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## Summary

*In the climate of the absolute.*

*C. Veenhof (1902-1983). Life and work.*

In this biography the life and work of C. Veenhof (1902-1983) is described and analyzed in the context of his era and environment. Main theme is the question of what goals Veenhof set for himself, whether or not they were realized, and which instruments he used to realize them. Further, an impression is given of his personality, and important turning points in his life are mentioned. In the end the microhistorical question is answered of what this book adds to insights in twentieth century church history in the Netherlands.

Son of a baker from Doorn, the Netherlands, Veenhof experienced a happy youth. While the family was not well to do, there was no question of hunger or poverty. He was intelligent and studious and loved to read. His father stimulated him by thorough commitment to the funding of the education of his children. Just as his grandparents, Veenhof's parents were religiously active within the pietistic context of the later *Afscheiding* (Secession) in the vicinity of the *Utrechtse Heuvelrug* (Utrecht Ridge). At a young age, his father had been influenced by the theology of H. Bavinck by means of extensive catechetical instruction. In the Veenhof family, the pietistic awareness of sinfulness and human shortcoming was closely allied to activity within church, state and society in the tradition of Abraham Kuyper. This fascinating but intimidating combination coincided with the religious tension between the Reformed believers of the *Afscheiding* and those of the *Doleantie* (Dissent) after the *Vereniging* (Union) of 1892. Both found their embodiment in Veenhof. At quite a young age he aspired to the clergy, but immediate entrance to the *Theologische School* (Theological Seminary) via the *gymnasium* (Latin school) was thwarted by financial hardship. Like other less affluent individuals, he was obliged to follow the arduous route via teachers college and a short career as a grade school teacher, followed by the state *gymnasium* exam.

In the period between 1916 and 1920, Veenhof studied at the *Hervormde* (Reformed) Jan van Nassau Teachers College in Utrecht. The Stone lectures

of Abraham Kuyper, who had been prime minister in the year Veenhof was born, were a revelation for the young Veenhof. He experienced them as an exhaustive, scientifically formulated, Calvinist worldview within which Reformed principles took their place as a guidebook for the Christian life. They offered solid footing in the stormy period of modernity after the First World War, during which the discipline of psychology made its appearance, with its concentration on feelings and subjective experience. After matriculating, Veenhof was appointed to a post as grade school teacher in the fishing village of Spakenburg. At this time he made his public profession of faith. A life in honor of God – Veenhof's ultimate Reformed objective in life – would be achieved, on the one hand, by prayer and contemplation, and on the other hand by a variety of church and political activities following in the footsteps of Kuyper who passed away around that time. In Spakenburg he met the lively and talented pastor's daughter Marrie Bakker, who would become the love of his life. He also got to know the publications of A. Janse and K. Schilder. He would meet Schilder personally during visits to the local pastor Rev. J. de Waard, who was Schilder's soulmate. When Rev. De Waard came to Spakenburg in 1921, Schilder confirmed him. Veenhof was present at the service.

In the first two decades of his life, Veenhof developed his educational, oratorical, and organizational talents at the teacher college, two different grade schools in Spakenburg, the Reformed youth and men's societies, and to a lesser degree, in politics. He also continued his studies there. However, due to his arduous zeal, he suffered a nervous breakdown at this time. He returned to his parents' home around the beginning of 1924 not only to recover, but also to be free to study for his state *gymnasium* exam, supported by a provincial church fund and a private sponsor. Toward the end of his adolescence, the typically pietistic questions of the environment in which he had grown up began to gnaw: was he really converted, and was God really calling him to the pulpit? In short, Veenhof searched for assurance and purity of faith.

After having earned his *gymnasium* diploma in 1926, Veenhof left for Kampen, to begin his studies at the *Theologische School van de Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland* (Theological Seminary of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands). As a freshman he again suffered a nervous breakdown. Especially because of the related struggle with the pietism of his youth, Veenhof found a spiritual father and friend in A. Janse from Biggekerke. K. Schilder and D.H.Th. Vollenhoven were his mentors, the first in theological respect, the second in philosophical. With them he also developed a friendly relationship, just as with H. Ridderbos, the son of the Old Testament professor at Kampen, J. Ridderbos. The faculty in Kampen were runners-up in their influence on the young Veenhof. He revolted against the attention paid to

the discipline of psychology by prof. T. Hoekstra, professor of *ambtelijke vakken* (Practical Theology) and philosophy. Veenhof considered this as being too subjective.

The character of Veenhof's spiritual ideals changed while he was in Kampen, especially under the influence of Janse. He took leave of the pietistic faith of his native region. The *bevindelijke* (experimental Reformed) factor was relegated to the background. Fearful of the deeper chasms of the soul – Veenhof could fall prey to doubt – he directed his attention towards obedience to what he saw as clear statutes in the Bible. That became his compass. To that end, he was obliged to make a thorough study of what he saw as transparent and concretely comprehensible Scripture. Behavior and attitude became primary, the more internal aspects of faith moved to second place. His studies apparently cost him little difficulty as he spent a lot of his time on organizational business in the student world, in and outside of Kampen. He became president of the Kampen fraternity *Fides Quaerit Intellectum* in 1929 and chair of the new Calvinist student movement in 1930. In addition, he assisted with the preparation of manuscripts for publication by Janse, Schilder, and Vollenhoven. 'With great satisfaction', Veenhof passed his *kandidaats* (Bachelor) exam at the end of 1932.

In the spring of 1933, Veenhof preached his inaugural sermon in the village of Harkstede in Groningen, having married Marrie Bakker in Doorn, after a long engagement period. In Harkstede they were blessed with two sons: Jan, born around the beginning of 1934, and Klaas, around the end of 1935. Veenhof lived life to the full in Groningen in preaching, pastorate, and continued study, and considered starting on a Ph.D. He had regular contact with his friend K. Schilder who had just become professor of *dogmatiek* (systematic theology) in Kampen, and stirred him up against his colleague prof. V. Hepp from the VU University at Amsterdam in the context of the discussion on pluriformity in the church. In this period, under the influence of Janse's view of Scripture, but also through his contacts with Schilder and Vollenhoven, Veenhof advanced more and more into the erstwhile climate of the absolute. Scripture gave transparency and a concrete rule of life within God's covenant for every *heilshistorische* (redemptive-historical) context. His aims were ambitious. Principles were relegated to the background, while church and covenant came to the fore. Thus, he found the assurance and purity of faith he longed for so dearly.

As pastor he played a more independent role within the young *reformatische* (Reformational) movement, as networker, organizer, and publicist. He was the first member of the *Vereeniging voor Calvinistische Wijsbegeerte* (Society for Calvinistic Philosophy), instituted in 1935. He instigated the existential theological debate on soul and *zelfonderzoek* (introspection) in the second half of 1935 in extensive articles in the *Gereformeerde Jongelingsblad*



(Reformed Young Men's Magazine), in which he theologically dealt with his own spiritual struggle with the pietism of his youth. Anti-subjectivism became his personal theme. For Veenhof, mysticism had become a menace. Within the covenant, introspection into one's *staat* (status) – am I a Christian? – wasn't necessary, while examination of one's *stand* (stance) – do I behave like one? – was. As a result of Veenhof's articles, tension within the *Gereformeerde* (Reformed) churches intensified between followers of the Reformational movement and more conservative individuals like Hepp, H.H. Kuyper, and J. Waterink. So for a while he did play an important role in the emergence of the conflicts culminating in the *Vrijmaking* (Liberation, based on Article 31 of the Dordt Church Order).

The move to Haarlem in 1936 was an understandable step in the career of this talented young clergyman with excellent connections. That year the denominational tension around the Reformational movement was on the agenda of the general synod of Amsterdam. Hepp and Kuyper fought against the movement because they considered its ideas to be in conflict with the classical ideas of Bavinck and Kuyper and sometimes even with the confession. Thus a largely academic dispute between professors achieved denominational moment, turning theological disagreements into doctrinal controversy. The confrontation at the synod did not run adversely for the Reformational movement, partly because membership of the *Nationaal-Socialistische Beweging* (National Socialist Movement) and *Christelijk-Democratische Unie* (Christian Democratic Union) had been decreed censurable by the general synod following a motion by Schilder. Veenhof increasingly made a name for himself within the Reformational movement with its inspiring leaders Dooyeweerd, Janse, Schilder, and Vollenhoven. In the conservative camp he was in the picture as well. With fervor, Veenhof approached them by way of church history. With his books *In Kuyper's lijn* (In the Line of Kuyper) and *Soevereiniteit in eigen kring* (Sphere Sovereignty), he attempted to convince conservatives that the Reformational movement was trying to connect to Reformed classics like Calvin, Kuyper, and Bavinck. With his innate yearning toward harmonious relationships, Veenhof exerted himself toward building bridges within the church. In the meantime, the Veenhofs welcomed a daughter, Margriet, in 1938.

Veenhof's attempts at building bridges turned out to be unsuccessful in the polemic thirties. He tempered Schilder, after initially galvanizing him into action, in order to prevent him from going overboard in his polemics, and thereby damaging support for the Reformational movement on the local church level which Veenhof was attempting to enlarge by lectures, articles, and pamphlets. In tempering Schilder, he widened the distance between them and moved closer to Vollenhoven. During these years, Veenhof also lost contact with Janse, particularly due to his resigned attitude with re-

spect to the German occupation after the outbreak of World War II. While both kneeled for the absolute authority of what they saw as concrete and transparent Scripture, they construed its meaning differentially with regard to obedience to the occupying power. Thus, Veenhof suffered the loss of his paramount spiritual father and mainstay.

Leaving Haarlem, Veenhof moved in 1941 to the great city of Utrecht where he further developed into a nationally recognized Reformed clergyman. Because of the war, it was a difficult and complicated period, particularly after the Veenhofs took a Jewish refugee into hiding. When, after a number of years, the synod representatives' doctrinal investigation of several theological issues, such as the matter of religious introspection, was again placed on the agenda of the joint synod in 1942, Veenhof was initially satisfied with the unanimously taken doctrinal rulings. He was also prepared to take part in a committee of synod representatives for further study of the question of denominational pluriformity.

At the same time, he participated in a network of individuals who objected not only to the judicial proceedings at the synod of Sneek-Utrecht, which, because of the war situation, had prolonged itself beyond the standard three years, but also to the contents of the *Toelichting* (Explication) on the substance of the doctrinal rulings. Nevertheless, he adopted a singular stance, not considering it opportune to file an appeal, while others were already going ahead. And despite his objections, he also did not find the question of self-prolongation of the synod weighty enough to appeal it officially. In addition, Veenhof not only supported Schilder, but criticized him soundly as well, and furthermore, toward the end of the synod decision-making process on the denominational issues, peace-lover as he was, he attempted to bridge the gap with Berkouwer as chair of the synod. Meanwhile he suffered firm criticism from Schilder, who felt that he should press ahead, which put their friendship under pressure. In this period of excessive denominational tension, the difference between their characters became clear. While Schilder sought content-wise the 'absolute in every concrete thing', Veenhof was prepared to suffer injustice for the cause of denominational peace.

So Veenhof revealed himself as a denominational strategist and peacemaker who demanded room for both opinions on covenant and introspection, meanwhile passionately seeking after a good formulation of conscientious objections. For Veenhof, his denominational stance lay more in the line of the intention of the synod rulings of 1905. Because of all of this, he again came nearer to Vollenhoven. In the middle of the war and the synod's treatment of the denominational problems, and after finding a book by Helenius de Cock, Veenhof began studying the history of the *Afgescheiden* (Secessionist) congregations and the viewpoint on covenant and baptism in those cir-

cles. This would be a turning point in his life, after which he would extensively and permanently immerse himself in his own spiritual background. His church-historical studies led to various publications pointing clearly to the exceedingly delicate current events within the denomination. Slowly he would detach himself from the climate of the absolute.

*Predik het Woord* (Preach the Word) is an important book for the reason that, in it, Veenhof extensively discusses Kuyper's concept of the *veronderstelde wedergeboorte* (presuppositional regeneration), a key notion in the denominational problems of that time. Veenhof's contribution to 'Rondom 1905' (Around 1905) should also be mentioned, because he was able to emphasize, on the basis of argument, that the synod rulings of 1905 were a pacification formula which offered space for various covenant views on the balance between election and human responsibility. Meanwhile, his pastoral work went on amidst the difficulties of war, the occupation, and a Jewish refugee-in-hiding. Locally, he was also confronted with the repercussions of the denominational problems. In the three congregations where Veenhof served as pastor, he was loved for his sermons and pastorate, also among the young people. He conducted regular lectures at meetings of the *Jongelingsbond* (Reformed Youth Union). He further continued to propagate Reformational philosophy via courses. Altogether, however, it made continuous inroads into his health. The candle of available energy burned on both ends.

When the ecclesial *Vrijmaking* took place in August 1944, after Schilder's suspension and ousting, neither Veenhof nor Vollenhoven and Dooyeweerd followed him. A schism went too far for the peace-loving Utrecht pastor, and furthermore, according to him, there were still possibilities of filing a protest. In expectation of prompt liberation from the German occupation, a local religious peace (*godsvrede*) was concluded, in Utrecht as well as in Amersfoort. Veenhof hoped that this would bring openings for a national reconciliation, which can be considered rather naive. Done is done. But eventually, a year after the liberation, and under pressure from both Schilder and elder and friend J.G. van Oord from Utrecht, Veenhof could no longer take responsibility for the series of interpretations of the various synod rulings and the suspensions. His late *Vrijmaking* and the associated hesitations point to the fact that his soul was deeply torn between the old and the new denomination. He left many precious things behind in the *Synodale* (maintaining the rulings of the synod) churches, not in the last place his good friend Vollenhoven.

Directly after his own personal *Vrijmaking*, he warned against the danger of pride and complacency in his own Article 31 circles. Shortly thereafter he was appointed professor of Practical Theology at the new *Theologische Hogeschool van de Gereformeerde Kerken (onderhoudende artikel 31)* (Theo-

logical Seminary of the Reformed Churches [maintaining Article 31]). At that moment all the tension of the past war years emerged and Veenhof had a nervous breakdown for the third time in his life. That his direct local colleague Rev. M. de Goede had again been found guilty of adultery was the last straw; he was overburdened with emotions and tension. After repeated hesitation whether he should indeed accept the professorate, he was inaugurated in Kampen in June 1946.

When Veenhof's energy was back to normal, he revealed an enormous industry in the *Vrijgemaakt* churches as ecclesiastical and political ideologist, and as historiographer of the *Vrijmaking* and professor. As professor of Homiletics he emphasized covenant obedience in church, state, and society, viewing the church, just like Schilder, as the foremost cultural force. *Doorgaande reformatie* (Permanent Reformation) remained his motto, even though he did not interpret that term necessarily in the same sense that was common in the *Vrijgemaakt* churches with their inclination towards institutionally-focused Permanent Reformation. Partly by his research into the history of the *Afgescheiden* churches, Veenhof emphasized personal piety and Reformation of the heart. Thus, religious introspection was still his personal theme. During the thirties he had been very reluctant towards introspection, but now he more and more became convinced of its necessity for the *Vrijgemaakt* churches, though more in a collective sense, i.e. for the *Vrijgemaakt* community as a whole. He feared that Permanent Reformation would degenerate into a growing tendency towards glorying in *Vrijgemaakt* organizations.

Nevertheless, as scribe of the *Vrijgemaakt* elite, he produced the fierce political pamphlet *Kracht en doel der politiek* (Power and aim of politics) directed against the Anti-revolutionary Party. In the pamphlet he criticized the Reformational philosophy with its sphere sovereignty which carried in itself the danger of obscuring the ethical conflict that had developed between the *Vrijgemaakten* (members of the Article 31 churches) and the *Synodalen* (members of the churches who in 1944 followed the synod). Nowhere in his publications did Veenhof actually mention the *Vrijgemaakt* churches as the 'true church', but he suggested it implicitly. However, he always remained a member of the Society for Calvinistic Philosophy.

Several years later, the faculty of the Theological Seminary was dismayed by the aggressive atmosphere within the *Vrijgemaakt* churches after the development of the Kralingen issue as well as the Bos campaign in 1948 and 1949 in which a large group of *Vrijgemaakten* returned to the *Synodale* Reformed churches, and so they issued a collective warning in 1951. In that vein, Schilder spoke at the annual Seminary Day on the distinction between *Zelus en Zeloten* (Zeal and Zealots) whereas Veenhof sketched anew the great menace of irritating pride in *Vrijgemaakt* organizations. He even made the

comparison with the Jewish Sanhedrin, which had murdered Christ, and spoke of Pharisaism. This warning had a dramatic sequel in the sudden death of Schilder and Holwerda in the spring of 1952. To Veenhof it was divine judgment. Even more than before, he would emphasize the primacy of personal piety within all kinds of church activities. His anti-subjectivism became milder in character. For a great part, he had wrestled himself free from the climate of the absolute, although he remained outwardly antithetical.

The method of the church-historical parallel became Veenhof's prime method of critiquing the church reality. In that vein, he referred not only to 'thus is it written' but also to 'thus it took place'. He preferred to form opinions, but declined direct positions of leadership within the *Vrijgemaakt* church and its related societal organizations, synod included, as much as he was begged to do so. Veenhof feared a repetition of the adversity of the pre-advisors during the conflict before the *Vrijmaking*. In addition, he wanted to create room for divergent currents within the *Vrijgemaakt* churches, a desire which can also be related to his mild character, devoted to social harmony. Veenhof personally formed a mixture of the different groups within the *Vrijgemaakt* churches.

After the death of the undisputed *Vrijgemaakt* doyen, Klaas Schilder, the tension between the different factions grew, within the Seminary as well. The crisis it created among the editors of *De Reformatie* (*The Reformation*), which was won by the followers of Permanent Reformation, disappointed Veenhof so in what had taken place between *Vrijgemaakt* brothers that Veenhof longed for death. He was ousted from the editorial board of *The Reformation*, a journal for which he had worked for many years. Kamphuis became one of the chief editors. The emphasis on personal piety also meant a shift in Veenhof's view on Scripture and in his homiletics. In the Bible and in preaching, the central theme was God himself, the gift of God's love. For Veenhof, the Bible was no longer a theological encyclopedia or an ethics manual, but rather a love letter from God. For Veenhof, the *Vrijgemaakt* church with its own organizations receded to the background. He maintained contacts with other Reformed Christians as well. Meanwhile he exerted himself with heart and soul for the *Vrijgemaakt* community.

While Veenhof was opposed to sectarianism and polarization and direct leadership within the churches, he allowed himself be persuaded to participate in the establishment of a second *Vrijgemaakt* church-wide journal, *Opbouw* (Building up). The first issue appeared in the spring of 1957. Without intending to do so, this new publication strengthened the dichotomy within the *Vrijgemaakt* churches, as, by its appearance, it institutionalized the split. When, after the death of prof. Deddens, Kamphuis was appointed as professor of *Kerkrecht* (Ecclesiastical Rule) and Church History, the

split became even more apparent within the seminary. This appointment had everything to do with the refusal of the Senate to propose a candidate for the curators and the synod to vote on. Veenhof, in a desperately impassioned correspondence with Kamphuis, tried to prevent him from accepting the appointment, but that turned out to be an illusion.

From that moment on, Veenhof was condemned to the position of commentator which he had forced on himself. He did not want to lead, only to offer an opinion. That meant automatically that he left the initiative to Kamphuis to whom leadership in the church was an absolute necessity and who, as a professor, saw his denominational star ascend. Towards the end of the fifties, Veenhof's opus magnum *Prediking en uitverkiezing* (Preaching and Election) appeared, the crystallization of the theological treatment of his doctrinal position during the *Vrijmaking* and of his whole spiritual development from the point of his reorientation towards the history of the *Afscheiding*. Inwardly, Veenhof had left the climate of the absolute. Influenced by the course of his life, he looked back towards his roots, the climate of the *Afgescheiden* churches, particularly at the time of the Union of the *Afgescheidenen* (Secessionists) with the *Dolerenden* (Dissenters). As a professor, he was not unconditionally loved by all his students. His commentary on sermons in the homiletics class could be scathing. Nevertheless he made a deep impression on most students, especially when he would start to preach himself, during the lessons. And, he could praise a student when he was really enthusiastic about his sermon.

The mainstream within the *Vrijgemaakt* churches itself, though, continued to move into the climate of the absolute, towards the sphere of the '*preciezen*' (the strict), not the sphere of the '*rekkelijken*' (the liberal). The tension within the *Vrijgemaakt* world crystallized in the first half of the sixties within a number of issues, certainly after the synod of Assen, purely on principle, implacably closed the door in the face of members of the *Synodale* Reformed churches who were seeking reconciliation. The affair concerning the pastors A. van der Ziel from Groningen-South and B. Telder from the congregation of Breda predominated. The Van der Ziel affair was the result of the tension concerning the relationship with the *Synodale* Reformed churches and the related *Vrijgemaakt* 'true church' concept. Had the ethical conflict been settled in the meantime or not? The issue in this affair was also the maintenance of church rule. The controversy around Telder concerning death and eternal life touched on the confession. Were the confessions to be maintained literally or was there any space for interpretation?

Veenhof, who disagreed with Telder doctrinally, urged tolerance and continued debate. Both in the case of Telder and Van der Ziel, he was against censure as there was, in his view, no conflict with the fundamentals of Christian doctrine. In the meantime, he was so busy with the denomina-



tional conflict that he fell short in the coaching of his Master students. He was also frequently ill. There were moments that he felt sorry that he had gone along with the *Vrijmaking*, but he saw no way back. Some people in the *Vrijgemaakt* churches began to doubt his confessional integrity, because of his emphasis on the human and imperfect character of statements of faith. His emphasis on the difference between fundamental and non-fundamental elements of Christian doctrine was detrimental to his position within the church as well. With the censure of Van der Ziel at the synod of Rotterdam-Delfshaven in 1964, the churches definitively embraced the line of Permanent Reformation that was consistently extrapolated into church life, especially by prof. Kamphuis. Jager and Veenhof, the most important spokesmen for the minority, again lost ground.

In the middle of 1965, Veenhofs confessional integrity was not only doubted but also disavowed. At the end of that year, a large-scale debate was held at the seminary between professors and curators on the controversies in the church. It was clear that the faculty was not a homogeneous team. Three items were on the agenda: the status of the *Vrijmaking*, adherence to the confession, and opinions on church government. During the debate, Veenhof warned against confessionalism and legalistic use of church rule and pleaded for continued discussion of the differences. He placed the emphasis fully on the Bible itself. Kamphuis ascertained devaluation of the confessions and disdain for the general synod. Veenhof saw the *Vrijmaking* as a work of God, stained by human sin. Kamphuis regarded it as a factual work of God. Jager emphasized personal piety and a living relationship with Christ. Kamphuis, Doekes, and H.J. Schilder also considered that important, but only within the boundaries agreed upon within the church. Both inside and outside of the seminary, this last viewpoint was dominant.

The curators drew the following conclusions around the beginning of 1966: the main premise remained that the *Drie formulieren van enigheid* (Three Forms of Unity) were a summary of Scriptural doctrine; the signers of the confessions were required to file an official complaint in case of substantive objections; it was not allowed to attack the confession in publications. Furthermore, the curators called on the professors to be very circumspect in their commentary in the press on church conflicts still under review in the church judiciary. Meanwhile, in their injunctions, the curators chose the line of Permanent Reformation. Veenhof and Jager were implicitly warned.

In 1966 the denominational train derailed when Rev. Van der Ziel, pastor of the Groningen *Tehuis* congregation, was defrocked and a regional schism took place around the conflict in Breda. The *Tehuis* congregation requested help and assistance from the rest of the *Vrijgemaakt* churches in the Netherlands, which the classis of Groningen advised against as a violation of denominational unity. That year Veenhof expounded his ecclesiological

viewpoint extensively in *Om kerk te blijven* (In Order to Remain Church). In that document he put the status of the Vrijmaking and the denominational institutions into perspective. C. Trimp and later J. Douma attacked the book robustly. On Reformation day 1966 a number of prominent *Vrijgemaakten* published an *Open Brief* (Public Epistle) in support of the *Tehuis* congregation which could be interpreted as an explicit provocation of the classis of Groningen. In the Public Epistle, there was talk of a specific *Vrijgemaakt* ideology and the signers called for thinking on the level of the world church. Veenhof did not sign the *Open Brief* but did not attack it either. The document would split the *Vrijgemaakt* church as it began to function as a denominational *shibboleth*. All who were not against the *Open Brief* were considered censurable.

Because of Veenhof's liberal ecclesiastical vision, president-curator Rev. D. van Dijk publicly accused him in the spring of 1967 of departing from the confession. Shortly thereafter, the author of the *Open Brief*, Rev. B.J.F. Schoep from Nieuwer-Amstel, was excluded from the general synod of Amersfoort-West because of what the synod saw as confessional infidelity. A few months later, in June 1967, Veenhof's local congregation, Kampen, split over the *Open Brief* due to the refusal of the local pastor, Rev. J.O. Mulder, who had signed the Epistle, to retract his signature. Veenhof found himself outside of the *Vrijgemaakt* church. He considered criticism of the Epistle possible, but refused to denounce it. Prof. Jager shared his good friend's fate.

Because of the local schism, the theological seminary found itself in an impossible situation. The professors stood on both sides of a denominational divide and the same would be true for the students. Rector Veenhof saw no escape, but the youngest professor, J. van Bruggen, proposed that the issue should be resolved with a so-called 'attest' (testimonial) decision. This was, in fact, an attempt to get a grip on implementation of the denominational censure within the seminary following the ruling of the synod of Amersfoort-West. The confessional fidelity of each student from a congregation suspected of sympathy with the *Open Brief* would be reviewed in a personal interview. Veenhof considered that unacceptable, certainly after the synod had explicitly drawn his personal confessional integrity in doubt, stating that, together with prof. Jager, he had violated the agreements of early 1966 within the seminary in *Opbouw*. Shortly thereafter Veenhof broke down mentally and went on sick leave. This was advantageous for the faculty in the sense that they did not have to suspend their 'nestor' because of refusal to work, which was what happened to the lectors D.J. Buwalda and H.M. Mulder. Veenhof was able to leave the seminary in 1968 via the side door of an early retirement with honor, due to his health.

In this situation, Veenhof did not wish an official farewell from the semi-



nary, but accepted an unofficial meeting organized by alumni during which all denominational sensitivities remained out of bounds. Jager was honored at the same event. Later that year, despite their honorable retirement, the synod of Hoogeveen censured them both. Veenhof's right to advise the senate (a right he possessed as retired professor) was retracted on account of what was deemed unsatisfactory defense of the confession. Jager was accused of outright infidelity to the confession. He also lost his right of advice to the senate. And thus, both retired professors were set aside by many of their former pupils.

So after a quarter of a century, Veenhof was finally chastised for his vacillating stance during the *Vrijmaking*, which had led to distrust among the people arguing for Permanent Reformation from the very beginning. It was not to be permitted to debate the status of the *Vrijmaking* as a work of God. As far as the Three Forms of Unity and church rule was concerned, Veenhof was considered not to have remained true to the signature he had set when accepting office in the church. That same year Veenhof published his changed view of the church in *Volk van God* (People of God), the book in which he definitively took leave of Schilder's church view and sought refuge with Bavinck's. Also on this point he had returned to Doorn, to his father who had quite early been influenced by Bavinck. For the Christian, it was all about personal piety as part of the people of God, a people who could be found in various denominations. The church as institution was no longer central for Veenhof, the important thing was the personal relationship with God. In that sense, introspection was emphasized, also in its value for the community. Where he had been reluctant towards this in the past because of his personal spiritual crisis, he now concluded that introspection was necessary for the Christian and for the denomination of which he was a member.

After his early retirement, Veenhof evolved into the spiritual father of the *buitenverband* (disassociated) *Vrijgemaakt* congregations, the later *Nederlands Gereformeerde Kerken* (Dutch Reformed Churches). The *Akkoord van Kerkelijk Samenleven* (Church Community Agreement) which the new denomination accepted in 1982 carried his stamp, without him consciously having attempted to place it. The atmosphere in these churches still breathes the spirit of Veenhof: true to Scripture and the main points of the confession with ample room for debate on differences of opinion. He also left his spiritual legacy outside the church, especially in his warnings against Marxism and communism in a period in which the spirit of Marx was rampant. Further, Veenhof renewed a number of old friendships and contacts like those with Vollenhoven, Ridderbos, and Berkouwer who was succeeded at the VU University of Amsterdam by Veenhof's oldest son. Facts are stranger than fiction. In the end, Veenhof would turn out to be primarily a pupil of Vollenhoven. As much as Janse and Schilder had influenced him,

the nuanced and careful Vollenhoven was the one closest to Veenhof. After the death of his wife, Veenhof stayed with his daughter and son-in-law in Uithoorn and later in Oudemirdum, where, during his last years, he enjoyed their loving care in happiness and inner peace.

On their gravestone, Veenhof and his wife took stock of a full, active, and happy married and family life, heavily marked by a good deal of ecclesiastical heartache and conflict. The significance of principle, confession, church institute, and reflection on the covenant were put into perspective by the professor of Practical Theology. Inwardly no stalwart man, he no longer wished to cast the anchor of his life into those waters. He had left the climate of absolutism where, for a while, he had been able to drown out his own personal uncertainty. He also no longer sought support from powerful personalities. Via long ecclesiastical circumnavigation, Veenhof eventually returned to the point from which he had begun: dependency, in the fear of God, on His mercy, the faith he had tasted so fully in his pietistic family on the Utrecht Ridge. He now realized not only the dangers of pietism, but also that the Christian life could not do without a healthy dose of *bevindelijkheid* (being experimental Reformed). His earlier church-institutional words had died away. It was enough to be part of God's people. God Himself and His praise, Veenhof's overarching Christian goal in life from the very beginning, were the themes that made their way onto the granite slab above his grave in the Kampen cemetery. It is a short summary of the thinking of this existential, practical theologian, whose motto was that 'real theology should consist of preaching the Word': 'Resurrected, I will declare His praise' (Ps. 17:8, Genevan Psalter 1968).



Veenhof was a man who needed a lot of support and confirmation from his environment. He sought that among the great classical and contemporary Reformed thinkers. The character of his relationships with Janse, Schilder, Vollenhoven, and later Jager, is highly revealing. His inclination to quote others can be interpreted in the same manner. He was reluctant to give independent, systematic analyses. His use of quotations took place with a view to current church events. In reality, as a professor he always remained the clergyman, even in his seminary lecturing. He preached more than that he analyzed. In the meantime he ever enjoyed the unconditional support of his optimistic spouse. Sensitive in nature, he had great difficulty handling conflict. Burnout and depression lay lurking. They were associated with significant turning points in his life: his struggle with the pietism of his youth, his *Vrijmaking*, the editorial board crisis within *De Reformatie*, and the denominational conflict during the sixties. Veenhof's sensitivity made

him a man of hyperboles: he could be lyrical but sharply critical as well. Exaggeration was not foreign to him.

Veenhof's life course is similar to that of the Andalusian shepherd in the modern fairy tale – already a classic now – *The Alchemist* of Paulo Coelho.<sup>1</sup> Just like the young shepherd, Veenhof had a dream in his youth. After incessant wanderings in which he found the love of his life, just as the main figure from Coelho's parable, he finally and unexpectedly found the treasure from his dream, right where he had begun. Both Veenhof and the young shepherd suffered great losses on their way, however their journeys turned out to be the pathway to purification. But there are even more parallels. In the course of his life, the young shepherd also encountered the meaning of the written Word: *Maktub*.<sup>2</sup> In the story of Veenhof's life, the sacraments played a large role, in particular baptism, just as the signs in the young shepherd's quest. And, also in *The Alchemist*, the reader experiences the tension between Word and Spirit, mind and emotion, reason and heart.

This biography of Veenhof offers new insights into Dutch church history of the twentieth century in the sense that, even stronger than before, it becomes apparent that *bevindelijkheid* was an essential factor, not only in the Vrijmaking, but also in the schism within the *Vrijgemaakt* churches during the sixties. While doctrinally the Vrijmaking concerned the presuppositional regeneration and the related issues of election and covenant, beneath the surface lay the existential desire for assurance and purity of faith. That is apparent especially from the distinction between introspection and self-ordeal. In the tension within the *Vrijgemaakt* churches in the sixties, *bevindelijkheid* also played a large role. While the debate concerned itself mainly with the status of the *Vrijmaking* and the *Vrijgemaakt* churches, and that of the confession and the church order, under the surface lay the existential inquiry into veritable Christian identity. Do we find the true Christian in the true church, or is it possible to find salvation outside of this church community? What comes in the first place: the heart of the believer or the institute of the church? Precisely in this biography, the mind and heart of the Reformed churches, whether *vrijgemaakt* or not, have been examined existentially. Doctrinal choices have been interpreted in a profoundly existential manner. Because of their background, the *Vrijgemaakt* churches were, within the context of the *gereformeerde gezindte* (Reformed modality), affected most by modernity. As a result of their absolute character, the *pietas*, the personal piety, was ecclesiastically too undetermined for them. The leaders of the *doorgaande reformatie* were fearful of this, making it difficult for them to accept diversity. Aspiring to the absolute – typical of modernity – made them rigid, at the expense of freedom and diversity. That Veenhof's biography almost exactly corresponds to church history, certainly after the *Vrijmaking*, makes the lines of *bevindelijkheid* and modernity crystal clear.

It is noteworthy that, during the prelude to the *Vrijmaking*, Veenhof emphasized the 'objective' side of the covenant with God, while in the fifties and sixties, he would more and more stress the 'subjective' side, although he preferred to refrain from the use of this terminology. These are no meaningless theological details. The tension between both sides of the covenant runs throughout the entire history of the church and stems directly from the New as well as the Old Testament. It is a tension that belongs to Christian life and, in a general sense, to human life as well. Right up to the present time, this tension between feeling and reason, internal experience and external expression of faith, life and rule can be felt in the various denominations.

For decades this theme has played an essential role in the contacts between the churches which the *Vrijmaking* had brought forth and the *Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken* (Christian Reformed Churches) who continued to maintain suspicion against the absolute character of the *Vrijgemaakt* approach. In particular the *bevindelijke* movement within the Reformed community that is essential to the *Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken*, allows more margin for diversity as they ultimately consider spiritual experience to be more important than Reformed doctrine. In that sense too, Veenhof's life is illustrative, coming as he did from a pietistic milieu. After a short polemic start, he pled more and more for tolerance. That this also had to do with the nature of his personality needs no further explanation. In church history, he fulfilled the role of instigator, actor and victim. Contentwise he was adverse to modernity, but from the start he stimulated Schilder to be typically modern in his approach. In the period before the *Vrijmaking*, Veenhof began to doubt the strategy of absolutism, but he did yet finally choose to become *vrijgemaakt*. In the end he became victim of his own absolutism from the thirties of which he had, in the meantime, taken leave. In the present study, it has appeared meaningful to employ the historical microscope of the biography, by which church conflicts could be analyzed more in relationship to one another on an existential level. The overarching topic is the great ecclesiastical theme that S. van Velzen had addressed, shortly before the union between *Afgescheidenen* and *Dolerenden*, at the occasion of the installation of a new rector, in his oration: 'The Union of Love for Truth and Tolerance'.<sup>3</sup>

(Translation by Robert Laird Harris Jr., Leeuwarden, Netherlands)

### Notes

1. New York HarperCollins 1993.
2. Coelho, *The Alchemist*, 73. This means 'Thus it is written'.
3. *De vereeniging van waarheidsliefde en verdraagzaamheid* (Kampen Zalsman 1889).

## Over de auteur

Ab (Adriaan Pieter) van Langevelde werd op 25 februari 1954 geboren te Goes en groeide vanaf medio 1957 op in Emmeloord. In 1972 behaalde hij daar het diploma Atheneum B aan de Christelijke Scholengemeenschap. In 1978 slaagde hij *cum laude* voor zijn doctoraal examen algemene economie aan de Vrije Universiteit te Amsterdam. Vervolgens werkte hij in de periode 1980-1994 in Leeuwarden bij de Kamer van Koophandel en Fabrieken voor Friesland, het Economisch-Technologisch Instituut voor Friesland (ETIF) en de Afdeling Onderzoek van de Provincie Friesland. In die tijd verrichte hij ook werkzaamheden voor de Federatie Noordelijke Economische Instituten (FNEI), een samenwerkingsverband van de drie noordelijke ETI's met de Rijksuniversiteit Groningen. Vanaf 1994 was hij verbonden aan de Faculteit der Ruimtelijke Wetenschappen van die universiteit voor een promotie- en een postdoc project. In 2001 promoveerde hij op een proefschrift over de invloed van de tweetaaligheid op de Friese economie. In het betrokken onderzoek maakte hij gebruik van de reformatorische filosofie. Tot 2005 was hij vervolgens bezig met een postdoc project samen met een hoogleraar geografie van Calvin College, Grand Rapids (MI), USA, waarin de reformatorische filosofie werd toegepast op de economie en de geografie in het algemeen. Daarna begon hij als projectmedewerker aan het Archief- en Documentatiecentrum van de Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland (ADC) te Kampen met het project *Biografie C. Veenhof*. Sinds 2012 werkt hij bij het ADC samen met prof. dr. George Harinck ook aan het project *De Vrijmaking in brieven*, waarin wordt onderzocht hoe gereformeerden op de lokale kerkvloer de Vrijmaking hebben beleefd in een tijd van oorlog.