certain preference of Company and church officials for the styling of religious and cultural life in New Netherland. Likewise, it is easy to isolate each one of the ministers by identifying his particularities and his failures. For a good understanding of the religious policy of the West India Company, it may be, however, much wiser to look for what united them and tied them together. Let us start with the first church official of New Netherland, Bastiaen Jansz Krol.

**Bastiaen Jansz Krol.** There remains some mystery surrounding Bastiaen Krol, or Crol (1595-1674), whose life story has been intensively scrutinized by the Dutch Church historian Albert Eekhof.11 Krol’s late baptism at the age of twenty-one and his Frisian origin make it plausible that he grew up as a Mennonite. Mennonites, who rejected infant baptism, were particularly numerous in Friesland, in particular at Harlingen, the Frisian harbor town he came from, according to the indication of the marriage records of Amsterdam, where he married on February 7, 1615. There may, however, remain a doubt about his true origin. Indeed, his first wife, Annetje Stoffelsdr, was born at Esens, a small town of Harlingerland, a district which, contrary to the suggestion contained in its name, does not surround the town of Harlingen but is a coastal region in the county of East Frisia, a hundred miles to the east. Abroad, marriages between people from the same town or region were current practice, since ethnic grouping tended to serve as a survival strategy in a hostile environment or under rough living conditions. Krol was adopted into the Reformed community of Amsterdam at his baptism in the New Church on February 23, 1616, consecutively to the equally Reformed baptism of his newborn son Thonis on August 16, 1615, six months after his marriage.

If ever Bastiaen Krol had been educated as a Mennonite, he was not one by that time. There might even be reason to believe that he pertained to that important group of late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century Dutchmen who, due to the hardness and the confusion of those times, initially confessed no particular religion at all and who were baptized only at a later stage in their lives.12 Had Bastiaen Krol, being a caffawercker (velours worker), perhaps been subject to some conversion experience, either as a former Mennonite or from

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West India House at the Haarlemmerstraat (Herenmarkt), Amsterdam, since 1623 headquarters of the West India Company (photograph by the author).

his previous unbelief? Such experiences were rather common among craftsmen of the early seventeenth century, when popular piety still expressed itself freely and was not yet molded into the standards of the official church. The second New Netherland minister, Everardus Bogardus, had come to his ministry through a similar conversion experience. And his Rensselaerswijk colleague Megapolensis was himself a convert from Catholicism. Such a conversion would explain Krol’s initial zeal for the cause of the Reformed religion.

As we know, Krol served the West India Company in different functions, first as a comforter of the sick (1624-1626), then in two periods as a commissioner, or commander, at Fort Orange (1626-1632 and 1638-1644), and, in the meantime, as provisional director-general of New Netherland (1632-1633). In between, he must have continued to sail as a merchant. Being a commissioner at Fort Orange, he served at the same time as a representative of the patron Kilian van Rensselaer. When conflicts arose between the directors and the patron, Krol choose in favor of his employers, the Company directors. His loyalty went to the Company first. Quite clearly, in his later years Krol did not get on as well as did some other officials of the West India Company. On October 15, 1645, he signed at Amsterdam with a shaky hand his probate inventory,

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10 See, for example, Gerald F. De Jong, The Dutch Reformed Church in the American Colonies (Grand Rapids, Mich., 1978) and his articles on the same subject.

written after his wife's death and one year after his return from New Netherland. The inventory shows a shabby interior, provided with only the most indispensable furniture, utensils, and kitchen tools. His six shirts and seven chairs are said to be in a bad state. Eekhof, who consulted this inventory, misunderstood the precekstooel mentioned on the list: he took it — in its present-day sense — for Krol's New Netherland pulpit, whereas it is not more than an old name for an ordinary folding chair to be used while listening to a sermon in a church without pews. The seven pictures and eleven books figuring on Krol's list remain unspecified, but such small quantities were common among the lower middle classes. Besides, notarial listings never include the cheapest cultural artifacts, such as pamphlets, broadsheets, or cheap prints, which, though widely spread among the simple folk, were considered destitute of market value. Evidently, Krol was not an active reader of books, let alone a learned theologian, but a man of practical piety.

Krol's social retrogression in his later years and his choice of a civil career and commercial activities after his ecclesiastical calling have tempted Eekhof to pronounce a rather severe, unfavorable judgment on his behalf: "Surely this Krol was not the 'hero' whom one would have desired as a founder of the Reformed Church." But there is no need to project backward into his early Career years the misfortune that happened to him in later times. Eekhof and others after him have wondered what exactly brought the Amsterdam consistory to appoint in December 1623 Bastiaen Krol as a comforter of the sick in the service of New Netherland. Apparently he was barely literate — since he put a cross under his marriage act — and only recently baptized. He was seemingly an insignificant man and a quite inappropriate choice of the consistory and the Company. The question is certainly legitimate, the more so as the Reformed authorities ordinarily were very careful in the choice of their church officials. Indeed, the registers of the Reformed consistory contain many mentions of candidates being refused for lack of religious education or sent back in order to improve their knowledge of the Christian doctrine.

Krol himself was not received at his first appearance before the consistory on October 12, 1623, where, provided with good testimonies, he was asked to be sent to West India as a comforter of the sick. It must, however, be acknowledged that his examiner, domine Jacobus Trigland, was one of the most severe members of the Reformed orthodoxy. The sudden illness of the first chosen comforter of the sick for West India, Gerrit Pietersz from Monnickendam, and the urgent need for a substitute brought the consistory to make Krol pass a further examination on November 30, before the ministers Lucas Ambrosius, who happened to be slightly more moderate in religious affairs, and Gossinus Geldorp. Geldorp was, in fact, a straightforward partisan of Trigland but, when a minister in Friesland before his transfer to Amsterdam, he had actively combated the Frisian Mennonites. If my hypothesis on Krol's origin is correct, this convert may well have benefited from Geldorp's sympathy on this occasion. Krol was finally admitted on December 7 of that year. Given the fact that his daughter Ytje was baptized in Amsterdam slightly less than nine months later, on August 25, 1624, her father being still in New Netherland, he might well have been taken by surprise on that second occasion. In early 1624 he certainly went to Manhattan without his wife and children.

However, another factor may have argued more strongly in Krol's favor. In the same year, 1623, when Krol asked to be admitted for West India, the Amsterdam printer Gerrit Hendricksz van Breugel published a pamphlet entitled Troost der vromen, that is, "Comfort for the godly who are distressed about the present state of the Church of God." The pamphlet was written in the form of a rhymed dialogue between two men, the first one called metaphorically "Firm confidence," the other "Feeble hope." Parts of it could be sung to a well-known melody, which points to a layman's culture of memorization through poetry and music. In this pamphlet, the orthodox believer tries to feed with new spiritual arguments the trust of the sceptic in the true Reformed faith against the background of the political situation.

Title page of the pamphlet Troost der vromen (Comfort for the Godly), by Bastiaen Jansz. Krol (Library of the University of Amsterdam).
Het Ziet gelyk op de twijf.

B. I. KROL.

Gocht is allen gec.

Oorsprong der Twaalf, of, kortweg: Het Ziet gelyk op de twijf.

Door I. wandeling.

Een nieuwe streven, de Echter, de Echte.

Oorsprong der Twaalf, of, kortweg: Het Ziet gelyk op de twijf.

Door II. wandeling.

Een nieuwe streven, de Echter, de Echte.

Oorsprong der Twaalf, of, kortweg: Het Ziet gelyk op de twijf.

Door III. wandeling.

Een nieuwe streven, de Echter, de Echte.

Oorsprong der Twaalf, of, kortweg: Het Ziet gelyk op de twijf.

Door IV. wandeling.

Een nieuwe streven, de Echter, de Echte.

Oorsprong der Twaalf, of, kortweg: Het Ziet gelyk op de twijf.

Door V. wandeling.

Een nieuwe streven, de Echter, de Echte.

Oorsprong der Twaalf, of, kortweg: Het Ziet gelyk op de twijf.
meant a prospective participation in the colonization of Brazil, seen as the new promised land. The Brazilian adventure would really start for the Dutch with the victory of All Saints’ Bay in 1624, but ever since the conception of a West India Company by Willem Usselinx (1567-1647) at the beginning of the century, the ideal of a commercial and agricultural colonization, sustained by a social order founded upon the true Christian doctrine, attracted the orthodox Calvinists among the Dutch merchants and the petty people.  

The register of shareholders of the West India Company (1621-1624), which still exists but has never been fully analyzed, shows a much more popular subscription pattern than the East India Company two decades earlier: shopkeepers, craftsmen, textile workers, schoolmasters, and even servants subscribed in considerable numbers for small shares, presumably moved as much by pursuit of gain as by the religious propaganda of the initiators and major shareholders, such as the future co-patron Johan de Laet.  

Van Rensselaer himself, who took shares for f 18,200, prompted his co-partners, the members of his family, and his friends to subscribe, including his maid-servant Aeltgen Henrix, who invested the bottom value of f 50. In the final format of the West India Company as it was founded in 1621, little was left of Usselinx’s utopian colonization program, but some of its inspiration continued to mark single orthodox directors and the very patronship design itself. Significantly, the first New Netherland minister, Jonas Michaellius, started his career overseas as a candidate for the new godly colony of Brazil, and his temporary work in Guinea went in the same direction. As for Krol, it was, in fact, the coincidence of a double illness and the hazards of sailing ships which brought him to New Netherland instead of Brazil.

Third, in his pamphlet Krol identifies himself as a declared Counter-Remonstrant supporter of the Reformed orthodoxy, defined at the Synod of Dordrecht four years earlier, and an opponent to Roman Catholics and all the Protestant sects. It is my hypothesis that it was, in the eyes of both the West India Company and the Amsterdam consistory, precisely his combative, orthodox character that made him fit for a new colony where the true Word of God had to be sown and where soon, at Fort Orange, a colony of true believers was to be founded under the supervision of the same West India Company. As Krol’s own subsequent demands to the Amsterdam consistory in November 1624 suggest — and as Eekhof indeed concluded — it is quite probable that Krol accompanied the Walloon colonists who were to settle at Fort Orange. This would be a supplementary argument in favor of his firm orthodoxy. Besides, in the instructions given in January 1625 to director Willem Verhulst, the Company administrators expressly ordered Krol to instruct the Indians “in the Christian religion out of God’s Holy Word.”

It is there, on the upper Mauritus and in the Indians’ company, that he must have learned the Indians’ language, which made him fit, fifteen months later, for the post of commander at Fort Orange.

Henceforth, the elements revealed by this analysis will be constantly central to the West India Company’s policy: church officials had to be orthodox, even militant, Calvinists, strongly and personally involved in a form of community-building which reconciled commercial interests with Christian values, and able to instruct the Indians in order to prepare them for the Christian faith and to a culture of cooperation of which Christian belief was considered a natural element, hence the need for well educated ministers. Initially, service on board ships or in the fortresses abroad as comforter of the sick was a popular way for craftsmen to qualify themselves for the ministry overseas. So did, for example, Everardus Bog gardus when going to the fortress of Mourne on the Gold Coast (Guinea) in 1630. Similarly, his provisional successor, Johannes Cornelisz Backer, another comforter of the sick, had thought himself quite fit for the ministry at Curacao, notwithstanding his default of matriculation at a university.

But as early as 1630 the Synod of North Holland complained about the great number of comforters of the sick who were enlisted by the East and West India companies without any previous ecclesiastical control. Twelve years later, in 1642, the directors of the West India Company decided that they would not engage for the colonies any more idioata, that is ministers who were not educated at a university.  

Religious concern thus helped Company officials structure a well-ordered society in which the minister, being a well-ordained official and a learned preacher, served as a warrant for the safeguard of social values. There was no opposition between commercial interest and religious values. To the contrary, both had to sustain one another. Commercial tycoons could really be pious.

21 Algemeen Rijksarchief (The Hague), Oude WIC, no. 18*, cf. the partial analysis by J. Acquoy, Deventer's participatie in de West-Indische Compagnie (Deventer, 1922).
23 Eekhof, De Hervormde Kerk, 1: 79.

Images of the Remonstrant conspiracy against stadtholder Prince Maurice of Orange in February 1623 and its repression (Gemeentebibliotheek Rotterdam, Pamfletten 1623, no. 15).
captain David Pietersz de Vries, a clever, ambitious, and sometimes ruthless sailor and merchant but also a very pious and orthodox believer, co-founder of the church in the fort, churchwarden, and probably an elder of the Reformed community. In the realms of causality and motivation, either personal or collective, God played a major role as the original author and the final legitimation of all human activity. Religion was the language with which values were asserted, and it provided the ritual through which they were transferred within the community, hence the Company’s concern for the maintenance of a proper ecclesiastical regime, with skilled religious officials and clear religious aims.

Two such aims are prominent in the Company’s policy toward New Netherland: first, the desire to build religiously the colony’s community from within the Company’s strongholds, the fortresses, in order to control the conformity of religious policy with economic interests; second, the wish to assure the religious unity of all the people involved in the territory of the Company’s activity: Europeans, blacks, and Native Americans. It was the minister’s task to decide whether such a unity should be a more sociological and ceremonial form of Christianity, embodied in a public church, open to all without any distinction, generous toward non-Europeans, and preaching a common public morality — as was in fact the case until the directorate of Petrus Stuyvesant — or whether it should correspond to an in-depth Christianization, toward an Ecclesia purior of the elected, accompanied by an even more active effort to eradicate paganism, magic, heresy, and sectarianism.

This latter option became church policy more and more from the 1650s onward. In a movement corresponding to what in the Old World is known as “confessionalization,” it brought about a restricted Reformed community, combative toward other confessions and religions (Roman Catholics, Lutherans, dissenters, and Jews). From the beginning, the task of the West India Company, as it was implicitly understood by the Articulbrieff (the Company officials’ regulations), was simply to assure and protect the public space as an undivided Christian space under the authority of the Reformed Church, conceived as the public church, in principle open to all. Christian faith was considered the natural religion of mankind. The territory of the Company’s commercial monopoly had to be a space in which all Christians could feel at ease; Christian motivations could help toward patriotic concerns, and economic prosperity could foster the honor of God. Hence, the baptismal registers of the 1640s are still quite clearly confessionally neutral. It is the gradual decrease of the Company’s influence over the colony that gave room to the new confessional developments of the 1650s and 1660s, changing the Reformed Church from a public church into a confession among other competing confessions.

Jonas Michaëlius. The appointment of a full minister for New Netherland as early as 1628, when the colony was still tiny and scattered over a huge territory, is clear proof of the West India Company’s concern for religion, cultural values, and social order. It must be stressed that this appointment was a distinctive sign of religious concern. Seen from the Netherlands church organization, such a post was barely justified among the other religious institutions.

Alleged portrait of Jan van Foreest (1586-1651), director of the West India Company and a Reformed magistrate at Hoorn, by Elias Pickney, 1628, oil on canvas (Gemeente Alkmaar, Alkmaar; photograph: Iconografisch Bureau, The Hague). Family tradition identifies this portrait as that of Jan van Foreest; there is, however, a slight doubt, as the age of van Foreest does not correspond with the age mentioned on the top of the picture.

Calvinists, as the history of the Dutch Republic shows abundantly. Indeed, the Calvinist view of human reality reconciled in one big theological scheme God’s designs with, or decisions about, mankind and human activity in the light of eternity.

When reading the sources in this light, a different picture emerges. In 1628, for example, some of the major shareholders of the Amsterdam Chamber of the West India Company presented a petition to Prince Frederick Henry in which they reminded the stadtholder of the four principles which hitherto had guided their actions: first, the honor of God; second, the pursuit of the true Reformed religion both in their fatherland and overseas; third, the prosperity of the country and, in particular, their town; and fourth, the losses inflicted on the enemy. Some decades ago, this text brought historians of the West India Company to a sharp discussion of the reality of the religious claims of the Company’s policy. We may recognize that such a discussion has become obsolete by now. The question is no longer to determine whether the West India Company pursued a political, economic, or religious aim but how these different objectives interlocked, in what way a public motive could conceal other motives, and how the different aims legitimated and stimulated each other. It would not be difficult to prove that in the directors’ current policy the goals were exactly reversed with regard to those expressed in their petition. Privateering (the fourth goal) played in some years a predominant role, whereas, in other years, regular economic exchanges (the third goal) were in the foreground.

It would, nevertheless, be an error to think that God’s interests always came last, just after those of religion. Seventeenth-century merchants, however rough and ungodly their behavior often may have been, were not really able to think of a world without God. Suffice it to read again, with new eyes, the writings of

2Copie Van Requesien van de goede gehoorzame Burgeren ende Gemeente dezer Stede Amsterdammene (s.l., 1628). On this pamphlet see Evenbus, Ook dat was Amsterdam, 1: 304-306.


(65)
as yet. Many other colonies had to satisfy themselves for long periods with comforters of the sick or even simple schoolmasters. In New Netherland, on the contrary, a permanent Reformed community was created from the outset, to the surprise of the first orthodox colonists themselves. Not expecting to be served so quickly, they had forgotten to bring their certificates of religion with them, as Michaëlius tells us.

Jonas Michaëlius (1584–before 1645) was the first ordained minister of the colony and is considered the founder of the Reformed Church of New Netherland. Whereas Michaëlius has almost been canonized as a true saint in early American historiography, his successor Everardus Bogardus often receives a much less favorable judgment. Yet, there is much to say for a thorough revision of the current image of both ministers, concluding that there is a greater likeness between the two than is usually assumed. First of all, Michaëlius’s writings, and, indeed, his whole surroundings breathe the strength of orthodoxy. After the religious troubles of which Krol had been a witness, Michaëlius was the man of the winning and triumphant church. The letters he wrote from Manhattan that have been conserved, as well as his whole action pattern, speak of a man convinced of his central position in the colony, of his good right in denouncing unlawful activities, and of his intimate certainty that his superiors would protect him.

Michaëlius, who was a truly learned man, must have participated in the same theocratic vogue for the establishment of new godly colonies in the West Indies as did Krol on his own, more practical level. Both testify to a model of colonization which united economic flourishing with religious interest. Commercial prosperity was a token of election as well as a duty of the Christian who wanted to honor God by establishing the best possible equation between his belief and his life. What characterizes Michaëlius’s position best is perhaps not what he did or wrote but the people with whom he surrounded himself, his friends. For instance, his famous correspondence with Jan van Foreest, secretary of the executive of the Estates of North Holland and West Friesland, in which the first detailed descriptions of the social life in the colony are given, is more than an exchange of letters with the haphazard secretary of a bureaucratic body.

Jan van Foreest was, in fact, a pious and orthodox Calvinist. His father, Jacob (1556–1624), first secretary of the executive of the Estates of North Holland and West Friesland, had been in his early adulthood an elder of the Reformed Church at Alkmaar and, as such, a delegate of his church at the national synods of Dordrecht in 1578 and Middelburg in 1581. His only son, Jan (1586–1651), succeeded him as secretary of the executive. He had studied at Leiden (1600) and taken a degree in law. French king Louis XIII made him a French knight, but his family had pertained to the old nobility ever since the Middle Ages. More important, he was among the orthodox counselors with whom Prince Maurice filled in 1618 the magistrature of the town of Hoorn after having cleansed it of Remonstrants and some remaining Catholics. Having been elected burgomaster in 1636 Jan van Foreest remained a member of the town council of Hoorn until his removal to The Hague in 1638 as a member of the Supreme Court of Holland and Zeeland. In 1646 and 1649 he was a deputy to the Reformed Synods of South Holland at Buren and Leiden.

Ever since the beginnings of the West India Company in 1623, he had been a director (bewindhebber) of its Hoorn Chamber, which explains his close ties with the New Amsterdam minister Michaëlius, who originated from a small town nearby. He was also a personal friend of Captain David Pietersz. de Vries and probably one of the instigators of his repeated colonization efforts in New Netherland. Jan van Foreest finally revealed himself to be a moderate man, perhaps because he reconciled a firm Calvinist attitude with the properly humanistic education characteristic of the literate culture of old Dutch families. His personal device was “Vincat amor patriae”: may the love of our fatherland win! In fact, being a true patriot, he was also a fruitful Greek and Latin poet whose Latin poems were esteemed even by the famous Leiden professor Scaliger.

Printed editions have been conserved of his poems on the victories of Prince Maurice (1620), on the resuming of the war after the Truce (1622), and on the reduction of Bois-le-Duc (1629), Breda (1637), and Steenbergen.

28. See the article “Van Foreest” in the new series of Nederland's Adelsboek, vol. 82 (1922), 485-517, especially page 490.
When Jan van Foreest, as a director of the West India Company, finishes his letter of January 19, 1629, to domine Michaëllius recommending him to God, "utriusque Reipublicae protectori," protector of both states — that is, civil and ecclesiastical — he most clearly expresses his conviction that state and church each has its own autonomous realm and have to sustain each other mutually. This double concern, about religion and state, in a direct line with their mutual relationship in his fatherland, was exactly what characterized Michaëllius’s actions in New Netherland. Most of his troubles with director Minuit and others derived from his desire to conform social life to religious standards and his incapacity to understand that both “states” obeyed their own rationality, not only in New Netherland but also at home.\(^9\)

Although in his letter of August 11, 1628, to his Amsterdam colleague Smoutius [or Smout] he expressed the desire “to separate carefully the ecclesiastical from the civil matters which occur, so that each one [of the members of the consistory] may be occupied with his own subject” and that “matters and offices, proceeding together, must not be mixed but kept separate,” his concern about good government led him to the proposal “to serve them [the members of the council] in any difficult or dubious matter with good advice.”\(^9\) In fact, his problems in the colony came from his desire to establish a godly society with the help of the authorities who should take responsibility in this matter. He was, indeed, a true representative of the theocratic wing within the Reformed Church, hence his correspondence with Adriaen Smout, a declared, even violent, Counter-Remonstrant and the most orthodox of the Amsterdam deputies for the overseas churches. This hypothesis is confirmed by the names of the Amsterdam ministers to whom he sends his greetings: zealous theocrats like Jacobus Trigland or Johannes Cloppenburg and a popular right-wing priest like Rudolphus Petri.

Ever since Michaëllius’s return to Holland in the winter of 1631/32, at the same time as Peter Minuit, the directors of the West India Company obstinately refused to give him a second chance. In doing so, they ran counter to the explicit desire of the Amsterdam consistory which repeatedly insisted upon Michaëllius’s virtues and his value as a minister. Whereas Bastiaen Krol was provisionally appointed as the colony’s director, Bogardus succeeded Michaëllius after one year. He embarked together with the new director, Wouter van Twiller. Every now and then, the directors’ obstinacy against Michaëllius still gets a bad press among the historians, who tend to explain it as a victory of the commercial view over the interests of religion.

But there is some reason for a more balanced approach. First, Michaëllius’s theocratic intentions were not at all consistent with the stealthily tolerant way in which Dutch society tried to assume and to organize its cultural and religious heterogeneity, let alone with the needs of the already colorful society overseas. Second, Michaëllius’s strongholds on the Amsterdam consistory were not simply Reformed believers, Calvinists of the common kind, but partisans of the most orthodox view on Christian religion and of a basically intolerant vision of society itself. Third, given what I have suggested before on the position of Bastiaen Krol, Krol’s appointment as a provisional director should not at all be considered as a disavowal of religion but, on the contrary, as a skillful way of reconciling one and the same person religion and commerce. In the directors’ eyes, Krol must have embodied the best parts of domine Michaëllius and a good Company director, hence their unwillingness to compromise this fragile equilibrium by the return of a quarrelsome preacher. Apparently, not even his local protector, Company director Jan van Foreest, was ready to help Michaëllius in this matter.

### Everardus Bogardus

A similar conclusion can be drawn about the arrival of Everardus Bogardus in 1633. Ever since the discovery, more than two decades ago, of the identity of domine Bogardus (1607-1647) as the Woerden orphan child and tailor’s apprentice who in 1622 and 1623 had a mystical experience enabling him to realize his craving for the service of God’s Word and to become a minister, a reassessment of Bogardus’s life course has been a desideratum. This is not the place to resume Bogardus’s biography. I must refer to my book and to some of my articles.\(^5\)

Yet, two aspects of his life have to be considered here. First, his spiritual orientation: Bogardus’s intemperance has gotten him a very bad press in popular New Amsterdam historiography and not a much better one in learned literature. Van der Zee describes him as one of those ministers “who were better known for their hotheadedness than for their piety,” whereas Michael Kammen asserts that he “could not serve communion without spilling the wine because usually he had the shakes.”\(^33\) Even Alice Kenney goes so far as to affirm that “Bogardus . . .

\(^32\) Nieuw Nederlandse biografisch woordenboek, vol. 1 (Leiden, 1911), col. 880-881, with a list of his publications and other subsisting works.


\(^34\) Eekhof, Jonas Michaëllius, 119, 131.


was a lusty individual subject to the temptation of intemperance in food, drink and words, so that there was always a new and juicy tale of his latest indiscretion for wagging tongues to relish.”

Such judgments prejudice contemporary observations with present-day standards of public morality and do not help us create a more reliable image of the past. In fact, it was not until Bogardus became involved in major problems with the Company’s officials that his intemperance became a scandal and still only in his opponents’ view. It has to be stressed that virtually all of the remaining sources on Bogardus’s New Netherland life come from the pens of his adversaries, who depict him simply as a rascal and a drunk. But more than once Bogardus had protested against his opponents’ calumnies. Besides, the opinions of his own partisans, as reflected in the pamphlet Breeden Raedt (Broad Advice, 1649), were quite different indeed: for them, Bogardus was a true leader of the congregation who spoke with the spiritual authority needed in the morally confused state of New Netherland. In fact, seen from his youthful experience, Bogardus may be considered as a representative of early seventeenth-century popular pietism. In spite of his calling as a minister, Bogardus presents many features of an independent believer with an individually shaped religion, reluctant to accept higher authorities either in matters of church policy or spiritual affairs. In my view, his ecclesiastical calling must be appreciated much more as a personal way to obtain a spiritual position from which he would be able to speak with authority within the congregation than as a form of subordination to the church as an ecclesiastical body. Many of his problems in New Netherland derived from the tension that arose between this personal view of his ministry and his official position as a minister at the service of the West India Company and under the authority of the Amsterdam classis. Yet, it has to be noted that neither the Company directors at Amsterdam nor the Amsterdam classis ever incriminated Bogardus or formally called him back on any charge of disreputable behavior. The initiative to justify himself in his fatherland was his, and he postponed that as long as possible.

There is an explanation for this apparent incongruity of a quarrelsome minister being protected by the very authorities that should support social order and peaceful relations between state and church in the colony. The key to Bogardus’s inexhaustible credit in Amsterdam may well be his profound orthodoxy, as expressed in the pamphlets telling of his youthful experience in Woerden and in the few elements of his sermons that have been conserved in the accusations of the New Netherland directors. His pietism, related to early English Puritanism through the translations of Puritan authors made by his uncle, minister Vincent Meusevoet, qualified him as a partisan of Reformed orthodoxy, which would become the mainstream in the Reformed Church after the Synod of Dordrecht, hence the favorable judgment of the Amsterdam classis when he presents himself as a candidate for the ministry in June 1632. In spite of his short stay at the Leiden faculty of theology (less than a year) and his basically self-taught theological education while a comforter of the sick in Guiana, he is immediately received as a minister without being requested for any further examination. In fact, the Company directors, aware of Michælius’s return to Amsterdam and the problems of the colony, had already asked Bogardus to present himself for the ministry of New Netherland. Bogardus immediately accepted, and we know from a confidence made to Megapolensis that his departure had been precipitated before the matter of his salary could be settled.35

We may well ask why the high and mighty directors of the West India Company intervened in favor of a virtually unknown comforter of the sick born in a small provincial town. Three reasons may be brought to attention. First is the excellent testimonies Bogardus brought with him from his stay in Guiana. He must have worked there under the responsibility of minister Laurentius Benderius, one of the very first who, just like Michælius had done in the same place five years earlier, worked actively for the conversion and the cultural education of the native population. This sheds, by the way, new light on Bogardus’s good relations with the Africans in New Amsterdam and his pastoral care for them.

The second reason may be found in van Rensselaer’s correspondence of 1634. According to van Rensselaer, Bogardus was the protégé of Company director Marcus de Vogelaer, who at that moment was a member of the New Netherland committee.36 Vogelaer was a very wealthy merchant of Flemish origin, of orthodox faith, akin to some of the highest authorities in the Dutch Republic, and very much involved in the matters of state and church. He was also a firm defender of the commercial character of the West India Company and an opponent of the patroons. For Vogelaer, Bogardus must have been the Company’s man: faithful in religious matters, an excellent preacher, a pillar of public morality, and reliable in his loyalty toward the director-general, just as he had been in Guiana.

The third element of appreciation comes again from Megapolensis, who reveals that the Amsterdam minister Otto Badius, then a deputy for Indian affairs, had been the connection between the Company and the candidate for the New Netherland ministry. Badius was, with Smout and Trigland, one of the fiercest defenders of Reformed orthodoxy. Just like them he had been publicly ridiculed by the celebrated liberal poet Joost van den Vondel, a born Mennonite converted to Catholicism. For Badius, Bogardus’s appointment in New Netherland must have been the best way to continue the policy inaugurated by Michælius and to secure the orthodox religious outlook of the Reformed congregation of New Netherland, initiated by Krol and continued by the same Michælius. Thus, from the very beginning the Dutch Reformed Church of America may be considered as pertaining to the right wing of orthodoxy, without any temptation of liberalism. However, it was an orthodoxy prone to those forms of pietism which would play such an important role in the middle colonies in decades to come.

It would not be difficult to insert Bogardus’s provisional successor Johannes Backerus into this series of orthodox personalities with a similar view of the relations between church and state. But I hope to have made my point. Let me resume my conclusions. First, there is much to win by a closer look at the life stories of the persons involved in the history of New Netherland and a reconstruction of the networks in which the West India Company directors and officials were inevitably involved. Second, there is no reason to suspect the West India Company of neglect in matters of religion, but there is still much to discover as to the exact relationship between religion and commerce in every single director’s behavior and in his mind. Third, it is never too late to read ancient sources with new eyes, sharpened by the development of historical method.

35 Alice P. Kenney, Stubborn for Liberty: The Dutch in New York (Syracuse, N.Y., 1975), 119.
37 Van Laer, Van Rensselaer Bowier Manuscripts, 269.