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Incidentally

by James Koldenhoven

Resumé of Swierenga Lectures

Dr. Robert P. Swierenga, Professor of History at Kent State University, Kent, Ohio, visited the Dordt campus in early March to deliver a series of four lectures. Swierenga, who classifies himself as a moderate behavioral or "social science" historian, has recently been engaged in extensive research into nineteenth century Dutch immigration to the United States.

In his first lecture, "Dutch Immigration in the Nineteenth Century: A Computer-Aided Analysis," the guest lecturer discussed the data sources he has utilized in his research and the preliminary findings he has reached in his analysis of Dutch immigration in the period 1831-1880. Using as his basic resource statistical profiles of 21,500 Dutch emigrants compiled with computer assistance from Dutch government registers (*landverhuizer* lists) ship passenger lists, and American manuscript census records, Swierenga has attempted to characterize the emigrants of this period, trace them from their native villages to American ports of entry, and follow them to their location of settlement. The last step, he observed, is by far the most difficult, since the Dutch immigrants constituted

a minute percentage of the total population of the United States.

Dutch migration in the nineteenth century, the speaker noted, can be divided into three phases: sporadic movement of individual families in the 1820's and 1830's, group migrations in the 1840's and 1850's, and again emigration of individual families in the post-Civil War period. Dutch immigrants entering the United States tended to be older than those of other nationalities, Swierenga revealed, and the proportion arriving in family units, 80 per cent, was extremely high. Moreover, they had larger families than other immigrant groups. He also pointed out that only 13 per cent of the Dutch immigrants prior to 1880 were Seceders (*Afgescheidene*).

The schism in the RCA (Reformed Church in America) in 1857 giving rise to the CRC (Christian Reformed Church), affiliation with these two churches in the following years by Dutch immigrants, and the relationships existing between the particular situation of these immigrants in the Netherlands and their choice of affiliation was the focus of attention in the second lecture, "Local-Cosmopolitan Theory and Emigrant Religion: Social Basis of the Ante-

Belum Dutch Reformed Schism." Analyzing 1000 immigrant families that joined the CRC and an equal number that associated with the RCA, Swierenga found that knowing their previous old country church affiliation, whether *Hervormde* (state church) or *Afgescheidenen* (seceded churches) had little value as a prediction of denominational choice upon arrival in the United States. Approximately equal numbers from each Dutch church joined the CRC and RCA. Other factors such as economic status, occupation and reason for leaving he also found to be of little use as significant predictors of denominational selection. Rather, Swierenga argued, the salient determinant of church membership in the United States was the regional source of origin in the Netherlands, meaning, to a large extent, non-quantitative historic cultural and religious factors. Using the local-cosmopolitan model advanced by sociologist Robert K. Merton, he asserted that immigrants from more cosmopolitan areas tended to affiliate with the more assimilated, American-oriented RCA, whereas those from the more localistic and isolated provinces such as Groningen, Drenthe, Overijssel and Zeeland preferred to unite with the more isolated, less Americanized CRC.

Departing from the specific focus of his Dutch immigration research in his third lecture, "Ethnicity in Historical Perspective," Swierenga subjected assimilationist and pluralist theories of American social structure to an historical analysis. The theoretical foundations of assimilationism, he contended, are to be found in the evolutionary social model posited by classical European social theorists, such as Max Weber and Ernst Troeltsch, who argued that ties such as those of race and religion were anachronistic to modern urban society, and in enlightenment humanism that viewed

cultural differences to be historical accidents rather than inherent traits.

Such presuppositions are rejected by pluralists who vigorously contend that the preservation and solidarity of ethnic minorities are necessary for the existence of a robust society. Explicitly committed to the pluralist position himself, the speaker pointed out that assimilationist, or "melting pot," ideals reigned supreme in the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century. However, since the 1960's the melting pot theory has increasingly been challenged. Among the challengers have been historians of the ethno-cultural school whose quantitative research has revealed the importance of ethnic and religious issues as motivators of human behavior. If a truly pluralistic society is to be established, it is necessary, Swierenga declared, to get rid of the remains of the old assimilationist thinking and to encourage research into ethnic group life and history as a prerequisite to intelligent policy decisions.

Swierenga devoted his final lecture, "Behavioralism in Historical Research," to a critique of behavioral, or social science, history. It is, he maintained, both possible and appropriate for a Christian to utilize the behavioral approach to historical investigation. The behavioral historian, Swierenga stated, asserts that past human behavior can be studied scientifically and that historians can legitimately join in the search for and development of general laws of human behavior. Pointing to the considerable dissimilarity between behavioral and "traditional" history in respect to their sources, methods and objectives, he suggested that the differences between them should be conceptualized as a spectrum consisting of a continuum with many gradations rather than, as some would advocate, a bipolar spectrum

separated by an impenetrable gulf.

Swierenga acknowledged that social science history embodies certain dangers, such as a tendency towards an ideological behavioralism and a propensity to ignore the human aspects of history. Nevertheless, he argued, these are more than offset by positive values, such as encouraging historians to make their assumptions clear and introducing theories and hypotheses that are very useful in enabling the historian better to focus his research. Traditional and behavioral historians have found it quite possible to coexist within the historical profession, he noted. "Behavioral history does not and cannot provide an objective seamless web containing all aspects of human life," Swierenga concluded, "but it can be most effectively used to describe, explain and understand some aspects of history."

Wm. Nawyn



Key to Theatre

Those who availed themselves of the opportunity to visit with Tom Key, or hear his performance of C.S. Lewis, were not disappointed. Tom Key is a dynamic Christian theatre artist. He is an actor. He has a future, too, if the Christian community will give him support.

This 27-year old Georgian was raised a Southern Baptist, though he says he was not a Christian until a few years ago. In the meantime, Tom Key

had been pursuing an acting career. Not that he was born into a family of actors. Quite the opposite. He says, "My father had one position and one position only, about theatre, and that position was that theatre is inherently evil." That was his first obstacle. Unfortunately, it would seem that the inspiration for him to become an actor came from a totally secularized commercial theatre experience. Tom reported that while he was in high school, the school bussed its students to New York. There the kids were turned loose to see some Broadway plays. "I was mesmerized," he said, "and I knew from that time on, I had to be an actor."

His interest soon got him enough training and experience to get some small roles in local theatre productions. His big opportunity came, as he saw it then, to direct and perform theatre in a cabaret, a kind of dinner theatre situation. The shows were all geared to selling food and drinks. The bar was the most profitable part of the enterprise, and the producer would actually mingle with the audience after a scene or song was performed to count the number of drinks sold. Key said, "In a sense we were all bartenders in disguise. Not that I'm a teetotaler, but I didn't get a Masters degree in theatre and become a Christian just to push drinks."

Then Tom Key got another break, this time more to his liking. A matron of the local community asked if he would do something at a poetry club meeting to restore some interest in literature. Key accepted the invitation, and was soon looking for material. Instead of poetry, he came across C.S. Lewis, the famous English scholar and writer of *The Screwtape Letters*. Tom Key's interest in C.S. Lewis grew. He read everything he could get his hands on. And in the process, Key developed both a short presentation for the poetry club and, later, material for a one-man show,