

GEERHARDUS VOS

REFORMED BIBLICAL THEOLOGIAN,
CONFESSIONAL PRESBYTERIAN

DANNY E. OLINGER



REFORMED
FORUM

Copyright © 2018 Danny E. Olinger

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be used or reproduced in any manner whatsoever without written permission except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles and reviews.

Reformed Forum
P. O. Box 27422
Philadelphia, PA 19118
www.reformedforum.org

Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are from the ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations denoted KJV are from *The Holy Bible: King James Version*, Electronic Edition of the 1900 Authorized Version. (Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 2009).

Library of Congress Control Number: 2018956367

ISBN: 978-0-9987487-2-6 (hardcover)
978-0-9987487-3-3 (ebook)

ABBREVIATIONS

ESV	English Standard Version Bible
KJV	King James Version Bible
WCF	Westminster Confession of Faith

CONTENTS

Abbreviations.....	v
Foreword.....	xi
Life in the Old Country.....	3
Education in America and Europe.....	13
Spring Street Christian Reformed Church.....	16
Princeton Seminary.....	17
The Mosaic Origin of the Pentateuchal Codes.....	18
Germany: Berlin and Strassburg.....	20
Professor at the Theological School in Grand Rapids.....	29
The Prospects of American Theology.....	30
Theological School in Grand Rapids.....	32
Reformed Dutch-American Connections: Abraham Kuyper, Herman Bavinck, and Benjamin Warfield.....	35
Doctrinal Controversy: Supralapsarianism.....	39
Election, Covenant, and Baptism.....	42
Reformed Biblical-Theological Beginnings.....	47
The Doctrine of the Covenant in Reformed Theology.....	48
The Covenant of Works and the Reformed Principle.....	50
The Covenant of Redemption and the Reformed Principle.....	52
The Covenant of Grace and the Reformed Principle.....	53
Precursor to Reformed Biblical Theology.....	56
Election, Covenant, and Baptism.....	58
Princeton Seminary's Pursuit.....	60
Jan Vos and Abraham Kuyper.....	65
Change of Mind.....	67

New Beginnings at Princeton.....	71
Catherine Smith.....	73
Plans on Teaching Reformed Biblical Theology.....	74
The Idea of Biblical Theology	
as a Science and as a Theological Discipline.....	78
Presbyterianism and Marriage.....	82
Reviews.....	84
Charles Augustus Briggs.....	86
The Prophets.....	91
1898 Stone Lectures: Abraham Kuyper.....	94
Confessional Revision.....	99
The Biblical Importance of the Doctrine of Preterition.....	107
1901 General Assembly.....	109
The Scriptural Doctrine of the Love of God.....	110
Family Life, the Kingdom of God, and the Church.....	119
The Bible Student.....	123
The Teaching of Jesus concerning the Kingdom of God and the Church.....	125
Reviews.....	133
The Biblical Theology.....	141
Biblical Theology.....	143
Pre-Redemptive Special Revelation.....	145
The Patriarchal Period.....	149
The Mosaic Era.....	151
Prophetic Epoch.....	154
The New Testament.....	155
Reviews.....	157
Pauline Eschatology.....	163
The Theology of Paul.....	167
Review of Kennedy's <i>St. Paul's Conception of the Last Things</i>	169
Princeton Seminary Centennial.....	170
The Eschatological Aspect of the Pauline Conception of the Spirit.....	171
The Pauline Eschatology.....	174
The Structure of the Pauline Eschatology.....	175
The Interaction Between Eschatology and Soteriology.....	177
The Religious and Ethical Motivation of Paul's Eschatology.....	180

The Coming of the Lord.....	180
The Resurrection.....	181
Chiliasm (Premillennialism).....	182
The Eternal State.....	183
Reviews.....	184
Dr. Buswell's Premillennialism.....	188
Richard B. Gaffin, Jr.	190
Anthony Hoekema and Andrew Bandstra.....	192
Grace and Glory.....	195
Grace and Glory.....	197
The Wonderful Tree.....	197
Hungering and Thirsting After Righteousness.....	198
Seeking and Saving the Lost.....	201
Rabboni!.....	202
The More Excellent Ministry.....	204
Heavenly-Mindedness.....	205
John DeWaard.....	207
Edmund Clowney.....	208
Jay Adams.....	210
Charles Dennison.....	212
Final Sermon at Miller Chapel.....	213
Changes at Princeton, the Reconstruction Movement, Departed Friends, and Family Life.....	215
Woodrow Wilson and the League of Nations.....	218
Eschatology of the Psalter.....	220
Plan of Union.....	224
Low Attendance.....	225
Cornelius Van Til and John DeWaard.....	226
Abraham Kuyper, Benjamin Warfield, and Herman Bavinck.....	229
Family Life.....	231
Presbyterian Unrest.....	235
Christian Faith and the Truthfulness of Bible History.....	237
The Messianic Consciousness.....	239
The Self-Disclosure of Jesus.....	241
Epigraph.....	242
The Strategic Importance of the Messianic Consciousness.....	242

Modern Liberal Christianity's Opposition to the Messianic Consciousness.....	246
Messianic Names.....	249
The Messianic Task—To Save.....	250
Princeton Seminary.....	251
Whither Westminster and Retirement.....	257
Vos and Machen	262
Retirement.....	264
Poetry.....	266
Catherine Vos.....	271
J. Gresham Machen	273
Santa Ana to Grand Rapids.....	275
Funeral: Grand Rapids.....	277
Burial: Roaring Branch.....	279
Appreciation and Legacy	283
Westminster Theological Seminary.....	286
Richard B. Gaffin, Jr.	293
Orthodox Presbyterian Church.....	298
The Teaching of the Epistle to the Hebrews.....	300
Distinctive Character of the Epistle to the Hebrews.....	300
The Priesthood of Christ.....	301
The Epistle's Philosophy of Revelation and Redemption.....	302
Reviews	303
Acknowledgements.....	311
Index of Subjects and Names.....	318
Scripture Index.....	330

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

—Hebrews 12:1–2

FOREWORD

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY HAS enjoyed renewed interest among evangelicals in recent years. This is evidenced in the catalogues of leading publishers and the treatment of related themes in several conferences. Though I whole-heartedly welcome this resurgence, I also lament the fact that many are approaching the subject *de novo*. We have forgotten the lessons of the past—or worse, we never knew they existed. Years ago, my colleagues and I interviewed a leading New Testament scholar on the subject of biblical theology. During the course of the conversation, we asked him about the work of Geerhardus Vos. To our dismay, he confessed that he had not read much, if any, of Vos’s work. Regrettably, this is not an isolated incident. Vos is known to many in our ecclesiastical circles as the father of Reformed biblical theology, yet he is all but unknown to the broader church.

Writing the foreword to Vos’s *The Pauline Eschatology*, Richard B. Gaffin, Jr. called Vos a “pioneer in calling attention to this funda-

mental datum of New Testament teaching—what can be termed its eschatological, redemptive-historical orientation.”¹ Vos introduced a truth that is life-transforming but not readily understandable to many. Prior to seminary, I read Vos’s *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments*, but I cannot say that I understood much of it. Studying independently, apart from a Reformed ecclesiastical context, I struggled to integrate the concepts of covenant and eschatology. This changed when I moved to Philadelphia to study at Westminster Theological Seminary and started attending Calvary Orthodox Presbyterian Church. Here, I was confronted with the organic character of God’s revelation.

My wife and I attended Calvary’s monthly Vos Group, which met at the home of Grace Mullen, archivist at Westminster’s Montgomery Library. Dr. Lane Tipton, professor at Westminster, led our modest group page by page through *Biblical Theology*. Danny Olinger would always attend, providing keen insights into Vos and his interpreters. In studying Vos, I apprehended the progressive unfolding of God’s Word. The Scriptures were no longer a static deposit of timeless truths but a dynamic record of God’s communication to his covenant people. I came to realize that I was a member of this covenant, and this was my history as well. A wonderful connection between biblical studies and church history abides. God is at work among his people, speaking to them through his Word, and we may read the Bible knowing that it does not record the lives of strangers but fathers, mothers, brothers, and sisters of the faith.

As a churchman immersed in our shared history, Danny Olinger knows this connection. Danny serves as the General Secretary for the Committee on Christian Education and President of the Committee for the Historian of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, the denomination of J. Gresham Machen. Though Vos did not follow Machen to Westminster or the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, his heart was with them both. His influence manifests in each of

1. Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., Foreword to Geerhardus Vos, *The Pauline Eschatology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1994).

Machen's warrior children, but there is no one better suited than Danny to write the history of this Dutch giant of American Presbyterianism. *A Geerhardus Vos Anthology*,² which Danny edited in 2005, is but a glimpse into his mastery of the subject. For him, Vos's history is much more than a scholarly project; it embodies a way of life, a pilgrim ethic that characterizes Vos's ministry as well as Olinger's. We are honored to introduce this work as Reformed Forum's first published monograph, because this pilgrim ethic directs our labors as well.

We pray that the Lord would use this book to open the eyes of the church to the riches available to her in Vos—not only from his pen but also from his life. Vos was a humble servant, called and gifted of the Lord to carry out the labors set before him. More than anything, he was a believer who began with the end. His life was an outworking of his theology, and his theology was *eschatological*: oriented toward the consummate communion between the triune God and his covenant people. May a new generation of biblical theologians arise, following Vos among a great cloud of witnesses, who run the course set before us by Christ, our ἀρχηγός.

Camden M. Bucey

Pastor, Hope Orthodox Presbyterian Church (Grayslake, Illinois)

President, Reformed Forum

2. Geerhardus Vos, *A Geerhardus Vos Anthology: Biblical and Theological Insights Alphabetically Arranged*, ed. Danny E. Olinger (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2005).

The friendship of the LORD is for those who fear him, and he makes known to them his covenant.

—Psalm 25:14

LIFE IN THE OLD COUNTRY

IN THE MIDDLE to late 1820s Geerhardus Vos's parents, the Reverend Jan Hindrik and Aaltje Beuker Vos,¹ were born three years apart and raised in farming families in Grafschaft Bentheim, Germany. The Voses were peasants who worked on a rented farm. The Beukers were landowners, Aaltje's mother descending from Bentheim nobility, the von Heest family of Laarwald.²

The difference in social status was also reflected in the difference in the church affiliation of the respective families when Jan and Aaltje were children. The Beukers were members of the established German Reformed Church. The Voses were members of the Old Reformed Church (*Altreformierte Kirche*), which was formed in 1838 in

1. Jan was born in 1826 to Gerd and Anna Clement Vos, in Osterwald, Grafschaft Bentheim. In 1829, Aaltje was born to Berend Jan and Fennigjen Stokman Beuker, in Vozel, Grafschaft Bentheim.

2. See, "Hendricus Beuker," German-immigrants.com, accessed September 24, 2016, <http://www.german-immigrants.com/tng/getperson.php?person-ID=1222&tree=Bentheimers-I>.

secession from the German Reformed Church. The Old Reformed Church believed that the German Reformed Church had abandoned Presbyterian polity, sound doctrine, and ecclesiastical independence in order to preserve its favored status and economic support in the Kingdom of Hanover.³ The opinion that the state church was compromised in polity and doctrine was not uncommon in Bentheim, but the law of Hanover prohibited citizens from leaving the state church for a non-sanctioned church. Old Reformed members risked imprisonment in seceding to form a new church, but they were convinced that fidelity to the Word of God demanded such a stand. Nearly every Old Reformed preacher was imprisoned at one time or another. Jan Berend Sundag was imprisoned twenty-eight times for preaching the gospel between 1838 and 1845.⁴ Police would search out and break up illegal church services. Monetary fines were also handed out for those caught attending the services, the penalty doubling with each additional arrest.⁵

One of the challenges for the Old Reformed was the ordaining of its officers. Seeking orthodox Reformed ministers, the Old Reformed looked across the Lower Saxony border to the Christian Reformed Church (*Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerk*) in the Netherlands for help. Christian Reformed minister Albertus Van Raalte installed

3. Herbert J. Brinks, "Ostfrisians in Two Worlds," in *Perspectives of the Christian Reformed Church*, ed. Peter De Klerk and Richard R. De Ritter (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983), 24.

4. H. Beuker, *Tubantiana: Church-State Conflicts in Graafschap Bentheim, Germany* (Holland, MI: Historical Library Committee of the Graafschap Christian Reformed Church, 1986), 12. For a summary of Sundag's ministry and his influence upon Jan Bavinck, the father of Herman Bavinck, see Ron Gleason's *Herman Bavinck* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2010), 7–9.

5. Even after the Kingdom of Hanover reforms of 1848 that permitted membership in other churches, the Old Reformed faced severe restrictions. When seeking to get married, Old Reformed members would have to engage the local German Reformed minister in their municipality to get an official marriage certificate. Before issuing the certificate, the German Reformed minister could demand a public confession of faith from the Old Reformed couple that they never meant to leave the German Reformed Church. See, Gerrit Jan Beuker, "German Oldreformed Emigration: Catastrophe or Blessing?" in *Beaches and Bridges: Reformed Subcultures in the Netherlands, Germany, and the United States*, ed. George Harinck and Hans Krabbendam (Amsterdam: VU Uitgeverij, 2001), 102–103.

the elders and deacons of the Old Reformed Church in Uelsen in January 1838. Hendrik De Cock did the same for the Old Reformed congregation in Bentheim in 1840.

Six years earlier De Cock, then pastor of the Dutch Reformed Church in Ulrum in the province of Groningen, had been at the center of the events that led to the creation of the Christian Reformed Church. De Cock had been suspended from the gospel ministry for baptizing children of parents who had objected to the liberalism of their local churches. De Cock refused to recant for his actions, and on October 13, 1834, he and the congregation in Ulrum seceded from the Dutch Reformed Church. Others joined with them the next day in signing the Act of Secession of 1834.⁶

Reflecting upon his parents' upbringing in the Old Reformed Church and their love for the Christian Reformed Church, Geerhardus Vos commented:

Both my parents came from Graafschap Bentheim, where there was great empathy with the religious movement involved with the "Secession" (*Afscheiding*). They remembered that a prohibition (based on the Napoleonic Code) against secret political gathering was used to have the dragoons scatter the religious gatherings of small groups who stood in protest against the 'Big Church' (*Groote Kerk*) in Bentheim.⁷

The identification of the Old Reformed Church with the Christian Reformed Church did not stop with a devotion to Reformed orthodoxy and a willingness to stand for the truth. Both churches used

6. Liturgically, these believers—known as "Seceders"—objected to the departure from exclusive Psalm singing to that of Psalms and hymns in worship. Doctrinally, they lamented the church reorganization of 1816, which they believed weakened the confessional status and teaching authority of the Belgic Confession (1561), Heidelberg Catechism (1563), and the Canons of Dordt (1618), the so-called Three Forms of Unity. Regarding the polity of the church, they favored the practice of the Dutch Reformed Church prior to the 1816 reforms. See, *Reformation of 1834: Essays in Commemoration of the Act of Session and Return*, ed. Peter Y. De Jong and Nelson Kloosterman (Orange City, IA: Pluim, 1984).

7. Geerhardus Vos, "Autobiographical Notes," trans. Ed M. van der Maas, *Kerux: The Journal of Northwest Theological Seminary* 19, no. 3 (December 2004): 6. The article was first published in the Dutch language in *Neerlandia*, January 1933, 9–10.

the Three Forms of Unity—the Belgic Confession, Heidelberg Catechism, and Canons of Dordt—as their confessional standards. Old Reformed ministers preferred preaching in the Dutch language, the German language being identified with the Lutheran Church and theological liberalism.⁸ Both Christian Reformed and Old Reformed members were seen as culturally backward, but, in their opinion, the cultural emphasis of the German Reformed Church and the Dutch Reformed Church led to the spiritual decline of both. Joining both the Christian Reformed Church and the Old Reformed Church was a matter of personal conviction and not a matter of convenience or societal aspiration. It was no surprise then that Christian Reformed ministers helped form eight Old Reformed congregations in the territory of Bentheim and five congregations in Eastfriesland (*Ostfriesland*).⁹

The Beuker family's departure from the German Reformed Church came about in the 1840s through the gospel witness of a hired servant, Gerrit Bouws, a deacon in the Old Reformed Church in Emlichheim. Although the Beukers came later than the Voses to the Old Reformed Church, once they were members they were totally committed to the cause. This was seen with the pursuit of the gospel ministry in the Old Reformed Church by Aaltje's brother Hendricus. He studied with local Old Reformed pastors in Uelsen before leaving Germany for the Netherlands and entering the Seceder Theological School in Kampen in 1858.

Established in 1854 as an orthodox option for those pursuing the gospel ministry in the Christian Reformed Church, Kampen quickly became the place for the cross-fertilization of Christian Reformed and Old Reformed members. This was true for the Vos and Beuker families. After studying under the tutelage of W. A. Kok and Jan Bavinck¹⁰ at Hoogeveen, the Netherlands, Jan Vos enrolled at Kampen in 1856 and was a member of the inaugural graduating class

8. Brinks, "Ostfrisians in Two Worlds," 27–28.

9. *Ibid.*, 21.

10. Jan Bavinck was born in Grafschaft Bentheim and knew Jan Vos well, even attending the same congregation. See, Gleason, *Herman Bavinck*, 2–3.

in 1858.

Jan and Aaltje were married following Jan's graduation from Kampen. On September 19, 1858, he was ordained and installed as minister of the Old Reformed congregation in Uelzen, Bentheim.¹¹

That Jan Vos could serve as pastor of the Uelzen congregation was due to the reversal of one law and the establishment of another. Previously, the Old Reformed had suffered from the prohibition on German ministers laboring outside the bounds of the state-recognized church, but that prohibition was lifted by 1858. At the same time, however, another law came into effect. Ministers born in the Netherlands could not be called to German pulpits, state church or not. Jan, a German native, was eligible to accept the call to a congregation in Bentheim.

Although Jan received his ministerial start in the church of his youth, he was more at home theologically in the Christian Reformed Church. In 1860 he accepted a call to pastor the Christian Reformed congregation in the rural Dutch town of Heerenveen in the province of Friesland, right across the German border.¹² It was during the second year of their stay in Heerenveen on March 14, 1862 that Jan and Aaltje celebrated the birth of their first child, Geerhardus. Three more children were born into the family, Anna in 1864, Bert in 1867,

11. On January 9, 1941, Geerhardus Vos wrote Henry Beets about a correction to his dad's pastoral record in the 1940 Christian Reformed Church yearbook. The necrology listed J. H. Vos's first pastorate as Velzen and listed it with his other pastorates in the Netherlands. Vos said, "The name of the place is Ulzen (sic), and it is a town in Graafschap, Bentheim, not in the Netherlands. Since there is a town in Holland, it creates the impression that my father once was pastor there." A month later on February 12, 1941, Vos wrote Beets again thanking him for "the exchange of Uelzen for Velzen in the recent edition of the yearbook." Vos then added, "I feel somehow that the substitution of the real name of his first charge in the necrological report is a last act of 'piety' (in the Latin sense of the word) performed in his memory." *The Letters of Geerhardus Vos*, ed. James T. Dennison, Jr. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2005), 244–245.

12. Charles Dennison believed that the political situation in Germany, particularly the rise of the military, contributed to Jan Vos's acceptance of the call to Heerenveen. See, Charles G. Dennison, "Geerhardus Vos and the Orthodox Presbyterian Church," in *History for a Pilgrim People: The Historical Writings of Charles G. Dennison*, eds. Danny E. Olinger and David K. Thompson (Willow Grove, PA: Committee for the Historian of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 2002), 77.

and Gertrude in 1870.

Never staying with a particular congregation for a long period of time, Jan held pastorates in the rural Christian Reformed congregations in Katwyk an Zee (1865–1870), Lutten (1870–1874), Pernis (1874–1878), and Ommen (1878–1881). A strict and devout piety pervaded the Vos home. The children were taught the Bible and the Three Forms of Unity. Scripture and the Heidelberg Catechism were memorized. Scripture was read and prayer would be offered both prior to meals and after meals. No foolishness was permitted when attending a public worship service. The Vos children were taught that when the people of God were gathered to worship on the Lord's Day, they were appearing before the great King in the beauty of holiness.

Until around the age of thirteen, Geerhardus attended public schools in the villages where his father ministered. He then attended the Tuinlann Christian School in Schiedam near Pernis. Although his course of study at Tuinlann included Latin and Greek, logic, literature, history, and geography, the school was unable to provide the quality of education necessary for entrance into the Dutch university system. Consequently, when Geerhardus reached the age of fifteen, his parents enrolled him in the "French School" at Schiedam, arranging for him to stay with the family of the Reverend C. J. I. Engelbrecht, pastor of the Christian Reformed congregation in Spijkenisse. Engelbrecht, who was fluent in English and French, also served as Geerhardus's personal tutor.¹³

Geerhardus then moved in 1878 to the *gymnasium* in Amsterdam,¹⁴

13. For a summary of Vos's early education, see George Harinck, "The Poetry of Theologian Geerhardus Vos," in *Dutch-American Arts and Letters in Historical Perspective*, ed. Robert P. Swierenga, Jacob E. Nyenhuis, and Nella Kennedy (Holland, MI: Van Raalte, 2008), 71.

14. In his "Autobiographical Notes," Vos wrote that "the rector was Kappeyne van de Coppello (the brother of the 'minister' of that name)." Translator Ed M. van der Mass provided the following footnote on why Vos put the word "minister" in quotation marks. He wrote, "This may be simply a pointer to the fact that he is using minister in a political rather than religious sense. An interesting speculation is that the quotation marks reflect Vos's negative opinion of Johannes Kappeyne van de Coppello, who was in Vos's view not a true minister (one who serves) in any

living in the home of his uncle and pastor of the Christian Reformed congregation in Amsterdam, Hendricus Beuker. After graduating from the Theological School in Kampen in 1862, Beuker pastored Christian Reformed congregations in Zwolle (1862–1864), Rotterdam (1864–1867), Giesendam (1867–1869), and Harlingen (1869–1873) before accepting the call to Amsterdam (1873–1881). During this time, Beuker gained notoriety in Seceder circles through his founding and editing of a theological journal, *The Free Church* (*De Vrije Kerk*). Some saw Beuker's journal as a deliberate foil to the political initiatives put forth in *The Standard* (*De Standaard*), the theological journal of another young Dutch Calvinist, Abraham Kuypers.

Life in Amsterdam was a cultural awakening for Geerhardus who had only experienced life in the small rural areas of his father's pastorates. First, there was the sheer size of the population, over 250,000 people. Next, there was the size of the Christian Reformed community in Amsterdam, some four thousand in number spread over three congregations. But, there was also the exposure to the arts and literature. At the gymnasium, Vos studied under Willem Jacobsz Hofdijk, a renowned Dutch poet and instructor in language and literature. Late in his life, Vos was loaned a collection of Hofdijk's poems (*Kennemer Balladen*) from the Reformed historian Henry Beets. Thanking Beets for sending the poems to him, Vos reflected on studying under Hofdijk and others at the gymnasium:

The perusal of them brought most kindly to mind the old days in Amsterdam when Hofdijk stood before the class reciting some of his own compositions, or left us to our work of drudgery, whilst he himself sat aloof wrapped up in reading delicious things, forgetful of his duties as a teacher. There was a great deal of that method in

sense. He was the liberal formateur of the coalition cabinet that served from 1877 until 1879. In this cabinet Kappeyne van de Coppello was Minister of the Interior. In that role he managed to get a new law on primary education passed, in spite of fierce opposition from confessional constituencies, which made the standards and requirements for the schools more stringent, but without any government support for the non-public schools. Petitions were signed by 305,000 Protestants (members of the Antirevolutionary party) and 164,000 Catholics, but to no avail. The coalition crumbled in 1879, when Vos was 17." See, Vos, "Autobiographical Notes," 7.

the old “gym”; I can remember some other professors indulging in the same habit. If home-study had been discountenanced, as it sometimes is in our days, there might be justification derived from the fact that the students after all had to be given time for writing out their themes, etc. But we had plenty of homework given to us.¹⁵

In another remembrance of Hofdijk and his romantic poetry, Vos wrote, “I greatly admired his ‘Kennemer Ballads,’ especially his reverence (which at times bordered on the religious) for the world of the trees of North Holland north of the IJ River.”¹⁶ He continued, “I still remember one expression he used in a description of that landscape: ‘Trees, you’d almost kneel before them.’”¹⁷

The exposure to Hofdijk ignited a passion that Geerhardus exhibited from his teenage years until his death, the writing of poetry. The Dutch poets J. J. L. Ten Kate and Jan Luijken, and writers Joost van den Vondel and Willem Bilderdijk had a great influence upon his poetical style. He also enjoyed the Swiss poets Gottfried Keller and Conrad Ferdinand Meier and the Austrian poet Rupert Hammerling. Once in America, he expressed great appreciation for Ralph Waldo Emerson and the British poets Alfred Lord Tennyson and Algernon Swinburne.¹⁸

As a student, Geerhardus combined a quick intellect with discipline and energy.¹⁹ Among his classmates were the famed Dutch poet Herman Gorter and composer Alphons Diepenbrock.²⁰ Gorter and

15. Vos to Henry Beets, January 1941, in Dennison, *Letters*, 242.

16. Vos, “Autobiographical Notes,” 8.

17. *Ibid.*

18. *Ibid.*, 9.

19. F. L. Rutgers, a leading Reformed preacher in Amsterdam, who had helped Abraham Kuyper found the *Vrije Universiteit* (Free University) in 1880, reported on Vos’s academic progress at the gymnasium to B. van Schelven in an August 27, 1886, letter. According to Rutgers, Vos started the third form in 1879. By the end of the year, he had been examined in the fourth form. In June 1880 he was promoted to the fifth and final form. See, George Harinck, “Vos as an Introducer of Kuyper in America,” in *The Dutch-American Experience: Essays in Honor of Robert P. Swierenga*, ed. Hans Krabbendam and Larry J. Wagenaar (Amsterdam: VU Uitgeverij, 2000), 245.

20. Harinck, “Poetry,” 71.

Diepenbrock would become leaders of the “Eighties Movement” (*Tachtigers*) in Dutch arts and letters. Another classmate was Herman Kuyper, the oldest son of Abraham Kuyper. Herman Kuyper would serve as church historian at the Free University of Amsterdam.

Vos graduated with honors from the Amsterdam gymnasium in the summer of 1881. His father accepted a call at the same time to serve as pastor of the Spring Street Christian Reformed congregation in Grand Rapids, Michigan. The exact reasons why Jan Vos accepted the call, having rejected a similar call four years earlier, are not known. Most likely several forces were in play. Political struggles between the kingdoms of Hanover and Prussia in the 1860s had led to Prussian military conscription. A famine in 1880 forced others to relocate. And, positively, it is highly probable that the opportunity to minister to the 1,700-member Spring Street congregation had some appeal for Jan Vos.

By the 1880s nearly 10 percent of Seceder membership had departed for America.²¹ Part of the reason for the heavy emigration of Seceders was the societal make-up of the Christian Reformed congregations. They were primarily farmers and hired hands, not the Dutch aristocracy. When Seceders individually and collectively made the move to America, they found Christian Reformed congregations to be similar to what they had left behind both theologically and culturally. In fact, some thought that the move to America allowed them to remain “more Dutch than the Dutch” with the ability to preserve the old values and practices.²²

For Geerhardus, his father’s acceptance of the call and his family’s relocation to America meant that he had a decision to make. Stay behind and attend school in the Netherlands or go with his family and attend school in the United States.

21. G. E. Boer, teacher at the Theological School at Grand Rapids, wrote to a pastor living in the Netherlands in June 1881, “Every week big crowds of people from the Netherlands arrive and for weeks at a row we announce their attestations in the Sunday services.” Harinck, “Vos as Introducer of Kuyper,” 245.

22. Herbert J. Brinks, ed., *Dutch-American Voices: Letters from the United States, 1850–1930* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), 15.