University of Alberta

"That Old Dutch Disease"
The Roots of Dutch Calvinist Education in Alberta

by

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ABSTRACT

In North America there are some 400 schools with roots in orthodox Dutch Calvinism. Canada is home to approximately 100 of these schools with nearly one third of these in Alberta. The purpose of this study is to provide a history of the early roots of Alberta's Dutch Calvinist schools and to explore the motivation for their establishment.

The motivation for the establishment of Dutch Calvinist schools lies in the history of the orthodox Calvinists community in the Netherlands. During the 19th century this community struggled to maintain the doctrinal purity of their Calvinist faith against liberalizing pressures of two 18th century revolutions --the Enlightenment and the French Revolution.

The orthodox Calvinist struggle against these revolutionary forces, under the leadership of Abraham Kuyper and his "anti-revolutionary" movement, gave an identity to orthodox Calvinists. In Dutch historiography the struggle is referred to as the *schoolstrijd*, a struggle over the right of parents to operate their own Christian schools that reflected their orthodox Calvinism rooted in the 16th century. The *schoolstrijd* created within the orthodox Calvinist mind a mythology and a sense of group identity. Both the myth and identity were transported to Canada resulting in the establishment of over two dozen Dutch Calvinist Christian schools in Alberta.

To

my wife Barbara, with all my love,

for her love, encouragement and support of my educational adventures.

my parents, Anne and Gerard Prinsen

who always said I could

Ps. 32:8

Michelle, Kevin, Vicki, Ruby

Deo gratias

Acknowledgments

There are many people whose individual stories have helped bring the story of Alberta's Dutch Calvinist schools to life. I thank all who shared their time and memories. Not all the stories appear in the text but the spirit of all the stories contributed to the narrative. (Names of all those who contributed stories are in the bibliography.) I wish to give particular recognition to Wilma Bouma of New Westminster, British Columbia, Alida Keegstra of Lacombe, Alberta, and Harry and Fokie Siebenga of Lacombe, Alberta. Their stories were of particular significance to the narrative. Rev. Tymen Hofman of Grand Rapids, Michigan, was also particularly generous with his insights and his material. My wife Barbara and I remember fondly bumping into him at Calvin College and being invited to his home.

I wish to acknowledge the help and support of my co-advisors at the University of Alberta. Dr. H. Hodysh and Dr. D. Wangler provided constructive advice as well as support and encouragement for this project. Both are examples of teachers who make learning the wonderful experience that it is. Thanks also to the numerous individuals at Calvin College in Grand Rapid, Michigan, and to Dan Vander Ark at Christian Schools International in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Dan provided access to archival material and read relevant chapters of my manuscript providing helpful insights. Other readers of selected material include Dr. J. Hiemstra, of The King's University College, Edmonton, Alberta and Henry Heinan of Lethbridge, Alberta. I also acknowledge the generous access granted me to their archives by the school boards of Edmonton, Lacombe and Lethbridge Christian schools.

Finally a thank-you to my wife Barbara Prinsen for her interest and help in archival searches, to Laurie Zylstra, who once again unscrambled my hand writing into legible text and did so with patients and professionalism.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

According to 1998 government statistics, [1] there are officially 213 private schools in Alberta serving the educational needs of 20,327 students. The 213 private schools are divided into two categories, registered and accredited. Registered schools are on the periphery of the private school community. They choose not to receive government funding and therefore do not have to hire certified teachers and do not have to teach the Alberta Program of Studies. There are only 26 registered private schools in Alberta, mostly in conservative Mennonite communities. Accredited private schools make up the bulk of the private school community. Accredited schools meet the same standards as public schools hiring only certified teachers, following the Alberta Program of Studies and requiring students to write provincial achievement and diploma exams. Accredited schools receive 60% of the basic instructional grant.

Of the 176 accredited private schools in Alberta, 31 have their roots in the post-war Dutch Calvinist immigrant community. These schools teach approximately five thousand students or 25% of the total number of students attending private schools

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[1] Alberta Education (1998) *Setting a New Framework.* Report of the Private Schools Task Force.

in Alberta.

Purpose

The purpose of this research is to document the history of the Dutch Calvinist schools in Alberta. Within this general purpose lie two important secondary purposes. First is the need to record the stories of the founders of the schools. These pioneers are in their senior years and there is little time left to record their stories. As is so often the case, after our heritage is allowed to disappear we despair its loss. The heritage represented in the stories of the founders of Dutch Calvinist schools needs to be preserved as part of the larger heritage of the history of Alberta.

Second, the research project explored the motives of the Dutch Calvinist community for establishing their own school. Public schools in Alberta in the 1940s and 1950s reflected the dominant Christian ethic of Canadian society, yet these Dutch immigrant farmers and tradesmen eschewed free public education and chose willingly to spend a significant part of their income on tuition and capital costs to ensure their children had a "Christian education" in their own neo-Calvinist oriented schools. Why? Was the motive deeply felt religious calling;

or, was the motivation more complex, reflecting a combination of ethnicity and religiosity?

The statistics of the Dutch Calvinist community provide interesting contrasts. In the Netherlands, at the time of the post war immigration to Canada, the orthodox Calvinist community made up only 10% of the population yet made up 41% of the Dutch immigrants. Bergen noted that "the most phenomenal growth in private schools has occurred through the efforts of the Orthodox [Calvinist] Christian Reformed Church."[2] The significant role played by Dutch Calvinists in the growth and development of private schools is further demonstrated by Digout's case study of the political process leading to partial government funding of private schools in 1967.

Digout's study says that during the process of lobbying the provincial government for private school funding there was evidence of strong Dutch Calvinist

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Bergen, John (1980). *Private Schools in Alberta: A Report to the Task Force on Private Schools for the Alberta Schools Trustee's Association,* Edmonton: Alberta School Trustees Association.

leadership.[3] Three organizations strongly influenced the successful lobby efforts for funding all with Dutch Calvinist connections: the Association for Private Schools and Colleges in Alberta, an organization in which the Dutch Calvinist community has consistently held leadership roles; The Christian Action Foundation, an organization with Dutch Calvinist roots; The Societies for Christian Education, an ad hoc group of Dutch Calvinist school societies. The impact the Dutch Calvinist community has had on the private school movement in Alberta, its attempts to create a unique approach to education, and the community's apparently seamless assimilation into Canadian society while maintaining their 19th century neo-Calvinist tradition make the history of the Dutch Calvinist school movement an intriguing topic for scholarly research.

Limitations and Delimitations

Some 400 schools in North America have Dutch Calvinist roots, approximately 100 in Canada. In Alberta, 31 private schools and one public school have roots in the Dutch Calvinist community. This study was focused on the first four Alberta schools; Lacombe Christian School, established in 1945; Edmonton

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Digout, Stanislaus (1969). *Public Aid for Private Schools: The Making of a Decision*, M. Ed. Thesis, University of Alberta.

Christian School, established in 1949; Immanuel Christian School in Lethbridge, established in 1962; and Calgary Christian School established in 1963.

A study of the origins of Dutch Calvinist schools in Lacombe and Edmonton provides a rural and urban study respectively. Including Lethbridge in the study has provided a bridge to explore a unique feature of Dutch Calvinism -- the propensity to schism. Schisms within the Calvinist community are relatively common and have impacted the schools of the Dutch Calvinist community in Alberta. About a half dozen Dutch Calvinist schools lie on the periphery of the Dutch Calvinist school movement. These peripheral schools grew out of ultra-orthodox Calvinist communities which in turn grew out of schisms -- the Canadian Reformed and the Netherlands Reformed churches. The origins of the Calgary Christian school provided a picture of a school that opened under a cloud of controversy.

The first four Dutch Calvinist schools that were the focus of the study served as templates for other Calvinist communities in Alberta as they organized their schools. Christian Reformed pastors from Edmonton, Lacombe and Lethbridge reached out to neighbouring communities in Leduc, Red Deer and Taber,

encouraging the establishment of Calvinist schools in those communities. Many church leaders saw the establishment of a Christian school as fulfilment of the baptismal promise to "instruct these children, as soon as they are able to understand, in the aforesaid doctrines [the Old and New Testaments]."

This study has focused on the formative years 1945 to 1967, the year partial funding was granted to private schools. The concluding chapter assesses the current status of the Dutch Calvinist schools and their prospects for the future.

Definition of Terms

The study has focused the history of a particular private school community in Alberta. The terms "private" and "independent" are used interchangeably in Alberta when referring to schools outside the publicly supported system, but each term can have quite a different connotation making the most accurate terminology difficult to ascertain. The organization representing most private schools in Alberta, the Association of Independent Schools and Colleges in Alberta, (AISCA), dropped the term "private" from its name in favour of what was perceived to be a less elitist sounding term "independent." Yet, at the time AISCA was changing its name, Gossage in her history of elitist private schools in Canada,

said that "the kind of schools most people think of as 'private schools' are more properly known as 'independent schools' . . . They are the schools that for generations have been regarded in the public mind as the establishment, home of the . . . infamous Old Boy Network."[4] The confusion of terms and the varying perceptions these terms raise in the mind of the general public is often an issue of debate among private school supporters. However, for the sake of clarity and consistency this thesis has used the term "private school"-- the term used by government and the term used in the School Act.

There are many types of Christian schools in Alberta, ranging from the publicly funded Roman Catholic schools to the private registered schools of the Mennonite Communities who refuse public money. Dutch Calvinists traditionally refer to their schools simply as *"the Christian Schools,"* rarely, if ever, referring to them as Calvinist schools. The use of the descriptive phrase "Christian school" has its origins in the School Struggle of the 19th Century in the Netherlands. This research usually refers to the schools as *Calvinist* schools rather than Christian schools to avoid a perception of presumptuousness or an appearance suggesting

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[4] Gossage, Carolyn (1977). *A Question of Privilege: Canada's Independent Schools,* Toronto: P. Martin Associates. p.1.

that Calvinist Christian schools somehow set the standard for what a Christian school should be. When the term Christian school has been used, it was used for the sake of narrative consistency.

The terms *Calvinist* and *Reformed* are often used interchangeably, although Reformed has a more ecclesiastical connotation. *Neo-Calvinist* refers to the followers of the Dutch leader Abraham Kuyper.

Several Dutch terms need to be defined. *Afscheiding* translates as "separation" or "breaking away," *Reveil* translates as revival, *Doleantie* (actually a Latin word) translates as "mourning, grieving, dissenting." These terms still have an emotional impact in the Dutch Calvinist community especially among the older postwar Dutch immigrants. For that reason, and because various scholars use those terms in the Dutch, this study will use the Dutch terms rather than the English translations.

In identifying the Reformed Church in the Netherlands two words are used

Gereformeerde [5] and *Hervormde*. Both words translate into English simply as "Reformed." However, in Dutch both words have quite different connotations. The word *Kerk* is Dutch for Church. In the Netherlands the *Hervormde Kerk* was the State Church, the church from which the *Gereformeerde Kerk* emerged. The *Gereformeerde Kerk* is generally equated with the Christian Reformed Church. It is the "home church" of most neo-Calvinists.

Although it would take more than the scope of this paper to define fully, and involves a risk of oversimplification, *Calvinist* Christian schools are understood in contrast to *Evangelical* Christian schools. Mark Noll, in his book *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*, in characterizing Evangelicalism states

> the British historian David Bebbington has identified the key ingredients of Evangelicalism as conversionism (an emphasis of the "new birth" as a life changing experience), biblicism (a reliance on the Bible as ultimate religious authority), activism (a concern for sharing the faith), and crucicentrism (a focus on Christ's redeeming word on the cross) .[6]

Although Calvinists would agree with the theological sentiments stated above,

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Some translations use a more precise but awkward translation of Gereformeerde as "re-reformed".

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Noll, Mark (1995). *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind.* Grand Rapids M.: W.B. Eerdmans.

their schools, unlike many "evangelical" Christian schools, would not see "conversion" as a role for the school, a key feature of many evangelical schools. Conversion is the church's task an important distinction for Calvinists and their schools. As well, pietism -- a rather strict moral and legalistic code of conduct and dress -- often part of the culture of evangelical Christian schools, would not usually be part of Calvinist school culture. In fact, many members of evangelical churches have in the past seen Calvinist schools as being too "worldly" since Calvinist schools usually have no dress codes and behavioural codes tend to be less moralistic. A final distinction between Calvinist schools and evangelical schools is that, in theory at least, Calvinist schools are places where culture is "encountered." They are not places of isolation or of withdrawal from the world, something that one might expect to find in evangelical Christian schools.

Significance of Research

The significance of the proposed research is threefold. First, the Dutch Calvinist community has played a leading role in the development and growth of the private school movement in Alberta. As such, a history of that community becomes a significant part of a more comprehensive history of private schools in Alberta. The history of private schools in Alberta (or the lack thereof) is the second point.

In spite of the growth of private schools and of their perceived threat to public education, there is virtually no written history of private schools in Alberta. That private schools have played an important role in the development of education in Alberta is noted by one researcher who wrote that

> . . . private schools in Alberta have been more than just a "brick" in the educational wall of Alberta. They have been responsible for initiating and carrying on efforts in several educational sectors in the Province. It is clearly evident that private schools have roots in the educational history of Alberta which predates the establishment of public schools. Without the influence of private schools, it is probable that education in Alberta would not have advanced as it has. [7]

Yet the history of private schools is largely absent in educational historiography. Chad Gaffield in an article in *Acadiensis*[8] observed that "an understanding of schools which [operate] outside the established system would be an important contribution to a general appreciation of the history of education." This view was echoed by Jean Barman five years later. In an article in *Historical Studies in*

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Hop, Denis (1982). *The Development of Private Schools in Alberta,* M.A. thesis, University of Calgary.

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Gaffield, Chad (1986). "Back to School: Towards a New Agenda for the History of Education", *Acadiensis,* Vol 15, no. 2 (Spring 1986).

Education[9] reviewing a series of books dealing with private schools in various parts of the world, Barman noted that "only from time to time does private schooling receive scholarly attention." Barman hoped that "these [the reviewed books] approaches to private education and to its boundaries with the public system will presage greater interest by scholars." In fact, little has occurred to suggest any greater scholarly interest in private schools.

Finally, the history of Dutch Calvinist schools has a significance beyond the scholarly need to fill a neglected part of Canadian educational historiography. A history of Dutch Calvinist schools is a history of a community and, when any community neglects its history, the future for that community becomes uncertain. Without an appreciation of the rich and complex history of Calvinist schools, their uniqueness and the importance of their role in the educational community of Alberta, and despite all the theoretical writings on the uniqueness of Calvinist education, the Dutch Calvinist schools as a unique experiment in private schooling will disappear.

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Barman, Jean ed. (1995). *Children, Teachers and Schools in the History of British Columbia,* Calgary: Detselig Enterprises. p.

E. D. Hirsch argues that "only by accumulating shared symbols and the shared information that the symbols represent, can we learn to communicate effectively with one another."[10] It is the communal sharing of symbols that help give meaning to our activities and these symbols only have meaning if they are remembered and understood. The title of Steven Vryhof's Ph.D. thesis for the University of Chicago, *Between Memory and Vision: Reformed Christian Schooling in America*, makes the point well. We live between memory and vision, "the past is granted to us and impels us with memories . . . Vision too impels us, drawing us with hope into an otherwise unknown and fearful future."[11] VanBelle observes that the members of the Dutch Calvinist generation born and raised in Canada

> . . . seem to know very little about [their] history . . . Nor do they show a great deal of interest in the struggle of the Reformed in the Netherlands one hundred years ago . . . this knowledge of one's origins and pride in one's heritage [is] essential for a sense of purpose and direction, particularly among urbanites. Without such knowledge and pride . . . the desire to perpetuate the tradition will rapidly diminish.[12]

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Hirsch, E.D. (1987). *Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know.* Boston: Houghton Mifflin p. xvii.

11

Vryhof, Steven Craig (1994). *Between Memory and Vision Reformed Christian Schooling in America.* Ph.d. Dissertation, University of Chicago. p.

12

VanBelle, H.A. (1994). The History of the Reformed Dutch in Edmonton". In H. Brinks, (ed), *The Dutch and their Neighbours in Transition.* Grand Rapids: Calvin College Archives p. 29.

The past needs to be accessible to non-historians. American historian Herbert Gutman is quoted in an article in *Acadiensis* as observing that historians know much more about the past in the 1980's than they did in the 1960's but "the past is more inaccessible to non-historians than it was thirty or forty years ago."[13] A community's history is significant because it gives meaning and shape to the present and allows one to have a vision for the future.

Robert Bellah sums up the significance of the history of a community writing

> Communities, in the sense in which we are using the term, have a history - in an important sense they are constituted by their past - and for this reason we can speak of a real community as a "community of memory," one that does not forget its past. In order not to forget that past, a community is involved in retelling its story, its constitutive narrative, and in so doing, it offers examples of the men and women who have embodied and exemplified the meaning of the community. These stories of collective history and exemplary individuals are an important part of the tradition that is so central to a community of memory.[14]

Design of Study

1. Primary Sources

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Acadiensis Vol. XVI #2, Spring 87 p.107.

14

Bellah, Robert N. Et al (1985). *Habits of the Heart*. Berkeley , CA: University of California Press p.153.

Primary sources for the history of Dutch Calvinist schools in Alberta are scattered, ranging from Calvin College Heritage Centre in Grand Rapids, Michigan, to the archives in the basement of the First Christian Reformed Church in Edmonton. Edmonton Christian School has archival material which includes board minutes dating from 1945 as well as newsletters and annual reports. Lacombe Christian School has several "boxes" of archives, the earlier material written in Dutch with English translation available for many of the documents. The Christian school in Lethbridge has sent all its archival material to Calvin College's Heritage Centre where it is available for research.

Several institutions have published yearbooks for special anniversaries, Lacombe Christian School published a 50th anniversary yearbook, Edmonton Christian School a 40th anniversary yearbook and the First Christian Reformed Church a 75th anniversary yearbook. Each of these yearbooks contains reflections of people associated with the formative years of Calvinist schools and also a selection of reprinted documents.

Provincial Archives are an obvious source for material especially Alberta Education's Annual Reports. The Alberta Teachers' Association archives have

proved helpful in determining the evolving attitude of the ATA towards private schools in Alberta. AISCA does not have an archive but they have copies of briefs and promotional material dating from 1958 which helps establish the early context of private schools in Alberta.

Christian Schools International (CSI) in Grand Rapids, Michigan, the umbrella association for Calvinist schools in North America, has a complete archive that includes copies of speeches, published curricular material and textbooks, and all issues of their magazine, "Christian Home and School," dating from 1922. Statistical information is available through Statistics Canada. The directories of AISCA and CSI were also useful for statistical information.

2. Methodology

The methodology of the research consisted of basic documentary research and personal interviews. The basic research involved a review of relevant primary sources (see above). As well, extensive reading of relevant secondary material such as Dutch ethnic studies, histories of the Netherlands, and published material directly related to Dutch Calvinist schools, provided a necessary background. The research also reviewed numerous unpublished sources such as theses and papers

dealing with Calvinist schools. Interviews, subject to ethics review procedures, with selected individuals involved with the beginnings of the four schools focussed on in the study were an important primary source.

When attempting to articulate an approach in historical writing it is all too easy to become entangled in the many and ongoing debates within the historical profession over numerous issues not least of which is the debate over methodology. I believe that historical writing has significance when it narrates past events, as accurately as possible, using all the relevant information available, while attempting to provide an explanation for these events.

Narrative is story telling. As historian M.C. Lemon notes "we will not go far wrong in equating a 'narrative' with a 'story', so long as we are not immediately insistent that a 'story' is something with a beginning, middle, and end," some stories "are simply adjourned."[15]

John Tosh identifies three types of historical writing; narrative and descriptive writing, which are attempts at recreating the past, and analytical writing which

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Lemon, M.C. (1995). *The Discipline of History and Thought.* London, UK: Routledge Press p. 42.

attempts to interpret the past. Tosh provides an example of the historical community's antipathy towards narrative writing when he argues that "analytical complexity means that narrative is most unlikely to be the best vehicle for historical explanation."[16] This bias against narrative however has been increasingly challenged within the historical community. Lemon also identifies three forms of historical treatment – descriptive, analytical and narrative history, but argues strongly for the central role of narrative in historical writing. Lemon states that "both descriptive and analytical history fail to relate fully to the ordinary intimations of the world 'history' the notion of a story of changing events. The 'mode of treatment' this necessitates is the narrative approach."[17] Lemon notes the low repute narrative has within the historical community and notes the accusation that narrative is naive, that historians should seek explanation rather than be story tellers. However, Lemon concludes his argument for narrative by noting that historians in "the quest for what has become a veritable philosophers stone, namely, the historical explanation [reject] what stands before their eyes in both

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16

Tosh, John (1984), *The Pursuit of History*. New York: Longman Group. p. 117.

17

Lemon, op. cit. p. 38.

convention and logic -- namely, narrative explanation."[18]

Lawrence Stone called for a "return to narrative" in a 1979 article in *Past and Present*. This call was echoed by Bernard Bailyn. In the 1960's Bailyn's book, *Education in the Forming of American Society*, revolutionized the way history of education was to be written. In 1982 Bailyn again challenged the historical community by calling for a historiography reflecting a synthesis through narrative. In an article in *The American Historical Review* Bailyn challenged historians to

> write such essential narrative - dominated by a sense of movement through time, incorporating technical studies, and devoted to showing how the present was shaped by its emergence from a very different past.[19]

Much of the theoretical work on the use of narrative has come from the social sciences, especially psychology and sociology. Donald Polkinghorne in an article in *Representation and the Text Re-Framing the Narrative Voice* argues that in the area of "posts" -- including post modernism -- there should be a new interest in the use of narrative as a means of presenting "knowledge statements." He argues that

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Ibid p. 38.

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Bailyn, Bernard, "The Challenge of Modern Historiography", *American Historical Review*, Vol. LXXXVI Part I (February 1982).

"the property of knowledge has been reconsidered. Instead of a logical certainty, knowledge is understood as an agreement reached by a community of scholars."[20] Polkinghorne quotes Ricoeur (1989) and Bruner (1990) when he states that "the discourse form that is most appropriate for describing human action is narrative."[21] The thesis of Polkinghorne's book *Narrative, Knowing and the Human Sciences* is

> that narrative is a scheme by means of which human beings give meaning to their experience of temporality and personal actions. Narrative meaning functions to give form to the understanding of a purpose to life and to join everyday actions and events into episodic units. It provides a framework for understanding the past events of one's life and for planning future actions. It is the primary scheme by means of which human existence is rendered meaningful. Thus, the study of human beings by the human sciences needs to focus on the realm of meaning in general and on narrative meaning in particular[22]

John Hoffman in *Law, Freedom and Story* similarly argues for the role of narrative

> We understand ourselves through complex narratives composed of actual or imagined memories from our personal past or form the history of our community through story we keep telling ourselves

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Polkinghorne in Tiernay and Lincoln (1997). Representation and the Text: Reframing the Narrative Voice. Albany, New York: State University Press. p. 7.

21

Ibid p. 13.

22

Polkinghorne, Donald E. (1988). *Narrative Knowing and the Human Sciences*. Albany, New York State: University Press. p.11.

> who we are, and what we must do, what we may hope for, where we are going[23]

In the context of Calvinist schools, John Bolt's *The Christian Story and the Christian School* is a contemporary apologetic for Christian schools. He formulates his apology as narrative arguing "the idea of narrative provides a solution to many of the problems and dilemmas facing education in general and Christian education in particular."[24]

In this study, the narrative of events begins with the opening of Alberta's first private Dutch Calvinist school in Lacombe in 1945. Through the use of documents, the process of starting a private Calvinist based Christian school and the vision for that school are revealed. As the story of the opening of Lacombe Christian school unfolds, the question of "why" naturally arises in the narrative. Why would a group of Dutch immigrant farmers want their own school, a school independent of the public system? Public schools in rural Alberta in 1945 still

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Hoffman, John C. (1986). *Law, Freedom, and Story the Role of Narrative in Therapy, Society and Faith.* Waterloo, ON: Wilfred Laurier University Press. Pp. 66 & 67.

24

Bolt, John (1993). *The Christian Story and the Christian School.* Grand Rapids MI.: Christian Schools International p. 155.

had a largely Christian orientation.

To begin to answer the question of "why," using secondary sources, the narrative moves from rural 20th century Alberta to 19th century Netherlands. In this part of the story two organizing principles are introduced. First, I will argue that the neo-Calvinist century-long struggle in the Netherlands for their "own" schools was a struggle that informed and defined the character of the Dutch Calvinist community in post-war Alberta. The school struggle, or *schoolstrijd* as it is referred to in literature (see Hiemstra,1998;Valk,1995;Glenn,1988), culminated with the creation of the uniquely Dutch social organization -- pillarization.

The second organizing principle evolves from the first. Post-war immigration from the Netherlands to Canada included a disproportionate number of orthodox Calvinists. These Dutch immigrants displayed a complex mixture of religion and ethnicity by bringing to Canada their "pillar." While appearing to assimilate well into mainstream Canadian society (see Schryer, 1998; Ganzevoort, 1988; Palmer, 1985), the Dutch Calvinists adapted their pillar to their new circumstances. The community established a series of organizations -- Christian Credit Unions, a Christian Labour Union and of course Christian Schools -- that reflected the

struggles of their 19th century neo-Calvinist ancestors in the Netherlands. I argue that, in looking for the motivation for the establishment of Calvinist schools, ethnicity must be considered as much as religious conviction.

Having established the Netherlandic origins of the desire of Dutch Calvinists for their own schools, the narrative returns to post-war Alberta. Through use of documents and interviews, the story of the founding of Dutch Calvinist education in Alberta continues through the stories of the founding of schools in Edmonton, Lethbridge and Calgary concluding in 1967, the year partial funding was granted to private schools in Alberta.

Peter Burke notes the dilemma faced by historians, namely the limitations of both narrative and analytical writing. Burke suggests the "form" used by historians in their analysis of the role of groups or individuals in social change may have to change. Burke implies that this change may be found in a return to narrative; but, since both analysis and narrative have limitations, a new form of narrative is needed. Burke calls this new form "braided" narrative, a mode of writing that

"interweaves analysis with story telling."[25] Burke argues for narrative as a mode of presenting "knowledge statements." The narrative is not a naive chronicle of events but rather a "braided" story setting out the "facts" and attempting to answer the "why" question implicit in the statement of historical events.

This research into the history of Dutch Calvinist schools in Alberta has used a narrative story of the origins and growth of these schools. To use Burke's term, the narrative was a "braided" with analysis which attempted to explain the "why" implicit in the events and to explain the motivation of the "characters" in the story. The story has a "beginning" and a "middle" though it has no "end," rather an "adjournment." Future historians (and the future may not be that far off) may indeed write an "end" to the history of the Dutch Calvinist schools in Alberta.

3. Organization

The first two chapters of the study contain the proposal and the literature review. Chapter three deals with the historical antecedents in the Netherlands of Dutch Calvinist schools. More specifically, chapter three has looked at the rise of

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Burke, Peter (1992). *History and Social Theory.* Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, p.163.

Calvinism in the Netherlands, the establishment of the "state church" and the origins of theological issues debated in the 17th century, issues still debated today among Dutch Calvinists. As well the chapter has reviewed the rise of neo-Calvinism in 19th century Netherlands, especially the work of Abraham Kuyper, the "School Struggle," and the origins of "pillarization" of Netherlands society.

Chapter Four has studied Dutch immigration first to the American mid-west and the beginning of the first Dutch Calvinist schools in Michigan and then early Twentieth century immigration to Canada, with a special focus on pre-World War One immigration and the establishment of Dutch Calvinist communities in Southern Alberta and in Edmonton.

Chapter five has used primary sources and interviews to document the beginnings of Dutch Calvinist schools in Lacombe. Chapter Six used similar techniques to relate the origins of the Dutch Calvinist school in Edmonton. Chapter Seven has focused on the spread and growth of Calvinist schools in Alberta. Chapter Eight has focused on the National Union of Christian Schools. Chapter Nine brings the story of Dutch Calvinist schools up-to-date and finally, Chapter Ten concludes the history with an analysis of the prospects and challenges that the Dutch Calvinist

schools will face as they enter the twenty-first century.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The first Dutch immigrants to Alberta arrived shortly after the turn of the century, settling in the southern Alberta communities of Granum, Nobleford and Monarch. A few years later, in 1912, a group of Dutch settlers established a community north of Edmonton they named Neerlandia. These early immigrants were farmers and, as a group, assimilated well into Anglo-Saxon Canadian society.

Palmer in *Peoples of Alberta* notes that these Dutch immigrants "seemed ideal colonists." Immigration officials as well as members of the general population saw them as "superior racial stock." Accordingly they would fit well into Canadian life since "they had no 'strange' religious or political practices that set them apart."[1] The early Dutch immigrants came from two distinct streams, some directly from the Netherlands others from Dutch communities in the American Midwest, especially Michigan and Iowa. Most early Dutch were orthodox Calvinists and most members of the American based Christian Reformed church.

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1 Palmer, Howard and Tamara (1985). *Peoples of Alberta: Portraits of Cultural Diversity.* Saskatoon: Western Prairie Producer. p.42.

Immigration from the Netherlands did not have a significant impact on local communities until after the Second World War with immigration peaking between the late 40s and the mid 50s. As with the first wave of immigration, the post-war Dutch immigrants assimilated easily into mainstream Canadian society. However, the new immigrants brought with them a new and unique feature of their cultural heritage -- a strong and committed desire for private Christian schools for their children that reflected their orthodox Calvinist heritage and beliefs.

The first such private school was established in Lacombe in 1945 followed by a school in Edmonton in 1949. Within 50 years the Dutch Calvinist community in Alberta would be the root of 32 schools reflecting the community's orthodox Calvinist tradition. Of these 32 schools, 26 grew out of the Christian Reformed community, four out of the more conservative Canadian Reformed community and two out of the ultra-conservative Netherlands Reformed community. All but one of the 32 schools are private schools, the exception being the school in Neerlandia which is a public school but well within the Calvinist tradition.

The fact that Dutch Calvinist schools account for a quarter of private school enrollment, combined with the fact that the Dutch Calvinist community played a

leading role in the growth of private schools in Alberta, invites a history of that school movement. The nature of the topic however, "Dutch Calvinist private schooling" does raise immediate challenges for the researcher. The first challenge is the apparent lack of interest shown by historians of education in the history of private schools in Canada. A review of the historiography of education in Canada reveals a scarcity of material on the history of private schools and even a greater scarcity of material on a particular private school community such as Dutch Calvinist schools.

The second challenge faced by any researcher is the very nature of the Dutch community as an ethnic group. The preface of *Dutch Immigration in North America,* an ethnic study, notes that "The Dutch have been welcome immigrants in North America, seen as easily assimilable and compatible with the society . . . ironically their easy acceptance in the land and their relative 'invisibility '. . . has hindered the growth of scholarship about the group."[2]

The relevant literature available to the researcher interested in the history of Dutch

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Ganzevoort, Herman and Boekelman, Mark (1983). *Dutch Immigration to North America.* Toronto: The Multicultural Society of Ontario.

Calvinist education will be reviewed in four contexts: literature related to 1) Dutch Calvinist schools, 2) the history of private schools in Alberta, 3) the Dutch community in Canada and 4) historical antecedents in the Netherlands.

Dutch Calvinist Schools in Alberta

Surprisingly, though Calvinist schools have existed for fifty years in Canada and over a hundred years in the United States, little scholarly attention has been paid to the history of this particular private school community. A review of the literature relating to the history of the Calvinists schools results in scattered references in various sources, usually sociological studies, a few published sources and monographs, and a handful of graduate theses. This lack of a broad-based historiography does not suggest that the Calvinist school community has not been involved in scholarly work. Many published works deal with curriculum theory and practice and educational philosophy. In fact there is a strong tradition of scholarly dialogue about schooling within the Calvinist school community. Calvin College Professor of Education Emeritus, Donald Oppewal, in his book *Voices from the Past: Reformed Educators,* notes that the Calvinist community "has made a considerable contribution to the thinking of not only its own group of believers, but has had an influence in the larger Protestant evangelical

Community."[3] Oppewal's book is a collection of essays and articles by Calvinist educational theorists whose names are well-respected in the Calvinist school community; Henry Zylstra, Nicholas Wolterstorff, Henry Beversluis, Cornelius Jaarsma, and Louis Berkhof.

Recent literature on educational theory and practice from within the Calvinist school community include; Beversluis, *Christian Philosophy of Education* (1978); Bolt, *The Christian Story and the Christian School* (1993); Quentin Shultze et al, *Dancing in the Dark* (1991); John Stronks and Jim Vreugdenhil, *Hallmarks of Christian Schooling* (1992); Gloria Stronks, *The Christian Middle School* (1990); Stronks and Blomberg ed, *A Vision With a Task: Christian Schooling for Responsible Discipleship* (1993); and VanBrummelen, *Steppingstones to Curriculum* (1995). There is also an extensive list of publications for teacher support as well as many textbooks and curriculum units. Most of this material has been produced and published through the umbrella association for Calvinist schools in North America, Christian Schools International, (CSI) based in Grand Rapids, Michigan. But, save for the few scholarly works that will be reviewed

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3

Oppewall, Donald (1997). *Voices From the Past: Reformed Educators*, Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America.

below, there is virtually no historiography of Dutch Calvinist schools.

Donald Oppewal wrote a monograph for the Calvin College monograph series entitled *The Roots of The Calvinistic Day School Movement* (1963). The opening sentence of the preface states "while there is a great need for a competent, comprehensive history of what in Reformed circles is referred to simply as 'The Christian School', there is little danger that this monograph will fill that need . . . It is hoped that the present theoretical framework will serve later historians in their search for meaning in the many facts about the school system."[4]

It took until 1986 for another scholarly attempt at a history of this school movement. Harro VanBrummelen, Dean of Education at Trinity Western College, wrote *Telling the Next Generation: Educational Developments in North American Calvinist Church School.* This is the most comprehensive (and only) English language history tracing the roots of Calvinist schools from 19th century Netherlands through to the contemporary period in North America. VanBrummelen discusses the movement's history in the United States and Canada

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4

Oppewal (1963) *The Roots Of the Calvinistic Day School Movement,* and Rapids, MI: Calvin College Monograph Series. p.3.

focusing particularly on how well the schools have realized their efforts at creating distinctively Reformed Christian approaches to curriculum. VanBrummelen argues that "differing religious and educational emphasis in North American Dutch Calvinism have led to contrasting perceptions of the Christian school program."[5] To some extent these differences are defined by the Canada - US border and can be characterized by the dichotomy of "protecting" children from worldly influences versus having children "encounter" worldly influences.

Two recent histories complete the rather limited historiography of Dutch Calvinist schooling. Peter DeBoer's *Origins of Teacher Education at Calvin College*[6] provides background on the development of a professional training program for teachers in Calvinist schools. Many teachers in Calvinist schools in Alberta received their initial teacher training at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan. John VanderArk in *22 Landmark Years: Christian Schools International, 1943-65* (1983) provides a descriptive history of the early years of

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VanBrummelen, Harro (1986) *Telling the Next Generation: Educational Developments in North American Calvinist Church Schools.*Lanham, MD: University Press p. 291.

6

DeBoer, Peter, (1991). *Origins of Teacher Education at Calvin* College. Lewiston, NY: University of America Press.

Christian Schools International.

Various unpublished theses provide helpful historical background. Hollaar (1989) is particularly useful in discussing the Reformed "world and life" view. The most useful thesis is Adriaan Peetoom's ethnic study of Dutch-Canadians, *From Mythology to Mythology: Dutch-Canadian Orthodox Calvinist Immigrants and Their Schools*. Peetoom's thesis is a more critical analysis then most studies. His argument is that the Dutch-Calvinist immigrants to Canada

> . . . had been taught a mythology by their forefathers, who themselves had been galvanized into action by a perceived threat to an earlier version of it. These post Second World War newcomers brought that mythology with them, quite deliberately, and many would begin to act out if it almost immediately on their arrival.[7]

Peetoom has made an important connection as to the motivation for Dutch Calvinists to establish Christian schools in Alberta. Certainly, for them it fulfils their faith as expounded by Abraham Kuyper in his phrase "let Christ be king," but the strong pull of their mythology, with its roots back to the 19th and even 16th century, must not be overlooked.

7

Peetoom, Adriaan (1983). *From Mythology to Mythology: Dutch Canadian Orthodox Calvinist Immigrants and Their Schools.* MA Thesis, University of Toronto.

The archives at Calvin College provide some unpublished manuscripts and theses dealing with the history of Dutch Calvinist schools. These include Arthur Kruyter *The Reformed Christian Day School Movement in North America* (1952), George Stob *The Christian Reformed Church and Her Schools* (1955), Jack Talstra *A Brief History of NUCS* (1958) and Ken Rowe *Christian Day School Movement and the Growth of Protestant Non-Parochial Elementary and Secondary School* (1971).

History and myth are closely connected, at least in the way the average person perceives history. Rollo May in *The Cry for Myth* defines myth "as a drama which begins as a historical event and takes on its special character as a way of orienting people to reality. The myth, or story, carries the values of society . . . [that is] formed into a narration which is passed down from age to age."[8] May quotes Virgil who said "we make our destiny by our choice of the gods." The story of Dutch Calvinist schools is, like their ethnic community, more complex than at first glance. Their god was and is God but their "gods" are many and varied and come to expression in their institutions, especially in Christian schools.

8

May, Rollo (1991). *The Cry for Myth.* New York: W.W. Norton & Co. p.26.

History of Private Schools in Alberta

The first schools in what is now Alberta were private schools. Hop's history of private schools in Alberta notes that "Private schools were the single source of education in the area now known as Alberta for the first forty years of settlement. It was not until 1884 that a public school system was established."[9] Hop's thesis is the most comprehensive study of the history of private schools in Alberta. Hop acknowledges the lack of any comprehensive study on private schools in Alberta. His thesis establishes Alberta's private schools in the Canadian context.

Hop's study includes extensive use of *Annual Reports* and records of Alberta Education from 1905 on, as well as many other primary sources and extensive use of interviews. Written in 1982 the study is dated in terms of the current context of private schools. The designation of private schools by one of four categories used in the 1980s has been replaced by the two categories of accredited and registered private schools mentioned above. As well, increased levels of public debate have polarized the position of various stake holders in education.

9
Hop, op.cit., p.183.

This debate culminated in 1998 in the Private Schools Task Force report, *Setting a New Framework*. The report recommended funding increases to private schools of 60% of the instructional grant. (Ironically, despite the at times bitter debate during the Task Force hearings, several public and private boards spent the spring and summer of 1998 exploring options for alternate status of private schools within the public system. Such a move by several of the larger private schools could have a profound impact on the private school movement in Alberta). Hop's study provides the background information that sets the context for individual private school communities. It also points the researcher to useful sources. Hop is not a disinterested observer however, as is the case with most studies dealing with private schools. In his acknowledgments Hop thanks his parents for their sacrifices to ensure he received a Christian education.

The most extensive general study of Alberta educational history is Chalmers' *Schools of the Foothill Province*. However, as extensive as Chalmers' study is there is virtually no space devoted to private schools. Chalmers does note early in his history that it "is obvious that the first schools in the Great Plains of Western

Canada were not public but what we now consider private."[10] Though dated (its publication date is 1967), Chalmers' work helps to establish the setting for Alberta schools and thus the educational context in which private schools operated in the mid- twentieth century.

There is one interesting piece of irony in the book. Sponsored as a centennial project of the ATA, Chalmers at one point asks a rhetorical question asked by many private school supporters today. In the context of a discussion on educational differences in Hutterite colonies Chalmers ends the chapter asking "Is not the essence of democracy the toleration of differences rather than the imposition of uniformity?"[11]

In 1967 private schools were granted limited funding by the Social Credit government of E.C. Manning. As noted above, Stanislaus Digout wrote a case study of the events leading to that decision. His extensive use of documentary sources provides a great deal of information concerning the status of private

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Chalmers, John W. (1967). *Schools of the Foothills Province - The Story of Public Education in Alberta.* Toronto: University of Toronto Press. p.6.

11

Ibid. p.333.

schools and government attitude towards private schools in the 1960's.

Western Canada ethnic studies can provide a means of exploring private schools. Ethnic communities often have a strong religious base. Clinton White in *Schools in the West: Essays in Canadian Educational History*[12] notes that, in Saskatchewan, shortly after the turn of the century, German Catholics set up private schools to ensure that the Bible was a part of the curriculum but also that German language would be taught and thus retained. In Alberta, German Lutherans established St. Matthew School in Stony Plain in 1905 for the same reason Biblical instruction and language retention. In Camrose, Norwegian Lutherans established Camrose Lutheran College but for different reasons as Chester Ronning's thesis *Camrose Lutheran College* makes clear.

Although Ronning's thesis was not written as a history, by virtue of its date, 1942, and its authorship, the thesis itself has become an historic document. Ronning writes that Norwegian Lutherans "were firm believers in the public school

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12

White, Clinton (1986) in "Education Among German Catholic Settlers in Saskatchewan, 1903-1918: A Reinterpretation" In *Schools in the West: Essays in Canadian Educational History*. Calgary, Detselig Enterprises Ltd.

system which provided opportunity for elementary education."[13] Camrose Lutheran College, as with most colleges in early Alberta, had its genesis in the need for a high school. High schools were generally restricted to urban areas in the first decades of the twentieth century. The residential colleges such as Camrose Lutheran provided high school opportunity for rural children. As Chalmers noted in one of his rare comments about private schools.

> Farmers who were comparatively affluent could send their sons or daughters to any one of a dozen private church sponsored schools, half of which were affiliated with the University of Alberta. In 1914 there were four schools in Calgary, four in Edmonton and one each in Red Deer, Raymond, Lacombe and Camrose[14]

Ronning's thesis is useful as historic background and his description of the historic context in Norway provides interesting parallels for the history of Dutch Calvinist schools. According to Ronning, the Norwegian Lutheran community around Camrose established an English-speaking private Christian school that was a reflection of the religious and political tensions of 19th century Norway. Ronning states that "After the Napoleonic Wars there took place in Norway a simultaneous

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13

Ronning, Chester A. (1942). *A Study of An Alberta Protestant Private School The Camrose Lutheran College*. M. A. Dissertation, University of Alberta p.20.

14

Chalmers, op.cit., p.189.

political, economic cultural and religious awakening."[15] This awakening was inspired by one Nicolai Fredrick Severin Grundtuig. Of Grundtuig, Ronning observes that "it would be difficult to overestimate the influence of Grundtuig upon educational, religious, cultural, economic and political developments in Scandinavian countries."[16] Ronning's observations resonate in the history of another group of European immigrants Dutch Calvinists.

In 1945 when the Dutch Calvinist immigrants in Lacombe opened their Christian school they, like the Norwegian immigrants, established an English-speaking, Christian-based school. Their concern, unlike German Lutherans of 1905, was not to maintain their language but rather to maintain their religious Calvinist orthodoxy. As Ronning noted with the Norwegian community, the Dutch Calvinist community also carried with them the effects of the Napoleonic era and was strongly influenced by the leadership of a charismatic 19th century figure - Abraham Kuyper. Van Brummelen notes that

> more than anyone else in modern times Abraham Kuyper put his stamp on Dutch Calvinism . . . , preacher, theologian, philosopher

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Ronning, op.cit., p.14.

16
Ibid. p.15.

> and politician, newspaper writer and editor; as such, Kuyper was the dominant and unrivalled thinker, organizer and communicator in Dutch society from 1880 to early in the new century.[17]

Several other older theses provide the scholar with information relevant to the background of private schools in Alberta. Franklin Smith's, *Protestant Secondary Schools* (1961), is a study of eight Protestant high schools in Alberta. Smith's concern was to discover how these private schools were able to integrate religious instruction into their academic program and to "attempt to find common elements within these private schools which might profitably be adopted by the public schools."[18]

Phillip Miller's thesis, *A Brief History of the Seventh Day Adventist Program* (1957), is a study of the Canadian Union College in College Heights, Alberta. This college is still part of a network of a dozen Seventh Day Adventist schools in Alberta with a current enrollment of about 800 students. Abram Konrad, in *Public Support of Private Education* (1961), explores the issues surrounding public aid of various kinds to private schools in Alberta and British Columbia.

17

Van Brummelen, op. cit. p.77.

18

Smith, Franklin Hyrum (1949). *A General Survey of the Protestant Affiliated and Accredited Secondary Schools in Alberta.* MA thesis, University of Alberta. p.3.

In terms of the history of private schools in Alberta the scholar is restricted to the sources mentioned above. However, these older theses provide an historic context and point the researcher to a variety of primary sources such as government and organizational reports.

Although private school histories are rare, that is not to suggest that private schools as institutions have been neglected in scholarly research. Several scholarly studies deal with current issues faced by private schools. Hollaar (1989) and DeCoux (1997) have written doctoral theses dealing with issues related to administration/management of private schools. Wagner (1995), Voogd (1996) and Buisman (1993) have written theses that, for lack of a better term, are apologetics for private schools. DeMoor (1994) explores the question of religious tolerance in private Christian schools in partial response to the Ghitter Report.

The Dutch Calvinist Community in Canada

To understand the post-war Dutch Calvinists in Canada one needs to understand how the Dutch have structured their society in the Netherlands. Dutch society up to the mid 1950s was divided into pillars (sometimes called blocs or *zuilen*). Several sources explain Dutch pillarization. Arend Lijphart's book *The Politics*

of Accommodation: Pluralism and Democracy in the Netherlands is the standard source in English dealing with Dutch politics and social structures. Lijphart observes that Dutch society is characterized

> . . .by an extraordinary degree of social cleavage. Deep religious and class divisions separate distinct, isolated and self contained population groups, social communication across class and religious boundaries lines is minimal. Each group has its own ideology and its own political organization . . . and schools - from Kindergarten to University. [19]

Despite such deep cleavages Lijphart notes that the Dutch have developed a stable and effective society noted for its tolerance. Richardson, in her Doctoral thesis *The Paradox of Dutch Education*, (1996), does not view this societal structure as stable and tolerant but argues that, in fact, Dutch society is repressive and intolerant.

William Shetter, as most commentators, argues that the Netherlands is indeed a very tolerant society -- tolerant by virtue of necessity. He states that a society so segmented by pillarization "can only function if its members have had long, hard

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Lijphart, Arend (1975). *The Politics of Accommodation: Pluralism and Democracy in the Netherlands*. Berkeley, CA.: University of California Press. Pp.1 & 2.

practice in the difficult art of toleration."[20] This pillarization of Dutch society is an essential part of the equation although an unconscious one in the establishment of Calvinist schools. Schryer (1998) makes this argument in his study, *The Netherlandic Presence in Ontario: Pillar, Class and Dutch Ethnicity.*

The Dutch assimilated quickly into Canadian society; they readily embraced the English language and their "invisibility" allowed the Dutch to blend well into Anglo-Saxon Canadian society. But Schryer notes Dutch-Canadians "maintained beliefs or values not immediately apparent to outsiders." This phenomenon is called "silent ethnicity."[21]

Schryer recognizes the importance of Dutch pillarization and its role in post-war Canada's orthodox Dutch Calvinist community. He notes that though the Dutch Canadian may not "exhibit a strong national or ethnic identity" they still tended to display "values and habits" that their pillar upheld in the Netherlands. Dutch

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Shetter, William (1971). *The Pillars of Society: Six C centuries of Civilization in the Netherlands*. The Hague, The Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff p.7.

21

Schryer, Frans J. (1998). *The Netherlandic Presence in Ontario: Pillars, Class and Dutch Ethnicity.* Waterloo ON: Wilfred Laurier University Press. p.2.

Canadians from Reformed traditions "are likely to marry someone from the same national background. A high rate of endogamy, together with the persistence of group boundaries based on common beliefs, leaves the door open for a subsequent revival of ethnic identity."[22]

A study of Dutch pillarization and its impact on the post-war immigrants begins to raise the question as to the deeper roots of Dutch Calvinist schools. The Christian nature of the schools was and is undoubtedly paramount in the minds of the founders of these schools; but, one is tempted to argue that maintenance of ethnicity or, perhaps more accurately, religious ethnicity is also an important factor in the history of Dutch-Calvinist schools.

Schryer is not the only one who makes the observation about the "invisibility" of the Dutch community in Canada. Several other sociologists and historians confront the theme of the "invisibility" and religious complexity of Dutch Canadians. Tamara and Howard Palmer note that to the casual student of history

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22
Ibid. p.3.

"the Dutch may seem all but invisible."[23] While the Dutch may have appeared not to have any "strange religion" when they first arrived, the Palmers wonder if the Dutch Calvinist "will become increasingly unusual in a society which is undergoing rapid secularization . . . [and] the Reformed presence in the province will likely become more noticeable."[24]

Ganzevoort and Boekelman have edited a series of articles on Dutch immigration to North America in *Dutch Immigration to North America.*[25] Their book is an attempt to overcome the "invisibility" of the Dutch in North America. They note that, as a group, the Dutch assimilated quickly and "young Dutch North Americans carry no burden of . . . ethnic self-disesteem; they feel no need to justify or explain their parents to . . . society." Such an attitude, if accurate, helps explain the dearth of published studies on the Dutch in Canada. On the other hand if the Palmers are correct the Dutch Calvinists may eventually become more noticeable and thus the focus of more scholarly interest.

23
Palmer, op.cit., p.143.
24
Ibid. p.173.
25
Ganzevoort & Boekelman, op.cit.

H. VanBelle, Professor of Psychology at The King's University College, has written several papers relevant to the study of the history of Dutch Calvinist education and its ethnic roots, as the titles indicate: *You Are Never Alone: the Story of the Reformed Dutch in Canada* (undated), *From Religious Pluralism to Cultural Pluralism: Continuity and Change Among the Reformed Dutch in Canada* (1991), *Ethnic Religious Ties as Manifestation of Ethnic Identity (1990), The History of the Reformed Dutch in Edmonton* (1994). Bradely Breems in his Doctoral thesis *"I Tell You We Are A Blessed People": An Analysis of "Ethnicity" by Way of a Dutch Calvinist Community* pursues the connection between ethnicity, religion and history. He states in the abstract "that members of ethnic groups maintain institutions and boundaries between themselves and others by which they prescribe and proscribe ideas, behaviour and practice . . . [and that they] . . .externalize their relationships and then maintain boundaries around themselves, using elements from the past, interpreting their present situation and contemplating effects on the future."[26]

Other sources that provide information on Dutch immigration to North America

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Breems, Bradley (1996). *"I Tell You We Are a Blessed People": An Analysis of "Ethnicity" by Way of Dutch Calvinist Community.* PhD thesis, University of British Columbia.

include: B.P. Hofstede, *Thwarted Exodus: Post-War Overseas Migration from the Netherlands* (1964), an analysis of the impact of pillarization on Dutch immigration, K. Ishwaran, *Family, Kinship and Community* (1977) a study of a Dutch-Canadian community exploring the role of religion as a mechanism of social control and Robert Swierenga, *The Dutch in America: Immigration, Settlement and Cultural Change* (1985). Henry Lucas' *The Netherlanders in America* (1955) is a frequently quoted study from the University of Michigan providing historical background establishing the historical and cultural tensions that led to Calvinist schools in Alberta.

Historical Antecedents in the Netherlands

In introducing Dutch Canadian ethnicity, I argue that an understanding of Dutch ethnicity is necessary to understand the origin of Dutch Calvinist schools. This observation is equally true for the need to understand certain periods of Dutch history. Of particular importance is the twenty-year period of the Batavian Republic during the era of Napoleon. This period set the stage for the 19th century and the rise of the "anti-revolutionary" movement of the neo-Calvinists Groen Van Prinsterer and Abraham Kuyper.

Calvinism was introduced to the Netherlands during the struggle against Spain in the mid-16th century. The Calvinist segment of the Protestant Reformation, then rolling through northern Europe, identified itself with the "patriotic" freedom struggle in the Netherlands against Roman Catholic Spain. By the end of the 80 Years War in 1648, Calvinism and Patriotism had become synonymous terms in the Netherlands and the Calvinists reaped the rewards of victory against Spanish Catholics. In a history of the Christian Reformed Church, *De Kolonie*, Marian Schoolland states that after the defeat of the Spanish "the government promised schools for the training of ministers . . . soon there would be more elementary schools as well as schools for higher education, all supported by the government."[27] Roman Catholics and their church were relegated to second class status. The Calvinist *Hervormde Kerk* replaced the Roman Catholic church as the state church.

Stephen Meyer in his doctoral thesis *Calvinism and the Rise of the Protestant Political Movement in the Netherlands* (1976) observes that the *Hervormde Kerk* had as its basis a literal and strict interpretation of scripture, the Three Forms of

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27

Schoolland, Marian M. (1973-1974). *De Kolonie: The Church That God Transplanted.* Grand Rapids, MI.: Board of Publications of the Christian Reformed Church. p.68.

Unity (the Heidelberg Catechism, Canons of Dort and the Belgic Confession), *Calvin's Institutes of the Christian Religion*, the teaching of dogma and doctrine, preaching and church discipline.[28] Most of these 16th century theological concepts find some form of expression in Alberta's Calvinist schools.

Harvard historian Simon Schama in *The Embarrassment of Riches* (1988) explores the complexity and tensions of the Calvinist mind during the Dutch Golden Age. He notes the "embarrassment" of the Dutch with their wealth and the resulting tension between being wealthy and moral. Schama begins his study with the observation of "the peculiar genius of the Dutch to seem, at the same time, familiar and incomprehensible."[29] This comment resonates with the sociological studies mentioned above which suggest that, while the Dutch may seem "invisible" in Canadian society, in fact their nature is more complex.

Schama introduces an idea he calls the "moral geography of the Dutch mind."

28

Meyer, Stephen (1976). *Calvinism and the Rise of the Protestant Political Movement in the Netherlands.* Ph.D. thesis, Georgetown University, Washington D.C. Pp. 40 & 43.

29

Schama, Simon (1987). *The Embarrassment of Riches*. London, UK: William Collins & Sons. p.3.

> [it was] adrift between the fear of the deluge and the hope of the moral salvage, in the tidal ebb and flow between worldliness and homeliness, between gratification of appetite and its denial, between the conditional consecration of wealth and perdition in its surfeit to be Dutch still means coming to terms with the moral ambiguities of materialism in their own idiosyncratic ways: through the daily living of it, in Sunday sermons on nuclear weapons and Monday rites of scrubbing the sidewalk.[30]

The tension Schama describes resulted from the 17th century Dutch sense of "manifest destiny." They overcame the floods, a parallel with their 80-year struggle against the Spanish. These struggles combine the image of Noah and Moses creating a national myth of a people set apart by God. The Calvinists, Schama argues, struggled with the paradox created by being an "elect" people while at the same time enjoying worldly wealth (see also Breems,1996).

The close connection between people and their landscape (landscape is a word of Dutch origin) is further explored by Schama in *Landscape and Memory* (1995) in which he notes that "although we are accustomed to separate nature and human perception into two realism, they are, in fact, indivisible."[31] The Dutch Calvinists

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Ibid p.609.

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Schama, Simon (1995). *Landscape and Memory*. Toronto, ON: Random House of Canada. p.6.

who established private schools in Alberta in the twentieth century carried with them the dispositions created by their history and their geography.

The French Revolution and Napoleon were to greatly effect the Netherlands and the subsequent rise of neo-Calvinism. The period from 1795-1815 in Dutch historiography is referred to as the *franse tijd*, the "French time." This period of nearly two decades is one that, as Schama notes in *Patriots and Liberators*[32], is "effectively deleted from the record of the nations history." Yet for an understanding of the rise of 19th century neo-Calvinism, this period is important. Called the Batavian Republic, the two decades are a transition period in which the traditional roles of the *Hervormde Kerk* as state church and the status of Calvinism as state religion were to be drastically altered. It was to be an incubation period for trends, such as the creation of a centralized school system, that threatened orthodox Calvinism and that set in place forces that eventually impacted education in twentieth century Alberta.

In 1816 the new king of the Netherlands re-established a state church but with

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32

Schama, Simon (1977). *Patriots and Liberators: Revolution in the Netherlands 1780-1813.* London UK: William Collins & Sons.

quite a different emphasis. Bratt states, in his book *Dutch Calvinism in Northern America*: *A History of a Conservative Sub-culture*, that the new church was established as "the State Department of Religion, just another civil institution ruled by a bureaucratic hierarchy removing control of religious affairs from the local level and making the church more a promoter of social unity than a body of fervent believers."[33] According to Yale philosopher Nicholas Wolterstorff, in his monograph *Keeping the Faith* (1989), the *Hervormde Kerk* "became very intellectualized in its sensibilities and, in its theology, very liberal, wide open to developments in culture."[34]

The drift of the *Hervormde Kerk* towards a liberal philosophy, acceptance of Enlightenment thought and compromise on the status of the "Three Forms of unity" led to a series of reactionary movements by orthodox Calvinists. The orthodox reaction to the *Hervormde Kerk* planted the seeds that led to the establishment, one hundred years later, of a series of "Dutch Calvinist" schools in

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33

Bratt, James (1984). *Dutch Calvinism in North America: A History of a Conservative Sub-Culture*. Grand Rapids MI.: W.B. Eerdmans p.5.

34

Wolterstorff, Nicholas (1989). *Keeping the Faith*. Grand Rapid MI: Calvin College Monograph. p.3.

Alberta. The reactionary events relevant to the origins of Dutch Calvinist schools in Alberta are the *Reveil* and the *Afscheiding* of the 1830's and the *Doleantie* of the 1880's. Two people whose names still conger up passionate feelings in Calvinist education circles today also enter the scene during this period. They are Groen Van Prinsterer and Abraham Kuyper. Of Abraham Kuyper, Wolterstorff states "In the narrative . . . of the odyssey of the Reformed people, two heroes stand head and shoulders above all the others: John Calvin and Abraham Kuyper."[35] (see also Lucas; Shetter; Swierenga).

Several English biographies of Abraham Kuyper are available that help give insight into this larger-than-life man -- Frank VandenBerg's *Abraham Kuyper* (1978), Langley's *The Practice of Political Spirituality* (1984) and Praamsma's *Let Christ Be King* (1985). Two other sources include significant detail on the influence of Abraham Kuyper. Hiemstra's *World Views on the Air* (1997), a history of Dutch broadcasting, devotes several chapters to Abraham Kuyper including a chapter on the School Struggle. The School Struggle precipitated the 1917 constitutional amendment which entrenched "a school policy that many

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35
Ibid. p.10.

social scientists identify as the first case of pillarization."[36] DeBoer (1991) introduces Kuyper's principle of sphere sovereignty stating that "this principle stated that each part of life; family, work, church, state, art, education have their own character and are subject to their own laws, laws established by God."[37] Each sphere is independent from another and no sphere has a higher status than another. Thus a theologian working in the "sphere" of religion theoretically had the same status as a tradesman working in his "sphere." Eventually "sphere sovereignty" led to the conclusion that Christian schools should not be parochial; thus, in Alberta all the Calvinist schools are run by Societies that are separate entities from the Christian Reformed Church.

James Bratt (1984) surveys the various schisms, splits and immigrations that eventually led to various trends in Calvinism in North America. Two trends are of particular importance for the history of Calvinist schools -- the trend towards personal piety and withdrawal from the "evils" of society and the trend to "transform" society by engaging society (see also Van Brummelen 1988;

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Hiemstra, John (1998). *World View on the Air*. Lanham, New York: University Press of America. p. 31.

37

DeBoer, op. cit. p. 10.

Swieringa 1985).

The first trend was as a result of the *Afscheiding* of 1834 which led to a large number of Dutch Calvinists immigrating to the United States. The nature of the schools in the Netherlands was a big issue for the dissenters of the *Afscheiding*. They did not accept the public school philosophy of "neutrality" in areas of religion because the Calvinists believed that one either had "to be for Christ or against Christ." Neutrality was not an option. Oppewal states that "The schools under the supervision of the state church were becoming neutral in matters of religion . . . it was this passionate concern for doctrinal purity intermingled with an opposition to state control of education that was carried over to America when these seceders emigrated as a group in 1847."[38]

The emigration to America was led by two ministers disaffected by the internal struggles of the *Hervormde Kerk* in the Netherlands. Hendrich Scholte led a group of settlers to Pella, Iowa, and A.C. Van Raalte led a group to western Michigan. The school communities that grew out of this early migration tend to reflect a

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Oppewall, Donald (1963). *The Roots of the Calvinist Day School Movement*. Grand Rapids MI.: Calvin College Monograph Series. p.11.

pietistic approach to Christian education and a more isolationist tendency than was to be the case in Canada.

The second trend was a result of the *Doleantie*. The Doleantie led to a schism within the "state church" with a large number of orthodox Calvinists leaving the *Hervormde Kerk*. This split led to the formation of *Gereformeerde Kerk*, a group that eventually formed the Christian Reformed Church in North America. This movement and schism was influenced by Abraham Kuyper. The neo-Calvinism of Abraham Kuyper was a Calvinism that, rather than withdraw from culture, sought to engage and transform culture in a way that reflected biblical principles. This form of engagement was to play a significant role in Canadian Calvinist schools.

Three articles in scholarly journals are helpful in establishing the Netherlands context of the Dutch Calvinist schools in Alberta. In the *Historical Journal*, Simon Schama[39] explores the origins of the "educational movement" during the Batavian Republic. The centralizing force of the Batavian Republic was to lead to a school struggle that eventually led to the establishment of societal Pillars and

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Schama, Simon, "School and Politics in the Netherlands 1796-1814", *Historical Journal*, Vol. 13, 4 (Dec. 4 1970).

of a school system that financed both public and private schools.

This issue is further explored by John Valk in *History of Education Quarterly*.[40] Valk argues that the issue of religion and the schools continues to be a debate in Canada. Using Utrecht as a case study of the school struggle in 19th century Netherlands, Valk observes that public schools can never meet the needs of all and that the compromise achieved in the Netherlands can provide a model for Canada. In *Religious Education* Johan Sturm explores the tension in the Netherlands between religious education as indoctrination and as emancipation. Sturm contends that neo-Calvinists education "was for a long time an instrument of indoctrination. However, in the end it has turned out to be a major source of discontent, cultural renewal, and individual emancipation."[41]

The apparent lack of interest by historians of education in the history of private schools, and the "invisibility" of the Dutch as an ethnic group, present the

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Valk, John "Religion and the Schools: The Case of Utrecht", *History of Education Quarterly*, Vol. 35 no. 2 (Summer 1995).

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Sturm, Johan,C. "Education Between Indoctrination and Emancipation". *Religious Education*. V. 88 (Winter 1993). Pp. 41 & 42.

researcher interested in Dutch Calvinist schools with challenges. These challenges, however, are not insurmountable. Diligent gleanings through bibliographies and conversation with other scholars provides a significant amount of material: published sources, unpublished papers and theses, and primary sources. These written sources, combined with interviews with founders and builders of the Dutch Calvinist schools, enables the researcher to draw enough material together to write the history of an important part of Alberta's educational history.

CHAPTER 3: HISTORICAL ANTECEDENTS IN THE NETHERLANDS

Lacombe, Alberta, 1945

On July 3, 1944, members of the Dutch community in Lacombe attended their first official meeting of the "Lacombe Christian School Society." The meeting was held in the consistory room of the Christian Reformed Church. The minutes, written in Dutch, indicate that "after discussion with the inspector for the school district, the committee was sure that it was possible to open a school[1]." With this positive assurance the Society began to plan for the opening of their Christian school scheduled for the following year, September 10, 1945.

Over the coming year, this small community of Dutch immigrant farmers had much work to do. One of the first items of business was to write and approve a constitution. The constitution, written in English and approved in 1944, clearly outlines the fundamental beliefs of orthodox Dutch Calvinists. As was the pattern set at the turn of the century by followers of the Dutch Calvinist leader Abraham Kuyper, the school was to be non-parochial, organized as a Society, free of church control. Article one of the constitution states "The organization shall be known as the Lacombe Christian School Society." Furthermore, the school was to be firmly based in orthodox Calvinism as Article two makes clear

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1 Lacombe Christian School Society, Board Minutes, July 3, 1994.

> The Society is based on the infallible Word of God, interpreted in accordance with the standards of faith of the Reformed Church. Our fundamental principles are; that our children are a heritage of the Lord; that therefore they must be trained for Him; that not the state but the parents are responsible for their Christian training; that all their training must be in harmony with the Word of God; and that such a training requires a separate Christian School.[2]

The first two articles of the constitution contain the key themes common to Calvinist schools across North America. These themes are adherence to the historic confessional standards of the Reformed Church -- the "Three Forms of Unity" the primacy of scripture as God's infallible word; the primacy of parents, as opposed to the state, regarding the education of their children; and the responsibility of parents to ensure "Christian training" for their children. These themes reflect the struggles of the orthodox Calvinists in the Netherlands of the 19th century.

What then motivated a group of working-class Dutch immigrants, recently arrived in a new country, to set up their own independent school? To understand the motivation behind the establishment of Calvinist day schools in 20th century Alberta, an understanding of the religious and political climate of the 19th century Netherlands is necessary. In his monograph *The Roots of the Calvinist Day*

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Constitution of the Lacombe Christian School Society, Minute Book (July 1944 - January 28, 1952) p.1.

Schools, D. Oppewal says that "no one can understand the [Calvinist] school without understanding the ecclesiastical roots in the church."[3] However, tracing such ecclesiastical roots is a complicated process given the general lack of knowledge of Dutch history and given the propensity of Dutch Calvinists to schisms. These schisms have resulted in a variety of Calvinist groups and denominations in the Netherlands and among the Dutch Calvinists in North America. In fact, it is in a schism in 1834 that the Netherlands roots of Calvinist education in North America can be found.

But before I look at the events in 19th century Netherlands, I will to look at the historical antecedents to these events. As with any historical study, it is difficult to know where to start since every historic event has an antecedent, thus 19th century neo-Calvinism has antecedents in the 18th century Enlightenment, the 17th century Remonstrants, and in the 16th century Reformation and the concurrent Dutch struggle for independence from Spain. This chapter will touch on all these issues.

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Oppewell, Donald (1963) *The Roots of the Calvinistic Day School Movement*: Grand Rapids, MI: Calvin College Monograph Series. p. 10.

The Low Countries

The area of Europe called the Netherlands was referred to as "the Low Countries" for hundreds of years. Christianity came to the Low Countries towards the end of the 4th century. In the Low Country village of Maastricht a Roman priest, Servatius, settled as missionary and priest to the people of the region. At that time Roman authority was losing its hold on the region to the Franks, and for the next several centuries paganism and Christianity struggled for dominance among the fiercely independent-minded people of the Low Countries.

At the end of the 5th century King Clovis of the Franks was baptized, a triumph for the Christian church in northern Europe. Two centuries later the Pope appointed an Anglo-Saxon, Willibrord, as Bishop of Utrecht in the Netherlands. The last gasp of pagan violence against Christianity in the Low Countries occurred with the murder of St. Boniface, Willibrord's assistant and archbishop, by the Frisians in 754. Over the next several centuries the church of Rome gradually established its dominance in Dutch society although it never gained the influence it had in other parts of Europe. As the Dutch historian Bernard Vlekke observed:

> the town councils forbade the transfer of real estate to the church. By other laws they [the Dutch] limited ecclesiastical jurisdiction over the people not directly connected with the church. These activities attested to an anticlerical sentiment which was incongruous with the Dutch tendency toward dogmatic concept of religion and theological discussion, both of which factors have

strongly influenced the entire history of the Netherlands.[4]

As this quote suggests, early in the history of the Netherlands one can observe the blend of religious independence with religious dogmatism, a blend that becomes most evident in the 19th century and which is still observed in the Dutch Calvinist community in Alberta at the dawn of a new millennium.

Rise of Calvinism

Roman Catholicism was the dominant religion in Europe until the Reformation of the 16th century. In the Netherlands the Reformation coincided with the Dutch revolt against Spain. Politics, diplomacy and religion were inexorably linked together during the turbulent 16th and 17th centuries. The details of the Dutch revolt are beyond the scope of this study; however, some observations are relevant to this narrative.

In 1536, John Calvin wrote his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. During the 1540's, Calvinism began to make an impression in the Netherlands. Calvinism first came to southern Netherlands slowly working its way to the north. Fighting in the south during the revolt virtually wiped out Calvinism in that region and

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Landheer, Bartholomew, ed. (1944). *The Netherlands*, University of California Press. p. 28.

Catholicism remained strong in the south. Meanwhile, in the north, Calvinism gained a strong following and is a region where orthodox Calvinism has remained concentrated and from where many of the orthodox Calvinists immigrants to Alberta originated.

The revolt against Spain began in 1568. The inquisition and the general persecution of the Dutch, personified in the person of the Duke of Alva who arrived in 1567, helped fuse Calvinism with Dutch opposition to Spain. The spark for the revolt occurred when the Dutch "in an access of mass fury. . . broke into the churches and vented their hatred of Rome and popery on the images of the saints and the visible symbols of Roman worship."[5] In 1568 William of Orange became "the heart and soul" of Dutch opposition.

The iconoclasts of 1566 formed a group to be mythologised in Dutch history as "The Sea Beggars." These men took to the sea both as pirates and as freedom fighters who held strong Calvinist beliefs. The Sea Beggars were able to gain control of the provinces of Holland and Zeeland for William of Orange. In the spring of 1573, Catholics were removed from public office and William of Orange

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Barnouw, Adriaan (1952). *The Pageant of the Netherlands History.* New York, N.Y.:Longmans, Green and Company. p. 115.

joined the Reformed church. Still, the Calvinists made up only about 10% of the Dutch population.

The 80 Years War with Spain did not officially end until 1648; however, by 1576, the last Spanish soldier had already left Holland and Zeeland. In 1579 the Union of Utrecht united the provinces of Holland, Zealand, Utrecht, Friesland and certain rural areas into a union that formed the basis for the Dutch Republic and which "expressly recognized the monopoly of Calvinism."[6]

The Dutch Republic that grew out of the rebellion against Spain entered its "Golden Age" in the 17th century. From that time to the 19th century, Calvinism was the dominant religious force in the Netherlands. Calvinism was closely identified with the patriots and as such "reaped the rewards" as victor. Catholic worship was repressed (although it was unofficially tolerated as long as Catholics worshipped in quasi-secrecy) and the medieval cathedrals and churches were confiscated by municipal authorities and made available to the Calvinists who changed them into Reformed churches.

Though Calvinism became the dominant religious force in the Netherlands, its

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Ibid p. 121.

influence exceeded its numerical strength. The percentage of Dutch Calvinists peaked in the mid-18th century to about 50% of the population[7]. As Barnow notes in reference to the revolt against Catholic Spain:

> This church revolution was a meek surrender to the dictation of a small but aggressive minority. The Calvinists alone possessed the armed might to impose their will upon their defenceless fellow citizens. Reliable figures are not available, but there is ground for assuming that at the time of the Prince of Orange's death in 1584 the Catholics outnumbered the Calvinists about ten to one. The successful outcome of the revolt tended to even up that inequality. Waverers saw wisdom in siding with the powerful minority, and lukewarm Catholics with political ambitions left the Mother Church in hope of joining the city fathers. Even so, the Catholics were never reduced to a negligible minority, and they still constitute fully one-third of the present-day population of the Netherlands.[8]

Although Calvinism became the dominant religion, it did not mean that all Calvinists thought alike. As Calvinism became "established" in the early 17th century, the seeds for the events leading to neo-Calvinism in the 19th century were being sown. Some Calvinists wanted to impose Calvinist orthodoxy on all. The ruling classes -- the merchants and burghers -- were opposed to such trends and refused to accept a theocracy. This class, "sometimes called libertinists, adapted themselves to the Reformation; but in the Erasmian tradition." These more liberal

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Richardson, Annette (1995). *The Paradox of Dutch Education: A Historical Study.* Ph.D. Thesis, University of Alberta. p. 76.

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Barnouw, op. cit., p. 119.

and tolerant upper classes and intellectuals opposed the rigidity of doctrinaire Calvinism. On the other hand,

> Dutch Calvinism never lost its hold upon the proletarian, the labourer, the man of the lower middle class. Over these people the minister - the *predikant* - exercised his vast authority, and through and with them he tried to rule the state. Each parish had its church council or consistory composed of laymen under the chairmanship of their minister. A number of churches were joined into a *classis* or colloquy, the *classis* of each province formed a synod. All these bodies met frequently and expressed their views upon many matters. They often tried to obtain from the civil authorities measures and edicts against dissenters and Roman Catholics. But they usually found themselves opposed by the urban and provincial regents who, though members of the established church, had no share in its democratic and revolutionary tradition and did not approve of its intolerance.[9]

The division between the liberal-minded ruling elite and the orthodox "masses" has important implications for 19th century neo-Calvinism in the Netherlands and for 20th century Calvinist schools in Alberta.

Arminius and the Canons of Dordt

In the 17th century, the mix of tolerant upper-class politics and orthodox proletariat Calvinism is exemplified in the conflict that arose over the debate between a Calvinist professor at the University of Leyden, Jacobus Arminius

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Renier, G.J. (1944). *The Dutch Nation: An Historical Study*. George Allen and Unwin Ltd. p. 28.

(1560-1609), and one Franciscus Gomarus (1563-1641). The issue was the Calvinist doctrine of Predestination.

Arminius challenged the doctrine of predestination, a doctrine confirmed in Calvinist confessions. Arminius' position did not sit well with orthodox Calvinists. To the 20th century casual observer the debate may seem insignificant, especially since Arminius and Gomarus agreed on many issues. However, the debate is very much alive even today. In a recent discussion with a principal of a Calvinist school in Alberta, I asked why the school had split from the already established Calvinist Christian school in the area. The answer I was given was that the established Christian school had become too ecumenical in its hiring policies -- hiring Mennonites and Baptists -- thus opening the door to Arminianism.

In any event, in 1610 the Arminians presented a "Remonstrance," a public declaration, in which they openly rejected the orthodox position on predestination. Their position was challenged by the followers of Gomarus who issued a "counter-Remonstrance." The rather complicated and detailed arguments in the position are summarized by the historian G.J. Renier:

> Both parties agreed that mankind was corrupt and deserved damnation in every one of its members. They also agreed that those whom God did not pass by and leave to their fate were made worthy

> of this favoured treatment only by the grace of God, which took the form of the gift of the Christian, i.e. the Protestant, faith. And here came the one material difference. The counter-Remonstrants held that, once the divine accident of election had operated, the salvation of the beneficiary was necessary and automatic. "How could it be," they asked, "that while the Almighty does everything that is needed for a purpose to be achieved, this purpose should nevertheless not be achieved?" The Remonstrants, on the other hand, said that the result of election was not inevitable salvation, but the chance of achieving it. The elected person could still fall from grace if his actions were evil. Grace is salvation, said the Gomarists. Grace is the indispensable prerequisite for salvation, the necessary instrument of salvation, said the Arminians. A man can withstand grace, or he can lose it, they said.[10]

The debate entered the political sphere when Oldenbarnevelt, an advocate of provincial autonomy, took the Remonstrants' position while William's son, Prince Maurice of Orange, Stadtholder an advocate of federal sovereignty, took the position of the counter-Remonstrants. In 1618 Oldenbarnevelt was executed and Prince Maurice took power, thus giving his orthodox Calvinist supporters power. The power of the orthodox Calvinists was further enhanced when the Synod of Dort (1618) found Arminians guilty of heresy. The Synod of Dort adopted Gomarus' position although rejecting the establishment of a theocracy. The state purged the Remonstrants from public office and from education.

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Ibid p. 46.

For historian Renier, the quarrel between the Remonstrants and counter-Remonstrants was more than a theological debate over predestination.

> It is clear that, though mainly a symbol, the degree of predestination was a mighty symbol. It marked the difference between tolerant humanist traditionalism and intolerant, dogmatic, revolutionary clericalism. It marked the difference between two temperaments, and temperament is the mother of conviction. It marked, finally, the parting of the ways for the two political parties that were henceforth, going to fight for mastery in the Dutch Republic.[11]

The Arminian debate established the foundation of orthodox Calvinism in the Netherlands and set the basis for attempts by Calvinists to promote the supremacy of the church over the state. "The ministers had the duty to speak from the pulpit and tell their flocks what rulers ought to do."[12] However, a theocracy was, in fact, never established. The tolerance of Dutch society prevailed. By 1625 harassment of the Remonstrants ended and nonconformity was tolerated and the Dutch Republic became a haven for the ideas of thinkers such as Descartes, Hobbes, Spinoza, Locke and others. In spite of, or perhaps because of, Dutch tolerance for nonconformity, the voice of orthodox Calvinism continued to dominate Dutch society. In the 17th century Gisbertus Voetius (1589-1676), a supporter of the counter-Remonstrants, emerged as the chief spokesperson for orthodox Calvinist

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Ibid p. 49.

12

Ibid p. 53.

thinking.

Voetius taught at the university of Utrecht. At the time, there was great concern in Reformed congregations in Amsterdam over the heliocentric teachings of Copernicus and Galileo. This concern soon became a more general concern over the attacks of the new sciences and philosophies on the traditional Aristotelian views. Voetius was in the middle of these debates. He attacked Galileo and especially, Descartes condemning Descartes' mechanistic view of the universe.

Voetius was also instrumental in bringing a more puritan, moralistic strain into orthodox Calvinism. Voetius and his followers championed anti-Catholic legislation and pressed the government to impose "Godly ways" on society. This included means to discourage or prohibit dancing, card playing, church organ music and to enforce strict Sunday observance.

By the end of the 17th century the heady thinking ushered in by the philosophers and scientists of the Enlightenment began a process of subtle erosion of orthodox Calvinism in the Netherlands. During the 18th century many embraced the ideas of the Enlightenment and the claims of Reason and Nature became more acceptable than the traditional claims of revelation. Christianity, in its more

orthodox guise, was seen to hinder the emancipation of the human spirit that the Enlightenment fostered. The Enlightenment, followed by the French Revolution, had a great impact on Dutch society and especially on orthodox Calvinism. In terms of education, the effects were profound, as demands for secular state-supported education were seen by the orthodox Calvinists as an attack on their religious liberty. It was the 19th century "school struggle" that led to the unique Dutch social structure called pillarization and ultimately to the establishment of Dutch Calvinist schools in Alberta.

The Netherlands in the 19th century

By the late 19th and early 20th centuries Dutch society was divided into "pillars" or "blocks." Depending on the source the number of "pillars" in Dutch society vary. Richardson, in her thesis *The Paradox of Dutch Education*, refers to "quadripartite societal segmentation"[13] identifying these segments as Roman Catholic, Protestant (Calvinist), secular and public. Meyer's thesis *Calvinism and the Rise of the Protestant Political Movement in The Netherlands,* on the other hand, identifies three "pillars"-- Roman Catholic, Protestant and neutral/general.[14]

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Richardson, op. cit., p. 114.

14

Meyer, Stephen (1976). *Calvinism and the Rise of the Protestant Political Movement in the Netherlands*. Ph.D. Thesis, Georgetown University Washington D.C. p. 4.

The number of pillars is not important. What is important is the existence of these "pillars" which segmented Dutch society along religious/philosophical belief systems. Each pillar developed its own hierarchical social structure and its own clubs, political parties, newspapers, social association and schools. Our interest is with the Calvinist pillar.

As noted earlier, with the end of the 80 Years War in 1648, Calvinism and Patriotism became synonymous terms in the Netherlands. Roman Catholics and their church were relegated to second class status. The Calvinist *Gereformeerde Kerk,* along with its literal and strict interpretation of scripture, adherence to the Three Forms of Unity , emphasis on the teaching of dogma and doctrine and church discipline, replaced the Roman Catholic church as the state church. As the state church, membership in the *Gereformeerde Kerk* conferred privileges. During the 17th and 18th centuries, social, political and professional advancements were directly related to membership in the *Gereformeerde Kerk*. However, the 19th century was to bring significant changes to Dutch society and especially to Dutch Calvinism. The vehicles for these changes were the Enlightenment, the French Revolution and Napoleon.

The French revolution and the subsequent occupation of the Netherlands by

Napoleon (1796-1814) introduced the "revolutionary" thinking of the Enlightenment into the Netherlands. These ideas gained a strong foothold during Napoleon's occupation of the Netherlands. After the defeat of Napoleon, the Netherlands declared itself a monarchy, but the ideas of the Enlightenment remained.

The *Gereformeerde Kerk* had been suspended as the state church during the French occupation. In 1816 the new king of the Netherlands reestablished a state church but with quite a different emphasis. The new church was established as "the State Department of Religion, just another civil institution ruled by a bureaucratic hierarchy . . . removing control of religious affairs from the local level and making the church more a promoter of social unity than a body of fervent believers."[15] With the reorganization, the church's name was changed from *Gereformeerde Kerk* to *Hervormde Kerk.* The reestablished church had a hierarchical structure with the monarch having the power to appoint delegates to Synod. The *Hervormde Kerk* had become intellectualized and its theology very liberal, wide open to developments in culture.[16]

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Bratt, James (1984). *Dutch Calvinism in North America: A History of a Conservative Sub Culture.* Grand Rapids, MI: W. B.Eerdmans p. 5.

16

Wolterstorff, Nicholas (1989). *Keeping the Faith.* Grand Rapids, MI.: Calvin College Monograph p. 3.

The drift of the *Hervormde Kerk* towards a liberal philosophy, acceptance of Enlightenment thought and compromise on the status of the "Three Forms of Unity" led to a series of reactionary movements by orthodox Calvinists. The relevant reactionary events to this study are the *Reveil* and the *Afscheiding* of the 1830's, and the *Doleantie* of the 1880's.

The *Reveil*, or revival, originated in Calvinist Switzerland in the 1830's under the leadership of Cesar Malan. Malan encouraged the establishment of "Free" Reformed Churches (as opposed to state controlled churches) and a return to orthodox Calvinism."[17] The movement caught the imagination of the upper class elite within the *Hervormde Kerk* under the leadership of a Dutch poet, Bilderdijk. In the late 1830's leadership of the *Reveil* passed to Groen Van Prinsterer, then a key figure in the king's household (he was secretary and historian to the king). Groen advocated restoration of the Reformed confessions (the Three Forms of Unity) and the primacy of scripture.

Groen "organized the *Reveil* as a political and social movement which was based upon a synthesization of restored orthodoxy and the positive direction of social betterment for the population." Groen believed in the "literal interpretation of

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Meyer, op. cit., p. 45.

scriptures and their application of human intercourse."[18] Groen began the process of thinking about one's Christian faith as being something more than a private relationship with God or simply as a desire for one to seek personal salvation through Jesus Christ and suggested that one's faith should make a difference in the community in which he/she lives. In other words, being a Christian meant one should be "in the world" and working to "transform" it.

This understanding has important implications for education. In Calvinist schools today it can be seen in the tensions among parents who seek Christian schools that isolate children from the world and those who believe children need to encounter the world. Those who want to isolate their children have their roots in the thinking that entered the *Reveil* through Pietism. In the early 19th century, Pietism was a major religious force in Europe. It emphasized personal salvation, the experience of the Holy Spirit and moral uprightness. Pietism had isolationist tendencies, tendencies that find expression "in their modern counterparts [who] send children to Christian schools primarily to isolate children from unhealthy worldly influences."[19]

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Ibid p. 77.

19

Van Brummelen, Harro (1986). *Telling the Next Generation: Educational Developments in North American Calvinist Schools.* Lanham, MD.: University Press p. 3.

Groen opposed the views of the pietists and believed that Calvinism must find expression in the daily lives of people. Ironically, Calvinists who wish to isolate themselves from worldly influences often quote Groen's statement that "in isolation is our strength." Dutch Calvinism's propensity to schism resolved the problem when the pietists left Groen's group.[20]

The *Reveil* eventually ran out of steam, but many leaders of the *Reveil* were to bring powerful leadership to a concurrent and more radical reaction against the *Hervormde Kerk* -- the *Afscheiding*. In the conservative and orthodox Calvinist stronghold of the northern Netherlands, a *Hervormde Kerk* minister, Rev. De Cock, "discovered the works of Calvin and the Synod of Dort and began to sound their themes in his sermons."[21] De Cock preached that the weakening of the historical confessional standards of the Reformed faith would lead to heresy and anarchy in the church. He further taught that the hymns sung in the *Hervormde Kerk* were evil, being the words of man. Only Psalms should be sung since they were the inspired words of God.

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In some Calvinist schools in Alberta, Pietism is still often considered an unacceptable faith expression by the more ardent followers of Kuyper.

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Bratt, P. op. cit., p. 6.

De Cock's church grew rapidly as more and more people wanted to hear the words of this minister. De Cock did not restrict himself to preaching. He wrote pamphlets outlining the importance of orthodox Calvinism and attacking two of his liberal colleagues as "wolves attacking the sheep of Christ."[22]

The government responded to this apparent threat to social stability by billeting soldiers in the homes of church dissenters, levying heavy fines and even with the imprisonment of some pastors. The *Hervormde Kerk* also responded by suspending De Cock as a minister of the *Hervormde Kerk.* In response, De Cock, in 1834, issued a proclamation entitled "An Act of Separation and Return." The separation was from the *Hervormde Kerk* and the return to the old *Gereformeerde Kerk.*

Whereas the *Reveil* was an upper class movement, the *Afscheiding* was a movement among the working class. Official provincial reports describe those involved in the *Afscheiding* as "for the most part . . . from the lowest ranks," "uncultured," "the least significant," and as "having no name among them."[23] In

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Schoolland, Marian (1974). *De Kolonie: The Church That God Transplanted.* Grand Rapids, MI.: Board of Publications of the Christian Reformed Church. p.81.

23

Bratt, op. cit., p. 6.

a plea to the King in defence of the dissenters one writer stated, "among every social rank. . .surely adherents of the faith of the fathers have remained, yet particularly so among two classes of residents . . . namely the poor and destitute in the towns and the peasants in the country."[24]

The *Afscheiding* had its greatest strength in the northern provinces of Groningen, Drente, Friesland and Overijsel. Kroes notes that the strongest area of dissent was in Groningen where 10% of the church population were part of the movement although nationally the movement never exceeded 1.3% of the entire population. Yet from the 1840s to 1850s the dissenters made up 13% of the immigrant groups, ten times their numerical strength. This disproportional representation was to be repeated in the post World War II immigration flood to Canada exactly one hundred years later.

In terms of the history of Dutch Calvinist education, the *Afscheiding* has several implications. Some members of the *Afscheiding* made early attempts at setting up their own schools. In 1840 the new king eased up on the dissenters, realizing they were only a religious movement and posed no threat to social stability. That same

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Kroes, Rob (1992). *The Persistence of Ethnicity: Dutch Calvinist Pioneers in Amsterdam Montana*. Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press p. 17.

year the dissenters' newspaper *De Reformatie* "called for government school teachers to be free to teach in the way they saw fit [and] . . . petitioned the king for freedom to educate children in harmony with the principles of the Word of God."[25] The King, however, made no changes in the structure of education. A few "free" Christian schools, that is schools free from state control, were started in the next few years. However, it was not until the changed constitution in 1848, guaranteeing freedom of education, that many Christian schools were established. By 1864 there were 267 "free" private Christian schools in the Netherlands.

The dissenters' strong desire for their own school system reflected their dissatisfaction with the *Hervormde Kerk.* They did not accept the public school philosophy of "neutrality" in areas of religion because Calvinists believed that one either had "to be for Christ or against Christ." Neutrality was not an option. "The schools under the supervision of the state church were becoming neutral in matters of religion . . . it was this passionate concern for doctrinal purity intermingled with an opposition to state control of education that was carried over to America when these seceders emigrated as a group in 1847."[26]

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VanBrummelen, op. cit., p. 25.

26

Oppewall, op. cit., p. 11.

The United States

Many cities and towns in Western Michigan reflect names of obvious Dutch origin -- Holland, Vriesland, Zeeland, Overijsel. The Dutch place names are evidence to the fact that it was in this part of the New World that many of the "seceders" settled (as the followers of the *Afscheiding* are called in America). In Michigan, the Christian Reformed Church was founded, the church which gave birth to the North American Dutch Calvinist schools.

The initial group of immigrant seceders were led by two dissenting pastors, Albertus Van Raalte and Hendrick Scholte. Each represented a different strain of doctrine within the *Afscheiding* movement but shared a common strain of pietism -- an emphasis on experiential religion. These early immigrants to America have been described by one historian as "the outcasts of the outcasts."

This immigration of the "outcasts" begins part of the mythology of the orthodox Calvinists in North America, a myth carried by succeeding waves of Dutch Calvinist immigration to North America. Whereas scholars of Dutch ethnicity have repeatedly shown that Dutch immigration coincided with economic cycles generated by agricultural crisis, and whereas it has repeatedly been shown that most Dutch immigrants have listed religious reasons low on the reasons for

immigrating, religion continues to be a major, if not a key factor, in the Dutch Calvinist struggle for ethnic identity and in the historical rationale for their community's immigration to North America.

In Michigan the early settlers that were part of VanRaalte's group showed little interest in education. Pioneer needs to secure food, shelter and clothing took precedence over schooling. When schooling was an issue the Dutch settlers were content to "Christianize" public schools. They established local school boards and, through these boards, controlled the public school, a pattern to be repeated in Alberta. In effect, the public schools were Christian Calvinist "state" schools, an ironic twist for people of the *Afscheiding* who distrusted not only state church but also state education.

Van Raalte had several battles with his followers, and his attempts to start an independent Christian school met with little success. The Calvinists were content with their public schools as long as Dutch could be the language of instruction. Often the main textbooks were the Bible and catechism, usually in Dutch. The most important criterion for a teacher was his/her faith. One school in Michigan hired a tree nursery man "because of his splendid faith."[27] Ministers, too, were

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Van Brummelen, op. cit., p. 51.

closely involved with the local school because the minister would be literate and, of course, a "man of God." The use of Dutch as at least one of the languages of instruction was important to the early pioneers. They wanted their children to speak and be instructed in Dutch mainly for two reasons. First, it would act as a barrier against the "worldliness" of America (note the isolationist tendency) and, second, most Calvinist writings were in Dutch and the parents and church wanted to ensure the continuity of Calvinism in the New World.

Van Raalte's push for a fully independent Christian school finally succeeded in 1857.[28] In that year the Christian Reformed Church was established in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Its formation was the result of yet another schism. Since the 1640s the Dutch Reformed Church (the *Hervormde Kerk*) was represented in North America by the Reformed Church in America (RCA). The Van Raalte group became affiliated with this church. However, for some of the seceders in Michigan, the eastern-based RCA represented many of the practices of the *Hervormde Kerk* they had left behind -- singing of hymns instead of Psalms, acceptance of lodge membership and support for public schools. To make it even

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This coincided with another schism leading to the formation of the Christian Reformed church after a break from the Reformed Church in America. From this point on the Reformed Church in America plays virtually no role in the Calvinist day school movement while the Christian Reformed Church becomes the main thrust for Christian day school education.

worse, the RCA questioned the legitimacy of the *Afscheiding*.

The disaffected seceders left VanRaalte and the RCA and established the Christian Reformed Church in 1857. One of the issues for this group was a "free" Christian school. Thus in response to fears of the "corrupting influences of city life" the Christian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan, opened a parochial Christian school. Peter DeBoer in *Origins of Teacher Education at Calvin College* presents a rather dismal picture of these early years of Calvinist Christian education. In reference to the "little Dutch school in Grand Rapids" he writes:

> In this, the only parochial school in the Christian Reformed Church from 1857 to 1874, the schoolmaster was appointed by and responsible to the church's consistory, but neither Mr. Pleune [the schoolmaster] nor his successors were professionally trained teachers. When Mr. Pleune resigned in 1862 to take up farming, he was succeeded by the church janitor and handyman, Mr. Spanjer . . . the objective of this church school was narrow: to provide instruction in the Dutch language and in religion . . . teachers were untrained, often inept . . . In 1873 a minister . . . visited the school and complained of the "exceedingly lamentable" instruction done in the greatest confusion.[29]

Despite the rough start, the Calvinist Christian day school movement in America, begun in the small Dutch immigrant community in Michigan, grew rapidly, largely due to an influx of Dutch immigrants. In 1881 there were six Christian schools in

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DeBoer, Peter (1991), *Origins of Teacher Education atCalvin College*. Lewiston NY,: Mellen Studies in Education Pp. 6, 7.

the US by 1920 there were 80 with a student population of nearly 11,000 children.[30] The quality of education improved as well as "Among the immigrants were professionally trained teachers."[31]

Before I leave the American Christian schools, one important decision taken by the Christian Reformed Church at this time should be noted. By the end of the 19th century most American Christian schools ceased being parochial and, instead, opted for "society" status operating schools nominally free from direct church control. This is reflected in Alberta where the Alberta schools noted in this history are formally organized *Societies* for Christian Education. Non-parochial *Society* status for Christian schools was due to the influence of Abraham Kuyper. And this brings us back to the Netherlands of the late 19th century.

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Van Brummelen, op. cit., p. 72.

31

Vander Ark, John (1983). *Christian Schools International 1943-65; Twenty-Two Landmark Years*. Grand Rapids, MI.,: Baker Book House p. 15.

Abraham Kuyper and the Doleantie

While the Calvinist communities in the United States were trying to maintain their orthodoxy, free from European liberalism, events continued in the Netherlands. In the Netherlands, neo-Calvinism became a major force from the 1870's to 1920's. The movement drew from orthodox Calvinists in the *Hervormde Kerk* as well as from followers of the *Reveil* and *Afscheiding*. The key figure in neo-Calvinism was Abraham Kuyper.

Abraham Kuyper was a giant figure in the history of the Netherlands at the turn of the century. He founded the Free University of Amsterdam, was an editor of several newspapers, a prolific writer on many subjects including religion, politics and education, and a politician who, as leader of the Anti-Revolutionary Party,[32] served as Prime Minister of the Netherlands. According to church historian J.D. Bratt, Kuyper believed Calvinism was the highest expression of Christianity. Abraham Kuyper wanted Calvinism to lead to a life in which one's Christianity affected "every sphere of life." Abraham Kuyper wanted to stir the orthodox Calvinists out of their comfortable isolation and "to make engagement rather than

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Anti-Revolutionary refers to both the "revolution" of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution.

withdrawal their paradigm for Christian life."[33] Kuyper, along with his colleague Groen Van Prinsterer, fought for financial equality for public and non-public schools. The current structure of the Dutch educational system has much to do with Groen and Kuyper.

Kuyper's philosophy included a principle called "sphere sovereignty." This principle stated that each part of life -- family, work, church, state, art, education -- "have their own character and are subject to their own laws, laws established by God."[34] One sphere is independent from another, although they overlap, and no sphere has a higher status than another. According to Kuyper, a theologian working in the "sphere" of church was as important as a tradesman working in his "sphere" of carpentry, a vocation. In education "sphere sovereignty" led to the conclusion that Christian schools should not be parochial and should not be part of a church. Schools had their own sphere as did churches. Thus, in North America in 1892 the Christian Reformed Church adopted a resolution stating "the synod encourages the organization of a Society for the promotion of Christian Reformed education." The Synod further promised that when such a Society was

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Bratt, op. cit., p. 6.

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De Boer, op. cit., p. 10.

organized "she will give it her moral support."

The movement led by Kuyper originated among the elite of the *Hervormde Kerk,* but internal disputes among the various groups and Kuyper's reaching out to "kleine luyden," literally "the little people," in reference to the lower classes, led to yet one more Calvinist schism. A key element in the schism was an article in the"Book of Church Order" of the *Hervormde Kerk* watering down the need for ministers to "adhere strictly" to the Three Forms of Unity. After a series of commission and Synods within the *Hervormde Kerk*, Abraham Kuyper, a member of the *Hervormde Kerk*, wrote a pamphlet concluding that the orthodox Calvinists within the *Hervormde Kerk* had only one alternative against the growing liberalism of the church -- secession. In 1886 and 1887, several thousand members of the *Hervormde Kerk* left the church. This schism is called the *Doleantie*, from the Latin meaning "mourning, grieving, dissenting." Kuyper was a key leader in this movement and also a leader in the union of the people of the *Doleantie* with the earlier secessionists of the *Afscheiding* into a one-denomination the *Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerk,* a group that eventually became closely aligned with the Christian Reformed Church in North America.

The work of Abraham Kuyper and especially his ability to organize and unite, at

least for a time, the scattered forces of the orthodox Calvinists requires a more detailed study. Kuyper, it can be argued, is the father of Alberta's Calvinists school community.

Abraham Kuyper, leader and founder of the Dutch political party, the Anti-Revolutionary Party (A.R.P.) became Prime Minister of the Netherlands in 1901. This event marked a high point in the struggle of orthodox Calvinists against what they perceived as government interference in the expression of their religious beliefs. Their struggle would culminate 15 years later with a constitutional amendment enshrining rights of parents to have fully funded Christian schools for their children. The events of 1901 and 1917 are manifest in the unique social structure of the Netherlands -- "Pillarization."

Pillarization and the "School Struggle"

Pillarization, or the segmentation of Dutch society into self-contained communities, evolved from a century of struggle by orthodox Calvinists over the issue of education. This struggle is referred to in Dutch historiography as the *schoolstrijd* (literally, school struggle). The *schoolstrijd* and the resultant pillarization of Dutch society gave the minority orthodox Calvinist community in the Netherlands an identity and a defining myth. They carried this myth to the new

world in successive waves of immigration, first to America in the 1840's and later to Canada in the 1950's where the immigrant communities became the founders of over 130 Dutch Calvinist schools, two dozen of which are in Alberta.

The *schoolstrijd* dominated Dutch politics and religion for most of the 19th century and Dutch educational historiography for much of the 20th century. Richardson has noted over 2,000 entries listed under *schoolstrijd* in Dutch libraries.[35] Adriaan Peetoom states

> No other factor had been so instrumental in allowing their leaders to organize, galvanize and inspire these people (Orthodox Calvinists). On no other issue had opponents held more distant and unyielding views the word schoolstrijd will still cause eyes to light up, blood to run more quickly, and backs to straighten.[36]

How did such an unromantic issue as a struggle over education in 19th century Netherlands become a defining myth for a people and find expression in 20th century Alberta? The answer begins with the French Revolution and with Napoleon.

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Richardson, op. cit., p. 98.

36

Peetom, Adriaan (1983). *From Mythology to Mythology: Dutch-Canadian Orthodox Calvinist Immigrants and Their Schools*. MA Thesis, University of Toronto p. 16.

The Batavian Republic

The Batavian Republic, established in the Netherlands in 1795, was a victory of sorts for a group of Dutchmen called the Patriots. The Patriots were liberal pro-French middle class professionals who advocated reforming Dutch society through the establishment of a strong central government as opposed to the existing loose federation of provinces dominated by the stadtholders. Key to the Patriots' idea of central government was a reformed education system operated by the central government, free of divisive denominational factions and infused with the concept of a "natural religion." Catholics and Calvinists saw in this move a serious threat to their religious liberties and immediately opposed centralized control. To the orthodox Calvinists the idea of a natural or rational religion was anathema. The orthodox Calvinists viewed the Patriots and other people of similar thinking as bringing to the Netherlands, historically a proud Reformed nation, the ungodly philosophies of the Enlightenment and French Revolution.

During the 18th century education was largely the responsibility of the *Hervomde kerk* or state Reformed church. The church willingly accepted this role. Historian Simon Schama has noted that

> The Reformed Church, in the spirit of the Synod of Dort, continued to regard schools. . .as instruments for the suppression of heterodoxy. The young were to be cleansed of improper doctrine by daily doses of the Heidelberg catechism and an otherwise unrelieved

diet of scriptural text.[37]

The Dutch tradition of weak central authority ensured local control over matters such as education. Local control was generally favourable to Reformed Christian instruction in schools. The Patriots' agenda threatened this arrangement.

The views held by the Patriots reflected those of the Maatschappij Tot Nut van't Algemeen, the Society for the Public Good (the Nut). The Nut was formed in 1784 by a Mennonite pastor. It quickly attracted middle class merchants, professionals and religious dissenters. The objective of the Nut was to print and distribute inexpensive material on a variety of social issues including religion and education. The Nut was influenced by Enlightenment thought and saw the need to enlighten the common person.

The Nut was especially interested in educational reform, even establishing several successful model schools. In the schools, religion was taught from the perspective of rational religion. It emphasized God's care and love, and Jesus' examples of virtue and morality. The Nut wanted doctrine eliminated from the schools since they believed doctrine to be divisive and beyond the ability of children to

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Schama, Simon, "Schools and Politics in the Netherlands, 1796-1814" *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 13, 4 (December, 1970) p. 593.

understand. Bible instruction was through children's Bible stories but separated from the full text of the Bible. In fact, once an approved list of books was printed, the Bible was not on the list, something that did not pass the notice of orthodox Calvinists.

The Nut believed that, through a school system free of denominational control, Dutch society could work towards unity. The Dutch at the time of the Batavian Republic suffered from a loss of national "self-esteem." The Dutch nation and people had fallen on hard times. The Patriots and the orthodox Calvinists both looked back at the glories of the "Golden Age." They found their economically and social-depressed era falling far short of the glories of the past. For the Patriots and for the Nut, national unity, through a central government and educational reform, could arrest the moral decline. The Patriots proclaimed that

> without unity our Republic can never succeed in being either important for her allies or redoubtable to her foe. Common interest dictates that the whole Batavian nation unite to form a single indivisible Republic.[38]

The orthodox Calvinists were also concerned with the economic and moral decline of Dutch society. In fact, they were victims of the decline in Dutch prestige. orthodox Calvinists remembered with pride the Golden Age, particularly the fact

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Schama, Simon (1977). *Patriots and Liberators: Revolution in the Netherlands.* London UK.: William Collins & Sons p. 14.

that an orthodox Calvinist Reformed church dominated and regulated society. However, by the end of the 18th century orthodox Calvinists were relegated to second class status. Their state church had become a department of the government and they themselves were largely an uneducated poor, remnant of their old selves. For Calvinists moral and economic decline could only be arrested by a return to the Calvinism of the past, particularly adherence to "the Three Forms of Unity." However, orthodox Calvinists were unorganized, formed a small minority in Dutch society, and were politically powerless being unfranchised. Their only avenue for dissent was through the church and through schooling.

In 1798 the Nut published an influential article *"Reflections on National Education."* This article formed the basis for the 1806 School Act which stayed in force for fifty years. The School Act established central control over schooling and instituted many essential reforms -- setting minimum standards, instituting school inspection, ensuring proper teacher training and remuneration. Most significant for orthodox Calvinists was the elimination of any denominational teaching. Article 22 was to be the flash point for many in the ensuing *schoolstrijd*. Article 22 stated:

> All instruction must be organized in such a way that, while learning suitable and useful skills, the rational abilities of children should be

developed, and they be trained in all social and Christian virtues[39].

Christian "virtues" suggested to Calvinists that Christianity was being relegated to a way of ordering society through good example and moral uprightness. Orthodox Calvinists believed this was unacceptable. Faith was the embodiment of Divine revelation and central to that revelation was the word of God -- the Bible. Article 22 seemed to threaten all they believed in.

Article 22 prohibited teaching doctrinal issues in public schools and imposed standards on private Christian schools that were enforced by inspectors. Even more serious for orthodox Calvinists was that the Act allowed private Christian schools to open but only with permission of local authorities and only if such schools would not have a negative effect on the local public school.

The orthodox Calvinists strongly opposed the Act seeing in it a direct attack on their historic faith expression. Their cherished and historic Calvinist faith was being undermined both by revolutionary influences in their church and in schooling. Calvinists insisted on the need to live by their historic creeds, creeds that impacted education. The Synod of Dort in 1618 declared that

Schools in which the young shall be properly instructed in piety and

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39
Quoted in Peetoom, op. cit., p. 20.

> fundamentals of Christian doctrine shall be instituted not only in cities, but also in towns and country places. The Christian magistery shall be requested that honorable stipends be provided for teachers, and that well-qualified persons may be employed and enabled to devote themselves to that function; and especially that the children of the poor may be gratuitously instructed by them and not be excluded from the benefits of the schools.[40]

This historic Synod clearly, at least in the minds of orthodox Calvinists, declared the need for Christian education taught from a doctrinal perspective. Parents, not the state, should have authority over the education of children. What orthodox Calvinists saw however were attempts by the state to impose "godless" schooling on their children.

By the 1830's, orthodox Calvinists finally had a voice in the person of Groen Van Prinsterer. Groen, a member of the upper class, a scholar (historian to the king) and a member of Parliament, was also a leader of the *Reveil*. His religious beliefs reflected the historic Calvinist faith of 17th century Netherlands.

Groen became an articulate and passionate spokesman for the orthodox Calvinists. His views about schooling were the antithesis of the view of the government. He argued that "so called neutrality [in schooling] grows into the most pernicious

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Oppewall, Donald (1997). *Voices From the Past: Reformed Educators*. Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America p. 266.

partiality favouring unbelief and ends in proselytism for the religion of reason and nature." Speaking in Parliament in support of the *Afscheiding* in mid-19th century, Groen argued a view reflecting the sentiments of Dutch Calvinists in Canada at the end of the 20th century and stated that

> Parents who, with or without adequate grounds, are honestly convinced that the character of instruction in the existing schools is non-Christian, must not, directly or indirectly, be prevented from providing for their children the kind of education for which they believe they can be responsible before God. That compulsion, to put it bluntly, is intolerable and ought to stop. It is a presumption springing from the Revolution which, disregarding the rights of parents, considers children the property of the state.[41]

Groen remained in Parliament until 1857. During his tenure he remained a champion for orthodox Calvinist schooling.

In 1848, the government instituted changes to the constitution which included a clause for "freedom of education." Article 194 stated "The giving of education is free, upon investigation of the quality and morality of the instructor and the supervision of the government both to be regulated by law."[42] The "freedom of education" phrase was generally understood to permit private Christian schools,

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Hiemstra, John (1998). *Worldview on the Air*. Lanham, New York: University Press of America p. 33.

42

Valk, John. "Religion and the Schools: The Case of Utrecht," *History of Education Quarterly* Vol. 35, No. 2 (Summer 1995) p. 171.

however Article 194 did not end the *schoolstrijd.* Groen wanted a public system divided into three confessional parts -- Protestant (meaning orthodox Calvinist), Catholic and "public." Furthermore, the Catholics and orthodox Calvinists, although now legally able to form private schools, had to do so at their own expense. Public money would only go to "religiously neutral" public schools. Finally, Catholics and orthodox Calvinists objected to the fact that education continued to be a monopoly of the state rather than a parental right.

In 1857 the government enacted legislation that replaced the 1806 School Act. The 1857 School Act was written by the anti-revolutionary Van der Brugghen. The Act allowed for "free" private schools at the expense of the parents. The Act had originally called for a subsidy to private schools, but that was defeated. Groen was frustrated with the new Act and resigned from Parliament. However, he returned five years later.

Various parliamentary and nationwide debates continued over the years. An indication of the toll the schoolstrijd was taking on all sides of the debate may be sensed from the liberal leader P.M. Thorbecke's response to one of Groen's parliamentary speeches on education.

> Were you [Groen and his party] a quiet party, which sought only to serve God in your way, one would offer respect, even if one held

> your view to be in error. But you want to assert your religious thesis in the area of politics, and behold, that is where your struggle starts. You are trying to open old wounds, to develop an old Dutch disease. I shall not now remind you that this speaker [Groen] so readily takes us back to the times of the Republic, when one part, then only one segment of the nation, ruled over the others, in the name of one brand of religion, of family compact, or privileges. But it is to this that I want to draw your attention, for it is of the utmost importance to see clearly and to say sincerely: if we should do what this speaker so often advocated, if we judge our laws and executive acts as Catholic or Protestant, if we should see every public affair through ecclesiastical eyes, the units of the state, the equality of the law, the possibility of government shall be at an end.[43]

That "old Dutch disease," reflected clearly in the *schoolstrijd*, did not run out of steam with Groen's retirement in 1871. In fact it picked up steam as the anti-revolutionary group came under the leadership of Abraham Kuyper. Kuyper took the lead in the *schoolstrijd* and in so doing both enshrined a myth in the hearts of the orthodox Calvinists and created a "pillarized" society. Kuyper believed that each segment of society had the right to live out their confessional worldview. This belief was stated in one of his first speeches on education.

> Every historically developed element in our people's life must, according to our loud demand, be rediscoverable in the regenerated national life, however modified and limited. Our Reformed people in front, but equally our Catholic countrymen, the men of the old [Society for the General Good] as well as the young Holland, call it modern or radical, in short every group and every direction, must be able to build along on the new house in which the Dutch people will

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Quoted in Peetoom, op. cit., p. 33.

live.[44]

For Kuyper and the anti-revolutionists, this meant that an issue as basic as education was too important to leave to the state and must belong to parents living out their confession in their own community. Kuyper opposed the idea of a "unitary hierarchy," the idea that a central government establish hegemony over society. Kuyper's approach was a pluralistic segmentation of society with the central government relegated to its delineated "sphere" of responsibility.

On the educational front a new School Act was passed in 1878. It increased state control over education partially in response to the growing number of private Catholic and orthodox Calvinist schools. The government imposed stricter standards for all schools which were costly and as a result were particularly hard on the private schools. Both the anti-revolutionaries and the Catholics opposed the bill and initiated a petition drive. Over 160,000 Catholics and over 300,000 Protestants signed the petition. The petition asked the King not to give royal assent to the bill. However, the Netherlands being a constitutional monarchy, the King signed the bill into law.

The effect of the new School Act was to give life to the newly-formed political

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Quoted in Hiemstra, op. cit., p. 34.

party, the Anti-Revolutionary Party (ARP) led by Abraham Kuyper. No longer a "movement," the party now forged ahead as a political party to capitalize on the opposition to the School Act. In 1887 the voting franchise was extended. The expanded franchise and opposition by both orthodox Calvinists and Catholics to the 1878 School Act led to a "Christian" coalition government in 1888 between the ARP and Catholics.

The coalition government introduced a new school act in 1889. This act, for the first time, provided a partial subsidy to private Christian schools. As Christian schools began to receive funding the supporters of the schools were in the middle of a schism. A group of dissenters, led by Kuypers, left the *Hervormde Kerk.* This split, called the *Doleantie*, led to a new alignment of Calvinist groups. Teachers who joined the *Doleantie* were released from the *Hervormde Kerk* schools. *Hervormde* schools were not open to *Doleantie* children so parents set up their own schools. Another group of Orthodox parents from the now three Calvinist churches also started a school society.

On the eve of the new century the long-lasting *schoolstrijd* was about to come to a conclusion. The Socialist Party adopted a resolution to allow state funding for private schools arguing "in order to save the class struggle, we let the religious

struggle end."[45] The Catholics and Calvinists were already working together in common cause. That left only the liberals in opposition.

The final battle of the schoolstrijd occurred in 1915. The liberal government was anxious to broaden the voting franchise. This required a constitutional amendment which required a two-thirds majority. The Catholics and ARP would not support the amendment unless there was also to be a constitutional amendment making provision for a pluralistic school system. This was agreed by all parties and in 1917 *de pacificatie,* or peaceful settlement, became law.

De pacificatie enshrined funding for public, Catholic and Protestant schools and would also define three Dutch pillars. Kuyper was able to bring together the orthodox Calvinists whom he referred to rather paternalistically as *de kleine luyden* or "the small people," and form them into an identifiable group. The Calvinists, with the Catholics and the "Neutrals," formed the basis of a social system in which each confessional group could function completely within its own worldview. In 1898 Kuyper was invited to Princeton University to be awarded an honourary Doctor of Laws degree. While there Kuyper was also invited to give the "Stone Lectures." In the Stone Lectures, Kuyper stated his Calvinist vision in which

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Ibid p. 41.

members of confessional groups "who still have faith must begin by drawing a boundary about themselves, that within this circle they might develop a life of their own."[46] The orthodox Calvinists had their own church, their own newspaper, their own political party, their own hospitals and nursing homes, sports clubs, radio station and, of course, their own school system.

During the 20th century the pillars solidified in Dutch society. As emigration from the Netherlands to Canada occurred through the century, each immigrating group of Dutch Calvinists carried to Canada a seed of the myth of the *schoolstrijd* and the legend of Abraham Kuyper. The early immigrants, struggling to survive, made little headway in establishing their pillar in Canada, but, when the post-World War Two immigrants came to Canada, they quickly established their pillar through institutions such as churches, Christian Credit Unions, Christian Labour Associations, Christian Farmers Associations and Christian Schools.

Dutch Calvinists in Alberta carry with them a mythology created by events in Dutch history. These historic antecedents include doctrinal struggles in the 16th century, schisms in the 19th century and a century long "school struggle." These antecedents, imprinted on the character of orthodox Calvinists, shaped the

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46
Quoted in Bratt, op. cit, p. 19.

communities they would create in Alberta.

CHAPTER 4: THE RIPPLE;

EARLY DUTCH IMMIGRATION TO ALBERTA PRE WORLD WAR I

Herman Ganzevoort[1] describes Dutch immigration to Canada with appropriate water imagery -- the Ripple (the period prior to World War I), The Wave (the period from the late 20s to the Depression), and The Flood (the post-World War II era). The table below shows immigration statistics from 1901 to 1955 and clearly indicate the three periods of Dutch immigration. Dutch Calvinists from each of these three periods contributed in their own unique way to the history of the origins of Dutch Calvinist schools in Alberta. This chapter looks at "the ripple" of immigration that occurred prior to the First War.

Dutch Immigration to Canada From 1901 to 1950[2]

1901	25	1926	1,721
1902	35	1927	2,242
1903	233	1928	2,465
1904	169	1929	2,340
1905	281	1930	2,458
1906	389	1931	788
1907	394	1932	269
1908	1,212	1933	259
1909	495	1934	164
1910	741	1935	148
1911	931	1936	208

1

Ganzevoort, Herman (1988). *A Bittersweet Land: The Dutch Immigrant Experience In Canada 1890 to 1990*. Toronto & McClelland & Stewart.

2

Lucas, Henry (1955) *Netherlands in America: Dutch Immigration to the U.S. and Canada 1789 - 1950*, University of Michigan Press p. 646.

1912	1,077	1937	192
1913	1,524	1938	232
1914	1,506	1939	376
1915	605	1940	411
1916	186	1941	238
1917	151	1942	203
1918	94	1943	146
1919	59	1944	131
1920	154	1946	159
1921	595	1946	2,234
1922	183	1947	2,738
1923	119	1948	6,998
1924	1,149	1949	7,169
1925	1,637	1950	19,266

Total for 1901 to 1950.....67,499

As noted in the previous chapter, religious unrest among Calvinists in the Netherlands led, in 1847, to a large group of dissenters leaving the Netherlands for America, settling in the Grand Rapids area of West Michigan and in Iowa. These orthodox Calvinist established stable communities complete with Reformed churches and schools, making them attractive for subsequent immigrants from the Netherlands, many of whom came to America not simply for religious reasons but often for the opportunity of economic betterment. However, by the 1880s and 1890s land in the settled areas became scarce and expensive leading some Dutch immigrants to heed the call of the day "to go west." Soon Dutch communities grew up in various American states and territories including Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Montana.

Many Dutch who moved to the West settled in Montana territory near the post office and train station called Manhattan. Manhattan was originally established by the Manhattan Malting Company. It sent all its malt to Manhattan, New York, hence the name. By 1903, the Dutch settlers established the Manhattan Christian Reformed Church followed in 1904 by a Christian school. The Dutch Calvinist community in Manhattan, Montana was to play a significant role in the growth of pre World War I Dutch Calvinist communities in Alberta, both as a staging area for America routed Dutch immigration and for introducing the American based Christian Reformed Church into Canada -- the church whose members were responsible for establishing most of the Dutch Calvinist schools in Alberta.

Southern Alberta, 1903

The first Dutch settlers into Alberta arrived in 1903 via Manhattan.[3] Most settlers had membership papers from the *Gereformeerde Kerk* in the Netherlands. Since church membership was important, the church urged its members to transfer their papers to a Christian Reformed Church as soon as possible. Several early settlers to Alberta had their membership recorded with the Manhattan Christian Reformed Church. This connection made the church in Manhattan responsible for the

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Much of the information on the early Calvinist settlements in Alberta comes from *The Strength of Their Years*. Hoffman Tymen (1983). *The Strength of Their Years*, St.Catherines Ont.: Knight Publishing Ltd.

spiritual well-being of their northern brothers and sisters in Alberta.

In 1904 another group of settlers, mostly orthodox Calvinists, arrived in southern Alberta directly from the Netherlands. Most came from the same provinces as the 1903 group-provinces in northern Netherlands that were strongholds of orthodox Calvinism.

In 1905 a child was born to one of the families. The child needed to be baptized. The settlers asked the consistory of Manhattan Christian Reformed Church what they could do to provide a baptism. This created a minor ecclesiastical crisis since no one seemed to know if a baptism could be administered outside of a proper church service. Calvin College in Grand Rapids was asked for advice and the Manhattan consistory was informed that a minister could indeed perform a baptism without a formal church service. Thus the Manhattan church sent its dominee by train to Lethbridge where he was met by a delegation from the Dutch community and escorted to the settlement some 40 km to the northwest. The following Sunday the community met in a settler's home, were given communion and witnessed the baptism of two infants. Within the year the Manhattan church sponsored the organization of a Christian Reformed Church for the settlers in southern Alberta. By the fall of 1905 the first Christian Reformed Church in

Canada was organized in what is now Nobleford, Alberta.

The American pattern of the formation of a Dutch Calvinist settlement and the establishment of a Christian Reformed Church was followed in southern Alberta. What was not followed was the organization of a Christian school society. This is peculiar given the fact that among the settlers was a man who had taught in a Christian school for four years in the Netherlands.

There is no documentable reason for the community's apparent lack of interest in a Christian school. Some possible reasons can be suggested, however. The community was spread over a larger distance than may have been the case in the American settlements. Money certainly could have been a factor, the community was extremely poor. It is also possible that settlers adventurous enough to settle in the Northwest Territories of Canada were of a mind set in which schooling was not a high priority. When a public school was established (also in 1905) the Dutch children attended but only for 3 or 4 years, then went to work on the farm as was the norm in northern Netherlands. Perhaps the most intriguing reason, however, is one that can be argued from Rev. Hofman's history of the community.

The majority of the Dutch settlers in southern Alberta came from the province of

Overijssel in the Netherlands. In fact most came from one city, the industrial city of Nijverdal. As mentioned earlier, there were two major schisms in the Reformed church in the Netherlands in the 19th century -- the *Afseheiding* of 1834 and the *Doleantie* of 1887. These two groups joined to form the *Gereformeerde Kerken* and, although both groups were orthodox Calvinists and had reacted against the liberalism of the state church, each group had a distinct mentality. Hofman describes the differences

> The *Gereformeerde Kerken* were always said to have an "A" strain and a "B" strain. The "A" Kerk was less intellectual, more experiential, exhibiting an open kind of piety, sometimes charged with being pietistic and legalistic. The "B" Kerk was intellectually and doctrinally progressive, majoring in a total application of Christian faith to life and society.[4]

The Calvinists in Nijverdal had a dynamic leader who identified with the *Afscheiding* and who was instrumental in the start of a Christian school in that city. With the Doleantie of 1887, however, strains began to appear in the Calvinist community. The antagonism against the *Hervormde Kerk* of 1834 was still felt, and not all orthodox Calvinists embraced the members of the *Doleantie,* all of who came from the *Hervormde Kerk,* nor the newly created *Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerk.* This antagonism, according to Hofman, created tensions in the Christian

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Hofman, p. 40.

school community, manifesting itself over issues of control of the school.[5] This antagonism included at least one member of the subsequent immigrant group to southern Alberta. The end result of the tension was the establishment of a separate Christian school in Nijverdal.

Perhaps the antagonism between orthodox Calvinists, with their focus on the local Christian school, led to a reluctance by the settlers in southern Alberta to organize a Christian school in their community and run the risk of importing tensions to their new home in Canada. They had left behind not only family and friends but also perhaps their feuds. In any event the Dutch Calvinists in southern Alberta gave their support and sent their children to public schools. There was not to be any serious effort at establishing a private Christian school in southern Alberta until well after World War II.

Edmonton, 1910

About the same time Dutch settlers were arriving in southern Alberta, Dutch immigrants were arriving in Edmonton. Unlike southern Alberta, there is no indicator when the first Dutch immigrants arrived. There certainly was no formal contact among the Dutch of Edmonton numbering perhaps two dozen adults and

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Hofman, p. 41.

children, but a family tragedy was to change that. In the spring of 1910 the *Edmonton Journal* reported the tragic death by typhoid fever of two young Dutch children, sons of a Henry Kippers. Many Dutch families, after reading the story, went to the Kippers' home to offer condolences. This bringing together was to lead to the establishment of a Christian Reformed church in Edmonton, the third Christian Reformed Church in Canada.

Sometime after the tragedy Kippers, described as a "well read and determined man of action,"[6] invited the Dutch community to his home. The group agreed to meet together for worship in their Reformed tradition and in their language. They met in a tent for the summer months at the corner of 109 Street and Jasper Avenue. Eventually the group made contact with Dominee Vander Mey of Manhattan Christian Reformed Church. This contact set in place a series of procedures leading to the arrival of Vander Mey in Edmonton in 1910 to formally establish the First Christian Reformed Church of Edmonton. The first service was held on October 23, 1910, with a celebration of the Lord's Supper and infant baptism.

That baptism was performed at the first service in both southern Alberta and in

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In His Soil: A 75 Year History of the First Christian Reformed Church of Edmonton, 1910-1998 Yearbook. p. 2.

Edmonton is notable beyond the significance of the Christian sacrament of baptism. In the Calvinist community baptism is recognized as a sign of the covenant between the community and God. The covenant promise made by parents on behalf of the child ensures the extension of God's covenant grace. The concept of covenant is explained in *Eerdmans Handbook to Christian Belief.*[7] The Covenant "gave expression to their [Israel's] promise to live as the people of God -- to be *a distinctive holy people* [italics added]. . . the covenant was produced to give a pattern to life."[8] This thread within Dutch Calvinism of a belief in being "a chosen people," recurs frequently in the history of that early Dutch Calvinist community in Edmonton. In fact it was to manifest itself dramatically in Edmonton within a few years of the formation of First Christian Reformed Church, and Kippers was once again to be a key player.

When Dominee Vander Mey returned to Manhattan he wrote an article for the Calvinist newsletter "De Wachter." The article once again raised the familiar theme of a chosen people. Vander Mey wrote "the meetings in the tent helped the congregation identify itself with the Old Testament people of God who were

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7

Eerdmans is a publisher in Grand Rapids, Michigan, and is well within the Calvinist tradition.

8

Keeley, Robin (1982). *Eerdman's Handbook to Christian Belief,* Grand Rapids, MI.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., p. 242 & 244.

pilgrims and strangers in a foreign land."[9] The article listed the virtues of northern Alberta. Written mainly for an American audience, the article compared Edmonton favourably to the Dutch Calvinist centre of Grand Rapids, Michigan. "Edmonton, a city of 25,000 people, is just as attractive to live in as Grand Rapids." This article was to provide the impetus for future immigration to Edmonton and to the fledgling Christian Reformed church.

The Edmonton church, to remain viable, needed to grow. Action was needed. The action taken was the formation of an Immigration Society with Kippers appointed as secretary. At one of the first consistory meetings of the newly-formed church it was agreed to place handbills at the train station directing immigrants to the Reformed community and its church. But Kippers also sent Vander Mey's description of Edmonton to newspapers in the Netherlands. The article described Edmonton in glowing terms:

> Land is plentiful, extremely fertile and cheap. Yields of 45 bushels to an acre for wheat, and 100 bushels an acre for oats are not uncommon. The climate leaves little to be desired. Unlike the southern part of the province, Edmonton is rarely windy. It is true, the temperature does occasionally dip down to minus 50 or 60 degrees Fahrenheit, but this is the exception rather than the rule. And even when it does, the atmosphere is so dry that it never feels

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9 In His Soil, p. 3.

colder than minus 20 in a damper climate.[10]

The Dutch immigrants had come to Edmonton as a temporary stopping point with the plan to earn money and then move to file claims on homesteads. For many the dream seemed remote since money was scarce. Many of the early Dutch settled in Fraser Flats (Riverdale) and worked in Edmonton. Some set up their own businesses. Some, however, continued to dream of homesteading, among them Mr. Kippers. In January 11, 1911, the following appeared in the De Wachter:

> A Dutch Colonization Society: In Edmonton, Canada, our church has a congregation. There is also a society to establish a Dutch colony (settlement) in that area. The society consists largely of members of our congregation there. Brother H. Kippers, secretary of this society, and at the same time clerk of the consistory, writes the following concerning this matter:
>
> There is here a Christian Society which purposes to establish a Dutch colony (settlement) in a good area. Nearly all members of our congregation have joined this society. This spring they will go to look for land (this was to have been done in the fall, but due to circumstances they did not have opportunity to accomplish it) to a well-known area and, with the Lord's blessing, are sure to succeed. Everyone will then receive 160 acres of the best land free by the drawing of lots. You need not worry that you will not have a church or school. You can be positively assured of those.
>
> To be a member of this society you contribute ten dollars. Send this to the treasurer J.H. Ter Horst, Pine Ave., Edmonton, or to the undersigned who is also the secretary of this society. Besides this, it is required that you are able to speak the Dutch language. Not only the head of a family, but every young man older than 18 has a right to 160 acres, so each claimant is required to pay ten dollars into this society.
>
> If you desire more detailed information, write soon since a

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Ibid, p.4.

> great number are interested. If you have little or no money, or if you are thinking to come to Canada to farm, we advise you to join (us); come in the spring, work in Edmonton the following summer and go with us to the farm. As much as possible, the consistory will supply work and housing. I may not ask for more space. Write for information, as soon as possible, to the secretary of the society, who is also the clerk of the consistory. This is necessary, for of course it would not do to make the congregation a colonization society. Therefore the consistory would also like this to placed under "Letters". Thank you for the allotted space.
>
> For the consistory,
> J. Kippers, Clerk
> 118 Griesbach St.Edmonton, Canada

The above letter was written in Dutch and published in the January 11, 1911, issue of De Wachter.[11]

The article had its hoped for effect. Dutch settlers directly from the Netherlands as well as a large group from Massachusets heeded the call. A front page headline on the *Edmonton Bulletin* date lined Whitinsville, Massachusets, April 4, 1911, indicates:

> **Nucleus of Dutch Colony en Route to Found Dutch Colony**
> Fifty Hollanders, residents of Whitensville, left from town today with their wives and children for Alberta, Canada, where they with another party from Holland will found a Dutch colony seventy miles west of Edmonton. The Whitensville party will meet their fellow countrymen in Montreal[12]

11

Kippers, Henry *DeWachter* January 11, 1911.

12

Edmonton Bulletin April 4, 1911.

The proposed colony would be in Townships 61 and 62 near present day Barrhead and was called Neerlandia.

In the fall a group of men left Edmonton to scout out the land.[13] When they returned, 16 of the men filed homesteads The *Edmonton Bulletin* reported:

> **Hollanders File on Homesteads**
> Yesterday a party of sixteen Hollanders appeared at the land office and filed on homesteads. They had spent considerable time in looking over the country adjacent to Edmonton and returned to the city satisfied that it was a good enough place for them to live and make their permanent home. The Hollanders located on land that will bring their homesteads all together, making them close neighbours.

The Dutch Calvinists, according to the memories of Ben Lievers of Neerlandia, had the

> . . . opportunity to take up land in that area [Edmonton], closer to the city and the railway. However, then they would have been among settlers of other nationalities, and the idea was to establish a *zuiver Nederlandse kolonie* (pure Dutch colony).[14]

The intent of the Dutch settlers was obvious. As noted in the local history, *A Furrow Laid Bare, 1985, Neerlandia and District*, "The intent of those early pioneers was clear: they wanted to start a community which would be exclusively

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One is tempted to draw parallel with the Biblical characters, Joshua and Caleb, in the Book of Numbers Chapter 13.

14

Neerlandia Historical Society (1985). *A Furrow Laid Bare: Neerlandia and District.I Neerlandia, AB: Neerlandia Historical Society. p.54.*

Dutch and Reformed wherein they could live out their faith isolated."[15] Isolation was characteristic of children of the *Afscheiding* and, at times, this was displayed in a narrow view of Christianity

> There was a tendency among the pioneers toward a narrow view of Christianity, a view that considered ideas and practices which did not conform to the Reformed view of Christianity and which were not Dutch, as unacceptable and therefore to be avoided. In order to be "in the world but not of the world" some thought it was best to avoid the rest of "Canadian" society by keeping geographically and culturally separate from it. People of other nationalities and religious backgrounds were at times made to feel that they were not welcome to settle in Neerlandia. The notion that there was only one correct view made it difficult for people to accept differences in others, and at the same time to accept differences among themselves.[16]

The symbol of the Christian Reformed Church is a cross interposed on a triangle. The triangle represents the trinity but could as easily represent the three key elements of a Calvinist family-- home, church and school. Both the Edmonton community and the Neerlandia communities quickly established their church once they were settled in their homes. The school proved more difficult.

The Edmonton community was conscious of the importance of a school reflecting

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15

Ibid p. 664.

16

Ibid p. 664.

their Calvinist faith. At a congregational meeting February 18, 1914, two essays were presented. The first entitled "The Necessity of Christian Education" was followed by an essay "The Possibility of Christian Education."[17] The records of that meeting indicated that there was great interest in the topic and a further meeting was held in March to continue the discussion. But the talk of Christian schooling did not bear fruit until after the Second World War.

As with southern Alberta, there is no clear documentation why a school was not started. It likely was a combination of factors. First, settlers lacked financial security. When the Neerlandia community was established the Edmonton church lost twenty-one families. This membership decline continued for much of the 1920's. Decline in membership was compounded by the church being caught in a land purchase deal just as the Edmonton real estate bubble burst. Another factor may be lack of decisive leadership combined with an often difficult congregation. As the official history of the First Christian Reformed Church notes:

> if "too many cooks spoil the broth", then it is equally true that too many determined and at times opinionated lay-theologians can cause a problem[18]

17

In His Soil op. cit., p. 14.

18

In His Soil op. cit., p. 9.

The difficulty the Dutch Calvinist community faced is reflected in correspondence to one of the more dynamic and decisive First Christian Reformed Church pastors, Rev. de Koekkoek. In a letter written in 1944 from the pastor in Neerlandia encouraging de Koekkoek to move to Edmonton the writer warns "sorry to say the church does not have a very good reputation, ie. several ministers have had tough going there."[19] The combination of a lack of money and turbulent relations between congregation and pastors likely impeded progress on the formation of a private Calvinist Christian school in Edmonton. Ironically, the first Dutch Calvinist school in Alberta was not a private school but rather a public school.

Neerlandia "Christian" School

The *schoolstrijd* by orthodox Calvinists in the Netherlands for publicly funded Christian schools culminated in 1917 with a constitutional amendment allowing for public money to Catholic and Protestant Christian schools. In the same year, in the wilderness of northern Alberta, the Dutch Calvinist colony of Neerlandia organized a *public* school based on Reformed principles thus receiving full government funding without the trauma of a *schoolstrijd.*

The original intent of the Reformed colony in Neerlandia was to establish an

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de Koekkoek, Paul. Private Papers. Calvin College Archives, Grand Rapids, Mich.

independent Christian school. A Christian school society was organized in 1915. Though there was no money for a school or teacher, the Society arranged for one of the settlers to teach the children in the church. In return for his services the "teacher" (he had no permit) received services from the community. However, this arrangement did not last long. When the teacher left, the community was faced with the problem of how to provide a Calvinist Christian education for their children.

Members of the community were divided as to what they should do. Some argued that the community was too poor for a Christian school; others argued it was their responsibility to provide their children with Christian education. The debate continued for some time but it was eventually decided to create a public school district. Since the school was in the colony and all members were Dutch Calvinists, it was believed that the community could staff the school with Christian teachers.

Contact was made with provincial authorities and on March 5, 1917, School District #3460 was formed. All members of the District were Calvinists and the Christian School Association turned over its affairs to the new school district in

1919.[20] The school has continued as a Christian school within the Calvinist tradition to this day. It was not always able to hire the type of teachers hoped for by the community and not all teachers left the community with fond memories. However, the community was able to maintain control over the school. When provincial changes to administration and control were instituted, the new structures worked with the school community invariably following the wishes of the Neerlandia advisory board.

By the end of World War I, several Dutch Calvinist communities were established in Alberta. Although each had the desire for its own "free" Calvinist Christian school, none came into existence, save for the public Christian school in Neerlandia. It would be up to the next two groups of immigrants to put into reality the dream of "free" Calvinist Christian schools. Immigration reached significant levels from 1925 to 1930. Many immigrants who arrived during this period moved to farming communities -- some to Neerlandia but also a significant number to Lacombe. These immigrants brought with them both the desire for better economic opportunities and the impact of the leadership of Abraham Kuyper and his followers.

20

Neerlandia op. cit., p. 730.

CHAPTER 5: THE WAVE: DUTCH IMMIGRATION TO 1945 ; AND THE FIRST "FREE" CALVINIST CHRISTIAN SCHOOL

In March 1929, Harry Siebenga, along with his brother Siebe, left their home province of Friesland to seek their fortune in Canada. Henry and Siebe were part of "the wave" of Dutch immigrants that came to western Canada during the latter half of the 1920's. The choice of Lacombe as a destination was the on the advice of a Mr. Van Ark,[1] formerly of Neerlandia, who was the CPR agent in the Netherlands. "Van Ark advised us to go west and suggested Lacombe because there was a family here who wanted to start a church."

The Great War effectively ended the "ripple" of immigrants that had started shortly after the turn of the century. In 1919 only 59 Dutch immigrants arrived in Canada. By the 1920's there was a resurgence of Dutch immigration with numbers increasing sharply peaking at 2,500 in the last years of the decade. The Great Depression ended the "wave," but not before 14,000 Dutch immigrants had arrived in Canada. Most immigrants were farmer labourers who realized that the chance

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In a chapter entitled "Sharks in Wooden Shoes", Ganzevoort makes note of a Willem VanArk who was CPR agent during the 1920's and 1930's." "The gulling of immigrants brought about a final attempt to deal with the most notorious of the CPR recruiters, Willem VanArk. Van Ark had been the busiest, most deceitful and most elusive of the agents,... his particular target [was] agriculturalists, particularly members of his own Calvinist persuasion whom he would recruit outside church doors on Sunday mornings." Ganzevoort, Herman (1988). "Shark in Wooden Shoes", *A Bittersweet Land: The Dutch Immigrant Experience in Canada 1890 to 1990* . Toronto: McClelland and Stewart. p. 152.

of owning a farm in the Netherlands was minimal. As Harry Siebenga noted "opportunities were very scarce at that time for anyone wanting to start something on their own." Harry's story of immigration gives a sense of what it was like for these early immigrants.[2]

After leaving their hometown the brothers arrived at Rotterdam for medicals and then went on to Antwerp. The following morning they boarded the boat for Canada. "Oh how luxurious at first. However soon a storm came up and our luxurious boat was soon renamed 'the old tub.' The storm was fierce and lasted the duration of the trip. Most of us were sea sick." The brothers landed at St. John. "We were not impressed with the dirty looking city. The next day we were put on a train for Montreal." After being warned to take along their own food due to the high cost of food on the train Harry and Siebe headed for Winnipeg. Winnipeg had an established Dutch community and members of this community looked after the two young men, giving them refreshment before they carried on with their trip to Alberta. "On April 6, 1929, we arrived by train in Wetaskiwin. The night before, a heavy snowstorm dumped six inches of fresh snow. We certainly didn't expect to find snow at this time of year. . .at eleven o'clock a train took us to Lacombe." Harry's future wife, Fokie, remembers the day well.

2

Harry Siebenga, interviewed by author, tape recording, Lacombe, AB. May 20, 1999.

Fokie Van Dyk left her home in the Netherlands a year early, on March 21, 1928, her 8th birthday. Her mother had passed away the previous year so father Reinder Van Dyk and five daughters left Friesland for Canada to start a new life. Fokiepicks up the story.

> We had just been here a year and we heard that there were some Dutch boys coming so we went to the Lacombe station. My father and sisters were talking Fries[3] of course and Harry and Siebe got off the train and there they heard someone talking Fries [a Dutch dialect] so they walked over there and met my dad - that was in 1929, we had just been here a year. Harry had already seen a picture of my sister and I on horseback going to school. My dad had put the picture in a Friesian newspaper and Harry saw that picture in Friesland. He always said that's when he fell in love with me.[4]

The actual romance was several years down the road, however. In the meantime the brothers had the pressing need to find employment. But there was no work to be had. Paul Bruinsma, a key figure in the future history of the establishment of a Christian school, was the contact person for the brothers. He arranged to have the two board with Jack ten Hoeve. This meeting became an interesting conjunction -- Jack ten Hoeve was to be the first president of the Lacombe Christian School Society, Paul Bruinsma the first secretary, and Harry and Siebe charter members.

3

Fries, or Frisian, is considered a dialect by some but most Frisians recognize Frisian as a separate language, in fact arguably the oldest existing Anglo-Saxon language.

4

Fokie Van Dyk, interviewed by author, tape recording, Lacombe, AB. May 20, 1999.

Finding work was a continuing concern. There was little work to be had in the Lacombe area and several of the single men left in the Fall of 1929 for British Columbia where they worked on dairy farms until 1932. The brother's reminiscences pick up the sad story. "Harry remained in B.C. until August 1932. It was then he decided to come back to Alberta. As many others, Harry too, rode the freight trains. But in Revelstoke, he jumped off and lost both hands under a train." An Anglican priest in Revelstoke helped Harry through this difficult time and ensured he was not deported. The priest arranged for Harry to return to Lacombe and Harry spent the winter with ten Hoeves adjusting to his artificial limbs. The loss of his hands did not stop Harry from fulfilling his dream of a better life as a Canadian farmer. In 1933 he and his brother bought some land and started farming.

Harry and Siebe, along with other members of the Dutch Calvinist community, were regulars at Paul Bruinsma's home. "Every Sunday was open house. The first Sunday we worshipped together was an experience which will never be forgotten. How great it felt to sing the Psalms in our own tongue."[5] In 1941, Harry married Fokie and together they raised nine children.

5
Siebenga, op. cit.

It was at one of the "convectiles" in Paul Bruinsma's home that the first mention of a Christian school was heard. Paul Bruinsma was a prominent figure in the Dutch Calvinist community in Lacombe.[6] Before the community had a formal church, informal services were held with Bruinsma reading sermons and playing the organ. At one of these gatherings, according to Harry Siebenga's recollection, Paul stated that a Christian school was needed for the community. This was around 1940.

The war and lack of money kept the idea at the talking stage. However, by 1944, a committee from the consistory of the newly formed Christian Reformed Church was appointed consisting of A.J. Bajema, H.J. ten Hove and O. Wiersma with the mandate to explore the possibility of starting a "free" Christian school. The committee met with the local school inspector and reported to the congregation that a school was possible. The minutes of the meeting note that "after some discussion it was decided to start a school and a school Society. The Society asked the Consistory [of the CRC church] to build their new accommodations in such a way that it could be used as a school."[7]

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In a poem written for the 50th Anniversary of Lacombe Christian school he is remembered as "Pake" Bruinsma (Pake is Friesian word for "grandpa") he was school janitor and choir director.

7

Minutes, Lacombe Christian School Society, July 3, 1944 p. 11.

The idea of a private Christian school was not welcomed by all residents of Lacombe. Harry Siebenga recalls that some members of the English-speaking community "did not like the idea." The departure of some two dozen children from the areas public schools posed a real threat to the local schools. Opposition was not restricted to local school concerns. The Dutch Calvinist community approached the Presbyterian church in Red Deer to join them on the Christian school project but the Presbyterian church refused on the grounds that they felt the idea of a private school to be unpatriotic.[8]

Despite some opposition, the Dutch Calvinist community opened its school in the fall of 1945, the second private Dutch Calvinist school in Canada (Holland Marsh in Ontario opened in 1943). The first teacher for Lacombe Christian was Alida Keegstra.[9] She has fond memories of her first four years as a teacher in Lacombe Christian school.

Alida's parents immigrated to Canada in 1928 and settled in the Vulcan area, where Alida grew up. In 1942-43 Alida attended Normal School in Calgary. Due

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It is interesting to note that in 1949 the Dutch Calvinist community in Vancouver held their organizational meeting in a Presbyterian church. When the school opened in the Fall of 1949 out of eleven students three had Anglo-Saxon names.

9

Alida Keegstra, interviewed by author, tape recording, Lacombe, AB. June 17, 1999.

to the teacher shortage and because of the war, teacher training consisted of six weeks including practice teaching. Alida, as she relates her story, saw her appointment as teacher for Lacombe Christian School quite literally an answer to prayer.

> For two years I had been teaching in the town of Hussar. . .the only time I was able to attend church was when I went home, which wasn't very often due to the lack of finances. Eventually I found I was in great need of spiritual food . . . I had been wondering what to do, I felt the Lord wanted me to do something different. I prayed about it. At the time I was living with a Catholic teacher in the teacherage and told her about my thoughts. When I got the letter from Rev. Roorda she said 'There's your answer'... I can't describe the feeling which I had then but there was no need to consider. This was the answer to prayer.[10]

The first day of school for the first private (or "free") Dutch Calvinist school in Alberta was September 9, 1945. Twenty-seven students waited for the day to begin. The actual school building was a building that the young people of the Christian Reformed Church had built to hold their meetings. Alida Keegstra recalls the first time she saw the school.

> I knew absolutely nothing about Lacombe, but that summer I was a counsellor at the Canadian Sunday School Mission Camp at Gull Lake. One day I phoned Rev. Roorda and he arranged to meet me and take me to the school. The sight was not too impressive. I had come from a treeless wheat growing county and there were so many trees here. The parsonage was in the process of being built, the church was a basement and there was mud everywhere. The only

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10 Keegstra, op. cit.

bright spot was the school that was bright and painted.[11]

Alida's memories of the day indicate a rather low-key official opening:

> At nine, September 10th, I met my twenty seven pupils for the first time in the new school building that had just been erected. Rev. J. Roorda opened with prayer. After reading a portion from the Bible, I filled in the register, and the pupils and I became acquainted. Eight grades were taught in our one room school.[12]

The minutes of September 10, 1945, written in Dutch, indicate a more formal evening ceremony.

> President K. Brouwer opened the meeting in the Dutch language. Special guest was Rev. de Koekkoek of Edmonton, who was thanked for his help and services to the school. The president reminded all present to remember the great gift God has granted and that He made it possible to have the children instructed in a Christian School.
>
> Mr. Ten Hoeve then took over in the English language, and welcomed Miss Keegstra. He hoped that her teachings would have many fruits, and that parents and pupils would cooperate with her task.
>
> Rev. de Koekkoek mentioned that this day is just the beginning, and that sometimes the road would not be smooth. Rev. Roorda closed the meeting with prayer. A very good lunch was served.[13]

Board minutes and the written and oral reminiscence provide a colourful snap shot

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11 Ibid.

12 Ibid.

13 Minutes, Lacombe Christian School Society, September 10, 1945, p. 45.

of the early years at Lacombe Christian School. Transportation is always of concern to schools, especially rural schools where distances can be significant. Students and parents dealt with transportation issues as was the norm in rural Alberta of 1945. Since school bussing was not available to Lacombe Christian School, students either walked, participated in a car/truck pool or rode horses.

The minutes of October 1, 1945, indicate board approval for the construction of a horse barn large enough for eight horses. The children of Siebe Siebenga wrote an anniversary book for their parents, *A Place of Our Own*. A portion of the book is reprinted in Lacombe Christian School's 50th Anniversary yearbook and, regarding horse transportation, provides a couple of interesting and poignant anecdotes.

When Siebe's oldest son was in grade two he rode his own horse, Nellie, to school. Eventually he was joined by his younger sister and then brother. Three children and one faithful horse. More siblings were to attend school and Nellie could not expect to carry all of them on her back. Siebe bought a cart for the horse from a neighbour who's children were out of school. "They just pointed the horse in the direction of school and she'd unerringly clip-clop her way without prompting or guidance."

However the young children were to face a tragedy involving Nellie.

> One crisp autumn morning [five children] rode to school in the cart as usual. At Rietsma's corner Nellie suddenly snorted, backed up and rolled in the ditch and died. Jack ran to Neil Brouwer's house to phone Dad while the rest of the kids stood around the horse in tears. Eventually they were picked up by a local community member and brought to school... that night they had to walk home from school. All along the road they saw where Dad had dragged the horse home[14].

Perhaps typically, given the times, women played an important albeit a supporting role in the early days of Lacombe Christian school. The minutes of the August 13, 1945, Society meeting noted that "women were welcomed." In the Reformed churches, as in many conservative churches, the role of women has been a point of tension. In the Christian Reformed Church, only in the last decade of this century have women been allowed to "hold office," that is, to serve on consistory. Thus it is interesting to note that at the July 5, 1946, School Board meeting. "The Board proposed to let the spouses of the members [of the Society] participate in the voting."[15] The motion, however, was defeated.

More organized participation by women in the operation of the school was through

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Quoted in *50th Anniversary Yearbook of Lacombe Christian School*, (1995). p. 58.

15

Lacombe Minutes, op. cit., July 5, 1946.

the Hannah Society.[16] The purpose of the Hannah Society was "to increase love for Christian instruction by the discussion of the teachings of the Bible. . . to promote the welfare of the school by financial and other help." Full recognition of the role of women in the school community was given at the August 26, 1955, Society meeting "Mr. B. Brouwer made a motion to make the ladies full members of the Society with a right to vote. The motion was carried with 13 in favour and 3 contrary."[17]

But why did this small and relatively poor group of Dutch Calvinist immigrants set up their own Christian school and willingly incur the expenses involved? Certainly one reason is what one sociologist refers to as the "remarkable fabric of Dutch ethnic cohesion." The bond that binds the fabric is their historical orthodox Calvinism with its defining myths and the strong attachment of the Dutch to their religious expression. This attachment transcends finances -- often an indicator of commitment. A review of the minutes shows remarkably few cases of people delinquent in their tuition payments with the occasional exception such as the entry for May 27, 1950.

16
In the Bible Hannah is the mother of Samuel. Hannah dedicated her son to the service of God.

17
Ibid, August 26, 1955.

> It was decided to announce from the pulpit that everyone who is behind in paying tuition fees . . .pay promptly. . .[18]

A few other entries indicate that, though ready to spend money on Christian schools, money was to be spent frugally.

> November 22, 1945, "Because of a shortage of money the children only received candy at the Christmas program. The consistory was approached if they would have a collection for this cause."
>
> December 3, 1946 "It was decided not to buy a new world map, because the war is over and there will be many changes on the newer maps. Rev. Roorda was asked to find a cheap older one, and a pencil sharpener."
>
> December 1952 "The Board thought it not advisable to buy a radio for the school, a glove would be much better."[19]

The Dutch are known for their frugality but the orthodox Dutch Calvinists are also quick to ensure the viability of their institutions as the following entry from August 27, 1954, Society meeting indicates:

> The treasurer, Mr. Reitsma, read his financial report. There was a shortage of $250.00 . . .the money shortage was discussed and the board suggested to borrow $250 from the bank. However Mr. John Brouwer and the others with him didn't think it advisable to start the new year with debts. Mr. Talsma then made a motion to have a 20 minute recess so as to give members an opportunity to donate a free gift for their school. This motion was recorded by Mr. Bruinsma and carried. The result was that after recess we had received $380.00 in free gifts. The president thanked the members for their

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Ibid, Minutes, May 27, 1950.

19

Ibid, Minutes.

splendid cooperation.[20]

When it came to schooling, money was of secondary consideration for these Dutch Calvinists. Of prime importance was an uncompromising maintenance of their religious identity, and this identity was most dramatically expressed in their idea of covenant (See also Chapter 4) the idea that they are a chosen people set apart by God. Within this concept is the Calvinist idea of predestination. (For most orthodox Calvinists predestination is simply an affirmation that they are a chosen people. For some extreme Calvinists however it is a millstone as I discuss in a later chapter). Rob Kroes, in his recent study of the Dutch Calvinists in Manhattan, Montana, explains the influence of the concept of covenant on the orthodox Calvinists.

> Their social order based itself on their conviction of being a covenanted people, secure in their anticipation of God's special grace. Ethnicity to them only counts in this light. As partners to the covenant, they are aware of their perennial links to a distant country where their fathers first saw the light. Thus they are in a line of Dutch descent in a very special, providential sense, one that connects them to the Synod of Dordt, to the Secession and Kuyperianism . . .Their level of descent links them securely to an old promise of collective salvation. At the same time it places them in a tradition that is forever intent on identifying deviation.[21]

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Ibid, Minutes, August 27, 1954.

21

Kroes, Rob (1992). *The Persistence of Ethnicity: Dutch Calvinist Pioneers in Amsterdam, Montana*. Urbana Illinois: University of Illinois Press. p. 101.

The Lacombe community was very much part of the Dutch Calvinist worldview expressed above. At a Society meeting in February 7, 1945, the minutes record the theme of the minister's message. "Rev. Roorda spoke about Christian education. The cornerstone of education is the covenant. The promise of the covenant is that God is our God through all generations." At this meeting the Society voted in favour of opening their school that Fall. In a similar vein, a speaker at the March, 1946 Society meeting reminded those present "about the Biblical command to teach the children all God's ways, and reminded the members of their promise when their children were baptized."[22]

Implicit in the concept of covenant is the notion of being set apart. This notion of "apartness" leads to various forms of isolation, the most dramatic expression of which is the Pillarization of Dutch society. But it is also expressed in various ways in the Dutch Calvinist school community.

In beginning to answer the question as to why these Dutch Calvinists set up their own school there is, at this point in the story, one more factor that must be considered. This factor is the role of "the dominee." In Lacombe there was a community of Dutch Calvinists who had expressed a desire for a Christian school

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22
Lacombe Minutes, op. cit., March 1946.

as early as 1940 but nothing happened for several years. Certainly the war and a lack of money were major factors in holding back plans, but one must not discount the lack of decisive leadership.

In 1944, Rev. Roorda arrived in Lacombe. This was to be Roorda's first "calling" and only the second CRC pastor for the Lacombe church. Roorda arrived in June. The momentum to start a Society was already there since the first Society meeting was held on July 3. Nonetheless, the important role of the pastor was noted in the board minutes of January 9, 1945, "Rev. Roorda to be asked to become Honorary President." As well a writer for the *Christian Home and School Magazine* in the February, 1945, issue noted

> Without reverting to the use of black magic, we have an idea that something is stirring in our Lacombe group. We know that there are at least a few with a strong interest and ardent desire to have a school. While in Grand Rapids last summer we might have had the pleasure of meeting the then Candidate Roorda. When we heard that this brother had accepted the call from Lacombe, it was certainly our intention to see him before he was to leave. Our own studies however did not leave us much spare time and in the rush of the last few days we managed only a telephone conversation. This and a few other things we had heard about the Pastor-elect of Lacombe, convinced us that it will not be Rev. Roorda's fault if Lacombe is long without a school. God bless you brethren and be assured that you have a Mighty Ally in your attempt to give your children an education "naar den eisch des Veronds en in over-eenstemming met uw eens gedaane beloften." [after the demand of

the Covenant and in agreement with our once given pledge][23]

Perhaps the item overstated Roorda's role in the opening of a Christian school in Lacombe, as most old-timers interviewed did not identify him as a key person. Church historian Ty Hofman's notes in correspondence with me that

> As for John Roorda, I doubt that he would have left much of an impression since he was not an impressive fellow. Not at all dynamic. Of course I did not know him like Paul de Koekkoek at whose feet I sat for over a year. I never did figure out where he was going in a sermon but you always knew he was heartily in favour of what he was saying.[24]

If Roorda's role in the establishment of a Christian school in Lacombe is open to debate, the role of Paul deKoekkoek in Edmonton is not.

23

Uitvlugt, Jacob (1945) "Report from Canada" *Christian Home and School Magazine* February, 1945. Archives, Christian Schools International, Grand Rapids, Michigan p. 19.

24

Prinsen, Peter personal correspondence, with T. Hofman.

CHAPTER 6: THE FLOOD;

POST WAR IMMIGRATION AND CHRISTIAN SCHOOL GROWTH

Edmonton Christian School

The Dutch Reformed community in Edmonton became an organized community in 1910 with the establishment of the First Christian Reformed Church. Despite its small size, 18 adults and 23 children, the Dutch Calvinist community managed to find something upon which to disagree. The issue was baptism, more precisely, the proper time of administration.

In the Reformed community baptism is very significant. Besides its universal acceptance in Christendom, baptism in the Reformed community is a sign that the infant is part of God's "covenant." As one Reformed scholar has noted "emphasis on the covenant has become one of the distinguishing features of Reformed theology."[1] It is not surprising, then, that baptism would be an area of discord.

In Edmonton, the dispute was serious enough to cause a split on two distinct lines. First, Dutch Calvinists who were earlier immigrants from the Netherlands and from the United States and who traced their roots to the *Afscheiding* and tended to be more separatist, evangelical and pietistic. Second, the more recent

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1 Hesselink, John (1983). *On Being Reformed.* Ann Arbor MI: Servant Books.

immigrants from the Netherlands who proudly claimed themselves Kuyperians who had "a more intellectually worked out vision and who favoured establishing Christian institutions which can affect all of society."[2] This latter group of Kuyperians eventually took the lead in establishing Calvinist Christian schools in Edmonton under the leadership of a newly arrived pastor and dynamic leader, Rev. Paul deKoekkoek.

Paul de Koekkoek came to Edmonton as a strong advocate of Christian schools. Even before he came to Edmonton he expressed concern about the state of Christian schools in America. In a letter to a colleague, written in the spring of 1942, de Koekkoek equates the importance of Christian schools with the greater struggle being waged at that time in Europe. De Koekkoek says that we "should train our youngsters for that [spiritual] conflict as really and even more so than we as a nation do in the army camps. . . and one of the outstanding institutions for that is the Christian school."[3]

Writing in the official voice of the Christian Reformed Church, *The Banner*, in

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In His Soil: A 75 Year History of the First Christian Reformed Church of Edmonton 1920-1985. Yearbook p. 14.

3

All quotation in reference to Rev. Paul de Kooekkoek from his personal papers, Calvin College Archives, Grand Rapids MI.

1943, de Koekkoek urged "the revitalization of the Christian school movement." In the article, de Koekkoek argues that "An ordinary school may belong to the common domain of life, but 'our' school is a vital part of the historical setting of the covenant of grace . . . Get busy, then, ye listless brethren and help build Christian schools."[4] De Koekkoek certainly took his own advice when he arrived in Edmonton in 1945.

De Koekkoek was born in the Netherlands in 1890. Through his paternal grandparents de Koekkoek is a lineal descendent of 17th century jurist and theologian Hugo Grotius. Ironically Grotius had to leave the Netherlands because of his support of Arminianism, a theological view of predestination strongly opposed by orthodox Calvinists and de Koekkoek was definitely an orthodox Dutch Calvinist.

De Koekkoek immigrated to the United States in 1908. After graduating from Calvin College Seminary in Grand Rapids, Michigan, in 1923, de Koekkoek served several American churches before accepting "the call" to the First Christian Reformed Church in Edmonton, February 18, 1945. Upon his arrival in Edmonton

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de Koekkoek, Paul "The Communion of the Saints and the Christians School" *The Banner* (April 16, 1943) p. 381.

he wasted no time working to establish a Christian school. John Winkelaar[5] first secretary of the Edmonton Society for Christian Education recalls:

> When de Koekkoek arrived he visited Dick Van Dyke. All he did all night was talk about Christian schools . . .he was getting really enthusiastic about school - it was infectious.

De Koekkoek's personal correspondence from Edmonton to American colleagues attests to his desire to build a Christian school. A letter written in June, 1945, indicates that de Koekkoek was at work with the Dutch Calvinists of the First Christian Reformed Church.

> June 15, 1945 - We are happy to report that we are getting along all right. Really like our place. See many opportunities for work. Perhaps more than I can handle. They lie along the line of evangelism, Christian Education and radio. . . Next week a meeting called together by a committee of the consistory to initiate action towards Christian education in general and a Bible school during the vacation this summer.[6]

The seed that de Koekkoek hoped would lead to a Christian school was Vacation Bible School. In the same letter de Koekkoek, in Dutch, writes "Ik hoop dat dat

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Reminisences of John Winkelaar shared in conversation with author, February 27, 1999.

6

de Koekkoek, Paul Correspondence with Mr. John Vander Ark, Hull, Iowa, June 15, 1945, Calvin College Archives, Grand Rapids, Mich.

muisje een staartje mag hebben." This Dutch idiom translates "I hope that mouse has a tail," a reference to the idea the Vacation Bible school would lead to greater interest in Christian education and to a Christian school. The theme of Christian education and Vacation Bible school is noted again in a letter June 27, 1945, to an Iowa colleague

> It is Kingdom business that moves me to write this letter. Our Edmonton people are beginning to rise to the cause of Christian education. They decided to organize for that purpose. They also want to conduct a Vacation Bible School for a few weeks.[7]

A similar theme is expressed in a letter to another colleague in Iowa dated the same day.

De Koekkoek's role in the formation of the Edmonton Society for Christian Education was significant. He was the key figure that brought the people and the idea together. De Koekkoek was, by all descriptions, a man who had an idea and worked to fulfill that idea. John Winkelaar recalls that "Paul was an instigator. Had a thing about Christian schools, he was gung-ho, wanted a school no matter what. . .[he was] a real go getter - went after what he believed."

7

Ibid, Correspondence with Rev. J. Visser, Otley, Iowa, June 27, 1945 Calvin College Archives, Grand Rapids, Mich.

Edmonton Christian School's first teacher, Wilma Bouma, recalls that de Koekkoek was the major role in starting a Christian school in Edmonton and remembers his personality "he was a pusher, not necessarily intimidating, but a pusher." Subsequent events indicate that de Koekkoek's tenacity bore fruit, but it did take several years, and the immigration "flood" to see de Koekkoek's push for a Christian school realized.

The first sets of minutes available for Edmonton are of the June 12, 1946, meeting of "the school board."[8] In 1944 the minutes of consistory of the First Christian Reformed Church switched from Dutch to English. Subsequently, the minutes of the Christian School Society were also written in English (unlike Lacombe which were in Dutch until early 1950). The minutes show that the board was well on the way to establishing a day school. President Monsma reported "on the work he did in connection with the purchase of land for the proposed school. Mr. Monsma also reported that he obtained plans for the proposed school from the Provincial Department of Education as these were required before permission to purchase the lots could be had."[9]

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All quotations of minutes taken from the minutes of the Edmonton Society for Christian Education, Edmonton Christian School Archives. Pages in minute books are not numbered.

9

Ibid, June 12, 1946.

The plans to purchase land and build a school coincided with the need of the First Christian Reformed Church to find larger facilities. The postwar immigration boom was beginning to be felt in the old church facility. As a result, the church council appealed to the school board not to go ahead with building plans since it was feared that two financial appeals to one community would be too much. As a result, plans for building were delayed. Instead plans were approved for the new school to meet in the basement of the new church building on the corner of 96 Street and 110 Avenue. The August 22, 1947, minutes report that "the Board recommended that a Christian Day.school be started in the basement of the new church to commence in the fall of 1948 and that the board is definitely in favour of building a school and that funds for this purpose be raised as soon as possible."[10]

The minutes of the board show it busy addressing many routine details including the purchase of desks, a blackboard, and installation of linoleum flooring. On October 10, 1947, the board met to discuss the hiring of a teacher. "Next item under discussion was the teacher situation - it was decided that steps should be taken immediately in regards to securing a teacher for new year. It was decided

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10
Ibid, August 22, 1947.

that it would be very advisable to consult the Pastor in regards to this matter."[11] However, teacher hiring was delayed as plans for the opening of the school in 1948 were put on hold. The minute book notes that "a special School Society meeting was held January 26 [1948]. It was decided and carried that the school society curtail activities for the coming year due to the heavy financial aid needed in building a new church."[12]

Not all activities were curtailed however, as the board continued to meet several times during 1948. In November, discussion was again held "in regards to type of teacher wanted, desired amount of salary, the number of grades that should be taught." The minutes of January 11, 1949, indicate that plans to hire a teacher were well in hand. "The Educational Committee recommendation for a teacher was Miss W. Bouma. A letter from her was read regarding scholastic achievement and other details."[13] A pastor's character reference was also read and "The Board agreed to approve Miss Bouma as teacher for the following term"[14] and pay her an

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11
Ibid, October 10, 1947.
12
Ibid, January 26, 1948.
13
Ibid, November 16, 1948.
14
Ibid, January 11, 1949.

annual salary of $1,500.00 with the understanding that she would attend summer school. Wilma Bouma remembers the times clearly and her story adds flesh to the barebones minutes of the early Society meetings.

Wilma[15] was born July 31, 1926, in a small town in the province of Friesland. Her father was from farming background and her mother's family were carpenters. Wilma's father was from a large family and several of her uncles had immigrated to Canada. When these uncles paid return visits to their homes they promoted Canada as a land of opportunity. This promotion worked for Mr. Bouma and in March 1930 he, along with three year old Wilma and his wife, headed for Canada. In April, they landed in Halifax and were processed through Pier 21, the point of arrival for so many immigrants to Canada. From Halifax the Boumas' took the train to Hamilton. They were met by a Reformed field man who arranged to have the family placed on a farm near Maitland, Ontario, on Lake Erie. The family was provided with an old house, but this house would not be home for long.

October 1930 was a memorable month for the family; a child was born and their house caught fire. In the fire the Boumas' lost everything except for their important immigration documents and a sewing machine. In 1930 both the Great

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Wilma Bouma, interviewed by author, June, 1999.

Depression and American prohibition were in full swing. Apparently it had been common for rum runners to make signal fires across Lake Erie. Investigators later determined that the house fire was deliberately set, probably by rum runners, since evidence showed that the fire was started along an outside wall. Either the suspected rum runners had little regard for human life or they thought the house was empty. The latter is the most likely explanation since the house, little more than a shack, had been vacant for quite some time. In any event, the fire was a traumatic, nearly fatal event for the Bouma family. Fortunately a passerby, a local teacher, happened upon the scene. He had assumed the house was deserted since had often passed it over the years but the fire caught his attention -- and then he heard the crying of a baby. He battered down the door and the family was saved. Neighbours took in the helpless Bouma family.

For the next few years the family moved several times finding work as farms labourers, but employment opportunities were few and far between during the Depression. Finally, around 1933-34, the family moved by train to Trail, British Columbia, where Mr. Bouma had family. For the first year he worked in the bush as a logger and on his brother's dairy farm to bring in an income. Money was always a problem, but hard work eventually paid a premium and in 1935 Mr. Bouma was able to purchase his own dairy farm.

All the while the family was trying to establish itself, Wilma's schooling needed to be dealt with. Although anxious to learn, schooling was not a pleasant experience for Wilma . She attended several one room schools and, as she recalls, was always "the only kid from somewhere else" in the school -- not an ideal situation for a young girl. The War caused even more difficulty for Wilma's schooling. Hired help was not available, due to the War, so at age 13 Wilma started work on the dairy farm delivering milk. The local school inspector visited the Bouma's several times and told Wilma's parents she should attend school. As a result Wilma worked on the farm while completing high school by correspondence.

In Friesland both Wilma's parents had attended Christian school, but this was not possible in British Columbia since there was no Christian school anywhere in Canada at that time. Her mother did express disappointment about this lack of opportunity for Wilma to attend a Calvinist-based school, but there was no alternative. (Neither was there a Reformed church, thus the parents choose the next best church -- Presbyterian.) However, even in remote British Columbia in the 1940's, the Dutch Calvinist community did not lose track of its members.

In the late 1920's a Christian Reformed Church was established in Vancouver and

this church ensured itinerant preachers would visit isolated families. Wilma recalls these pastors coming to visit and recalls the table conversation. "These preachers held up the importance of Christian schools." It was the American Christian Reformed ministers coming to serve Canadian churches who stressed the importance of Christian schools and their influence should not be discounted. These were American "CRC" pastors, not immigrant "CRC" pastors from the Netherlands. Thus the early seeds for Christian schools in Western Canada came by way of America (The differences in thinking about the nature of Christian education that this was to create will be looked at in the next chapter).

For Wilma, the road to becoming the first teacher of the Edmonton Christian schools began in 1946. Wilma, despite a less-than-positive schooling experience, "wanted to learn more". She wanted to go to college, but the idea of a "girl" going to college seemed a bit radical. "Father was not concerned about girls going to college" Wilma recalls, but "mother encouraged the idea." When, in 1944, the family moved to the lower Fraser valley Wilma's father consented to let Wilma go to college. However, he insisted she go to Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Wilma left Vancouver for Grand Rapids in 1946. However, she did not go with

the idea of becoming a teacher. As Wilma stated "in 1946 there really were only two career choices for a woman entering college -- nursing or teaching. I didn't particularly want to be a teacher." Wilma attended Calvin for one year then returned to Vancouver to earn money. She returned to Calvin in the fall of 1948. Wilma recalls "sometime in January of 1949 Rev. Paul de Koekkoek of Edmonton was at Calvin looking for a teacher. Since there were practically no Canadian students at Calvin College, perhaps three or four, he didn't have much choice."

Rev. de Koekkoek approached Wilma about teaching in the newly-organized Christian school in Edmonton. Wilma hesitated: she did not feel qualified. Wilma recalls de Koekkoek's response "don't worry we can take care of that, then he went and talked to my professor about teacher training for me." Wilma felt cornered. Her career goal was not teaching, but deKoekkoek was a strong-willed individual on a mission.

> It was different in those days. I did what I was told by authority figures, especially a dominee. And de Koekkoek did not really know what he was looking for either. It was a different breed of people at that time. I should have said something. He didn't want excuses he wanted a teacher. He wanted to establish a Christian school, he was forceful alright.

Wilma was recruited by a very strong personality whose desire to start a Christian school in Edmonton would not be thwarted by other concerns, not the least of

which was the feelings and wishes of a young Canadian woman who went to college because she "loved to learn." But, as Wilma noted, that was the way it was then.

By the time Wilma arrived in Edmonton in June, 1949, she "was in pretty bad shape, Edmonton was a strange place to me." When she checked out her "school," a small room in the basement of First Christian Reformed Church, "there was nothing there. The Board got desks; I went to the Department of Education to pick up material and I had summer school." Wilma had to take a summer course to meet Departmental requirements and found herself in a class with a group of experienced teachers. "I had to write a paper while still in Grand Rapids and mail it in. I neglected to include references and the professor was not to sure about the new student, as I found out after the course was over. He told me "you did very well. I was watching you."

Teaching was a difficult two years for Wilma. An inexperienced, and perhaps under- qualified teacher in a small room in the basement of a church was not the best start to a teaching career. The first year the school consisted of grades three, four, five and six. The following year the grades simply moved up one year.

The student body was quite a mix of Canadian-born children and immigrant children. The Canadian children had come from several area schools and had "good school background." The immigrant children came from different parts of the Netherlands and from different "classes" of people who normally would not associate with each other in the Netherlands and were now mixed together. The immigrant children brought differing attitudes as well. Needless to say, the trauma of war and living in an occupied country was very real. Furthermore, the experience of immigration caused the immigrants to have quite a different background than the Canadian born children, or the new teacher for that matter. Differences among students were also reflected in the school's supporting community.

There was a subtle but distinct difference between pre-war immigrants and post-war immigrants. Many old timers viewed the newcomers with suspicion. The newcomers had different attitudes about drinking and smoking -- they seemed to embrace both. Even going to movies was quietly tolerated among the newcomers. Newcomers were often seen as loud and crude by the old timers, including the new minister, Rev. J.K. Van Baalen, a scholarly American preacher who, besides the mandatory Calvin College degree, had Princeton University in his resume JK, as he was known, was often heard referring to "those Dutchmen" in a tone that left

little doubt as to his meaning.

A founding member of the school board, an old timer, remembered Van Baalen. "He was different, outspoken, he thinks out loud, I heard him refer to those dumb Hollanders." Several old timers remember "the great hullabullo every Sunday in church as the new-comers entered talking and visiting. The old timers expected one to enter church quietly, sit down and remain quiet, certainly not visit." J.K.'s rather blunt reaction to the "Hollanders" reflected what many of the old timers thought, though rarely stated.[16]

The fact that the parsonage was right next to the church, and thus the school, did nothing to ease the mind of a new teacher. Wilma recalls that the piece of land (often muddy) between the church and the parsonage was the playground. This arrangement forced "this scholarly man to have to listen to the noise of restless children out on recess or noon break."

Wilma remembers an incident that struck terror into a little boy's heart and no doubt some fear into Wilma. Some boys were playing football at recess and the

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Although a gruff man he had a good heart. I have fond memories of visiting the home of JK with my parents who became close friends with him and I still treasure some of the books he gave me from his personal library.

ball went through the sunroom of the parsonage, landing on an antique table. Rather than retrieve the ball the boys ran to the teacher telling her what happened and ensuring her "it was an accident, we couldn't help it." Nonetheless the boys needed to go see "the dominee" and confess.

With fear, the boys went to confess to the dominee. Wilma noticed that the boys took quite a time returning and was beginning to become quite anxious. After a good hour the boys returned all smiles. They had a good, and apparently pleasant talk with the "dominee" (Dutch for Reverend) who had not been angry. Wilma also recalls being taken out "to a restaurant" for dinner by Rev. and Mrs. Van Baalen. When asked what they were celebrating was told it was "Thanksgiving, *American* Thanksgiving."

Van Baalen exemplified the tensions between the old timers and the new comers. The newcomers were viewed as troublesome adolescents might be viewed in a family -- part of the family, but frustrating and even annoying. Mr. John Winkelaar, first secretary of the school board, remembers the immigrants.

> Some of us saw then as "green" they needed to learn but some were pushy and abrasive. There was also some jealousy because several of the new comers became successful in business. Most of the guys [old timers] were quite willing to help the new immigrants. They would loan money -with interest - to get them started and would drive them to church. They could be loud. Get them on a bus and

they would be loud.[17]

The difference between the two groups is reflected by their history. The old timers were children of the *Afscheiding*; the new comers were children of Abraham Kuyper. Although the Calvinism of both groups was a unifying factor in their lives, their differing histories was divisive. The children of the *Afscheiding* had more isolationist tendencies while the Kuyperians, especially those of the post-war period, believed in engaging or transforming culture through Christian institutions such as Christian schools.

This latter group would play an important leadership role in the Calvinist school movement. However, one must be careful not to generalize; there is a cautionary note. Albert Witvoet, past editor of several Dutch Calvinist periodicals in Canada, suggests that only about 50% of the immigrants were Kuyperians, the rest being of more conservative and pietistic background. However, J.G. Witvoet agrees that the leadership that grew out of the post-war immigrant community came mostly from Kuyperian groups.

In Wilma Bouma's first class, aside from all the schoolish differences, there was the difference of history dictating the function of a Christian school -- should the

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17
Winkelaar, op. cit.

school isolate and protect or should it engage and transform? This issue has never been fully resolved. To complicate matters, even Kuyperians often show isolationist tendencies in their practice. For example, the Calvinist community today experiences a high rate of endogamy, and their institutions such as the Christian school, although allowing and even encouraging non-Reformed enrollment, still have school boards that tend to be exclusively, or at least a majority, of Reformed membership. This strong strain of orthodox Calvinism is reflected in the constitution and by-laws of the Edmonton Christian School Society.

Whereas the Lacombe Christian School Society adopted a constitution at the outset, in 1945, the Edmonton Society appears not to have done so. However, a personal conversation with Mr. Winkelaar reveals that a constitution was adopted. At this point, however, my research has not turned up the document. In any event, at a Society meeting held on May 12, 1969, a set of By-laws was adopted and duly registered with the Registrar of Companies on May 20, 1969. As was the case in Lacombe, the by-laws clearly reflect orthodox Calvinism. The Preamble states:

> The object of the society is to further the cause of Christian education in general and more particularly to conduct in its own community a school system which will provide that week-day Christian instruction and education which the applicants deem necessary for covenant children in order that such children may, as children of God, occupy worthily their places in society, church and

state.[18]

The Kuyperian influence can be seen in the last phrase "that such children, as children of God, occupy worthily their places in society, church and state." Christian education was seen as preparation for service in society at large. It was not seen as isolating children from that society or from the state.

Article two states "The basis of the society is the infallible Word of God interpreted in accordance with the Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic or Netherlands Confession of Faith, the Canons of Dort, or the Westminster Confession." The basis of the society is firmly rooted in "The Three Forms of Unity," the watering down of which in the *Hervormde Kerk* in the Netherlands led to the *Afscheiding* and the subsequent immigration of dissenters to Michigan and Iowa where the first Calvinist schools were established in North America.

Article three outlines the "education policy."

> The Society is committed to the following fundamental principles:
>
> 3.1 That the instruction and education of children in the school, as well as in the home must be in accordance with the Word of God.
>
> 3.2 That although the church and the state have their own

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Edmonton Society for Christian Education, By-laws.

peculiar interests in the school, the school is not an institution dependent on or belonging to the church or the state, but that it depends on and proceeds from the home.

3.3 That throughout the course of the child's education the fundamental unity of the school and the home must be maintained.

3.4 That the child's training must be of a high standard properly relating to God's revelation in His Word and nature.

Again, orthodox Calvinism is clearly outlined by ensuring the primacy of scripture (3.1 and 3.4) and the "proper" place of both state and church in the role of education in relation to the family (3.2 and 3.3).

A very interesting article of the by-laws ensured that the Orthodox Calvinist nature of the schools would be maintained. Article 13.3 states that "The by-laws of the society shall not be rescinded, altered or added to except by special resolution, *with the exception of article 1 and 2 and 13(.3) which cannot be altered"*(italics added). Article one is the name "The Edmonton *Society* for Christian Education" and thus the concept of a school "society" is protected. Article two is the basis of the society in the "Three Forms of Unity," a phrase that has come up many times in this history and is obviously a key element in orthodox Calvinism.

The story of the founding of Edmonton Christian School is dominated by the

passionate drive of one man – Paul de Koekkoek. His neo-Calvinist fervor would allow no obstacle to stand in the way of establishing a Christian school. De Koekkoek's fervor was reflected among many Dutch neo-Calvinist immigrants in the post-war period. Their fervor often grated on the character of the more withdrawn old timers, many of whom traced their roots to the isolationist tendencies of the *Afscheiding*. This grating would continue as neo-Calvinists agitated for more Christian schools in Alberta during the 1950's.

CHAPTER 7: The 1950's; A Decade of Growth

The decade of the 1950's was a period of unprecedented and dramatic growth for Dutch orthodox Calvinist communities in Canada. In the first few years after the end of the war immigration from the Netherlands reflected pre-war levels; but, numbers rose quickly: 1949 (13,963), 1950 (21,330), 1951 (37,605), 1952 (48,690).[1] Immigration rates from the Netherlands remained consistently high for most of the 1950's.

What is most significant in these numbers is the disproportionate number of orthodox Calvinists among the Dutch immigrants. In the Netherlands orthodox Calvinists never exceeded 10% of the total population, yet this small group made up 45% of the post-war Dutch immigrants to Canada.[2] Members of the quasi state church, the *Hervormde Kerk* (Reformed Church) and Roman Catholic churches on the other hand, together representing the majority of the population of the Netherlands, only made up 25% and between 15% and 35% respectively of the

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1

Hofstede, B.P. (1964). *Thwarted Exodus: Post-war Overseas Migration from the Netherlands* The Hague Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff. p.5.

2

Schryer, Frans J. (1998). *The Netherlandic Presence in Ontario: Pillars, Class and Dutch Ethnicity.* Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press. p. 95.

Hofstede op. cit., p. 98.

Dutch immigrant groups.[3] These latter groups responded differently to Canadian culture than did the orthodox Calvinists.

Members of the Reformed and Roman Catholic churches readily joined existing Canadian churches.[4] These two groups eventually assimilated into mainstream Canadian society through marriage. Assimilation and intermarriage was not to be the story of Dutch orthodox Calvinists however. Their identity was to be maintained by an unconscious transporting of their pillar and their school myth to Canada.

The arrival of orthodox Calvinists in Canada was supported by existing Calvinist communities in Ontario, British Columbia and Alberta. These communities were small, often poor and with little by way of any Calvinist infrastructure. Pillarization and the supporting institutions, such an integral part of Netherlands society, were not part of the Dutch Canadian Calvinist tradition. In all of Canada in the immediate post-war period the central feature of orthodox Calvinism,

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3

Schryer op. cit., p. 97. Ganzevoort, Herman (1998). *A Bittersweet Land: The Dutch Immigrant Experience in Canada, 1890 to 1990.* Toronto: McClelland and Steward. p. 70.

4

Reformed Church members often joined main stream Canadian churches such as the Presbyterian Church. Other joined the American based Reformed Church in America which organized churches in Canada to help in the adjustment process.

Christian schools, was virtually non-existent except for the two "free" Calvinist Christian schools in Lacombe, Alberta, and Holland Marsh, Ontario. Nevertheless, despite limited resources, the existing Calvinist communities in Canada welcomed their fellow Calvinists from the Netherlands -- but not without some clashes of temperament.

Existing Dutch Calvinist communities in Canada, especially in Alberta, had connections with American Calvinists and their *Afscheiding* tradition. Orthodox Calvinist immigrants on the other hand were Kuyperians, neo-Calvinist activists, with roots in the struggle for religious identity and freedom and with a mythology rooted in the schoolstrijd.

The lack of a Calvinist infrastructure in Canada and differing traditions placed a burden on the two groups as they tried to accommodate each other. Old timers in Edmonton, Lacombe and southern Alberta would at times find the zeal of the new comers a bit overwhelming and in some cases unwelcome.

Post World-War II Immigration

The motivation for immigration and the worldview of the immigrants in the post-war period was quite different from the previous two periods of significant

immigration into Canada by Dutch Calvinists. The pre-World War One group and the 1925-30 group of Dutch immigrants were mostly farm labourers who saw no hope of owning a farm in the Netherlands and who saw in Canada a land of "freedom and open spaces." Canada encouraged these early immigrations since the Dutch colonists were seen by government agents as being of "superior racial stock", "splendid looking specimens", and "good people to cultivate."[5] For the Dutch farmer, the promise of owning a farm in such a welcoming land was too great an opportunity to pass by. Thus, they began the migration from their homeland. The worldview of these first immigrants grew out of the *Afscheiding* -- a worldview with a tendency to withdraw from society and with a rigorous and pietistic moral code (no smoking or drinking and no dancing or card playing).

Post-World War II immigrants were different. Earlier immigrants (1947-1950) were still mostly farm workers; but, by the early 1950's, more and more Dutch immigrants were tradesmen, businessmen and professionals. Their worldview was that of their historic, semi-legendary leader, Abraham Kuyper. This view encouraged engaging culture rather than withdrawing from it, but to engage culture from the strength of an institutionally complete Calvinist (or as they would

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5

Palmer, Howard and Tamara (1985). *Peoples of Alberta: Portraits of Cultural Diversity.* Saskatoon: Western Prairie Producer. p. 145.

say, Christian) infrastructure -- a transplanted Calvinist pillar.

The motive for the post-war immigrants was clearly based in the war and its immediate aftermath. Every aspect of the war created a reason to emigrate from the Netherlands -- the fear of another war, destroyed and flooded farm land, rationing of almost all necessities and simply (if that word is appropriate) the general economic distress and dislocation caused by the war in all spheres of daily life.

After five years of Nazi occupation the Netherlands was near collapse. The Dutch government responded by enacting edicts, regulations and policies. The people of the Netherlands responded as well. Two of these responses were emigration from the Netherlands and challenging existing Dutch social structures, especially the pillar system.

The Dutch government encouraged emigration. However, after the war emigration was problematic. Many potential receiving countries had imposed quotas on immigrants. Many foreign governments were already concerned with integrating de-mobilized troops into society and did not want the added worry of integrating large numbers of immigrants. The United States for example had a quota of 3,136

Dutch immigrants per year.[6] To circumvent such restrictions the Dutch government sought out countries willing to accept Dutch immigrants. Countries with existing Dutch communities such as Australia and South Africa were possible choices, but the most natural country to work with in receiving immigrants was Canada.

There were several reasons for choosing Canada. The most obvious was Canada's role in the liberation of the Netherlands. Dutch gratitude towards Canada for its liberation of the Netherland has become a central part of both nations' war mythology. In the period after the liberation close bonds were forged between Dutch citizens and Canadian soldiers. There were several thousand Dutch war brides, and many homes had billeted Canadian soldiers after the liberation. These billeted soldiers often became sponsors for later Dutch immigration to Canada.[7] And of course, Canada had been the place of refuge for the Dutch Royal Family for the duration of the war. Clearly, Canada, with such connections to the Netherlands, was a logical destination.

6

Ganzevoort op. cit., p. 64.

7

Sgt. Cyril Ironside of the Canadian Army was billeted in the Prinsen home in Nijmigen, Netherlands. He later sponsored us to Canada in 1951.

Dutch officials negotiated with Canadian officials resulting in Canada agreeing to open its doors to large numbers of Dutch immigrants. Such a large undertaking required coordination between governments of both nations and among the several religiously connected receiving groups in Canada.

Much of the coordination of the migration was undertaken by immigration societies. These societies were formed along the line of the pillars as they existed in the Netherlands. The first society to organize was under the auspices of Dutch-Calvinists through their Christian Reformed Church. Ganzevoort notes that "it was an aggressive and extraordinarily effective organization."[8] Within a few years the Roman Catholics and Dutch Reformed also organized societies, both in Canada and the Netherlands to help facilitate the settlement of their religious compatriots.

The three immigration organizations reflected historic Dutch religious tensions and the organizations did not always work well together. Ganzevoort states that the Calvinist group, aggressively evangelistic

> saw an opportunity to enlarge the Calvinist community by providing service to all immigrants of the Reformed tradition. As a result,

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Ganzevoort op. cit., p. 70.

> immigrants who had belonged to the Reformed Church in the Netherlands were aided and encouraged to join the Christian Reformed fellowship. This led inevitably to charges from Reformed Church officials of "raiding."[9]

This apparent infighting among a group of immigrants who were thought by Canadian officials to be one ethnic group caused some confusion and frustration. The sniping between the Dutch religious groups included an attack on the Dutch government official in Ottawa.

> The agricultural attache was attacked by the Christian Reformed [orthodox Calvinists] as being motivated solely by economic desire, while he in turn attacked them as being hypocritical empire - builders tied by unbending dogmatism. The Reformed resented the religious superiority complex of the Christian Reformed, who in turn accused them of abandoning Reformed and spiritual necessities. The Roman Catholics, dedicated to integration and assimilation, found the squabbles unnecessary and undignified.[10]

It seems that the representatives of the competing pillars were intent on inflicting what the 19th century Dutch Liberal leader, Thorbecke, referred to as that "old Dutch disease"-- religious dissension-- on Canadians.

As noted, orthodox Calvinists made up a disproportionately large segment of Dutch immigrants. This observation begs the question as to why so many

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9

Ibid p. 71.

10

Ibid p. 71.

orthodox Calvinists left the Netherlands and the relative security of their pillar for Canada? Three reasons come to mind.

The mythology of orthodox Dutch Calvinism, embedded as it is in their struggle against state control over their church and schools, has a strong strain of dislike and distrust of state control and planning. Their forefathers had fought against the 18th century "Patriot's" desire for a unitary government and the resulting central control over many areas of life. Now, in post-war Netherlands, the orthodox Calvinists were faced with a government that was seemingly run by bureaucrats intent on regulating all aspects of life. This position is stated clearly by a spokesman of the Calvinist Anti-Revolutionary Party who in 1951 observed:

> Increasing Government interference in all sectors of economic life, the creation of rule after rule, the enactment of ordinance after ordinance, form too great an obstacle to individual initiative. The opportunity of securing a certain amount of economic welfare and independence by working hard is so restricted by the pressure of taxation and increasing regimentation in the economic sphere, that life here is becoming too cramped for many people and that is why they wish to go to other countries where there is more room and more chance of success for private enterprise. They want prospects for the future and in return are prepared to accept the hardships of the first few years.[11]

This sense of increasing government regulation and control went against the independent-minded orthodox Calvinists. They resisted efforts that would negate

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Quoted in Hofstede op. cit., p. 133.

their religiously secure place in their institutionally complete pillar.[12] Aversion to government regulation was one reason orthodox Calvinists migrated; the weakening of the Dutch pillars was a second reason.

The end of the war caused many Dutch people to question existing social structures not the least of which was the church and the pillar system. As Calvinist sociologist VanBelle points out, "for many Reformed Dutch men and women the war experience evoked a crisis of faith."[13] The war created a situation where members of differing pillars could no longer remain isolated. Resistance activities, humanitarian work, and the need to hide individuals from the enemy forced people of different faiths and traditions to work together. The need to work together to resist the Nazis was much stronger than historic religious differences. Young people especially questioned the social cleavages created by the pillar system. This was highlighted by yet another Calvinist schism.

Despite a united war effort, Calvinists still managed to find a theological issue

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12

See also Ganzevoort op. cit., p. 64;
VanderMey, Albert (1983). *To All Our Children: The Story of Postwar Dutch Immigrants to Canada.* Jordan Station: Paideia Press. P. 62-63.

13

Van Belle, Harry "The Impact of WWII on the Reformed Dutch in the Netherlands and Canada: A Comparison" *Pro-Rege* (June, 199 1) p. 29.

over which to disagree. In 1944 the *Gereformeerde* Kerk was embroiled over an issue to do with baptism. As mentioned earlier, baptism is an important sacrament for Calvinists with its close connection to the concept of covenant.[14] The specific theological issue in 1944 was over the time of baptism, but the issue that led to the schism was over church authority. The Synod of the *Gereformeerde Kerk* deposed a minister over his stance on the baptism issue which ran counter to the official church position. The followers of this minister rejected Synod's authority to depose a minister (Article 31 of Church Order) and refused to accept the order. In reaction to the deposing the dissenters broke away and started yet another orthodox Calvinist church.[15] Many young Dutch Calvinists, already disillusioned by the war, now faced the fact that, in the midst of unpredecented human suffering, a church could still argue over fine points of doctrine. These disaffected people led the way after the war to a rapprochement of political parties such as the A.R.P. and the Roman Catholic party. For many orthodox Calvinists the hand writing was on the wall -- *ontzuiling* (de pillarization) was inevitable. Depillarization meant the end of their religiously secure community. Emigration seemed more attractive and by emigrating the orthodox Calvinists would transplant their pillar in Canada.

14

See also Chapter 4.

15

In the Netherlands the break away church is called "The Made Free" Reformed Church. Its Canadian counterpart is The Canadian Reformed Church.

It would be going too far to suggest that orthodox Calvinists came to Canada with an intent to transplant their pillar in Canada. However, many orthodox Calvinists did come with a missionary vision for Canada -- a third reason for Dutch Calvinist emigration. The most immediate and concrete result of this missionary vision was building a Christian school. Breems notes that "when Dutch Calvinists came to Canada. . . they took it as their task to duplicate this effort [pillarization]. . . In keeping with *Gereformeerd* suspicions of the power of the state, many felt that it was their duty to set up parent controlled religious schools."[16]

Orthodox Calvinists often make reference to "the cultural mandate". This mandate is in reference to the command God gave Adam in Genesis to "be fruitful and multiply and replenish the earth and subdue it" (Genesis 1:28). The A.R.P. translated this command into official party policy stating:

> There is something enterprising about Calvinism The Calvinists have a strong feeling that emigration "belongs to the pattern". This has its roots in the conception that the earth belongs to the Lord: you need not let yourself be shut up in one particular part of the world. The supply of Calvinist ministers desirous of working in the receiving countries always exceeds the demand. Calvinist emigration delegates also frequently accompany the emigrants.

16

Breems, Bradley (1996). *"I Tell You We Are A Blessed People" An Analysis of Ethnicity by Way of A Dutch Calvinist Community*. Ph.D. Thesis, University of British Columbia. p. 218.

> Many members of our church travel abroad.[17]

In 1949, *Calvinist Contact,* a newspaper for Canadian Calvinists, observed:

> we wish to have a positive influence and we wish to see our Calvinist principles permeate this [Canadian] society, principles which, under God's guidance, have bestowed such rich blessings on Christian countries.[18]

Support for Calvinist emigration came from political statements, newspapers the pulpit and books. In 1950 an A.R.P. official and an orthodox Calvinist, T. Cnossen, wrote a book *Canada: land Van Vrijheid, Ruimte en Ontplooing*[19] (Canada: Land of Freedom, Open Space and Unfolding). The book encouraged emigration extolling the beauty, opportunity and adventure awaiting immigrants to Canada. Cnossen devotes a chapter to church and school in Canada.

Cnossen writes about three groups of Dutch immigrants that have settled in Canada and their differing ways of responding to their new homeland. It is interesting to read these pages as he describes these groups from his neo-Calvinist

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17

Hofstede op. cit., p. 138.

18

Calvinist Contact, August 1949. p.2.

19

My copy of this book is inscribed by my mother to my father "Christmas '50 from your wife" with a biblical reference "Ps. 32:8". Christmas 1950 was a time of decision for my parents as we would immigrate to Canada in March of 1951. My parents background is a mix of Reformed and orthodox Calvinist but the passage clearly reflects a Calvinist faith in God's guidance. Ps. 32:8 reads "I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go". An apt passage at a time of decision.

perspective.

There are those, Cnossen writes, who have found a connection within established Canadian churches such as Presbyterian and United Churches. These Dutch Canadians have "become, as it were, ingrafted into the Canadian nationality." In contrast to this group are those Dutch Canadians who have isolated themselves "who have remained steadfast in their spiritual commitment . . . Their world and life view remains as it were when they were still living in Holland." The difficulty these people face is seeing their children grow up facing "worldly ideas and lifestyles."

A third group however have found a middle way between assimilation and isolation -- a group with which Cnossen identifies. This third group has become part of Canadian society and "in terms of their public life do not isolate themselves" but nonetheless "hold fast to their beliefs. Their personal understanding concerning the Word of God, the church and life are not surrendered." Cnossen concludes his survey of religious life among Dutch Canadians by pointing out that "this group [the third group] has it less easy than the first group, who readily allowed themselves to be carried along the easy path of a general Christianity and also more difficult than those who, in a puritanical

withdrawal, isolated themselves from the light and dark of the world."

Writing to a Calvinist market in 1950 Netherlands, Cnossen clearly articulated the neo-Calvinist philosophy that would dominate, either for good or for bad, the debate in Canada over the establishment of Calvinist Christian schools. Assimilation was an easy "cop out" while isolation was a pietistic reaction. What Canada needed was the neo-Calvinist philosophy of working within society for change but from the strength of adherence to Calvinist principles and institutions. Cnossen says of the third group, neo-Calvinists, that "they are, according to our way of thinking, the salt of the community."

The *schoolstrijd* is never far from the Calvinist mind. In describing the status of schools Cnossen writes that "In America there is currently a *schoolstrijd.*" In this struggle Cnossen notes groups eager to establish Christian Schools "in spite of the fact that they must pay to the last penny." Cnossen indicates that there are "a couple" of Christian schools in Canada and notes that more will likely be established. Cnossen raises a cautionary note, however, warning that "many Dutchmen just in Canada" push for Christian schools with great speed but not always with great tact. He says "Green newcomers can at times ride their

hobbyhorses so naively."[20]

Concern about the assertiveness of the immigrants was stated more directly by American-born Rev. J.K. Van Baalen, minister of Edmonton's First Christian Reformed Church. Van Baalen wrote a short item for the *Canadian Calvinist* sharing his impressions of Alberta. Van Baalen wrote:

> many immigrants lack culture and vision, hence they think they know it all, and that they alone know something. Consequently they have often proved the most troublesome church members . . . the Reformed Dutchman is never indifferent as to matters of religion. To him there never is a middle of the road; he must be on the left side of the street or on the right, and he must know why he is on that side.[21]

In his blunt style Van Baalen proved prophetic in that some of the "Dutchmen" would prove troublesome as will become apparent later in this chapter.

So they came, thousands of Dutch immigrants among whom were a minority group of orthodox Calvinists, a group Hofstede refers to as a "sect"[22] and Ganzevoort as

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Cnossen, T. (1950). *Canada: Land van Vrijheid, Ruimte en Ontplooing.* Wageningen, Nederland: N.V. Gebr. Zomer en keuning Vitgeversmij. Pp. 94 & 95. Translated by G. Fernhout and A. Prinsen.

21

Van Baalen, Rev. J.K. "Impressions of Alberta." *The Canadian Calvinist*, November 15, 1946 p. 4.

22

Hofstede op.cit., p. 35.

"a tribe on the move."[23] They came with their mythology of a chosen people who had overcome threats to their religious expression and their religious freedom. They came with their pillar mentality of institutional completeness. And they came with their collective memory of *schoolstrijd* and their zeal for free Christian schools.

These orthodox Calvinists were greeted in Canada by fellow Calvinists but Calvinists with a different history and without the mythology that they were soon to encounter. The welcoming Calvinists, "old-timers," came from the *Afscheiding* tradition, a tradition of isolation and strict moral codes. When the two groups, the old timers and the new comers, came together there was bound to be some stress and tension. The tension often found expression in the issue over building a Christian school. However, the old-timers were welcoming and arranged to have the immigrant families greeted upon arrival to their Canadian destination.

Upon arrival in Canada the Christian Reformed Church, through its immigration committee, arranged for "fieldmen" to greet the newcomers. In Edmonton the fieldman was Herman Wierenga, father of one of the early teachers in Edmonton Christian School. Wierenga greeted the immigrants at the train station and helped

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23
Ganzevoort, op. cit., p. 66.

them find housing, locate their sponsors and introduce them to the local Christian Reformed Church. Some of the more difficult aspects of his task was to orient the immigrants to the Canadian form of Dutch Calvinism. One of the founding members of Edmonton Christian School recalls that often the immigrants came with an attitude of "in Holland we did it this way", an attitude that rarely creates good will. To complicate matters, in Edmonton there was only one Calvinist church and one small Christian school and the school had to be paid for through tuition. Other than a church and a school there was no orthodox Calvinist infrastructure. The "new comers" would cause that to change and the impact of that change would be significant.

In 1945, 159 immigrants arrived in Canada from the Netherlands. At that time there were fourteen Christian Reformed Churches and two Christian schools in Canada. Ten years later, in 1955, there were 122 Christian Reformed Churches and fourteen Christian schools. By the end of the decade, 1959, Canada had 138 Christian Reformed Churches and 30 Christian schools. Clearly immigration had made an impact on Canada's Dutch Calvinist communities. This impact was felt by the two Calvinist schools in Alberta in the years of the immigration "flood."

Edmonton

Edmonton Christian School opened in 1949 in the basement of the only Christian Reformed Church in Edmonton. Within a few years the pressure of orthodox Calvinist immigrants would result in two new Christian Reformed Churches and expansion of the school. The early years of the school were often difficult. A former student in that first years recalls:

> It was a very difficult year for our first time teacher, Miss Bouma, trying to teach three grades, in one room with very limited space and very rowdy students.[24]

The limited space became even more evident as more immigrants arrived. As Edith Stiksma recalls:

> During this time many immigrants were coming into Edmonton and parents were wishing to send their children to a Christian school. Out of this came the need for a larger Christian school.[25]

The Board of Edmonton Christian School addressed the need for expansion and purchased land at 102 Street and 110 Avenue. Construction began in the spring of 1951 with a combination of purchased and donated labor. The building costs

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24

Stiksma, Edith. Undated handwritten article. First Christian Reformed Church of Edmonton Archives.

25

Ibid.

were $10,000 with an additional $5,000 in donated labor.[26]

Central Christian School[27] opened in the fall of 1951 with an enrollment of 81 children, up from 21 children two years previously. Enrollment continued to grow. By 1954 enrollment was over 130 students and there was no room for more students.

The crowded conditions didn't go unnoticed by Department of Education officials. A teacher of that time recalls:

> When the inspector came that first year, we [the teachers] were not very happy. He just sat down at the teachers desk, opened the drawer, looked at the book of lesson plans, and then started measuring the classroom all without saying anything. He noticed that students were setting up against the back wall. He was not happy with the facility , nor was he happy with the teacher who spoke with a foreign accent.[28]

Older students in grades seven and eight had to attend classes in a building at the corner of 95th street and Grierson Hill. This building, a former Jewish Synagogue, was at that time serving as the Third Christian Reformed Church. This was not an

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Article, undated, no title. First Christian Reformed Church of Edmonton Archives.

27

Although always referred to as "Central" School the official name according to photographs of the building was Calvin Christian School.

28

Generations: 1949 to 1989 (1989). Edmonton Society for Christian Education Yearbook. p. 9.

ideal location for junior high students. There was no play area, just a small parking lot. One former student recalls noon hours spent in Riverdale creating quite a disturbance for residents of the area.

Stiksma recalls the less than ideal learning environment in the temporary school building

> Conditions were not exactly ideal for we did not have desks but sat around tables that measure 4 by 8 feet and accommodated 6 students each. Our study books and notebooks were stacked in the centre of the table. This was not very conducive to good penmanship for the tables were rather shaky. For recreation we used a public playground in the river valley because there was a little room for playing at the back of the church. This playground was about 4 or 5 blocks away including a very steep hill which we had to walk up and down. We managed to play volleyball in the area behind the church. Needless to say we had many problems with the neighbours because the ball was forever being knocked into their garden. Many times the ball was not returned to us for a number of days.[29]

As Dutch immigration continued, Edmonton's neighbour, the town of Beverly, attracted many orthodox Calvinist immigrants, enough in fact that they would organize a fourth Christian Reformed Church in the Edmonton area. In 1954 Maranatha Christian Reformed Church was organized and became the centre for many of the Dutch immigrants in Beverly. In that same year the Edmonton Christian School Board proposed the construction of another Christian school, this

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29

Generation: 1949 to 1989 (1989) Edmonton Society for Christian Education Yearbook p. 8.

one in Beverly, to take pressure off Central Christian and to accommodate the continuous arrival of Dutch immigrants.

As one would expect in an immigrant community, money was scarce. An old-timer, a farmer, donated land for the school and an appeal for money went out to the community. The appeal to the Calvinist community was not based on the need to expand due to increased enrollment but rather, as Van Belle notes:

> the point was made, that, by building Christian schools, the members of the community would be continuing the work of their forebearers in the Netherlands, who, like them went though a similar struggle a century ago.[30]

Clearly, their mythology did not stay in the Netherlands. It went with the immigrants as readily as their suitcases. So strong was their commitment to their school that the appeal raised more money than anticipated.[31]

In the fall of 1955 Calvin Christian School East, built largely with donated labour on donated land, opened its doors. The two schools, Central and East had a total student population of 240 pupils. Enrollment pressures continued however and, in 1956, land was purchased in the west end of Edmonton near Coronation Park.

30

Van Belle, Harry (1994) "The History of The Reformed Dutch in Edmonton". Manuscript article p. 17.

31

The Guardian, February 25, 1955. Quoted in Van Belle.

In 1957 a third school was built with five classrooms -- Calvin Christian School West.

In 1960 Central school was sold and the money used to add four classrooms to Calvin Christian School West. Within ten years Dutch Calvinist immigrants in Edmonton had organized three Christian Reformed Churches and built three schools with a combined student population of over 400.

As the Edmonton Society for Christian Education added schools to meet demand, it also evolved a unique administrative system, unique at least for Calvinist schools in North America.

When a Dutch Calvinist community organizes a school, it forms a "Christian School Society." This is done for each school built. In Lacombe, for example, the Lacombe Christian School Society has, since 1945, operated the elementary - junior high school. When the Lacombe community felt the need for a Christian High School a separate society was formed opening the high school in 1989. Thus in the small community of Lacombe there are two separate "Christian School Societies," each operating a school. The Boards are different, tuition rates differ, even teacher salaries differ. This administrative structure is typical for Calvinist

schools in North America.

Edmonton, on the other hand, organized and operates all its own schools under one Society. In 1958 a separate school society was formed to organize a high school but this society merged with the existing society before the school was organized.

Lacombe

Alberta's first Calvinist Christian school in Lacombe faced the same pressures as did its sister school in Edmonton. By 1953 immigration resulted in Lacombe's Dutch Calvinists needing two Christian Reformed Churches. The newest Christian Reformed Church, Bethel, was in the town site of Lacombe[32] where many of the newly arrived Dutch Calvinists were living. Within a few years members of the Bethel congregation wanted a more conveniently located school in town and in 1956 organized the "Calvin Christian School Society."

The annual meeting of the Lacombe Christian School Society in July, 1956, confirmed Bethel's plans:

> The president spoke a few words of welcome to those present. As there were some people from Lacombe who were not members the

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32

The original Christian Reformed Church and Lacombe Christian School were both in the country.

> president asked what we should do about the election of board members, Rev. De Herder [pastor of Bethel Christian Reformed Church] advised us that at their last consistory meeting they had decided to start a school society in Lacombe.[33]

In that same year the Lacombe Board received a letter from the Red Deer Christian School Society "in which was stated the possibility of a centralized school. . . our board was not in favour"[34] but they decided to attend the meeting to discuss the proposal anyway.

Now there were three Calvinist school societies in central Alberta but as yet only one school. The idea of a centralized school appears in board minutes a half dozen times but no action was taken. Finally, at a general meeting in December 4, 1958, the president of the Lacombe Christian School Society introduced "the possibility of a central Christian school for the three central Christian Reformed Churches."[35] A discussion ensued during which the president "in a few well chosen words" indicated that the Board did not support the concept. The minutes suggested the meeting was vigorous but a decision was finally made

> Some members felt we could not vote on a big issue as this tonight but after some more discussion another one moved to vote after all.

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33 Lacombe Christian School Society, Board Minutes July 31, 1956.

34 Ibid, September 27, 1956.

35 Ibid, December 4, 1958.

> The result: centralization voted down with an overwhelming majority.[36]

Calvin Christian School Society from the town site and the Lacombe Christian School Society continued discussions for a few more years but both embarked on their own building programs. In 1960 the Lacombe Christian School Society opened a new school on its original site in the country and, in 1966, the Calvin Christian School Society built a school in town. In the spring of 1967 the two Societies accepted plans for a merger using the new school building in town but the old name -- Lacombe Christian School.[37]

Lethbridge

The first Christian Reformed Church in Canada was organized in Nobelford, Alberta, in 1905. (The history of the Dutch Calvinist community in those early days is discussed in Chapter 4). As with many immigrant churches, there were years of struggle. However slowly the Dutch Calvinist community became established and, by the 1930's, church services had converted mostly to English. During the war years the new pastor, Rev. Hoekstra "led the congregation into a

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36

Ibid.

37

The community in Red Deer opened a Calvinist Christian School in 1968. They became an alternative school in the Red Deer Public School System in 1999.

fundamental shift from being a predominantly Dutch-speaking church to being essentially Canadianized."[38] The Calvinists may have become Canadianized in the public sphere but their Calvinism would not allow them to forget the importance of Christian education.

Christian education was always an issue just below the surface of the Calvinist community in Nobleford; but, the community was small, poor and spread over a large area. The Nobleford public school was next to the Christian Reformed Church and in 1941 concerned parents were able to negotiate an arrangement with the school board that permitted a half hour of Christian instruction per week. The instructor was the Christian Reformed Church pastor, Rev. Hoekstra, but the arrangement did not work as planned. Hoekstra

> started using the Compendium [a Christian Reformed Church learning manual] for a text book. The people heard about that and they said "you're putting in Christian Reformed education not Christian education" and it blew apart. That was a mistake Hoekstra made but he was a good man.[39]

Perhaps the only way to ensure Christian instruction was through a private school. The war, however, kept such plans at bay.

38

Tymen Hofman quoted *Sons of Wind and Soil, Nobleford, 1976*. Provincial Archives of Alberta p. 75.

39

L.F. Konynenbelt, interviewed by author, tape recording, Lethbridge, Alberta May 1999.

In 1945, with the war in Europe nearing an end, a meeting was arranged between the two Christian Reformed Churches, Nobleford and Granum, and the Reformed Church in Monarch. This meeting led to the formation of the Southern Alberta Christian School Society in February of 1946.

The Canadian Calvinist reported on the plans for a Christian school in the Monarch area. The article notes the possibilities discussed but also makes clear the orthodox Calvinist preference for a "free" Christian school. The article, written by Edmonton's energetic Paul de Koekkoek, states that a "regular" Christian school

> is the goal of the group of Calvinists that met in the Reformed Church of Monarch, Alberta, February 11th. Attendants belong to both the Reformed and the Christian Reformed denomination, but evidently largely to the latter fellowship. The Rev. Hoekstra presided, the Rev. Moget also taking part. Organization for "religious instruction" had been agreed upon at a previous meeting. The next and pertinent question was whether that religious instruction would be given in the form of improved Bible instruction in the public school; or by petitioning for re-districting of the public school unit so as to bring the main body of our Reformed people there into one public school district with subsequent increased control of that institution; or by the establishment of a regular Christian school. The decision was quite unanimously for the latter course. Monarch wants a regular Christian school for its Covenant children.[40]

40

De Koekkoek, Rev. Paul "Christian Home & School" *The Canadian Calvinist*, May 15, 1946, p.3.

No action was taken until June of 1949, when the Board of the School Society went on record in favour of opening a Christian school in the fall of that year. This move created a mini-crisis for the local public school. Officials of the public school requested a meeting with the Society, wanting to know what their concerns were with public schooling. The members of the Christian School Society listed four concerns:

> 1.That Christian teachers be appointed in the Nobleford public school, whose religious convictions and merits as teachers must meet the demands of our School Society.
>
> 2. That religious instruction be provided according to the school Act cf. Arts. 156, 157, 158,159. That this instruction be given every day.
> 3.That the theory of evolution be taught only as a theory and not as fact.
>
> 4. That no mention be made whatsoever of this theory in the first eight grades.[41]

The public board indicated that all four concerns could be met. Thus in June 1949, the Society agreed to work with the public school. L.F. Konynenbelt recalls that time:

> we didn't want a church [CRC] school. Then my brother and older people said "lets put Christian teachers in" [the public school]. We got three or four Mennonite ladies and it went real good. They were

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41

Noble Christian Reformed Church (1980). Provincial Archives of Alberta, p. 129.

> really dedicated Christian. . . We said "why do we have to have a Christian school?" That was a good solution for Nobleford. That was about in 1950 or 52.[42]

As the old timers were expressing satisfaction with their solution to the issue of Christian education, Dutch Calvinist immigrants started to arrive. With them came a very different idea of what Christian education must be. An indication of the attitude of the new Dutch immigrants can be gathered from a comment in the *Christian Home and School Magazine,* in 1952.

> At one time Nobleford was near launching a school, but compromised with the public school, and since then the society has been moribund, the movement almost dead.[43]

Clearly, accommodation with public school authorities was not a viable option to a "free"Christian school as far as the newly arrived immigrants were concerned. As a result, first in Iron Springs in 1949 followed quickly in Granum, Taber, Nobleford and Lethbridge, Christian School Societies were established with the intent to start "free" Christian schools.

The Christian School Committee in Iron Springs grew out of the newly organized Christian Reformed Church, an immigrant church. Their approach to Christian

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42

Konynenbelt op. cit.

43

Oostendorp, Rev. Elco, "Christian Education in Alberta", *Christian Home and School Magazine*. Volume 30 - numbers 11-12 (July-August, 1952) p. 17. Christian Schools International Archives, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

education clashed with the approach of the old timers. The old timers had an established sense of community. They lived and worked in the community with their Mennonite and Baptist neighbours but the newcomers did not seem to recognize this community. Their agitation for a Christian school was often perceived by the old-timers as being done in a negative way -- making reference to "Godless" public school. As one old-timer recalls "the rhetoric was pretty strong at times. We resented this approach and the charges of Godless education, especially since this charge of Godlessness implied that our neighbours were the Godless ones."[44]

The old timers felt that the public schools responded well to their needs and that their accommodation with the public school, which was after all a Protestant school, worked well. Their feelings were that, just because an approach did not conform to the ideas of the Dutch Calvinist immigrants, they should not resort to negative attacks.

The flood of immigrants and their idea of schooling could not be resisted. Athough sensitivities were at times upset, the old timers and the new comers in the Dutch Calvinist community ended up working together. L.F. Konynenbelt, for

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44

Anonymous, interviewed by author, telephone conversation March 28, 2000.

example, who had acknowledged that the Nobleford accommodation with the public school as "a good solution," became first president of the Lethbridge Christian School Board and the old timer who felt the immigrants agitation for a "free" Christian school was too negative sent his children to that school.

Once again, as was often the case, the catalyst for finally translating the idea of a Christian school into reality came from a Christian Reformed Church pastor. Rev. Andrew Kuyvenhoven worked to bring together the several Christian School Societies in Southern Alberta, although the task was not easy. Both the Nobleford and Iron Springs Societies had purchased land -- Nobleford for a high school and Iron Springs for an elementary school. Iron Springs even had a building on their property. The Societies tried at various times to open a school but were faced with frustration each time. Kuyvenhoven believed a combined effort was necessary.

The new comers and the old timers also had different ideas as to the best grade levels for a Christian school. As L.F. Konynenbelt recalls, "we had a high school in mind in Nobleford."[45] The old timers believed that Christian high school education would be the firm basis that young people needed as they entered

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45
Konynenbelt op cit.

adulthood. The new comers, on the other hand, believed in building a foundation starting with elementary. A long time teacher at Lethbridge, recalls the debate:

> The Nobleford people [old-timers] said "Lets start a high school. At least the kids will get a good solid Christian education". You had that in Nobleford. A lot of the local immigrant churches wanted an elementary school first. You have to start from the ground up, was their thinking. You start with a foundation and you build on that foundation.[46]

On November 23, 1960, Rev. Kuyvenhoven chaired a meeting of area school societies. The minutes of the meeting indicate the purpose:

> Rev. Kuyvenhoven explained why we come to the point of forming one new society. The work of the local Societies and High School Society [has come] almost to a stop. In order to reach our goal, to establish a Christian school, it seems the best to join forces and form one Society for Christian Education in Southern Alberta.[47]

Members present voted in favour of the new Society but there were still a number of issues to overcome before a Christian school could open its doors. The first issue was introduced at the November 23, 1960, meeting and had to do with the constitution and by-laws of the new Society. The item in the minutes once again identifies the roots of Alberta's Calvinist schools in Dutch orthodox Calvinism. The minutes indicate a discussion about the basis of the school society:

46

Henry Heinen, interviewed by author, tape recording, Lethbridge, Alberta May 1999.

47

Southern Alberta Society for Christian Education, Board Minutes, November 23, 1960.

> Some of the members favoured a very broad basis. Their point of view is: In order to get other Christian parents interested in sending their children to our Christian school, we should have the Bible as our basis, not more. There were other members that thought just the Bible as the Word of God would be too broad a basis they like to see the 3 forms of unity of the Reformed churches added to it.[48]

This issue was resolved at the Society's next meeting. The minutes read:

> The committee is of the opinion that we should not change Article 2 [the Basis] as it is impossible to maintain a Christian school with out a solid foundation. It therefore proposed to read Article 2 as follows: The Society is based on the Bible as the word of God as it is interpreted in the 3 forms of unity of the Reformed Churches or the Westminster Confession.[49]

Thus the Christian school in Lethbridge would be based on the historic 16th century creeds of the Reformed Church of the Netherlands. This basis was/is also the basis of schools in Lacombe and Edmonton. The importance of the Three Forms of Unity to the founders of the Lethbridge Christian school is indicated at a subsequent meeting. Minutes note that "The constitution is lacking an article that the basis and purpose of the Society cannot be changed."[50] It was felt that the omission of an article preventing the change of the basis of the Society was an

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48

Ibid.

49

Ibid.

50

Ibid, February 7, 1961.

oversight and should be corrected.

Society minutes also indicate some internal problems. According to the minutes

> Lethbridge School Society [a chapter of the new Southern Alberta Society] is having internal difficulties. The unity as is so much needed is lacking and the local Society was given half a year to prove what they want to do either joining or not. A lengthy discussion followed.[51]

There is no hint what these internal problems might be but Lethbridge Society caused concern once more at the next Society meeting and the future of the new Society appeared in question.

> There was a lively discussion on the point of as to go ahead [sic] or not with the whole Society. The delegates from surrounding chapters were of the opinion that the Lethbridge local had gone too far by buying a school building without consent of the whole Society.[52]

The problems with Lethbridge appear to have been resolved as they do not appear in any subsequent minutes.

A more practical issue for the new Society was the question as to what grade level the new school should begin:

51

Ibid, April 5, 1961.

52

Ibid, June 19, 1961.

> The Board feels that the burden will be too heavy if we start at grade one. If we start at a higher grade the children outside of Lethbridge may benefit more by it.[53]

The two options considered by the board were to have a grade one to six school or to have a grades five to nine school. The question was resolved November 1, 1961, when the Board moved to open a school in Lethbridge, September 1962, with grades one to six.

The Iron Springs School Society had not yet joined the new Southern Alberta Society. Iron Springs owned land with a building on it. The question of Iron Springs joining Southern Alberta appears several times in the minutes. This issue was not resolved until a year after the Lethbridge school opened. Iron Springs joined in 1963. The Societies in Iron Springs and in Nobleford both owned land and these assets were eventually transferred to the Society for Christian Education in Southern Alberta.

Before the Society could open the doors of its Lethbridge school, it needed a building. This problem was addressed in an unique manner. The old RCAF training base in Claresholm had buildings that had been declared surplus by the

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53 Ibid, September 1, 1961.

federal government. After some negotiations, the Society purchased one of the buildings and had it moved to the school property in Lethbridge. A picture appeared in the Lethbridge paper showing a truck hauling a building traversing a bridge. The caption reads:

> TIGHT SQUEEZE- A steady hand was needed to guide this transport truck and its burden across the Oldman River Bridge just west of Lethbridge Wednesday afternoon. The building, the school from the Claresholm air base, was purchased by the Christian Reformed Church in Lethbridge [the Christian School] is being sponsored by the church but its services will be available to anyone wishing to attend there.[54]

Not everyone was pleased with the new school building however. An article in the local paper has a headline "North Businessmen to Protest Sneaky Way Building Was Located." The article reads, in part, that local businessmen expressed

> disapproval of the "sneaky way" in which an "unsightly building" was "snuck" into North Lethbridge . . . A contractor . . . said the building should have been of masonry to fit in with surroundings and stated that he would not be allowed to build such a building in that location.[55]

The Dutch Calvinist community in southern Alberta, after overcoming a series of obstacles, finally opened a Calvinist Christian school in September of 1962. The first newsletter represents the feelings of the community

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54

Lethbridge Herald, undated clipping. Immanuel Christian School (ICS) Archives, Lethbridge.

55

Ibid.

> The day that we have been looking for so long has finally become a reality. For years, parents were sending their prayers to God for a Christian school. A few weeks ago those prayers were answered. Tuesday, September 4 was a great day for the Calvinistic Christians in Southern Alberta; the school doors were opened and the covenant youth started to come in. They were a little shy at first, but soon they felt at home.[56]

In southern Alberta the differing elements of the Dutch orthodox Calvinist mythology are apparent. The *Afscheiding* tradition of isolation and accommodation are seen in the pre-war community members. They maintained their identity through their church and community life while accommodating to the larger society in which they lived -- making accommodation with public schools to address their need for a Christian education. The new immigrants displayed their zeal for "free" Christian schools by agitating for private Calvinist Christian Schools. This zeal, or "Dutch Activism", led to a divisive struggle in Calgary when the Dutch Calvinist community there wanted to organize a Calvinist school.

Calgary

In the early 1950's there was no significant Dutch community in Calgary but the post-war immigration flood quickly changed that. By 1952, there were enough Dutch Calvinists to organize the First Christian Reformed Church of Calgary (First

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56
ICA Newsletter, September 23, 1961. ICS Archives.

CRC). Unfortunately First CRC was, from the start, a divided church.

The congregation at First CRC was made up of 150 families, very few over the age of 50. All trades and many professions were represented in the Congregation as were most of the provinces of the Netherlands. In the Netherlands different provinces often reflected differing views on Calvinism. Many early immigrants to Alberta came from the conservative north east provinces where the *Afscheiding* originated in 1834. In the western urban areas of the Netherlands the neo-Calvinism of Abraham Kuyper was dominant. These differences in expressions of Calvinism became quite pronounced in First CRC.

First CRC was at first ministered to by one of many "home missionaries" sent by the American headquarters of the CRC to address the spiritual needs of the newly arrived Dutch immigrants. By 1955, however, there was a clear split in Calgary's First CRC. In attempts to heal the divisions within the congregation, Alberta born Ty Hofman was "called"[57] as Pastor.

57

CRC Pastors are "called" by a congregation. This is a formal process whereby a minister is hired to serve a particular church.

Ty Hofman[58] was born in the established Dutch Calvinist community of southern Alberta. He attended the University of Alberta in Edmonton and ended up studying for the ministry at Calvin College. When Hofman arrived in Calgary from his previous posting in Bozeman, Montana, he was the first Canadian-born CRC pastor in Canada. However, for some members of First CRC in Calgary, Hofman's credentials were not Calvinistic enough.

There were those in the congregation who were "heavily oriented toward Dutch activism [neo-Calvinism] and looked down their noses at CRC pastors"[59]. Pastors from the Christian Reformed Church were regarded as "American" and thus their brand of Calvinism was suspect. The Dutch activist group within First CRC opposed Hofman's call and would brand him as anti-Christian school (professional suicide in Canada) before his term at First CRC was finished.

The story of dissension within Calgary's CRC is complex and involves the timing and place of reading Hofman's letter of acceptance of his call to Calgary, it

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The account that follows is based on conversations with the main person involved, Rev. Tymen Hofman. Rev. Hofman also provided sections of the manuscript of his memoirs. Any misrepresentation is fully the responsibility of Peter Prinsen.

59

Hofman, T. unpublished memoirs 1999, manuscript.

includes "censure" (a form of church discipline) of dissenting elders and it includes many cases of personal pain. An example of the atmosphere in the church can be gathered from this note in Hofman's unpublished memoirs.

> The fact that the consistory met in the home of [name deleted] when I spoke to them about my call, and the fact that my acceptance letter was not opened before the Sunday service was all related to the problem of "leakage" of what was being done in the consistory. Some thought the janitor was eavesdropping but that did not explain many baffling revelations. Eventually the truth came out. They were the victims of a "fifth column". One of the elders had a wife who wheedled every bit of information out of him after the consistory meeting so that the very next day the dissidents already knew what had transpired in the consistory. He sat quietly while we discussed the problem and speculated about the janitor. His brother-in-law later told us that he was essentially coerced into telling her. I am convinced that he was flying under false colors. He would have joined the opposition if he had not been an elder but he didn't have the guts to be honest.[60]

Eventually Calgary's First CRC purchased two parcels of land -- one for the church building and one for a parsonage. The first priority was the parsonage. In March, 1956, a congregational meeting was held to approve the parsonage project. At about the same time the dissident group in First CRC began plans to form their own church, an action that would lead to Calgary's own *"schoolstrijd."*

Twenty-five families signed a petition requesting approval from Classis (an

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60

Ibid, memoirs.

administrative unit in the Christian Reformed Church) to form a second CRC in Calgary. The group making the request met the Sunday evening prior to the Classis meeting to discuss their proposal. At that Sunday evening meeting the group was encouraged to attend the congregational meeting of First CRC to support the proposal for a second church. Hofman picks up the story:

> the spokesman told the group that they all should be present at the congregational meeting of First Church which would be held on Monday night and that they should vote against the building of the parsonage. That land should be used as a playground for the school which should be built on the property on which we expected to build a church. In other words, the agenda of the "Second Church" would be the frustration of the building plans of First Church. That would take the advantage that First Church would have in attracting new members. Of course the building of the Christian School was being promoted as the highest priority of the church. I do not know how we found out about that plan to attend our meeting but by meeting time we knew all about it.[61]

The plan by the Dutch activists to "subvert" the building program of First CRC created a great deal of anger. The meeting approved the building plan "but it gave the opposition the occasion to declare that we were more interested in having a parsonage than a Christian school."[62]

61

Ibid, memoirs.

62

Ibid, memoirs.

The new CRC was organized in 1956 and took the name Emmanuel, meaning "God with us." The church name did not escape the notice of some of the First CRC members who believed they saw a subtle message in the name of the new church, namely that God was especially with the Dutch activists of the new church.

As immigration continued through out the 1950's both churches courted the immigrants. Those who spoke English generally joined First CRC favouring the program of Canadianization. The immigrants "involved in an ideological struggle [promoting Kuyperean Calvinism] joined Emmanuel."[63]

The two groups in Calgary's Christian Reformed community were not divided over the idea of a Christian school. Both groups were in agreement on the concept; the difference was more a matter of priority. Hofman and First CRC were of the opinion that the church needed to be firmly established before a school was built. The Dutch activists were of the opposite opinion -- the school was first

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63

Ty Hofman defined what he meant by Dutch activism and its ideological struggle "The Dutch activism I refer to was the Neo-Kuyperianism that resulted in Christian Labor Unions, Christian Political movements etc. and came to fruition in the AACS and the Institute for Christian Studies in Toronto. It was not that I was opposed to that development but I opposed their hell-bent determination to push these things at the expense of developing the church building program, which made it all a political football rather than what it should have been as a serious, wise and cooperative venture." Hofman, Ty. E-mail to author, Feb. 12, 2000.

priority.

Calgary had a school society by 1958 with Emmanuel dominating the Society's board. The board approved plans to open a school and presented its proposal to a society meeting held in May, 1958. The proposal called for opening a school in the fall of that same year.

The Society meeting was, to say the least, a vigorous one with the two competing views represented. The pastor of Emmanuel was keynote speaker. Although there was no building, no teacher, or no money, this pastor, in Dutch, declared "the school is here already. The school stands in the hand of God."[64] The speech had the desired effect of exciting the members about the idea of building a Christian school. After the speech various speakers stood up in support of a September opening. A rather surprised pastor of Emmanuel, hearing the call for a September opening turned to Hofman and said "Those crazy people, what do they want to do?"[65] Emmanuel's pastor had not given a timeline for "taking the school off God's hands." Hofman suggests that the pastor was promoting a concept but not

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64
Ibid, memoirs.

65
Ibid, memoirs.

necessarily for that September.

To defuse the situation Ty Hofman took a step that would follow him for the rest of his career. Hofman stood up and argued that a school without any visible means of support should not go ahead. He moved for a one year postponement on any discussion about the establishment of a Christian school. The motion was passed as Hofman recalls:

> At that point I could not refrain from putting forth the argument that there was no prospect whatever that this could be realized by September and I moved to postpone consideration of the motion for one year. The clerk of our consistory supported the motion and in short order it was voted on and carried. All the members of First voted for postponement and all the members of Emmanuel voted in the negative, except Marten who did not vote audibly. Needless to say that was the day that I established my reputation of being against the Christian school. I was against a half-baked school that had very little hope of being an educational reality or a Christian entity, considering the lack of Christian grace in the community.[66]

In 1962 Ty Hofman accepted a call to an America Christian Reformed church. In 1963 Calgary Christian School opened. The two events are not connected. However, in the minds of many Dutch activists across Canada, Hofman was considered as anti-Christian school. This reputation ensured that Hofman would never receive a call from a Canadian church -- well, almost never.

66

Ibid, memoirs.

The First Christian Reformed Church of Edmonton did call Hofman in the late 1950's. This is an interesting footnote since First CRC Edmonton was an old timer church and they did what Hofman had argued for in Calgary -- first build a church and then build a school. The Edmonton Society was formed in 1945, but school building plans were sidelined so as not to interfere with the building of a new church -- the church that would be home to Edmonton Christian school in 1949.

Funding

As the 1960's drew to a close, Dutch Calvinist schools in Alberta were well established. Schools or school societies existed in Edmonton, Lacombe, Lethbridge, Red Deer, Calgary and Rocky Mountain House. Though schools were central to Dutch Calvinist mythology and to their pillar mentality they did not neglect other elements that made up their pillar. Throughout Canada Dutch Calvinists had established Christian[67] Credit Unions, Christian Seniors Homes, a Christian Labor Union, Christian Farmers Association. The orthodox Calvinist pillar was being transplanted in their adopted country; however, one key element was missing. Christian schools received no public funding and Dutch Calvinist mythology would not rest until this issue of a perceived social injustice was

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67
Most Calvinist institutions are simply designated as "Christian".

addressed.

Efforts by private schools for public funding began in earnest in the early 1960's[68] and Dutch Calvinists were a key group in that effort. In fact Dutch Calvinists started seeking government funding as early as 1953. In 1953, John Olthuis

> a school board member for the Edmonton Society for Christian Education contacted Premier Ernest Manning by telephone and arranged for a meeting between the Premier and the school board to discuss the possibility of financial assistance for the Calvin Central Christian School. He also contacted the Honorable Anders Aalborg, Minister of Education, and expressed his views to him. Through a misunderstanding on the part of the school board, no meeting ever took place between Premier Manning and the school board. However Harold (Harry) Sweet, High School Inspector, paid a visit to Olthuis at his home and discussed the matter at considerable length. In Olthuis' opinion, Sweet had been sent by the Minister of Education to try to discourage continuation of attempts to get financial assistance for the school, and he (Sweet) emphasized strongly the hopelessness of the school board's request.[69]

Olthuis' early attempt to procure government financial aid was unsuccessful, but it does indicate Dutch Calvinists belief in the justice of the cause of funding for

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For a detailed history of the funding issue see: Digout, Stanislaus (1969). *Public Aid For Private Schools: The Making of a Decision.* M. Ed. Thesis, University of Alberta.

69

Ibid p. 44.

private schools, schools that allow parental choice. Soon, more organized attempts were undertaken and coordinated through a newly organized lobby group of private school operators.

On March 22, 1958, a group of private school operators met in Edmonton to form an association and "at this meeting, the group selected a committee to prepare a constitution for the association."[70] The association referred to is the Association of Independent Schools and Colleges in Alberta (AISCA).[71] Among the signators to this new association was a representative from Calvin Christian School, Edmonton. AISCA was to play a key role in the funding debate and Dutch Calvinists would play a key leadership role in the lobby efforts.[72]

The brief prepared by AISCA in 1958 does not request or even address the issue of funding. Its main concern was to ensure a secure regulatory basis for Alberta's

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70

Association of Private Schools (1958) *Brief to the Royal Commission on Education in Alberta re: Private Schools in Alberta.* AISCA archives. p. 1.

71

The current name is used in this history. In 1958 the name was "Association of Private Schools". The name was changed in the 1970's dropping the elitist sounding term "private" for a more egalitarian sounding term "independent".

72

Both the current and past Executive Directors of AISCA have roots firmly in the orthodox Dutch Calvinist community.

private schools

> a study of the statutes of Alberta and the regulations made by Order-in-council respecting private schools seems to indicate that the private school enjoys only a rather tenuous legal relationship with the government.[73]

AISCA's concern with regulatory issues related to private schools gave way to financial concerns by the early 1960's. Dutch Calvinist "activists", both through their own Societies and through AISCA, were influential in these efforts.

In Calgary, supporters of Calgary Christian School used the occasion of the building of their school in 1962 to lobby local MLA's for public money. Don Fleming was MLA in Calgary from 1959 to 1967. He recalls the occasion in a letter to a former Calgary Christian School board member:

> The need for financial assistance was brought to my attention by you Hank Verhoeff. My first memory was being invited to take part in the ceremonies regarding the laying of the cornerstone of the school the Dutch Reformed Church was building.[74]

Similar lobby efforts were being undertaken in Edmonton.

73

Brief op. cit. p. 2 - 3

74

Fleming, Don (January 26, 1998) Correspondence with H. Verhoeff. A copy of this letter was given to the author by Mr. Verhoeff.

In 1962, a Christian Reformed minister in Edmonton, Rev. Louis Taminga, organized the Christian Action Foundation. The Foundation was rooted in the Kuyperian neo-Calvinist ideology of the Dutch Calvinist immigrants, an ideology that taught that one was to encounter rather that withdraw from society and thus further the cause of justice in society based on Christian principles. Their concern for Christian education is clear in their stated goal:

> The Foundation will inform Canadian Christians about the relevance of the Bible for all life. They will explore the direction which political life is taking, they will analyse the motives that prompt the issues of our nation, they will explore the possibilities of political activities by developing a Christian program of action.
>
> The Foundation will, furthermore, pay a good deal of attention to matters of education at the different levels. It is their conviction that no subject can be taught without the basis of a life-and-world-view. The philosophy of education is either prompted by faith or apostasy; either man-centered or Christ-centered. Present legislation forbids religious convictions to have any bearing upon the curriculum, which in turn is a definite life-view namely that life can quite well proceed without God's will being known. The Foundation, therefore, will make Christian principles meaningful and relevant for education and science.[75]

One can detect a zealousness in their views, a zeal that at times caused friction with the old-timers. This zeal is more evident in an article in the *Edmonton Journal* a few years after the founding of the Christian Action Foundation. Their

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Digout op.cit., p. 41.

focus is still clearly education:

> As free citizens they [public school supporters] may seek education in which the world is limited to the observable, the touchable, the reasonable, the provable and the workable.
>
> But it also must be realized that these people are not the only ones in the country, although the monopoly of the one neutral secular school-system seems to indicate that their is the only respectable "normal" philosophy.
>
> There are, namely, people whose horizons are infinitely broader. They take God into the educational picture as the Author, Ruler, Redeemer, and Provider of created reality, whether spiritual or material.[76]

The Dutch activists were an effective force in promoting government funding. Members of the group contacted all sitting MLA's and Cabinet ministers and met with Premier Manning in 1963.

At the meeting with Manning, Taminga and Olthuis discussed the financial burden placed on Christian school supporters. Taminga would later recall that this meeting was important "since this was apparently the first time the Premier heard some of our arguments and motives."[77]

76

Digout op. cit., p. 62.

77

Quoted in Digout, p. 59.

In Calgary the Christian action people among the Dutch Calvinists continued their work. Verhoeff contacted Speaker of the House, Arthur Dixon, to arrange a meeting between members of Calgary Christian School Board and the Minister of Education. Dixon replied by letter stating

> On Wednesday, April 1st, the Minister of Education and the Calgary Members plan on meeting the executive of the Calgary Labour Temple to discuss the Foundation Program and I thought this might be an opportune time for your Group to meet the Minister and the Members to discuss your School that day.
>
> I believe it would be a good time to have a Dutch Treat dinner at noon at one of the Calgary restaurants, where we could all gather, and the reason I am suggesting the noon meeting is that the Minister's time is limited that day because of the other meeting, and the Teachers' Convention that is being held in Calgary at that time. However, he would be pleased to meet with your Group and the MLA's and a noon meeting would take care of the time situation.[78]

Private school supporters in Alberta, especially those who operated schools of Christian character, had two important allies in the Social Credit government, Speaker Dixon and MLA Fleming. It was Fleming who, in 1966, introduced a bill to allow public funding for private schools.

Private school supporters were pleased with the proposed Bill, but not everyone

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78

Dixon, Arthur (March 24, 1964) Correspondence with H. Verhoeff. Copy of this letter given to author by Mr. Verhoeff.

was happy with the decision to provide public money to private schools. The ATA for one was strongly opposed.

During the 1940's and 1950's, when Dutch Calvinists were organizing their schools, there was little if any opposition from the ATA. The general culture of the ATA was pro-Social Credit since Social Credit was seen as being pro-teacher. Public schools in the 1940's and 1950's reflected the dominant Christian ethic of the period.[79] An article in the ATA magazine in 1943 concluded by rallying teachers to "all go forward in happy cooperation with the intent that the boys and girls of the west may grow in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and man."[80] However, the ATA's opposition to private schools during the 1960's became more forceful. The focus of the opposition was on public funding of private schools.

At the annual meeting of the ATA in 1961 a resolution was adopted.

> Be it resolved that the Alberta Teachers' Association is opposed to the expenditure of public funds for either direct or indirect support of private schools duplicating educational services offered in public

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79

Private conversation with Charles Hyman Executive Director, ATA, July 7, 1999.

80

Priest, Harding, "Religion in Education" *The ATA Magazine*, June, 1943, p. 37 ATA Archives.

or separate school districts.[81]

The resolution was passed by a vote of 173 to 51.

The ATA remained constant in its opposition to public funding of private schools. The ATA Council received a report from its representatives on the "Minister's Advisory Committee on Private Schools" in June of 1966. (Dr. W.VandenBorn of Edmonton Christian School was an AISCA representative on the Advisory Committee). According to the committee report to Council, in March 1966, the Legislature had approved a resolution "urging the government to consider means of extending a measure of financial assistance to private schools teaching the Alberta curriculum." Council responded at this meeting by passing a motion opposing the resolution. One member of the Council asked to have his vote in opposition to the motion recorded.[82] In March, 1967, S.C.T. Clarke, ATA Executive Secretary, sent a letter to all MLA's outlining ATA opposition to the bill. Despite ATA opposition, by 1967, Bill 29 became law and Dutch Calvinist schools could count on a measure of government funding for their schools.

81

Minutes Annual General Meeting 1961, Resolution C14/61, ATA Archives.

82

Minutes, Executive Council, June 10, 1966, ATA Archives.

In the space of two decades Alberta's orthodox Dutch Calvinists had established a series of Calvinistic Christian schools throughout the province and had secured regulatory recognition and the principle of public funding for private schools. The mythology of the community overcame internal and external opposition and, as more than one founder has stated when referring to the early years of Christian schools, "we were blessed."

CHAPTER 8: NATIONAL UNION OF CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS

While Alberta's Dutch Calvinist schools were facing unprecedented growth, other parts of Canada were also encountering the immigrant flood. In Ontario the growth was most dramatic. Ontario was the favourite destination for Dutch immigrants with 50% of the new comers settling there. As was the case across Canada, Ontario's orthodox Calvinist immigrants were greeted by their Calvinist compatriots, but once again there was a lack of any Calvinist infrastructure -- there was only one Christian school in Ontario. Similarly in British Columbia, immigrants arrived to a small community of orthodox Calvinists with only one Christian school, Vancouver Christian established in 1949. By the end of the 1950's, however, Ontario would be home to twenty Christian Schools and British Columbia home to six.

Despite growth in the number of Christian Schools across Canada, there was no national coordinating body. The Christian Reformed Church was kept at arms length from the schools and each school society was an autonomous body. South of the border however, where a tradition of Calvinist Christian schooling went back to the mid-19th century, there was a national organization to serve the

schools -- the National Union of Christian Schools (NUCS).[1]

Just as the American based Christian Reformed Church provided much needed support to its sister churches in Canada during the post-war immigration, so did NUCS automatically reach out to assist existing and new Christian schools in Canada. Joining NUCS was an assumed part of opening a Christian school in Canada. According to the *1999-2000 CSI Directory* Edmonton Christian joined NUCS when it opened in 1949. Lacombe joined the same year, four years after its opening.[2] NUCS would play a significant role in Canadian schools including the Calvinist schools in Alberta but not without that Calvinist trait of disagreement and even of potential splits.

NUCS was formed in 1920 as an alliance of Christian school societies. By the 1940's NUCS was a service organization for American Calvinist schools with headquarters in Grand Rapids, Michigan. NUCS services to Christian schools

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1

The National Union of Christian Schools (NUCS) changed its name to Christian Schools International (CSI) in the mid 70's.

2

The 1999-2000 CSI Directory indicates that Lacombe joined CSI in 1949 however the Lacombe Board minutes indicate a close association in the first year of operation "June 10, 1946: It was decided to order a yearbook of the National Union of Christian Schools for every member at 10 cents each".

included a pension plan for teachers in affiliated schools, Christian textbooks, annual conventions and a magazine *The Christian Home and School* (started in 1922).

Christian Home and School was (and is) a magazine for parents and supporters of Calvinist Christian schools. Articles feature issues related to a variety of topics from social issues to class room practices. An article in an issue during the 1940's gives a sense of the strict moral code common to Calvinists at the time. The article, "Comic Books", directs parents to the dangers of comic books featuring as they do "crime, lust and sex." Comic books of any kind

> use vulgar expressions constantly which stem from the names of God and Jesus or refer to God's dwelling or virtues Gosh, Golly, By Golly, Gee, Gee Whiz, Darn it, O My Gosh, Heavens, Gracious, etc. Is it any wonder that so many of our boys and girls use these improper and unchristian expressions.[3]

Common themes in *Christian Home & School* include reminders that, for the dedicated Calvinists, Christian schools are not a choice but an obligation. An article in February, 1947, reflects the mythology of the *schoolstrijd* among Canadian Calvinists, and the resultant obligation to send their children to a

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3

"*Christian Home & School*" date and page no. not available. Christian Schools International Archives, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

> Oh, that Covenant children everywhere might have such days! Oh, that Christian parents everywhere might know the blessed power of Christian education in a free school. Oh, if these children were now endowed with the gift of expressing their feelings. . . how eloquent would be their plea: Give us such schools. This is our birth-right. This atmosphere is our native air, our element, as water to the fishes, as air to the birds. Give us Christian schools; and teachers who are fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters. Without them our souls will wither. . . Cost? To be sure! Even sacrifice, perhaps. But think of the past! Think of the pennies, the nickels. How God has blessed them! What if YOUR fathers and mothers had counted the cost too great?[4]

Throughout the 1940's and 1950's *Christian Home & School* featured news items from Canadian schools. In February 1950, Edmonton Christian school had an article featuring the opening of the school. In 1952 the magazine produced a special promotional issue featuring the growth of Christian schools in Canada. The editorial noted that "there is every reason to hold high hopes for the vigorous growth of the Christian school in Canada." The reason for such an optimistic view

> lies in the faith that these Dutch immigrants profess and live by. As one meets many of these people he senses soon enough that they are genuine Calvinists and that they want to live in harmony with the principles of that great faith. . .The Christian school is a logical and necessary implication of Calvinism. If God is what the Calvinist professes Him to be, then no fact may be considered apart from that glorious Creator and God. And if God has made his blessed

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4

Uitvlugt, Jacob. "Canada Reports". *Christian Home and School Magazine*. February, 1947, p. 14, Christian Schools International Archives, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

> covenant arrangement, by which he enters into living fellowship with his people, then the child in such a family must be reared in that fellowship with God at every step of his life. A so-called "neutral" education has no place in a Calvinistic pattern of life and thought.[5]

Relations between NUCS and its Canadian member schools have not always been easy. One point of tension was over the fact that NUCS was often seen as an American organization and thus had differing expressions of Reformed Christianity than those of the newly arrived Dutch activists. Dan VanderArk, Executive Director of CSI, comments:

> some of the Dutch immigrants saw the American expression of Calvinism as being accommodating and assimilating into American culture. This was viewed with suspicion by the Kuyperian Dutch Calvinists who had a social reconstruction orientation.[6]

The differences in Calvinistic philosophies between Canada and NUCS were pointed out in a Canadian Christian school magazine which noted "there is an unmistakable difference of emphasis placed on Christian education in both lands."[7]

In his history of NUCS, John A. Vander Ark notes that the involvement of an

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Heerema, Rev. Edward. "Canadian Challenge", *Christian Home and School Magazine*. July-August, 1952 p. 12 Christian Schools International archives, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

6

Private conversation with Dan Vander Ark, Executive Director, Christian Schools International, Grand Rapids, Michigan, February 11, 2000.

7

Christian School Herald November/December, 1961 p. 4.

American organization in Canada with its

> complicated binational, bicultural situation was neither fully understood nor always appreciated by NUCS even if the motives may have been purely altruistic. . .well intentioned actions can be soured by patronizing attitudes.[8]

The American issue was compounded at an annual NUCS convention in Hamilton, Ontario, in 1961. A motion was introduced to change the name of NUCS by dropping the word National and replacing it with the word International. Although NUCS did eventually make the change to CSI in the mid 1970's, at the 1961 convention the motion was defeated.

Much of the ideological difference between Canadian Calvinists and American Calvinists can be attributed to the very different mythologies of both groups. The American schools had their genesis among the immigrants who left the Netherlands for America after the *Afscheiding* of 1834. They did not experience in the same direct way the *schoolstrijd* nor the leadership of Abraham Kuyper. The Canadian post-war immigrants, on the other hand, were children of the *schoolstrijd* and disciples of Kuyper.

8

Vander Ark, John (1983). *Christian Schools International 1943-65: 22 Landmark Years.* Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House. p. 77.

Dutch Calvinist immigrants to Canada were fiercely independent. They were used to living and working within their own institutionally complete pillar and they were driven by their passionate attachment to their mythology. When these immigrants looked at American Calvinism they felt that it had become too American and too accommodating. Americans worked with the existing mainstream American structures; Dutch Calvinists were used to their own structures. Peetoom, himself a post-war immigrant, describes the difference:

> Roughly speaking, when American ministers spoke about "carrying Jesus Christ into the Main Street," their models were those individual Christians whose otherwise splendid voices were heard in businesses, labour unions, political parties, newspapers, radio stations and other areas of human life as simple, honest, competent and hardworking professionals. When Dutch-born ministers used similar phrase, for instance that Jesus Christ was relevant to "all of life," their models came from a world in which individuals banded together in some confessionally-based institution, a *Christian* political party, a *Christian* labor union (although not necessarily a *Christian* business enterprise).[9]

Christian school supporters, especially in Ontario, reacted to the perceived threat of an "American" organization, with its suspect Calvinism, giving leadership to their schools in Canada. In 1956, the Ontario Christian school societies formed a separate organization within NUCS, the Ontario Alliance of Christian Schools

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9

Peetoom, Adriaan (1983). *From Mythology to Mythology: Dutch-Canadian Orthodox Calvinist Immigrants and Their Schools*. M.A.Thesis, University of Toronto p. 63.

(OACS). To this day there is friction between Dutch activists in OACS and with CSI.

Shortly after OACS was organized a Canadian magazine was introduced for supporters of Dutch Calvinist schools. The magazine, names *Christian School Herald* was originally printed in Dutch but changed to English after a few years. In the early 1960's *Christian School Herald* produced three promotional booklets. These booklets (40-60 pages in length) are apologetics for Christian education in Canada reflecting the influence of the Kuyperian oriented orthodox Calvinist immigrants.

The first booklet in the series is filled with the echos of the orthodox Calvinist mythology of the *schoolstrijd*. The negative influence of the French Revolution and orthodox Calvinist opposition to state control are clear in the following item:

> most people in the western world simply take for granted that the state is obligated to provide schools for the children of the land Several leaders in the French revolutionary movement insisted that people must be made to realize that children belong not to their parents as much as to the state.[10]

10

DeJong, Dr. P.Y. (1962). *Christian Education in Changing Times*. Hamilton, Ontario: Christian School Herald. p.14.

Kuyper's concept of "sphere sovereignty" (see Chapter Four) and his belief that Christian schools, although Reformed, should not be church controlled, is reflected in the argument that

> we should remember that the Bible nowhere gives warrant to the church to enter the field of general education though closely related to the churches life and ministry in this world, the schools constitute a domain [sphere] distinct from that of the organized church.[11]

There is a chapter entitled "Special Schools for Special People" which deals with the idea of covenant, noting that "our covenant God has placed us with a high and holy purpose to be witnesses for him and his marvellous grace in our educational enterprise."[12] The above quote hints at the missionary aspect of the orthodox Calvinist immigration. This missionary aspect is further reflected when the author writes "God places us in this world with a message for this world, in order that by his grace we may be a true blessing."[13] The booklet ends reflecting a Calvinist pillar mentality:

> Our warfare has a double aspect. In the first place we must man our defences. We must seek to strengthen our homes and schools and communities against the foe. Then we must also conduct an

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11
Ibid p. 15.

12
Ibid p. 19.

13
Ibid p. 20.

offensive against the foe.[14]

The second booklet in the series is a history of education beginning with "Education Among the Hebrews" and includes a section detailing the history of education in the Netherlands lamenting that by the mid-19th century "nothing remained of the Reformed character of the schools which had been established and cherished by the founders of the Dutch republic" but noting that "not everyone however, acquiesced in these deformations,"[15] reference to the struggle of orthodox Calvinists in the *schoolstrijd.*

The third booklet in the series is a collection of essays explaining how various subjects such as history, literature and Latin, can be taught from a distinctive Calvinist Christian perspective.

The material from OACS, the booklets mentioned above, and the *Christian School Herald*, were present in Alberta's schools as several references to the material can be found in board minutes, but there is scant evidence in Alberta that there was any

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14

Ibid p. 36.

15

DeJong, Dr. P.Y. (1962). *The Story of the Schools*. Hamilton, Ontario: Christian School Herald p. 31.

concern about the American nature of NUCS or its perceived philosophical differences. Former board member and board president of Edmonton Christian School, John Woudstra, recalls that working with American based NUCS

> has been an issue [in Alberta] but never as strong as Ontario . . .For years there has been a controversy between the West and Ontario when it comes to the West and CCEF [an Ontario based fund raising group for writing Canadian curriculum material]. Basically it comes down to how does Ontario feel about being beholden to head office in Grand Rapids[Michigan] The west is much more comfortable with that.[16]

Current CSI Executive Director Dan Vander Ark reflects the same sentiments. He stated

> American and Alberta [Calvinists] did not see being part of a broader culture as being a diminution of Reformed Christian culture. In Alberta there is less of a border between Alberta and the US than there is between Ontario and the US.[17]

John Woudstra attributes the differences between Alberta Calvinists and Ontario Calvinists

> to the fact that when we came as immigrants we were more inclined to emulate the people who were already here, who had more roots. People here came from places like Whitinsville, Massachusets, their roots were in the states. . . Here we have tended to follow the older churches -- Nobleford, Granum, First Christian Reformed Church in Edmonton and Vancouver. The newcomers tried to fit into

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16

John Woudstra, interviewed by author, tape recording, Edmonton, Alberta, February 2000

17

Daniel Vander Ark op. cit.

these.[18]

Although differences between the mentality of Dutch Calvinists in Ontario and Alberta are significant, but this does not suggest there have not been disagreements, among Alberta's Dutch Calvinists. Calvinists seem to thrive on disagreements as evidenced by the difficulties in organizing Christian schools in Lethbridge and Calgary. Nonetheless, Alberta's Calvinists Christian schools maintain strong ties with Grand Rapids based NUCS while their sister schools in Ontario continue to agitate for "independence" from this organization.

Teacher Professionalism

NUCS provided support for teachers in Christian schools on a variety of matters -- salaries, pensions, and benefits -- but one of the main concerns of NUCS has been the need to improve the professional status of teachers in Christian schools and in recruiting teachers for its member schools.

One means of encouraging professionalism was through establishing teacher associations. In 1954, Ontario formed the "Ontario Christian Teachers Association," with a membership of some two dozen teachers, and in 1962

18
Ibid, Woudstra.

teachers in Alberta formed the "Christian Educators Association." For the period of this history the major work of these two associations was planning annual teachers' conventions. Grand Rapids based Calvin College made several unsuccessful attempts at creating a national teachers association that would be a self governing professional association. However there was never enough interest. The only "national" voice for teachers in Calvinist Christian schools in Canada and the United States was a professional magazine, the *Christian Educator Journal,* first published in 1961 (the magazine continues to publish four times a year).

A more significant issue for the profession in the 1950's was a lack of teachers. In 1955 *Calvinist Contact*[19] reported a nation wide shortage of 15 teachers, a significant percentage of total teaching positions. Edmonton's Paul deKoekkoek anticipated a shortage as early as 1945 noting in his *Canadian Calvinist* that "teachers will be in increasing demand as other Christian schools will be opened. Their early training is imperative."[20] For North American Calvinists, teacher

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19

Calvinist Contact, April 1, 1955, p. 1.

20

deKoekkoek, Rev. Paul. "Home and School" *Canadian Calvinist.* September 1945. Calvin College archives, Grand Rapids, Michigan. p.1.

training meant a place called Calvin College.

Teacher Training

In Edmonton the only reference to board concerns regarding teacher training appears in the minutes of March 22, 1950, where a motion was "made and carried that the secretary write informing Calvin College in regards to Miss Bouma not securing practice teaching when this had been requested by her and also by Provincial Department of Education."[21]

The best sense of teacher training in these first years in Edmonton comes from Miss Bouma's reminiscences in her address to the school society at its 40th anniversary banquet:

> Then there is the matter of teachers and their qualifications. Let me share something of my "training." In grades 5, 6, 7 and 8 I was a pupil in a small one-room school in the interior of B.C. I had one classmate in my grade and we shared a desk. In those days we had arithmetic and grammar texts with answers in the back so that we could correct our own work. The teacher could be contacted when needed. By the time I was 12, I had to help in the dairy and there was no high school. However, the inspector came to see my parents and urged them to have me go on by taking correspondence courses from the department of Education and that's how I

21

Edmonton Society for Christian Education, Board Minutes, March 20, 1950.

> did the entire high-school program. Then I went to Calvin College, the denominational college of the Christian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan. In my second year I had a visitor from Edmonton - Rev. Paul de Koekoek . . . with the mission of recruiting someone for a new school. I was not assertive enough to withstand the recruitment. I came with the model in my head from my one-room school experience[22].

Another teacher in the early 1950's, Mrs. Dixie VandenBorn, also remembers her teacher training as she remembers "the six week wonders."

> "We were called the six week wonders', she recalled. "We attended University classes for six weeks each summer, and had two weeks off before the next school year began. It was very busy."
>
> After only one year at Calvin College, Dixie wondered how she ever survived the responsibilities of teaching. "When you're 19 you don't realize the enormity of the situation so you simply do the best you can."Understanding parents and experienced colleagues were instrumental in Dixie's transition from student to teacher . . ..[23]

In both cases the teachers make reference to Calvin College. Calvin College is the denominational college of the Christian Reformed Church. Located in Grand Rapids, Michigan, it is the home of the first parochial Calvinist school in North

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22

From Generation to Generation (1989) Edmonton Society for Christian Education Yearbook p. 4.

23

Ibid p. 10.

America. Calvin College started as a theological school in 1876.

Peter De Boer traces the history of training teachers for Calvinist day schools at Calvin College. In the 1920's, Calvin College was seen as the centre for training Christian school teachers. De Boer quotes Professor Berkhof writing in 1916. For Berkhof

> the function that ranked "next in importance to the training of theological students" was educating teachers for our Christian schools." Christian schools were absolutely necessary for fulfilling covenant promises . . . But Christian schools would not "answer the purpose of their existence, if there be not teachers who understand the principles that are dear to us and know how to inculcate them into the minds of our children."[24]

From the beginning, teachers in Alberta Christian schools were required to meet provincial standards of training. For example, the June 10, 1950, minutes of the Edmonton School Board report "that educational authorities although hesitant and reluctant agreed to grant Miss Bouma a letter of authority . . . the School Board upon recommendation to the Educational Committee decided to strongly urge Miss Bouma to secure her certificate this year."[25]

24

De Boer, Peter (1991) *Origins of Teacher Education at Calvin College*. Lewiston New York: Mullen Studies in Education p. 11.

25

Edmonton Society for Christian Education, Board Minutes, June 10, 1950

Professional training was important, but so was training in the art of being able to teach from a Christian perspective. As the chart below indicates, hiring in Edmonton favoured teachers with training in Christian institutions. The chart shows that of the 18 teachers listed 10 had training in some form of Christian higher education, eight of whom had at least part of that training at Calvin College. Although documentation is not available, it is likely that the four teachers for whom information is not available also had some training at Calvin College. (Information below is compiled from the newsletters of The Edmonton Society for Christian Education 1950 to 1960.)

Teacher Training for Teachers in the Edmonton Society for Christian Education 1949- 1960	
Miss Wilma Bouma	2 years Calvin College and Summer School
Mrs. Skirrow (Rietsma)	Information not available
Mrs. Rita Smith	Christian training in the Netherlands/2 years normal school
Miss Irene Hanenburg(Wiersma)	2 years Calvin College
Miss Blom	Information not available
Miss Dixie Wieringa	1 year Calvin College and Summer School
Mrs. Nell Van Rij	Christian training in the Netherlands

Teacher Training for Teachers in the Edmonton Society for Christian Education 1949- 1960	
Miss Joyce Van Dyke	Information not available
Miss Mae Kamps	Information not available
Mr. Norman Brouwer	2 years Calvin College/2 years University of Alberta
Mr. John Nieboer	4 years Calvin College
Mr. John Struik	Christian training in the Netherlands/3 years Calvin College
Mr. Jack Wiersma	4 years Calvin College
Mr. B. Boulogne	Christian training in the Netherlands/2 years U. of A.
Mr. A.C. Ashley	Normal school, Calgary
Mr. G. Dooge	2 years Calvin College
Miss E. Cupido	2 years Calvin College
Mr. H. Konynenbelt	4 years Calvin College

Calvin College certainly was the school of choice for teacher training in the early years. However, in the 1960's another Christian Reformed College, Dordt College, was established in Iowa with a strong emphasis in teacher training. This college was closer to Edmonton and tended to be more conservative. During the 1970's teachers were recruited from both Dordt and Calvin. However, these two colleges could not meet the growing demand for teachers in Calvinist schools in Canada.

As a result, Societies in Alberta recruited candidates from secular universities although these teachers were required to take formal training in "Christian Perspectives in Teaching," offered by the umbrella association for Calvinist schools, Christian Schools International.

In 1979 the Calvinist community in Edmonton established The King's University College. In 1995 King's introduced an after-degree B.Ed. This program may be attractive to students wishing to teach in Calvinist Christian schools, although it is not limited to such students. It remains to be seen if the program will play a major role in training teachers for service in Canadian Calvinist schools. The first graduate of the program is employed with the Edmonton Public School Board.

By the end of the 20th century, enrollment in Edmonton's Calvinist schools was on a steady decline. From a peak of well over 1,000 students in the mid 1980's, there were just over 700 students in 1998. The Calvinist community in Edmonton struggled with the tensions the Reformed community faced for many years. Should schools be places where children are "protected" from the influences and forces of society, the isolationist tendency of the *Afscheiding,* or should they be places where students "encounter culture," the view promoted by Kuyper's

disciples? To complicate issues even more, the Christian Reformed Church in North America was in the middle of another schism, as more conservative Calvinists reacted to what they perceived to be liberal tendencies creeping into the Christian Reformed Church. As yet the schism has had little impact on the schools but school leaders watch the schism with a wary eye.

Isolation, engagement, accommodationism, schism -- are all issues that will impact Alberta's Calvinist Christian Schools in the 21st century.

CHAPTER 9

That "Old Dutch Disease"

My study has focussed on the roots of Alberta's Calvinist Christian schools in Alberta to 1967. It seems appropriate to conclude this history by noting the status of and tensions within the disparate Calvinist school communities in Alberta since these tensions will affect the schools well into the 21st century. The tensions within the Calvinist school community include debates over cultural engagement verses cultural isolation, the impact of a schism within the Christian Reformed Church and accommodation, or "compromise," with public education. It is likely that these issues will constitute a major part of any future history of the Dutch Calvinist Schools of Alberta

At the close of the 20th century, orthodox Dutch Calvinists, more than any other segment of Dutch immigrants, had been able to maintain a cohesive group identity. This identity rooted, in the 16th century Synod of Dort with a line of descent through the *Afscheiding* of 1834 and the neo-Calvinism of Abraham Kuyper, has its strongest and most passionate manifestation in the Calvinist Christian school. These schools represent a tangible link to the Dutch *schoolstrijd* of 19th century.

It was within the context of the *schoolstrijd* that the minority and marginalized orthodox Calvinists found their voice in Dutch society. The "kleine luyden" (little people), under the leadership of Abraham Kuyper, formed an institutionally complete social structure. This structure, or pillar, set every sphere of life in a Calvinist Christian context -- everything from a Christian Goat Breeders Association to educational institutions including the Free University of Amsterdam. The pillar mentality survived three waves of emigration to Canada resulting, by the end of the 20th century, in over two dozen Dutch Calvinist Christian schools in Alberta.

At the height of the post-war immigration boom, 1957, the North American based Christian Reformed Church, home for most Dutch orthodox Calvinists, celebrated its centennial. A hymn was commissioned and this hymn celebrates the mythology of the group

> O Lord, beneath Thy guiding hand
> Our fathers, fathers formed our creed,
> Brought prayer and psalm to this fair land
> And were supplied in every need.
>
> In every part of life the light
> Of knowledge shines, at home, abroad.
> May covenant children, taught the right

Tell others of their sovereign God.[1]

The two verses reflect the Calvinist mythology embedded in the Reformed creeds brought (with a certain missionary zeal) to Canada and taught (in a Christian school) to covenant children. More significantly, however, is the theology within the hymn, a theology that sees God's blessing to a chosen (Covenant) people -- the orthodox Dutch Calvinists.

Bringing the creeds and "prayers and psalms to this fair land" may have in fact ensured the survival of the orthodox Calvinist community. In the Netherlands war and changing social mores were rapidly leading to "depillarization". It was within the security of their pillar that orthodox Calvinists had been able to develop their communities and their Calvinist traditions.

As emigration to Canada gained momentum, societal change was reshaping the Netherlands. By the mid-1960's Netherlands' unique pillar system virtually

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Hartog, Adrian and Post, Marie (1957). *Psalter Hymnal: Centennial Edition; O Lord Beneath Thy Guiding Hand.* Grand Rapids, Mich., Publication Committee of the Christian Reformed Church Inc. p. 565.

disappeared.[2] With the breakdown of the pillar system and with increased efforts at rapprochement between religiously based political parties, traditional religious boundaries became blurred. From their vantage point in Canada, Dutch Calvinists watched what they perceived as the steady secularization of Dutch society in their old homeland.

In the Netherlands in the 1970's the Calvinist Anti Revolutionary Party and the Catholic party merged to form a Christian Democratic party.[3] In the 1980's the *Hervormde* and *Gereformeerde* churches began discussions about a merger called *Samen Op Weg*, literally "together on the road". Most telling, however, was the perceived secularization of Christian schools in the Netherlands. Today, many Dutch Canadian Calvinists share a belief that the Christian schools in the Netherlands are but a shadow of what they once were. This view is reflected in the comments of the long time business manager of Lethbridge Christian school.

> My brother is a retired Christian school teacher in Holland. He said "we call it a Christian school but the schools are full of non-

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2

Lijphart, Arend (1975). *The Politics of Accommodation: Pluralism and Democracy in the Netherlands*: Berkley, CA: University of California Press, Pp. 196-197.

3

Ibid p. 197.
Van Belle, H.A. (1991) *The Impact of WWII on the Reformed Dutch in the Netherlands*. Pro Rege Vol XIX, 4 June, 1991 p. 29.

> Christian teachers". What happens is they get the same privileges [government funding] as anyone else. They don't have much choice if they need a teacher -- something to do with the union maybe.[4]

Some neo-Calvinists fear that secularization of the Calvinist Christian schools may also occur in Alberta. As noted later in this chapter, the fear would have a very specific focus in Edmonton.

In the 1940's and 1950's Dutch Calvinists in Alberta concentrated on organizing and building their Christian schools. The 1960's were a time of active lobbying for regulatory recognition and government funding. By the 1970's Alberta's Dutch Calvinists devoted their energies to ensure that their schools remained true to the vision of their mythology. Unfortunately, agreement as to what that vision actually was (and is) led to "that old Dutch disease," [5] religious and ideological strife.

Although orthodox Calvinists seem to represent a homogeneous group, they are in fact a complex religiously based ethnic group: Kuypernians, or "Dutch activists", who believe in social action; children of the *Afscheiding* who tend

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4

Mient Visser, interviewed by author, tape recording, Lethbridge, Alberta, June 22, 1999.

5

See quote page 86. The "old Dutch disease" is in reference to the "one brand" of religion, Calvinism, ruling society and causing division and strife.

towards isolation from society; and mixed through both groups are those whose main concern is with purity of church (Calvinist) doctrine. These competing ideologies are currently writing the next chapter in the history of Dutch Calvinists schools in Alberta.

Isolation

During the 1950's and 1960's members of the Canadian Reformed Church[6] maintained an uneasy alliance with the Christian Reformed based Christian Schools International (CSI) schools in Alberta. CSI based Christian schools in Alberta, with Canadian Reformed supporters among their membership, made efforts to accommodate Canadian Reformed families. In Lethbridge this accommodation included a change to the Society's constitution guaranteeing that Canadian Reformed members would be represented on the school board and education committees. Edmonton made similar accommodations in practice by ensuring regular Canadian Reformed membership on the school board.

However, despite attempts to accommodate Canadian Reformed families,

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The Canadian Reformed Church is the result of a schism in the Netherlands in 1944. See chapter 8.

differences in Calvinist world views between the Christian Reformed and Canadian Reformed became more and more pronounced. Many Canadian Reformed Calvinists could be heard quoting a Dutch saying -- "you can't have two seeds in one field." The Canadian Reformed believed that the Christian Reformed Church and its CSI Christian schools were losing their Calvinist distinctiveness. CSI Christian schools were too open to other Christian ideas as evidenced by liberal enrollment policies and the hiring of non-Calvinist teachers. Canadian Reformed Calvinists desired schools that were more distinctively Calvinist (Reformed).

A principal of a Canadian Reformed school explained this distinctiveness when he stated that "the main difference we see, in practical terms, is emphasis on the Covenant. To us, at times, the CRC and her schools have done too much watering of the wine."[7] As well, CSI schools seemed to be moving away from the historical doctrinal standards of Dutch Calvinism. Harthoorn continues by noting that in the CSI Christian schools "doctrinal standards are not upheld. We hold strongly to the confessions but CRC schools have broadened their doctrines. . . If I have an issue we decide on a solution with the Bible open and the Confessions

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Joop Harthoorn, interviewed by Author, March 27, 2000.

open."[8]

The perception that the Christian Reformed Church and its CSI Christian schools were "watering down" their orthodox Calvinist roots led Canadian Reformed Church communities to establish their own schools. In the 1970's Canadian Reformed schools opened in Neerlandia, Edmonton, Calgary and Coaldale. There is little interaction between the two Dutch Calvinist school communities. For example, Canadian Reformed teachers do not participate in any conventions or professional development days hosted by CSI Christian schools. Canadian Reformed schools, in the Calvinist tradition of the *Afscheiding*, have isolated themselves, not only from secular society but also from doctrinally questionable Calvinist society, that is CSI Christian schools.

Though now operating their own Calvinist Christian schools, Canadian Reformed and Christian Reformed Calvinists did have a period of some twenty years where they worked together in a common Calvinist school. Another Dutch Calvinist denomination, however, never could bring itself to work with either the Canadian or Christian Reformed communities -- the Netherlands Reformed Church (NRC).

8
Ibid.

The NRC is an ultra conservative church which in many ways reflects the stereotype of the dour Calvinist. Predestination looms large in their faith expression. Church services are sombre events, and only a few members out of a large congregation partake in communion others fear that their sinfulness is too great and thus they are not fit to partake. Women must wear hats in church. A system of lights indicates when people may enter the church sanctuary. A red light means only those with assigned seats may enter, a green light allows visitors to enter. Prior to a wedding, a bride must appear before consistory ensuring her gown is modest enough. A shawl is available in case the dress is not considered modest enough. Members refuse vaccination against disease, and do not purchase life or fire insurance, believing God will take care of all their needs. Owning a television set is also prohibited, and in the school there is no sport program since sports is considered idolatry.

The first NRC families in Canada arrived in the Lethbridge area during the post-war immigration of 1948. They held their own worship services not wishing to join any of the existing Reformed churches in the area. Even when a Calvinist Christian school opened in Lethbridge in 1962, NRC families preferred to send their children to a public school rather than a doctrinally suspect Calvinist

Christian school. When asked why they did not send their children to a school that was at least closer to their belief system than a public school, a common answer was a reference to a Dutch proverb -- "Better the devil in wooden shoes in a public school than the devil in stocking feet in a Christian school".

The meaning is clear. Public schools do not claim to be religious or to espouse a Christian doctrine, thus one anticipates lifestyles and teachings that are "unChristian" and is on guard. In a Calvinist Christian school, however, one's guard would be down. Thus, one could be negatively affected by teachings and lifestyles that may "appear" Christian but in fact subvert the "true" faith. CSI Christian schools fall into the latter group as far as the NRC are concerned.

As with most orthodox Dutch Calvinists, Christian schooling was part of the NRC heritage in the Netherlands. Like many other Calvinist immigrants to Alberta, the NRC wanted its own school. Finally, in 1979, the NRC opened Calvin Christian School in Monarch, Alberta. The school's statement of purpose reflects their orthodox Calvinist roots:

> As members of the Netherlands Reformed Congregations we confess that we and our children being conceived and born in sin, are by nature children of wrath; but the Lord, in His mercy, has not only given us a *time* of grace, but has also placed us under the means

> of grace. His infallible Word, wherein He charges us to bring up (instruct) our children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord (Eph. 6:4). As members, parents present their children for baptism and promise to provide this instruction (or cause it to be provided) to the utmost of their power and our school, under the authority and supervision of our churches, has the task of assisting parents in their endeavours to honor this promise.[9]

The NRC school's instruction "is based on the unchangeable and infallible truth of the Word of God (KJV) which truth is closely expressed in the Three Forms of Unity of the Reformed Faith as established by the Synod of Dordt in 1618-1619."[10]

Calvin Christian school (a school with an enrollment of over 500 students) is a response to the isolationist roots of the NRC. Enrollment is open only to NRC children or like minded believers. Each family must sign an enrollment form which includes a statement in which "we acknowledge that we do not have, or intend to have, a television set".[11] Teachers must be members of the NRC. If a teacher can not be found locally they will hire from the Netherlands. Calvin Christian School will not hire Christian Reformed or Canadian Reformed teachers.

9
Calvin Christian School, Kindergarten Registration, 2000-2001 p. 2.

10
Ibid.

11
Ibid p.1.

In the 1990's a group within the NRC left the church and school over doctrinal issues. The group formed its own church and school, Providence Christian School in Lethbridge.

Calvin Christian and Providence Christian Schools, both with strong Dutch Calvinist roots are, schools rooted in the pietistic and isolationist thinking of the *Afscheiding*. Their isolationism was never moderated by the neo-Calvinism of Kuyper in the latter half of the 19th century, a philosophy which moderated the isolationist tendencies of the Christian Reformed Church and her schools.

As the 20th century ended, Alberta's Dutch Calvinist community was home to four distinct and separate Calvinist Christian schools meeting the educational needs and nurturing the spiritual needs of over 5000 students. The possibility of yet a fifth "distinct" Calvinist school in Alberta looms as a schism has caused a split in the Christian Reformed Church.

Schism

The Christian Reformed Church is the largest and oldest orthodox Calvinist church in North America. It emerged from a schism with the Reformed Church of

America (the transplanted *Hervormde Kerk* or state church of the Netherlands) in 1857. In the 1980's the Christian Reformed Church faced her own schism.

During the 1980's the Christian Reformed Church went through some turbulent times as it dealt with a series of controversial issues. Two issues, in particular, stand out. These are the issue of evolution/creation and the issue of the role of women in church.

The issue over evolution/creation was sparked by a professor at Calvin College. In 1986, Howard Van Till, a professor at Calvin College, wrote a book[12] in which he explored what science and what scripture teaches about creation. He argues that

> It is my contention that neither the scriptural nor the scientific view of the cosmos is complete in itself, despite the fact that each view contributes an essential perspective on the complete reality. Through the spectacles of scriptural exegesis, we Christians see the cosmos as Creation; we see where it stands in relationship to God the Creator, who is its Originator, Preserver, Governor, and Provider. Through the lens of scientific investigation, natural scientists are able to observe the internal affairs of the material world-its coherent properties, its lawful behaviour, and its authentic history. Both views are integral parents of what I call the

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12

Van Till, Howard (1986). *The Fourth Day: What the Bible and the Heavens are Telling Us About the Creation*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

> "creationomic perspective," the view of the cosmos that is gained when natural science is place in the framework of the biblical doctrine of creation.[13]

Van Till recognized that the issue he was writing about was "the topic of much lively discussion and sometimes the subject of heated (but not always illuminating) debate within the Christian church".[14] However he was not prepared for the maelstrom he unleashed.

A storm of reaction followed the publication of Van Till's book. Much of the criticism was highly personal; most was very divisive for the Christian Reformed denomination. The most dramatic and vitriolic reaction was from a Grand Rapids millionaire, Leo Peters. Peters, inventor of the Butterball turkey and a member of the Christian Reformed Church, took out full page ads in the local Grand Rapids Press. The ads, mostly columns of text, attacked Van Till, several other professors, and Calvin College administration. In the middle of one of the ads is a series of three pictures of administration buildings at Calvin College with captions reading

> These are the "stables" from which the Four Horsemen of the

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13
Ibid p. viii-ix

14
Ibid p. 3.

> Apocalypse come galloping out to spread destruction across the CRC. Here is where the CRC vultures roost. Here is where the Bible was destroyed.[15]

The article contains many similar attacks and wild accusations. Even though the attacks were so clearly intemperate, they did have the desired effect of fanning the flames of the controversy. A slightly more elevated level of debate can be seen in the Christian Reformed magazine, *The Banner*. In the magazine some ministers and elders make a

> *Request for Silence*. Questions about the college and the three professors have caused the greatest unrest . . . [a minister] maintains that the three professors teachings on Genesis need to be curtailed. [an elder] called the teachings of the three professors "a cancer" that is gnawing away and sapping our very strength.[16]

The debate, unwittingly unleashed by VanTil, caused him great personal pain. It also caused many teachers in Christian schools throughout North America to tread very carefully when discussing creation and evolution. The issue often became a focal point for school supporters dissatisfied with their local school.

On the heels of the *Fourth Day* controversy, another conroversy arose as questions

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15

Peters, Leo (Nov. 17, 1988) Grand Rapids Press, Grand Rapids, Mich.

16

Creation: That 'Elegant Book' The Banner, June 27, 1988 p. 8.

and debate over the role of women in the church were raised. In the Christian Reformed Church only men could be ordained as ministers and only men could hold church "office" (ie. serve on church councils, act as church elders). By the 1990's there was increased pressure on the church to acknowledge gender equality. Church Synod, after several attempts and much debate, made provision for member churches to allow women to "hold office" but not without creating more controversy.

In the same issue of the *Banner* in which some church leaders called for "silence" from Calvin College, there is a news article about the appointment of a professor to the seminary. Dr. Henry DeMoor's appointment, usually a routine affair, was made more difficult because he

> has publicly stated that he favours the ordination of women to all church offices. So when the Calvin College Seminary . . . appointed him in February to a three-year term . . . three classes -Illiana, Alberta South and Hamilton -asked synod not to confirm the appointment.[17]

Conservative members of the Christian Reformed Church believed strongly that the ordination of women was unbiblical. After heated debate, many conservative

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17

DeMoor Survives Challenge: Receives Seminary Appointment. The Banner, June 27, 1988 p. 10.

members eventually left the Christian Reformed Church and started their own church, the Orthodox Christian Reformed Church.

These two issues, creation/evolution and the role of women in church, had their effects on Christian schools in Alberta. All school societies in Alberta affiliated with CSI allow women on their boards (note how the issue was laid to rest in Lacombe in 1955) and many women are school principals. Gender has not been an issue in CSI Christian schools. However, the Christian school, being so closely connected by membership to the Christian Reformed Church, was affected by the debate in the church on the role of women. Conservative school supporters, especially those of the Orthodox Christian Reformed Church, were keeping a close eye on school activities.

This became even more obvious in regard to the evolution/creation debate created by Van Till's book. School boards were sensitive as to how teachers dealt with the issue of evolution/creation. In Edmonton, for example, the school board instructed teachers not to answer parental questions on the issue but to direct the question to school board members.

Many school boards in Alberta worry that the schism caused by the issues of gender and evolution/creation may lead to disaffected parents withdrawing their children from the local Christian school. In Lethbridge, where there is a large Orthodox Christian Reformed congregation, school leaders have indicated concern that at some point in time a doctrinal or ideological issue will arise in their school resulting in members of the Orthodox Christian Reformed Church withdrawing its support for the school and setting up its own Christian school. It is noted by school supporters in Lethbridge that the Orthodox Christian Reformed has a large church building with an education wing, a large parcel of land, and strong financial resources. Similar fears have been expressed in Edmonton. The history of Dutch Calvinists shows that they are not reticent about breaking away to begin their own "purer" Calvinist denomination and schools.

Thus far in this chapter, I have noted that Dutch Calvinists in Alberta are living out their varying interpretations of orthodox Dutch Calvinism. The everpresent tendency toward isolation, or what some have termed as the "Dutch Wall", can be seen in differing degrees in the schools of the Canadian and Netherlands Reformed. For schools supported by members of the Christian Reformed Church, the Calvinist propensity for schism may yet have an impact as the Orthodox

Christian Reformed keep an eye on "liberal" tendencies in CSI Christian schools. However, the most significant issue that supporters of the Calvinist Christian schools may face in the first decade of the 21st century might be a combination of ideology --where to place the "Dutch Wall" -- and accommodation or compromise with public education. In Edmonton these, two issues can be seen to converge as Edmonton Christian School experiments with a unique approach to Christian education, the ultimate wisdom of which will have to await the work of future historians of education.

Compromise: Edmonton Christian School - 1949-1999

As noted above, some Calvinists believe that Christian schools must be places where students are isolated from worldly influences and unsound Christian doctrine. This isolationism has deep roots in Dutch Calvinism and comes to fullest educational expression in Canadian and Netherlands Reformed schools. Christian Reformed, or CSI Christian schools, have a more complex ideology related to isolationist tendencies.

The Christian Reformed Church is firmly rooted in the *Afscheiding* and its tendencies towards isolation, but the Christian Reformed Church is also strongly

grounded in the philosophy of Abraham Kuyper and his concern that one's Christian faith impacts all spheres of life. This means that Christians should not isolate themselves from society, but rather should become active participants in society, transforming society so that it reflects Christian principles of social justice. However, this engagement with society should be done from the security of Christian institutions. One should not accommodate secular society. In other words, as Calvinists are often heard to say, one should be "*in* the world but not *of* the world." These competing visions, isolation and transformation, find complex expression in CSI Christian schools at the end of the 20th century.

The dominant rhetoric in CSI Christian schools is one of inclusion, of engaging society. This is most clearly reflected in liberal enrollment policies and open hiring policies (few, if any, CSI Christian schools restrict hiring to Calvinist candidates). As well, many schools make a deliberate effort to avoid using Calvin in their school name and many school boards avoid the use of the word Reformed in their literature. Lee Hollaar, Director of Societies of Christian Schools in British Columbia (SCSBC), reflected at a conference of Reformed institutions

> Perhaps the word "Reformed" sends people away [from Christian schools]. Are we the author of our demise, attaching to the word

"Reformed" the notion that our way is the right way?[18]

At the same conference Keith Ward, Academic Vice President of The King's University College, reflected

> In The King's *Statement of Faith*, the schools educational philosophy is defined, but there is no mention of the word "Reformed". The principles are recognizable as Reformed principles but edited to take out exclusive language. Referring to Reformed creeds is as close as we get[19]

In a similar vein a Dort College[20] professor wrote in the *Christian Educators Journal* that

> no longer is the Christian school primarily for CRC kids; parents from many different church backgrounds now enroll their children in these schools. As a result the word "Reformed" is often dropped from the school vocabulary as being exclusive[21]

It has almost become a mantra for Christian school leaders to declare that their schools are not Christian Reformed schools. Lee Hollaar notes for example that "in most of our [SCSBC] schools only 25% of the students are of Reformed

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Conference Record, prepared by Gayla Postma: Reformed Institutions in Transformation (June 11-13, 1998) Bolton, Ontario. p. 10.

19

Ibid p. 9.

20

Dordt College, Sioux Centre, Iowa, is owned and operated by the Christian Reformed Church.

21

Fennema, Jack "Education Within the Reformed Tradition: What are We Really Talking About? *Christian Educators Journal*, Volume 38, Number 2 (December 1998) p. 10.

background".[22]

Based on such declarations it would appear that CSI Christian schools and their inclusiveness are the opposite of the Canadian and Netherlands Reformed schools and their exclusiveness. Closer analysis, however, would suggest that the differences are more a matter of degree, a matter of where the "Dutch Wall" is placed. CSI Christian schools, despite their rhetoric, still display isolationist tendencies, its just that they are more subtle. Events in Edmonton in 1999 will help clarify this observation.

In the fall of 1999, Edmonton Christian School opened its doors to welcome students to a new school year, as it has done since its beginnings in the basement of First Christian Reformed Church in 1949. But this school year was special -- special in that 1999 marked the 50th anniversary of Edmonton Christian School and special in that it marked the first year of Edmonton Christian School as part of Edmonton Public Schools.

For several years Edmonton Christian School faced a steady decline in enrollment

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Ibid "Conference Record" p. 10.

-- from a high of nearly 1,200 to a low in 1998 of barely 700 students. A number of factors contributed to declining enrollment; increased competition from other private Christian schools, rising tuition costs, Edmonton Public's decision to begin a Logos Christian program and changing demographics -- families were getting smaller.

As well, there was a definite weakening of commitment by families in sending their children to the Calvinist Christian school. Families that had traditionally supported Edmonton Christian school were leaving for other types of Christian schools, both private and public. Even some Christian Reformed pastors did not send their children to Edmonton Christian School, something that would have been unheard of only a generation earlier. Clearly, something had to be done to ensure that Edmonton's Calvinist school remained viable.

The Board of Edmonton Christian School was under constant pressure to do something to stem the tide of declining enrollment. Failure to act could lead to the end of Edmonton Christian School; yet options were few. The Board's most dramatic action was the closure and sale of its Beverly school. This move made economic sense, but was a devastating blow to the Beverly community.

A less dramatic move was hiring a Development Director. The Director was given responsibility for fund raising, promotion and advocacy. In the mid 1990's the Board instructed the Director to make informal contact with Edmonton Public and Edmonton Catholic schools. The purpose was to explore the level of interest by these boards in having Edmonton Christian as a Christian alternative program within its system. These informal contacts were followed by more formal board to board contacts. Edmonton Catholic decided not to pursue the idea, but Edmonton Public left the doors open.

Finally, in 1998, serious negotiations began between Edmonton Public Schools and Edmonton Christian School. These negotiations led to a formal agreement by which Edmonton Christian School became an alternative program within Edmonton Public Schools beginning in the fall of 1999.

The agreement meant, in effect, that parents were given choice in the education of their children and this choice would be supported with public funds. It would seem that the issues neo-Calvinists had fought for, issues so closely linked to their identity--parental choice and public funding -- were finally within reach. However, not everyone was supportive of Edmonton Christian School's plan.

In the agreement signed by Edmonton Public and Edmonton Christian School, Edmonton Public undertakes "to providing a program of studies to students whose parents desire an educational setting in accordance with the Vision and Mission Statement of Edmonton Christian School . . ."[23]. Embedded in the Vision Statement of Edmonton Christian School is a sentence reflecting Dutch Calvinist mythology, "Teaching staff and administrators will be professional educators who understand both the *history* and the *transformational* character of its *reformed* vision and mission" (italics added).[24] This statement reflects much of what neo-Calvinists hold dear -- acknowledgment of an historic tradition of cultural transformation from a Calvinist perspective. Yet, some of the strongest voices in opposition to the agreement were from neo-Calvinists. In some cases, the very ones who had argued for inclusion and who were busy dropping references to "Reformed" or "Calvin" from their institution's literature were the most vocal critics. Neo-Calvinists may make public declarations urging inclusion and openness but the reality is often far different.

Despite the rhetoric of inclusion, the "Dutch Wall" is still very much intact in the

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Hull, John (March 29, 1999) A letter to members of the Edmonton Society for Christian Education with Draft #6 of agreement between Edmonton Public Schools and Edmonton Christian School p. 1.

24

Ibid Vision and Mission Statement ECS Article III.

institutions of the Dutch Calvinists, including their schools. Neo-Calvinists cannot escape their history. Isolation is part of who they are and thus accommodation with secular institutions is anathema to many neo-Calvinists. As noted earlier, in a 1952 issue of *Christian Home and School* a Canadian writer asserted that the attempt by a southern Alberta Calvinist community to "compromise" with a public school caused the death of the Christian school movement in that community. Compromise implies a middle road -- that common ground can be found with non-Christian, or secular, institutions. Calvinists shy away from anything they consider secular since they believe that one is either "for Christ or against Christ", there can be no neutral ground.

The declaration by early 19th century neo-Calvinist Groen Van Prinsterer still resonates among all Calvinist -- "in isolation is our strength." The debate is not for or against isolation as much as it is over where to place the "Dutch Wall." Dutch Calvinists welcome, in fact invite, broad-based participation in their institutions, but they do not extend this welcome to the inner core -- the control centre of their institutions.

In Alberta there are nineteen CSI Christian schools operated by fourteen societies. A review of the leadership of these schools, based on Dutch surnames, indicates

that eleven of fourteen societies (79%) have "Dutch" presidents. Fourteen of nineteen schools have "Dutch" principals. There is no society in Alberta that does not have at least one Dutch surname listed among the members of the board executive.[25]

Similarly, in British Columbia, where Hollaar noted that most of the members schools of SCSBC had less than 25% of their students who were Reformed, control of the societies and schools resides with Dutch Calvinists. Of the thirty societies in British Columbia, twenty have presidents with Dutch surnames and twenty-four societies have at least one person with a Dutch surname on the executive. Eighty percent of SCSBC's societies are controlled by people with Dutch Calvinist roots.[26]

This pattern of Dutch Calvinist control over their institutions is noted by sociologist Frans Schryer. Schryer[27] notes that the Calvinist labour union, CLAC, "is still run by a leadership steeped in the Kuyperian neo-Calvinist tradition" as is

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25

CSI Directory, 1999-2000; Grand Rapids, Mich. Pp. 127-132.

26

Ibid Pp 132-143.

27

Schryer, Frans (1998). *The Netherlandic Presence in Ontario: Pillar, Class and Dutch Ethnicity*. Waterloo, Ont.: Wilfrid Laurier University Press p. 134.

CPJ, a broadly based social advocacy group whose "leadership is still Dutch Canadian Reformed." The question of control was the central issue for the neo-Calvinists who opposed Edmonton Christian School's accommodation with public education.

Edmonton Christian School's agreement with Edmonton Public protects the "Reformed" character of the school. Critics, however, question how the Reformed character of the school can be maintained when control is in the hands of a "secular" organization. The critics note that teachers will belong to the ATA (a "secular" union, not a "Christian" union) and the principal will be an appointment of the Public School Board. Accommodation with a secular institution, argued the critics, means loss of control, loss of control means loss of the Reformed basis of the institution.

Edmonton Christian School held two Society meetings in April1999. The objections raised at these meetings to the proposed association with Edmonton Public reveal the concern over loss of orthodox Calvinist control of their Christian school. The "Dutch Wall" did not come down easy. The minutes of the two meetings record the following summaries of comments by prominent neo-Calvinist educators:

> [name] expressed concern that the governance is too far removed [from the Edmonton Society for Christian Education]
>
> ATA motto is "Masters not Servants". Catholic teachers are treated as second class citizens; you will have to strike.[28]
>
> The one who hires the principal interprets the vision. Vision Statement is missing reference to sin and grace. We don't want another worldview to interpret our vision . . . if we can't hire the principal we are in trouble in our mission.[29]

Loss of control was not a concern for all Calvinists however. One prominent neo-Calvinist stated that

> Our present closed door admission policies is not the way to evangelize. The admission policy in the agreement is a strong start. [but, the speaker added] It gives us control.[30]

Another speaker stated that "this is a tremendous opportunity for our Society. Recognition of the principle that we are part of the public realm."

Daniel VanderArk, Executive Director of CSI, reflected on the plans of Edmonton Christian School in an e-mail to school principal, Hans VanGinhoven. In the e-mail VanderArk notes the concerns expressed and comments on the lingering

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A Society member who was also an ATA member responded to this comment by noting that "Catholic teachers are well respected..."

29

Edmonton Society for Christian Education Society Minutes, April 12, 1999.

30

Ibid April 19, 1999.

suspicions of the state of Christian schools in the Netherlands, suspicions that were in the minds of many school supporters. VanderArk writes that

> the negative comments . . . sound to me as if the vast majority of those were clustered around the issue of choosing teachers, getting bumped, not having control over hires . . . It sounds like the unionization of teachers was where the opponents lodged their fear. That, and perhaps their knowledge of what has happened to some Christian schools in the Netherlands . . . After visiting two Christian schools and speaking with about ten leaders in the Christian school system [in the Netherlands, VanderArk noted] that the loss of Christian distinctiveness came from the loss of faith in the churches, not from the fact that the government funded the schools.[31]

It seems that the majority of Edmonton Christian school supporters agreed with VanderArk in that some form of compromise with the state does not necessarily mean the loss of distinctiveness. Supporters of the agreement (75% of the Society voted in favour) recognized that the agreement has risks but doing nothing would also have incurred risks. The Christian School Board believed that the agreement protected Reformed education in Edmonton. In a "question and answer" document that the Board sent to Society members the question as to why Edmonton Christian should join Edmonton Public was addressed.

> Question:
> Why does the ESCE Board want to make ECS a public school?
> Answer:
> The reformed heritage of ESCE consists of two central impulses: i)

31

E-mail correspondence, Dan Vander Ark to Hans Van Ginhoven, May 11, 1999.

> personal piety and ii) social transformation. As a private, independent school we were able to develop the first impulse much more than the second. In fact, this imbalance has contributed, in part, to our social isolation: the educational vision of ECS is largely unknown outside of ESCE. The early founders of ESCE believed in publicly funded Christian education. They settled for private school status because their first choice was not possible. Now that choice is possible.[32]

The Board of Edmonton Christian School sought to break from the Calvinist tendency of isolationism and carry its vision of Calvinist Christian education to its logical conclusion --full inclusion. The Board of Edmonton Christian School took a bold step. Perhaps it did not tear down the "Dutch Wall" but it certainly opened wide several gates. Edmonton Christian School is entering new territory of accommodation with a secular institution. They have moved away from their pillar and brought their idea of Christian education into the public square. History will have to determine the ultimate wisdom of their decision. As VanderArk notes, there are questions yet to be answered "questions that I will ask myself and which a hundred other Christian school boards will ask in various forms over the next decade in both Canada and the US."[33]

32

Ibid, Hull, "Questions and Answers".

33

Vander Ark, op.cit.

CHAPTER 10: CONCLUSION

When the 20th century ended Alberta was home to over two dozen private (and three public alternative) schools rooted in orthodox Dutch Calvinism. These schools, whose student population makes up a quarter of the enrollment in Alberta's private schools, represent four different interpretations of Dutch Calvinism. The significance of these schools in the private school community is disproportionate to the actual number of orthodox Calvinists and belies the assumption that all Dutch Canadians assimilated fully into Canadian society.

The number of orthodox Calvinists in their home country of the Netherlands never exceeded 10% of the population. However, when the post-world War II immigration flood occurred this minority group in the Netherlands made up nearly half of the Dutch immigrants to Canada. As an ethnic group in Alberta the Dutch are so small (about 2%) they generally fall under the category of "other;" yet, enrollment in the private schools that grew out of this ethnic group accounted for 25% of the student population of private schools.

Dutch immigrants to Canada have often been considered an "invisible" ethnic group. They appear to have assimilated well into Canadian society. Dutch immigrants were quick to adopt English as their language, many joined

mainstream Canadian churches and many married outside their ethnic community. This, however, was not the case for Dutch orthodox Calvinists.

Although orthodox Calvinists in some ways are part of the "invisible" minority, they have been able to retain an important part of their ethnicity -- their religious identity. Central to their religious identity is the orthodox Calvinist passionate commitment to "free" Calvinist Christian schools.

The history of Dutch Calvinist schools in Alberta reflects the story of orthodox Dutch Calvinism. When they came to Canada the orthodox Calvinists brought with them their narrative. This narrative is rooted in 16th and 17th century Dutch religions controversies, culminating in the Reformed Church's doctrinal standards collectively referred to as the "Three Forms of Unity;" and is rooted in 19th century struggles over educational control known in Dutch historiography as the *schoolstrijd*.

Although the "Three Forms of Unity" established the doctrinal basis for orthodox Calvinists it was the *schoolstrijd* which provided them with a group identity. The outcome of the *schoolstrijd* recognized parental choice in education, as opposed to state control, and entrenched the concept of public funding for religious schools.

The *schoolstrijd* also led to the "pillarization" of Dutch society segmenting society into distinct and institutionally complete groupings along religious or ideological lines. Pillarization enabled orthodox Calvinists to establish "Christian" institutions and literally allowed them to exist within their Calvinist community from the cradle to the grave.

When orthodox Calvinists immigrated to Canada they brought with them their belief in their right to Christian schools and they brought their "pillar" mentality -- a belief in the need for "Christian" institutions. These beliefs found expression in the establishment of dozens of Calvinist Christian schools across Canada during the 1950's, including those in Alberta.

The history of the roots of Alberta's Dutch Calvinist schools is a story. In presenting the history the narrative form has been used. Historian M.L. Lemon equates narrative with story in the writing of history. However, he cautions that in writing a narrative history one must not insist that the story has a beginning, middle and end. Instead of an "end" Lemon argues, the story may simply "adjourn." So it is with the narrative history of Alberta's Calvinist Christian school -- the story adjourns.

The story adjourns at a critical time in the history of the schools. Two Alberta schools have merged with public schools and other schools are watching. What does the future hold for "free" Calvinist Christian schools?

The accommodation with public schools is an area that will provide historians of education several topics for research. These topics include the reactions of various interest groups such as the ATA and CSI, the long term viability of Calvinist schools under the umbrella of public schools, and the impact of possible further fragmentation of Alberta's Calvinist schools as a result of the accommodation.

The story of the origins of Dutch Calvinist Christian schools in Alberta is the story of a small orthodox community that carried a mythology and vision to their new homes in Canada. This vision is manifest most clearly in the community's Calvinist Christian schools, schools that, in most cases, are shared with the larger Canadian community. The vision for Christian schools was brought to reality with sacrifice by members of the Dutch Calvinist community but also with a conviction that their efforts would be blessed. The first 50 years of Calvinist Christian schools, established and nurtured with passion, love and sacrifice does appear to have been blessed. It remains to be seen if this community can survive not only "that Dutch disease" but also whether it can survive assimilation pressures and a

dwindling desire for self sacrifice.

Alberta's "Dutch" Calvinist Christian schools are a manifestation of the desire of orthodox Dutch Calvinists to maintain their identity. This identity is defined by, and rooted in, orthodox Dutch Calvinism that is born of a history reflected, and at times mythologized, in the orthodox Calvinist community.

The history of orthodox Calvinists is one of doctrinal struggles and religious strife. To this day, in 21st century Alberta, 16th century Dutch doctrinal disputes, defined in the "Three Forms of Unity," find expression in most Calvinist Christian school bylaws or constitutions, and 19th century schisms in the Netherlands are reflected in the variety of Dutch Calvinist communities in Alberta, each with their own Christian school. While on one hand Calvinist Christian schools have welcomed and even encouraged families from many different Christian backgrounds, on the other hand, the founding Calvinist communities have erected barriers around themselves. These barriers, though subtle, ensure school control remains with orthodox Calvinists and help Dutch Calvinists retain their identity by excluding non-Dutch, or those who dissent from a particular interpretation, from their inner circles.

Edmonton Christian School, by joining with Edmonton Public Schools in 1999, endeavoured to challenge those voices that have doubted the wisdom of working with a state controlled system of education. Calvinist Christian educators may well have much to offer by way of educational practice. Their knowledge and expertise may provide an opportunity to contribute to a new perspective on the development of Christian education in Alberta.

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Hofman, Tymen; Grand Rapids, Mich. Retired, Christian Reformed minister.

Hyman, Charles; Edmonton, Alberta. Executive Secretary, ATA.

Keegstra, Alida; Lacombe, Alberta. Retired, first teacher, Lacombe Christian School.

Konynenbelt, L.F.; Lethbridge, Alberta. Retired, first president Society for Christian Education in Southern Alberta.

Siebenga, Fokie; Lacombe, Alberta.

Siebenga, Harry: Lacombe, Alberta. Charter member, Lacombe Christian School Society.

VanderArk, Daniel; Grand Rapids, Mich. Executive Director, Christian Schools International.

Vanden Born, Dixie; Edmonton, Alberta, Retired teacher, Edmonton Christian School.

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CONSENT FORM for participants in research on the origins of the Dutch Calvinist Schools in Alberta with Peter C. Prinsen, PhD Candidate, University of Alberta.

Date:_____

Name of participant:_____

1. **Nature of Research**: I understand that Peter C. Prinsen is conducting research on the history of Dutch Calvinist schools in Alberta, with specific emphasis on the communities of Edmonton, Lacombe and Lethbridge during the years 1945 to 1967. I have been provided with a summary of Peter Prinsen's thesis proposal and I have been given the opportunity to read the entire proposal.

2. **Nature of Participation**: I understand that my interview is being recorded and that part or all of the interview may appear in the thesis. I also understand that I will be given any relevant transcripts of the interview that may appear in the thesis and that I will be able to edit, correct or refuse the inclusion of my interview in the thesis.

3. **Opting Out**: I understand that I may terminate the interview at any time and that this may be done without any feelings of ill will.

4. **Anonymity:** I understand that I may remain anonymous in the report. I also understand that this anonymity may be limited through the necessary identification of my role in the early years of the school ie. teacher, board chairman. I also understand that I may waive anonymity.

I wish to remain anonymous:_____

I agree to have my name used in the thesis:_____

5. **Consent:** I hereby give consent to be interviewed by Peter Prinsen with conditions and understandings as outlined above.

Signature_____ Date _____