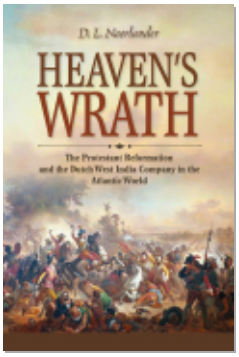
4. Planting the Lord's Vineyard in Foreign Soil: Public Worship in Early Dutch Forts and Settlements



Chapter 4

Planting the Lord's Vineyard in Foreign Soil

Public Worship in Early Dutch Forts and Settlements

On November 14, 1624, the Amsterdam consistory gathered around a large table in the *Oude Kerk* to discuss religious affairs at home and in the growing territories of the East and West India Companies. At some point during the meeting they were surprised by a visit from Bastiaen Jansz Krol, whom they had sent as *ziekentrooster* to "Virginia" (New Netherland) ten months before. Why had he returned so soon? Krol explained that the colonists "demand[ed] a minister." There were "pregnant women" among them, he said, and they wanted their children baptized. As an unordained lay preacher, he did not have the authority to perform the sacrament. Consistory members recognized the problem, but they also knew that "there are few households there," perhaps too few to justify a minister at a time when qualified clergy were in such great demand. After considering the issue for a week, the consistory decided to give Krol permission to baptize, sending a second *ziekentrooster* to assist him in 1626.[1]

New Netherland was one of many places that fit uncomfortably in the WIC's Grand Designs against the Spanish and Portuguese in the South Atlantic. If Krol's request caught the consistory off guard, it was because most people who paid attention to what was happening in America at the moment had their eyes on the WIC's major fleets and conquests, as they would for some time.[2] However, warfare wasn't the only way to grow Dutch power and influ-

ence, nor were Brazil and Chile the only areas of interest. The company was actually a bit of a latecomer to the imperial contest, and as such, it inherited certain preexisting Dutch claims and possessions at its founding. In addition to New Netherland, the Dutch already had a presence in West Africa and a number of small, struggling outposts in South America, mostly on the Amazon River and the so-called Wild Coast (the Guyanas). To these the company quickly added islands like Curaçao and Bonaire: both technically conquests; but they were still very like New Netherland and the other inherited possessions in the sense that they had little-to-no conquered population. Should the Dutch decide to do much *new* planting, they had to plant and build almost from scratch. It was now the WIC's right to make those decisions and strike the proper balance between warfare, trade, and colonization.

In the end the company did promote some immigration, and the church and its representatives—especially lay clergy like Krol—tried to provide pastoral care and re-create Dutch religious institutions in frontier settings that weren't especially suited to the effort. No one at the time doubted the WIC's right to support colonists and build new societies because the charter was clear: "[The company] may advance the population of fruitful and uninhabited regions."[3] Dutch writers and WIC supporters recognized that colonization had ancient roots among the Old Testament Jews and in the classical Greek and Roman Empires, and some writers were enthusiastic about the opportunities now. Even when their main interest or subject was warfare, they also wrote about America's fertile, "empty" lands and the need to send Europeans to establish and grow colonies.[4]

Insofar as they grew rather slowly, Dutch colonies were victims of Dutch success at home, for stability and prosperity tended to attract people to the Republic, not push them away. The church also struggled in many places because of conditions beyond anyone's control, including disease and death, inhospitable climates, and indigenous peoples who could not be supplanted and did not want to change. The WIC founded colonies that quickly disappeared. Some survived as mere outposts, the Dutch presence marked by a fort and perhaps a few huts and other slovenly, primitive facilities. Early colonial populations were disproportionately male: sailors and soldiers with a greater propensity to revolt than to settle or farm. One could (and some did) blame the company for sluggish growth because it feared competition. But its most stiflingly monopolistic policies didn't last beyond the 1630s. Warfare and the adverse physical conditions found in many locations were usually the true culprits behind the sorry state of affairs. According to Reformed thought, the church wasn't officially established before calling a minister and organizing

a consistory; yet the sickly, transient population contained too few church members and too few potential elders and deacons. Lay ministers in these settings didn't have the authority to create a consistory anyway.[5]

Early Dutch colonial religion was a cross between the limits and frustrations of public religion in the Netherlands during the Protestant Reformation and the stunted possibilities of shipboard worship in the Dutch maritime world. Where the Dutch at home had depended a lot on former Catholic priests and untrained clergy before they could develop a professional Protestant clerical pool, the Dutch of later generations in Africa and America depended heavily on *ziekentroosters* and other laymen whose pioneering work and place in the Dutch religious, imperial system is often overlooked. Likewise, where shipboard worship lacked many features of the full religious life—church discipline, charity, the Lord's Supper, etc.—early Dutch forts and colonies lacked the same things. Clergy could at least uphold WIC authority through regular exhortation and the condemnation of disobedience and sin. And as much as their environment and positions allowed, they provided the religious services and teachings that Calvinist believers expected and valued. Those familiar services may have meant even more in an otherwise alien colonial setting.[6]

Pilgrims in the Greater Caribbean

Dutch ships had been traveling to the Caribbean for decades before there was any West India Company.[7] They first appeared there in significant numbers in the 1590s, spurred by the Spanish embargoes on salt and other essential products that they used to acquire in European ports that were now closed to them because of the war. In the Caribbean they also found tobacco, sugar, cocoa, pearls, animal hides, dyewood, and potential victims for their piratical, privateering schemes. They acquired some of these products by trade, others by force. More than any other Dutch province, Zeeland took an early interest in the Caribbean, and more than any other Zeeland merchant or merchant firm, a man named Balthazar de Moucheren organized the earliest expeditions to Africa and the Americas. He was a refugee from the southern Netherlands and "a fervent Calvinist."[8]

The Dutch made many false starts on the Wild Coast. After first founding a fort on the Essequibo River in 1596—then quickly losing it to the Spanish—they launched an unknown number of colonial projects in the region.[9] Some were just outposts or "factories," meant to facilitate trade and little else; others were more strictly colonial in nature, reflecting an interest in immigration and

social planting. A 1603 request for support from the States General demonstrates that at least some Dutch recognized a connection between immigration and other possible endeavors. In their "Memorial" on colonization they affirmed the beauty and fertility of Guyana, the opportunities for agriculture, trade, and mining. But there could be no riches, they wrote, "until the land is colonized and strengthened with good strong towns and forts." They called theirs a "Christian project . . . for the glory of God and the propagations of His holy word," and they said that Guyana would be a refuge for the destitute and for the exiles of war-ravaged Europe. They lamented the fact that exiles sometimes returned to Catholic countries after living in the Netherlands, then asked, "Who knows but some would have preferred to go to the uttermost bounds of the earth, in freedom of their faith and conscience, rather than return to popery like a dog to his vomit?"[10]

By the time the WIC took control of existing Dutch Atlantic possessions in the 1620s, one small colony had finally emerged on the Essequibo River, and the WIC (usually the Zeeland chamber) continued to promote projects in that region in the future.[11] One of the first attempts under the company was with a group of Walloons and Huguenots who did, in fact, fulfill the basic predictions of the 1603 Memorial: like Balthazar de Moucheren and so many company directors and clergy, the Walloons were newcomers and foreigners in the Dutch Republic, and they looked to America as a possible final destination in their wanderings. They would find, however, that Guyana was a cruel, inhospitable place to those who did not know it well. To most Europeans it was indeed a "Wild Coast."[12]

Walloons and Huguenots sometimes worked together because both spoke French. The former came from the mainly French-speaking regions of the southern Netherlands (the provinces that remained under the Spanish after the Revolt) and the latter were Protestants from France itself. A common gathering place was the city of Leiden, where the Huguenot merchant Jesse de Forest established himself at about the same time as a group of English Separatists known today as the Pilgrims. As members of Leiden's diverse Reformed community, De Forest and his friends would have witnessed English preparations to travel to America, and they were perhaps inspired by them to organize a similar undertaking. Just one year after the *Mayflower* set sail, De Forest had enlisted between fifty and sixty Walloon and French families, about 230 people. Like the Pilgrims they decided first to approach the Virginia Company in England, but the company only agreed to sponsor them on the condition that they disperse among a number of different towns when they arrived. So De Forest turned instead to the Dutch West India Company, which had not

existed when he first made his plans. The WIC was happy to have them because, as the company later explained, native-born Dutch with ample work and "enough to eat" had no reason to go abroad.[13] Interestingly, the English had also flirted briefly with Dutch sponsorship. If things had gone a bit differently, the two might have traded places, with the Pilgrims settled on the Essequibo and Hudson Rivers and the Walloons in Virginia or New England.

De Forest sent two possible messages when, in his original petition to the Virginia Company, he wrote that his people were "all of the Reformed religion." First, he was making a simple statement about the faith at the core of the Walloon-Huguenot experience and identity. At the same time he signaled his understanding that England was by that point a Protestant state, and English colonial planners might wonder about the religio-political affiliations of French-speaking Europeans. By declaring their religion up front, the Walloons clarified their allegiances in the major struggles of the times.[14] But the difficult conditions they faced when they first arrived in America didn't usually permit the full, developed practice they had enjoyed in Holland. After coming to an agreement with the WIC they split into two groups, some of them going to the Wild Coast, the rest later to New Netherland. The Wild Coast contingent sent an advance party of ten to twelve men under De Forest to find a suitable location in July 1623. Going ashore a few months later in the region of today's northern Brazil and French Guyana, they offered "many prayers." Then they wandered from place to place, finding occasional European settlers, trading with different indigenous groups, scouting meadows and other potential farmland. In late December they finally agreed on a site for their colony and purchased a field for tobacco.[15]

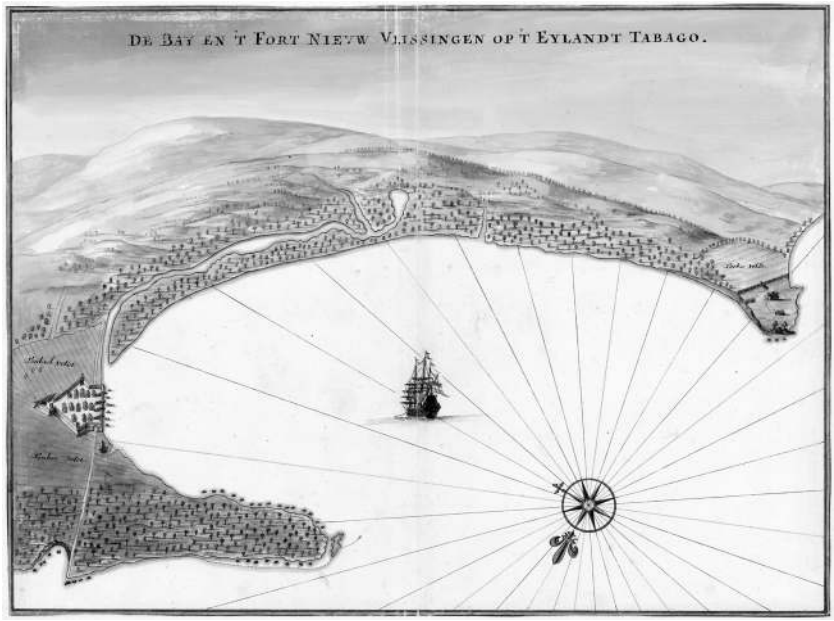
The experiment only lasted about a year. At one point the Walloons joined with their Native American allies to slaughter (by their own count) 120 indigenous enemies. But they were no match for the local insect population. As the anonymous author of their journal described it, they were "very much inconvenienced by mosquitoes." After coming down with a "severe fever," De Forest died in October 1624, and by December of that year the rest were almost out of stores. Seeing that "we should be obliged to force the Indians to give us food," they chose to quit their adventure, returning to Holland aboard a newly arrived company ship.[16]

In the 1620s and 1630s the WIC's Caribbean possessions and population increased, sometimes immediately by conquest, sometimes sluggishly through the failures and small successes of colonizers after the Walloons. Founded in 1627 by another Zeeland merchant, Abraham van Pere, Berbice joined Essequibo as the only Wild Coast colonies of the era. That they remained "colonies" (plural) instead of becoming one colony is a reminder that the WIC was

quite splintered, allocating ownership and control among various chambers and individuals. The continued partition of Essequibo and Berbice is also a testament to their small size: although they were only seventy-five miles apart, both grew mostly along their namesake rivers and never had a reason to merge.[17] As for island settlements, over the fifteen years after Berbice the WIC acquired Curaçao, Aruba, Bonaire, St. Eustatius, and Saba, all of which faced outside threats but generally remained in Dutch hands after their conquest or founding. Conversely, Tobago and St. Martin had numerous claimants and saw endless bloodshed as Spanish, English, French, Dutch, and even Courlandian colonists (from modern-day Latvia) competed for their harbors and soil. Only the southern half of St. Martin joined the other five islands as a long-term Dutch possession.[18]

The religious laws that Abraham van Pere and the WIC issued for Berbice in 1627 were typical for Dutch colonies. In the public sphere they forbade all religion except the Reformed religion, and they required (rather naïvely) that no one deviate from the doctrines and traditions of the church in the Netherlands. Blasphemers would be punished, but otherwise settlers would not suffer for their private religion and private beliefs.[19] When the company formally created the patroonship system the following year, encouraging colonization by allowing wealthy "patroons" (patrons) to start their own settlements in WIC territory, the religious laws didn't change. In other words, the patroons' broad legal powers didn't include complete religious freedom. They had to send and support Calvinist clerical personnel, beginning with *ziekentroosters*, extending later to ministers and teachers when patroonships matured. Their charters reveal a clear expectation that *ziekentroosters* would have a pioneering role in the Dutch Atlantic.[20]

Early descriptions of Berbice and Essequibo also reveal the tremendous obstacles the original colonists faced and the impossibility of employing anything but the most rudimentary worship services. In his 1629 journal, WIC captain Gelein van Stapels wrote that by that date, two years after arriving in Berbice, Lord Cornelis van Pere and his eighty underlings were scattered up and down the river. They had built one large house of logs and tiles, defended with six cannon; but only four people lived there. The rest had given up trying to grow tobacco and other provisions as a group, instead dividing into smaller groups and living among the local Arawak Indians. To gather all the Europeans in one place would take at least eight days, Van Stapels said. And most of them were afflicted for months at a time with debilitating diseases and parasitic bugs and worms in their toenails and feet.[21] Moving northwest along the coast, Van Stapels reported a similar situation at Essequibo, where colonists were also "pretty bad afflicted by the pox." But he did find better



Fort New Vlissingen on the island of Tobago, by Johannes Vingboons (1665). Tobacco fields surround the fort. Courtesy of the Nationaal Archief, The Hague.

conditions in the islands. After one year in their new home, the sixty Tobago setters were mostly healthy, and they already had tobacco fields, huts, three larger houses for officers and storage needs, and a small fort. According to Van Stapels, the lieutenant's house doubled as a makeshift church: "They also say their prayers there."[22]

The Dutch could have begun with a small, preexisting population at Curaçao after taking the island from the Spanish in 1634. But the conquerors feared the inhabitants for their Catholicism, and after the destruction of the invasion, they worried that they would not be able to feed so many mouths. So they deported more than 400 people to the mainland. Curaçao's first governor, Johannes van Walbeeck, explained to his superiors in Europe that the old populace was "entirely papist" and "untrustworthy." As a member of the Reformed Church, sometimes an elder in its consistories, he wanted to promote his own faith and felt that religious uniformity was best, even for Native Americans and African slaves.[23]

Making Curaçao a Protestant island would be difficult, of course, without clergy, and at first the Dutch had no one, not even a *ziekentrooster* or other lay minister. The colony is unique among these early Caribbean endeavors in that

its early clerical history is clear from the start. The records of the rest might mention an occasional prayer, a provisional chapel, or an unnamed minister. Only later do they reveal specific identities and stories. In this case Van Walbeeck complained that none of his three ships had carried a *ziekentrooster* or reader—"although in many circumstances we have had great need of one." He therefore appointed the most capable men available, and they did "the prayers and other edifying exercises" to the best of their ability. By "edifying exercises" he probably meant that the officers and soldiers were singing and reading scriptures together, for Van Walbeeck knew that without an ordained minister, the church at home would frown on anything more. He now requested someone who could "lead us from all sin," someone who could teach the men and exhort them to live better lives.[24]

Van Walbeeck's campaign for a minister became a widespread priority when the church learned just a few months after the conquest that the WIC was sending a group of about twenty colonists to Curaçao, both men and women. Among them were Dutch, Walloon, and English names: Thomas Fletcher, Jacob Jacobsen van Domburgh, Laurens Pietersen, and so on. Fletcher may have been a De Forest-like figure, a member of a faction of disgruntled Puritans who had just lost a years-long battle to appoint their preferred candidate to the English pulpit in Amsterdam. Whether the Curaçao Fletcher was the same man, he was undoubtedly the leader of these particular immigrants because he was the first to appear before the WIC with their request to settle in America, and the company later referred to them as "the colonists of Thomas Flitchert."[25] To accompany them as the island's new spiritual shepherd the church selected Fredericus Vittaeus, a young man who had by that point already worked for the WIC in some capacity. Van Walbeeck was especially happy to see him because, he wrote, "I knew him before this in [Brazil] as a person of very sound doctrine and life."[26]

By late 1635, little more than a year after the Dutch seized Curaçao, the island boasted 412 Europeans, most of whom were soldiers, sailors, and other WIC employees. Van Walbeeck complained in his letters and reports of runaways and mutineers, enemy Indians and agricultural problems. In that regard the colony was no different from the American projects that preceded and succeeded it. Yet it had at least survived and grown, which so many others in that time and region failed to do. Curaçao also had fortifications and some few freemen and planter families, and they already had a minister and a few lay clergy. Also encouraging were the minor successes and survival of colonial neighbors like Essequibo and Berbice. As small and uncertain as it still was in the 1630s, a Dutch Caribbean was starting to emerge.

A Seed Sprouts on "the Manhattes"

The *ziekentrooster* Bastiaen Jansz Krol, one of the best-known figures from early New Netherland history, only ended up in that colony because of a bug. Probably born to a Mennonite family in the province of Friesland, he didn't join the Dutch Reformed Church until he reached adulthood. Historians once interpreted the conversion as opportunistic and questioned Krol's commitment and faith, partly because he accepted secular positions after his church service. But as the term "lay clergy" suggests, secular work was both common and necessary. It was also consistent with Protestant understandings of priesthood and religious authority. A recently discovered pamphlet, published in 1623, demonstrates the depth of Krol's anti-Catholic, anti-Spanish, "pro-Dutch Calvinism."[27] The church in Amsterdam first selected him as *ziekentrooster* for the WIC's Brazil fleet in December of that year. However, a last-minute illness prevented his departure, and he recovered just in time for the New Netherland opening a few weeks later.[28]

The people Krol served as *ziekentrooster*—the WIC's first North American colonists—traveled aboard the *Eendracht* and the *Nieu Nederlandt* in January and March of 1624. Krol left with the first group. The second consisted of roughly thirty Walloon and French families from the ongoing Jesse de Forest experiment. Before they set sail they assembled on the docks in Amsterdam, where two magistrates read the WIC's terms and conditions aloud: "They shall within their territory practice no other form of divine worship than that of the Reformed religion," the second article read. The company also required the Dutch language for all political, military, and judicial business, revealing at least a half-hearted hope that the already diverse undertaking would be Dutch in more than just name.[29] Company directors didn't stipulate the language of church services, too, but for the sake of their officers they probably had similar expectations. Regardless, the Walloons may have enjoyed some kind of service in French. Historian Willem Frijhoff believes that Krol spoke the language, and they could have received instruction from one of their own: their original petition to the Virginia Company listed a "theology student" named P. Gantois.[30]

Even if Gantois was among those who traveled to New Netherland, he and Krol would have had a hard time ministering to everyone in the colony because the settlers were immediately divided and established at four locations stretching from the Delaware to the Hudson and Connecticut Rivers. Krol himself ended up at Fort Orange on the upper Hudson. Like the Berbice colonists who needed eight days to gather, he and his flock knew that any large meeting and frequent visits were very unlikely. The dispersal must have been especially frustrating to the Walloons because they had rejected the Virginia Company

in part because the English wanted them to live in different towns in America. In this case the WIC was trying to thwart competing European claims by creating the biggest possible footprint with a small number of people.[31]

But the migrations of 1624 to 1626 weren't just about planting a flag and establishing a legal right on the international stage. While the company was certainly divided over questions of colonization and concerned about the potential threat to its fur monopoly, similar movements to Guyana and the Caribbean in the same period—usually in groups of twenty to eighty people—contextualize the New Netherland situation and demonstrate a widespread pattern of colonizing activity in the early WIC. The directors clearly expected their North American colony to grow, for in the two years after the Walloons they sent at least seven additional ships with everything that they believed was necessary to start a new life in an unfamiliar land: farm families, ploughs and tools for dairy production, hundreds of horses, cattle, hogs, and sheep, plus trees, grapevines, unnamed seeds, and experimental spices like anise and cumin, both of which were native to Asia and the Mediterranean. They told their new commander, Willem Verhulst, to identify streams and rivers for sawmills. They asked him to find arable land and look for "other suitable places for future settlers."[32]

The directors also showed that they expected the colony to grow in their orders regarding public institutions like the church. "First," they wrote, Verhulst "shall take care that divine service be held at the proper times . . . [and] enable the comforter of the sick, Sebastiaen Jansz Crol, to perform his duties in conformity with the authorization and instructions given him by the Consistory." Verhulst was supposed to respect Krol, which meant, in part, giving him a seat at the governor's table, providing him with a farm, and building him a home. The directors mentioned the baptismal authority Krol had recently attained during his brief return to the Netherlands. But if that development gave them any ideas about trying to get by forever using the cheaper lay clergy, they must have rejected the option, because in their instructions they designated property for "each succeeding pastor" (*predikant*). In fact they looked forward to the day that New Netherland would have a pastor and *ziekentroosters* (plural).[33] Finally, within the fort the directors wanted Verhulst to build a large facility with a school on one end, a hospital on the other, and the public church in the center. "And when the population shall increase," they concluded, "the school and hospital can be removed to make more room for the church."[34]

Ultimately the company's plans were too grandiose and expensive for the distant American frontier, especially given the many other Dutch endeavors in the South Atlantic at that time. Manhattan Island wasn't even the original

target, but a secondary location selected by Verhulst or his successor, Peter Minuit, who were supposed to establish their council on the Delaware River. Verhulst probably chose the island and used it to pasture WIC livestock in 1625; Minuit purchased the land from Native Americans in 1626. The town that gradually emerged there was very different from the one outlined in Verhulst's instructions.[35]

The famous letter reporting the "Manhattes" purchase mentions the same pregnancies and childbirth that required Krol's baptismal authority. And it provides the first glimpse of what the nascent colony was like at a time when the settlers were abandoning their original settlement assignments and gathering at the mouth of the Hudson River: "Our people are in good spirit and live in peace," the author described. "They had all their grain sowed by the middle of May, and reaped by the middle of August."[36] Another source from the same year puts about 270 people in the colony then, and, on Manhattan Island, a stone counting house, thirty homes of "bark," and the beginnings of a smaller fort than WIC directors originally wanted. It was supposed to enclose the whole town, but colonists were living outside it, and the new, improvised version couldn't have contained them all anyway. The same source describes Krol's efforts—still at Fort Orange—and the efforts of a second *ziekentrooster* on

An imaginative depiction of Fort New Amsterdam on Manhattan Island. Originally printed in *Beschrijvinghe van Virginia*, by Joost Hartgers (1651). Courtesy of the John Carter Brown Library, Providence, Rhode Island.

Manhattan, Jan Huygen, to administer the stunted church services of their profession. "Whilst awaiting a clergyman," Krol and Huygen "read to the commonality there, on Sundays, texts of Scripture and the commentaries," meaning the explanatory aids written by Protestant authorities like John Calvin. The settlers did not yet have a chapel, and they wouldn't for some time. However, the WIC was then building a mill "over which shall be constructed a spacious room sufficient to accommodate a large congregation."[37]

The new names and faces, Peter Minuit and Jan Huygen, had enough foreign blood and foreign experience to prepare them for their leadership roles in the diverse young colony. Governor Minuit is a difficult man to peg: a French-speaking, Germano-Dutch Walloon (to coin an awkward term). His father had fled the southern Netherlands along with many other Protestants during the Spanish troubles of the 1580s, eventually settling in Wesel, Germany, which was a haven for religious exiles from England and France, as well. The younger Minuit was born and raised in that environment, moving to the Dutch Republic and working as a diamond cutter before joining the WIC.[38] Huygen was his brother-in-law, and Huygen also lived in Wesel for a time. Religious antagonism and exile were, for both men, a personal, familiar reality, not just because Wesel was home to so many refugees, but because Spanish armies attacked and occupied the city often in the 1610s and 1620s, agitating existing antagonisms and creating new stories. Both also served their consistories as elders and deacons—Minuit probably as a member of the Walloon-Huguenot consistory in Wesel, Huygen with the Dutch-speaking consistories in Wesel and Kleve. The church appointed Huygen as *ziekentrooster* because of his ecclesiastical experience and relationship with Minuit.[39]

New Netherland couldn't and didn't have its own consistory until Reverend Jonas Michaelius arrived in 1628. He was clearly a Dutchman, born in Holland to a Protestant minister father. He had traveled just as much (if not more) than Minuit and Huygen, and he too knew the war firsthand. After his studies at Leiden University he received additional training in Germany, then took up his first post in what is sometimes called a *kruisgemeente*—literally a "cross community," or a church *under* the cross, meaning a hostile, dangerous environment. For Michaelius that meant serving in the unincorporated province of Brabant in the Dutch-Spanish borderlands. Next he returned to Holland, where he worked in two different towns over a period of about twelve years. Like Krol, he was supposed to serve the WIC in Brazil. But an enemy army—not, in his case, a bug—foiled his plans and drove him briefly to Africa, then back to Holland and on to New Netherland. Eventually the mobile minister would even work in England.[40]

In 1628 he didn't know about England yet, of course; he only knew that a colonial post could be just as dangerous and burdensome as any *kruisgemeente* in Europe. His troubles began with an "ungodly" cook and an indifferent captain during the Atlantic crossing. The captain was a "petty tyrant" with the manners of a "big buffalo," Michaelius complained. And the man didn't attend church services when they arrived in America.[41] Far more upsetting to Michaelius was the fact that his wife of sixteen years (fifty years old and pregnant) got sick and died just a few weeks later, leaving him with two small children. His communications with friends in Europe about her death touch on everything from faith and grief to the relationship between women, religion, and colonization. He was clearly devastated by the loss. But for his friends he opined about the will of God and bearing his cross with patience. Courage and patience were especially critical in America, he claimed; and one friend, Johannes van Foreest, agreed, suggesting in return that Michaelius's "learning" (i.e., his education and polish) made frontier life that much harder to bear. Van Foreest mourned Mrs. Michaelius's passing because of her pregnancy and how it would have increased the Dutch, Christian presence in the New World. Happily, he concluded, the year was still remarkable for "the fertility of the women" in general. Michaelius also took comfort in news from Protestant Europe and Dutch Asia, requesting as much information as Van Foreest would send. He found that interesting news, like patience, was especially necessary in a "wild country" without a clerical or marital companion.[42]

Unfairly labeled "the moodiest, bitchiest resident of New Amsterdam" in one recent history of the colony, Michaelius was (it's true) a bit schizophrenic in his feelings about America.[43] Given his family tragedy, and given the value of his descriptions when there are so few other accounts from his era, perhaps we can forgive him. On the one hand the people were "rough and unrestrained," some of them lazy. And the colony was still too sparsely populated, he complained. On the other, Michaelius was obviously happy about how the settlers welcomed him. "I find in most all of them both love and respect toward me," he wrote. The land was fertile yet overgrown, the climate healthy yet (in the winters) too cold. Butter and milk were scarce and livestock too few; but the sheep and pigs were growing in number, and he reported that the 1628 harvest was a good one: "larger than ever before." Despite signs of activity and social, economic development, including a second mill and homes to replace the hovels, Michaelius grumbled that they still lived sober, difficult lives, "like poor people."[44]

Whatever the circumstances of the colonists' physical existence, their spiritual life under Reverend Michaelius changed dramatically, approaching near—though still not replicating exactly—the religious services and institutions of

the Dutch Republic. Simple scripture readings and published commentaries now became moments of spontaneous instruction; sermons became more personal, relevant, and lively, no longer regurgitated from a book. Most importantly, lay clergy had not had the training or authority to administer the Lord's Supper and organize a consistory. Full Protestant worship and governance weren't possible without both traditions, and both only arrived in New Netherland with Michaelius. In reporting to Van Foreest that "we have begun to found a Christian church here," he wasn't forgetting or disparaging the ecclesiastical work that Krol and Huygen had been doing for years by that point.[45] His remark might sound like just another elitist snub, akin to the sentiments scattered throughout his correspondence about the extra burdens of learned men and the rough character of poor settlers. Michaelius did sometimes betray a superior, class-conscious mind. But in this instance he was technically correct in suggesting that the church hadn't been established until then.

In another case Michaelius wrote that he had only established "the form of a church," probably because the small colonial population and the distances between forts and settlements prevented the immediate implementation of certain Reformed offices and councils. His first consistory, for example, had just four people: himself, Governor Minuit, Jan Huygen, and Bastiaen Jansz Krol. To govern the church in New Amsterdam Michaelius would have interacted on a regular basis with Minuit and Huygen. Both were elders and both, he said, were "persons of very good character." He probably would have thought well of Krol, too, but again, Krol lived and worked at Fort Orange, rarely making the 150-mile journey downriver to meet with the other consistory members. And none of them were deacons, who typically handled poor relief. Unless frontier conditions really did have the leveling effect that Michaelius suggested, making *everyone* poor, he and his two elders dealt with welfare needs themselves. The consistory could also organize church disciplinary procedures against wayward members and arrange critical religious events like the Lord's Supper. Except insofar as the churches of the Netherlands acted in the same capacity, the New Netherland consistory didn't have the advice and other support that it would have enjoyed as part of a regional classis and synod. The colony had too few people and congregations to justify that type of organization.[46]

Historian Diarmaid MacCulloch describes the Lord's Supper as a religious celebration and "a high festival of community life."[47] It was one of the few sacraments Protestants retained during the Reformation, although they interpreted it differently and held it less often than the Catholic Mass. Frequency among European Calvinists ranged from just once or twice per year in Scotland to four times per year in Holland: once each at Easter, Pentecost, sometime in

the fall, and again before Christmas. Amsterdam was the exception, celebrating the Lord's Supper six times per year at the start of every second month. Dutch churches preceded the event with a period of censure and examination, beginning in the consistory and extending from there through visitations to individual member homes. Usually a minister delivered a preparatory sermon the Saturday before the rite. Then everyone gathered again the next day at the church, where they sat at long tables and listened to the minister read about Jesus Christ's sacrifice. When he finished the printed service, the minister read Bible passages as one of his colleagues distributed bread and wine and the congregation ate and drank from tin plates and goblets. They organized other meals and events outside the church where the Lord's Supper was less common and people had to travel farther.[48]

As a young, scattered colony, New Netherland fell into this category. The first sacramental rite under Michaelius was "a great joy and comfort to many," he claimed. He had about fifty participants, both Walloon and Dutch, and he would have had more if so many officers and soldiers weren't still living on the Connecticut and Delaware Rivers (and at Fort Orange). Another problem arose because some members didn't have the paperwork they usually showed prior to the Lord's Supper to prove their standing in the church: some had forgotten it, others had not known it would be necessary in America, and others had lost their certificates in a recent fire. So Michaelius had to improvise, admitting people to the Communion table on the testimony of fellow colonists. He wrote that "we cannot observe strictly all the usual formalities in making a beginning under such circumstances," and he hoped that his superiors in Europe wouldn't think poorly of him for the changes he made. He also broke with Dutch tradition in holding the sacrament three times per year instead of four, at least until the population grew. He didn't create a regular Sunday service in French because most Walloons also spoke Dutch, and some lived too far away to come to New Amsterdam in bad weather. But he did read them a sermon in French before the Lord's Supper, and he read the sacramental service in French too.[49]

What happened to *ziekentroosters* and other lay clergy when an ordained minister took charge? Depending on the length of their contracts, they might continue in their positions, supporting the minister and sometimes working secular jobs as well. The minister still needed someone to read scriptures during church services, someone to lead the congregation in song, and someone to help him visit and comfort the sick. And *ziekentroosters* still delivered sermons at distant outposts like Fort Orange. In a church with a corporate priesthood, a church where governing authority was shared among male congregants, the division between lay clergy, elders, deacons, and other offi-

cers could be quite thin. Krol and Huygen both became elders in 1628, even though Krol's *ziekentrooster* contract had expired and Huygen's had one more year. Huygen was also the WIC's storekeeper in New Amsterdam, and Krol became a fur trader and commander at Fort Orange. After Minuit's tenure, Krol even became provisional governor of New Netherland. Their willingness to work these jobs wasn't so different from the merchant or magistrate who served at the same time as elder or deacon.[50]

Two years after his arrival, Reverend Michaelius reported that the colonial church was growing both in numbers and piety. He told Van Foreest, "I had a pretty large congregation in proportion to the place and the population." But he had already had a falling out with one of his elders, Governor Minuit, for reasons that aren't clear today. Michaelius had complained from the beginning that some colonists were trading with Native Americans, possibly violating WIC regulations and rights. Though he wasn't sure at first, and though he originally said he intended to avoid secular, political concerns, by 1630 he couldn't help himself any longer. He now told anyone who would listen, including the directors, that Minuit was an oppressive, fraudulent, fornicating swindler.[51] In an era when the recently implemented patroonship plan was dividing the company into trade and settlement factions, pitting colonist and patroon interests against WIC interests, the minister exerted his moral authority in the political sphere, maybe positioning himself as a company man for his own benefit. Whatever his intent, the directors addressed the conflict by recalling him *and* Minuit to the Netherlands in 1631.[52]

New Netherland and the Reformed Church continued to grow, though slowly, throughout the 1630s. In that decade the former WIC director Kiliaen van Rensselaer founded the only successful, lasting patroonship in the colony on the upper Hudson, near Fort Orange. He sent various small groups of settlers to the area, mostly men and farmers, including some Dutch and some Scandinavians. At first the population wasn't large enough for a minister, though, so Van Rensselaer authorized the farmer Brandt Peelen van der Niekerck to "read aloud some chapters from the Holy Scriptures" on Sundays and holidays. The patroon also ordered his political council to pray at all their meetings.[53]

As the colonial capital, New Amsterdam still had the only minister of the 1630s. And the town got the colony's first chapel and first school in the same period. For the ten months or so between Michaelius's departure and the arrival of his replacement, Everardus Bogardus, the Reformed congregation reverted to the simple services that were so common in the early Dutch Atlantic. Bogardus was a *ziekentrooster*-turned-minister who had already served the WIC in Africa before his North American appointment. When he arrived

at Manhattan in 1632 the consistory and congregation were still meeting in the attic of a large stone mill. But Wouter van Twiller, the new governor, built a wooden chapel and parsonage for Bogardus on Pearl Street the next year.[54] Lest he or anyone else in this quaint setting start to feel too disconnected from the more bloody company wars still raging in the South Atlantic, the bells and chimes that called them to church each week reminded them that they were part of something bigger, for the bells had come originally from San Juan de Puerto Rico. The WIC had commandeered them and shipped them to New Amsterdam after sacking the Spanish settlement a few years before.[55]

Under Governor van Twiller and Reverend Bogardus, Manhattan still had none of Spanish America's grand cathedrals and New England's crowded townships. Dutch prosperity at home, the Republic's small population base, and WIC interests and commitments elsewhere conspired to keep the Dutch footprint in North America relatively small. Manhattan in the 1630s was also different because it *wasn't* Spanish and it *wasn't* English; it was now a Dutch island, and the Dutch had to develop a colonial approach that matched their own unique history and their own needs and circumstances. For colonists they could count on some of the many Protestant exiles and foreigners in the Netherlands. And the religious system that had emerged there during the Protestant Reformation provided a model for colonial pastoral care, not because the system was easily re-created, but because lay clergy were, by design, an abundant, flexible group, which made them useful as pioneers and clerical assistants in moments of social change (e.g., the Reformation) and new social development in places like America.

Weeds and Worms in West Africa

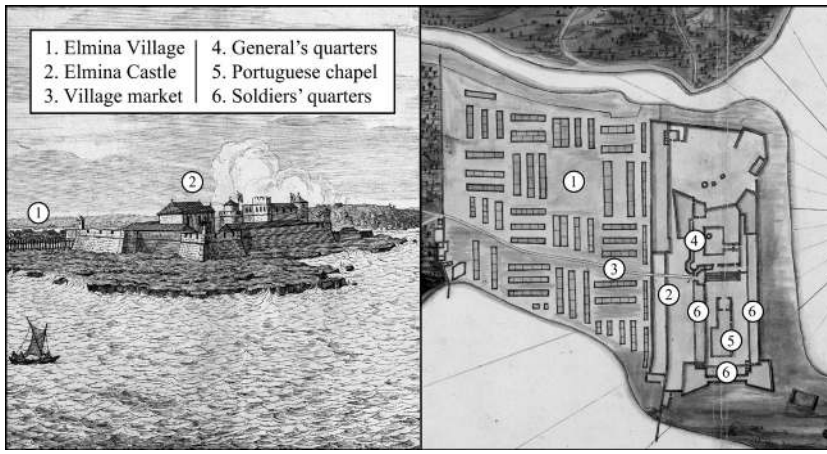
Of all the lay positions in the Calvinist tradition, the office of *ziekentrooster* seemed ready-made for Africa. After the early, contested decades of expansion the Dutch consolidated their territory in America. Colonial populations always remained comparatively small, but they did grow, and the church grew accordingly. In Africa the situation was different. There the Dutch didn't face America's weakened indigenous people, terribly susceptible to Old World diseases, sometimes already subjugated or destroyed by prior waves of Spanish or Portuguese. In Africa the Dutch had to cope with powerful, organized states, and the disease/power dynamic was reversed. Now it was the newcomers who suffered terrible mortality rates in Africa's tropical climates. Dangerous pathogens and African power limited Europeans to a skeletal, male, commercial presence on the west coast. Who better to direct the spiritual needs of this

sickly crew than a *ziekentrooster*—a comforter of the sick—whose clerical limitations shouldn't have mattered there?[56]

Yet the limitations did matter to the Dutch in Africa. Ultimately (and in a few cases briefly) the WIC claimed forts and trading posts from as far north as modern-day Senegal southward to the so-called Gold Coast, from the Slave Coast to São Tomé, the Kingdom of Kongo, and Luanda. Stationed at Fort Nassau on the Gold Coast, the first two Reformed clergy in Africa were both *ziekentroosters*: Meynaert Assuerus and Jan Hermanss. The WIC toyed with the idea of always using *ziekentroosters* there, but after Assuerus and Hermanss the church insisted on calling at least one ordained minister to what was then the company's principal fort in the region. And many WIC officers expressed a similar preference.[57] Surprisingly, Dutch ministers in Africa carried instructions that didn't differ much from the instructions of American colleagues. They were supposed to organize the church and plant the Gospel. They could preach, administer the sacraments, call elders and deacons, and hold church disciplinary procedures in the consistory.[58] Their presence and ecclesiastical powers may have meant that the Dutch didn't yet understand the limited possibilities for establishing European institutions in Africa. More likely, Calvinists in the company valued their religious services enough to employ the more expensive minister even when they knew he would rarely be able to exercise all his authority.

Lay clergy continued to live and work at most African forts, observing the same traditions there that they did at sea: daily prayers and psalm-singing, twice-weekly sermons, and occasional days of supplication and thanks. After the WIC took it from the Portuguese in 1637, Elmina replaced Fort Nassau as the company's headquarters in West Africa. More a castle than a fort, it was home to the local commander and the region's only ordained minister, and employees sometimes traveled from nearby forts to worship with them.[59] Elmina also boasted one of the few chapels in Dutch West Africa, built by the Portuguese inside the castle walls. But the company used the chapel "for buying and trading." A Lutheran soldier and goldsmith named Michael Hemmersam, who worked at Elmina off and on from 1639 to 1645, wrote that "we held our Sunday with prayer, reading and singing in the great hall of the general's quarters, which was hung with pikes, muskets, and similar weapons and was more like an arsenal than a church." At other forts they met wherever they could find space, including the "Commander's hall" and maybe outdoors when the weather allowed it.[60]

Hemmersam's comment about Sunday services is a reminder that many WIC employees were not Calvinists, nor even Dutch. Still, the company required everyone's presence and participation, and clergy had to choose from



Elmina Castle on the Gold Coast of Africa (modern-day Ghana). The image on the left is by Jan van Brosterhuyzen (ca. 1636–1644). Courtesy of the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam. The image on the right is by Johannes Vingboons (1665). Courtesy of the Nationaal Archief, The Hague.

among this mixed group to appoint elders and organize the Lord's Supper. In doing so they divided the European population. Hemmersam claimed that missing the Lord's Supper was "the greatest loss and cause of regret for me and others attached to the Evangelical [i.e., Lutheran] religion." He also said the clergy "knew quite well what each man's religious affiliation was."[61] Of the 200 to 300 men the company usually kept on the Gold Coast, the number of church members fluctuated drastically. Reverend Meindert Hendricks, who lived at Elmina in the same years as Hemmersam, reported just thirty members.[62] At other times membership reached as low as twelve and, when employees were willing to profess a new faith, as high as seventy. Reverend Bartholomeus IJsebout won over so many Catholics and Lutherans in his weekly, voluntary catechization meetings, he was able to organize a consistory and convince Calvinists in nearby Danish and English forts to celebrate the Lord's Supper with him at Elmina. The church had never "bloomed and flowered" as it did under his supervision, he boasted.[63]

The personalities and enthusiasm of individual ministers like IJsebout probably help explain the fluctuating number of members in Africa. Instability had more to do with disease and mobility, though. Few employees remained in one place; most transferred among WIC outposts or just returned to the Netherlands at intervals. Many also died, including ministers and *ziekentroosters*, struck down by malaria and yellow fever, immobilized by the infamous "Guinea worm," which entered the body in contaminated drinking water and grew to about a meter, usually emerging through the skin of the legs and

feet.[64] So common was the specter of death among European employees that Cornelis Jacobsen could write, with only some exaggeration, that *ziekentroosters* were more useful than ships in Africa. He was the schoolmaster at Fort Nassau during the tenure of a minister who was so worried about "land sickness" (malaria) that he, the minister, spent most of his time aboard one of the local, coastal vessels, neglecting his duties at the fort for weeks on end. In general, disease discouraged ministers from working in Africa, thinned congregations, and killed members.[65]

Reverend Benderius, the absentee minister mentioned above, could at least claim that he was a better example than Adriaen Louwerens, a *ziekentrooster* at Elmina who, ironically, got sick and killed himself. It was during Louwerens's third ailment in just seven months that General Jacob van der Wel reported the grisly scene:

> This afternoon at two o'clock the *fiscaal* came to me and informed me that the *ziekentrooster*, Adrian Lourens . . . had shut himself in his room and that various people had knocked, and tried to speak to him, fearing that some mishap had occurred. But he did not respond and would not open the door. Therefore the *fiscaal* asked if we might open it one way or another. I went with him, and having forced the door a bit, I saw that the *ziekentrooster* lay dead before it. After opening the window, we witnessed a sad and horrible spectacle, he having strangled himself on the door, wrapping his garter around his neck.[66]

Van der Wel wrote that the suicide came as a shock to everyone, for Louwerens had always behaved himself (the general continued) as a good Christian, ready with godly, comforting words for others, never showing the least sign of despair or weakness. Now an unsympathetic Van der Wel prayed that God would "cast such men from us in the future."[67]

However valuable their instructional role with the sick, clergy were mostly supposed to ignore the dead. Protestants and Catholics had disagreed vehemently on this issue during the Reformation, perhaps more than any other. Protestants had done away with last rites, burial rituals involving candles and crosses, funeral sermons, prayers to saints, and Masses for deceased loved ones because, they believed, no one on either side of the mortal divide could do anything for anyone on the other, and they felt that Catholic traditions smacked of superstition and idolatry. Under public pressure the Dutch brought back the occasional funeral sermon, but their funerals were still a shell of the pre-Reformation variety.[68] If WIC officials in West Africa felt any similar pressure from the Catholic population to hold more extravagant affairs there, extant sources don't show it. At Elmina they buried the dead beside the chapel on a

plot of land that was, like the chapel, used for general work purposes. The service took place in military fashion, with musket and cannon salvos, probably followed by a scripture or a few pious words from any clergy who weren't busy hiding or dying.[69]

Another problem for WIC clergy was the lack of interest and the outright challenge from bored, isolated employees who resented efforts to keep them from their few amusements: gambling, alcohol, and sex with indigenous women in the African homes and towns that surrounded European forts. Certain "pious persons" (probably some of his Calvinist supporters or consistory members) once warned IJsebout about "whoredoms" among the soldiers, and when he went to their quarters to rebuke them, they mocked him. After he complained to the local WIC general, they were punished severely; then, "to scare the others," the general sent the chief agitators to a smaller, even more isolated outpost—probably as much for their treatment of the minister as for their original transgression.[70] Secular officers were in a difficult position. They had to support the clergy, but they also worried about the needs of soldiers and tended to be more forgiving. One general defended his men from a minister's complaints, acknowledging that they led rough lives. They were clearly not church wardens, he joked, but they rarely committed wanton harm. Officers had to strike a balance between piety and popularity, with the clergy usually encouraging them to be more strict. They supported clergy by punishing soldiers for blatant misconduct, which was in their own interest, and by attending prayers and sermons and making their subordinates do the same. Some officers also served on the consistory.[71]

The consistory might have been a good tool for keeping order if more employees had belonged to the church. Only members were subject to church discipline, and the consistory probably, therefore, had little influence in African forts. Most of the time there weren't enough members to justify one in the first place. Represented then by the clergy, "the church" still helped maintain order and sustain WIC authority among the motley crew. There was a fine line between choices the company simply couldn't tolerate—insubordination, dereliction of duty, fighting, murder—and behaviors that were sometimes connected to them, like drunkenness and sexual sin. Either of the latter might lead to the former. Whether an officer tried to end these problems because he was most concerned about sin and the wrath of God or for more practical reasons, his interests and the interests of ecclesiastical leaders were often the same.[72]

Faith, power, and justice worked hand in hand. WIC punishments ranged from monetary fines and loss of alcohol for minor infractions, like missing the prayer, to harsh physical penalties for drunkenness and fighting. Lashings were

common, and some troublemakers were confined in a dark pit with little or no food and water. The WIC also utilized the infamous wooden horse in West Africa. When Thymen Jansz quarreled with and injured another soldier at Fort Nassau, he had to straddle "the horse"—a narrow, raised wooden plank—for two hours per day for two days, his hands bound and twenty-five-pound weights strapped to each foot. It was a cruel punishment because it could injure the genitals and dislocate the joints of the thighs and legs.[73] Like religious services, these punishments were public affairs, a warning to everyone to avoid trouble and do their duty. Regular prayers and sermons were a convenient time to remind soldiers about God's anger and their oaths to the company. Following the prayer an officer extracted promises from the whole assemblage to behave themselves that day and, after the sermon, he questioned anyone accused of misconduct. Similarly, the minister preached a sermon whenever one WIC commander replaced another, suggesting the divine origins of secular authority. "Suggesting" is perhaps the wrong word here because Reformed theologians never tried to hide their views on church-state relations and the duties of godly rulers.[74]

Fornication and adultery were among the clergy's biggest dilemmas because neither usually interfered with company business, which made them more difficult targets. Also complicating the situation, soldiers and officers both sometimes violated this particular stricture. Most men, including the most powerful, didn't have European wives in Africa. Occasionally they celebrated a marriage at Elmina, but weddings were just as rare as funerals were common. Some of the few marriages mentioned in the fort's journals were between soldiers and indigenous women and mulatto women of Portuguese-African descent. All other relations were forbidden. Given the mobile, transitory experience of most outsiders in Africa, even the sanctioned relationships probably didn't last.[75] IJsebout tried to end the "abominable sins of this place," as he put it, by asking the directors to send the wives of married men and single, marriageable women for everyone else. Though his commander supported his campaign, nothing came of it. His successor, Abraham Oudewater, confirmed IJsebout's assessment and complained that even some church members had "close friendships and peculiar associations" with African women.[76]

The story of Maritgen Jans (also known as David Jansz) highlights the lack of Christian marriage and western society in general in Africa. According to the seventeenth-century doctor and historian Nicolaes van Wassenaer, at the age of seventeen Jans donned men's clothing, cut her hair, and adopted the name "David" because she saw no other way to make a living. Then she signed on with the WIC and sailed to Fort Nassau. Well-liked and helpful, particularly with the sick, she avoided detection, Van Wassenaer wrote, by bribing

her bunkmate and hiding her body. When the soldiers went to the river to bathe, she told them that she couldn't swim, and she washed near the shore in her clothes. Van Wassenaer believed that her heavy drinking and regular visits to "a beautiful black woman" were part of the ruse, an effort to blend in with the other soldiers. Another possible explanation is that Maritgen Jans preferred both liquor and women.[77]

Her work with the sick betrayed her in the end, destroying the disguise and forcing her eventually to leave Africa. When Jans fell ill two months after her arrival, she ended up in the infirmary with all the other patients. She still avoided exposure for a time by refusing to change her clothes. But she was too weak to do it herself in the dark of night, and when others finally insisted, she had no choice. Van Wassenaer wrote in his dry, clinical style that "she revealed her Breasts, over which everyone stood wondering, finding beyond a doubt a Young Maid in their presence." Word of the incident spread quickly through the fort, and when someone told Adriaen Cornelisz, the local commander, that "David Jansz was found to be a woman," he immediately assumed the role of the concerned father. He arranged private quarters for Maritgen and, not knowing what else to do with her, began making plans for a wedding with a still-to-be-determined husband. He gave her dresses, a gold necklace, and other gifts "to show her off, so that someone might get the urge to marry her." Before she was fully recovered he allowed "the most pious" suitors to visit and converse with her at her bedside. "Wherever there is only one white Woman," Cornelisz purportedly declared, "there one finds no ugly or bad white Women."[78]

The wedding of Maritgen Jans and Jacques le Fievre, WIC *fiscaal*, was better attended and more grand than they could have hoped, had they met and married in Europe. In accordance with Dutch law, the couple announced their wedding banns three successive Sundays before the ceremony. On the third Sunday the officers, merchants, soldiers, and sailors gathered from all around to watch the *ziekentrooster* Johannes Mercator perform the marriage rite. Everyone "took great pleasure" in the affair, Van Wassenaer claimed, "for such a thing had never happened there before, and it would possibly never happen there again." The group feasted and socialized for three days, celebrating "as if they were at a King's Wedding." But the merriment didn't last, and not just because General Cornelisz finally made them get back to work. He also made Jans return to Holland when her new husband died of an unspecified illness a few months later.[79]

Africa was only like America in that the WIC had claims, interests, and personnel in both places. Beyond those broad generalities, the parallels and colonial possibilities diminished rapidly. Neither the Dutch, English, or French had

any serious missions and ecclesiastical presence in West Africa in the period, nor would Europeans obtain one until the Industrial Revolution gave them the medicines and tools to exercise greater control. The *ziekentrooster* and poet Jacob Steendam, who lived in Africa for most of the 1640s, wrote that in "wormy old Guinea," Europeans were like Israel in Egypt, "many hundreds of miles from home." Steendam described himself as an exile, a traveler in a "Strange land," a shepherd wandering far from his own field. Africa was a place for Dutch "Strongholds and Castles," not Dutch cities, a place where God had planted "Our Trade," not society.[80] At times he hoped that it could be more, writing that Africa was a corner of "God's Vineyard." But he decided that it was a lousy vineyard for his purposes. The poisons of disease and sin ruined the soil. The first rotted the body, the second corrupted the soul. Africa was "contrary to our nature," he insisted. "There Christ's true church / Has neither place nor bed," meaning flowerbed.[81]

Using the same metaphor, Reverend Hendricks claimed that among the few fruits of his labor—the "fruits of Guinea"—was the worm sprouting in his foot as he prepared to leave. IJsebout also wrote about the worms that were "gnawing and eating [his] living body," concluding that he would never thrive in Africa: "I am as meager as a stick."[82] If the clergy could not thrive, if they died and even took their own lives, their church could not take root either. In Dutch forts it never grew beyond the limited, half-formed customs of WIC ships and military companies. The number of church members rose and fell, sometimes celebrating the Lord's Supper and forming consistories, always passing or scattering and forcing ministers to start the planting anew.