

Acculturation and Acrimony
The Impact of "Americanization" on a Dutch Immigrant Congregation,
Sioux Center, Iowa, 1919-1929

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The waves of European immigrants that reached the United States during the 19th and early 20th centuries included many from The Netherlands. As did millions of others, the Dutch came primarily for economic reasons, but they did not shed their cultural heritage as they passed through the turnstiles.

For many of these new Americans in the CRC, religion was the most important unifying force which gave them a sense of identity and cohesion and which marked out the boundaries between them and the surrounding "American" culture. An important issue facing these Dutch-Americans was the process of Americanization. Most accepted the fact that acculturation was inevitable, but at stake was the matter of whether or not religious orthodoxy would become a casualty of the process. On this issue, members of the CRC were divided. One group, the "slow Americanizers," argued that sure ways to strengthen and purify their Calvinist faith would be to establish separate organizations such as Christian schools, and to provide their own study materials for Sunday School and catechism teaching. Also, one should retain the Dutch language and close religious ties with the Old Country of whose religious orthodoxy they could be certain. The other group, the "fast Americanizers," believed that Americanization required entering the larger society in order to bring a transforming Christian witness. Of course, this would necessitate a rapid change from Dutch to English language usage.¹

The fact that religion was the governing force in people's lives and that they were divided as to how best to maintain doctrinal purity meant that it was necessary to define and redefine orthodoxy and to scrutinize carefully possible aberrations and defections from the true faith. This situation often led to internecine quarrels in which the participants "did not shrink from cutting into their own flesh."² Furthermore, because of the democratic nature of CRC church polity, the quarrels were often

¹ James D. Bratt, *Dutch Calvinism in Modern America: A History of a Conservative Subculture* (Grand Rapids, MI, 1984), 37-39. Cf. Robert P. Swierenga, "Religion and Immigration Behavior: The Dutch Experience," in Philip R. Vandermeer and Robert P. Swierenga, eds., *Belief and Behavior: Essays in the New Religious History* (New Brunswick, NJ, 1991), 164-188.

² Rob Kroes, *The Persistence of Ethnicity: Dutch Calvinist Pioneers in Amsterdam, Montana* (Urbana and Chicago, 1992), 99, 101-2, 120.

intensified. Dissidents might and often did maintain that they were right and that individuals in positions of authority were woefully incompetent.³

This article traces the history of the Sioux Center Christian Reformed Church of Sioux Center, Iowa, as a case in point. The congregation experienced difficulties in the 1920s that were typical of the CRC denomination as a whole in its attempt to adjust to life in a new country. The decade was marked by rancor and discord which governed the members' thoughts and actions and left a legacy of bitterness that lasted for years.⁴

When post-war American society began polarizing religiously between modernism and fundamentalism, the Sioux Center congregation desired to steer a middle course. Unfortunately, the members could not agree as to how to accomplish this task. The slow Americanizers wished to retain the language and traditions of the Old County and they looked to the elders to hold the line against change. The fast Americanizers demanded concessions to Americanization in order to hold the youth some of them were beginning to associate with the English-speaking RCA youth groups. They demanded that church services and catechism and Sunday School instruction be in English, and that some decision-making authority must rest with these agencies.

Two issues became lightning rods for the former, the English language in worship and the American Sunday School movement. During World War I, a state law had stipulated that all religious services must be conducted in English in order to demonstrate proper patriotism and to obviate the possibility of public dissent. The impetus toward more English usage continued after the war, to the great dismay of the conservatives.⁵ The Sunday School issue posed a greater threat to traditional Dutch Calvinism because it was an outgrowth of American revivalism and was strongly tinged with Armenian free will doctrine. In many American congregations, Sunday School classes were so popular that they overshadowed regular worship services.⁶

³ Lawrence J. Taylor, *Dutchmen on the Bay: The Ethnohistory of a Contractual Community* (Philadelphia, 1983), 141-63.

⁴ I am indebted to the Council of the First Christian Reformed Church of Sioux Center, which gave me complete access to its archives and minute books (hereafter Sioux Center I Archives). The clerks of that period recorded verbatim all correspondence sent and received. Suzanna Kok translated Dutch documents, and Marinus Goote and Charles Greenfield translated the Dutch language minutes of Classis Sioux Center.

⁵ H. Brandes, "Memorandum," 22 Aug. 1929, Sioux Center I Archives. Cf. Bratt, 89.

⁶ Winthrop S. Hudson, *Religion in America: An Historical Account of the Development of American Religious Life* (2nd ed. New York, 1973) 234-36. Cf. Sydney E.

The impact of the Sunday School movement on church life was of sufficient concern to the Christian Reformed denomination that the Synod of 1918 deemed it necessary to delineate the lines between the CRC and "the world." It adopted guidelines for local congregations, which required that the Sunday School curriculum must be under "strict church supervision so that an attitude of 'Christianity above differences in belief' does not arise. Perhaps there is nothing in present time that advances the weakening boundaries as much as the Sunday School as it exists around us."⁷ It was not made clear in this instance what was meant by "church." The Synod of 1924 reiterated the need for effective catechetical and Sunday School instruction because of "the swift progress of Americanization in our circles. Ten years have changed our churches from being almost exclusively Dutch, to being almost completely Americanized." The Synod warned that "our covenant youth" must be safeguarded from the "perils of liberal teaching with which the air is full."⁸

The "Sioux Center Affair" began quite innocently in February 1919, when the consistory decided to expand the Sunday School staff by adding five teachers and to let parents decide whether all instruction would be in English. Until this time the consistory had always chosen the teachers, but in March it merely accepted the life of names of those chosen by the Teachers Meeting, as the Sunday School staff referred to itself. However, the consistory, reminded of the warning issued by the Synod of 1918 regarding supervision of Sunday Schools, soon had second thoughts about the nomination procedure. It interpreted "church supervision" to mean *consistorial* supervision, and thus, *all* societies were to be under its control.⁹

It was at this crucial juncture that the Rev. Cornelius De Leeuw arrived as the new pastor of the Sioux Center congregation. De Leeuw was an ardent proponent of

Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven and London, 1972) 741.

⁷ *Acts of Synod 1918 of the Christian Reformed Church*, "Report of the Committee to Show the relationship of the Sunday School to the Church," 53, 150-51. Cf. Bratt, 59-60.

⁸ *Ibid.*, "Report of the Committee on Improvement of Catechetical Instruction," 349; "Report on Graded Sunday School Lessons," 332; "In re the Affiliation of our Sunday Schools with State or County Organizations," 103-5. Synod cited the fact that in October 1923, the Sunday School Association of Christian Reformed Churches of the Middle West had affiliated with the state-wide Michigan Sunday School Council of Religious Education thus imperiling the Association's doctrinal soundness.

⁹ Consistory Minutes, 3 Feb.; 1 Mar.; 9, 11, 23 May 1919.

that phase of Kuyperian thought that argued that Calvinists had a positive role to play in influencing the course of contemporary society in general. He differed with his consistory over the nature of consistorial authority, believing that the Teachers Meeting and other congregational societies should have more freedom.¹⁰ As the "dominie" of the congregation, De Leeuw was by tradition the president of the consistory, Teachers Meeting, Boys Society, Girls Society, Young Peoples Society, and Choir. He was thus in a unique position to undercut the authority of the consistory, who in fact began to suspect him of doing so deceitfully.¹¹

Matters came to a head in the summer of 1919, when the Teachers Meeting, composed largely of second generation Dutch who were competent in both Dutch and English languages, drew up a new constitution and duly submitted to the consistory for approval. Three articles in the new constitution boded trouble. Section 4 allowed teachers to elect officers from their own number. Section 6 acknowledged that the Sunday School was under the supervision of the Consistory, but added ominously that the Consistory "will *acquaint* [italics added] themselves with the teachers that give instruction, with their teachings and also with the papers that are used in connection therewith." Section 9 provided for constitutional amendments at any time by a majority vote of teachers present.¹²

If the consistory had previously suspected that its authority was being systematically undermined, the proposed constitution removed all doubt. The Teachers Meeting appeared to be declaring independence from higher authority. This was an intolerable situation, and the elders rejected the new constitution by a vote of eight to one. They instructed the teachers to continue to function under the old constitution

¹⁰ Sioux Center I had three pastors and several counselors as it moved through the 1920s: C. De Leeuw (1919-1924), M. M. Schans (1924-1927), J. M. Dykstra (1929-1939). Taking its mandate seriously, the consistory believed that even the smallest details of church life should come under its direct supervision including such matters as determining who should play the pipe organ and deciding whether the choir could have permission to place risers in front of the sanctuary for a performance.

¹¹ *Toelichting en Verantwoording van den Ouden Kerkeraad te Sioux Center, Iowa* [Clarification and Reply by the Old Consistory of Sioux Center, Iowa, 5. This pamphlet was issued in the name of the Old Consistory. Internal evidence suggests that it was written sometime after November 1921, when Rev. L. Ypma arrived as pastor of Sioux Center II and before June 1922 when the case came before Synod.

¹² Teachers Meeting Minutes, 3 Oct. 1919. Teachers Meeting minutes were written in English, however, correspondence with the consistory was written in Dutch.

which required consistorial approval of teachers.¹³ Over the ensuing weeks, the Teachers Meeting hardened its position. After reviewing the Church Order and the Acts of Synod of 1918, and consulting a professor at the denominational Calvin Theological Seminary, the teachers informed the consistory in November 1919, that they would continue to stand by their view because, in their opinion, the denomination required that the Sunday School be under the supervision of the consistory but not necessarily directed by it.¹⁴

The consistory, however, considered the teachers' stance to be open mutiny, and the situation was especially regrettable because the minister sided with the dissidents. In December, the consistory informed the Teachers Meeting that unless they agreed to operate under the old constitution, the consistory would close down the Sunday School temporarily after the Christmas program. The teachers were equally adamant, but they decided to accede. At the end of the Christmas program, the Teachers Meeting stunned the congregation by announcing under protest the temporary closing of the Sunday School because of the impasse with the consistory regarding the new constitution and the proper procedure for filling vacancies.¹⁵

The announcement caught the consistory by surprise because it had no inkling of the intentions of the Teachers Meeting. The consistory construed the announcement as a "declaration of war" that put the blame for the closure on itself. The leaders were also deeply offended that, in front of the whole congregation, it had been made to appear culpable and put in a false light. The teachers had publicly transgressed the ninth commandment, "Thou shalt not bear false testimony," and this public sin required public confession.¹⁶ The Teachers Meeting in collusion with Dominie De Leeuw had obviously attempted to bypass consistorial authority by taking its case directly to the congregation.

¹³ Consistory Minutes, 6 Oct. 1919; *Toelichting*, 6; Teachers Meeting Minutes 10 Oct. 1919.

¹⁴ Teachers Meeting Minutes, 24 Oct., 21 Nov. 1919; 30 Jan., 6 Feb. 1920. Professor Louis Berkhof, one of the signers of the report of 1918, stated: "Supervision of the Sunday School is most important. Sunday School teachers would do well to present nominations to a subcommittee of the consistory for approval before announcing them. If the subcommittee does not approve, the appointee need not know. Naturally, if the appointee is not approved, he always has the right of appeal to the consistory."

¹⁵ Consistory Minutes, 2 Dec. 1919; *Toelichting*, 7. Teachers Meeting Minutes, 24 Dec. 1919, 56-58. Mrs. John A. De Zeeuw, nee Dena Hubers, personal interview, 1977. Dena Hubers was the secretary of the Teachers Meeting for many years.

¹⁶ *Toelichting*, 7.

Within four days after Christmas, the three other young peoples' societies also stopped functioning in protest against the consistorial action. To the consistory these actions confirmed that it was dealing with mutiny, and that De Leeuw, its presiding officer, apparently had influenced the termination of society activity. The consistory asserted that it wanted to reopen the Sunday School but only on its own terms; thus things were at an impasse.¹⁷ Meanwhile, an opposition group in the congregation list no time in challenging the wisdom of consistorial action. It circulated a printed petition, again without the knowledge or permission of the consistory, requesting that the Sunday School be reopened. The protesters presented their petition to the consistory at its next meeting. Their request included the following statement: "We thus regard the demands of the Consistory as an interference with the rights of the teachers and the terminating of the Sunday School as an unlawful deed below the dignity of the Consistory, which is appointed over the congregation as a serving and not as a ruling power."¹⁸ The consistory rejected the petition on the grounds that it challenged consistorial authority.

The Sunday School affair was the focal point of several consistory meetings in early 1920. The frustrated petitioners notified the consistory that, according to Church Order Article 31, they were forwarding their petition to the next meeting of the regional assembly, Classis Sioux Center. The consistory again demanded that the Sunday School teachers confess their sin of slander publicly from the pulpit.¹⁹ The consistory also appealed to Classis Sioux Center for its endorsement. Besides Dominie De Leeuw, the consistory delegated Elder Epke Vander Berg; ironically, both men had supported the teachers all along. For this reason, the consistory requested that Classis give *all* elders the opportunity to speak to the issue.²⁰

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹⁸ Consistory Minutes, 29 Dec. 1919; *Toelichting*, 8. E. Straatsma, W. Bierma, and H. Brandes signed the petition. Brandes was a printer by trade and publisher of the local weekly, *Sioux Center Nieuwsblad*.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 14, 27, 29 Jan. 1920; *Toelichting*, 8.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 13 Feb. 1920; Teachers Meeting Minutes, 13 Feb. 1920; Consistory Minutes, 23 Feb. 1920; 16 Mar. 1920; *Toelichting*, 9-10. Pastors of CRC congregations regularly attend classis meetings. Elders attend on a rotation basis which perhaps explains Vander Berg's presence as a delegate.

At this point there is a break in the chronology of the Teachers Meeting minutes. The last minutes recorded are of the joint meeting of February 1920. The minutes take up again on 13 May 1921, without a gap in the page numbers. Thus,

Classis Sioux Center unfortunately reached vague and contradictory decisions. Classis noted with regret that the consistory had closed the Sunday School without a greater attempt to work out an accommodation with the Teachers Meeting. Classis also decided that the petitioners' statement be "severely condemned" in spite of their good intentions. However, the nub of the matter, namely, the proper relationship between consistory and Teachers Meeting was not clearly delineated. Classis advised that the Sunday School be reopened and that the nomination and approval of Sunday School teachers be under the supervision of the consistory. However, Classis did not specify just *who* should do the nominating and the approving. The consistory feared that the teachers had gotten their way at the expense of the consistory, and that the consistory had been made to appear as "stiff, narrow-minded, power-hungry, and irreconcilable."²¹ In effect, the appeal to Classis had resolved nothing.

Events over the summer of 1920 indicate just how deeply the congregation had become divided. At a May congregational meeting to elect new consistory members, Dominie De Leeuw allowed nominations from the floor in addition to the normal consistorial slate. The consistory took De Leeuw to task for this decision, but he declared that the consistory ought to be sensitive to the will of the congregation. The consistory also decided not to reopen the Sunday School, claiming that peace could not be restored in the congregation by doing so. Meanwhile, ten members lodged complaints with the consistory against De Leeuw and demanded that the observance of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper be suspended until the minister confessed guilt for his public sin in undermining the authority of the consistory at the May congregational meeting. The consistory agreed with the complainants but concluded that, because the minister had sided with the "mutineers," discipline could not be administered effectively. At this point, Elder Vander Berg openly sided with De Leeuw with the result that the consistory as well as the congregation was divided. Convinced that there was a faction in the congregation, led by the minister, which was dedicated to unseat them, the consistory requested a meeting with its counterparts in the nearby Hull and Rock Valley Christian Reformed churches for the purpose of evaluating De Leeuw's leadership.²²

The meeting, referred to as the "double consistory," began on August 9 and lasted twenty-nine hours! As further developments were to show, it too produced

²¹ Classis Sioux Center Minutes (Doon, Iowa), 23, 24 Mar. 1920; *Acts of Synod 1922*, "Translation of report of the Advisory Committee Relative to the Sioux Center Matter," 286; *Toelichting*, 11-14.

²² Consistory Minutes, 3 May 1920; 25, 28, 30 June 1920. Cf. Consistory Minutes, 8, 22, 26, 30 July 1920; 2 Aug. 1920; Congregational Meeting Minutes, 23 May 1920; *Toelichting*, 15-17.

meager results. The double consistory recommended that Sioux Center's consistory show more willingness to meet the youth and the congregation halfway. In a move that was to produce a great deal of furor in the future, the double consistory further requested that the consistory take care that both factions were represented in the nominations for office-bearers in the forthcoming congregational meeting.²³ Some accommodation ought to be made between conservatives and progressives in order to retain congregational unity and to present a unified front to secular society.

The Sioux Center consistory followed this advice and allowed the congregation to submit written nominations.²⁴ However, of the thirty-three names submitted for elder and fifty names proposed for deacon, the consistory could find only two people from the progressive faction who in their eyes qualified for office.²⁵ When they announced the list of nominees from the pulpit the following Sunday, the reaction was predictable. A host of complaints, which the consistory considered frivolous, were lodged against the nominees. Among other things, it was alleged that one of the nominees was too old, another had not been a member of the congregation long enough, another slept during the service, still another always came late for church, and another had acted immorally on the ship while emigrating. The essence of the complaints was that persons with the best qualifications had not been nominated. In the minds of the protesters, the consistory obviously was not doing its work properly. What most shocked the consistory was the fact that these letters of protest had been pre-printed and circulated through the congregation for members of sign and to take to the consistory. In its collective mind, this was further proof that a mutinous situation existed within the congregation.²⁶

Because of the general unrest, the consistory decided not to hold the congregational meeting. But the postponement did not bring any respite because the language issue had resurfaced. In deed, the demand to adopt English had been part and parcel of the entire Sunday School affair. Already in December 1919, two members, E. Straatsma and H. Brandes, both of whom supported the Teachers Meeting, had appeared at the consistory meeting and requested that worship services and catechism

²³ *Ibid.*, 30 Aug. 1920.

²⁴ *Acts of Synod 1918*, "Church Order of the Christian Reformed Church," 161. Article 22 of the Church Order stipulated that "[E]very church shall be at liberty . . . to give the members an opportunity to *direct attention to suitable persons*, [italics added] in order that the consistory may thereupon. . . present to the congregation for election as many elders as are needed"

²⁵ Consistory Minutes, 4, 29 Oct. 1920; 8, 11 Nov. 1920; *Toelichting*, 20-21.

²⁶ *Toelichting*, 21, 23, 24; Consistory Minutes, 22, 24 Nov. 1920.

instruction be in English. They also had wanted Watse Bierma's name added to the list of nominees for office-bearer. His name was rejected on the ground that the request came too late, and no action was taken regarding the language issue.²⁷ However, by 1920 a number of members began to voice the opinion that, because of the unrest and turmoil, it would be better to divide the congregation between the Dutch and the American factions. In January 1921, the consistory, with the exception of Epke Vander Berg, decided to split the congregation on the grounds that it was impossible to satisfy both parties.²⁸ It is difficult to say at this point whether the consistory had temporarily forgotten about the Sunday School issue or whether it had seized upon the language issue and a split in the congregation was a convenient way out of the impasse. Crucially, the language problem implied risking a break of orthodox religious ties with The Netherlands and of getting caught up in secular American culture. In any event, a weighty meeting took place on 14 January 1921, where the consistory decided to take active steps toward implementing a separation. The consistory conceded that there were two parties, one, including the Teachers Meeting, wanting the adoption of English and the other refusing take such a step.²⁹ The consistory also decided to request Classis Sioux Center to develop guidelines at its next meeting in March for dividing the congregation.

Meanwhile the consistory had to deal with the unresolved matter of the postponed congregational meeting for the election of officers. Against the advice of Dominie De Leeuw, it decided to hold a congregational election on 18 February 1921, and the present the original list of nominees for the balloting in spite of having received sixty-five letters of complaint against it. The election went forward in spite of the protests.³⁰

In late February, five members of the congregation presented yet another protest to the consistory "on behalf of 90 protesting brothers." Among other things, the protest contained the following accusations:

Our beloved Reformed principles are trampled underfoot. They have been stomped into the slime by the consistory. That is where, in our opinion, the

²⁷ Consistory Minutes, 2 Dec. 1919; *Toelichting*, 6. Brandes was a printer by trade and publisher of the local weekly, *Sioux Center Nieuwsblad*. Bierma was a farmer. Straatsma's occupation is unknown.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 22 Dec. 1920; 5, 10 Jan. 1921.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 14 Jan. 1921.

³⁰ Consistory Minutes, 4, 11, 15, Feb. 1921; *Toelichting*, 24-25.

large and malevolent sin of the Consistory lies, by which simple souls have been consciously misled

[For] our dear Reformed principles, . . . our pious fathers kept their lives pure, in order to be able to pass them on as an inheritance to their descendants. To regain possession of them, for that we fight, whatever the cost. For this reason we support our beloved minister with all that is in us. If he has already become the victim of, and the martyr for, [sic] and if he must endure hatred and malevolent misjudgment, we give the assurance that we wish to stand with him in the strife for these principles and the Reformed Truth.³¹

Things did not go well for the consistory at the March 15-18 meeting of Classis Sioux Center. Classis refused to issue guidelines for dividing a congregation on the ground that the language issue was not sufficient reason. What was needed was reconciliation, not secession. Classis also decided that, for the sake of peace in the congregation, the officers elected in February should not be installed. Rather, a new slate should be selected entirely with nominations coming from the floor (termed a "free election"). To facilitate matters, a seven-man classical delegation was appointed to supervise the election meeting, with the stipulation that no further consistory meetings be held without the presence of the classical deputies. The delegation's threefold mandate was to effect a reconciliation, to supervise the congregational meeting, and to serve as an appellate body (actually a sounding-board for the congregational factions). It was also given power and authority "to act as circumstances required."³² In other words, the classical committee was given a virtual blank check.

While Classis was still in session, the Sioux Center consistory met to lodge a protest against the proceedings and to inform Classis that it intended to appeal to the next national Synod assembly in 1922.³³ The consistory correctly maintained that a "free election" was contrary to the Articles of Incorporation of the Sioux Center Christian Reformed Church. Also, such an arrangement violated Article 97 of the Acts of Synod of 1886: "In special cases, free elections may be held *at the discretion of the consistory*" [italics added].³⁴

³¹ *Toelichting*, 27, 28, 29.

³² Classis Sioux Center Minutes, 15-18 Mar. 1921; *Acts of Synod 1922*, 2890-291; *Toelichting*, 34-35. Evidently, Classis Sioux Center contained a strong progressive element.

³³ *Ibid.*, 15-18 Mar. 1921; Consistory Minutes, 18 Mar. 1921; *Toelichting*, 37, 41.

³⁴ *Acts of Synod 1886*, Art, 97, Church Order, 34; *Toelichting*, 39-41.

The classical deputies attempted to implement their mandate, but the tortured negotiations merely created the solidarity essential for what ultimately became a separate, Dutch language congregation, the Second Christian Reformed Church of Sioux center (known commonly as Sioux Center II). After Classis had adjourned and before the stipulated congregational election meeting, eighty-one members and nine consistory members protested the open nominations procedure and Classis's nullification of the results of the legal congregational meeting of February. On the morning of 30 March 1921, the day set for the congregational meeting, the classical deputies called the consistory into session and asked if it intended to abide by the decision of Classis. If not, the members should resign from office. The consistory affirmed that it was honor-bound before God to carry out its mandate to oversee the spiritual welfare of the congregation, as defined by the Church Order, the Acts of Synod, and the Word of God. It would not alter its stance even if that meant deposition. When queried a final time, the consistory still refused the road of reconciliation except on its own terms, namely, that the dissenters must openly confess their public sins. Reconciliation was not genuine without repentance. On that point the consistory refused to budge. So the classical deputies deposed the consistory, acting on the authority of Classis Sioux Center.

This group, now known as the Old Consistory, claimed that its deposition had been unlawful according to Article 79 of the Church Order, which stated that deposition shall take place at a meeting of the consistory, together with the consistory of the nearest church. But they had in fact had been deposed by classical deputies at a meeting at which those ousted had not even been present.³⁵ The Old Consistory thus made an appeal to Synod based on three grounds: that Classis Sioux Center had set aside the results of a lawful congregational meeting, that "free election" could only be called by the consistory, and that insufficient grounds had been given for their deposition.³⁶

About half of the congregation, eighty-one families plus the Old Consistory and their families, refused to accept the deposition, and almost immediately they took action. This group considered itself to be the legal consistory and congregation. After all, four elders and five deacons had stood together against the minister and one elder

³⁵ *Toelichting*, 48. Cf. *Acts of Synod 1922*, 282.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 84-85. The deposed consistory members were Elders B. Van Maanen, S. Altena, S. Snieders, and W. Heynen, and Deacons W. Lammers, H. Duim, L. Achterhof, W. Pelskamp, and W. Wassink. Those deposed represented a cross-section of farmers and businessmen.

and were recognized by almost half of the congregation.³⁷ In the spring of 1921, the rump group decided to meet separately even though they lacked a pastor of their own. However, Classis Sioux Center refused to acknowledge their assemblage, and its ministers declined to conduct their worship services and to administer the sacraments. Whereupon the group temporarily withdrew from the classis and sought association with the next nearest CRC regional assembly, Classis Orange City.

In the meantime, Dominie De Leeuw and those who remained as the original church (now known popularly as Sioux center I) viewed events from a different perspective. They installed the elders and deacons elected in March, who in turn reopened the Sunday School according to the proposed constitution of October, 1919, including the famous Article 6. The new consistory also tried to resolve the matter of the separation. It argued that the original consistory had not been deposed but only individual *members* had been unseated and the reduced consistory had been brought back to full strength by a congregational election in March and the installation of officers on 17 April 1921. This new consistory was the legal one, and the seceding Old Consistory had no legal status whatever.³⁸

By the fall of 1921, the Old Consistory determined that it could no longer carry on without a pastor of its own. It extended a "call" to the Reverend L. Ypma of Worthington, Minnesota, and he accepted and arrived in November. His official installation was postponed, however, pending the outcome of the appeal to the Synod of 1922. The Old Consistory argued that two congregations and two ministers now existed in fact, and that there was no possibility or desirability in reuniting.³⁹

The Sioux Center case was duly considered by the Synod of 1922, which by coincidence met as scheduled at nearby Orange City from 21 June to 5 July. After a lengthy review of the affair, Synod sustained the appeal of the Old Consistory and ruled that its deposition was illegal. Classis Sioux Center had violated Article 22 of the Church Order, which stipulated that nominations for office-bearers were to be

³⁷ *Toelichting*, 62. At this point the minutes of the Old Consistory cease. The Secretary, a member of the Old Consistory, took the minute book with him and refused to surrender it until after the group was formally organized as Sioux Center II in the fall of 1922. Thus, the group which remained as Sioux Center I was obliged to purchase a new minute book. Sioux Center II remained a member of Classis Orange City until 1937 when it joined Classis Sioux Center.

³⁸ Consistory Minutes, 18 Apr. 1921; 2, 34 May 1921.

³⁹ *Toelichting*, 82-83, 85. The Reverend L. Ypma was pastor of Sioux Center II from 1921-1934.

conducted by the consistory and not by free election.⁴⁰ In addition, Classis Sioux Center had annulled the results of a legal congregational meeting. The Old Consistory was also wrong, however, when it withdrew from the congregation immediately after its deposition. It should have submitted to the decision of Classis under protest until Synod had met.⁴¹

In an attempt to resolve the affair, Synod adopted several recommendations. The deposed Old Consistory was the legitimate one, and the members chosen in the controversial congregational meeting of 18 February 1921, were to be seated. The new consistory chosen in March was to retire, and the Reverend De Leeuw and Elder Vander Berg were to apologize to the congregation for their part in the affair. Also the Reverend Ypma had violated Church Order by accepting a call not issued in a legal manner. The Synodical recommendation, however, which caused the most dissension in the future was that should people wish to organize a Sioux Center II church, they should receive financial aid from the mother church in order to acquire property. A synodical committee was appointed to carry out these decisions locally and to give advice. In the meantime, the situation in Sioux center was to remain in status quo until the committee had had an opportunity to meet with the brothers there.⁴²

Synod apparently was not aware that its decision was, in effect, a hopeless attempt to turn the calendar back to February 1921. It did not realize that events had progressed far beyond that point. Sioux Center II had already been meeting separately for over a year, and it had its own minister for more than six months. Local attitudes had not changed, and confidence that the affair had finally been resolved proved to be a delusion.

Events became complicated at this point. In effect, Synod had recommended that the two congregations reunite, and an attempt was made in September 1922. However, the Old Consistory and the break-away group had every intention of retaining their status as a separate congregation (Sioux Center II).

Before the deposed consistory could be reinstated on 3 September at a service of reconciliation, the synodical committee, which had a clearer grasp of the true state of affairs than did Synod, decided that it was necessary to organize a new congregation. On 5 September, the Old Consistory, which had been reinstated and was in favor of

⁴⁰ *Acts of Synod 1918*, Art. 22, Church Order, 161.

⁴¹ *Acts of Synod 1922*, 283-84, 285-88, 290.

⁴² *Acts of Synod 1922*, 154, 291. After the reinstatement of the deposed consistory, minutes were again written in the original minute book. On 9 October 1922, the book was returned to Sioux Center I after the congregation had voted to split.

separation, requested permission to withdraw and to organize a new congregation. The synodical committee approved, adding that there should also be a *pro rata* division of the property. The Old Consistory then decided on a schedule for payment to the new body, with half to be paid two months after the date that the new congregation was organized and the remainder two months later. The synodical committee called for a meeting on 28 September to place the matter before the congregation.

The group that supported Dominie De Leeuw and was to remain as Sioux Center I urged reconciliation and protested this turn of events, arguing that the two sides should try to work out an amicable solution fraternally. The chairman of the synodical committee, however, informed the protesters by letter they must submit to the ruling of the committee to allow separation "or sever relations with the [denomination]." ⁴³ In addition, the Old Consistory had set its course. It replied to those who protested a separation that God's Word allowed divisions where it was necessary for the well-being of the people. The Old Consistory would follow the advice of Synod and of the synodical committee to form a new congregation if that seemed necessary. Thus, those working for restoration faced the choice of accepting a new church organization, which it opposed, or of submitting under protest to a consistory not inclined to remain united. At a special meeting on 25 September, attended by those who wanted a permanent reunion, it was decided that because the group did not want to be insubordinate, and above all, it did not want to be separated from the Christian Reformed denomination, it would therefore accept, under protest, the advice of the synodical committee, including a *pro rata* division of the property. The group also indicated that it would appeal its case to the Synod of 19224 (synods met biannually). As a consequence, at the combined congregational meeting on 28 September 1922, the vote to separate carried with only one dissenting vote, and there were now officially two Christian Reformed churches in Sioux Center. ⁴⁴

Seemingly, with the separation into two congregations the affair should have been settled, but after 1922, the dispute now sifted from church policy to a question of a proper *pro rata* division of the property. After three more trips to the CRC Synods of 1924, 1926, and 1928, the affair was finally adjudicated in civil court. Because Sioux Center I had resolutely refused to pay *any* money to Sioux Center II, that group received the keys and title to the church property in 1928 after Sheriff's sale. All lingering monetary questions were finally settled in September 1929.

Thus, in people's minds, if not in their hearts, the Sioux Center Affair finally came to a close after a full decade of bitter contention. The seminal cause of the conflict was a fundamental disagreement about the pace of Americanization. One group desired

⁴³ *Acts of Synod 1926*, 161-62. The letter was dated September 15, 1922.

⁴⁴ Consistory Minutes, 11, 18 Sept. 1922, Evening Session, 25, 28 Sept. 1922; Congregational Meeting Minutes, 25 Sept. 1922; *Acts of Synod 1926*, 147-173.

to maintain orthodoxy by maintaining tradition. The other wished to meet the challenges of living in a new land at least by redefining church authority and by teaching and preaching in English rather than in Dutch. The slow and the fast assimilators could find no common ground, and they seized on the proper exercise of consistorial authority as the forum for waging cultural war. The language issue and the Sunday School program became the instruments that ultimately breached congregational unity.

Over time the quarrel took on a life of its own, with the inevitable result that the original dispute was side-tracked, and the affair ended up far from that which gave it birth. By deciding to separate rather than to reconcile, the principals in the drama were no nearer to resolving the underlying tensions at the end of the decade than they were at its beginning. Does one withdraw from society in order to preserve orthodoxy or is one's religious identity best retained by getting involved in a new culture in order to shape its course. Those involved in the dispute never submitted their respective causes to rational analysis and the question remained unanswered.

In trying to ascertain just why the two sides regrouped as they did, I have concluded that the cleavage cut across rather than along socio-economic lines. For example, Farmer Bierma (who was an unbeliever until after he had immigrated), Printer Brandes, and Businessman Vander Berg championed the cause of the Teachers Meeting and urged that catechetical instruction and preaching be in English. Sons of these three followed the same livelihood as their fathers, and they and their descendants remained at Sioux Center I. William Wassink, critic of De Leeuw and deeply involved with the break-away group, was in the construction business in partnership with his brother-in-law, Lane De Stigter, who became a leader and office-bearer at Sioux Center I. Sons of these two worthies also became contractors, and they and their descendants retained the same church affiliations as their fathers. Moreover, pastors apparently were not cultic leaders. While it is true that De Leeuw supported the fast Americanizes, the Sunday School issue had surfaced before his arrival and continued long after his departure. Indeed, it was the Old Consistory that was De Leeuw's harshest critic.

I find James Bratt's analysis of CRC mentalities to be most helpful. Among the mentalities that Bratt analyzes are the optimistic Kuyperians who believed in entering and altering American society, and the defensive, antithetical Kuyperians who believed that avoiding "the world" was the best way to preserve orthodoxy.⁴⁵ I can argue only from inference because people involved in the Sioux Center Affair did not commit their private thoughts to paper. However, I do find it instructive that the Rev. Henry Beets, whom Bratt lists among the optimists, was Sioux Center CRC's first ordained pastor (1895-99) and I have already mentioned De Leeuw's inclinations in the same direction. Also, the traditionalist, hold-the-line position of the Old Consistory seems to fit the mold of the defensive mentality. One should also note that several families who withdrew with the

⁴⁵ See Bratt, 42-54, for a detailed discussion of what he terms the four mentalities that comprised the CRC at the turn of the 20th century.

Old Consistory, later left Sioux Center II to join antithetical Herman Hoeksema's newly established Protestant Reformed denomination. Thus, the issues raised in the 1920s would be left for future generations to decide.