

## LANGE HINNERK AND HIS FOLK

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A fairly complete record is available in the state archives in Aurich and in Groningen, as well as in published materials of the early 1740's which makes it possible to see the environment, the life, and the activities of Hinrich Jansen, a religious leader in Freepsum, East Frisia, in perspective. While Hinrich Jansen is by no means a stranger to those interested in the religious history of East Frisia and the Netherlands, new interpretations can be made about the pietistically oriented revitalization movement of this tall and handsome charismatic leader and the relationship of this movement to both the established Reformed Church of the day and to the secular authorities. A longer version of this paper which was presented at the meetings of the Canadian Association for the Advancement of Netherlandic Studies in London, Ontario, in 1978 has been published in the July 1981 issue of Nederlands Theologisch Tijdschrift. The shorter version here presented hopes to point out some of the major findings and to provide a summary for readers who may not have access to the longer version.

The Weihnachtsflut and its Aftermath

The career of Hinrich Jansen, the Freepsum farmer, becomes meaningful only if it is seen within the context of the disastrous Weihnachtsflut and of the events following the catastrophe of 1717. The flood continued to have reverberations on regional economics for three decades or more. The rebuilding of the dikes, itself, took only six years, but the debts the farmers acquired through having to replace their livestock and other goods, and to provide for their daily needs in the bad years when no crops could be raised on the salt-drenched soils, were great.<sup>1</sup> Even a greater hardship proved to be the exorbitant dike and drainage assessments which the farmers had to pay for years to cover the costs accrued in making the land arable again. Between the years 1717 and 1750, many farmers were reduced to pauperism.

In 1727, soon after the dikes were rebuilt, another misfortune occurred. This was civil war in East Frisia, the Appelkrieg.<sup>2</sup> Loyalties were divided between those faithful to the Luthern Count of East Frisia, Georg Albrecht, and the Calvinist aristocrat, Heinrich Bernhard von dem Appelle, of Gross-Midlum a village in the Krummhörn, the area north of Emden in western East Frisia. While most of the Krummhörn farmers supported von dem Appelle, all suffered financial losses because of the

war, just when many fields were beginning to produce a crop again. Tensions remained high between the two groups and, although winner, the count was powerless and could not turn his renitent Krummhörn farmers into loyal subjects again.

A third factor, minor in comparison with the other two, was the unusual weather conditions in East Frisia in 1739-1740.<sup>3</sup> In 1739 the grain harvest was poor. During the winter of 1739-1740 many cattle perished in the stables of hunger. After two bad seasons the farmers seem to have been exceedingly anxious about the prospects of the third. Anxieties were high. Under such conditions people are prone to turn to a leader who appears to have special links with the supernatural. Hinrich Jansen appears to have filled this need.

#### Conditions in Freepsum

In addition to the general situation outline above which pertained to the entire Krummhörn, some more local events applied specifically to the Reformed community of Freepsum during the years 1717-1741 when Hinrich Jansen was formulating his religion.

The behavior of the Freepsum clergy was such that many members of the community found it difficult, if not impossible,

to see the clergy as a role model to be emulated.<sup>4</sup> Lambertus Swarte, pastor between 1718 and 1725, was removed from office because of fleischlicher Vergehen (adultery or rape). Walrich Reining, his successor, was an alcoholic and because of slandering involved in court cases. Jansen was among the parishioners who expressed a dissatisfaction with this pastor.<sup>5</sup> No complaints seem to have been lodged against Reining's successor, Johann Jacob Munnig (1733-1740), an older man who perhaps chose to allow matters to follow their natural course in the community. He died in office.<sup>6</sup> Choosing a successor for Munnig brought friction into the community, as two factions existed. One favored Theodorus Weerman, the other-a smaller group of which Jansen was a member - did not.<sup>7</sup> Weerman was invited as pastor. After he arrived, ecclesiastical action in Freepsum and personal attacks against Jansen increased in intensity.

In addition, the Freepsum church experienced fiscal problems<sup>8</sup> which contributed to a weakening of community solidarity. The church appears to have become unusable following the flood of 1717, and the pastor was forced to make his rounds to the dispersed farms and there to conduct services to which only the closest neighbors could attend.

Although the entire Krummhörn was experiencing harsh times following the Christmas Eve Flood of 1717, we see that Freepsum

had additional problems. It is in settings such as this that religious movements arise. They represent dissatisfaction with existing conditions and suggest ways of providing relief for the distraught and disillusioned individual by suggesting relief from these wrongs.<sup>9</sup> For Hinrich Jansen this appears to have begun to take shape in 1730 or 1731, because the former year is the last time his name is recorded in the Freepsum church books.<sup>10</sup> If children were born to him and his wife after this date, the couple refused to allow them to be baptized.

#### Hinrich Jansen, the Man

As closely as can be determined, Hinrich Jansen was born around 1685, possibly of Lutheran parents.<sup>11</sup> By 1724 he was in Gross-Midlum attached to the von dem Appelle estate.<sup>12</sup> In that year he made the successful bid on the lease (1725-1730) of the Grashaus Coldeweer in Freepsum, one of the count's many domains. By early January 1727, Jansen was already in arrears on the payment of his taxes,<sup>13</sup> but this was paid by June. In 1729 he was behind in the payment of his rent. He wrote a letter to the count in polished High German expressing his inability to pay both taxes and rent on a farm which apparently had yet to produce a crop following the flood. By December 1731, Jansen was put in custody for non-payment of his bills.<sup>14</sup>

Soon he had escaped from prison, but his property was sold at public auction to cover his debts.

By 1733 a new leaser for Coldeweer had been found. This man was freed from the responsibility of having to pay diking and drainage assessments. Meanwhile, at the age of 47 or 48, Jansen returned to Freepsum to work an unidentified farm. Nevertheless, he does not appear among the village Interessenten.<sup>15</sup> By 1735 Coldeweer was leased to yet another person Hinrich Hansen, who unlike his predecessors became a successful farmer, Jansen being now virtually penniless. The two men were and remained enemies. As strongly as Hansen supported Pastor Weerman, Jansen reproached him.

If conditions were bad on the East Frisian Marsh, they were worse in Freepsum but disasterous for Jansen. By 1740 his religious movement was well underway, to which Weerman and Hansen were leading opponents.<sup>16</sup> There were numerous other persons in near-by villages, moreover, who -- feeling that the world did not treat them correctly -- had become Jansen's followers and attended the pietistically oriented house assemblies which he called. Collectively his followers became known as the Lange-Hinnerks-Volk.

The Lange-Hinnerks-Volk and Their Activities

By 1733-1734, if not earlier, Jansen began to hold conventicles. Pastor Hessling, who died in 1734, makes reference to the house assemblies Jansen held in Grimersum.<sup>17</sup> Hessling disliked these conventicles because they advocated the collective ownership of property. He was also disturbed because of the rumors he had heard of Jansen having committed adultery.

Other Krummhörn clergy, Garbrands of Manslagt and Eilshemius of Uttum, supported Jansen's house meetings, suggesting not only that they involved edifying discussion of the Bible but also that the character of those who attended was above reproach.<sup>18</sup>

Reports came to the authorities that a woman who attended Jansen's meetings had become mentally ill because of it. Pastor van Santen of Grimersum said, however, that he knew of a case in which a woman gave up her suicidal tendencies because she attended these conventicles.

By 1739, Emden's Calvinist church fathers became concerned about the impact Jansen was having in their parishes.<sup>19</sup> The clergy were asked to make visits to those who attended Jansen's meetings and to try to get these persons back into the fold. Among the most frequently mentioned was a Peter Diedemann, Jansen's second in command, who worked as a cobbler in the city of Emden.

In some villages of the Krummhörn Jansen's followers had an even greater impact in their communities than they did in Emden. His followers attended services in the community church only to create disorder. They interrupted the clergy during the sermons, prayers and the administration of the sacraments with statements like "Lier, you are damned," or "You present no truth" and then would leave the church in a noisy huff.<sup>20</sup> Jansen had come to be seen by his followers, numbering in the hundreds, as a special messenger of God, and because of his prophecies as a reformer.

The Consistory of Emden called him before them to write a statement of his beliefs. This he did in his Annotatien, a document written in Dutch of some sixteen hand written pages, each passage documented with appropriate Bible verses.<sup>21</sup>

Some of the main points of Jansen's beliefs are summarized as the following:<sup>22</sup>

- 1) What the Bible tells is the imagination of man. The Bible tells things not as they are but as man imagines them to be.
- 2) God is the life and the single power of all creation. All things come through him and must return to him.
- 3) The Trinity does not exist. Christ is only a saint, not the spiritual son of God. It is absurd to say that the Holy Ghost is the third part of the devine being.



- 4) Christ has not existed since the beginning of the world but only since the time he was conceived by Mary.
- 5) Everything which happens, both good and bad, is dependent upon God's wishes and actions.
- 6) Man has no free will. Everything man does is really done by God himself through the human medium. If a man commits murder, it is really God doing it. Man only imagines that he himself performs the act.
- 7) Good angels are the souls of persons who were blessed before they died: devils are only the souls of bad persons.
- 8) Sins and the like consist only in that man imagines that he has sinned and fails to recognize that the evil act has come from God.
- 9) If a believer falls into sin, it is God working in him to make the sinner more modest.
- 10) Prayer, the sacraments, religious orders, and all religious institutions are useless things.
- 11) The only religious truth is that which comes through divine inspiration. God selects certain people to act through. These are believers and children of God and are the ones who teach and believe only like Hinrich Jansen.
- 12) It is useless and a hypocrisy to ask for revelation and grace before God saves one.
- 13) The Protestant church is undergoing a very dark period. It needs a reformation, for the Babylonian hore sits upon the throne.
- 14) All heathens and Jews will eventually be saved. In the future there will be no godless persons.
- 15) The believers and followers of Hinrich Jansen will take control within a short time, and the clergy and others who oppose him will be flailed to death.

Following the presentation of the Annotatien, Jansen was again called before the Consistory, and attempts were made to get him to recant. It was to no avail ! In despair the Consistory turned to Carl Edzard, Count of East Frisia. On May 10, 1740, the count appointed Pastor Weerman of Freepsum to instruct Jansen on the principles of acceptable Christianity, and to report back the results.<sup>23</sup>

As Weerman met with no success, and as Jansen refused to change his views when questioned by a special commission established at the capital in Aurich, the count on August 31, 1740, presented a judgment that Jansen must leave East Frisia within eight days and never return.<sup>24</sup> Jansen, in turn, declared that he would leave only if his Heavenly Father revealed this to him. Jansen also prophesied that within four years East Frisia would become a waste land and that "Baal's followers" (all those who were not Jansen's followers) would be beheaded.<sup>25</sup>

Within a short time Jansen was escorted to the Knock placed in a small boat to cross the Dollart - the bay which separates Germany from Holland - to Termunten. Before long, however, Jansen was back, carrying the message that he had received a prophecy which told him to come home.<sup>26</sup>

In November 1740 the authorities captured Jansen at Middelste-  
wehr, and he was again exiled to Groningen. Jansen now claimed  
that only 1 1/2 years remained before "it would end in fire and  
murder."<sup>27</sup>

By February of the next year Jansen was again in Freepsum. In  
March he was brought to Aurich and put in prison. The count now  
formulated a plan to guarantee that Jansen would never return.  
He wrote a letter to the authorities in Groningen to enquire as  
to the cost of trial and detention there.<sup>28</sup> The return report  
must have been satisfactory, because in April the count

sent a directive to the administrators in Amt Emden,  
the administrative district of which Freepsum is a part, saying  
that Jansen's property was to be seized and auctioned off to  
pay for costs resulting from his capture and banishment.<sup>29</sup>

By the summer of 1741, Jansen had been escorted to Groningen.  
On August 26, 1741, he was imprisoned at Jacobus Scholten's  
Tughthuis in the city of Groningen.<sup>30</sup> Jansen's second in  
command, the cobbler Peter Diedemann of Emden, had already  
been exiled to Groningen in April, 1741. Diedemann maintained  
his freedom in rural Groningen for about ten months propagating  
his "Spinozistic and other pernicious beliefs" at Wildervank.<sup>31</sup>

On January 12, 1742, Diedemann appeared on trial at Zuidbroek in the Oldambt and, too, was sentenced to prison.

Jansen died in the Groningen prison in 1751. His disciple died there in 1757.

### The Decline of the Movement in East Frisia

With the two leaders effectively removed from East Frisia, the followers of Jansen became less disruptive to the traditional religious life of the communities in which they lived. Nevertheless, the movement continued to simmer in the Krummhörn for a number of years, especially in the former Uckowallist strongholds of Grimersum and Wirdum. In one particularly well-documented case, two of the followers of Jansen were sons of an Uckowallist who had converted to the Reformed church in 1696 upon marrying a woman of the Calvinist faith. In 1744 one of these young men experienced an unusual death by lightning. His brother, also a Jansen follower, who formerly had not permitted his children to be baptized, saw this as a sign of God and took a change of heart. When his next child was born a few months later, the parents not only allowed the infant to be baptized, but in church the father publically recanted his former doctrinal errors.<sup>32</sup>

In the following years the movement continued to lose momentum. Nevertheless, a 1779 publication carried the following observation about the Lange-Hinnerks-Volk:<sup>33</sup>

There was a certain Hinrich, a farmer.... who founded a sect, of which now and then a few families still adhere --- partially openly, partially secretly, but now in general are Spinozists and Pantheists.

When Bartels, the general superintendent of the East Frisian church, sent letters to Krummhorn clergymen in 1889 to determine what, if anything, remained of the Lange-Hinnerks-Volk, he received replies that not only did some of the oldest parishioners remember hearing about them from grandparents, but also that the spirit of the movement still remained in some farm families.<sup>34</sup>

## Notes

- 1 Cf. Gerhard Ohling, "Kulturgeschichte des Krummhörn," In Jannes Ohling, ed., Die Acht und ihresieben Siele (Pewsum: Selbstverlag [I, Entwässerungsverband Emden, Sitz Pewsum], 1963), pp. 75-82.
- 2 Cf. Heinrich Schmidt, Politische Geschichte Ostfrieslands (Leer: Gerhard Rautenberg, 1975 [Volume V of Ostfriesland im Schutze des Deiches]), pp. 318 ff.
- 3 Cf. Tileman Dothias Wiarda, Ostfriesische Geschichte [Band VIII] (Aurich: August Friedrich Winter, 1798), p. 96.
- 4 Cf. Niedersächsisches Staatsarchiv in Aurich, Dep. LIII, Bartels Nr. 51 [Sammelband betr. Lange Hinderk, R. Bluhm, Ecclesiastica, gedruckte Miscellen].
- 5 Ibid. Cf. Peter Friedrich Reershemius, Ostfriesländisches Prediger-Denkmal ... reformirten Prediger (Aurich: 1774), p. 75.
- 6 Reershemius, pp. 75 and 209.
- 7 Bartels, Dep LIII Nr. 51.
- 8 Cf. Niedersächsisches Staatsarchiv in Aurich. Dep. LIII, Bartels Nr. 8 [Handschriftliche Materialien u. Zusammenstellung zur ostfr. Kirchengeschichte].
- 9 Anthony Wallace, Religion: An Anthropological View (New York: Random House, 1966), p. 34.

- 10 Archive of the Parish of Freepsum, Kirchenbuch von Freepsum 1713 - pp. 7, 9.
- 11 Cf. Anon. "Summarische Nachricht von einer in Ostfriesland entstandenen Rotte neuer Schwärmer und Libertiner," in Acta Historico-Ecclesiastica, Vol. 5:2 (1740), p. 14.
- 12 Niedersächsisches Staatsarchiv in Aurich, Rep. 28, Nr. 239a Item 84. [Coldewehr 1724-1742].
- 13 Ibid., item 20.
- 14 Ibid., item 53.
- 15 Niedersächsisches Staatsarchiv in Aurich, Rep 28, Nr. 3508. [Meentebuch von Freepsum 1731-1805]. The Interessenten were men who, because of their property or wealth, participated in decision making activities pertaining to the community. They occupied village and church positions such as that of mayor, church warden and overseer to the poor and selected the pastor and the schoolmaster.
- 16 General superintendent Bartels, "Mitteilungen zur Geschichte des Pietismus in Ostfriesland und den benachbarten Landschaften," in Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte Vol. 5 (1882), p. 285.
- 17 Bartels, Dep. LIII Nr. 51.
- 18 Ibid.
- 19 Archive of the Parish of the Reformed Church of Emden (Neue Kirche). Kirchenratsprotokolle der ref. Kirche Emden. 1738-1740, p. 104a.
- 20 Anon. "Fortsetzung des Berichts von der in Ostfriesland unlängst entstandenen Rotte neuer Schwärmer und Libertiner," in Acta Historico-Ecclesiastica Vol. 5:6 (1741), p. 216.

- 21 Two copies are still in existence. They are at the Niedersächsisches Staatsarchiv in Aurich: Dep LIII, Bartels Nr. 51 and in the Privatarchiv von Stiekelkamp.
- 22 Cf. also Menno Smid, Ostfriesische Kirchengeschichte. Weener: H. Risius, 1974 [Volume VI of Ostfriesland im Schutze des Deiches], p. 378f.
- 23 Niedersächsisches Staatsarchiv in Aurich Rep. 28, Nr. 3500 [Ender Amtsprotokolle 1738-1752], p. 132.
- 24 Ibid., p. 152.
- 25 Acta Historico-Ecclesiastica Vol 5:2 (1740), p. 23.
- 26 Acta Historico-Ecclesiastica Vol 5:6 (1741), p. 213.
- 27 Niedersächsisches Staatsarchiv in Aurich, Rep. 28, Nr. 3627, Vol. III [Greetsieler Amtsprotokolle], p. 581.
- 28 Op. cit. Ender Amtsprotokolle, p. 183.
- 29 Ibid., p. 185.
- 30 Staatsarchiv Groningen, Archieven Hoge Justitie Kamer, Inv. Nr. 2 F2 Registratie boeken van opgenomen tuchtelingen... 1670-1814, p. 57.
- 31 Staatsarchiv Groningen, Rechterlijke Archieven, Nr. Vss Crimineel Prothocol van het Oldambt 1719-1768, p. 124.<sup>2</sup>
- 32 Anon. "Fegter III, des Stammes Geerdes, aus Wirdumer Neuland in Ostfriesland," in Deutsches Geschlechterbuch Vol. 59 (1928) p. 47, footnote 24. Cf. also Bartels, op. cit. 1882, p. 284.
- 33 Anon. Ueber den Religionszustand in den Preussischen Staaten seit der Regierung Friedrichs des Grossen. Vol 4 (1779).
- 34 Dep LIII, Bartels, Nr. 8.