Warning against the Pietists: The World of Wilhelmus à Brakel

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Abstract

In 1700 the Reformed minister Wilhelmus à Brakel published a voluminous compendium of theology in the vernacular for a Dutch lay audience. The book immediately proved a best-seller. Still in print, it remains highly valued as a work of devotional literature among Dutch neo-calvinists. In the third edition (1707) the author added a new chapter, delineating Reformed orthodoxy against various forms of ‘natural’ religion. Brakel appears to have been very apprehensive of the developments in German Pietism. The genesis and content of the new chapter, warning his audience ‘against Pietists, Quietists, and ... Spiritless Religion Under the Guise of Spirituality’ show how a prominent minister like Brakel found himself moving the frontiers between Reformed orthodoxy and rationalism, reacting against some of the pietisms of his day, and evolving towards a ‘new Protestantism.’

1 Between Reason and Piety

At the turn of the eighteenth century, Wilhelmus à Brakel (1635–1711), ‘Minister of the Divine Word’ in Rotterdam, published his *Λογική λατρεία, dat is Redelyke godts-dienst* (Logikè Latreia, that is Reasonable Religion). The author could not have predicted that his voluminous work would become and remain a best-seller.¹ Although the title might suggest a commitment to contemporary rationalism, in reality it referred to the apostolic vocabulary of earliest Christianity (Paul’s letter to the Romans, 12,1). In ecclesiastical historiography Brakel is associated with post-Reformation confessionalism or even early Pietism. As a

1 Wilhelmus à Brakel, *Logikè latreia, dat is Redelyke godts-dienst. In dewelke de Goddelijke Waarheden des Genaden-Verbondts worden verklaart, tegen allerleye partyen beschermt, ende tot de practijke aangedrongen. Als mede de Bedeeling des Verbondts ende Handeling Gods met sijne Kercke in het Oude Testament onder de Schaduwen; ende in het Nieuwe Testament onder de Vervulling vertoont in een verklaringe van de Openbaringe Joannis* (The Hague, 1700).

minister in the Dutch Reformed Church he was of impeccable Calvinist orthodoxy. Up through the present he has belonged to a canon of true and trusted 'old writers' from before the Enlightenment, highly valued among an orthodox Protestant readership.²

The full title of the book continues: *in which Divine Truthes concerning the Covenant of Grace are expounded, Defended against Opposing Parties, and their Practice Advocated, as well as The Administration of this Covenant in the Old and New Testaments*. An explanation of the Apocalypse of John was meant to demonstrate the administration of the covenant under the 'shadows' in the Old and the 'fulfilment' in the New Testaments. By dealing with this matter Brakel joined a debate in Dutch theology about Bible exegesis between the followers of Gisbertus Voetius (1589–1676) and Johannes Coccejus (1603–1669). Apparently he felt an urgency to contribute to this controversy in a fruitful way, and with an eye on the religious practice of common believers.³ More relevant to the topic of this chapter, Brakel also entered into an emerging debate on the position of religion between reason and irrational 'enthusiasm,' a debate spurred on by the flowering of prophecy, religious revival, and radical spiritualism during and in the wake of the religious wars of the seventeenth century.

The influence of *Redelyke godts-dienst* was largely restricted to the Reformed tradition in the Netherlands.⁴ A comparable measure of interest could have been expected in several parts of Germany. Calvinism had been established there in a number of cities and regions, while developments in theology and the church in the Dutch Republic were closely followed. A German translation of Brakel's work was published in 1714 by Johann Daniel Günst in Kassel. It was soon followed by a reprint, but then was almost forgotten.⁵ *Redelyke godts-dienst* was well known among Dutch colonists in the Republic's overseas territories as long as the language of the mother country remained in use and

2 F. J. Los, Wilhelmus à Brakel (Leiden, 1892; reprint Leiden, 1991); Fred van Lieburg, 'De Redelijke godsdienst van Wilhelmus à Brakel' in: *Boekenwijsheid. Drie eeuwen kennis en cultuur in 30 bijzondere boeken. Opstellen bij de voltooiing van de Short-Title Catalogue*, Netherlands, ed. Jan Bos and Erik Geleijns (Zutphen, 2009), pp. 186–94.

3 F. G. M. Broeyer and E. G. E. van der Wall, eds., *Een richtingenstrijd in de Gereformeerde Kerk: Voetianen en coccejanen 1650–1750* (Zoetermeer, 1994); Joris van Eijnatten, *Liberty and Concord in the United Provinces: Religious Toleration and the Public in the Eighteenth-Century Netherlands* (Leiden, 2003).

4 See Fred van Lieburg, 'Reformed Doctrine and Pietist Conversion: The Historical Interplay of Theology, Communication and Experience,' in: *Paradigms, Poetics and Politics of Conversion*, ed. Jan N. Bremmer, Wout J. van Bakkum, and Arie L. Molendijk (Leuven, 2006), pp. 133–48.

5 Wilhelm van Brakel, *Logikè latreia, das ist Vernünfftiger Gottesdienst*, trans. J. Quitter (Kassel, 1714; 2nd ed., Frankfurt/Leipzig, 1717).

its traditions were honoured. However, an initiative to have it translated for Reformed readers in North America around 1800 failed.⁶

Even disregarding its reception history, Brakel's handbook is an important research case for identifying religious changes around 1700. Beginning with its third edition in 1707, the work contained an intriguing new chapter that has never been published separately. It bears the title "Waarschouwende Bestieringe tegen de Piëtisten, Quiëtisten, en dergelijke afdwalenden tot eenen natuurlijken en geesteloozen godsdienst, onder de gedaante van Geestelijkheid" (A Warning Exhortation Against Pietists, Quietists, and All Who in a Similar Manner Have Deviated to a Natural and Spiritless Religion Under the Guise of Spirituality).⁷

The following pages will give Brakel's "warning guide" against contemporary spirituality the attention that has never been paid to it in scholarly historiography, though it certainly deserves such consideration, especially in the present volume.⁸ Whom did Brakel actually want to unmask? What type of new religiosity did he perceive? Which meaning may be given to this text, as it is, with hindsight, Brakel's swan song? This case study is based upon earlier biographical and contextual research. In addition, it is profitable to examine a handwritten letter by Brakel to August Hermann Francke (1663–1727), a founding father of German Pietism, discovered by Jan van de Kamp in the archives of the Franckesche Stiftungen in Halle.⁹

6 The Dutch Reformed Church in New York wanted to have it translated around 1800, but eventually the job was done by B. Elshout, resulting in the publication of *The Christian's Reasonable Service*, 4 vols. (Morgan, Pa., 1992–5). See for its influence in South Africa: A. Raath, 'The Dutch Second Reformation on the Frontier: Wilhelmus à Brakel (1635–1711) and the Relationship between the Church and Political Authorities in the Transvaal Settlements in South Africa (1845–1860),' *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae* 28 (2002), 76–119.

7 'Waarschouwende Bestieringe tegen de Piëtisten, Quiëtisten, en dergelijke afdwalenden tot eenen natuurlijken en geesteloozen godsdienst, onder de gedaante van Geestelijkheid,' in: Wilhelmus à Brakel: *Redelijke Godsdienst* (3rd ed., Rotterdam, 1707), chapter 43, pp. 1103–58. No separate editions have been found.

8 Some surveys were offered in religious magazines in order to legitimate warnings against manifestations of present-day evangelicalism in Reformed denominations, for example W. van 't Spijker, 'W. a Brakel en de Piëtisten,' *De Wekker* 72, nos. 7–13 (1962–3); A. de Reuver, 'Wilhelmus à Brakel en het Piëtisme,' *De Waarheidsvriend* 27 November and 4 December 1992; L. M. P. Scholten, 'Terzijde: evangelisch,' *De Wachter Sions*, 29 January–12 March 1998. Cf. A. de Reuver, 'Wilhelmus à Brakel en het Piëtisme,' *Documentatieblad Nadere Reformatie* 22 (1998), 82–90.

9 J. van de Kamp et al., "'Een soort nieuw Licht en leven': Een onbekende brief van Wilhelmus à Brakel aan August Hermann Francke over piëtisme en mystiek,' *Reformatorisch Dagblad*, 4 October 2016.

2 Theodori Filius

At first sight it would appear that Wilhelmus à Brakel followed the typical career path of a successful minister in the Dutch Reformed Church. The son of Theodorus Gerardi à Brakel (1608–69), a preacher, he studied theology at the academies of Franeker and Utrecht before starting his pastoral service in 1662 in the village of Exmorra in Friesland. After that he worked in the towns of Stavoren, Harlingen, and Leeuwarden, the Frisian capital. Eventually he was called to the harbour city of Rotterdam, Holland's North Sea port. Only a pulpit in the metropolis of Amsterdam or an appointment at one of Dutch universities would have brought him to a higher step on the social ladder. To all appearances he lacked scholarly ambitions.

A closer look at Wilhelmus's biography shows that his identity was strongly marked by the career and character of his father. Theodorus à Brakel was far from an average minister, neither in his ecclesiastical career nor in his spiritual orientation. Although he attended a Latin school, he did not continue his studies in academia and became a schoolmaster in Leeuwarden, where a group of ministers persuaded him to seek admission to the clergy on the basis of 'singular gifts.' After he was ordained as minister in a Frisian congregation, an overzealous woman confronted him with published notes of his conversations with members of his congregation in 1649. Thus appeared *Het geestelijk leven, ende de stant eenes gelovigen mensches, hier op aerden* (The spiritual life and the condition of a believer here on earth). A bookseller in Amsterdam saw a market for this edifying work and indeed brought out several editions in the following two decades.¹⁰

As a student Wilhelmus, who presented himself as Theodorus Filius, became acquainted with professors and preachers in Utrecht who were congenial to Brakel *père*. The pious and learned Johan Godschalk van Schurman (1605–64) and his sister Anna Maria (1607–78) were personal friends of his father. Once they were his guests in Friesland. Theodorus's ascetic lifestyle and strict Sunday observance made a great impression upon them. In this Utrecht milieu the young Brakel met a minister's widow, Sara Nevius (1632–1706), a friend of Anna Maria van Schurman. He married her in 1662, just before his

10 Dirck Gerrits van Brakel, *Het geestelijk leven, ende de stant eenes gelovigen mensches, hier op aerden*, (Leeuwarden, 1649); this volume includes the appendix *Eenighe kenteekens, waer uyt een geloovich mensche hem can verseecken, dat hy van Godt is bemint*. Corrected and enlarged editions appeared in Amsterdam in 1651, 1656, 1657, 1665, 1670. Another work was: Theodorus Gerardi à Brakel, *Eenige christelijke gebeden, ende danck-segginge* (Amsterdam, 1652, many editions).

inauguration in the parish of Exmorra. Later in this story we will encounter this extraordinary minister's wife again.¹¹

At his father's deathbed, Wilhelmus promised to prepare an unpublished manuscript of Theodorus à Brakel for publication. This text included a description of "the bliss and right practice of godliness" as well as an autobiographical account of his spiritual development from his early youth. The son completed the work by reporting the sorrows and sayings of his late father during his last days. A constant in the work was the latter's intense relationship with God and his heartfelt care for his congregation. The following year the entire testimony was published in Amsterdam under the title *De trappen des geestelijken levens* (The steps of the spiritual life).¹²

The 35-year-old Wilhelmus à Brakel thus first emerged as a publicist in an effort to pay homage to his father. As is apparent from the preface, he realized that the predominance of mystical experiences and extraordinary revelations could elicit concerns about the doctrinal purity of the protagonist of *De trappen*. Nevertheless, the reception of the book was very positive. It was reprinted as early as 1671, adorned with an emblematic engraved title print of a Christian mastering the stairs of faith during successive stages in life, despite the temptations of the world and the evil promptings of swarms of demons. As with *Het geestelijk leven*, many editions of *De trappen* appeared up through the end of the eighteenth century, as is also true for the *Redelyke godts-dienst* of Wilhelmus à Brakel Th.F. So the son followed in his father's footsteps in three ways: as minister, as writer, and as author of a 'steady seller'.¹³

3 Warning against the Labadists

In the 1680s, Brakel became involved in the public discussions about the new theological fashion in Reformed theology inspired by Cocceius. The Leiden professor had interpreted sacred history as a series of periods or covenants that were to be detected in many biblical texts with a generous dose of linguistic and hermeneutical creativity. Brakel, following the Utrecht professor Voetius, preferred a literal, unambiguous exegesis. In a book on the covenant of grace published in 1687, Brakel took sides in the controversies between the Voetians

11 Fred van Lieburg, 'Sara Nevius (1632–1706): The Pietist Ministry of a Dutch Reformed Minister's Wife,' *Studia historiae ecclesiasticae* 30 (2004), 52–74.

12 Theodorus à Brakel, *De trappen des geestelijken levens* (Amsterdam, 1670, 1671, 1680, 1684, and 1702).

13 Cf. W. Heijting, 'Protestantse bestsellers in de Republiek rond het begin van de achttiende eeuw,' in: *Pietas reformata: Religieuze vernieuwing onder gereformeerden in de vroegmoderne tijd*, ed. J. van de Kamp et al. (Zoetermeer, 2015), pp. 233–45.

and the Coccejans.¹⁴ This conflict, later known as an 'eighty years' war' in the church of the Netherlands, touched upon cultural and political as well as theological issues. The question whether Christians were morally bound to the Fourth Commandment on the strict observance of the Sabbath divided clergy and laity. Brakel defended strict Sunday rest.

Having entered the public arena, Brakel repeatedly took up his pen to comment on ecclesiastical developments. In 1669 the Walloon pastor Jean de Labadie (1610–74) in Middelburg left the Reformed Church in despair about its moral decline. Given the conduct of many ministers and church members, he concluded that the church was full of 'unreborn' souls or false believers. Brakel felt attracted to Labadie's endeavour to form a separatist, pure community. He even contemplated joining the Labadists, as his and his wife's Utrecht friend Van Schurman did. However, after theological reflection, he refused to depart from the public Church. After all, the Church existed by the grace not of sinful people's piety but of the covenant of God.¹⁵ Triggered by sadness over the secession of the Labadists, and well aware of the attractiveness of their ideal of purity, Brakel explained his views in his publications *Trouwhertige waarschouwinge* (Faithful warning, 1683) and in *Leer en leydinge der Labadisten* (Teaching and leading of Labadists, 1685).

Furthermore, as a Voetian, he resisted the government's strong interference in ecclesiastical affairs. In 1688 he openly criticized the city fathers of Rotterdam who had disapproved a minister's call. Brakel claimed a measure of spiritual autonomy for the local church that was in fact not far removed from the independent course of the Labadists which he had so recently refuted. His principled stand in this case earned him a suspension from his office and the deprivation of his salary for over a year. The conflict gained considerable notoriety, but Brakel and the Rotterdam magistracy were eventually reconciled, due to the intervention of the stadtholder, Prince William III (1650–1702).¹⁶

From that point on, the minister turned away from polemics and towards providing pastoral help to church members in many places who threatened to secede from their congregations. Reformed church members on the brink of secession aspired to live a puritan lifestyle, attended conventicles, and often even shunned the partaking of the Lord's Supper because of the participation of so many 'name-Christians.' To keep these scrupulous believers within the

14 Wilhelmus à Brakel, *Hallelu-jah, ofte Lof des Heeren over het genaden-verbondt, ende des selfs bedieninge in het Oude en N. Testament, by occasie van de verklaringe van den achsten psalm* (Rotterdam, 1687, many editions).

15 T. J. Saxby, *The Quest for the New Jerusalem: Jean de Labadie and the Labadists, 1610–1744* (Dordrecht, 1987); Daniel Vidal, *Jean de Labadie, 1610–1674: Passion mystique et esprit de Réforme* (Grenoble, 2009).

16 W. Geesink, 'De zaak van Brakel in 1688,' *Rotterdamsch jaarboek* 8 (1888), 153–68.

Reformed fold, Brakel wrote *De scrupuleuse ontrent de communie des Heyligen Avontmaals in een verdorvene kerke* (Those who are scrupulous about partaking of the Holy Supper in a corrupted church, 1690).

Meanwhile an ambitious plan ripened in his mind. Brakel wished to offer plain people a complete overview of the teachings about church and faith according to the Bible and the Reformed creed. Over the course of ten years he composed what would become the *Redelyke godts-dienst*, completing one chapter after the other, using earlier writings where possible. Eventually in 1699 the manuscript of thousands of pages was ready for the press. As mentioned, the phrase *Redelyke godts-dienst* did not intend to elevate natural reason above revelation by God's Word. For Brakel as for all his orthodox colleagues, natural reason merely urges every human to honour and serve the heavenly Creator. Reasonable religion, however, denotes the assent of rational Christians to the truths of biblical revelation, as explained in creed and catechism, and experienced in the human conscience.

4 Marketing a Manual

Who was better able to judge whether there was a market for a large companion to Christian religion—an experienced pastor or an experienced publisher? After receiving patent from the States of Holland on 17 September 1699, the (Catholic) States' printer Cornelis van Dijck in The Hague produced both volumes of Brakel's work. The bookseller Reinier van Doesburg (ca. 1650–1731) in Rotterdam, manager of a flourishing stock of theological writings, took responsibility for their distribution. This deal seems to have been inspired by the author, who wished to keep the price of his work low so that its buyers would include relatively impecunious people. As the Rotterdam book reviewer Pieter Rabus (1660–1702) noted in his journal, Brakel had wanted to share his work “in such a laudable way, that no printer (let alone he himself) would line his purse, but every student and practitioner of the reasonable religion could enrich his soul.”¹⁷

17 Pieter Rabus, *Twee-maandelijke uyttreksels van alle eerst uytkomende boeken* (Rotterdam, 1701), pp. 1–48, there 2. “op zoodanige loffelijke wijze aan de wereld heeft willen mededelen, dat geen drukker (veel min hij zelf) daarmee zijn beurs, maar een onderzoeker en oeffenaar van den redelijken godsdienst zijn ziel zoude verrijken”, as cited in: Jaques Alexandre de Chalmot, ‘W. à Brakel,’ in: *Biographisch Woordenboek der Nederlanden*, 8 vols. (Amsterdam, 1798–1800), 4: 177–82, there 178–9. See Hans Bots, *Pieter Rabus en de ‘Boekzaal van Europe’, 1692–1702: Verkenningen binnen de Republiek der letteren in het laatste kwart van de zeventiende eeuw* (Amsterdam, 1974); J. J. V. M. de Vet, *Pieter Rabus (1660–1702): Een wegbereider van de Noordnederlandse verlichting* (Amsterdam

Brakel wrote the preface of his work on 26 February 1700. He addressed it to “de gemeente Gods in Nederland” (God’s congregation in the Netherlands), in particular to the congregations of Rotterdam and Middelburg, the capital of Zeeland. The latter locale had twice honoured him with a call, both of which he had declined. Thinking of how the printing press had promoted the Reformation in the sixteenth century, Brakel had a wide readership in mind, restricted in neither time nor space. His optimism about the eagerness with which his book would be received proved to be well founded. Within six months the first print run of one thousand copies had sold out. Van Dijck immediately produced a second printing, according to the account of the author. Brakel wrote a short additional preface on 2 October 1701.

No doubt the interest in the work reflected the author’s popularity and his pastoral commitment to the reading public. Brakel offered something new for literate lay people who wished to receive more religious instruction than just sermons and catechizations. Church members need the translation from dogmatic theory to personal experiences and exchanges with fellow believers. In his preface Brakel gave his readers some remarkable advice, possibly based on personal experience in local practice. “Form small groups of acquaintances among yourselves for the purpose of reading a chapter or portion each time, and may that which is read present subject matter for edifying discussions.”

As for another stimulus for religion as a social practice of conscious individuals, reference can be made to the chapter “Concerning Experiences” as an aspect of spiritual life that Brakel wanted to promote among good Christians. He described such experience as a “godly practice, consisting in a recollection of numerous noteworthy incidents for the purpose of using them to our benefit and that of others.” Subsequently he worked out this definition in a series of exhortations. Brakel noted that there were many previous examples of this practice, not only in the Bible but also in church history and devotional literature. Among these he mentions a collection of spiritual biographies of children that followed a Dutch translation and an edition of an English Puritan work on the practice of piety.¹⁸

Brakel also wanted to draw readers’ attention to the experiences of the godly with whom they had fellowship. “In the Lord’s providence you may have the privilege of enjoying such company, enabling you to hear how the Lord has dealt with them and what manner of deliverances they have experienced—so

1980); J. J. M. Baartmans and J. J. V. M. de Vet, eds., *Intellectual Emancipation during the Early Enlightenment: The Ambitions of a Pioneering Periodical from Rotterdam: An Essay Concerning the Digital Project* (Nijmegen, 2013).

18 William Guthrie, *Het groote interest van een christen; ofte Het deel van een geloovige getoetst [...] wie het heeft, ende hoe te krijghen. [...] / Aanhanghsel, bevattende XXXij. exempelen van eenige vroomen* (Vlissingen, 1669; many later editions).

that you would take note of it and derive benefit yourself from it.” Indeed, Brakel provided a detailed outline for producing a spiritual autobiography, either for one’s own meditation or to pass on to others orally or in writing. “Therefore, take careful note of all that transpires, remember everything, write it down, reflect upon it often, tell it to others, and make daily use of what you have previously experienced—to the benefit of yourself and others.”

5 Interconfessional Exchange

In the early eighteenth century there was a growing interest in exemplary Christian life stories. However edifying Brakel may have considered those stories, they also posed a danger to confessional orthodoxy. Soon after the release of *Redelyke godts-dienst* the appearance of a volume of such stories provoked Brakel to make another public statement on the biblical judgment on spiritual experiences. A former Lutheran pastor of German origin, Friedrich Breckling (1629–1711), had been living in The Hague for a number of years.¹⁹ For a project of his that focussed on the stories of pious individuals in church history, he had compiled a catalogue of “testimonies of truth” from Martin Luther (1483–1546) up to the present. Breckling passed these materials on to his colleague Gottfried Arnold (1666–1714), who used them for his book *Das Leben der Gläubigen* (The Lives of believers), printed in Halle in 1701.²⁰ Meanwhile, Johann Henrich Reitz (1655–1720) pursued his series *Historie der Wiedergeborenen* [History of the Reborn], a similar collection of religious life-narratives based on many printed and unprinted sources in several languages.²¹

Brakel and Breckling were in more or less regular contact. Thus the Rotterdam pastor learnt from his colleague in The Hague that Arnold’s

19 Friedrich Breckling, *Autobiographie: Ein frühneuzeitliches Ego-Dokument im Spannungsfeld von Spiritualismus, radikalem Pietismus und Theosophie*, ed. Johann Anselm Steiger (Tübingen, 2005).

20 Gottfried Arnold, *Das Leben der Gläubigen* (Halle, 1701).

21 Johann Henrich Reitz, *Historie Der Wiedergeborenen: Vollständige Ausgabe der Erstdrucke aller sieben Teile der pietistischen Sammelbiographie (1698–1745) mit einem werkgeschichtlichen Anhang der Varianten und Ergänzungen aus den späteren Auflagen*, ed. Hans-Jürgen Schrader (Tübingen, 1982). See also Hans-Jürgen Schrader, *Literaturproduktion und Büchermarkt des radikalen Pietismus: Johann Henrich Reitz’ “Historie der Wiedergeborenen” und ihr geschichtlicher Kontext* (Göttingen, 1989); Rudolf Mohr, ‘Niederländer und Niederländische Literatur in der “Historie der Wiedergeborenen” von Johann Henrich Reitz,’ in: *Pietismus und Réveil*, ed. J. van den Berg and J. P. van Dooren (Leiden, 1978), pp. 192–206.

collection included a chapter about Theodorus à Brakel.²² Reitz also provided a chapter on Brakel *père* in his series.²³ The text was extracted from a German translation of the fourth edition of *De trappen des geestelijcken levens*, published in Bern in 1698.²⁴ However, the son was not amused by this international interest in the 'hagiography' of his father. In these German collections the man figured among a disparate host of characters of Catholic, Lutheran, Calvinist, or confessionally vague affiliation. The whole passion for collecting pious biographies was indeed targeted at inner religiosity, irrespective of ecclesiastical or institutional adherence.

Brakel could not just let it go. He seems to have suspected that this genre of pious biography signalled a trend away from established orthodoxies originating among Protestants in the German Empire. On 25 April 1702 he wrote a letter to the renowned professor Francke in Halle (Saxony), manager of the orphanage where Arnold's collection had been published.²⁵ Brakel had a positive impression of Francke, especially due to his contact with the Scottish minister James Brown (d. 1713) in Rotterdam, a pastor who had previously served an English congregation in Königsberg (Prussia). Francke was said to be congenial to the 1529 Marburg Articles on the Lord's Supper, indicating not the sacrament as such but the belief in Christ as the core of salvation. Brakel wisely opened his letter by praising Francke for combining great knowledge with particular godliness. Brakel recognized that Francke's writings revealed powerful piety.

In general this piety was also clear from the volume which Brakel mentions as the "collectio variorum Practicorum" (collection of several practical writers) published by the Halle orphanage. Without mentioning the name of its editor, Gottfried Arnold, Brakel gave the example of the biography of his father that, according to Breckling, figured among many testimonies of orthodox as well as heterodox Christians. He did not specify which of the subjects of these biographies he considered unorthodox, but merely the inclusion of medieval mystics must have been a thorn in his side. He could not abide the prospect of future church historians drawing direct lines between Bernardine

22 Theodorus à Brakel, 'Erzählung von seinem geistlichen Leben: Die Staffel des geistlichen Lebens,' in Arnold, *Das Leben der Gläubigen*, pp. 727–829.

23 'Historie von Theodorus à Brakel, in seinem Leben Prediger zu Makum in Friessland,' in Reitz, *Historie Der Wiedergeborenen*, vol. 3 (1703), pp. 34–51. Reitz refers to Brakel's son as "sein Sohn, so auch Prediger, und noch gegenwärtig, wie geglaubet wird, im Leben ist."

24 Theodorus à Brakel, *Die Staffel desz Geistlichen Leben: Beschrieben in Holländischer Sprach, und zum vierdten mahl getruckt [...]*, (Bern, 1698), including 'Das Sterb-Stündlin Des Gottseligen Manns, Herren Theodor von Brackel,' unpagged, 16 pages.

25 Archiv Franckesche Stiftungen, Halle, C 714:4.

mysticism and Reformed spirituality as demonstrated by Theodorus à Brakel.²⁶ “Quæ communio Luci cum tenebris?” (What does the Light have common with the darkness?)

Finally Brakel asked Francke for information about the movement in Germany that was known for its claim of ‘*nova quasi Lux et vita*’ (a kind of new Light and life), ‘*nomine Pietistarum, et mysticorum*’ (under the name of pietists and mystics). He had immersed himself in pietist writings in sincere eagerness, but had come to the conclusion that good and evil were mixed up together in it. The truly godly were found between heretics and schismatics. “*Religio ipsorum, quo sublimior videtur, eo magis recedit a simplicitate quæ est in Christo Jesu, et accedit ad pietatem naturalem, in qua et Ethnici quidam præclari fuere*” (The higher the impression their religion leaves, the more it deviates from the simplicity which is in Jesus Christ and comes close to a natural piety, in which some heathens also have been excellent). And: “*Judico aliquid faciendum, ut pii in via recta conserventur, et dirigantur*” (I judge that something should be done to keep and direct the pious on the right way).

6 The New Religion in Germany

There is no evidence of any response from Francke to Brakel. In October 1702 the busy manager in Halle received a reminder from his former pupil Johann Hieronymus Liebenroth (ca. 1675–ca. 1730), who had settled in Rotterdam in order to promote the Pietas Hallensis in social and medical care.²⁷ Liebenroth let Francke know that Brakel was waiting for an answer, as he intended to write a treatise against the pietists, but again there is no evidence of a response. In July 1705 Francke made a journey across the Netherlands, communicating his reform ideas in public speeches and during visits with key figures. Nothing is reported about a meeting with Brakel in Rotterdam.²⁸ In the meantime Liebenroth worked on a Dutch translation of a book by Francke. May we

26 J. de Boer, *De verzegeling met de Heilige Geest volgens de opvatting van de Nadere Reformatie* (Rotterdam, 1968); I. Boot, *De allegorische uitlegging van het Hooglied, voornamelijk in Nederland: Een onderzoek naar de verhouding tussen Bernard van Clairvaux en de nadere reformatie* (Woerden, 1971); A. de Reuver, *Verborgten omgang: Sporen van spiritualiteit in Middeleeuwen en Nadere Reformatie* (Zoetermeer, 2002); id., *Sweet Communion: Trajectories of Spirituality from the Middle Ages through the Further Reformation* (Grand Rapids, Mich., 2007).

27 Archiv Franckesche Stiftungen, Halle, C 286:2.

28 Udo Sträter, ‘Interessierter Beobachter oder Agent in eigener Sache? August Hermann Franckes Hollandreise 1705,’ in: *Goldenes Zeitalter und Jahrhundert der Aufklärung: Kulturtransfer zwischen den Niederlanden und dem mitteldeutschen Raum im 17. und 18. Jahrhundert*, ed. Jost Erdmut and Holger Zaunstöck (Halle, 2012), pp. 63–77.

suspect that this trip was a charm offensive undertaken by the German Pietist leader, provoked by his knowledge of Brakel's plans for an anti-pietist polemical work?²⁹

A brief look at the Dutch book market can help get a clearer view on Brakel's apparent apprehension that what was happening in Germany paralleled similar trends in the Netherlands. An important mediator of the new movement was the Lutheran bookseller Sebastian Petzold (d. 1704) in Amsterdam. He propagandized for the large project in social care and education in Halle by publishing a Dutch version of Francke's prospectus on the "marks of the living God" in the Prussian kingdom.³⁰ What's more, at the beginning of the eighteenth century Petzold launched a true publicity offensive for the works of Arnold, the bold challenger of Protestant orthodoxy. Both the latter's series about the lives of the Church Fathers³¹ and his history of the Church and heretics³² were published in the Dutch language. The Amsterdam bookseller Jacobus van Hardenberg (fl. 1680–1700) offered a little bit of competition by publishing Arnold's volumes on the first Christians, translated into Dutch by the Quaker historian Willem Séwel (1654–1720).³³

Special attention deserves to be given to Petzold's edition—also in 1701—of the first Dutch book with the label 'pietists' in the title: *De leere der mystiken, quietisten, pietisten, en der zo genaamde nieuwe religie in Duytsland, etc.* (The teaching of mystics, quietists, pietists, and of the so-called new religion in Germany, etc.).³⁴ The publication contained two texts in different genres. The first was a translated letter by the Reformed minister's widow Catharina Elisabeth Wetzels-Uckermann (1667–after 1705). 'Wittwe Wetzels' had gained renown as a prophetess and female leader of a group of mystical believers and church critics. She had become the centre of a controversy in the county

29 Aug. Herman Franken, *Schriftmaatige overweeging van genade en waarheid* (Amsterdam, 1706), translation of: August Hermann Francken, *Schriftmäßige Betrachtung Von Gnade Und Wahrheit / Zur Erkenntniß der Herrlichkeit Jesu Christi [...]* (Halle, 1705). The translator is not identified. That Liebenroth was the translator is evident from two letters to Francke, 29 February and 21 July 1706, in AFSt/H C 286:4 and 6.

30 Augustus Herman Franke, *Merktteeken en voetstappen van den noch levenden [...] God [...] ontdekt [...] door een omstandig verhaal van het wees-huis [...] tot Glaucha by Halle* (Amsterdam, 1701).

31 Godfried Arnold, *Het leeven der voornaamste oudvaders of woestyniers* [engraved titlepage: *Leevens beschryvingen der heremyten en heremytinnen*] (Amsterdam, 1701).

32 Godfried Arnold, *Historie der kerken en ketteren* (Amsterdam, 1701).

33 Godfried Arnold, *Waare afbeelding der eerste christenen* (Amsterdam, 1700–1). See also William I. Hull, *William Sewel of Amsterdam, 1653–1720: The First Quaker Historian of Quakerism* (Swarthmore, Pa., 1933).

34 *De leere der mystiken, quietisten, pietisten, en der zo genaamde nieuwe religie in Duytsland, etc., voorgesteld in verscheide tractaten en brieven* (Amsterdam, 1701).

of Hessen, instigated by the ecclesiastical and political authorities.³⁵ She had defended herself in a series of letters, of which this was one. Here it was apparently published as a specimen of the “new religion in Germany.” The other part of the publication was an unrelated treatise by the Spanish monk Juan Falconi de Bustamante (1596–1638).

Another publication may be mentioned here because it is found in a convolute volume alongside the former work, reflecting the receptive climate for mystical or radical thought in the religious discourse of the time. Published by Barent Bos in Rotterdam in 1702, it highlighted in its title its focus on mysticism: *D'inwendige staat en de mystijke theologie of verborgen godgeleertheid ...* (The inner state and the mystical theology or hidden divinity ...).³⁶ The greater part of the volume offered texts from the debate about Quietism in the Roman Catholic Church. A short text was added, under the title *Brief waarin het Wesen Gods voorgesteld en ontdekt wort* (Letter in which the essence of God is proposed and discovered). Information on the background of this letter is not available.

Finally, the conversion story of Grietje Hendriks (1610–1702) in Amsterdam offers an intriguing document of unusual spirituality in those years. An illiterate widow and member of the Walloon Church, she had never distinguished herself by any interest in the practice of piety. When the 91-year-old woman—deaf, probably suffering from dementia, and hallucinating—related that she was hearing psalm-singing and seeing visions, her neighbours concluded that these were the direct effects of the Holy Spirit during her last days. After her death, maybe at the instigation of her pastor, an account of Hendriks' late-life experiences was published by Johannes Kitto (1699–1739) in The Hague.³⁷ Possibly through the intercession of his local agent Breckling,

35 Barbara Hoffmann, *Radikalpietismus um 1700: Der Streit um das Recht auf eine neue Gesellschaft* (Frankfurt am Main, 1996), pp. 99–106; id., ‘... daß es süße Träume und Versuchungen seyen. Geschriebene und gelebte Utopien im Radikalen Pietismus’, in: *Im Zeichen der Krise: Religiosität im Europa des 17. Jahrhunderts*, ed. Hartmut Lehmann & Anne-Charlott Trepp (Göttingen, 1999), pp. 101–28, there 115–8.

36 *D'Inwendige Staat en de Mystijke Theologie of Verborgen Godgeleertheid, Verklaard in wigtige stukken, rakende d'Overdenkinge en Beschouwing van Gods Liefde. Hier by komen eenige Aanmerkingen; over een Uittreksel van Voorstellingen, om de Ziel tot die hooge bespiegeling op te heffen. Ter gelegentheid van de berugte Verschillen van de Aartsbisschop van Camerik en den Bisschop van Meaux. Door F.M. Mitsgaders een Brief over het Wesen Gods* (Rotterdam, 1702). A copy of this book is held by the Gemeentebibliotheek in Rotterdam (22 E 23:2).

37 *De wonderen, van Gods vrije genade, getoont in de bekeering van Grietje Hendriks, in het 91 jaar hares ouderdoms, in de tijt van 16 weeken door de Heere geroepen, geregtveerdigt, geheyligt en verheerlijkt. Gestorve den 22. january, 1702. Door liefhebbers der waarheit* (The Hague, 1702; many editions up to the present day).

Reitz could include a chapter on “Margreta Henrichs” in his collection of spiritual biographies,³⁸ which shows not only the common ground but also the interconnectedness between the “new religion” in Germany and the receptivity that Pietism met with in the Netherlands.

7 Publishing the Warning

It is obvious from the letters of Brakel and Liebenroth to Francke that in 1702 the author of *Reasonable Religion* intended to write a warning against the pietists. It took five years before this exhortation appeared in print. One of the reasons for the delay could be the serious illness of Brakel's wife, Sara Nevius, who died on 24 January 1706. As mentioned, they had come to know each other forty years earlier in Utrecht. Sara was a daughter as well as a widow of a Reformed minister. One of her brothers lived in New Amsterdam (New York), and another in Frankfurt am Main. The local problems around Philipp Jakob Spener (1635–1706) and Johann Jakob Schütz (1640–1690), which initiated the pietist movement in Germany by 1670, may have been communicated to Brakel by his brother-in-law, the merchant Peter Neefs (born 1630).³⁹

According to her husband, Sara Nevius was a godly and gifted woman. Already during Brakel's time in his first parish she had started to organize small meetings of married women and spinsters, whom she taught and inspired to godliness. While busy as a mother and a minister's wife, she kept notes of her personal reflections and religious meditations. After she died Brakel decided to edit the greater part of these manuscripts for publication at his own expense. The book was entitled *Een aandachtig leerling, wordende van de Heere Jesus selve geleert sonder hulpe van menschen* (An attentive pupil, being taught by the Lord Jesus himself without the help of people). In his preface, dated 4 June 1706, he defends himself against those who would classify this strictly private and solitary interaction with God in the “soliloquies” of his wife as fanaticism or unhealthy mysticism.⁴⁰

38 Reitz, *Historie Der Wiedergebohrnen*, vol. 5 (1717), pp. 252–76: ‘Vierzehende Historie, Von der sonderbaren Bekehr- und Erleuchtung Margreta Henrichs, einer 91-jährigen alten Frau und Bürgerin zu Amsterdam.’

39 Brakel's father-in-law Johannes Nevius was born in Frankfurt about 1600 and ministered several Reformed congregations in the Netherlands. His brother Peter, a Reformed merchant in Frankfurt, and his wife were suspected of sympathy for Valentin Weigel by the Lutheran pastors; see Andreas Deppermann, *Johann Jakob Schütz und die Anfänge des Pietismus* (Tübingen, 2002), p. 24.

40 Sara Nevius, *Een aandachtig leerling wordende van de Heere Jesus selve geleert sonder hulpe van menschen* (Rotterdam, 1706; editions 1718, 1725, 1735, 1737, and 1745).

The chapter “*Waarschouwende Bestieringe*,” his warning against the pietists must have been written or completed in the same period. Brakel wrote a preface to the third impression of his *Reasonable Religion* on 1 June 1707. Besides the warning, two other texts were added to this edition. To be sure, Brakel brought the urgency of discovering diverse doctrinal errors to the attention of the readers. “May it be useful in defending the truth and true godliness, both of which are under assault in these days. They are assaulted on the one side by people of a corrupt mind who propose reason to be the rule for doctrine and life; on the other side by people who, in striving for holiness and love, set aside the truth and stray towards a religion which proceeds from nature, revolving around the practice of virtue.”⁴¹

The treatise was added as chapter 43 to the first volume, which—in conformity with the classical division of Reformed dogmatics—consecutively dealt with theology, anthropology, Christology, and ecclesiology. Apparently, according to Brakel the appendix on spiritualism found its logical place after these chapters, rather than at the end of the second volume after the parts on soteriology and eschatology. In his encyclopaedic work the author noted doctrinal deviations at many places, including those of pietists.⁴² In chapter 43 he passed over some themes and referred his readers to other sections in *Redelijke Godts-dienst* in order to avoid repetition. He also did not miss the opportunity to refer to familial publications: “If someone desires an example of holy meditations for the purpose of being instructed by them, he ought to read *De Trappen des Geestelijken Levens* by my deceased father, *Theodorus à Brakel*. If you desire meditations of a simpler level, you ought to read, *De Aandachtige Leerling* by my deceased wife, *Sara Nevius*.”⁴³

Meanwhile the book printer Van Dijck in The Hague was no longer involved with the production of *Redelijke Godts-dienst* by this time. The 1707 edition was produced by the Rotterdam book printer Johannes de Melander for part I and by Hermanus Herts, also in Rotterdam, for parts II and III. Both volumes were financially guaranteed by Brakel. From 1713 onwards, Hendrik van den Aak and

41 “De Heere zegene ook desen derden Druck, dates zy tot verdediginge van waarheyt, ende van ware Godtsaligheyt, welke beyde in dese dagen bestormt worden, aan de eene zyde door menschen van een verdorven verstandt, die de reden stellen tot een Regel van Leere ende Leven: ende aan de andere zyde door menschen, die geset zijnde op heyligheyt en liefde, de waarheyt ter zyden stellen, en afdwalen tot een natuurlijken Godtsdienst en Deughtsaamheyt.”

42 For example in the sections 31.8; 31.17; 32.24; 32.25; and 37.7.

43 Brakel, *Redelyke godts-dienst*, vol. 1 (1707), p. 1154. “Begeert yemant een Voorbeeldt van heylige Meditatie, om daar door opgeleydet te worden, die lese De Trappen des Geestelijken levens van my zalige Vader Theodorus à Brakel: Of begeert hy Meditatie in een lager trap, hy lese De Aandachtige Leerlingh van Sara Nevius mijn Vrouw zaliger gedachtenisse.”

his heirs were the regular publishers of the popular work up to the eighteenth impression in 1767. When Brakel died in 1711, his eternal fame was already established. According to his colleague Abraham Hellenbroek (1658–1731), who delivered the funeral oration, the manual was distributed so widely that even though one would hardly find devout believers anywhere, Brakel's *Redelijke Godts-dienst* could be found among them.⁴⁴

8 Identifying Mysticism

Brakel's fifty-page "Waarschouwende Bestieringe" can be summarized along diachronic or historical lines and—in the following section—by a synchronic or contemporary approach. His opening is theocentric and universal. "It pleases the Lord to glorify Himself upon earth by separating unto Himself, from all other men, His own people—His congregation or church." The truth is entrusted to the church in the person of Jesus Christ and in the form of holy scripture. However, the truth has many enemies, who will attempt to eradicate the church either by external violence or by introducing false doctrines. The latter are often subject to a distinction between matters of faith and confession or matters of practice of life, but in essence they are all contrary to the truth.

A second observation concerns the rapid return of Christians to the heathendom that once received the gospel from God. "All wisdom is now defined in relation to the knowledge of natural sciences and to eloquence," writes Brakel, making reference to the Epicureans (considering worldly pleasure to be their heaven and felicity) or the Stoics (considering the absence of feeling to be happiness). "Others follow the example of religious pagans, some of whom, without knowing Christ, strive to cease from doing evil, and endeavour to do that which is good. Other religious pagans occupy themselves with meditating and speculating about God, finding their delight and religious practice therein." The latter way is followed by many so-called Christians who have a natural impression of, but no true communication with, God.

After his nod to antiquity, Brakel casts a similar judgement upon the Roman Catholic Middle Ages, a period in which he also identifies forms of natural spirituality. "Among those who espouse blind popery—whose religion does not differ much from paganism—there have always been those who have rejected creature-worship and who have written much about internal religion,

44 Abraham Hellenbroek, *Algemeene rouw-klagt in de straaten van Rotterdam over den zeer eerwaardigen [...] Wilhelmus à Brakel [...]. Voorgesteld uit het laatste gedeelte van Prediker XII: 5* (Rotterdam, 1711).

elevating this as highly as their natural intellect would permit them.” Among mystical writers, Johannes Tauler (1300–1361) and Thomas à Kempis (1380–1471)—who wrote “that excellent treatise” *De imitatione Christi*—were excluded from general blame. “However, both Tauler and à Kempis have little to say about the Lord Jesus as being the ransom and righteousness of sinners.” Apparently Brakel presupposes that these authors circulated among his Protestant readers.

Just as Brakel in his overview had skipped the period of the Church Fathers, he paid no attention to the age of the great Reformers. He condemns with strong words all post-Reformation writers who deviated from the genuine practice of godliness, both within and outside popery. “Numerous imaginations originating in empty minds, natural speculations, deceptions of Satan, dreams, and zealotry go under the name of mysticism.” After mentioning Jacob Böhme (1575–1624) and his followers in Germany, as well as the Quakers in England, Brakel discusses the Spanish priest Miguel de Molinos (1628–1696) as an example of the new sect of the quietists. He also criticizes the French Archbishop of Cambrai, François de Salignac de la Mothe-Fénelon (1651–1715), for his mystical writing. Finally he turned to the pietists in a paragraph worth fully quoting here:

Some years ago there was a sizeable movement among the Lutherans in Germany toward religiosity. Of some we believe that it was in truth, but with the majority it was but an illusion. This counterfeit religiosity has in some places also affected those of Reformed persuasion. People of the world, due to observing that many of them turned to a godly lifestyle, called them Pietists, thinking to offend them in this way. Instead, they, being ungodly, actually condemned themselves in doing so, and placed a crown upon the head of the truly godly whom they intended to offend—for to be a Pietist means to be a godly person. In desiring to warn everyone against the Pietists and to give some direction in this respect, we do not have the truly godly in mind at all. Far, far be this from me! May the Lord bless them and give them more light to see the Lutheran error and to turn away from it. Rather, I have in view those who stimulate various fictitious notions and errors, such as mystics, Quietists, heretics, fanatics, David-Jorists, Boehmists, Quakers, and all such individuals who in our day are known as Pietists.⁴⁵

45 Brakel, *Redelyke godts-dienst*, vol. 1 (1707), p. 1106: “Voor weynige jaren isser onder de Luthersche in Duytslandt een groote beweginge tot Godtsdienstigheyt ontstaan, sommige, gelooven wy in waarheyt, maar de meeste in schijn, welke schijn-Godtsdienstigheyt

9 Defining Pietism

Against whom did Brakel want to warn his Dutch (Reformed) readers, or which possible new readers did he want to convince of errors? He guides his readers in their choice of devotional literature from an international and non-confessionally-defined landscape of pious authors—Tauler, à Kempis, Böhme, Molinos—whose works were available in Dutch translations. Among those who make the wrong choices, the followers of David Joris (ca. 1500–1556) were casually mentioned. Although works of this early Anabaptist author were published far into the seventeenth century, Brakel could have meant the Mennonites in general. He also mentioned the Labadists among “all others who are in error as far as the practice of godliness is concerned.”⁴⁶ While Labadism was already condemned as a heresy in Reformed ecclesiology and theology, not least by Brakel himself, and the Labadist congregation (then domiciled in a Frisian lord’s manor in Wieuwerd) was in decline, tendencies of separatism might still have been alive among Reformed believers.

In any case, Brakel seems not just to have been aiming at dangerous books but at people who were deviating. Not without reason, he considers the communicative appeals of heretics to godly but unstable persons who would be impressed by what such “seducers” speak about. These people’s attractive proposals are concerned with the direct contemplation of God, the denial of self, and the delightfulness of love. “When these matters are presented in a most charming manner, they will find entrance into the hearts of those who are naturally pious and of those who are truly godly.”⁴⁷ Except for the Labadists (just mentioned) and the Quakers (to be discussed later), Brakel avoids making

ook overgeslagen is tot de Gereformeerde in sommige plaatsen: de wereltsche menschen siende dat veele sich tot een Godtsaligh begaven, noemden dese Pietisten, meenende haar te smaden, maar in der daat veroordeelden sy daar mede haar selven, dat sy Godtloos waren, en setteden een kroone op het hooft der ware Godtsalige die sy meenden te smaden, want een Pietist is een Godtsalige te seggen. Wy willende een yegelijk waarschouwen tegen de Pietisten, en willende daar omtrent eenige bestieringen geven, hebben ganschelijk niet in 't ooge de ware Godtsalige, verre, verre is dat van my. De Heere zegene haar en geve haar meerder verlichtinge om de Luthersche dwalingen te sien, en haar daar van af te wenden: Maar ik hebbe in 't oog de gene die allerleye phantasien en dwalingen voeden, als de Mystijke, Quietisten, Dwaal-geesten, Geest-dryvers, David-Joristen, Boemisten, Quakers en al sulken soort van menschen, die heen ten dage onder de naam van Pietisten bekend zijn.”

46 Brakel, *Redelyke godts-dienst*, vol. 1 (1707), p. 1132 (section 5.14).

47 Brakel, *Redelyke godts-dienst*, vol. 1 (1707), pp. 1106–7: “Als dese saken, op het lieflijkste voorgesteld worden, soo heeft het ingank in 't herte van natuyrlyk devote, en van de ware Godtsalige.”

explicit warnings against individuals or groups who we know were also active in the Netherlands around 1700, such as the Collegiants, Hebraists, or Spinozists, possibly because of the same caution he demonstrated in distinguishing the truly godly from the religious deviants among the (German) pietists.⁴⁸

However, why should we look for concrete identifications of Brakel's concerns? The core of his contribution could just be found in his typology of true and false piety. On the one hand, he followed the track of tradition in preaching and pastorate by—as his father had done—listing the signs of true faith. On the other hand, we can detect a new approach, in which he distinguishes true, revealed religion from various types of manmade persuasions, or 'natural' religion. His argument, although expressed in theological, not logical, terminology, shows a remarkable similarity to the chapter "Of Enthusiasm" in Locke's *Essay concerning Human Understanding*. Locke added this chapter, in which he rejects direct inspiration and prophecy that cannot be confirmed by revealed (that is: biblical) authority, to the *Essay* after the English Calvinist John Edwards (1637–1716) criticized his rationalist exegesis in *The Reasonableness of Christianity* (1695). Both Brakel's argument in the "Waarschouwende Bestiering" and Locke's chapter "Of Enthusiasm" start with the demand for great love of the truth, and both point to self-interested conceit as the origin of religious 'enthusiasm'.⁴⁹ Rather than enumerate and refute the errors of named opponents, Brakel stated and defended general propositions, whereby the errors will be evident and whereby believers, holding fast to those truths, can judge for themselves and will be delivered from their temptations:

1. A Christian must have a great love for the truth; all splendid pretence void of love for the truth is deceit.
2. A Christian must have great love and esteem for the church.
3. The Holy Scriptures are the only rule for doctrine and life.
4. Regeneration is the originating cause of spiritual life, and of all spiritual thoughts and deeds.
5. A Christian continually avails himself of faith.

48 Cf. Michiel Wielema, *The March of the Libertines: Spinozists and the Dutch Reformed Church (1660–1750)* (Hilversum, 2004); Piet Visser, ed., *Socinianisme in de Nederlanden* (Amsterdam, 2004).

49 John Locke, *An Essay concerning Human Understanding* (from the 4th ed., 1700), IV, 19. On the controversy with Edwards: Roger Woolhouse, *Locke: A Biography* (Cambridge, 2007), pp. 351–4, 376–86, 398, on the chapter on enthusiasm there 417–9. The similarity between the titles of Locke's *Reasonableness of Christianity* and Brakel's *Redelyke Godts-dienst* may not be entirely accidental, and it is quite possible the two men knew each other, at least by reputation, from the time Locke resided in the Republic. I thank Jo Spaans for this suggestion.

6. All of man's felicity, here and hereafter, consists in communion with and the beholding of God.⁵⁰

After elaborating on these six propositions at length, while referring to many proof-texts from the Bible, Brakel offered his own conclusion. "There is natural and spiritual religion, a natural and spiritual denial of self, a natural belonging to God as Creator and preserver and a spiritual and true belonging to God as a reconciled Father in Christ, a natural and spiritual love to God and to man, and a natural and spiritual reflection upon and beholding of God."⁵¹ Of course Brakel, a prominent pastor in the Dutch Reformed Church, was orthodox enough to keep his distance from all who have been considered heterodox among the representatives of the (early) Enlightenment. But his conscious effort to come close to clear trends in contemporary religion makes him more than a defender of the old confessionalism—instead, he opened up a view on a new Protestantism.

10 Blaming Quakerism

Nevertheless, Brakel does not make it easy to support the general impression of a shift in religious culture around 1700. His writing style is prolix, and repetitions and overlapping passages obscure the core of his argument. Possibly his elaborate, even somewhat belaboured style results from origins of his text in (oral) sermons or catechizations, which would only underline the importance of Brakel's endeavours in the education of common (church) people. Rather than exploring his own explanations, section by section, on the six propositions, I will here deliver another example of his criticism of the

50 "I. Een Christen moet groote liefde hebben tot de waarheyt: al het schoon voordoen sonder liefde tot de waarheyt is bedrogh.

II. Een Christen moet groote liefde tot en achttinge voor de Kerke hebben.

III. De Heylige Schriftuyre is de eenige Regel van Leere ende Leven.

IV. De Wedergeboorte is het beginsel des geestelijken levens, ende van alle geestelijke gedachten en daden.

V. Een Christen maakt geduyrig gebruyk van het Geloove.

VI. Al des menschen saligheyt hier en hier na, bestaat in de gemeynschap met, en beschouwinge van Godt."

51 Brakel, *Redelyke godts-dienst*, vol. 1 (1707), p. 1154 (section 6.44): "'t Slot van al 't gene wy tot waarschouwinge van de Pietisten geseght hebben is, datter is een Natuyrlijke Godtsdienst en een Geestelijke: Een natuyrlijke verloocheninge ende een geestelijke: Een natuyrlijk eygendom aan Godt als Schepper ende Onderhouder, ende een geestelijke en ware als versoende Vader in Christus: Een natuyrlijke liefde tot Godt ende tot menschen, en een geestelijke: Een natuyrlijke verloocheninge ende een geestelijke: Een natuyrlijke bespiegeling, beschouwinge van Godt ende een geestelijke."

variety of contemporary representatives of “natural and spiritless religion,” now with respect to the Quakers. As with the pietists, this issue is very illustrative for the concrete local and international context of Brakel's sense of urgency in transmitting his warning.

The Society of Friends was established by George Fox (1624–91) in London in 1648. These proponents of the ‘inner light’ were soon nicknamed ‘quakers’ because of the distinctive body language and spiritual passivity in their religious meetings. The Quakers developed successful missionary activities on the European continent.⁵² Groups of adherents, often recruited from Mennonite congregations, were also formed in Dutch towns, among them Rotterdam, an important point of access into the Republic for English merchants, exiles, and travellers. The anti-institutional and anti-clerical movement attracted critical attention from Reformed theologians and ecclesiastical bodies. More commonly, certain members of the public church were associated with the new brand of piety. Brakel signalled in *Redelyke godts-dienst* that many “true godly” were smeared with the epithet Labadists, Quakers, or pious ones.⁵³

It might be asked whether Brakel had any personal contact with Benjamin Furly (1636–1714), the undisputed leader of the Quakers in the Low Countries. From 1659 until his death, the English friend of Fox lived in Rotterdam, the city where Brakel had resided since 1683.⁵⁴ Furly was a relative of William Penn (1644–1718), another influential Quaker, who travelled through the Netherlands and Germany in 1677 and offered a new future to many (mainly Palatine) Protestants immigrating—via Rotterdam—to the North American colony of Pennsylvania after 1683. A very rich merchant, Furly had an immense library in his house consisting of numerous religious books in several languages.⁵⁵ If Furly and Brakel met at all, the spiritual distance between them must have been striking. A high servant at the English Court indicated the haughty individualism of the Quaker leader in a letter in 1706: “Furly is a pious Christian, but of no church, nor goes to anyone.”⁵⁶

52 J. Barclay, ed., *William Penn's Journal of His Travels in Holland and Germany, in 1677* (London, 1835); Oswald Seidensticker, ‘William Penn's Travels in Holland and Germany in 1677,’ *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 2 (1878), 237–82.

53 Brakel, *Redelyke godts-dienst*, vol. 1 (1707), p. 611: “En is ‘er hier ofte daar een Godtsalige, ofte een t’samenkomste van eenige om een Godtsaligh discours met malkanderen te hebben, ofte eens met malkanderen te bidden, die zijn het voorwerp van den haat, van bespottinge ende onderdruckinge, die noemt men Labadisten, Quakers, Fijne, enz.”

54 William I. Hull, *Benjamin Furly and Quakerism in Rotterdam* (Swarthmore, Pa., 1941); Johan A. van Reijn, ‘Benjamin Furly, Engels koopman (en meer!) te Rotterdam, 1636–1714,’ *Rotterdams Jaarboekje* (1988), 219–46.

55 *Bibliotheca Furliana, sive Catalogus librorum [...] Benjamin Furly [...]. Auctio fiet die 22 octobris 1714* (Rotterdam, 1714). Brakel's oeuvre is missing in the title catalogue.

56 John Talbot, duke of Shrewsbury. Cf. Van Rheijn, ‘Benjamin Furly,’ p. 227.

In any event, in his warning against the pietists, Brakel listed the Quakers next to the Böhmissists among the post-Reformation deviating groups. He mentioned their origins and explained their popular name, referring to the physical effects of their pretended illumination by the Holy Ghost. Then he stated simply: "Their numerous fanatical practices are common knowledge."⁵⁷ Given these comments, it stands out that Brakel delivered an implicit description further on in his disquisition. In the following paragraph, the Quakers are quite recognizable due to their characteristic worship service. Apparently, the indirect portrayal sufficed to meet the pastoral-theological target of Brakel's warning against all those deviating from the path of godliness.

Some remain quiet and in a disposition wherein which they are turned unto God, and do nothing but wait upon the Spirit. If nothing comes to mind, then they again proceed, being well satisfied. If something occurs to them, they deem this to be of the Spirit; then this is truth, and is more certain and infallible than the Word of God which they consider to be but a dead letter, a primer for beginners, and of no benefit whatsoever. If the thought which occurs to them gives direction to do or not to do something, it is considered to be the leading of the Spirit and they give heed to it. They do not pray, speak, or do anything unless they are motivated by such an idea coming to mind; they thus, quietly and with delight, live on. When they are stirred up by an idea which occurred to them, they depend on this, irrespective of whether it either agrees with or is contrary to God's Word. This they do not investigate; it is a matter of indifference to them.... Some go further than that and play prophet. When thoughts about future events occur to their empty minds, they are deemed to be revelations which will either occur or not occur. Poor, misguided people! They desire to seek God and to do His pleasure, but completely miss the way itself. With all their ideas and the adamant passion of their own spirit they perish.⁵⁸

57 Brakel, *Redelyke godts-dienst*, vol. 1 (1707), pp. 1104–5: "In Engelandt zijn de Quakers opgestaan, die soo genoemt worden om dat sy aan Godt in opgetoogenheit denkende, of van Godt en Goddelijke dingen sullende spreken begonden te beven ('t welk de waare Godtsalige door ontsach voor Godt ook wel gebeurt) quansuys als ofse dan den Heyligen Geest ontvingen, hare menighvuldige dweperyen zijn bekent."

58 Brakel, *Redelyke godts-dienst*, vol. 1 (1707), p. 1138 (section 6.13.d): "Sommige houden haar stil in een toegekeerde gestalte tot Godt, doen niets als wachten op den Geest, valt haar niets in sy gaan weer heen, wel te vreden: Valt haar wat in, dat is dan by haar de Geest, dat is dan waarheit, en sekerder ende onfeylbaarder als het Woordt Godts, datse maar achten als een doode letter, en maar een A.B.C. voor de eerst beginnende, ofte van gansch geene nuttigheyt. Als de inval haar dit of dat aanwijst om te doen ofte te laten dat is de leydinge van den geest, die volgense, sy bidden niet, sy spreken niet, sy doen niets, soo een inval

11 Conclusion

Mystics and spiritualists, Pietists and Quietists, Quakers and Labadists—a lot of generic names and group labels configure the mirror Brakel wanted to hold up to the members of the Dutch Reformed Church around 1700. In essence, just like *Redelyke godts-dienst* in general, his specific warning in the additional chapter 43 is a tentative analysis of the changing religious minds of his time, which were no longer to be distinguished by clear confessional or ecclesiastical criteria but needed a systematic guide in order to separate ‘true’ divine and biblical religion from ‘false’ human and natural spiritual religion. At the same time, Brakel’s summary of current religious errors was obviously not drafted in isolation. It clearly resulted from his knowledge of international literature, correspondence with fellow theologians, and contacts with individuals and groups on both sides of the crucial border of ‘reasonable’ faith.

Reflecting on how Brakel’s lens through which we get a glimpse of religious thought could be integrated into historiography, it is curious to have a look at a scholarly yet similar effort to grasp the religious dynamics of the period. At the turn of twentieth century, the Dutch theologian Cornelis Bonnes Hylkema (1870–1948) published his *Historical Studies of Religious Movements in the Aftermath of the Golden Age*.⁵⁹ A liberal Mennonite pastor, Hylkema was concerned with figures such as Galenus Abrahamsz, Coenraad van Beuningen, Jan Rothe, Johann G. Gichtel, and Daniel Zwicker. Completely independent from and probably unaware of Brakel’s treatment of the criteria for true religion in six statements, his investigation resulted in a comparable list of five essentials, although his own preference is practically the opposite of Brakel’s:

1. An aversion of traditional church Christendom in doctrine as well as in life.

haar niet drijft, en leven soo stil met genoeg daer hene: maar als een inval haar drijft, daer gaanse dan op aan, of het dan na Godts of tegen Godts woort is, daer doense geen ondersoek na, dat is haar even veel, en worden alsoo door haar eygen geest wel vervoert tot grouwelen, daer ook de natuyre voor schrikt, gelijk getuygen de gene die Godt door sijne goedtheyt van de dwalinge hares weghs bekeert heeft, en de dagelijkse ondervindinge leert. Sommige gaan verder en speelen de Propheet, als hare holle herssenen invallen opgeven van toekomstende dingen, dat sijn dan openbaringen, dat sal dan komen ofte niet komen. Arme verdoolde menschen! Sy hebben begeerte om Godt te zoeken, ende sijn welbehagen te doen, maar loopen den geheelen wegh mis, en gaan met hare invallen, en onversettelijke drift van eygen geest verloren.”

- 59 C. B. Hylkema, *Reformateurs: Geschiedkundige studien over de godsdienstige bewegingen uit de nadagen onzer Gouden Eeuw* (2 vols., Haarlem, 1900–2; reprint Groningen/Amsterdam, 1978).

2. A free and autonomous individualism, above all apparent from a passionate search for 'the long-lost truth,' either on the basis of 'the Scriptures and sound Reason,' or in the direction of oftentimes phantastic speculations by feeling.
3. The enthusiastic conviction, concerning 'true religion,' to have knowledge that was hidden to churches, 'the sects,' and of which the distribution would shortly dissolve the different denominations in 'the general belief.'
4. A lively religious consciousness, distinct from ecclesiastical piety on characteristic issues (the view of regeneration and sin, grace and reconciliation, freedom of will and predestination, the neglect of the 'ceremonies' and in general of the order).
5. Morals that recall sayings in the Sermon [Matthew 5].⁶⁰

Of course, Hylkema's early contribution to understanding late-seventeenth-century Protestantism has been followed by a wealth of publications by (church) historians, syntheses as well as case studies. Whereas Hylkema generalized his heroes as "Reformers," others spoke of "Stepchildren of Christendom" or "Christians without Church."⁶¹ An American historian opted for the umbrella term 'Second Reformation,' notwithstanding its different uses parallel to Post-Reformation confessionism or movements of 'further reformation.' Anglophone historiography seems confident with traditional labels such as Baptism, Puritanism, or Quakerism. German scholarship sticks to the dichotomy of (ecclesiastical) Pietism and (separatistic) Radical Pietism, although

60 Hylkema, *Reformateurs*, pp. 462–3:

1°. Afkeer van het traditioneel kerkelijk Christendom zoowel in leer als in leven.

2°. Een vrij en autonoom individualisme dat zich openbaarde vooral in een hartstochtelijk zoeken naar "de overlang verloren waarheid", hetzij aan de hand van "de Schriftuur en de gezonde Rede", of in de richting van allerlei vaak phantastische gevoelsspeculatiën.

3°. De geestdriftige overtuiging, aangaande "den waren godsdienst" een kennis te hebben die aan kerken, "de secten," verborgen was en wier verspreiding eerlang de verschillende gezindten zou doen oplossen in "het algemeene geloof."

4°. Een levendig godsdienstig besef, hetwelk in karakteristieke punten (de opvatting van wedergeboorte en zonde, genade en verzoening, wilsvrijheid en voorbeschikking, de geringschatting der "ceremoniën" en in het algemeen van het geordende) zich van de kerkelijke vroomheid onderscheidde.

5°. Een moraal die herinnert aan de uitspraken van de bergrede.' [Mattheus 5]."

61 J. Lindeboom, *Stiefkinderen van het Christendom* (The Hague, 1929); Leszek Kołakowski, *Chrétiens sans Eglise: La Conscience religieuse et le lien confessionnel au XVII^e siècle* (Paris, 1969). Cf. Richard H. Popkin, *The Third Force in Seventeenth-Century Thought* (Leiden, 1992).

recent studies favour a comparative approach of parallel renewal movements, including Quietism.⁶²

Arguably, the challenge arising from our brief introduction to the world of Brakel is to connect the discourses of confessional orthodoxy, mystical spiritualism, pietism, and the early Enlightenment. Just as the concept of 'reasonable religion' asks for a revision of the customary description of the relationship between traditional theology and early modern philosophy, the contrast of 'natural religion' with 'true religion,' as emphasized by Brakel, hints at a decisive divergence between the public or state-controlled church in society and the personal freedom of belief and conscience of its members. At the same time, the discourses were deeply embedded in intellectual exchange, social networks, and popular culture. People around 1700 both faced and produced intensive religious change—not least of all a prominent pastor wrestling with the profile of piety.

62 Hartmut Lehmann, Hans-Jürgen Schrader, and Heinz Schilling, eds., *Jansenismus, Quietismus, Pietismus* (Göttingen, 2002).