
Dieleman Digs into History of Dutch Religious Life

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DIELEMAN DIGS INTO HISTORY OF DUTCH RELIGIOUS LIFE

Associate Professor of Theology Dr. Kyle Dieleman ('09) recently published a book titled *Navigating Reformed Identity in the Rural Dutch Republic: Communities, Belief, and Piety*. The book, published by Amsterdam University Press, explores the local dynamics of religious life in the early modern Dutch Republic by examining Dutch Reformed church records and theological texts. As is stated in the book summary, "the book argues that within the religiously plural setting of the Dutch Republic, church officials used a variety of means to establish a Reformed identity in their communities."

For some time, Dieleman has been interested in how theology and practice intersected in the early modern Dutch Reformed churches. When he looked into how those churches observed the Sabbath, he found many complaints about Sabbath desecration in rural areas.

"So, I wanted to explore more fully how rural contexts might lead Reformed Christianity to be lived differently than in urban contexts," he explains.

"I'm one of a few scholars in the United States who can read hand-written Dutch consistory records, so I thought I could make a contribution to the field and to Reformed church history that otherwise might go unstudied."

The book addresses issues such as religious pluralism, theological disputes, and church polity, which are "all still quite relevant today, especially in Dutch Reformed traditions," says Dieleman.

Rural Reformed churches in the Dutch Republic were often on the receiving end of major theological or ecclesiastical decisions from church authorities, but



JAMIN VERVELDE ('09)

"Having a book published brings lots of feelings: relief, anxiety, and excitement, to name a few," says Dr. Kyle Dieleman.

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— Dr. Kyle Dieleman, associate professor of theology

that "top-down" process didn't always match the experiences that individual churches had.

"For example, it's one thing for a synod to say you couldn't work on the Sabbath, but what about in rural farming communities when a storm was coming Monday and you needed to get a crop in or risk starvation?" says Dieleman.

"Those rural Christians and churches needed to decide for themselves how they were going to think about and live out their Reformed identities. Sometimes that meant going against the more 'official' versions of what it meant to be Reformed."

Dieleman's favorite part about writing

the book was conducting the initial research. "I found it really exciting to go into an archive and look through pages of church records from the 1600s," he says. "It's a window into the lives of people who lived in such a different world and yet are brothers and sisters in Christ."

He wants readers to gain a stronger understanding of the complicated history of Dutch Reformed churches.

"I hope scholars will better understand the complexity of Dutch Reformed communities, especially the multiplicity of ways in which theology was understood and lived in rural areas," he says. "For lay readers, including those from Reformed traditions, I hope the book will help them consider the varied understandings of what it has meant to be 'Reformed,' and recognize the complex ways that theology gets adapted and used in differing contexts."

SARAH MOSS ('10)

ABOUT DR. DIELEMAN

Dieleman received his Ph.D. in Religious Studies at the University of Iowa and his undergraduate degree in theology from Dordt. He previously taught history and theology at Trinity Christian College in Palos Heights, Illinois.

This fall, Dieleman taught courses such as Ancient and Medieval Theology and Gospel, Church, and Culture. In the spring, he will teach Theology of the Reformation and The Great Tradition.

He is enjoying his first year of teaching at Dordt. "My colleagues and students have been welcoming and also delightfully curious about theology and history," he says. "I've also appreciated the intentional, passionate focus on a Reformed perspective."