

Colonies of Concord: Religious Escapism and Experimentation in Dutch Overseas Expansion, ca. 1650–1700

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Abstract

The historiography of early modern Dutch colonial expansion in the East and the West shows a rather stark division between studies on governance and trade on the one hand, and those on Christian mission on the other. This chapter explores a third field of research: the impact of cultural and religious entanglement in the context of the voyages of discovery, the creation of trade networks, and colonial enterprise. After an analysis of the legal justifications for rule and proselytizing overseas, either by conquest (Batavia, Brazil), first occupation (New Netherland, Cape Colony), or treaty (Ternate, Decima) the chapter presents three very different yet related projects for religious regimes in the Dutch overseas colonies of the second half of the seventeenth century: the first by the Leiden professor of theology Johannes Hoornbeeck, the second by the freethinkers Franciscus van den Enden and Pieter Plockhoy, and the third by the Labadists. Despite having very different inspirations, all three projects aimed to overcome the confessional strife afflicting Dutch society at the time. While Hoornbeeck's ideal was missionary, Van den Enden and Plockhoy's inclusive, and the Labadists' sectarian, they all looked to the overseas colonies not merely as a source of worldly riches (for which purpose they had been founded in the first place) but most of all for spiritual gain. All these projects, however, ended as brilliant failures because of the problematic relationship between the secular sovereign and the public Reformed Church. Successful mission had to await the Dutch missionary societies of the later eighteenth century. Early modern settlements overseas can be seen as shelters for escapism and laboratories for experimentation, and they functioned as a safety valve to release interconfessional pressure.

In his classic *The Dutch Seaborne Empire* (1965), still one of the few comprehensive studies of the early modern Dutch world on a global scale, Charles Boxer elegantly characterized the background to Dutch overseas expansion as a discordant marriage between gain and godliness. Combining the seeking

of profits with efforts at evangelization, “the Dutch managed to square the precepts of a religion which denounced this life as a mere nothing (*dit leven is gants niet*) with the practices involved in their possession of a world-wide commercial empire.” The lust for gain, Boxer argued, was the most important driving force behind this empire; godliness clearly played a subordinate role.¹ In subsequent scholarship, this relative subordination has become open separation: whilst Boxer had still characterized gain and godliness as uneasy bedfellows, commerce and religion have become increasingly estranged in the historiography. Leading studies of Dutch expansion overseas generally focus on its commercial aspects, paying little to no attention to religion.² There is the occasional attempt to bring the two spheres together again: Willem Frijhoff, for example, has convincingly argued that profit and religiosity were intrinsically linked in the seventeenth-century mindset.³ Yet overall the divorce between gain and godliness has been sealed. Studies that discuss in detail the role of religion in the Dutch colonial world are few and far between; often clearly religiously inspired, they risk becoming apologetic and therefore remain somewhat marginal to the general debate.⁴ As a consequence, issues of clear religious significance, such as toleration in the Americas or confessional non-interference in Asia, are often reduced to mere manifestations of mercantile pragmatism. Godliness has departed, leaving gain as the only important factor to explain Dutch rule overseas.

This relative neglect of religiosity in early modern Dutch colonial history has meant that significant recent developments in the study of Dutch religious

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- 1 C. R. Boxer, *The Dutch Seaborne Empire, 1600–1800* (London, 1977), p. 113. The global scope of Boxer’s analysis, including both Asia and the Atlantic, has been matched only by J. van Goor, *De Nederlandse Koloniën: Geschiedenis van de Nederlandse expansie, 1600–1975* (The Hague, 1994) and Piet Emmer and Jos Gommans, *Rijk aan de rand van de wereld: De geschiedenis van Nederland overzee, 1600–1800* (Amsterdam, 2012).
 - 2 See e.g. the two standard accounts of the Dutch East and West India Companies: Femme S. Gaastra, *De geschiedenis van de VOC* (Zutphen, 2003) and Henk J. den Heijer, *De geschiedenis van de WIC* (Zutphen, 2013).
 - 3 Willem Frijhoff, *Wegen van Evert Willemsz: Een Hollands weeskind op zoek naar zichzelf, 1607–1647* (Nijmegen, 1995), p. 499.
 - 4 See A. Th. Boone, ‘Zending en gereformeerd piëtisme in Nederland: een historisch overzicht,’ *Documentatieblad Nadere Reformatie* 14 (1990), 1–31; L. J. Joosse, *Scoone dingen sijn swaere dingen: Een onderzoek naar de motieven en activiteiten in de Nederlanden tot verbrediging van de gereformeerde religie gedurende de eerste helft van de zeventiende eeuw* (Leiden, 1992); G. M. J. M. Koolen, *Een seer bequaem middel: Onderwijs en kerk onder de 17e–eeuwse VOC* (Kampen, 1993); F. L. Schalkwijk, *The Reformed Church in Dutch Brazil (1630–1654)* (Zoetermeer, 1998); and G. J. Schutte, ed., *Het Indisch Sion: De Gereformeerde kerk onder de Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie* (Hilversum, 2002). An important recent exception is Evan Haefeli, *New Netherland and the Dutch Origins of American Religious Liberty* (Philadelphia, 2012).

and intellectual culture around 1700 have largely bypassed the colonial dimensions of the Dutch world. The pioneering research of the past two decades on the Early Enlightenment generally discusses the Dutch Republic within its European context, with occasional attention given to the impact of global networks of knowledge and the confrontation with exotic religious cultures in Asia.⁵ Nonetheless, there is still no clear picture of the specific role of Dutch colonial rule in the changing perceptions and practices of religion around 1700. This lack is even more apparent because the few existing studies of the religious aspects of Dutch colonialism have focused mostly on the first half of the seventeenth century, thus leaving few clues to assist in interpreting the main transformations in Dutch religious culture after 1650. How did Dutch rule overseas relate to the intellectual development of the Early Enlightenment?

To answer that question, an inclusive approach is needed—one that not only considers religion to be an intrinsic element of the Dutch colonial enterprise but also incorporates the colonial world as an intrinsic element of Dutch religious culture. The aim of this essay is to help establish such an approach. Starting from a general overview of the crucial link between sovereignty and evangelization in seventeenth-century colonial church politics, I analyze three different examples of the interaction between Dutch global expansion and religious thinking and practice between 1650 and 1700: the missionary work of the orthodox theologian Johannes Hoornbeeck, the overseas utopias of the free-thinkers Pieter Ploekhoy and Franciscus van den Enden, and the millenarian mirages of the Labadist sect. The juxtaposition of these three cases shows not only how religious zeal contributed in different ways to Enlightened visions of intercultural dialogue, ecumenical openness, and communal spirituality, but also how the colonial world could offer the conflict-ridden Dutch society an escape route from internal tensions and a valve to release intraconfessional pressure. As shelters for escapism and laboratories for experimentation, overseas settlements created room for some of the farthest-reaching religious projects of the second half of the seventeenth century. Yet despite their exoticism, the underlying rationale of these projects remained very much in line with the

5 See e.g. Jonathan I. Israel, *Enlightenment Contested: Philosophy, Modernity, and the Emancipation of Man 1670–1750* (Oxford, 2006), pp. 590–662; Lynn Hunt, Margaret C. Jacob, and Wijnand Mijnhardt, *The Book that Changed Europe: Picart and Bernard's Religious Ceremonies of the World* (Cambridge, Mass., 2010); Siegfried Huigen et al., eds., *The Dutch Trading Companies as Knowledge Networks* (Leiden, 2010); and Thijs Weststeijn, 'Vossius' Chinese Utopia,' in: *Isaac Vossius (1618–1689) between Science and Scholarship*, ed. Eric Jorink and Dirk van Miert (Leiden, 2012), pp. 207–42.

main intellectual characteristic of early modern Dutch society: its obsessions with maintaining concord and overcoming the ills of pluralism.⁶

1 The Politics of Colonial Religiosity: Church and State Overseas

When Dutch exploration and overseas expansion took off at the end of the sixteenth century, it was doubtless the lust for gain that drove Dutch merchants and navigators to the outer ends of the known world. Yet before long, godliness entered their minds as well. Challenged to make sense of their deeds and to legitimize their colonialist pursuits, the protagonists of Dutch expansion claimed to be fulfilling a predestined plan to spread the Reformed faith across the globe. One such protagonist was Jacob van Heemskerck, whose seizure in 1603 of the Portuguese vessel *Santa Caterina* occasioned Hugo Grotius's elaborate defense of the freedom of the seas, traditionally considered the intellectual foundation of Dutch imperialism. A few months after the seizure, Van Heemskerck wrote to the directors of the recently established Dutch East India Company (VOC) that the Dutch attacks against the Portuguese in Asia were not merely serving commercial and political interests but contributed to a much more divine agenda of worldwide religious unity. "Oh, may God's glory be exalted among so many different nations, peoples and countries by means of the true protestant religion," Van Heemskerck wrote. "Perhaps the Lord will use a small, despised country and nation to work his mighty miracles."⁷ This evangelical message was echoed by other powerful members of the VOC administration such as Jan Pieterszoon Coen, governor-general between 1619 and 1623. In his agenda-setting *Discoers* from 1614, Coen concluded his proposals to build a Dutch empire in Asia with a strong exhortation to send God-fearing ministers overseas, so that concord could be created among the Dutch colonists and the indigenous would be colonized. "Is there anything in the world," Coen asked rhetorically, "that unites and connects the hearts of men more than the

6 See Willem Frijhoff et al., *1650: Bevochten eendracht* (The Hague, 1999). Recent work by literary scholars has highlighted the conflictive aspects of this quest for unity: see Helmer Helmers, *The Royalist Republic: Literature, Politics and Religion in the Anglo-Dutch Public Sphere, 1639–1660* (Cambridge, 2015), and Freya Sierhuis, *The Literature of the Arminian Controversy: Religion, Politics and the Stage in the Dutch Republic* (Oxford, 2015).

7 Quoted in Martine van Ittersum, *Profit and Principle: Hugo Grotius, Natural Rights Theories and the Rise of Dutch Power in the East Indies (1595–1615)* (Leiden, 2006), p. 42.

concord and exercise of religion, or on the contrary, anything that more separates the hearts of men and creates larger hostility than religious difference?"⁸

Such voices were raised not only in relation to Dutch colonialism in Asia. Willem Usselinx, the main intellectual inspiration behind the founding of the Dutch West India Company (WIC), was equally adamant in his claims that overseas colonization paved the way for the dissemination of scripture (and the reading of *sola scriptura*) on a global scale, and specifically in the Americas. As Benjamin Schmidt has shown, early-seventeenth-century Dutch visions of the New World identified indigenous American peoples as innocent victims of Spanish tyranny and Catholic persecution, to be countered by Protestant proselytization, which used peaceful persuasion instead of force to win over their heathen souls. Usselinx was one of the most prominent propagators of this Calvinist colonial agenda.⁹ In one of his many writings in favor of colonization in the West, Usselinx argued that Dutch expansion in the New World would realize four different objectives: "To advance the honor of God through the dissemination of the holy Gospel; also, to damage the enemy; and third, to increase the country's income and to relieve the community; finally, for the common welfare of all inhabitants of these united lands."¹⁰

In concrete colonial practice, this hierarchy of objectives was more likely ordered in exactly the opposite way: gain remained much more dominant than godliness throughout the opening decades of Dutch colonization worldwide.¹¹ Nonetheless, in line with the fervent calls to proselytize overseas, the ecclesiastical authorities, backed by the governing boards of the VOC and the WIC, decided to send ministers, schoolmasters, and comforters of the sick overseas and to erect churches in newly conquered territory. The classes of Amsterdam and Walcheren generally took the lead in these initiatives, and the particularism and provincial strife that characterized Dutch society and politics were

8 Jan Pieterszoon Coen, 'Discoers,' in: H. T. Colenbrander, *Jan Pietersz. Coen: Levensbeschrijving* (The Hague, 1934), p. 474: "Isser ter werelt wel iets, dat meer des menschen harten vereenicht ende verbindt als de eendracht ende exercitie van religie, oft ter contrarie, dat meer des menschen harten scheyt ende grooter vyantschap maect, als de differente religie?"

9 See Benjamin Schmidt, *Innocence Abroad: The Dutch Imagination and the New World, 1570–1670* (Cambridge, 2001).

10 Quoted in O. van Rees, *Geschiedenis der koloniale politiek van de Republiek der Vereenigde Nederlanden* (Utrecht, 1868), pp. 74–5: "tot bevordering van de eere Godes door de voortplanting des heiligen Evangelium; ten anderen tot afbreuk der vijanden; ten derde tot vermeerdering van 's lands inkomen en ontlasting van de gemeente; eindelijk tot gemeen welvaren van al de ingezetenen dezer vereenigde landen."

11 See Frijhoff, *Wegen van Evert Willemsz* (see above, n. 3), pp. 499–500.

thus transposed to the colonial world.¹² Moreover, the theological and political controversies of the late 1610s, which brought the Dutch Republic to the brink of civil war, temporarily eclipsed the grand ideals of a global Reformed evangelization. Only after the securing of orthodoxy at the Synod of Dordt could the best and brightest theological minds begin to project their religious zeal overseas.

This renewed emphasis on colonial religiosity is exemplified by the second charter of the VOC from 1622, which explicitly stated that the Company had been created “for the preservation of the public Reformed faith.”¹³ That same year, the *Seminarium Indicum* opened in Leiden to train Dutch missionaries under the guidance of the orthodox theologian Antonius Walaeus, a prominent propagator of the Contra-Remonstrant interpretation of the relationship between church and state. For Walaeus, the worldly sovereign was neither superior to the ecclesiastical authorities nor neutral toward its evangelical pursuits; church and state were distinct yet interdependent entities that together were responsible for the preservation of the true faith.¹⁴ In line with the *ius reformandi* authorized by the Diet of Augsburg in 1555, the worldly sovereign was, moreover, considered to possess the authority to impose its confessional denomination over the people within the territory it claimed. At the same time, the Dutch war for independence had at least partly been fought to safeguard religious liberty and to protect the private conscience from persecution. The Union of Utrecht of 1579 postulated this freedom as one of the founding principles of the newborn United Provinces. The ensuing religious-political framework of the Dutch Republic and the public Reformed Church was therefore based on the foundations of sovereignty and liberty, but the exact demarcations of state sovereignty and religious liberty remained a matter of continuous dispute. This religious-political framework was equally applicable to the colonial world, where the VOC, according to its charter, fulfilled the

12 L. J. Joosse, ‘Kerk en zendingsbevel,’ in: *Het Indisch Sion*, ed. Schutte (see above, n. 4), pp. 25–42. On the impact of provincial strife on Dutch colonialism, see Henk den Heijer, ‘Het recht van de sterkste in de polder: Politieke en economische strijd tussen Amsterdam en Zeeland over de kwestie Brazilië, 1630–1654,’ in: *Harmonie in Holland: Het poldermodel van 1500 tot nu*, ed. Dennis Bos et al. (Amsterdam, 2007), pp. 72–92.

13 Quoted in G. J. Schutte, ‘De kerk onder de Compagnie,’ in: *Het Indisch Sion*, ed. Schutte (see above, n. 4), pp. 43–64, there 47: “de conservatie van de het publieke Gereformeerde geloof.”

14 See Antonius Walaeus, *Het ampt der kerckendienaren: Midtsgaders de autoriteyt, ende opsicht, die een hooghe christelicke overheydt daer over toecompt* (Middelburg, 1615). For a lucid synopsis of the Contra-Remonstrant position, see Douglas Nobbs, *Theocracy and Toleration: A Study of the Disputes in Dutch Calvinism from 1600 to 1650* (Cambridge, 1938), pp. 1–24.

rights and duties of a sovereign actor.¹⁵ Accordingly, the concrete claims of the VOC for territorial sovereignty formed an essential precondition for recreating the Dutch Reformed order of church and state overseas.

The transposal of this metropolitan framework to the colonial world was far from unproblematic. As in the Republic itself, it resulted in a difficult dynamic of continuous collaboration and competition between representatives of church and state. This dynamic is clearly illustrated by the case of Ambon, the first place in Asia where the VOC claimed to exercise territorial sovereignty after conquering the Portuguese settlement on the island in 1605. Not coincidentally, Ambon was also the first focus of Dutch mission in the East. These evangelical efforts could only be consolidated, however, once VOC sovereignty over the island had been firmly established over the course of the 1640s and 1650s.¹⁶ In Batavia, founded in 1619 as the center of the Dutch colonial government in Asia, direct sovereignty could be claimed straightaway on the basis of the right of conquest. Yet here as well, the relationship between church and state remained problematic. Batavia was a multicultural city dominated by Muslims and Buddhists, and especially the large Chinese population formed a constant challenge to the public dominance of Reformed orthodoxy. The ecclesiastical authorities attempted to strengthen their position through a combination of evangelization and suppression, but the eventual outcome was the civil government's unofficial toleration of Buddhism in the city, somewhat similar to the position taken toward Catholics and Jews in the Dutch Republic. The practices of dealing with religious diversity at home were thus copied overseas to deal with diversity there.¹⁷

The other areas in Asia where the Dutch actively tried to spread the Reformed faith were the Banda Islands, where since the bloody Dutch conquest in the 1620s the local population remained deeply suspicious of the authorities;¹⁸

15 The position of the VOC in international law is analyzed in Jan A. Somers, 'De VOC als volkenrechtelijke actor,' PhD dissertation, Erasmus University Rotterdam, 2001. See also my 'The VOC as a Company-State: Debating Seventeenth-Century Dutch Colonial Expansion,' *Itinerario: International Journal on the History of European Expansion and Global Interaction* 38 (2014), 13–34.

16 Cf. H. E. Niemeijer, 'Orang Nasrani: Protestants Ambon in de zeventiende eeuw,' in: *Het Indisch Sion*, ed. Schutte (see above, n. 4), pp. 127–45. On the gradual establishment of Dutch sovereignty over the island, see Gerrit Knaap, 'De Ambonse eilanden tussen twee mogendheden: De VOC en Ternate, 1605–1656,' in: *Hof en handel: Aziatische vorsten en de VOC 1620–1720*, ed. Elsbeth Locher-Scholten and Peter Rietbergen (Leiden, 2004), pp. 35–58.

17 See H. E. Niemeijer, *Batavia, een koloniale samenleving in de 17de eeuw* (Amersfoort, 2005), and the lucid judgment of Haefeli, *New Netherland* (see above, n. 4), pp. 129–33.

18 H. E. Niemeijer, "Als een Lelye onder de doornen": Kerk, kolonisatie en christianisering op de Banda-eilanden, 1616–1635," *Documentatieblad voor de Geschiedenis van de Nederlandse Zending en Overzeese Kerken* 1 (1994), 1–24.

Formosa (Taiwan), where missionaries such as Robertus Junius, a student of Walaeus in Leiden, helped to win souls and territory until the Chinese ousted the Dutch in 1662;¹⁹ and Ceylon, where from the late 1630s onwards the Dutch expanded their territorial authority and their proselytizing activities in equal measure.²⁰ It is clearly no coincidence that these evangelization projects were carried out in areas conquered by the VOC: the right of conquest formed the juridical basis of claims for sovereignty in the seventeenth-century colonial world,²¹ and the rightful existence of a Reformed sovereign, in the political-religious framework of Dutch Calvinism, was the precondition for creating a public Reformed Church. Arguably, the existing historiography has not sufficiently emphasized this fundamental aspect of the politics of religiosity in Dutch colonialism. It helps to explain why the proselytizing activities of the Dutch remained limited in comparison to the Catholic mission in the Spanish and Portuguese empires, which is often interpreted too simply as a token of the dominance of gain over godliness within Dutch expansion. At the same time, it also serves as a warning for apologetic accounts not to use the modern, nineteenth-century ideal of evangelization to judge seventeenth-century concepts and practices.²²

For in most areas in Asia where the VOC was active, its power remained rather undefined, with no direct exercise of undisputed sovereignty. A case in point is the island of Ternate in the northern Moluccas, where the position of the VOC was circumscribed by a series of treaties with the local rulers that included stipulations of non-interference in each other's religious affairs. As a result, the Company's efforts to proselytize in the area were heavily restricted: as long as the VOC could not claim sovereign rule, it could not support the establishment of a Reformed public church.²³ Similar treaties were concluded

19 Leonard Blussé, 'De Formosaanse Proeftuyn der Gereformeerde Zending,' in: *Het Indisch Sion*, ed. Schutte (see above, n. 4), pp. 189–200; and idem, 'Dutch Protestant Missionaries as Protagonists of the Territorial Expansion of the VOC on Formosa,' in: *Conversion, Competition, and Conflict: Essays on the Role of Religion in Asia*, ed. Dick Kooiman et al., (Amsterdam, 1984), pp. 155–84.

20 G. J. Schutte, 'Een hutje in den wijngaard: Gereformeerd Ceylon,' in: *Het Indisch Sion*, ed. Schutte (see above, n. 4), pp. 177–88.

21 For a wide-ranging analysis of the importance of claims for sovereignty and occupation in the development of Western imperialism, see Andrew Fitzmaurice, *Sovereignty, Property and Empire, 1500–2000* (Cambridge, 2014).

22 See Peter van Rooden, *Religieuze regimes: Over godsdienst en maatschappij in Nederland, 1570–1990* (Amsterdam, 1996), pp. 132–7, and the literature mentioned in note 4 above.

23 Cf. H. E. Niemeijer, 'Agama Kumpeni? Ternate en de protestantisering van de Noord-Molukken en Noord-Sulawesi, 1626–1795,' in: *Het Indisch Sion*, ed. Schutte (see above, n. 4), pp. 147–75.

with many other powers throughout Asia.²⁴ Arguably the most remarkable and best-known example of this ‘empire by treaty’ was the small Dutch trading post in Deshima in the Bay of Nagasaki, where the Dutch received exclusive commercial privileges through complete subservience to the Tokugawa shogunate. To the dismay of the ecclesiastical authorities in the Dutch Republic, this subservience included the forsaking of any Christian signs or activities in public.²⁵ The VOC’s willingness to abide by this condition is often explained in mere terms of commercial interests and an unhindered lust for profits. Nonetheless, here as elsewhere, gain was not necessarily opposed to godliness: the religious-political framework of Dutch Calvinism created room for such mercantile pragmatism to prevail in the absence of a Reformed sovereign.

Dutch colonial sovereignty was much more clearly defined in the West, especially in the main area of Dutch expansion in the Atlantic: Brazil. Not long after the establishment of the WIC in 1621, the conquest of Salvador da Bahia in 1624 gave rise to enthusiastic appeals for extensive evangelization in the New World. The orthodox minister Willem Teellinck, for example, argued in a series of pamphlets that Dutch expansion in Brazil offered a perfect opportunity to disseminate the Gospel “to the blind inland heathens, banned Jews and erring Portuguese.”²⁶ Once Dutch sovereignty in northeastern Brazil was secured and expanded from the 1630s onwards, the Reformed Church gained an unparalleled level of institutional strength with the creation of twenty-two congregations and a total of fifty-three ministers serving in the colony until its demise in 1654. Unlike in Asia, the colonial church obtained its own independent organizational framework with the establishment of the Classis of Brazil

24 See *Corpus diplomaticum Neerlandico-Indicum: Verzameling van politieke contracten en verdere verdragen door de Nederlanders in het Oosten gesloten*, ed. J. E. Heeres, 5 vols. (The Hague, 1907–38), and see the analysis in my “‘Love Alone is Not Enough’: Treaties in Seventeenth-Century Dutch Colonial Expansion,” in: *Empire by Treaty: Negotiating European Expansion, 1600–1900*, ed. Saliha Belmessous (Oxford, 2014), pp. 19–44.

25 Adam Clulow, *The Company and the Shogun: The Dutch Encounter with Tokugawa Japan* (New York, 2014). For the reaction of the ecclesiastical authorities in the Dutch Republic, see the ‘Acta’ of the Utrecht classis from August 9–10, 1653, in Utrecht, Het Utrechts Archief, Archief classis Utrecht, inv. nr. 3, pp. 312–4. I owe this reference to Jo Spaans.

26 Quoted in A. Th. Boone, “‘Tot verbreydinge van het rijcke onses Heeren Jesu Christi’: Een inleiding tot de zendingsgedachten binnen het gereformeerd Piëtisme in Nederland,” *Documentatieblad Nadere Reformatie* 17 (1993), 1–17, there 3: “tot de blinde inlandsche Heydenen, verstoote Joden, ende verdwaelde Portugesen.” On Dutch missionary activities in the Atlantic, see also Mark Meuwese, ‘Dutch Calvinism and Native Americans: A Comparative Study of the Motivations for Protestant Conversion Among the Tupís in Northeastern Brazil (1630–1654) and the Mohawks in Central New York (1690–1710),’ in: *The Spiritual Conversion of the Americas*, ed. James Muldoon (Gainesville, Fla., 2004), pp. 118–41.

in 1636 and the Synod of Brazil in 1642. Yet also in Brazil the relationship between church and state remained problematic. The WIC, fulfilling the rights and duties of the worldly sovereign, was responsible for upholding the public church, yet the clergy continuously complained about insufficient financial support. Ecclesiastical hardliners were outraged, moreover, with the rights to public worship that the WIC granted to Portuguese Catholics and Jews.²⁷ As in Batavia, this practice of toleration echoed similar attitudes in the Dutch Republic itself, such as was manifested in the privileges granted to Catholics in the conquered cities of Venlo and Maastricht.²⁸

Elsewhere in the Atlantic, Dutch sovereignty was claimed on the basis not only of conquest but also on the right of first occupation, as with the colony of New Netherland and, in South Africa, the Cape Colony. In these settler colonies there existed no formal toleration of other public congregations, but attempts to strengthen the Reformed church order and to further evangelize fluctuated according to local circumstances and developments.²⁹ Overall, the particularities of the Dutch Reformed political-religious framework, together with the vicissitudes of global politics, created a hybrid colonial conglomeration where gain and godliness constantly interacted in the creation of a global Dutch empire of trade and religiosity.

A typical attempt to make sense of this hybrid empire was the treatise *'t Geestelyck roer van 't coopmans schip* by the orthodox cleric Godefridus Udemans. First printed in 1638, then published in enlarged editions in 1640 and 1655, this work principally aimed to steer Dutch merchants, sailors, and devout armchair travelers on the righteous path toward God's grace. Troubled by the dominance of commerce in Dutch overseas expansion, Udemans argued that trade should be considered not an end in itself but rather a means "to expand the Kingdom of Christ to the end of the world."³⁰ Udemans thus tried to reconcile gain with godliness as the double essence of Dutch colonialism. This attempt was certainly not confined to the margins of Calvinist orthodoxy. Jacob Cats, a bestselling author and prominent politician, accompanied Udemans's treatise with a poem that proclaimed: "A Christian's heart should burn with zeal / When the anchor is dropped near rich beaches / Not for the beautiful

27 See Schalkwijk, *Reformed Church in Dutch Brazil* (see above, n. 4), and Michiel van Groesen, ed., *The Expansion of Tolerance: Religion in Dutch Brazil (1624–1654)* (Amsterdam, 2007).

28 Haefeli, *New Netherland*, (see above, n. 4), p. 101.

29 See the analysis in Haefeli, *New Netherland* (see above, n. 4); A. W. Biewenga, *Kaap de Goede Hoop: Een Nederlandse vestigingskolonie, 1680–1730* (Amsterdam, 1999).

30 Godefridus Udemans, *'t Geestelyck roer van 't coopmans schip*, facs. ed. 1640 (Dordrecht, 1965), pp. 14–5: "om het rijke Christi te verbreyden tot aen het eynde der werelt."

galore of scents or silk / But to bring a wild bunch to the Church.”³¹ Around 1650, after half a century of Dutch expansion overseas, Cats’s words represented a widespread feeling that religious zeal should counteract the lust for gain in the Dutch colonial world. How did this call for godliness resonate in the second half of the century?

2 Channeling Religious Zeal Overseas: Hoornbeek’s Mission for Intercultural Dialogue

After the peace with the Habsburg monarchy was signed in 1648 and the Dutch Republic entered a period of ‘True Freedom,’ attempts to overtly outdo Catholic proselytizing efforts worldwide did not cease. On the contrary: the most extensive argument in favor of Reformed global evangelization was developed over the course of the 1660s by the theologian Johannes Hoornbeek. Hoornbeek, who has only recently been rediscovered as a prominent figure in Dutch intellectual life around the middle of the seventeenth century, had been a student and colleague of Gisbert Voetius, the doyen of Dutch orthodoxy at Utrecht University, before he was appointed professor in theology at Leiden in 1654.³² Combining an academic desire for universal knowledge with a practical approach to pastoral issues, Hoornbeek trained his students at Leiden to study the different guises of heathenism and to develop theological counterarguments through public disputations. These disputations formed the basis

31 Ibid., sig. *8r.: “Hoe dat een *Christen-hert* van yver dient te branden / Wanneer men ancker werpt ontrent de rijcke stranden / Niet om haer schoon gewas van reuck, of sijde-werck / Maer om een *woesten hoop* te brengen tot de *Kerck*.” Cf. A. Th. Boone, “Om een woesten hoop te brengen tot de kerck”: Een onderzoek naar zendingsgedachten in piëtistische zeemansvademeccums,’ in: idem and J. van Ekeris, *Zending tussen woord en daad: Twee hoofdstukken uit de geschiedenis van gereformeerd piëtisme en zending* (Kampen, 1991), pp. 12–46, there 26–31.

32 For Hoornbeek’s background and significance, see Jos Gommans and Ineke Loots, ‘Arguing with the Heathens: The Further Reformation and the Ethnohistory of Johannes Hoornbeek (1617–1666),’ *Itinerario: International Journal on the History of European Expansion and Global Interaction* 39 (2015), 45–68; and idem, ‘Johannes Hoornbeeks ethnohistorische methode en de Nieuwe Wereld,’ in: *Reizen door het maritieme verleden van Nederland: Maritiem-historische opstellen aangeboden aan Henk J. den Heijer*, ed. Anita van Dissel et al. (Zutphen, 2015), pp. 189–203. Gommans and Loots’s work supersedes the earlier studies that approach Hoornbeek from a purely evangelical perspective, including B. Oosterom, ‘Johannes Hoornbeek als zendingstheoloog,’ *Theologia reformata* 13 (1970), 81–98, and T. Brienens, *Johannes Hoornbeek (1617–1666): Eminent geleerde en pastoraal theoloog* (Kampen, 2008).

of his large missionary treatise *De conversione Indorum et gentilium*, published posthumously in 1669.

In the introduction to this work, Hoornbeeck revisited many of the commonplace arguments that had been raised by Dutch advocates of evangelization such as Teellinck and Udemans. He started by claiming that the Great Commission from Matthew 28, Jesus' admonition to his disciples to spread his teachings over the world, was still applicable and also easier to fulfill now that the Dutch "not only have knowledge of all the world" but also the means to visit and communicate with people and places that had been unknown to the ancients. Moreover, these "hidden corners of the East and West ... have also been occupied, tamed and possessed by the Dutch since some time, in my opinion not so much to promote the matters and glory of the Republic as those of the kingdom of Christ and the church."³³ With this revealing phrasing Hoornbeeck emphasized the crucial aspect of Dutch evangelization overseas: occupation and ownership (in other words, legitimate sovereignty) were the essential conditions for establishing a Reformed church order and spreading the Gospel in the colonial world.

Hoornbeeck went on to argue that the remarkable expansion of the Dutch presence overseas since the preceding decades must have been part of a providential plan. For certainly God did not bestow so much fortune on the Dutch "only to explore and usurp these regions or to take away the riches of the earth for a larger or even superfluous quantity of material things, on behalf of the glory and the idle triumphs of the Dutch name." Neither territorial expansion nor commercial gain nor national glory could be the main objective; instead, providence wanted the Dutch to spread the true faith "to lands that so far have been alien to the company of humanity and religion, and to people who know only the earth and earthly matters."³⁴ Such evangelization was furthermore a fulfillment of the divine order that different peoples should assist each other in the mutual exchange of goods. This stance came close to Grotius's natural law argument for overseas expansion,³⁵ but Hoornbeeck, like his evangelical

33 Johannes Hoornbeeck, *De conversione Indorum et gentilium* (Amsterdam, 1669), p. 1: "Nec innotuerunt tantum qua Orientis, qua Occidentis recessus, sed occupati, domiti, possessi Belgis sunt, ab aliquo retro tempore, ad Reip. non magis, quam regni Christi & Ecclesiae opinor promovendas res & gloriam." My translation follows, with some minor changes, the edition of *De conversione* by Ineke Loots, forthcoming from Brill. I am very grateful to Ineke for allowing me to consult her work before publication.

34 Hoornbeeck, *De conversione* (see above, n. 33), pp. 1–2: "tantummodo ad regiones hinc inde explorandas & usurpandas, vel ad terrarum avehendas opes, & corporalium rerum majorem vel superfluum copiam, ad gloriam & inanes triumphos Belgici nominis [...] cultum terris hactenus ab humanitatis & religionis contubernio alienis, & praeter terram & terrena nihil sapientibus."

35 Cf. Hugo Grotius, *The Free Sea*, ed. David Armitage (Indianapolis, 2004), p. 49.

predecessors Teellinck and Udemans, turned the Grotian emphasis on commercial exchange into spiritual exchange, so that “we give spiritual goods to the people who enrich us with their material goods.”³⁶ Godliness in return for gain. Indeed, the Dutch would be obliged to spread the Word of God regardless, for, as the example of the apostle Paul showed, preaching to the heathens is itself a priceless reward for the faithful.

These were staple statements of the standard evangelical literature, but Hoornbeeck also made an unusual, highly significant move. Evangelization overseas, he argued, could be a welcome means to channel outward the religious zeal that was consuming Dutch society from within: “the disputes and quarrels among the Christians and even among the Protestants ... will at least skillfully be avoided, if not corrected in this manner.”³⁷ This was an oblique but all the more suggestive reference to the religious controversies that raged incessantly in the Dutch Republic, both at a strictly theological level and more generally in public political debate. During the time of his teaching in the early 1660s, Hoornbeeck had become deeply involved in these controversies. Earlier he had proved to be one of the staunchest polemicists on behalf of the Reformed Church against Catholics and Protestant dissenters such as Remonstrants and Lutherans, and especially against the novel heresy of Socinianism. More significantly, he was also a key player in the schism that had arisen within the Reformed church following a dispute on the observance of the Sabbath. At Leiden, Hoornbeeck positioned himself in the vanguard of this polemic, writing a series of treatises on the matter against his colleague Johannes Coccejus.³⁸ But toward the end of his life, at the time when he wrote the introduction to *De conversione*, Hoornbeeck seems to have become somewhat disillusioned about this ongoing infighting in the church, which was “often with minimal result.” Mission overseas now seemed to offer an antidote against this internal strife, a way to direct religious zeal to a more noble and fruitful purpose. For, as Hoornbeeck bitterly noticed, the constant quarrels in the church implied that “perhaps the Christians will sooner become heathens than the heathens Christians.” To counter this risk, all theological forces should be mobilized toward the conversion of the heathens instead of toward internal

36 Hoornbeeck, *De conversione* (see above, n. 33), p. 2: “ut spiritualia recipiant, qui nos suis ditant corporalibus.” For the comparison with Teellinck and Udemans, see Gommans and Loots, ‘Arguing with the Heathens’ (see above, n. 32).

37 Hoornbeeck, *De conversione* (see above, n. 33), p. 3: “Praeterea disputationes & rixae inter Christianos, & Reformatos etiam ... hoc modo artificiose, si non corriguntur, saltem devitantur.”

38 For the political context, see F. G. M. Broeyer and E. G. E. van der Wall, eds., *Een richtingenstrijd in de gereformeerde kerk: Voetianen en coccejanen, 1650–1750* (Zoetermeer, 1994), especially pp. 74–94.

disputes. Indeed, Hoornbeeck concluded, “to turn a heathen into a Christian is more worthwhile and more useful than to change a Christian into a member of a different Christian sect, even if perhaps of a better one.”³⁹

The prospect of converting heathens overseas thus served for Hoornbeeck as an escape route, a colonial valve that could relieve the rising pressure within Dutch society. Moreover, the confrontation with exotic heathenism offered the true believer a much more rewarding challenge than the futile attempts to make all Christians, Catholics and Protestants alike, agree on the same principles. For could a singular confessional denomination truly pretend to embody the divine truth? Hoornbeeck’s own phrasing (‘perhaps’) shows his doubts about the usefulness and necessity of a relentless theological debate on the *adiaphora* of faith. And once doubts enter the scene, curiosity takes over. The result, in *De conversione*, is a highly inquisitive and open approach to the many appearances of heathenism worldwide.⁴⁰ Subdivided into two parts, the book starts with a learned and truly global survey of ancient and modern heathenism, based on classical authors and the latest ethnographic literature. Without reservation, Hoornbeeck used especially Jesuit sources and interpretations for this survey, along with some recent Dutch scholarship such as the work of the missionary Abraham Rogerius on the Brahmins.⁴¹ While Udemans had characterized the Jesuits as “grasshoppers of the whore of Babylon,” Hoornbeeck’s embrace of their example indicates his relative openness.⁴² Of course, he considered Alexander VI’s bull, on which Habsburg claims for global dominance rested, to be a sham, but this anti-papal stance did not become the basis of an uncompromising anti-Catholic polemic. Once again following Grotius, Hoornbeeck preferred to make a secular argument, using the verdict of the Spanish scholastic Francisco de Vitoria to argue his case against the papal bull’s legitimacy.⁴³

In the second part of the work, Hoornbeeck continued to analyze the differences between heathenism and Christian doctrine, in terms of beliefs as well as habits. The analysis starts with an overview of authors who argued against

39 Hoornbeeck, *De conversione* (see above, n. 33), p. 3: “saltem exiguo saepe cum fructu, de iis contendatur inter Christianos: unde Christiani fere prius deveniunt gentiles, quam Gentiles Christiani.... prout majoris pretii ususque est, Gentilem formasse Christo, quam Christianum alteri cuicumque etiam in Christianismo sectae, si forte meliori.”

40 This inquisitiveness is highlighted in Gommans and Loots, ‘Arguing with the Heathens’ (see above, n. 32).

41 Abraham Rogerius, *De open deure tot het verborgen heidendom* (Leiden, 1651). Rogerius is discussed in detail in Hoornbeeck, *De conversione* (see above, n. 33), 1.5 and 2.8.

42 Udemans, *t Geestelyck roer*, quoted in Oosterom, ‘Johannes Hoornbeeck’ (see above, n. 32), p. 96: “sprinckhanen van de hoere van Babel.”

43 Hoornbeeck, *De conversione* (see above, n. 33), pp. 8–9. Cf. Grotius, *The Free Sea*, ed. Armitage (see above, n. 35), pp. 15–7.

the heathens, from the Church Fathers and Thomas Aquinas to Renaissance humanists such as Marsilio Ficino and Juan Luis Vives, Grotius's ecumenical *De veritate religionis Christianae*, and, especially, the Jesuit missionary José de Acosta. Following their lead, Hoornbeeck discussed the crucial matters of debate with the heathens, from the existence of a single eternal God and the immortality of the soul to exotic practices of worship and wrongful behavior such as nudity and polygamy (focusing especially on Asia, Hoornbeeck did not share the obsession with cannibalism that can be encountered in contemporary sources on the Americas).⁴⁴ Significantly, Hoornbeeck continuously looked for comparisons and similarities with Christianity to create a fruitful basis for successful evangelization.⁴⁵ The overall result is an interreligious dialogue of sorts, in which the peaceful exchange of arguments should pave the way for the vindication of the true faith and the conversion of all heathens. Here, Hoornbeeck once again referred to the missionary work of the Jesuits as a laudable example to be followed, especially with regard to their knowledge of indigenous languages. He even argued for the establishment of a Dutch Reformed counterpart to the *Congregatio de propaganda fide*, comprising a worldwide network of missionaries and correspondents who would survey the global state of religious affairs. True to the Contra-Remonstrant interpretation of the relationship between church and state, Hoornbeeck emphasized that the governing board of such an organization should include not only ecclesiastical members but also representatives of the worldly sovereign.⁴⁶

The curiosity toward exotic cultures and the openness shown to Catholicism eventually brought Hoornbeeck to an oblique but nonetheless powerful condemnation of Dutch colonial conduct. He voiced this criticism indirectly by denouncing Spanish "cruelty and greed" in the Americas, following the famous accusation directed at Spain by Bartolomé de las Casas. Clearly, such an accusation did not apply to Spaniards only, "for the heathens, however barbarian and wild they are, judge people and their profession from their moral behavior."⁴⁷ Dutch colonists and missionaries should therefore retain the highest ethical standards and not succumb to the classical double vice that brings empires down, "the desire for riches and the desire to rule." Again referring to Vitoria and now subtly censuring Grotius's theory of just war, Hoornbeeck insisted that Christians are not allowed "to wage war on the barbarians for whatever

44 Cf. Michiel van Groesen, 'Arnoldus Montanus, Dutch Brazil, and the Re-Emergence of Cannibalism,' in: *Transformations of Knowledge in Dutch Expansion*, ed. S. Friedrich, A. Brendecke, and S. Ehrenpreis (Berlin, 2015), pp. 93–120.

45 Gommans and Loots, 'Arguing with the Heathens' (see above, n. 32), pp. 57–9.

46 Hoornbeeck, *De conversione*, (see above, n. 33), p. 210.

47 Hoornbeeck, *De conversione*, (see above, n. 33), p. 220: "Etenim Gentiles, utcunq[ue] barbari & rudes, ex vivendi moribus tamen aestimant homines, & eorum professionem."

reason, be it religion or the extension of empire or to punish them for their sins, least of all their lack of faith.”⁴⁸ Conversion can take place only through inner conviction, never the use of force. But the main threat to successful evangelization was not so much the Dutch desire to rule as the Dutch desire for riches, epitomized by the reproachable subservience of the VOC in Japan. “It is to be feared,” Hoornbeeck concluded, “that we want to do all our business to the ignominy of God.”⁴⁹

All in all, Hoornbeeck’s argument in favor of global Reformed evangelization aimed to substitute godliness for gain as the main driving force behind Dutch overseas expansion. “I wish that both would always be sought in equal measure!” he sighed. “At least we can hardly deny that God’s providence has pointed out a fruitful opportunity in spiritual matters and that we should undertake to promote to our utmost the matters of God and his kingdom, not only our own.”⁵⁰ This appeal for an increase in missionary zeal not only meant rebalancing the Dutch colonial mindset. It specifically aimed to achieve concord in the religious realm, both at home and overseas. Worldwide evangelization clearly served to bring all people together in the single true faith; intercultural dialogue with other belief systems, as well as the explicit emulation of Catholic missionary models, could build universal concord under the umbrella of the Reformed Church. At the same time, such evangelical enthusiasm would also restore concord within that church in the Dutch Republic. Channeling all religious zeal overseas would demobilize and thereby put an end to the internal disputes that were tearing Dutch society apart. The colonial world, for Hoornbeeck, offered a double opportunity to conquer the demons of confessional pluralism.

48 Hoornbeeck, *De conversione*, (see above, n. 33), pp. 225, 227–9: “opum & regendi cupidate”; “inferre Barbaris bellum, ex quavis causa sive religionis, sive imperii provehendi, aut castigare illos propter peccata sua, minus vero infidelitatem.” Cf. Hugo Grotius, *The Rights of War and Peace*, 3 vols., ed. Richard Tuck (Indianapolis, 2005), 2.21.

49 Hoornbeeck, *De conversione*, (see above, n. 33), p. 256: “Metuendum sane ... quin cum ejus ignominia velimus conjuncta nostra negotia.”

50 Hoornbeeck, *De conversione*, (see above, n. 33), p. 10: “Quod utinam quaesitum aequè fuisset semper, atque illa! Saltem Dei providentiam digito indicasse sementem copiosam in spiritualibus faciendam, negare haud possumus; & Dei etiam ac regni ejus, neque nostris tantum, rebus promovendis, pro virili, esse incumbendum.”

3 Starting Anew in the New World: The Utopian Projects of Van den Enden and Ploekhoy

Hoornbeeck's *De conversione* was not the only attempt to rethink the role of religion in Dutch overseas expansion during the 1660s. In the same years that he was discussing his ideas with his students at Leiden, pamphleteers and politicians in Amsterdam were debating two very different yet comparable proposals for building religious concord through colonial enterprise. The ideological background of these proposals was directly opposed to the Reformed orthodoxy of Hoornbeeck, but they nonetheless shared his fundamental conviction that Dutch colonialism involved exceptional prospects for fostering confessional concord by challenging the colonial status quo.

These two proposals both originated in the context of New Netherland, the WIC colony along the shores of the Hudson River and its surroundings. In 1656, the city of Amsterdam had established its own colony alongside New Netherland after receiving a patroonship or fief from the WIC in return for the city's assistance in the local war against New Sweden. This colony, christened 'New Amstel,' was located on territory conquered from the Swedes on the Delaware River, some two hundred kilometers south of Manhattan. The directors of the colony, a committee appointed by the Amsterdam Burgomasters, immediately started a recruitment campaign, publishing a set of favorable conditions to attract prospective settlers to the colony.⁵¹ At first, encouraged by the Amsterdam classis, they hoped to make it a stronghold of the Reformed Church, but within a few years marked by setbacks they changed their strategy: in 1662 two Catholic priests received permission to preach in the region, and the following year, a Lutheran pastor was also allowed to administer to the remaining Swedish congregation.⁵² By then, New Amstel had grown into a sizeable colony along the Delaware, including a southern outpost near the Atlantic coast called Hoerenkil, purchased from indigenous chiefs in 1659.

This colonial outpost became the focus of a remarkable experiment in political and religious utopianism, triggered by the relative openness of the Amsterdam directors and their willingness to attract new colonists. The experiment started with a petition by Franciscus van den Enden, an ex-Jesuit

51 *Conditien die door de Heeren Burgemeesteren der Stadt Amstelredam ... gepresenteert werden aen alle de gene, die als coloniers na Nieuw-Nederlandt willen vertrecken* (Amsterdam, 1656). On the colony of New Amstel, see Jaap Jacobs, *New Netherland: A Dutch Colony in Seventeenth-Century America* (Leiden, 2005), 126–32.

52 Haefeli, *New Netherland* (see above, n. 4), 237.

freethinker who is known especially for being Spinoza's teacher of Latin.⁵³ Loitering at the Amsterdam Exchange in the early 1660s, Van den Enden had come into contact with "some well-intentioned citizens, residents as well as foreigners, nonetheless lovers of this Free-State," who wanted to leave for Hoerenkil. For this diverse group of prospective colonists, the river mouth of the Delaware seemed a perfect location to create a virgin society on virgin soil overseas, to start anew in the New World. Van den Enden, learned and rhetorically skilled, became their spokesman, and in December 1661 he presented their proposal for a new society to the directors of New Amstel. An intricate series of negotiations followed and the directors continually asked for further clarifications of the colonists' plan, which contained some remarkable democratic and tolerationist elements. Yet eventually (by April 1662) the proposal was denied. Van den Enden, clearly upset, then decided to publish all documentation relative to the negotiations to defend his cause in public. The Dutch reading public had recently been provoked by the radical republican writings of the De la Court brothers, and Van den Enden explicitly claimed to follow their example, "encouraged by their invitation or seduction on the way of a modest exercise of Freedom."⁵⁴

Van den Enden's provocative tone is evident from the opening words of his pamphlet, addressing an audience "that has no interest in the Preaching-Ministry and all the other mostly also idle scholarly delusive knowledge and that is likewise not supporting all worldly authorities founded upon imposture and violence." Indeed, Van den Enden's ideal reader was one who would take "no or little notice of the judgment of foolish, academically conceited Know-it-alls, cocky Grammarians, and such like envious Characters of the Night."⁵⁵

53 See Jonathan I. Israel, *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity, 1650–1750* (Oxford, 2001), pp. 168–70, 175–84.

54 Franciscus van den Enden, *Kort verhael van Nieuw-Nederlants gelegenheit* (1662), ed. F. Mertens, from <http://users.telenet.be/fvde/WorksP/kortVerhael.pdf>, pp. iv, 43; "aenge-moedicht om hare nodingh of aenlokingh ter baan van bescheide Vryheits-betrachting"; "enige wel-geintentioneerde Burgers, en Inwoonders, als mede Vremdelingen, en niet te min Liefhebbers van dezen Vryen-staet." On the De la Court brothers, see my *Commercial Republicanism in the Dutch Golden Age: The Political Thought of Johan & Pieter de la Court* (Leiden, 2011).

55 Van den Enden, *Kort verhael*, (see above, n. 54), p. ii: "ghy die zijt buiten Interest van 't Predick-Ampt, en van alle andere ook meest ydele schoolze waen-geleertheyt, midtsgaders ontoegedane aen alle wereltze, op bedroch, en geweld gevestighde, heerschappijen ... laet hy sich aen der sotten, schoolze laetdunkende *Betweeters*, vijze Grammatisten, en diergelijke nijdige *Nacht-gediertens* oordeel weinigh, of niet gelegen zijn." I follow the translation and analysis by Haefeli, *New Netherland* (see above, n. 4), pp. 241–7, with some minor differences. See also Henk Looijesteijn, 'Petitioning, Colonial Policy, Constitutional Experiment and the Development of Dutch Colonial Thought,' paper presented at the 10th International Conference on Urban History, Ghent, 1–5 September 2010.

Given this anti-establishment attitude, it is not surprising that the directors of New Amstel saw little reason to accept Van den Enden's petition. But they were also critical of the practical implications of his plan. Speaking in the name of the several families willing to leave for Hoerenkil, Van den Enden's proposal was to establish overseas a "society of different people with conflicting sentiments," where there was to be no room for any "preachers, who feed and stiffen particular opinions." For Van den Enden, the main challenge for any peaceful society was the institutionalization of religious pluralism and the ensuing plurality of churches, which would entail "appointing particular preachers for each sect." This would not only be unfeasible practically but would also result in "an unavoidable ruinous pest of all peace and concord, without which no righteous society can be established, advanced, or in any way expected to be stable."⁵⁶

In line with orthodox theologians such as Hoornbeeck, Van den Enden thus argued that institutionalized pluralism must at all times be avoided. But his proposed solution to counteract such pluralism overseas was diametrically opposed to Hoornbeeck's project of Reformed evangelization. In Van den Enden's colony, all public worship was to be based on scripture alone, the "most peaceful and least expensive Preacher."⁵⁷ For other, human preachers, there would be no place in society: public worship would consist of young members of the colonial community taking turns reciting scripture aloud at specific hours. This proposal came close to the Collegiant ideal which by then was spreading in Amsterdam, and possibly at least some of Van den Enden's prospective colonists were Collegiants themselves. Nonetheless, clearly directing himself against all existing churches, Van den Enden did not speak explicitly on behalf of any particular confessional denomination. His ideal was one of a broad public church, to be based on *sola scriptura*, the inalienable exercise of private freedom of conscience and on a radical anti-clericalism. This inclusivist and relative tolerationist stance, however, did not imply that there would be place for all sorts of believers in Van den Enden's colony:

All intractable people, such as stiff-headed Papists narrowly devoted to the Roman See, usurious Jews, stiff-headed English Quakers, Puritans and

56 Van den Enden, *Kort verhael* (see above, n. 54), pp. 28–9: "een Societeit van verscheide in gevoelens strijdige menschen ... alle Predicanten, als voeders, en stijvers van ieders particuliere opinie ... voor ieder gezintheit byzondere Predicanten te stellen ... een onvermijdelijke ruineuxse pest van alle vreed, en eendracht, zonder de welke geen rechtschapige Societeit kan begonnen, noch gevordert, veel min op eenigerhande manier bestant te zijn geacht werden."

57 Van den Enden, *Kort verhael* (see above, n. 54), p. 29: "den aldervreedzaamste, ook onkostenlijkste-Predicant, de H. Schrift."

foolhardy stupid Millennialists, as well as all stiff-headed contemporaries claiming revelation etc., must be carefully excluded from this still fragile Christian civil society to preserve the common peace.⁵⁸

Given this significant stipulation, Van den Enden's radicalism or religious openness should not be exaggerated. After all, his proposal remained thoroughly Protestant in character, and quite close to the general Reformed ideal of a single public church. Indeed, during the negotiations over the proposal, the directors of the Amsterdam colony were concerned not so much with Van den Enden's religious ideas as with more worldly matters such as desired tax breaks for the colonists and the administration of justice in their new society. The main problem posed by Van den Enden's colony was the possibility that it might become too independent of Amsterdam's control and thus undermine the city's colonial sovereignty. After more than a year of negotiations, the directors of New Amstel therefore refused to grant its support. The crucial issue, as so often in the Dutch colonial world, was not so much religion as such but rather the proper allocation of sovereignty.

This relative importance of sovereignty over religion is shown by the success of a new proposal that was presented to the directors of the city-colony one month later, in May 1662. This time, the directors were approached by an ex-Mennonite freethinker from Zeeland, Pieter Plockhoy.⁵⁹ In the late 1650s, Plockhoy had spent some time in England, where he had tried to convince Oliver Cromwell to support his plans to establish an ecumenical community in Ireland. When these plans did not come to fruition, Plockhoy returned to the Dutch Republic (where he may have been in contact with Quakers and Collegiants) and turned his attention to the New World. The openness of the Amsterdam city-colony and the ongoing discussions about sending colonists to New Amstel triggered Plockhoy's enthusiasm. Like Van den Enden, he became the spokesman for a small group of prospective colonists willing to settle in Hoerenkil, possibly including members of Van den Enden's flock. Their aim was to establish a society of twenty-five men, farmers as well as artisans, who would form a colonial company of shareholders, "a peaceful, harmonious

58 Van den Enden, *Kort verhaal* (see above, n. 54), p. 52: "Aengezien alle intractabele Menschen, als daer zijn stijf-koppige, en aen den Roomse-Stoel-naeuw-verplichte Papisten, Woekerige Joden, Engelze stijf-koppige Quakers, Puriteinen, en driestige domme duizent-jarige Rijks-Gezinden, midtsgaders alle stijf-hoofdige hedendaeghse Revelatie-pretendeerders, enz. uit deze noch tedere Christ-burgerlijke Societeit, tot behoudt der gemene rust omzigtelijk moesten werden geweert."

59 On Plockhoy, see Henk Looijesteijn, "'Born to the Common Welfare': Pieter Plockhoy's Quest for a Christian Life (c. 1620–1664)," PhD dissertation, European University Institute, 2009. See also Haefeli, *New Netherland* (see above, n. 4), pp. 247–51.

and selected people” who would remain subject to the authority of New Amstel and ultimately to the city of Amsterdam.⁶⁰ Their proposal, presented by Plockhoy, contained a democratic foundation similar to Van den Enden’s plan, but it made adamantly clear that the sovereignty of Amsterdam would not be infringed. Plockhoy had learned from Van den Enden’s mistake of asking for too much colonial independence.

At the same time, Plockhoy’s proposal also slightly differed from Van den Enden’s with regard to the religious characteristics of the society that he wanted to establish. The foundations were comparable, and again there was likely Collegiant inspiration: Plockhoy’s society would form a broad Christian association of colonists who would not be educated by “human interpretations of Religion,” so that “no foundation of sectarianism or partisanship shall be laid in their hearts.” As in Van den Enden’s plan, the aim was a broad public church where, “to balance everything,” public service was restricted to Bible reading and the singing of psalms, while all could exercise their freedom of conscience. Yet unlike Van den Enden, Plockhoy also explicitly created room for private congregations to have “their own particular meeting places and to maintain their own pastors, for this is an issue that does not concern the society in general.”⁶¹ Plockhoy thus challenged Van den Enden’s unyielding anti-clericalism, proposing a confessional framework that was more akin to the religious practice in a city like Amsterdam, where dissenting congregations such as Lutherans, Catholics, and Jews were allowed to meet and practice their faith in private (which practically entailed the toleration of semi-clandestine *schuilkerken* or more visible religious centers such as the Amsterdam Synagogue). Within the limits of this established framework in terms of colonial sovereignty as well as religious openness, Plockhoy realized how to convince the directors of New Amstel to support his project by claiming that it was, in fact, not at all utopian. As the poet Jacob Steendam put it in his accompanying verse to the proposal, directed at the prospective colonists for the new society overseas: “It is no utopia, it rests on well-founded laws, which set you a clear rule for liberty.”⁶²

60 Pieter Plockhoy, *Kort en klaer ontwerp, dienende tot een ondeling accoort, om den arbeyd, onrust en moeyelijckheyd van alderley-hand-wercx-luyden te verlichten door een ondelinge compagnie ofte volck-planting* (Amsterdam, 1662), unpagged: “een vredigh, een-stemmigh en uyt-gesocht Volck.”

61 Plockhoy, *Kort en klaer ontwerp* (see above, n. 60), sig. Bv: “In saecken van Religie (om alles wel te ballanceren) sal elck vryheyd van Conscientie behouden ... haer eygen particuliere vergader-plaetsen hebben, en haer eygen Leeraers onder-houden. Als sijnde een sake die de Societeyt in ’t gemeen niet aen en gaet.... geen menschelijcke Formulieren van religie ... geen Fondament van Secterije of partijschap in hare herten geleyt worden.”

62 Plockhoy, *Kort en klaer ontwerp* (see above, n. 60), unpagged: “’T is geen *Utopia*, ’t steund op gegronde wetten: Die tot de vryheyd u, een vasten Regel setten.”

The directors of New Amstel approved Ploekhoy's proposal in June 1662, but the first colonists, including Ploekhoy himself, did not leave until almost a year later, in May 1663. Yet for all this apparent cautiousness, the project soon turned out to be doomed: in 1664, New Netherland was conquered by the English and the nascent settlement at Hoerenkil, "the most radical religious and social experiment the republic's colonies ever saw," was plundered.⁶³ No more was ever heard of Ploekhoy: all physical traces of his colony have disappeared from the banks of the Delaware River. Yet Ploekhoy's and Van den Enden's written proposals remain vivid witnesses to the idea that religious concord, the *fata morgana* of Dutch society, could be found beyond the horizon by the creation of new societies overseas. The existence of a plurality of churches may have made confessional unity impossible at home, but a single, inclusive church still seemed an achievable goal in the colonial world. In the early 1660s, this colonial window of opportunity opened thanks to the exceptional context of the Amsterdam city-colony and its expansion at Hoerenkil. That window soon closed again, but it gave rise to freethinking experimentation that was further developed in later years. It might be argued that Van den Enden's failure to convince the directors of New Amstel to accept his proposal had the unforeseen consequence of directing all his attention, and that of his erstwhile pupil Spinoza, once again to reforming Dutch politics, church, and society from within, which resulted in Van den Enden's *Vrye politieke stellingen* (1665) and culminated in the publication of the *Tractatus theologico-politicus* in 1670.⁶⁴ Yet in the ensuing development of the Radical Enlightenment, the colonial world continued to be a platform for religious zeal, offering many a prospect of heavenly concord that was unattainable at home.

4 Awaiting Doomsday in the Wilderness: The Labadists in Suriname

The New World attracted plans for a new society on the basis not only of ecumenical openness but also the opposite ideal: that of a faraway sectarian community flourishing in perfect isolation. In the Dutch context, the best illustration of such sectarian escapism was the community of the Labadists. Epitomizing the continuous confessional conflict that haunted Dutch society, this sect originated as a schismatic group within the Calvinist Walloon Church, led by Jean de Labadie, a French ex-Jesuit. In his writing and preaching, De Labadie strongly emphasized personal piety, inner spirituality, and asceticism, and eventually

63 Haefeli, *New Netherland* (see above, n. 4), p. 233.

64 Cf. Israel, *Radical Enlightenment* (see above, n. 53), pp. 175, 260.

he established an independent community in Amsterdam in 1669. Persecuted by the authorities for transgressing public order, the Labadists soon moved away and ended up after Labadie's death in Friesland, where they obtained significant privileges such as the right to hold public meetings. Moreover, they were allowed to settle their community near the village of Wieuwerd thanks to the invitation by the local aristocratic family of Van Aerssen van Sommelsdijk.⁶⁵ This autarchic community at Wieuwerd, whose members lived in community sharing goods and adhering to strict group discipline, soon became a tourist attraction of sorts, visited by curious travelers such as William Penn and John Locke. Clearly, the isolation the Labadists desired was not complete, and in the early summer of 1684, a large group left Wieuwerd to seek a proper refuge from worldliness in the wilderness of Suriname.

This choice for Suriname was obviously no coincidence. The year before, the Society of Suriname had been established to govern the Dutch colony at the 'Wild Coast,' conquered from the English in 1667; the three shareholders of the Company were the WIC, the city of Amsterdam, and Cornelis van Aerssen van Sommelsdijk, who was also appointed the colony's first governor. The sisters of Cornelis had invited the Labadist community to Wieuwerd, where the Labadists were granted official freedom of religion in 1675 by the States of Friesland, henceforth enjoying the right to practice their faith publicly. Now that the family had gained new territory overseas, the Labadists were offered a perfect opportunity to spread out. Once again, the issue of sovereignty proved to be crucial: Van Aerssen van Sommelsdijk was the legitimate sovereign over the colony of Suriname, onto which he copied the political-religious framework of Friesland. This circumstance gave the Labadists the exceptional possibility of creating a new religious settlement of their own. A sizeable portion of the community followed the governor, including his sister Lucia van Aerssen van Sommelsdijk, and after their arrival in 1684 they established a plantation some eighty kilometers up the Suriname River on land granted to Lucia. The settlement, far removed from the small colonial headquarters at Fort Zeelandia, was christened 'Providentia.'⁶⁶

The rationale behind this providential escapism followed directly from the main principles of the Labadists' religiosity. According to the account by Petrus Dittelbach, an apostate of the community at Wieuwerd, Labadie had preached a millenarian vision wherein the situation of his church "would be

65 See Mirjam de Baar, 'Godsdienstvrijheid voor de labadisten in Wieuwerd (1675–1732),' *De zeventiende eeuw* 20 (2004), pp. 66–82, and more generally on the Labadists T. J. Saxby, *The Quest for the New Jerusalem: Jean de Labadie and the Labadists, 1610–1744* (Dordrecht, 1987).

66 L. Knappert, 'De Labadisten in Suriname,' *De West-Indische Gids* 8 (1926), 193–218.

the last state until the coming of Christ's judgment." A proper location was therefore needed to await Doomsday in isolation; Labadie had thought about moving his community to the Cape Colony or Madagascar for this purpose. Divine intervention, however, brought the Labadists after Labadie's death in contact with Van Aerssen van Sommelsdijck, and thus God had directed his elected flock towards Suriname, "the poorest land in the world as to the necessities of nature." A first reconnaissance of the territory was not very promising, but "nonetheless the Lord ordained ... that this would be the place that would be like a Zoar for his church, when God would destroy this world with its falsely pious people." According to Dittelbach, the Labadist leaders therefore sent a selection of the community's members overseas, telling them that "there they would be in a freer state, and they would be enabled to practice more intensely the freedom that God had given to his House and children and that cannot be discovered or enjoyed among or amidst the worldly believers." The ascetic life in the wilderness was thus considered a breeding ground for religious freedom and intense spirituality.⁶⁷

On the basis of such deepened internal religiosity, a community would arise in utter autarchy and isolation to avoid any contamination by other Christians, who had strayed from the true path and had thus willingly shunned their own salvation: "Israel must live alone and far from the world, for those to whom Christ had already been revealed could not be helped, but the heathens would listen."⁶⁸ Like Hoornbeeck, the Labadists believed that while proselytizing at home was to no avail, it would succeed overseas among the unspoiled heathens; like Van den Eenden and Plockhoy, they believed that the establishment of a communal society on virgin soil would be a way to overcome religious pluralism. For orthodox theologians, utopian freethinkers, and millenarian sectarians alike, the colonial world thus served as a mirage of successful evangelization, internal concord, and eventual salvation.

67 Petrus Dittelbach, *Verval en val der Labadisten* (Amsterdam, 1692), pp. 51–3: "den laatsten stand sou zijn tot op de komste Christi ten oordeel ... het armste Land ter wereld aangaande de nootsakelijkheden voor de natuur ... de Heere deed evenwel gevoelen ... dat dit de plaats sou zijn, die als een Zoar sou wesen voor dese sijne Kerke, wanneer God door sijne oordelen de hier zijnde Werelt met hare valsche pieusen sou te niet maken.... dat sy daar in een vryeren stand soud en staan, en in staat wesen om meer in te gaan in de vryhey die de Heere aan sijn Huys en kinderen gaf, welke hier noch onder en in 't midden van de wereltlike vromen soo niet kon ontdekt noch genoten worden."

68 Dittelbach, *Verval en val der Labadisten* (see above, n. 67), p. 54: "Israel moest alleen wonen en veyre van de werelt: want aan die gene die Christus nu al was verkondigt, was niet aan te doen, de heydenen soud en horen."

Yet also for the Labadists, the colonial reality proved to be merciless. The conditions in the wilderness of Suriname were extremely harsh, the colonists from Wieuwerd were totally unprepared to work the soil of the rainforest or to withstand tropical diseases, and soon poverty and plague struck the community. A second expedition from Wieuwerd aimed to bring some relief, but the situation only got worse: the dream of colonial concord turned into a nightmare of discord and internal strife, and many of the colonists who survived the epidemic decided to return home. Only a few remained. In April 1700, some fifteen years after the first group had arrived at Providentia, the famous illustrator and natural historian Maria Sybilla Merian visited Suriname and saw the plantation colony almost entirely abandoned. Merian had lived among the Labadist community at Wieuwerd, and her religiosity was one of the initial inspirations behind her study of flowers, insects, and the finest details of God's creation. Her marvelous drawings of tropical caterpillars and butterflies made during her stay in Suriname were eventually published in *Metamorphosis Insectorum Surinamensium* from 1705.⁶⁹ The Labadists' colony, now mainly populated by black slaves, lingered on for a few more years until the plantation was sold in 1719; the community at Wieuwerd finally fell apart in 1732. Such was the tragic metamorphosis of what was meant to be a Zoar for the chosen ones.

5 Conclusion: Redrawing the Limits between Inner and Outer Religiosity

Dutch intellectual and religious life entered a maelstrom after 1650, and before long the colonial world was sucked into this maelstrom as well. The continuous dualism of the desire for religious unity and the reality of confessional plurality resulted in a centrifugal clash between the public church and dissenting congregations. All searched for deeper internal religiosity and personal piety, which strengthened religious communities from within but also led to the opening up of new vistas of interreligious dialogue, ecumenical openness, and communal living overseas. Johannes Hoornbeeck, as a representative of Reformed orthodoxy, defended the purity of the single public church by looking for connections with other belief systems; Franciscus van den Enden and Pieter Plochhoy challenged orthodoxy from the outside by putting forth

69 On Merian, see Natalie Zemon Davis, *Women on the Margins: Three Seventeenth-Century Lives* (Cambridge, Mass., 1995), pp. 140–202, and Ella Reitsma, *Maria Sibylla Merian & dochters* (Zwolle, 2008). Her visit to Providentia is mentioned in *Metamorphosis Insectorum Surinamensium ofte verandering der Surinaamsche insecten* (Amsterdam, 1705), p. 20.

a radically different vision of a single public church, based on the Collegiant ideal of inclusivity; the Labadists challenged orthodoxy from within by establishing an exclusive independent community intended to isolate the true believers from the rest of the world. All looked overseas to realize their ideals: the maelstrom of religious and intellectual changes in the second half of the seventeenth century was not confined to the narrow borders of the Dutch Republic.

All three colonial projects turned out to be brilliant failures, mainly because of concrete political and geographical circumstances: Hoornbeeck's plea for worldwide evangelization was hardly equipped to meet the realities of Dutch sovereign control overseas; Van den Enden and Ploekhoy's plans were aborted because of colonial disputes in Amsterdam and warfare in New Netherland; the Labadists' millenarian dream of salvation was smothered in the worldly hardship of the wilderness. Clearly, the colonial escape route to concord did not lead anywhere. One of the main reasons for this failure was the unresolved tension between political authority and the church within the Dutch framework. In all three cases, the possibilities of success depended on the willingness of the civil sovereign: Hoornbeeck could realize his plans for global mission only if backed by the VOC and WIC, Van den Enden and Ploekhoy could put forward their plans for a new settlement only thanks to the relative openness of the directors of New Amstel, and the mirage of the Labadists could materialize only because of the support they received from Van Aerssen van Sommelsdyck. The problematic relationship between church and state thus heavily conditioned the success, and the failure, of religious experiments in the colonial world.

Such failure could have resulted in a further hardening of entrenched confessional positions. Yet after almost two centuries of endless infighting between Christians, a different outcome could be realized by redrawing the limits between inner and outer religiosity, between the private and public spheres of religious expression—at home and overseas. Over the course of the eighteenth century, the Dutch Reformed framework of a single public church eventually yielded to a multiconfessional reality, at home and also in the colonies, when other Protestant congregations such as Lutherans were officially allowed to establish churches in Batavia and the Cape Colony. In New England, the Dutch conception of the interdependence between church and state was replaced by the Erastian practices of the new colonial government, which created much more room for dissenting pilgrim settlements.⁷⁰ Indeed, the Labadists also established a community in Maryland, which had considerably more success

70 See Haefeli, *New Netherland* (see above, n. 4).

than the outpost in Suriname.⁷¹ Finally, Dutch evangelization overseas truly took off at the end of the eighteenth century with the establishment of the *Zendelinggenootschap* or Missionary Society, which was founded as a private initiative in 1797.⁷² Where the public church had failed, private religious zeal now took over. Colonial escapism and the experiments of the opening decades of the Enlightenment had contributed to this gradual demise of the primacy of the Reformed Church as the public church, and to the gradual rise of inner spirituality as the essence of colonial godliness.

71 Saxby, *The Quest for the New Jerusalem* (see above, n. 65).

72 P. N. Holtrop, 'Van kerkstaat naar particulier initiatief: De Indische kerk en het Nederlandse Zendelinggenootschap,' in: *Het Indisch Sion*, ed. Schutte (see above, n. 4), pp. 225–36.