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From New Netherland to 'New Zeeland'

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Evan Haefeli's book (*New Netherland and the Dutch Origins of American Religious Liberty* (Philadelphia 2012)) corrects the wide-spread belief that the Dutch in colonial America were responsible for introducing religious tolerance in the New World. Instead, he shows convincingly how the concept of tolerance as an ideal was never the plan, but the practical outcome of a process of dynamic power relationships which turned out to be more tolerant than most other nations. He explains how this idea of the Dutch as the founders of tolerance emerged and how events in the Dutch Republic and its colonies shaped practices and policies in New Netherland. This book is instructive about the impact of national boundaries on religious loyalties in the early modern period and contributes to the current debate about religious tolerance.

The first serious historical survey of New Netherland written in the Dutch language appeared in 1818. Nicholas Lambrechtsen, a Zeeland aristocrat, wrote the work during the years of the French occupation as a means to comfort his countrymen and inspire them with an epic story. A moderate patriot, Lambrechtsen indicated that intolerance elsewhere in Europe (especially in England and France) had inadvertently assisted in building the wealth of the Dutch Republic. The effects of this development could be felt in the New World as tolerance continued there. After the publication of Lambrechtsen's book the Dutch were silent on the subject for about a century: then Albert Eekhof, church historian at Leiden University, published his original studies on the Dutch Reformed Church and its ministers in North America. Eekhof's books confirmed the existence of Dutch tolerance among the homogeneous citizenry of New Netherland.[1]

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During the late twentieth century this harmonious view came under attack. Historians discovered ethnic and religious variety in the Dutch colony. American historians such as Randall Balmer and Joyce Goodfriend revealed that true tolerance emerged only after the British captured New Netherland in 1664.[2] Balmer and Goodfriend's studies appeared in the 1990s as part of a revival of interest in New Netherland, triggered by the multicultural revolution in American historiography that emphasised diversity and by the new religious histories that turned to the practices and experiences of the flock. However, the American journalist and researcher Russell Shorto revived the story of the Dutch as tolerant in his 2004 bestseller *The Island at the Center of the World*.[3] This book claimed that the sources of tolerance and pluralism in North America lay in New Netherland rather than in New England. According to Shorto, Dutch innovations had laid the groundwork for modern America.

Dutch historians, most prominently Jaap Jacobs and Willem Frijhoff, joined in the debate and reaffirmed the Dutch character of New Netherland. They contradicted the impression of a quick adaptation to American conditions that is so often conveyed in surveys of colonial America. Jacobs, Frijhoff and others proved that New Netherland was an extension of the institutions of the Dutch Republic and their celebrated tolerance was confined by the Dutch context.[4] Freedom of conscience was guaranteed in the colonies just as in the motherland, but did not include equality for all religious traditions.[5]

1 N.C. Lambrechtsen van Ritthem, *Korte Beschrijving van de Ontdekking en der verdere Lotgevallen van Nieuw-Nederland, weleer eene Volkplanting van het Gemeenebest der Vereenigde Nederlanden in Amerika* (Middelburg 1818); Albert Eekhof, *De Hervormde Kerk in Noord-Amerika (1624-1664)* (The Hague 1913).

2 Randall Balmer, *A Perfect Babel of Confusion: Dutch Religion and English Culture in the Middle Colonies* (New York 1989); Joyce D. Goodfriend, *Before the Melting Pot: Society and Culture in Colonial New York City, 1664-1730* (Princeton, NJ 1992) and her essay 'Toleration in Dutch New Netherland', in: Chris Beneke and Christopher Grenda (eds.), *The First Prejudice: Religious Tolerance and Intolerance in Early America* (Philadelphia, PA 2011) 98-122.

3 Russell Shorto, *The Island at the Center of the World: The Epic Story of Dutch Manhattan and the Forgotten Colony that Shaped America* (New York 2004).

4 Jaap Jacobs, *The Colony of New Netherland: A Dutch Settlement in Seventeenth-Century America* (Ithaca, NY 2009); Jaap Jacobs, 'Between Repression and Approval: Connivance and Tolerance in the Dutch Republic and in New Netherland', *De Halve Maen* 71:3 (1998) 51-58; Willem Frijhoff, *Fulfilling God's Mission: The Two Worlds of Dominie Everardus Bogardus, 1607-1647* (Leiden 2007); Willem Frijhoff and Jaap Jacobs, 'The Dutch, New Netherland, and Thereafter (1609-1780s)', in: Hans Krabbendam, Cornelis A. van Minnen and Giles Scott-Smith (eds.), *Four Centuries of Dutch-American Relations, 1609-2009* (Amsterdam, New York 2009) 31-48.

5 Fred van Lieburg, 'The Dutch and Their Religion', in: Krabbendam, *Four Centuries*, 154-165.

New Netherland and the Dutch Origins of American Religious Liberty, the new book by Columbia University historian Evan Haefeli[6], explores the many American and Dutch contributions to tolerance in a comprehensive, well-structured, balanced and beautifully written synthesis. Americans hardly need to be persuaded about the relevance of this theme, but Dutch readers will gain a new perspective, as in their own the country tolerance has become a contested idea. To the Dutch, the aura of tolerance is at the core of their national identity. They often praise their own tolerance as if it were ingrained in Dutch genes. Diplomats use this virtue as the historical glue of the transatlantic alliance. Thanks to the recent publications from Dutch historians however, we know that the Dutch colony on Manhattan contributed relatively little to the spread of religious tolerance in the New World and that it occupied a modest place in the Dutch Empire overall. Translations of the early Dutch sources published by the New Netherland Institute in Albany, New York, as well as modern Dutch monographs, have spread support for this view in America. For scholars who followed this debate closely, Haefeli's interpretation does not produce any big surprises, but they will appreciate his synthesis. He carefully integrates the character of Dutch connivance in the early modern period into the frameworks of space, time, politics and religious beliefs. Haefeli bases his findings on original Dutch sources and connects the results to debates in both countries. The primary value of his work is a correction of the misinterpretations in the two cultures. This he presents in a complete, balanced and readable account.[7]

The second service that this book renders is to the legal debate on tolerance. It gives a strong historical argument that debunks the popular belief in the inevitable and limitless expansion of personal freedom. Haefeli's introduction sharpens the concept of tolerance as an ideal shaped in practice and not as a universal or natural virtue. Tolerance is a result of dynamic power relationships that differ in each culture. Theory contributes to the actual results, but is not the origin. After this sophisticated framing of the concept, Haefeli applies it to the situation in old and New Amsterdam. This is a brilliant move, as the Dutch Republic was in the midst of building its own institutions on a global scale and had to take note of the existence of different religious traditions. Thus the book contributes to intellectual history and to the current debate about the universality of values, even while it works to characterise the historic significance of an advanced Dutch outpost in the New World.

Before Haefeli arrives at the question: 'what was new in the North American continent, and why did events take place as they did', he has to

6 Evan Haefeli, *New Netherland and the Dutch Origins of American Religious Liberty* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012, 355 pp., ISBN 9780812244083).

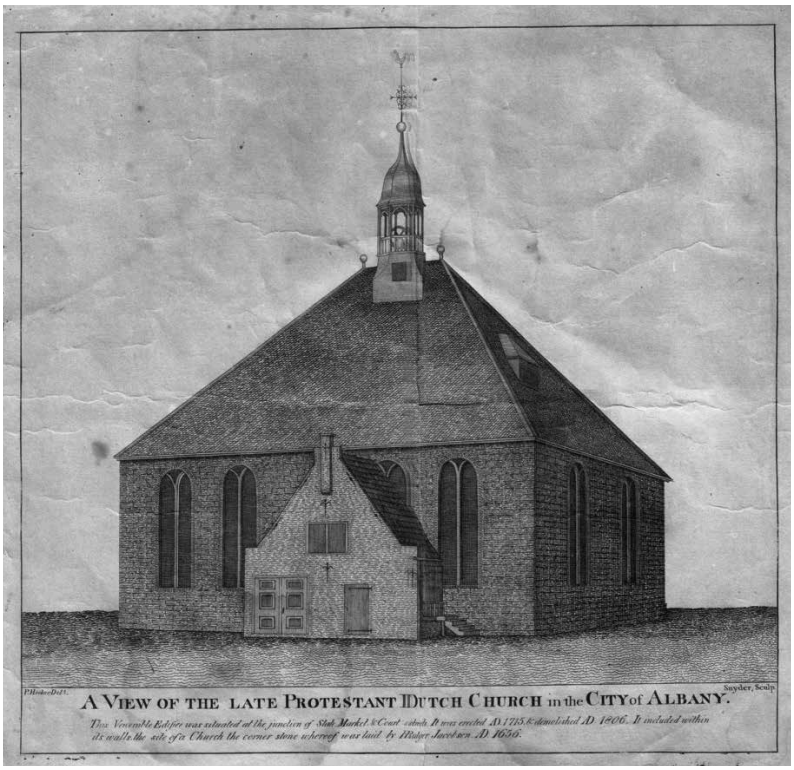
7 For an example of the Dutch debate see the essays in Marcel ten Hooven (ed.), *De lege tolerantie. Over vrijheid en vrijblijvendheid in Nederland* (Amsterdam 2001) especially 39-82.

remove some mythological debris by excavating how and why the seventeenth-century Hollanders had such a reputation for tolerance.[8] Some historians credit the all-transcending Dutch trade interests. Haefeli however, resolutely refutes this easy, but shallow solution, one so often applied by commentators on the Republic with an agenda of their own. The rich work of Van Deursen, Frijhoff, Groenveld, and others has proved that the Dutch Republic had a religious objective, and it was a contested one. Catholic commentators have exaggerated the Republic's religious freedom to show that it was only interested in financial gain and was therefore doomed to collapse. Radical Protestants did the same in order to press for equal treatment for their own religious services. Both groups of observers pointed to the Province of Holland, ignoring the other six provinces that often had different religious policies. There was no single consistent Republican policy.

Haefeli uses this wider horizon to locate the European political arena in which the Dutch Republic had to secure its independence. Holland, and the city of Amsterdam, carried the burden of this process, but neither of them was unique in its liberal religious policy. Other cities in Europe also granted religious rights to their citizens in order to boost the population. Inside Holland and its assortment of colonies, religious traditions occupied different positions.

Each new colonial settlement or conquest challenged the administrators to find a modus vivendi for the diversity present there, without necessarily advancing diversity or tolerance as a cause. It was the explicit goal of the colonial expansion to strengthen the Reformed Church. In New Netherland the Lutherans and radical Quakers provoked the Calvinist dominance. Initially the Reformed Church created space for Lutherans by removing the promise to adhere to the doctrine taught in their specific Reformed Church in the baptism questions asked of the parents, thus circumventing an explicit agreement with the Reformed tradition. This measure allowed Lutherans to participate in the church. However internal religious debates, pressures on the boundaries of the empire and radical Enlightenment ideas made it difficult to maintain a Reformed society and the authorities in New Netherland had to work hard to maintain order. Only after the English conquest of the colony in 1664, did other religious traditions receive more space. This was due to the liberal policies of the restored English monarchy between 1660 and 1688. The legacy of forty years of Dutch supervision safeguarded the middle colonies, allowing them to absorb a variety of religious traditions.

8 Willem Frijhoff, 'Seventeenth-century Religion as a Cultural Practice: Reassessing New Netherland's Religious History', in: Margriet Bruyn Lacy, Charles Gehring and Jenneke Oosterhoff (eds.), *From De Halve Maen to KLM: 400 Years of Dutch-American Exchange* (Münster 2008) 159-174.



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The First Reformed Church in Albany, New York, built in 1715 around the original 1656 edifice. This building lasted till 1806.

New York State Library, Albany.

This general reconstruction of the course of the Republic, the religious forces and the regional differences need an explanation. Haefeli reaches for the late penetration of the Reformation in the Low Countries and the complete acceptance of freedom of conscience. This was a major aim of the Dutch in the struggle for freedom against Spain, but the new nation recognised only one public religion, the Dutch Reformed Church. The presence of other traditions and the lack of a strong central authority created space for other Christian religions. In the early seventeenth century however, domestic and foreign religious forces began to shift. The Republic's global expansion confronted many different actors. Internally, the stadtholder accumulated power that became entangled with the process of increasing confessionalism. Frijhoff characterised this trend as part of the heightened profile of the Reformed Church in society, strengthening its cause, for instance, at the Synod of Dort (1618-1619). The function of the church changed from an umbrella for all citizens to a banner for true (and loyal) believers. The originally inclusive organisation of the pioneer phase became more exclusive in its requirements of its members.

This shift deepened the tension inside the church between piëtists and conservatives, and outside the church, with the Lutherans. In old Amsterdam Lutherans received more rights, because they were numerous and the authorities felt the pressure in the struggle to keep the Sont open for Dutch trade: but in New Amsterdam the authorities did not yield.

Haefeli refers to the stricter policy in religious affairs in border areas that gave rise to great tension between Protestants and Catholics. There, religious restriction curtailed the public presence of Catholics in order to strengthen the Protestant communities. In the colonies, Catholic clerics were generally banned and Jews were only tolerated as long as they contributed to the economy and did not become public charges. New Amsterdam faced a different constellation, as was clear by 1654. In that year director-general Petrus Stuyvesant declined the Lutheran appeal to have a minister of their own. Stuyvesant feared the undermining of the public church and the creation of a precedent. Two years later the New Netherland authorities increased pressure to restrict other groups.

The width of tolerance was determined by the nature of religious neighbours, their size and the chance they might join the Reformed Church. Haefeli emphasises the religious ambitions of the Dutch Calvinists, accomplished without force and without a comprehensive plan. This combination explains the relative liberty of the numerous Catholics in Dutch Brazil and the Lutherans in the conquered Scandinavian colony at the Delaware.[9] In other parts of the planet the colonial authorities had different

9 Frans Leonard Schalkwijk, *The Reformed Church in Dutch Brazil (1630-1654)* (Zoetermeer 1998).

approaches. This is the core of Haefeli's book: if there was some sort of common policy it was meant to restrict not to broaden religious boundaries.

Haefeli needs to answer the challenge that it was perhaps Stuyvesant personally who was an obstacle to greater tolerance. Haefeli interprets the man with the wooden leg as part of the pattern, not as an exception. Stuyvesant's strict enforcement of the official policies fits into the contra-Remonstrant approach, even though the WIC regretted Stuyvesant's all too crass actions. Stuyvesant tried to block the spread of conventicles. Religious practices of whatever kind were allowed in the privacy of the family, but were forbidden when practiced in larger circles. His harsh treatment of Quakers, which is often taken as Stuyvesant's personal grudge, was not an effort to make them change their religious allegiance, but was an instrument to pressure them into obeying his authority in civic matters. Stuyvesant's behaviour did not differ from governors in British or in other Dutch colonies. The famous Flushing Remonstrance, the petition by English dissenters clamouring for more individual religious expression, did not have a ghost of a chance in this construction aimed at minimising the distance between State and Church.

Haefeli's positioning of the director's acts is plausible, but does not conclude the discussion about the leverage of individuals. Personal leadership had a great impact in this pioneering phase. The relationships between preachers and officials determined the enforcement of the rules. Recent research on the careers of the Reformed ministers in New Netherland reveals that the selection process resulted in candidates who were often sources of tension, either because of their character or their mission. Moreover, there were few moderating instances. The Stuyvesant biography in preparation by Jaap Jacobs might help decide this issue of personal input.[10]

Haefeli's conclusion is that old and New Amsterdam drifted apart in religious arrangements in the 1650s, but not in a linear development toward greater liberty. The only window of opportunity for radical believers (mainly a small elite) in the colony occurred in 1663 when Pieter C. Plockhoy began a liberal religious experiment in New Amstel in the Delaware valley. His plan was directed against strong government institutions but the experiment's existence was too short to prove that his alternative was viable.

In the end it was the result of the conflict between the Republic and England that determined the religious relations in the colony. Because both nations were Protestant, the locals were not too concerned about the future and did not openly resist the change. The real change happened in 1664. The Reformed church lost the exclusive support of the state and in practical

10 See the biographical portraits in Leon van den Broeke, Hans Krabbendam and Dirk Mouw (eds.), *Transatlantic Pieties: Dutch Clergy in Colonial America* (Grand Rapids, MI 2012).

terms, tolerance in New York was confirmed. The re-conquest by a Zeeland fleet under direction of Cornelis Evertsen de Jongste in 1673, did not last long enough to allow the old situation to return, but this brief period offered strong clues as to what would have happened had the colony stayed in Dutch hands in the negotiations of 1674. The rebaptism of the colony to New Orange and of Albany to Willemstadt, are clear indications that it would have followed Zeeland rather than Amsterdam in its religious ways. The new authorities began to restrict religious boundaries, but could not complete the process. After 1674 the Reformed church was weakened by the dearth of young forceful ministers and lack of funds.

In summary, this book confirms the grip of the old World on the new and removes the ideal of religious tolerance from the list of Dutch innovations in North America. The shift in European power relations defined the boundaries of practical tolerance in the Republic and its satellite colonies. The interaction with native tribes and African slaves made the situation more complex but did not fundamentally change the structure.

This conclusion diminishing Dutch innovations in the North American founding period might change again in a new round of historical research. New contributions to the historiography would do well to delve into the relationship between members and non-members of the Reformed church. This is the remaining leg of the tripod of theory, policy, and social practice. Further analysis of the local religious situation should reveal the effect that protection of the public church had on the relationships among the citizens. Was the level of tolerance high or low in the private sphere, and did it change on the border between the public and private realms?[11] Did this colonial pattern differ from other frontiers? Was the religious trend in New Netherland, resembling as it did more Zeeland than Amsterdam, reflected in other domains, such as the economy and education?

The conclusion of Evan Haefeli's book might be sobering to some readers as it lessens the confidence in the Dutch contribution to American religious liberty, but it definitely does not disappoint as a study. Haefeli clearly proves that it was never the intention of the Hollanders to establish a tolerant society, even though the practical outcome was more tolerant than most other nations. In this light, the title of his book is unnecessarily ambiguous. One may still read the title as an indication that expansion of toleration was the Dutch aim, which was explicitly not their goal.

11 Benjamin Kaplan, *Divided by Faith: Religious Conflict and the Practice of Toleration in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, MA 2007). As Jacobs in *Colony*, 157-160 indicated, membership records are scarce, but reconstruction is possible. Useful published sources are Janny Venema's translation and edition of the *Deacons' Accounts, 1652-1674: First Dutch Reformed Church of Beverwyck/ Albany, New York* (Grand Rapids, MI 1998), and *Liber A: 1628-1700 of the Collegiate Churches of New York*, Francis J. Sypher, Jr. (ed.) (Grand Rapids, MI 2009) 284-300.

New Netherland did contribute to more diversity, allowing space for Jewish and Christian variations in the first decennia of its existence and offering an opportunity for minorities to take root. However the importance of this book is larger than this contribution to the settlement period. I see at least five areas of significance. First, this book exposes the finalistic Whig interpretation of tolerance as a linear development and offers a strong conceptual clarification of the term by concentrating on the actual outcome of complex power relations. This eminently historical analysis offers a framework for renewed debates about the universal aspects of tolerance. Secondly, the book offers specific examples for the academic debate about trans-nationalism, and about the significance (or irrelevance) of national boundaries for religious loyalties. On the one hand it shows how deep national debates penetrated into the colonies. On the other hand, it shows how national conquests fundamentally changed religious privileges. Thirdly, it enriches the discussion about the space for individuals, and the strength of structures, in processes of change. Fourthly, this balanced book holds up an integrated transatlantic mirror encouraging historians to include other provinces in the positioning of a colony like New Netherland. Finally it has an immediate diplomatic consequence; after this book no diplomat can claim with any authority that tolerance was a Dutch legacy to America. ◀

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