events. Not so unfamiliar is the identification of the Transylvanian church with Old Testament Israel but for the stress put on Transylvania’s position as a reformed outpost wedged between the supposedly diabolical powers of the Ottoman and the Habsburg Empires. The church was also distinctive because of its close contact with anti-Trinitarians and, to a lesser degree, with Orthodox believers.

By the early seventeenth century, the Calvinist church of Hungary and Transylvania had grown into one of Europe’s largest reformed congregations. Murdock points out that its contribution to Calvinist theology at large was not very distinguished, but that it successfully clung to what he calls “home-grown confessional statements” (291) and a hierarchical ecclesiastic structure. For a long time, it was supported by the ruling princes of Transylvania and many nobles of Royal Hungary, while the Ottomans would usually leave the church in peace as long as it kept a low profile.

Murdock’s main argument is enlivened by a wealth of telling details. We learn, for instance, that the dying Alsted cut up his personal papers and threw them into an outside privy, from which they were rescued through the services of a local beggar (88). The impatient educationalist János Apáczai Csere compared his countrymen unfavourably to the inhabitants of the Dutch East Indies, calling them “you sleepy, drunken, dim Hungarian people” (106). And we learn to our surprise that ministers should not wear boots because of their military associations: soldier’s clothing was to be avoided “because of licence associated with soldiers’ lifestyles” (234-235). The book is a pleasure to read and will hopefully be an eye-opener to many for whom, until now, the history of Hungarian and Transylvanian Calvinism seemed to be not more than an exotic footnote to the history of Calvinism at large.

M.E.H.N. Mout, Leiden


Johan Huizinga once famously asserted that Netherlanders “knew better” than to believe that theirs was a Calvinist land. The myth, however, persists, revived most notably by cultural historians such as Simon Schama. In this collection of previously published essays, the distinguished historian of Dutch Protestantism G.J. Schutte applies his own antidote of “reality” to the problem of Calvinism and Dutch culture. The essays consider a variety of topics in the history of Dutch Calvinism from the seventeenth to the twentieth centuries: the Golden-Age Republic, the slave trade, the VOC, enlightenment and revolution, schisms in the Reformed church, the ARP and parliamentary politics, the role and influence of Abraham Kuyper, the development of the modern Calvinist “pillar”, colonial missions and
Among the myths Schutte attempts to debunk is the stereotype of the early modern Dutch Republic as a Calvinist state and society; quite rightly he dismisses this notion as a product of the revival of nineteenth-century Reformed orthodoxy and its attendant historiography, which liked to draw a direct line from John Calvin to itself. In terms of numbers, political power and social influence the Reformed Church in the Golden Age enjoyed a privileged but hardly monopolistic position in a society that included significant numbers of Mennonites, Catholics, Lutherans, Jews, and confessionally uncommitted. By extension he offers a more nuanced picture of the influence of the Dutch Reformed Church in the colonial world, demonstrating in particular the fallacy of the popular assumption that South African apartheid ideology is a direct descendant of Cape Calvinism. Likewise he questions a cherished myth of nineteenth-century Calvinism, that the Kuyperian orthodox revival represented a popular movement of kleine luyden, when in fact it comprised believers of considerably diverse social backgrounds. Schutte is very adept at holding these notions up to an examining light, though he never explains satisfactorily their persistence and success. To what extent do they rest on Calvinist propagandists and to what extent on the misapprehensions of outsiders? Both groups seem to have ascribed to Dutch Calvinism an influence, be it positive or negative, that the historical record calls seriously into question. It would be interesting to learn more about how Schutte accounts for their continuing durability.

The author’s essays on nineteenth- and twentieth-century Calvinism, where he seems more at home than in the early modern period, are models of clarity and exposition. The article entitled “De ere Gods en de moderne staat” in particular is an illuminating explanation of the theological and ideological culture of the Anti-Revolutionary movement and its reaction against modernity, and should be required reading for all students of modern Dutch history. Its description of Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer is probably the best short introduction available to this father figure of the Calvinist revival of the 1880s. Schutte correctly emphasizes that the Anti-Revolutionary stream in Dutch Calvinism began first of all as a religious movement that tried to recover, reassert and exercise Christian belief in a world never imagined by Calvin. That it later became the most successful of all the confessionalized political movements of the modern Netherlands Schutte ascribes principally to the efforts and energies of the tireless Abraham Kuyper.

Kuyper is the elephant in the room of modern Dutch Calvinism, unavoidable and impossible to get around. Indeed, Schutte opens and closes the volume with Kuyper and is clearly fascinated by him. Kuyper, the neo-Calvinist and conservative radical, rejected the ideas of modernity but happily exploited its institutions — newspapers, universities, political parties —