Learning (Re)formation: An Ethnographic Study of Theological Vision and Educational Praxis at Grand Rapids Christian Schools

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Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Theology in the Divinity School of Duke University

2015
ABSTRACT
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Abstract

The West Michigan Dutch enclave of the Christian Reformed Church has made private, Christian education a centerpoint of its tradition. While Horace Mann was advocating for national common schools, forming youth into civil religious adherents, this group chose to be separatist. What began with one school in 1856 has now become a network (Christian Schools International) of nearly 500 Reformed Christian schools enrolling 100,000 students. When Grand Rapids Christian High School was founded as a spin-off from Calvin College and Seminary in 1920, there was a clear theological mission steeped in a Kuyperian worldview. Although there have been numerous studies of schools in America, none focus on the significance of mission statement (its evolution over time and its implementation within the educational community). This school developed in a city whose racialized geography allowed the community to prosper as white American Protestant citizens insofar as they were willing to assimilate. This school currently displays American capitalism and an evangelicalism which extends beyond strict Calvinism. Although it began as an insular site for ethnic and religious formation, Grand Rapids Christian High School now aims to prepare American Christians for success and servant-leadership in the world.

This dissertation seeks to describe the historical, sociological, and theological foundations of Grand Rapids Christian Schools and to trace changes over time; to observe the formational practices which occur in this educational community; and to consider which theological and pedagogical precepts might be useful in this particular context. This project involves an ethnographic study at Grand Rapids Christian High School and a constructive theological and pedagogical response. Along with data gleaned from historical archives about the school’s founding and development, there are daily
observations and interviews. The goal is to explore the explicit manifestations of the school’s theological vision and the implicit practices that reinforce or undermine it. Potential results include heightened awareness of the school’s theological vision throughout the school community and increased connectivity between theory and praxis. By using the microcosm of one school, this research will highlight the place of myriad Christian schools in the American educational landscape. My work brings history, theology, and pedagogy together in order to trace the cultural forces that shape learning communities.
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Introduction

After the ballgame and speeches the canteen opened with God’s plenty: choice of hamburgers or fried ham sandwiches, all donated by the butcher; choice of cherrynut ice cream or butterbrickle, all donated by the creamery; every mother brought her fanciest cake. The proceeds were for adding a third year to the Christian High—how else would we revolutionize America?¹

In 1834, a group of orthodox Calvinists left the Netherlands Reformed Church for reasons of piety and a desire to maintain local, congregational control over schools without governmental intrusion. Religious oppression and economic depression in the ensuing decade led some to emigrate. From 1846-1857, about 40,000 Dutch immigrants traveled to America, many of them settling in the Northwest Territory, seeking freedom of worship and freedom of education.² Rev. Albertus C. VanRaalte led a group to the shores of Lake Michigan, and they established the colony of Holland in 1848. VanRaalte understood the strategic importance of education and considered the establishment of Christian schools a central component of his work. In his report to the Board of Domestic Missions of the Reformed Church in America (RCA) in 1853, Van Raalte asserted that “no sacrifice should be regarded too great, to see that the children of the church are trained in the spirit of positive Protestantism, derived from the Bible.”³

His influence was felt in the nearby colony of Grand Rapids, where a parochial school was established by Second Reformed Church in January 1856 with assistance from the RCA Board of Education. A year later when that congregation seceded from the Reformed Church in America and formed the Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRC) with three other

³ Quoted in George Stob, “The Christian Reformed Church and her Schools” Th.D. dissertation, Princeton Theological Seminary, 42.
local churches, the school went with the new denomination. From its founding, the CRC put emphasis on cultural separation and doctrinal purity. Covenantal community was preserved through church-related theological formation from baptism to adulthood. Early generations of CRC congregants resisted Americanization, and their private, Christian schools offered instruction solely in Dutch until the turn of the 20th century. Dutch language was considered an “indispensable medium” for teaching Reformed biblical literacy and preserving ethnic culture without the “diluting influences” of American types of Christianity. Subsequent generations of families in the CRC have remained committed to Christian education. In fact, 80% of them sent their children to private schools in the 1970s, but now they are less interested in Dutch identity and more invested in assimilating to the American success story.

The West Michigan Dutch enclave of the Christian Reformed Church has made private, Christian education a centerpoint of its tradition. While Horace Mann was advocating for national common schools, forming youth into civil religious adherents, this group chose separatism. What began with one Grand Rapids school in 1856 has now become a global network (Christian Schools International) of nearly 500 Reformed Christian schools, enrolling 100,000 students. When Grand Rapids Christian High School was founded as a spin-off from Calvin College and Seminary in 1920, there was a clear theological mission. Over time this vision has shifted, swayed by cultural and economic factors. Their current Mission Statement:

At Grand Rapids Christian Schools our mission is to prepare students to be effective servants of Christ in contemporary society. We work to instill a love for learning and a love for Christ in each child. We give our students opportunities to explore, understand, and delight in God’s universe. Our students explore old and new questions through a Biblical perspective. Our school’s teachers and staff convey God’s love and are committed to excellence in His name. We expect our students to be reflective, to ask questions, to discern what is true, and to seek wisdom. Our desire is to join the Holy

4 George Stob, “The Christian Reformed Church and her Schools,” 74-75.
5 Harro Van Brummelen, Telling the Next Generation, 1.
Spirit in the work of redeeming God’s world through work and service.⁶

Notice how this mission statement displays a desire to turn students outward to serve in the broader society. The Christian language is not explicitly Calvinist, though it does have Reformed echoes of Creation, Fall, and Redemption. Unlike the CRC educational vision enacted on the 19th century North American frontier of West Michigan, these schools now display American capitalism and an evangelicalism which extends beyond strict Calvinism. My project seeks to chronicle the historical trajectory of these schools which began as insular sites for ethnic and religious formation, but now serve to prepare American Christians for success and servant-leadership in the world. My initial task was to observe the explicit manifestations of the school’s theological vision and the implicit practices that reinforce or undermine it, but also to determine how their mission statement has been shaped over time, by whom and to what end. Guiding questions include:

To what extent is the language of the mission market driven (e.g., to mirror middle-class American values) or theology driven (e.g., to mirror Reformed beliefs)? Does it point toward a Reformed vision of shalom, or is it worded intentionally to create ecumenical Christian (Protestant) space?⁷

Does the mission statement flow from the top down, from administration and school board to faculty and students, or from the bottom up, as an organic depiction of what is already happening? Do all members of the educational community understand, accept, and support the school’s mission statement? How are new members brought into the vision of the school?

Who is part of this educational community, and how are new members invited for inclusion? What are the indicators of diversity (denominational, racial, socio-economic-status)? What forms of diversity are welcomed and valued or shunned and devalued?

⁷ Nicholas Wolterstorff, a distinguished member of this educational community, describes the telos of Christian education as shalom. He defines it as enjoyment of living before God and with one another in right, harmonious relationship” and he asserts that “Shalom is both God’s cause in the world and our human calling” – a commitment to liberation and justice for all creation, and the divine possibility of present renewal. In Educating for Life: Reflections on Christian Teaching and Learning (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 101-104.
This dissertation project began as a study of theological vision and educational mission, but I soon realized that words are imbedded in language, which is spoken by people groups who live in a specific time and a particular place. I did not want to perpetuate obliviousness to the nuances of social location or extirpation from geography. And so I found myself doing a mixture of history, sociology, ethnography, and theology in order to trace the myriad forces that shape Grand Rapids Christian Schools. I argue that this community began as an ethnic, religious enclave of immigrants, developing schools in contradistinction to Horace Mann’s public model. It developed in a city whose racialized geography allowed the community to prosper as white American Protestant citizens insofar as they were willing to assimilate. Now, this community faces numerous challenges, including reconciling the narratives of worldly success and Christian faithfulness (What must I do to inherit eternal life?), and delineating the boundaries of Covenantal community (Who is my neighbor?) in a context of declining denominational loyalties and the persistent specter of American racism and classism.

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8 Michael Omi and Howard Winant write about racial obliviousness, describing it as “a form of not-seeing that is not primarily intentional but reflexive. As such, it occurs on an experiential continuum ranging from benign to a subconscious or repressed protection of power.” See Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s 2nd edition. (New York: Routledge, 1994): 19. To oppose race or other forms of oppression, one must notice and not ignore its multifaceted existence.

Significance of the Research and Audience

Potential results of this work include heightened awareness and deeper understanding of the school’s educational vision (past and present) throughout the school community and increased connectivity between theory and praxis. Careful theological reflection can fuel more faithful responses to Christian formation. This may include re-visioning mission and its implementation with community-wide participation in the process. By using the microcosm of one school, this research will highlight the place of Reformed Christian schools in the American educational landscape. The guiding questions and the methodological approach could be used by other learning communities. My audience includes:

1. Christian school administrators, faculty, and church congregations that support Christian education, especially members of Christian Schools International.
2. Teachers of Practical Theology and Christian Education (college, university, seminary) who notice the tensions between theory and praxis, who attend carefully to formational communities, and who equip people to do theological reflection and to enact creative/faithful response.
3. People who are interested in the racial, religious and educational history of Grand Rapids.

Why study the mission statements of private, Christian schools?

In the United States, most organizations are guided by a mission statement, meant to convey philosophy and purpose. Some see them as a compass or road-map, offering direction for solving problems. Others describe them as guiding lights, especially in times of crisis. Studies have shown that performance improves when institutions align structure with strategy and when people have a high level of commitment to them.\(^{12}\) But what happens when there is a lack of understanding or endorsement of the mission statement? And what happens when there are

contradictions between stated aims and actual practices? Albert Boerema surveyed numerous educators about which issues in Christian Education they thought needed research, and he found that the topic which received the most focus was “the linkage between school mission and practice” or the gap between them.

According to the National Center for Education Statistics, in 2011-2012 almost 25% of all American schools were private, and 10% of all American students attended them. Furthermore, 68% of private schools, enrolling 80% of private school students and employing 72% of private school teachers, had a religious orientation or purpose. Educational organizations that offer accreditation to private schools, such as the National Association of Independent Schools, recognize the importance of a school’s mission. One of the central requirements for the accreditation process is that each school must have a clear statement of educational mission that is congruent both with its programs (e.g., admissions, development, and curriculum) and with accepted principles of academic scholarship (freedom of inquiry, diversity of viewpoints, and independent thinking). In fact, “the entire educational program should stem from the school’s beliefs about teaching and learning which are regularly reviewed and which are consistent with the mission of the school.” Private, Christian schools are likely to have mission statements informed by a specific theological vision. As such, research regarding them must address their unique religious sense of identity as it pertains to the formulation of their

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mission statements. By discovering how well (or how poorly) the mission statement is expressed and integrated into the daily practices of the school, schools can improve the likelihood of their accreditation, and – more importantly – unify members of the educational community (faculty, staff, students, and parents) with a shared vision for education. There have been numerous studies of schools in America, both public and private.\textsuperscript{17} Some focus on administrators,\textsuperscript{18} teachers,\textsuperscript{19} or students.\textsuperscript{20} Sarah Lawrence Lightfoot studied six schools (public and private) seeking to capture “their essential features, their generic character, the values that define their curricular goals and institutional structures, and their individual styles and rituals.” What she found is that “good high schools reveal a sustained and visible ideological stance that guards them against powerful and shifting societal intrusions,” and this stance is explicitly and clearly articulated in their statements of purpose and goals; it gives these schools order, coherence, and authority.\textsuperscript{21}

**Methodology and Theoretical Strands**

From critical theorists, I derive the impulse to deny the human capacity to create disinterested knowledge, to expand what counts as knowledge, and to interrogate the power


dynamics of social structures in order to point toward transformation.\textsuperscript{22} This approach requires that social critique be paired with agency for research participants in determining the way forward, which is why my conclusion offers questions for the GRCS community to consider, rather than a prescription for what must change. It also requires me to scrutinize my autobiography and name my positionality.\textsuperscript{23}

**Positionality: A daffodil among tulips\textsuperscript{24}**

I did not enter into this project as an objective scientist focused on empirical data. Quite to the contrary, I grew up in this community, albeit as a partial outsider (e.g., a fundamentalist Baptist in a Calvinist Christian school, where the faculty was 100\% CRC and the student body was nearly 95\% CRC when I attended), and I bring historical memories of my time in Grand Rapids to the research. When I was reading Pamela Perry’s ethnography, I was struck by the words of one student: “You cannot love yourself and hate your culture . . . it’s important to have some respect for that facet of who you are because you see it every time you look in the mirror.”\textsuperscript{25} Those words and their sense of ambivalence echo my own. Having attended a school similar to GRCS in West Michigan, I recognize the powerful formative influence such educational institutions have on youth. Returning to this community gave me the opportunity to see the light and the shadows in the present that shaped me in the past, and for that, I am deeply

\textsuperscript{22} Yvonna Lincoln, “I and thou: Method, voice, and roles in research with the silenced,” In *Naming Silenced Lives* (NY: Routledge, 1993). Niobe Way suggests that “the belief in a blank mind—a mind without biases, prejudices, or preunderstandings—is a powerful trope or figure for scientific research but an untenable research tool” In “Striving for engagement: Reflections from a qualitative researcher,” *Journal of Adolescent Research*, Vol. 20 (2005), 533.


\textsuperscript{24} The tulip is the unofficial national flower of The Netherlands. Every year, Holland (MI) hosts Tulip Time with 4.5 million flower bulbs, parades and events such as Dutch klompen dancing. I, on the other hand, am a self-avowed Anglophile: my favorite place on the planet is the Lake District, where William Wordsworth memorialized my favorite flower, the daffodil, in his poem, “I wandered lonely as a cloud.”

grateful. My research is also informed by my subject position (Christian, white, female, and middle-class), my academic background (educational, literary, and theological), and my theoretical presuppositions (critical, feminist, and liberative).

During my time at Duke, I have realized ever-more-deeply that I am a practical theologian, which means attending carefully to contexts—past and present—and to the ways individuals are shaped by social systems and the ways communities can be places of transformation. Following others such as Richard Osmer, I presuppose that human beings are inherently “hermeneutical,” engaging in the process of making sense out of their experience. He delineates four core tasks, each with a guiding question:26

1. **The Descriptive-Empirical task**: Gathering information that helps us discern patterns and dynamics in particular episodes (single event that emerges from the flow of everyday life and evokes attention/reflection), situations (broader and longer pattern of events, relationships, circumstances) or contexts (social and natural systems in which a situation unfolds); *What is going on?*

2. **The Interpretive Task**: Drawing on theories of the arts and sciences to better understand and explain why these patterns and dynamics are occurring; *Why is this going on?*

3. **The Normative Task**: Using theological concepts to interpret particular episodes, situations or contexts, constructing ethical norms to guide our responses, and learning from best practices of the Christian tradition (past and present); *What ought to be going on? What are we to do and be as members of the Christian community in response to the events of our shared life and world?*

4. **The Pragmatic Task**: Determining strategies of action that will influence situations in ways that are desirable and entering into a reflective conversation with the “talk back” emerging when they are enacted; *How might we respond in ways that are faithful and effective?*

My primary attention was on the first task with some consideration of the second. In the conclusion, I turn toward the third and the fourth, but I believe those tasks must be addressed by the community itself.

Theologians such as Mary McClintock Fulkerson have sought out just, authentic expressions of Christian life within particular contexts. *Places of Redemption* is an example of

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theological reflection that “arises in an organic way out of Christian life in order to address real life problems.” But even as these problems are named as “wounds,” inquiry about them “assumes an emancipatory interest . . . shaped by a logic of transformation.” Creative, theological responses are non-linear and dialectical, occurring in places where past, present, and future converge in new, improvisatory ways. In trying to understand who the GRCS educational community understands itself to be and what it believes it is called to do, I have followed Fulkerson in my attempt to be just, “to write about its people, about its habits and idiosyncrasies, its mistakes and its blindness, as well as its moments of honesty and grace.”

Qualitative research methods acknowledge the complexity of interwoven variables (personal, political, social forces), and focus on context (the patterns of educational life and its narrative about the community) and its interpretation. Qualitative approaches have the capacity to locate places where policy and practice may not agree; for example, helping to uncover areas of tension between stated mission goals and the actual work of teachers in the classroom, while charitably pointing to what is valuable about the community. Ethnography, as one form of qualitative research, tries to offer “thick description” of what is happening in the community and how it is understood by members of the community, but this requires sustained observation (e.g., the six months I spent at the school). I used three main sources from which to make inferences: historical documents (from Grand Rapids Public Library, Hekman Library at Calvin College, Christian Schools International archives, and documents from Grand Rapids Christian Schools), field notes from observations (classrooms, chapel, sporting events, meetings), and transcriptions.

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of interviews (with administration, faculty, and students). The latter are especially important because “without the accounts of the people being studied, it is very difficult to say something about the meanings of and ideas guiding particular behaviors and practices.”

Throughout the process of archival research, observation, and interviewing, I was attentive to the possibility of discovering what Angelides describes as “critical incidents,” moments when participants and I both experience something that seems significant or surprising, that indicates an underlying structure or trend. A few of these moments are narrated in chapter four, along with my sense of their layered significance.

My approach was also informed by Lightfoot’s portraiture, which turns an artistic eye to the process of research, balancing the outsider’s perspective and the insider’s subjective view. It acknowledges the shaping hand of the researcher and makes science more aesthetic. We share a similar goal: “a commitment to holistic, complex, contextual descriptions of reality,” and the desire to capture the culture, character, and essential features of schools with critical generosity in the depiction.

**Guiding Concept and Summary of Chapters**

My guiding concept was to describe the historical, sociological, and theological foundations of Grand Rapids Christian Schools; observe the formational practices which occur in

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31 Sarah Lawrence Lightfoot, *The Good High School: Portraits of Character and Culture* (NY: Basic Books, 1983). Noting that too often the focus has been on documenting what is wrong with schools, she used data collected over there years with stints of a few days at each school to depict each one in its uniquely good context. Goodness is different than effectiveness, as it includes each school’s history, current ethos, and vision for the future, and goodness includes imperfection, particularly the ways a school attends to its area of weakness. Her goal was to “capture the culture of these schools, their essential features, their generic character, the values that define their curricular goals and institutional structures, and their individual styles and rituals” (6).
that community; and consider which theological/pedagogical precepts might be useful in that particular context.

Chapter One displays the groundwork for the American educational context. We begin with the mid-19th century rise of common schools and their initial alignment with liberal Protestantism, and the opposition to those schools from conservative Protestants and Catholics, who either wanted to reform internally or to secure funds to operate externally. Next, we explore the evangelical Protestant push to stake a claim in the Northwest Territory by populating the area with Christian (Protestant) teachers, schools and universities in order to combat threats of Barbarism and Romanism in the growing nation. Finally, we land in Michigan, a young state attempting to determine the boundaries for private and public schools – and the place of religion in both. Central Argument: Protestant privilege and American nativism are made clear in this chapter, along with the aim of schools as sites of enculturation and American citizenship.

Chapter Two investigates the complex dynamics between Church, State, and School in parallel contexts: Netherlands and America. For each of these settings, we will address denominational splits (1834 and 1857), tensions with national government, and the development of private, Christian schools by Dutch Reformed immigrants in Michigan up to World War I. Central Argument: The tensions between rigid orthodoxy/separatism and flexible compromise/Americanization are embodied within the Dutch Reformed community.

Chapter Three offers a survey of the relationship between immigration, cultural assimilation, and the shifting categorization of whiteness in America, for both African Americans moving north and for Dutch Calvinists settling in the Midwest. The topography of racialized geography includes homes and schools, shaped by redlining and other segregationist
policies. Central Argument: The American Dream is a whitewashed version of this mapping, which we see painted over time in Grand Rapids, from the start of the 20th century to present.

Chapter Four begins with contemporary architectural theory and practice, the ways that buildings both express and reinforce values, cultivating particular angles of imagination. Schools are constructed spaces of formation into knowledge and power relations. After flying over all of the schools in one district, we will land to tour Grand Rapids Christian High School, including its explicit mission statement and its implicit core values, and the ways both manifest themselves within the educational community (buildings, people, and practices). Central Argument: Architectural spaces shape how we learn, how we behave, how we view ourselves in the world, and how we configure relations of power. Special attention is given to places of tension and contradiction.

Finally, we will review what is distinctive about the Reformed approach to life and learning, and then move from the descriptive task (What is going on?) to the normative and pragmatic tasks. That is, we will begin to wonder: How can GRCS both articulate and embody its telos? How could/might/should members of this particular Christian community respond in ways that are faithful and effective? Which theological approaches and teaching methodologies might be useful in this context?
Chapter One: American Educational Context  
(Northeast, Midatlantic and Northwest Territory)

Forasmuch as the good education of children is of singular behoof and benefit to any Common-wealth; and whereas many parents & masters are too indulgent and negligent of their duty in that kinde. It is therfore ordered that the Select men of everie town, in the severall precincts and quarters where they dwell, shall have a vigilant eye over their brethren & neighbours, to see, first that none of them shall suffer so much barbarism in any of their families as not to indeavour to teach by themselves or others, their children & apprentices so much learning as may inable them perfectly to read the english tongue, & knowledge of the Capital Lawes: upon penaltie of twentie shillings for each neglect therin. Also that all masters of families doe once a week (at the least) catechize their children and servants in the grounds & principles of Religion.1

1 Excerpt from Massachusetts Bay School Law of 1642; The rest of the law reads as follows: “if any be unable to doe so much: that then at the least they procure such children or apprentices to learn some short orthodox catechism without book, that they may be able to answer unto the questions that shall be propounded to them out of such catechism by their parents or masters or any of the Select men when they shall call them to a tryall of what they have learned of this kinde. And further that all parents and masters do breed & bring up their children & apprentices in some honest lawful calling, labour or imployment, either in husbandry, or some other trade profitable for themselves, and the Common-wealth if they will not or cannot train them up in learning to fit them for higher imployments. And if any of the Select men after admonition by them given to such masters of families shall finde them still negligent of their dutie in the particulars aforesaid, and whereby children and servants become rude, stubborn & unruly; the said Select men with the help of two Magistrates, or the next County court for that Shire, shall take such children or apprentices from them & place them with some masters for years (boyes till they come to twenty one, and girls eighteen years of age compleat) which will more strictly look unto, and force them to submit unto government according to the rules of this order, if by fair means and former instructions they will not be drawn into it.” full text available at http://www.constitution.org/primarysources/schoollaw1642.html (Accessed December 20, 2013). Throughout this chapter, the use of male-gendered language predominates.
From the settling of the first Europeans, America has been a religiously plural place where faith intersects with educational and civic goals. Throughout our history, we have (re-)negotiated the terms of the relationship between them. Initially, education was predominantly a function of family and church, but as population grew, the need for schools increased. Each colony, and later each state, formulated its own vision and implementation of education, often shaped by its religious roots. James Fraser offers a succinct description of Massachusetts: “More than the other colonies, [it] had a significantly structured civil society, including churches and schools—what one of its leading ministers, Cotton Mather, called ‘the evangelical church-state.’”¹ Literacy mattered because each person was expected to read the Bible and to make wise and faithful choices within the community. In 1642, the *Massachusetts Bay School Law* was passed (see epigraph). It required parents to make sure that their children learned the English language, the principles of Christian religion, and the laws of the commonwealth. In 1647, Massachusetts passed the *Old Deluder Act* to thwart Satan’s tool of ignorance and to foster “knowledge of the Scriptures.” Towns of fifty or more families were required to set up an elementary school and to appoint teachers to instruct children in reading, writing, and religion. Towns with one hundred or more families were required to establish a grammar school.² This community organization and financial support of

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¹ James W. Fraser *Between Church and State: Religion & Public Education in a Multicultural America* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1999), 11. In Massachusetts, the Congregational Church was endorsed until 1832.

² “It being one chief project of that old deluder, Satan, to keep men from the knowledge of the Scriptures, as in former times by keeping them in an unknown tongue, so in these latter times by persuading from the use of tongues, that so that at least the true sense and meaning of the original might be clouded and corrupted with false glosses of saint-seeming deceivers; and to the end that learning may not be buried in the grave of our forefathers, in church and commonwealth, the Lord assisting our endeavors. It is therefore ordered that every township in this jurisdiction, after the Lord hath increased them to fifty
schools is considered by many to be the foundation of public education in the United States, but these schools were expected to provide religious instruction (paired with the formation received at home and in church) in order to bring children into the Christian faith of the established denomination.

In the early nineteenth century, in Massachusetts and elsewhere, there was not a clear distinction between private and public schools. Many schools, including “charity schools” and parochial schools (affiliated with churches), received government funding. Carl Kaestle notes that separation of Church and State was not a clear mandate of the United States Constitution. Instead, “public policy developed gradually and unevenly at the local level during the nineteenth century.”

If Church and State were not plainly divided, then the relationship between religious faith and education had to be negotiated in each community. Let us travel down the eastern seaboard and across to the Great Lakes of Michigan. We will start with the development of common schools in Massachusetts, guided by Horace Mann; conservative Protestant opposition to common schools in Pennsylvania and Massachusetts, led by Frederick Packard and Matthew Hale Smith; and Catholic contention in New York against Protestant privilege in public schools with Bishop John Hughes and Governor William Henry Seward. Then we will venture to Connecticut where Horace Bushnell’s vision of Christian nurture was meant to

households shall forthwith appoint one within their town to teach all such children as shall resort to him to write and read, whose wages shall be paid either by the parents or masters of such children, or by the inhabitants in general, by way of supply, as the major part of those that order the prudentials of the town shall appoint; provided those that send their children be not oppressed by paying much more than they can have them taught for in other towns. And it is further ordered, that when any town shall increase to the number of one hundred families or householders, they shall set up a grammar school, the master thereof being able to instruct youth so far as they may be fitted for the university, provided that if any town neglect the performance hereof above one year that every such town shall pay 5 pounds to the next school till they shall perform this order.” [http://www.constitution.org/primarysources/deluder.html](http://www.constitution.org/primarysources/deluder.html) (accessed 12/20/13)

foster national community and combat Barbarism in the growing nation, to Ohio where Lyman Beecher’s fear of Catholic incursion was countered by an evangelical plea for well-trained Protestant teachers; and finally, we will make our way to Michigan, where the work of John David Pierce and John Milton Gregory as Superintendents of Education laid the groundwork for public and private schools in the state.

Massachusetts: Horace Mann and Common Schools

The movement for tax-supported state systems of “common schools” developed in the 1830s, advocated by groups with varied motivations. Some argue that leaders of the movement were humanitarians, striving to better society through universal education, as a natural extension of democracy and liberalism. Others focus on the capitalists who wanted to insure stability in the emerging industrial order and to form trained workers who would accept social hierarchy and their place in the system, or on the workers seeking educational opportunities for their children. Most interesting for this chapter are the various stripes of Protestants who wanted to preserve religious privilege, perhaps even unwittingly, in the wake of expanding national territory and in the face of growing religious pluralism with each new wave of immigrants, many of whom were Catholic.

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5 See Carl F. Kaestle and Maris A. Vinovskis, *Education and Social Change in Nineteenth-century Massachusetts*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980). They cite George H. Martin and Ellwood P. Cubberley (humanitarian), Frank Tracy Carlton (workers), and Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis (Capitalist). Houston advocates the first: “the genesis of the public school movement in this country was not to create a nation adept at the three R’s or to create cogs for the industrial workplace. Public schools were created as places where a diverse nation of immigrants could come together to learn how to be citizens in a democracy. Common schools were places where civic virtue was passed on to the next generation (“From Horace Mann to the Contrarians,” 3). Rush Welter advocates the second: “Because the Americans believed in their political and social institutions they also established a democratic educational system. Their object was to perpetuate the social order all of them knew so that all of their children might benefit from it, and education was instrumental . . . Knowledge was power to be like every other American—free, republican, prosperous, active, moral—and education offered every man the opportunity to know his duty and to profit from it.” *Popular Education and Democratic Thought in America*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1962), 116-117. See also Nord, *Religion and American Education*.

6 Kaestle explains that public school leaders were often middle-class Protestants whose ideology centered on capitalism, republicanism and Protestantism. He suggests that American Protestantism can be
In the nineteenth century, Massachusetts experienced both social and economic change due to industrialization and urban migration; progress was a mixed blessing.

David Tyack describes education’s role for a nation in flux:

Patricians, workingmen, nativists, average citizens—Americans found in their traditional belief in education a way to reconcile their articles of faith with new social conditions. Most Americans at the time believed in progress, in a benevolent God, in equality of opportunity, in the mission of the United States to serve as a model of republican virtue to the world. Yet social evils—intemperance, crime, slums, ignorance—were all the more visible and ominous because of the rapid growth of cities.¹

There was widespread, popular agreement that common schools could ameliorate social evils, as they offered “moral education to produce obedient children, reduce crime, and discourage vice; citizenship training to protect republican government; literacy for effective economic and political participation; and cultural education for assimilation and unity.”⁸ Many reformers, like Horace Mann, believed that education was the best means for individual, social, and national improvement, and he envisioned schools with a nondenominational Christian foundation for ethical formation. Such an education “would summarized through ten propositions: 1. Sacredness and fragility of the republican polity 2. Importance of individual character in fostering social morality 3. Central role of personal industry 4. Delineation of respected but limited domestic role for women 5. Belief in familial and social environments as important sites for character building 6. Sanctity of property 7. Belief in equal and abundant economic opportunity in the US 8. Superiority of American Protestant culture 9. Grandeur of America’s destiny 10. Necessity of public effort to unify America’s population. (Pillars of the Republic, 76-77)

¹ David Tyack, Turning Points in American Educational History (Waltham, MA: Blaisdell Publishing, 1967), 124. For exploration of the relationship of Mann’s educational reform with the rise of industrialization and capitalism, see Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis, Schooling in Capitalist America: Educational Reform and the Contradictions of Economic Life (New York: Basic Books, 1976): “Sensing its productive potential, he [Mann] embraced the new capitalist order and sought through social amelioration and structural change to adjust the social institutions and the people of Massachusetts to its needs . . . the impetus behind the implementation of school reforms was not from urbanization itself, not the introduction of capital intensive machinery, but rather the rise of the factory as the dominant production unity” (173-74).

impart norms of proper behavior, teach respect for property and hard work, and help to prevent irresponsible behavior.”9 Well-behaved, productive citizens would be the result.

In an era when religious affiliation shaped both individual and social sensibilities, Horace Mann was raised in a Congregational church in Franklin, Massachusetts under the tutelage of Rev. Dr. Nathaniel Emmons, a well-known exponent of "New Light" Calvinism.10 In Mann's own words, Reverend Emmons expounded all the doctrines of total depravity, election, and reprobation, and not only the eternity but the extremity of hell torments, unflinchingly and in their most terrible significance, while he rarely if ever descended on the joys of heaven, and never, in my recollection, upon the essential and necessary happiness of a virtuous life.

Although Mann was initially swept into this theological vision, he recounts his spiritual epiphany at age twelve (in 1808):

I remember the day, the hour, the place and the circumstances, as well as though the event had happened but yesterday, when in an agony of despair, I broke the spell that bound me. From that day, I began to construct the theory of Christian ethics and doctrine respecting virtue and vice, rewards and penalties, time and eternity, God and his providence which, with such modifications as advancing age and a wider vision must impart, I still retain, and out of which my life has flowed.11

In 1810, after his older brother Stephen drowned (on a Sunday, while skipping church), “having not yet experienced the orthodox form of conversion, Horace’s agonized heart

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10 For a succinct description of religious terminology (e.g., New Divinity Calvinism as a stream of New Light theology of the First Great Awakening), see Raymond Culver, *Horace Mann and Religion in Massachusetts Public Schools* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1929), 3-18. John H. Gerstner discusses the hyper-Calvinism of Nathaniel Emmons [1745-1840], noting that he was described as the “boldest thinker” at Princeton in part because he was willing to imagine God as the author of sin. Even in children, “God works in them to will and to do of his good pleasure; or produces those moral exercises in their hearts in which moral depravity properly and essentially consists” (Emmons in Sermon XXVI: "Man's Activity and Dependence Illustrated and Reconciled” in *The Works of Nathaniel Emmons*, Vol IV, p 357 qtd in Jacob T. Hoogstra, Editor, *American Calvinism: A Survey* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1957), 31. Emmons goes on to say “Moral depravity can take place no where but in moral agents; and moral agents can never act but only as they are acted upon by divine operation.”

11 *Life and Works of Horace Mann*, Volume 1, 15.
stimulated his imagination” regarding eternal punishment. Rather than consoling Horace and his family, Pastor Emmons offered a fiery sermon, asserting that the young man would burn in hell. At that moment, Horace “deliberately, with all the tremendous force of his will, chose to suffer with the latter, rather than make one with the selfish immortals who found happiness in witnessing torture.”’12 These pivotal childhood experiences shaped his beliefs about education, as we see in an 1856 letter to a friend:

I feel constantly, and more and more deeply, what an unspeakable calamity a Calvinistic education is. What a dreadful thing it was to me! If it did not succeed in making me that horrible thing, a Calvinist, it did succeed in depriving me of that filial love for God, that tenderness, that sweetness, that intimacy, that desiring, nestling love, which I say it is natural the child should feel towards a Father who combines all excellence.13

Sydney Ahlstrom notes that Rev. Emmons “exerted a kind of involuntary reverse influence” on some people, and Mann offers a famous example, because he viewed this Christian formation “as a blight on his life,” from which he rebelled, embracing a “pronounced liberal” theology instead. “Dogmatic Puritanism was banished from Mann’s mind, and the public education system he envisioned naturally made no place for it.”14 He continued his religious development over the years, eventually adopting Unitarian theology with a more benevolent God at its center, and broad, nonsectarian Protestantism for common schools.15 As we will see, his beliefs about natural human goodness also made him more hopeful about the education of children and less inclined to severe discipline (e.g., corporal punishment) than the Calvinists who espoused total depravity.

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12 Life and Works of Horace Mann, Volume 1, 16-17
13 Life and Works of Horace Mann, Volume 1, 479-480.
Other than catechetical instruction in Calvinism, Mann’s schooling consisted only of brief and erratic periods of eight to ten weeks a year. Mann educated himself by reading volumes from the Franklin Town Library. He entered Brown University in 1816, graduated in three years as valedictorian (the title of his speech was “The Gradual Advancement of the Human Species in Dignity and Happiness”), studied law at Litchfield Law School, and was admitted to the bar in 1823. In his first year of legal practice in Dedham, Massachusetts, Mann was invited to deliver the Independence Day address. The principles that he introduced in the speech, including the assertion “that education, intelligent use of the elective franchise, and religious freedom are the means by which American liberties are preserved” were topics he would return to throughout his life. John Quincy Adams, newly-elected President, was present and predicted Mann would have a distinguished career.\(^\text{16}\)

Along with practicing law, Mann was in state politics from 1827-1837. As president of the Massachusetts senate, he signed the act that created the State Board of Education in 1837. He left law and politics that same year to become Secretary of Education for Massachusetts.\(^\text{17}\) It is to his words written and spoken on behalf of education that we now turn.


\(^{17}\) James Gordon Carter (Harvard graduate, teacher, and educational reformer who recommended state-supported teacher training and better textbooks; elected as Lancaster representative to the Massachusetts House 1834-1836 and to Senate 1837-1839) was expected to get the position, but his failed teacher-training school in Lancaster (and the litigation surrounding its dissolution), his demotion from the deaconship of the Congregational Church (due to his Unitarian theology), and State Board of Education member Edmund Dwight’s suggestion to Governor Edward Everett that “the reform of the common schools was too important and difficult an undertaking to be placed in the hands of a mere educator” led the group to elect Mann, a prominent social figure with strong political connections and adroit rhetorical skills. For more on James Gordon Carter, see Keith R. Hutchison, “James Gordon Carter: Educational Reformer,” The New England Quarterly, Vol. 16, No. 3 (September, 1943), 376-396; Gaither, American Educational History Revisited (New York: Teachers College Press, 2003), 40-44; and B.A. Hinsdale, Horace Mann and the Common School Revival in the United States (New York: Scribner, 1937), 109-111.
Annual Reports of Massachusetts Board of Education

Schools will be found to be the way that God has chosen for the reformation of the world.  

As the only salaried employee of the State Board of Education, Horace Mann’s job was to collect information about the condition of Massachusetts schools and to prepare yearly overviews for wide dissemination. In each of the first five years he held the position, Mann toured the fourteen counties in his state. Some of his findings include: a lack of support for schools; school buildings that were too small, in disrepair, poorly furnished, or poorly located; teachers who were poorly trained and transient (cf. First Annual Report); no state-wide curriculum (cf. Second Annual Report); limited, hodgepodge collections of textbooks (cf. Third Annual Report); short school terms and sporadic attendance (cf. Fourth Annual Report). He argued for: compulsory attendance and longer school terms; a prescribed, unified curriculum; publicly-controlled and funded schools (cf. Seventh Annual Report); severe limits on corporal punishment (cf. Seventh Annual Report); and better training for teachers, including female teachers (cf. Eighth and Ninth Annual Reports). He accomplished: setting a longer school term (six month minimum); doubling financial support for schools; founding fifty high schools; increasing teacher salaries (by 62%); and opening three normal schools for teacher training.  

James Fraser asserts that during his tenure as secretary, “Mann did more to define the role and

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18 Horace Mann in a letter to Samuel J. May, September 22, 1848. Quoted in Messerli, Horace Mann, 441.
19 “One of Horace Mann’s favorite devices for upgrading local expenditures was to publish annually a ranked list of per pupil expenditures in the public schools for all the towns in the state. Local school committees responded in their annual reports with dutiful statements of pride or shame concerning their high or low rating.” Kaestle and Vinovskis, Education and Social Change in Nineteenth-century Massachusetts, 124. They go on to explain that “although Horace Mann tried to reduce the inequality in public school funding for nineteenth-century Massachusetts communities in public school expenditures by persuading those at the bottom to increase their support of education, there was an increase in the extent of inequality during his years as the secretary of the Massachusetts Board of Education” (198); Kendall, “Education as ‘The Balance Wheel of Social Machinery,’” 21.
purpose of public schools (or common schools, as he called them) in the new nation than any other American.\textsuperscript{20} His annual reports “were devoted partly to reporting the existing state of things, including the progress that was made from year to year, but especially to the discussion of present and coming questions with a view to creating public opinion and guiding public action.”\textsuperscript{21} By exploring a few of his annual reports, we will gain a clearer sense of his educational vision, particularly the role of moral and religious instruction in his educational model and his belief in American exceptionalism.

\textit{First Annual Report (1838):}

In his first review of the educational landscape, Mann names “apathy” as a great barrier to educational reform. It arises from two places, in his estimation:

On one side there is a portion of the community who do not attach sufficient value to the system to do the things necessary to its healthful and energetic working. They may say excellent things about it, they may have a conviction of its general utility; but they do not understand that the wisest conversation not embodied in action, that convictions too gentle and quiet to coerce performance, are little better than worthless. . . Opposite to this class, who tolerate, from apathy, a depression in the common schools, there is another class who affix so high a value upon the culture of their children, and understand so well the necessity of a skillful preparation of means for its bestowment, that they turn away from the common schools, in their depressed state, and seek, elsewhere, the helps of a more enlarged and thorough education.\textsuperscript{22}

Notice how he critiques both those who do not care enough about education to act on their convictions and those who care sufficiently about education, but only selfishly and with no concern for the wider community. Mann connects the problem to the conflict of having both public and private schools. He was against private education for numerous

\textsuperscript{20} Fraser, \textit{Between Church and State}, 25. Throughout this chapter, “public schools” and “common schools” will be used interchangeably.

\textsuperscript{21} Hinsdale, \textit{Horace Mann and the Common School Revival in the United States}, 163. This book also gives a lengthy summary of each report: 164-180.

\textsuperscript{22} First Annual Report (Facsimile Edition) in \textit{Annual Reports of the Board of Education}, 46-8.
reasons. Not only was it inefficient (forcing redundancy of resources), but its exclusiveness was a threat to “democratic cohesion and equality.” Religious schools widened the sectarian divide and trained children “from their tenderest years to wield the sword of polemics with fatal dexterity,” shifting the Gospel from “a temple of peace” into “an armory of deadly weapons, for social, interminable warfare.” Private schools also exacerbated social stratification. People who could pay more would attempt to buy a better education (e.g., secure better teachers by offering a higher salary), but Mann asserted that the upper class would be corrupted by its own social privilege and become a barrier (knowingly or not) to the advancement of the rest of the population, who might remain mired in ignorance. For him, such injustice led to “the fracturing of the democratic community” which would “distort the moral life for all of its members.” Instead, common schools should offer “an equal welcome” to all children, “especially the children of the poor.”

It seems crucial here to note a few of the inherent contradictions of this educational ideology. Common schools were theoretically intended to be free and universally available, holding “out the promise that the educational frontier was as open and promising as the land itself.” In reality, however, they were closed to working class children who could not afford time away from a farm or factory, they were closed to most black children, and they were closed to children with “strange” religious beliefs, such as

23 Bob P. Taylor, *Horace Mann’s Troubling Legacy: The Education of Democratic Citizens* (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 2010), 31. Kaestle and Vinovskis have shown that the number of students attending private schools in Massachusetts in 1840 was only 13.8% of total school population and it declined to 8.4% by 1880. See *Education and Social Change in Nineteenth-Century Massachusetts*, 33-37.


Catholics. Mann embodies many of these contradictions. He was opposed to anti-Catholic violence and open to Catholic teachers in public schools, but he seems largely unaware of the ways common schooling was rooted in Protestant privilege. He was an Abolitionist who believed “it is as impossible for free, thorough, universal education to coexist with slavery as for two bodies to occupy the same space at the same time. Slavery would abolish education, if it should invade a free state; education would abolish slavery if it could invade a slave state.” However, Mann “feared that if he took sides in the Boston integration issue he might ‘never get another cent’ for school improvement.”

To his credit, Mann was an advocate for the education of females, declaring that the “female had every right to a full and complete mental development which belongs to the other sex. As compared with man, I believe she would reward all labors and expenditures for her thorough education with quite as ample returns of beauty, utility, and power.” His Ninth Annual Report (1845) urged the employment of female teachers, in part because he “thought that women were naturally suited to serve as teachers, as he

28 In response to Rev. D Wight (April 28, 1848) about whether or not common schools could have Catholic teachers, Mann wrote, “I do not see how, according to our law, a man is to be disfranchised, or held to be disqualified for the office of a teacher, merely because he is a Catholic. If his manners and his attainments are good, if his conduct is exemplary, his character pure, and he has ability to inculcate justice, a sacred regard to truth, the principles of piety, and those other excellences which the Constitution enumerates, can you reject him because you understand him to be a Catholic? . . . I could not construe our law and constitution to say that, because a man is a Catholic, therefore he cannot inculcate and simplify justice, virtues, the principles of piety, etc.” *Life and Works of Horace Mann*, Volume 1, 263. On August 11, 1834, a private school for girls (Protestant and Catholic) run by Ursiline nuns was pillaged and burned by a mob in Charlestown (MA) near Boston (See Messerli’s description, 191-193). Mann considered the act a “horrible outrage,” and he was appointed to lead the legal investigation, but illness kept him from completing the assignment.
29 Horace Mann, *Slavery: Letters and Speeches* (Boston: B.B. Mussey & Co., 1851), 46
30 Kaestle, *Pillars of the Republic*, 89. For a description of Mann’s conflict with William Lloyd Garrison and Wendell Phillips in trying to desegregate Boston schools and Mann’s abolitionist actions, including housing a black student so she could attend school at West Newton, see Messerli, *Horace Mann*, 445-447.
31 Mann, “A few thoughts on the Powers and Duties of Woman: Two Lectures” (Syracuse: Hall, Mills & Company, 1853) quoted in Kaestle, 86.
believed that a maternal disposition of patience and affection helped them to work effectively with students—especially small children,” but he seems unconcerned with the wide disparity in pay between male and female teachers.\textsuperscript{32}

\textit{Seventh Annual Report (1843):}

For this report, Mann had spent months travelling across Europe to learn how moral character and religious instruction were imparted in their schools. He found that in Holland, all religious instruction is excluded from schools: “The Bible is not read in them. Children are permitted to withdraw at a certain hour, to receive a lesson in religion from their pastors; but this is not required. It is optional to go or remain.” Religious instruction is also prohibited in Ireland, but “separate hours are set apart, in which all the children receive religious instruction from the clergymen of their respective denominations; the principle being to give combined literary and moral with separate religious instruction.” Religious creeds are directly taught in England and Scotland, and students are adept at finding scripture passages, but largely incapable of connecting the Bible to daily ethics. Mann deplores this kind of ignorance, because it makes students more likely to “become the passive subjects and recipients of a compulsory religion, however false.” Ethical enlightenment is necessary for wise citizens, and America was fertile soil for moral growth.\textsuperscript{33}

Most of Mann’s findings were favorable to America. Whereas while abroad, he “found religion to be used for political purposes, not to enthrone a Deity in the heavens, but a king over a state, not to secure the spontaneous performance of good works to men,\textsuperscript{32} Rury, \textit{Education and Social Change}, 76.\textsuperscript{33} Annual Report for 1843, \textit{Life and Works of Horace Mann}, Volume 3, 390-2 and 399.
but the blind submission of person and property to the ruler,” he praises the American common school system which “is designed to promote the development and growth of the understanding, to cultivate upright and exemplary habits and manners, to quicken the vision of conscience in its discriminations between right and wrong, and to inculcate the perfect morality of the gospel.” Unlike many European countries, America does not legally prescribe religious beliefs. In describing the educational statutes of Massachusetts, he notes that they “provide guaranties for the moral character of teachers . . . and the aim is to secure as much of religious instruction as is compatible with religious freedom.” He reminds his readers that they are not “descendants of an ignorant horde, or pauper colony, driven out from the parent country in quest of food, and leaving all metropolitan art, intelligence, and refinement behind them,” but rather intelligent and accomplished people who understood the importance of education such that they founded colonies and schools simultaneously.  

His rhetoric soars as he praises the nation, the land, and its founding inhabitants:

Surely never were the circumstances of a nation’s birth so propitious to all that is pure in motive, and great in achievement, and redundant in the means of universal happiness. Never before was a land so consecrated to knowledge and virtue. Never were children and children’s children so dedicated to God and to humanity as when in those forest-solitudes that temple of the wide earth and the o’erarching heavens, girt round with the terrors of ocean and wilderness, afar from the pomp of cathedral and court, in the presence only of the conscious spirits of the creatures who made, and of the Creator who accepted their vows we, their descendants, were devoted to the cause of human freedom, to duty, to justice, to charity, to intelligence, to religion, by those holy men.  

America is an exceptional nation, but it must remain committed to knowledge and virtue. Despite the grand American educational vision offered, thirty-one Boston schoolmasters

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voiced their objections to the report and to the secretary who penned it in in a lengthy pamphlet, and thus began a battle of words in print.36 Raymond Culver suggests that along with concerns about pedagogy and curriculum, there was also a religious component to the debate, both from those outside Protestant circles (e.g., Roman Catholics) and those inside who were troubled by the generalized, liberal assumptions of Mann’s theology and educational ideology.37 We will explore these further in the next sections.

Twelfth Annual Report (1848):

Education has never yet been brought to bear with one hundredth part of its potential force, upon the natures of children, and, through them, upon the character of men, and of the race. In all the attempts to reform mankind which have hitherto been made, whether by changing the frame of government, by aggravating or softening the severity of the penal code, or by substituting a government-created, for a God-created religion; in all these attempts, the infantile and youthful mind, its amenability to influences, and the enduring and self-operating character of the influences it receives, have been almost wholly unrecognized.38

After twelve years as Secretary of the Massachusetts Board of Education, Mann understood the importance of education and its role in communities, particularly in a nation that was striving to define and unify itself. He believed that well-educated children would be good citizens. He understood “that in a nation without a single established church, some new institution needed to step in to fill the void. Some force had to continue the process of shaping and carrying the common culture and morality if there was to be a unified people.”39 In America, that institution could and should be public education. This would help individuals overcome “moral oscillation” and would connect people through

36 For more on the Seventh Annual Report and the resulting pamphlet war, see Taylor, Horace Mann’s Troubling Legacy, 42-46.
37 Raymond Culver Horace Mann and Religion, 189-204.
38 Twelfth Annual Report (1848) in Annual Reports on Education (1872), 705.
39 Fraser, Between Church and State, 31.
shared experience. “Education, then, beyond all other devices of human origin, is the
great equalizer . . . [and] the balance wheel of the social machinery.” Mann praises “able
and experienced teachers” who understand “the errors and the excellences of children”
and who have “unanimously declared” the following belief:

If all the children in the community, from the age of four years to that of sixteen,
could be brought within the reformatory and elevating influences of good schools,
the dark host of private vices and public crimes, which now embitter domestic
peace and stain the civilization of the age, might, in ninety-nine cases in every
hundred, be banished from the world.

And this remarkable improvement could occur “without any miracle, without any
extraordinary sacrifices, or costly effort,” but would only require using the system of
common schools with limited community effort and at an expense that even the poorest
town could muster.40

Moral education is at the center of smooth social existence. Mann warns that “the
unrestrained passions of men are not only homicidal, but suicidal; and a community
without a conscience would soon extinguish itself.” Morality is best found in religion,
and human beings are meant to be religious:

Devoid of religious principles and religious affections, the race can never fall so
low but that it may sink still lower; animated and sanctified by them, it can never
rise so high but that it may ascend still higher . . . Indeed, the whole frame and
constitution of the human soul show, that if man be not a religious being, he is
among the most deformed and monstrous of all possible existences. His
propensities and passions need the fear of God, as a restraint from evil; and his
sentiments and affections need the love of God, as a condition and preliminary to
every thing worthy of the name of happiness.

People who believe that the human race can attain happiness or avoid misery without
religion are ignorant about human nature, but these people are not his primary audience.
Mann asserts that the people of Massachusetts are sensitive on the subject of religion and

any suspicion of “irreligious tendencies” would lead them to renege their support. This awareness helps to explain why Mann repeatedly asserts his support of Christian religious education and why he claims everyone else agrees:

In this age of the world, it seems to me that no student of history, or observer of mankind, can be hostile to the precepts and the doctrines of the Christian religion, or opposed to any institutions which expound and exemplify them; and no man who thinks, as I cannot but think, respecting the enduring elements of character, whether public or private, can be willing to have his name mentioned while he is living, or remembered when he is dead, as opposed to religious instruction, and Bible instruction for the young . . . [and] such is the force of the conviction to which my own mind is brought by these general considerations, that I could not avoid regarding the man, who should oppose the religious education of the young, as an insane man.

Mann goes on to assert that a system “whose first and cardinal principle it is to recognize and protect the highest and dearest of all human interests, and of all human rights” cannot be “an irreligious, an anti-Christian, or an un-Christian one.”

Mann gives the reader a brief history lesson about how governments have attempted “to secure the prevalence and permanence of religion among the people,” explaining that there are basically two systems. The first, which has prevailed for fifteen hundred years, makes regulation of religion one of the functions of government. The second holds that “belief is a matter of individual and parental concern; and, while the government furnishes all practicable facilities for the independent formation of that belief, it exercises no authority to prescribe, or coercion to enforce it.” Government in the latter system facilitates the acquisition of religious truth, but does not arbitrate what religious truth actually is. Mann cites the Constitution of Massachusetts as an expression of this precept: “All religious sects and denominations, demeaning themselves peaceably

41 Twelfth Annual Report (1848) in *Annual Reports on Education* (1872), 701, 710, 714-16, and 731.
and as good citizens, shall be equally under the protection of law; and no subordination of one sect or denomination to another shall ever be established by law.”

In laying out his description of the resultant religious education in public schools, he explains that it should proceed in broad ways, “leaving it to every individual to add, for himself, those auxiliary arguments which may result from his own peculiar views of religious truth.” If struggles over sectarian doctrines were allowed in the common school, its “function as a force promoting a sense of community would be negated,” and the school would become a catalyst for division within the community, rather than a melting pot of Americanization.

Mann argues that public schools are not seminaries and should be restricted from teaching “the peculiar and distinctive doctrines of any one religious denomination.” Instead, schools should acknowledge their limitations and inculcate general “Christian morals” founded in the Bible. But in using the Bible, it must “speak for itself” without the use of sectarian glosses/interpretations. There should be no protest to its use in this way, and Mann avers that

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42 Twelfth Annual Report (1848) in Annual Reports on Education (1872), 723.
44 Lawrence Arthur Cremin, The American Common School: An Historic Conception (New York: Columbia University Bureau of Publications, 1951), 199. Compare this idea to Mann’s discussion of religious diversity in the 1839 edition of the Common School Journal: “The diversity of religious doctrines, prevalent in our community, would render it difficult to inculcate any religious truths . . . were it not for two reasons: first, that the points on which different portion of a Christian community differ among themselves are far less numerous than those on which they agree; and, secondly, were it not also true, that a belief in those points in which they all agree, constitutes the best possible preparation for each to proceed in adding those distinctive particulars, which did not recognize the truth that we were created to be religious beings, would be as though we were to form a human body forgetting to put in a heart.” Common School Journal, Volume 1 (1839), 14.
45 Twelfth Annual Report (1848) in Annual Reports on Education (1872), 729. George M. Thomas, Lisa R. Peck, and Channin G. De Haan describe the shifting approach to the use of the Bible from the 19th to the 20th century: “Before the turn of the [19th] century, most educators with Progressive sensibilities accepted American civil religion and supported the inclusion of prayer and Bible reading as symbols of the common religion . . . The early common school principle had been to exclude religious organizational authority by excluding commentary. But the twentieth century Progressive educators saw the Bible itself differently. They proposed retaining the study of the Bible, but as literature . . . The Bible now
in all my intercourse, for twelve years, whether personal or by letter, with all the school officers in the State, and with tens of thousands of individuals in it, I have never heard an objection made to the use of the Bible in school except in one or two instances; and, in those cases, the objection was put upon the ground, that daily familiarity with the book, in school, would tend to impair a reverence for it.  

As we will see in the section on Catholic opposition to common schools, *sola scriptura* (Bible reading without use of commentaries or glosses and without any reference to its interpretation via the tradition of *magisterium*) is a distinctively Protestant principle, and the King James Bible read in common schools is a Protestant translation.  

According to James Fraser, the heart of the problem was “the public school system’s founders’ failure to understand the need to respect the faith of a wide diversity of citizens.”  

Eventually, many Catholics opted out of public education, while many Dutch Reformed folks never opted in to it, choosing their unique sectarian faith over generalized civil religion. Let us turn first to Protestant opposition to common schools in Philadelphia and Boston, and then to Catholic protests against Protestant public education and their petitions for tax dollars to fund parochial schools in New York.

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46 Twelfth Annual Report (1848) in *Annual Reports on Education* (1872), 735.  
47 “Even if there was no denominational catechism, [common] schools used the Protestant rather than the Catholic Bible. Indeed, to read the Bible without comment itself was not neutral but was a Protestant notion; for Catholics, the Bible required the gloss of the church to be understood.” (Nord, *Religion and American Education*, 73). Another example was the 1869 resolution by the National Teachers Association to read the King James Bible devotionally, but without comment by the teachers.  
48 Fraser, *Between Church and State*, 47.
Protestant Opposition to Common Schools

“The gravest obstacle to the development of an effective common school system throughout the United States was neither urban taxpayers’ parsimony nor rural complacency but religious intransigence.”

Although Horace Mann was passionate and persuasive, everyone did not support his vision of common schooling. Some people saw no need for improvement or reform; they were content with the educational status quo. There were those who wanted to maintain local control of education, rather than relinquishing power to state-wide or national institutions. There were parents who wanted to secure the right of their children to attend private schools. And then there were religious leaders who questioned whether nonsectarian education was compatible with orthodox Christianity. Rush Welter contends that this latter group presented the biggest obstacle to widespread acceptance of national common schooling. In 1838, Frederick A. Packard of the American Sunday School Union put himself in the center of a controversy about book selection in school libraries, engaging in a six-month battle in print with Horace Mann. In 1846, Matthew Hale Smith accused Mann and the Massachusetts Board of Education of running “godless” schools. Both Packard and Smith were Protestant, though of a more conservative bent than Mann.

Since this dissertation focuses on schools founded by Dutch Reformed immigrants, it seems important to note that both Packard and Smith were Calvinists, and their objections to Horace Mann and his vision for schooling centered, at least in part, on theological tenets such as total depravity. Perhaps even more significant is their belief

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49 Welter, Popular Education and Democratic Thought in America, 105.
50 Welter, Popular Education and Democratic Thought in America, 104.
51 For further explanation of various sites of religious opposition, see “Roots in Practice” in Cremin’s The American Common School.
that specific theological propositions cannot and should not be watered down to general ethical principles for moral behavior. This indicates a willingness to uphold religious orthodoxy above broad communal unity, even if such is seen as separatist or anti-American. As we will see in chapter three, the tension between the forces of Americanization and the forces of maintaining cultural and religious purity in enclaves runs through the history of the Christian Reformed Church (and its split from the Reformed Church in America) and Grand Rapids Christian Schools. 52

**Philadelphia: Frederick Packard and the American Sunday-School Union**

Frederick A. Packard was born in Massachusetts in 1794 to parents of Puritan descent; his father was a pastor. He was a lawyer and an editor of *The Hampshire Federalist*, which later became *The Springfield Republican*. Initially chosen as a delegate to the anniversary of the American Sunday-School Union, he so impressed the group that he was offered the position of editor of their publication. Edwin Wilbur Rice claims that “more than to any other one man the shaping of the early literature of the American

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52 Edwin Rian explores the response of Calvinists in the public school movement in New Jersey, which mirror the debates between the CRC and the RCA in Michigan. Both sides were in favor of universal education, but some (e.g., Charles Hodge of Princeton Seminary) held that private schools were the best location for such formation, while others (e.g., Presbyterians John Maclean and the Reverend Robert Baird; Reverend Abraham Messler of the Old Raritan Church, President Theodore Frelinghuysen of Rutgers College, and Governor Peter Vroom, all from the Reformed Church) supported public schools. Rian notes that Presbyterians divided into Old School and New School in 1837. The Old School developed under the leadership of Hodge, who argued that parochial institutions would help to maintain religious orthodoxy against the increasing forces of worldliness. During the conflict over public funding for Catholic Schools in New York, Hodge wrote the following: “The State must do one or the other of two things. She must make her schools accessible to all classes of people, by excluding religion from them entirely; or she must let every denomination, or the people in every district, regulate the schools as they please.” (Quoted in Boylan, *Sunday School*, 58). Hodge used the example of Catholics and fellow Calvinists in Scotland and Holland to plea his cause convincingly enough that the General Assembly appointed a committee in 1844 to consider the issue. When the committee recommended parochial schools in 1846, it marked a victory in battle. Between 1846 and 1861, thirty-six schools were founded. But apathetic congregations who offered little monetary support and the rise of public schools foretold a lost war. By 1870, private Calvinist schools had almost completely disappeared in New Jersey. Edwin H. Rian, *Christianity and American Education* (San Antonio: Naylor Co., 1949), 30-33.
Sunday-School Union was due to Frederick A. Packard. He personally examined most of the Union’s publications and even created several himself.”

In March 1838, now living in Philadelphia, Packard began a series of five letters which appeared in successive issues of the New York Observer and the Boston Recorder. He wanted wider use of his organization’s collection of school library texts throughout New England. Packard accused Horace Mann and the Massachusetts Board of Education of “conspiring to drive the Bible and religion itself out of the public schools.” The conflict began when Packard wrote to Mann, asking him to evaluate the merit of Abbot’s The Child at Home, one of the books in the library series. In Mann’s journal, an entry dated March 18, 1838, he writes:

> Having got the book and read it, I have today written him a long answer, condemning the book in toto so far as the view of a great portion of our people are concerned. For my own part, I should rather no District Library should ever be formed, than to have them, if they must be composed of such books as that.

In Mann’s letter to Packard written the same day, he explains that the book is offensive because it denounces people to “eternal perdition for the most trivial neglects or acts of disobedience,” because it places an “arbitrary & mechanical” obedience to God over love of God, because God is not characterized as “amiable” or “lovely,” and because of its

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54 Culver asserts that “even though it be granted that Packard was sincere in his conviction that the orthodox, evangelical doctrines of Christianity should be taught in the public schools, nevertheless his action was dictated in part by another motive. His letter [July 9, 1838] admits that he went to New Bedford to promote the sale of his library.” (Horace Mann and Religion in the Massachusetts Public Schools, 72).

55 Welter, Popular Education and Democratic Thought in America, 105. See Culver, Horace Mann and Religion in the Schools, chs 5-6. “The issues between Packard and Mann arose in the first place because Mann was authorized to recommend books for district school libraries. . . [but this debate was a nonissue because] The Massachusetts legislature had banned sectarian textbooks from the common schools long before the Board of Education came into being, and in any event Packard was a resident of Pennsylvania” (Welter, note 4, pages 351-2)
emphasis on total depravity.\textsuperscript{56} Mann’s optimism about human nature is at stark variance with Calvinism’s pessimism about human depravity.

Packard conceded in the second letter that some people may disagree with the theological content of some of the texts, but he is incredulous that “facts” such as “the existence of a God, the inspiration of the Scriptures, [and] a future state of retribution” should be deemed “sectarian.”\textsuperscript{57} Notice his use of the word “facts” for doctrines that have been long-contested within Christianity, and his contention that such doctrines are not sectarian, but universal. Jonathan Messerli explains that Packard included all human beings in his assertion that “doctrinal beliefs on the Trinity, Baptism, and original sin were crucial factors in conditioning their social behavior.” On the other hand, Mann believed human actions were based on general ethical principles shared by all reasonable people. As such, “beliefs in total immersion [baptism], the divinity of Christ, or the innate depravity of children had little influence on how one lived as a member of a family or a citizen of a community.”\textsuperscript{58} The extent to which particular tenets of religious faith impact education and ethics is a recurring point of contention in the work of Horace Mann and those who opposed it.

In Mann’s final letter, dated July 22, 1838, he reminds Packard that the Massachusetts law of 1827 requiring towns of more than five-hundred families to have a public high school has been “almost unanimously” ratified by government officials and by the public. Mann garners the additional support of Samuel M. Burnside, who drafted

\textsuperscript{56} Quoted in Culver, \textit{Horace Mann and Religion in the Massachusetts Public Schools}, 57 and 59.
\textsuperscript{57} Quoted in Culver, \textit{Horace Mann and Religion in the Massachusetts Public Schools}, 56.
the law. Burnside’s letter of June 4, 1844 to Mann explains the origins of the law, the (intended) meaning of its language, and its widespread acceptance:

It was not construed to mean the excluding of religious teaching in the great doctrines of the gospel; this had given no offence for two hundred years to the religious denominations making together the great body of the people; it was interpreted to mean, if to be operative, the exclusion of ecclesiastical systems of church government and discipline . . . The committee did not understand that any doctrines of dogmatic theology had been taught in our schools for many years—they were all of the opinion that such doctrines ought to be excluded—that our schools could not otherwise be sustained—that the school room should never become the battle ground of polemic combatants . . . I know the bill was universally understood as excluding doctrinal subjects of doctrinal theology.⁵⁹

Whether or not Burnside is correct that dogmatic theology was no longer being taught in schools is debatable. What is striking is that “not a word was uttered against” formation in Christian morality—which might tell us something about the hegemony of liberal Protestant Christianity in Massachusetts politics at the time.

For Mann, “the great idea” of the common school is achieved when “the children of men of all denominations attend the school together,” but this requires compromise. Mann clearly outlines the differences between himself and Packard in their plans and their audience, as the former envisions himself serving “every religious denomination,” while the latter represents a sectarian fragment which propagates “peculiar views.”⁶⁰ The latter was undeterred in his endeavor. Packard tried to disparage Mann at a meeting of the Massachusetts General Association, proposing to read publically Mann’s private correspondence to him, and then realizing his mistake (his breach of social etiquette? his lack of popular public support?), “he made the surprising request that the matter should

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not be made known outside the assembly.”61 Packard was partially discredited, Mann was widely defended, and both went on to market their widely disparate visions for religious education.62

**Boston: Matthew Hale Smith, The Bible, the Rod, and Religion in Common Schools**

*Education without religion, is irreligious. It cannot be neutral, and in fact is not neutral. The effort to keep out religion from all the books and all the instructions, gives them of necessity an irreligious and infidel character.*63

Matthew Hale Smith was born in Maine and ordained a minister of the Universalist denomination at the age of 17. He converted to Calvinism when he was 32 and ordained an orthodox minister in Massachusetts. He preached the sermon, “The Ark of God on a New Cart” to the Church and the Society of the Pilgrims in Boston on October 10, 1846. It was printed in the *Boston Recorder* a few days later, as was a review of the sermon by William B. Fowle, publisher of the *Common School Journal*.64 Central to the sermon are Smith’s following points of contention:

An effort has been made, and that too with some success, to do three things with our common schools: 1. To get out of them the Bible and all religious instruction. 2. To abolish the use of the rod, and all correction, but a little talk. 3. To make common schools a counterpoise to religious instruction at home and in Sabbath schools. The Board of Education in Massachusetts has aided in this work in two ways: 1. By allowing an individual, under the sanction of its authority, to disseminate through the land crude and destructive principles, principles believed to be at war with the Bible and with the best interests of the young for time and eternity. 2. By a library which excludes books as sectarian that inculcate truths, which nine-tenths of professed Christians of all names believe while it accepts others that inculcate the most deadly heresy — even universal salvation. We ask

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64 Subsequent correspondence between Smith and Mann was collected in *The Bible, the Rod, and Religion in Common Schools*. For more information about this controversy, see Hinsdale, *Horace Mann and the Common School Revival in the United States*, 220-232; Culver, *Horace Mann and Religion in the Massachusetts Public Schools*, 204-213; and Messerli, *Horace Mann*, 432-440.
Rev. Smith furthers Packard’s position about school books, implying that the sensibilities of one-tenth of Christians (presumably the Unitarians and possibly the Catholics) should not outweigh the beliefs of the rest. His deeper contention is that the Massachusetts Board of Education (with Mann at its helm) is functioning at odds with Christianity; in fact, they may be enemies in a war against faith.

Fowle’s review of the sermon is scathing. He attacks Smith’s pessimism as idiotic and suggests that schools, churches, and other charitable institutions are helping to make the world better, not worse. He defends the members of the Massachusetts Board of Education as “not only orthodox men, but distinguished as leaders and lights among the evangelical sects.” He asks “Who but the Romanists would take the Bible away from our youth?” And then he lays out the facts of the current situation in schools in order “to expose the barefacedness” of Smith’s charges:

First, then, the Board have never said a word against the use of the Bible in schools, but on the contrary, have required it to be used in the only schools under their control . . . the Bible is probably read daily in every public school in the State, and it is required to be read in the schools of this city. Secondly, the Board have always and everywhere strenuously urged the importance of early religious instruction — and, if the preacher does not know this, he is ignorant beyond excuse, and if he does know it, he is wicked beyond pardon.

Fowle exhorts Smith to review Mann’s Ninth Annual Report in which he may “read his own condemnation,” and he ends with a censure of the paper’s editor, who never should have published Smith’s sermon in the first place and who should have acted more quickly to expose its falsehood. For propagating such lies, Fowle makes the following pronouncement about what should happen to Mr. Smith: “if we believed in the utility of

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65 The Bible, the Rod, and Religion in Common Schools, 11
capital punishment, we should say, [the sermon] entitles the preacher to a ride in a cart
that would leave him standing, as his whole sermon stands, on — nothing.”66

In Mann’s reply to Matthew Hale Smith, he defends the intentions of the Board of
Education, who support rather than undermine the use of the Bible in schools, and he
points to the positive results of their efforts throughout Massachusetts:

It is well known to every person who has had the honesty to ascertain the facts on
the subject, to be wholly untrue. The whole influence of the Board of Education,
from the day of its organization to the present time, has been to promote and
encourage, and, whenever they have had any power, as in the case of the Normal
Schools, to direct the daily use of the Bible in school.

He praises the efficient efforts of Board of Education in getting the Bible into schools,
noting that his last inquiry revealed its use in all of the towns in the State, except for a
few, and because those three towns had not responded, was likely used in them as well.67

Smith’s reply is lengthy and directed more personally at Mann:

1. I regard you as the representative of a system, or its head, which seeks to
change, slowly, perhaps, but surely, the whole system of education in common
schools — the result of which will be to elevate the intellectual over the moral,
and man above God. In detail and in element I conceive your notions, in this
matter, to be crude, their fruits destructive; and the more I have seen your system
explained, the worse, to my mind, it appears. 2. I understand you to be opposed to
the use of the Bible in school as a school book . . . I suppose you to be willing that
parts shall be read. But are you in favor of the whole Bible as a school book? 3.
Are you in favor of the use of the rod as a principal means of enforcing
obedience? That you tolerate it in deference to public sentiment, I do not dispute.
But I am misinformed if you are not against its use, and do not, as you have
opportunity, discountenance its use. 4. I understand you to be opposed to religious
instruction in schools; that you rule out as far as you have power truths and
sanctions which nine tenths of professing Christians believe essential to sound
morals and an honest life, no less than to the salvation of the soul.68

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66 Wm. B. Fowle in *The Bible, the Rod, and Religion in Common Schools*, 15, 17, and 19.
67 Letter from Horace Mann to Rev. Matthew Hale Smith, October 19, 1846, in *The Bible, the
Rod, and Religion in Common Schools*, 23-4. Mann returns to results in his letter of November 9, 1846:
“from the official reports and letters of the school-committees, it appears that the Bible was never so
extensively used in our schools as at the present time, and that its use has been constantly increasing, ever
since the influence of the Board was brought to bear upon the subject.”
68 Reply Letter from Rev. Matthew Hale Smith to Horace Mann, October 27, 1846, *The Bible, the
Rod, and Religion in Common Schools*, 26-7.
He asserts that Mann has dangerously upended the proper hierarchy between God and human beings. Rather than acknowledging the value of the Bible’s use in school, he attacks Mann for his disrespect of the Bible. Since Smith believes corporal punishment is commended in the Bible, he questions Mann’s discouragement of using the rod. And notice how their definitions of “religious instruction” are at play in the fourth point. For Smith, orthodox tenets of doctrine should be taught; For Mann, ethical principles distilled from the Bible, which makes known “the rule of life and the means of salvation” should be taught, limited only by legal boundaries, as he explains in his reply of November 9:

Every one who has availed himself of the means of arriving at the truth, on this point, knows that I am in favor of religious instruction in our schools, to the extremest verge to which it can be carried without invading those rights of conscience which are established by the laws of God, and guarantied [sic] to us by the Constitution of the State.  

Mann goes even further to defend his position, using a biblical allusion to demonstrate his fervor: “I regard hostility to religion in our schools as the greatest crime which I could commit against man or against God. Had I the power, I would sooner repeat the massacre of Herod, than I would keep back religion from the young.”  

They both support “religion” as a component of education, but they each mean something different in their use of the term.

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69 Letter from Horace Mann to Rev. Matthew Hale Smith, November 9, 1846, in The Bible, the Rod, and Religion in Common Schools, 33. Mann further explained: “I will adopt the motto of the Hon. Abbott Lawrence — ‘A universal education, founded upon the morals drawn from the Bible.’ Give us this and an open Bible, and we will fear neither Pope, Pagan, nor Despot.” Abbott Lawrence (1792-1855) was a prominent American businessman, politician, and philanthropist. He founded Lawrence, Massachusetts. In a letter, Lawrence wrote “All intellectual culture should be founded upon our Holy Religion. The pure precepts of the Gospel are the only safe source from which we can freely draw our morality.” (Memoir of Abbott Lawrence by Hamilton Andrews Hill [Boston: Little, Brown & Company, 1884], 115.)

70 Horace Mann: Sequel to the So-called Correspondence between the Rev. M.H. Smith and Horace Mann, 31 quoted in Culver, 208.
In his reply, Smith acknowledges that the Bible is used in schools, but claims it has been demoted from “the Inspired Word of God” to “a book full of inspired maxims,” and thus stripped of its “moral power.” Smith goes on to excoriate those Christians who question the divine inspiration of the Bible, as he believes Mann to be one of them:

If your own voluntary testimony is to be taken, you do not believe the whole Bible to the inspired Word of God. . . The man who rejects a part of the Bible, must, in my opinion, reject the whole. It claims entire inspiration. If it be not so inspired, it is not true . . . No plan can so effectually get the Bible, ultimately, out of Common Schools, as that which rejects a part as not true, and another part as fit to be read.

Smith lays out an all or nothing ultimatum, asserting that only accepting parts of the Bible is “nothing more than Deism, bald and blank.” Smith then asks a useful question about what may or may not be legally forbidden: “If I may not teach native depravity in schools, because the Constitution forbids it, may you teach native holiness?” Since Mann believed human depravity was a dangerous and damaging tenet, while innate human goodness was useful and positive, he might not have accepted that both positions were sectarian. Both seem to universalize their position. Smith suggests that districts should have the right to “make their schools as religious as they please,” and dissenting individuals or groups have the right to use their tax money for separate education.71 This is an argument that recurs throughout American educational history, with differing levels of success (e.g., the charter school and homeschool movements).

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71 Reply Letter from Rev. Matthew Hale Smith to Horace Mann, November, 1846, The Bible, the Rod, and Religion in Common Schools, 36-9, 44, 48, and 53.
New York: Catholic Opposition to Common Schools

By their establishment and control of both public and private schools, churchmen stamped upon neighborhoods, states, and nation an interdenominational Protestant ideology which nurtured dreams of personal and social progress. By the middle of the nineteenth century, leading citizens assumed that Americanism and Protestantism were synonyms and that education and Protestantism were allies. The prevalence of this sentiment encouraged nativism, muted the voice of the courts in issues involving church-state relationships, and impelled Jews, Catholics, and some Protestant groups who rejected the interdenominational consensus to institute separate systems of parochial schools.\textsuperscript{72}

As common schools found a cultural foothold, there was need to delineate between secular education (no religion), moral education (fundamental tenets held by all religions), and sectarian education (specific denominational-Protestant or Catholic doctrines). In 1792, Bishop John Carroll of Baltimore (with jurisdiction over all Catholics in the United States) published a pastoral letter calling for the “Christian education of youth,” and in 1829, the First Provincial Council of Baltimore (with representative bishops from each of the United States dioceses present) called for the establishment of schools where students would be taught the principles of Catholic faith while also being instructed in other things.\textsuperscript{73} But the issue of parochial Catholic schools did not gain widespread momentum until controversy erupted in New York a decade later. To understand the context, we need to back up to 1805, when a group of Protestant philanthropists in New York City were given a charter as the Free School Society (FSS) by the New York state legislature to establish free schools for poor children not currently under the care of any religious society. The city received funds for education from a share


of state tax on the sale of liquor. The allotment to organizations such as the Free School Society (FSS) was to be proportional to the number of students who attended, and the money was to be used for teachers’ salaries. Timothy Smith argues that “all congregations except the Roman Catholic, Dutch Reformed, and Associate Reformed Presbyterian relied increasingly upon this nonsectarian organization to educate the children of their indigent families.”

Over the years, however, the Free School Society was also granted building lots, construction subsidies, and other monetary allotments; it effectively served as the public school system for the city and held a monopoly for over a decade. In 1826 when the Free School Society (FSS) was granted a new charter, it changed its name to the Public School Society (PSS).

In 1820 the Bethel Baptist Church of New York, located in a section of the city not yet served by the FSS, opened a school for poor children of all religious faiths in its basement, enrolling 686 students in its first year. The congregation was granted the usual per-student monetary distribution for teachers’ salaries in 1821, “but also the right to use any surplus funds, after payment of salaries, to equip or erect buildings—a right previously reserved for the Free School Society alone.” Bethel Baptist expanded to three schools by 1822. Other churches followed suit, opening schools and petitioning for similar tax-funded privileges. The Free School Society cartel was under siege, and it openly opposed such schools on the grounds that it threatened their non-sectarian common schools and encouraged the growth of divisive sectarian schools. Bethel Baptist

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75 In this section, I will follow the chronological shift in title and follow other historians who use acronyms or call it “The Society.”

76 Timothy Smith, “Protestant Schooling,” 685.

insisted its program was as nonsectarian as that of the FSS since they used the same curriculum and the same nondenominational catechism for religious instruction. In 1825, the Common Council of the New York state legislature passed an ordinance denying common school funds to any religious society.

Timothy Smith argues that the success of the FSS depended on its ability to persuade people that “nonsectarian Protestant education could be thoroughly religious.” The Society argued that its schools and their textbooks set forth “the fundamental truths of the Christian religion free from sectarian bias” and asserted that their schools could offer moral education based on Christian ethics, but separated from divisive dogmas. In 1812, the FSS implemented a plan to suspend school on Tuesday afternoons to allow time for catechizing children according to the religious preferences of their parents. Fifty “women of distinguished consideration in society and belonging to the different religious denominations” volunteered to serve as instructors. These were eminent Protestant church women. There were no provisions made for the Catholic students, which added insult to the injury of anti-Catholic textbooks and Protestant Scripture reading practices. Catholics might agree on the importance of moral formation, but not that it could be separated from specific doctrines. What the Free School Society claimed was nondenominational was seen by Catholic bishops and priests as “Protestant sectarianism aimed to subvert the religious faith of Catholic children.” Diane Ravitch is correct in her assessment of FSS blindness to this critique:

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78 Timothy Smith, “Protestant Schooling,” 683.
80 Timothy Smith, “Protestant Schooling,” 683.
81 Vincent P. Lannie, Public Money and Parochial Education: Bishop Hughes, Governor Seward, and the New York School Controversy (Cleveland: Case Western University Press, 1968), ix.
The Society failed to recognize that its version of nonsectarianism was sectless Protestantism. Its failure, too, to remove voluntarily the open slurs against Catholicism in many of its textbooks underscored the transparency of its seeming religious neutrality. The Society’s inability to surmount its narrow cultural horizons made it impossible for the Society to reach a compromise with the Catholics.82

Catholics were initially split on schooling. Some believed that religious training belonged most properly to the realms of home and church and trusted in public schools to embrace all religions equally. Others (an increasing majority) understood that public education was always and already stacked against Catholics (especially poor immigrant Catholics) because of class, language, and theology. They wanted to enjoy the benefits of their tax dollars spent on common schools without their children being subject to discrimination. But instead, there was increasing nativist and anti-Catholic hostility, with riots breaking out in New York, Boston, and Philadelphia.83 By the time the fires were extinguished, Catholics were determined to educate their own children, preferably with public funding.

In his second annual address to the state legislature in January 1840, New York Governor William Henry Seward (Protestant, Whig) took up for the oppressed immigrants.84 Ravitch suggests that Governor Seward was convinced that “universal education was the challenge of his age.”85 He believed education could lower rates of poverty and crime, but it could also serve the public welfare by cultivating good citizens and bolstering social equality. According to Joseph McCadden, Governor Seward “had

83 In 1843, when the Philadelphia school board ruled that Catholic students could use the Douay Bible, more violence erupted. By the time it ended, “two Catholic churches and dozens of homes had been burned down, the militia had fired point-blank on crowds, mobs ruled the city for three days, and thirteen people had been killed.” Nord, Religion and American Education, 73.
84 Seward also spoke out against slavery as early as 1839 and incurred the wrath of Southerners when he refused to return fugitive slaves who made their way to New York. After losing the Republican presidential nomination in 1860, he became Lincoln’s secretary of state (Ravitch, 39)
85 Ravitch, The Great School Wars, 38.
learned that thousands of children (his advisers said 25,000) were receiving no education whatever,” and in New York City, out of conscience, they would not avail themselves of the education offered by the Public School Society.\textsuperscript{86} If necessary, Governor Seward supported the establishment of schools where immigrant children could receive instruction from teachers who spoke their native language and shared their religion. The PSS, fueled in part by nativist sentiment and also by the economic threat of losing students, offered a remonstrance arguing that it was crucial for immigrants “to become familiar with our language and reconciled to our institutions and habits” as quickly as possible, and that their schools were the prime site for that cultural assimilation.\textsuperscript{87}

John Hughes was an Irish immigrant, the son of a poor farmer, who came to the United States in 1817 at the age of twenty. While Hughes was working in Maryland as a gardener for Mount St. Mary’s College and Theological Seminary and preparing for admission as a student, he met Bishop John Dubois (president of the college at the time). Hughes served as a priest in Philadelphia before being called to New York in 1839 to replace DuBois as bishop after the latter suffered a paralytic stroke. Bishop Hughes was in Europe raising money and recruiting priests and teachers when Governor Seward made his radical proposal, but he returned prepared to rally the troops and to take Seward up on his offer.

After convening a meeting of the trustees of the city’s Catholic churches, a petition was drafted on behalf of all eight parishes which supported a free school and agreed to seek public funding. The petition, requesting public aid based on financial need,

\textsuperscript{87} Quotation from PSS remonstrance cited in McCadden, 193.
was submitted to the Common Council’s Board of Assistant Alderman on February 25, 1840. Shortly thereafter, similar petitions were submitted by the Scotch Presbyterian Church and the Hebrew congregation on Crosby Street in New York City. Strenuous opposition came from the Public School Society and numerous denominations, including Methodist Episcopal, Reformed Presbyterian, and Dutch Reformed churches. While the Board considered the petition, the PSS furnished Rev. Felix Varela (co-vicar-general of New York with Dr. John Power) with a set of textbooks for his perusal, so that they might remove any offensive passages.

On April 27, 1840, the Committee on Arts and Sciences and Schools submitted Document No. 80, which was its response to the controversy. It asserted that Catholics were taxed as citizens for the support of civil government and not as Catholics for the support of another religion, and further explained

> Our institutions are designed not to create or perpetuate religious distinctions, but to place all mankind upon a common footing of equality. Any legal acknowledgement of any religious denomination, as a dependent upon the public bounty for any kind of pecuniary aid or support, would be an abandonment of the great constitutional principle, that the end and aim of all just government is the equal protection of all men in the free exercise and enjoyment of the rights derived from the written Constitution of the land.

The document asserted that the church and the home were the proper place of religious instruction and argued for common schooling free of sectarianism. As such, it directed the PSS to remove any books which might be offensive to Catholics or other sects.

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88 Edwin H. Rian, *Christianity and American Education* (San Antonio, Naylor Co: 1949), 124-126. It is worth noting that the Dutch Reformed churches had unsuccessfully petitioned for monetary support of their schools in 1826 in line with Bethel Baptist, so their opposition may have the taste of sour grapes.

89 Quotation from the Report of the Committee on Arts and Sciences, Document No. 80, Board of Assistant Alderman, April 27, 1840. Cited in Ravitch, 43.
Document No. 80 was adopted by the Board of Assistant Aldermen by a vote of 16-1. Catholics took to the presses to address the issues to a wider audience.

On July 4, 1840, Dr. John Power (Vicar-General of the Diocese of New York) set up a new weekly, the *Freeman's Journal*, with lawyer James W. White as editor, the stated purpose of which was to gain access to the public school fund for Catholic children (the unstated purpose was to supplant the current diocesan publication, *Truth-Teller*, which was less sympathetic to the cause).\(^{90}\) In the journal’s second weekly publication, Power published an open letter to the Public School Society. "I am decidedly opposed," wrote the vicar-general, "to the education which is now given in our ‘public schools.’ It is not based, as in a Christian community it ought to be, on the Christian religion. Its tendency is to make deists."\(^{91}\) Power further excoriated the PSS textbooks for containing “the most malevolent and foul attacks” on Catholicism.\(^{92}\) Another contributor to the journal agreed that public schools were sectarian in their Protestant bias, but wrote that elimination of any or all religious instruction was unacceptable.

In late October 1840, Bishop John Hughes testified in front of the Board of Aldermen for four hours on two successive days. In the face of outright attacks against Catholicism as intolerant and exclusivist, Hughes argued that the slander was based on misconceptions and misinformation. Some of that slander had come from PSS textbooks, he asserted. Along with offering bias-free instruction and excluding religious instruction from regular school hours, the Catholics “agreed to submit to supervision by city

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\(^{90}\) Ravitch describes publishers of *The Truth Teller* as being from “the Jacksonian bent of the Democratic party . . . [which] maintained that religious training belonged in the realm of the home and church” (41).


appointees, even by the Society, if only they were granted a share of the public funds.”  

After the hearing, the Board of Alderman appointed a special committee to handle the issue. During the intervening ten weeks, each side submitted compromise proposals which rehashed previous offers and were unsatisfactory to the other group: Catholics would not agree to any plan that did not recognize the distinctive nature of Catholic schools, and the PSS would not abide public funding of distinctly sectarian schools. The special committee’s recommendation on January 11, 1841 was to reject the Catholic petition, which the Board did by a vote of 15-1. “The lone dissenting alderman was Daniel Pentz, who afterwards was a great favorite of the Irish Catholics for his stand on their behalf.”

Catholics were undeterred on their path to a statewide hearing, believing they had the support of the governor.

Governor Seward’s Secretary of State and ex-officio Superintendent of Schools, John C. Spencer, submitted a report on April 26, 1841 which argued the importance of religious instruction in American schools:

> It is believed that, in a country where the great body of our fellow-citizens recognize the fundamental truths of Christianity, public sentiment would be shocked by the attempt to exclude all instruction of a religious nature from the public schools; and that any plan or scheme of education, in which no reference whatever was had to moral principles founded on these truths, would be abandoned by all . . . It may be regarded as a settled axiom in all schemes of education intended for the youth of this country, that there must be, of necessity, a

93 Joseph T. McCadden. “Bishop Hughes versus The Public School Society of New York.” The Catholic Historical Review. Vol.50. No. 2 (July, 1964): 200. There is some discrepancy between the public face and the private voice of Bishop Hughes. Ravitch characterizes him as someone who wanted to convert others to Catholicism, and she quotes a sermon he gave in his New York City cathedral in 1850: “Everybody should know that we have for our mission to convert the world, including the inhabitants of the United States.” (Ravitch, 35-37). Rian argues that Hughes eventually came to believe that schools were the key to furthering Catholic faith. To new priests at ordination, he said “you must proceed upon the principle that, in this age and country, the school goes before the church.” (Rian, 129 qtg from J.A. Burns, The Catholic School System in the United States. NY: Benzinger Brothers, 1908.)

94 Ravitch, The Great School Wars, 57.
very considerable amount of religious instruction.  

Spencer interpreted the no-establishment clause of the federal Constitution to mean “absolute non-intervention” by the government in matters of religious instruction. Thus, people in each locality would have discretion on such school policies. His report affirmed the need for a variety of schools in the United States “so that parents might exercise their right to choose one that accorded with their consciences.” Although the Public School Society had achieved a great deal, Spencer “scolded it for conceiving of itself as the only deserving educational organization in the metropolis.”

When the New York State Legislature convened in 1842, Governor Seward and William Maclay, chairman of the House Committee on Schools, renewed the attack on the PSS “as a private monopoly incapable of accomplishing the tremendous self-assumed task of public education.” Seward promised to approve legislation that would vest control of schools in elected commissioners. The Maclay Act, as initially proposed, accepted Spencer’s doctrine of “absolute non-intervention” and allowed that each city ward would popularly elect a school board to make decisions about education, including religious issues such as Bible reading. It was later amended to provide centralized funding and oversight by a New York City Board of Education; this was meant to insure uniformity and harmony among districts. The principle of “absolute non-intervention” was replaced by an explicit proscription against sectarian instruction in public schools.

The language in Section 14 of the Maclay Act which became law in April 1842 reads:

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95 Quotation from the text of Spencer’s report, qtd in McCadden, “Bishop Hughes versus The Public School Society of New York,” 204. Long before 20th century secularism, Spencer realized that the absence of religious instruction in public education was a form of sectarianism.


“No school above mentioned, or which shall be organized under this act, in which any religious sectarian doctrine or tenet shall be taught, inculcated, or practiced shall receive any portion of the school moneys to be distributed by this act.”98 This marked the end of the Public School Society. However, with a shift in political power, The Maclay Act was amended in 1844 to prohibit the New York City Board of Education from keeping the Christian scriptures out of the schools. In that same year, the Third Plenary Council of Baltimore (with authority over all Catholics in North America) declared its goal: ‘Every Catholic child in a Catholic school.’ From the middle of the 19th century until the mid-1960s, well over 90% of the children in private schools were in Roman Catholic schools.

**Connecticut: Horace Bushnell and Christian Nurture**

Horace Bushnell was born in Litchfield, Connecticut in 1802, part of New England’s site of transformation for American Protestantism at the turn of the century, according to David Smith: “The older schools of Calvinism, stressing God’s terrible justice and absolute sovereignty over against mankind’s total depravity, were giving way to teachings stressing a loving God’s rational moral government of the universe and mankind’s freedom within it.”99 Following a profound religious experience in 1831, Bushnell entered Yale Divinity School, where he was influenced by Nathaniel W. Taylor, who asserted that “sin is in the sinning” and human beings always have power to the contrary.100 Daniel Walker Howe describes the origins of various elements of Bushnell’s Christianity:

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98 Quotation from Section 14 of the Maclay Act, cited in McCadden, “Bishop Hughes versus The Public School Society of New York,” 207. This position eventually spreads to many other states.
100 For more on New England Theology and “the birth and growth of Taylorism, an offspring of the forced marriage of New England Calvinism with revivalism,” see *Nathaniel William Taylor, 1786-
Like the Calvinists, Bushnell acknowledged the existence of original sin. Like the
Lockeans, he emphasized the power of nurture to shape personality. Like the
romantics, he respected the human dignity of children. He also displayed romantic
influence by his belief in a ‘religious nature’ within human beings, that is, a
potential for religious sensibility that would develop if properly cultivated. 101

Unlike the Revivalists of the time, for whom conversion was individualized, occurring
after one reached the age of reason, Bushnell emphasized the influential, nurturing
atmosphere of the Christian household, which allows children to grow up in grace,
reading the “living epistles” of their parents, who communicate faith in every detail of
life. 102 James Bratt asserts that Bushnell’s greatest impact

might have come in the warrant he gave to the Victorian home—a more popular
sanctuary, it turned out, than cathedral confession, and pure church combined . . .
[and] Bushnell gave the most accurate forecast of the American Protestant future:
a regime of brawny industrialism guarded, or glazed over, by male character and
female virtue. 103

Bushnell’s vision seems to be an odd mixture of Calvinist covenantal community,
American domination, and Victorian domesticity.

Bushnell took the pulpit at North Congregational Church in Hartford in 1833 and
stayed there for his entire pastoral career, until 1859. Sydney Ahlstrom explains that “his
congregation, like many others, was committed to American democratic optimism,
repulsed by revivalism, concerned about the religious nurture of its children, and attracted
to the social amenities and liturgical graces of Episcopalianism.” 104 Perhaps his most

1858, A Connecticut Liberal by Sidney Earl Mead, published in 1942 (entire text available online
http://www.gospeltruth.net/nathanieltaylor.htm) and Sydney Ahlstrom, A Religious History of the American
History, Vol. 70, No. 2 (September, 1983): 315
University Press, 2004), 610.
famous book, Bushnell’s *Christian Nurture* began as sermons and was first published in 1847 by the Massachusetts Sabbath School Society. It “became the foundation stone for new approaches to religious education”\(^{105}\) In that book, Bushnell described conversion as a gradual and lifelong process of deepening awareness: “The child is to grow up a Christian, and never know himself as being otherwise.”\(^{106}\) Because Bushnell had an organic view of family, church, and nation, it seems natural that he would also see the value of schools as sites of nurture and development.

One of Bushnell’s early biographers, Edwin Doak Mead, commends the 1840 “Christianity and Common Schools” address to the American people “above all others,” because it clearly articulates the fundamental importance of common schooling and “the inseparableness of democracy and public education.” Not only does Bushnell describe common schooling as “a great American institution” which has its beginnings “with our history itself” and which remains “an integral part of the civil order,” but also “the true schools for our American democracy, the schools which alone can make for the perpetuity and integrity of a really democratic society and democratic institutions.”\(^{107}\)

In this address, Bushnell asserts that common schools serve as “nurseries of the church,” but they can also foster the development of “all the nations in Christendom,” filling the world “with an intellectual, upright, and pure-minded race of men—men of

\(^{105}\) Sydney Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People*, 611. Heated opposition to the book caused them to withdraw publication, but other chapters were added and the completed work was published in 1861. In his 1937 text, *Horace Bushnell and Religious Education*, A. J. Williams Myers summarized six principles for which Bushnell is remembered: 1. There is some kind of nurture that is of the Lord; 2. Organic connection between parent and child; 3. The fellowship and love of the home; 4. Growth, not conquest, as the true means of extending God’s Kingdom; 5. Teaching should suit the age of the child; 6. Experience rather than doctrine is the basis of teaching.


\(^{107}\) Edwin Doak Mead, *Horace Bushnell, the Citizen* (Boston, 1900), 9.
order, law, strength and courtesy—production so advanced and economy so perfected, by
the restraints of vice and all bad indulgence, as to allow them leisure for books and the
useful refinements of taste and friendship.” This progress is more than mere possibility; it
is the duty of Christians to work toward its end, and this goal requires “securing the Bible
its proper place.” Bushnell acknowledges that “all sectarian aims must be sacrificed” to
keep the Bible in schools, but it is enough for the Bible to be embraced “as a book of
principles, containing the true standards of character and the best motives and aids to
virtue.”

For Bushnell, religion and education are inseparable: “Education without religion
is education without virtue. Religion without education, or apart from it, is a cold,
unpaternal principle, dying without propagation. . . In the highest and truest sense they
are one. Their end is one: the illumination and discipline of mind.” Continued support of
estrangement between the two is especially remarkable “when one considers that more
than half the money we give for missionary purposes is expended in the maintenance of
schools. As if the cause of Christ had an interest in the schools of India, or the North-
West Coast, and not in the schools of Connecticut!” America is also a mission field, as
we shall see with Beecher’s Plea for the West.

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108 Horace Bushnell, “Christianity and Common Schools,” Connecticut Common School Journal (1838-1842); January 15, 1840: 2, 7. American Periodicals pg. 102. Boardman Kathan notes that “When the public school ceased to perform the function of teaching religion [toward the end of the 19th century], a greater burden was placed on the Sunday school . . . it changed from a ‘school for the indigent’ to the missionary and evangelistic arm of the churches, the ‘nursery of the church.’ . . . The purpose of the Sunday school was two-fold: to teach the Bible, and to prepare children for conversion to the Christian faith.” in “Horace Bushnell and the Religious Education Movement,” Religious Education Vol 108. No. 1 January-February 2013: 45.

Bushnell focuses on the unifying force of public education in “Common Schools: A Discourse on the Modifications Demanded by the Roman Catholics,” an address delivered at his own North Park Congregational Church in 1853. He asserts that it is the responsibility of Protestants to make nationalized public schools palatable to Roman Catholics, and it is the responsibility of Roman Catholics to join in the common venture, rather than demanding separate schools for themselves. He laments that even after being invited into American citizenship and “admitted to an equal footing with us, they are not content, but are now returning our generosity by insisting that we must excuse them and their children from being wholly and properly American.” Bushnell is befuddled by their acceptance of national benefits, while simultaneously requesting certain immunities. He uses us vs. them language in his description of their recourse to foreign countries of origin, rather than shared American citizenship:

They accept the common rights of the law, the common powers of voting, the common terms of property, a common privilege in the new lands and the mines of gold, but when they come to the matter of common schools, they will not be common with us there—they require of us, instead, either to give up our common schools, or else . . . to hand over their proportion of the public money, and let them use it for such kind of schools as they happen to like best; ecclesiastical schools, whether German, French, or Irish; any kind of schools but such as are American, and will make Americans of their children.110

Bushnell bristles at their request to give up an institution like common schools, which is one of “the dearest privileges of our birthright” as (Protestant) Americans. He explains

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110 “Common Schools: A Discourse on the Modifications Demanded by the Roman Catholics” 1-2. Hartford, Press of Case, Tiffiny and Company, 1853. Accessed via HathiTrust. Bushnell explains that “The question of how Pagans, Mohammedans, and Atheists, are to be accommodated, is, in my view, a different question, and one, I think, which is to be answered in a different manner. They are to be tolerated, or suffered, but in no case to be assisted or accommodated, by acts of public conformity. I can not agree to the sentiment sometimes advanced, that we are not a Christian nation, in distinction from a Pagan, Mohammedan or Infidel. . . As we have never disowned God and Christ, as a point of liberty in the state, or to accommodate unbelievers, so we are required by no principle of American right or law to make our schools unchristian, to accommodate Turks and Pagans, or rejectors and infidels.” (12-13).
that except for the single colony in Baltimore, our history began as Protestant communities, and especially in New England.

We have had the common school as a fundamental institution from the first — in our view a Protestant institution — associated with all our religious convictions, opinions, and the public sentiment of our Protestant society. We are still, as Americans, a Protestant people . . . Protestant, that is, in our civil order, and the political fabric of our government.¹¹¹

Bushnell suggests that it seems “quite natural and right, or even a matter of course” that common schools remain Protestant, with “their ancient footing undisturbed,” but sadly the “Puritan common schools” are gone, as is the Westminster Catechism from classrooms. However, the nation can still have common schools which are established by state law, supported by taxes, and organized and overseen by public authorities for the children of all classes, sects and denominations. Public schools are the place where these children are “brought together and made acquainted with each other; thus to wear away the sense of distance, otherwise certain to become an established animosity of orders.” When rich children learn to “honor the struggles of merit in the lowly” and poor children “learn the force of merit,” understanding and friendship may be the result, but Bushnell goes further to assert that “no child can be said to be well trained, especially no male child, who has not met the people as they are, above him or below, in the seatings, plays and studies of the common school. Without this he can never be a fully qualified citizen.” To make them palatable, these schools should be cleared of that which might cause religious objection, as determined by “the fixed rule of majorities . . . with moderation and impartial respect to the rights and feelings of minorities” in each school district. Ideally, the public schools will be so advanced and “perfected in their range of culture

and mental and moral discipline” that it will be in the best interest of all to attend them. There should be no exceptions made and no financial provisions offered for private or parochial schools. In fact, Bushnell asserts that an application for separate schools is “an application for the dismemberment and reorganization of the civil order of the state . . . Common schools are nurseries of a free republic, private schools of factions.”

Bushnell acknowledges that sometimes there has been just cause for complaint by Catholics, such as when Protestants have “thrust our own forms of religious teaching on the children of Catholics,” or insisting on retaining the Protestant Bible as a school book, even for Catholic students. He suggests compiling “a book of Scripture reading lessons, by agreement from both versions [Catholic and Protestant]” and provision for religious instruction by clergy members “at given hours, or on a given day.” However, despite the accommodations made in most schools, Bushnell explains that Catholics, some of whom are still speaking in foreign languages, have been preparing an assault on the common school system “complaining first, of the Bible as a sectarian book in the schools” and then after modifications on their behalf amount to discontinuance of religious instruction, they claim common schools offer “a godless scheme of education.” He asks, rhetorically: “Are we ready, as Americans to yield our institutions up in this manner, or to make them paymasters to a sect who will so far dismember their integrity?” Bushnell attacks the Catholic desire to have separate schools as sowing seeds of “faction” beginning in childhood which will grow and worsen in adulthood:

No bitterness is so bitter, no seed of faction so rank, no division so irreconcilable, as that which grows out of religious distinctions, sharpened to religious animosities, and softened by no terms of intercourse; the more bitter when it begins with childhood; and yet more bitter when it is exasperated also by distinctions of property and social life that correspond; and yet more bitter still,

when it is aggravated also by distinctions of stock or nation . . . [At these schools] they will be instructed mainly into the foreign prejudices and superstitions of their fathers, and the state, which proposes to be clear of all sectarian affinities in religion, will pay the bills!113

Divisions of religion are rooted in “foreign prejudices” which can only lead to division. He realizes that no solution will be found that could “silence all opposition or attack from the ultra-Protestant part on one side, and the ultra-Catholic on the other,” but he remains willing to offer modifications that will solidify unity without destroying the system and its Christian foundation. Having done this, it will then become clear that those who exclude themselves from common schools “are not American . . . and they should be made to bear the whole odium of it.” The rest of the diverse multitudes, whom “God has thrown together” in this nation may, through “good citizenship and acts of love” be “melted into one homogeneous people.” Bushnell ends with the hope that God may use this “ferment of experience” to “wear us into some other and higher and more complete unity” and exhorts us to look with expectation “until the glorious result of a perfected and comprehensive Christianity is made to appear, and is set up here for a sign to all nations.”114

Ohio: Lyman Beecher’s Evangelical Eye on the Northwest Territory

“The religious and political destiny of our nation is to be decided in the West. There is the territory, and there soon will be the population, the wealth, and the political power. The Atlantic commerce and manufactures may confer always some peculiar advantages on the East. But the West is destined to be the great central power of the nation, and under heaven, must affect powerfully the cause of free institutions and the liberty of the world. . . . It is equally clear, that the conflict which is to decide the destiny of the West, will be a conflict of institutions for the education of her sons, for purposes of superstition, or evangelical light; of despotism, or liberty.”115

Initially, the Federal Constitution did not provide for education or funding for schools, but when the Congress of the Confederation met in 1787 to outline the organization of the Northwest Territory (what would become the states of Ohio [1803], Indiana [1816], Illinois [1818], Michigan [1837], and Wisconsin [1848]), Article 3 of the Northwest Ordinance (July 13, 1787) included a significant provision:

Religion, morality, and knowledge being necessary to good government and the happiness of mankind, schools and the means of education shall forever be encouraged.  

Protestant clergymen were influential in the common school movement in the Northwest. Because members of clergy were often the best educated in their communities, they regularly also served as schoolmasters. These religious leaders understood that civilizing the wild frontier required churches and schools. Donald Tewksbury explains that “in the wake of the westward march of population, the religious forces of the day gathered strength as they laid plans to meet the ‘spiritual destitution’ of the new frontier settlements.” Protestant conquest of the continent was the goal.

Rev. Lyman Beecher “represents the New England establishment responding with vigor to the new empire beyond the Hudson.” He asserted that securing Christianity in the West “is as grand an undertaking as it was to plant it in the Roman Empire, with

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116 The entire text of the Northwest Ordinance (July 13, 1787) can be found at http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/nworder.asp (accessed 12/22/2013).

117 Donald G. Tewksbury, The Founding of American College and Universities before the Civil War (New York: Columbia University Press 1932), 68. “[Denominational] colleges were to serve as the outposts of an army of occupation of the advancing forces of religion that now arrayed themselves in deadly warfare against the forces of evil that were felt to be incarnate in the rude frontier population . . . Among the denominations that stood for an educated ministry and were very early in the field of higher education were the Congregationalists, Presbyterians, Episcopalians, Catholics, Lutherans, German Reformed, Dutch Reformed, and the Unitarians” (72-73, 89).

unspeakably greater permanence and power.”\textsuperscript{119} He called for “a Bible for every family, a school for every district, and a pastor for every thousand souls.” On the surface, this seems to be an admirable exhortation, but there are various troubling undercurrents roiling beneath his words. One of the currents was the conflation of the mission project with the education project. Another current was the desire to stave off Catholic encroachment in the new territory. As Lloyd Jorgenson explains:

“While the missionaries were organizing entrepreneurial and Sunday schools, they were at the same time promoting public schools, and they saw no incompatibility in these various endeavors. All would contribute to the spread of true Christianity—and the containment of Catholicism—in the West.”\textsuperscript{120}

In 1832, Lyman Beecher moved his family from Litchfield (CT) to Cincinnati (OH) to serve as President of Lane Theological Seminary.\textsuperscript{121} Lyman Beecher’s \textit{Plea for the West}, initially given as a sermon in various cities and published in 1832, argued that the “religious and political destiny of the nation” would be determined in the Northwest Territory, and the central weapon for both sides was education. Let us turn to the text as a case study of prevailing Protestant sentiment of American exceptionalism.

Beecher opens with an epigraph from the Bible: “Who hath heard such a thing? Who hath seen such things? Shall the earth be made to bring forth in one day? Or shall a nation be born at once? For as soon as Zion travailed, she brought forth her children” (Isaiah 66:8, KJV). Following others who viewed the United States as the “new Israel,” Beecher explains: “I consider the text as a prediction of the rapid and universal extension


\textsuperscript{121} He also founded numerous voluntary organizations dedicated to Christianity and social reform: American Bible Society, American Educational Society, American Sunday School Union, American Tract Society, and American Society for the Promotion of Temperance.
of civil and religious liberty, introductory to the triumphs of universal Christianity.” He cites Jonathan Edwards, who was of the opinion “that the millennium would commence in America.” Beecher then moves to an encomium for the young nation, asserting that it is the only nation capable of reforming itself with “physical effort and pecuniary and moral power” such that it might “evangelize the world.” Despite America’s divine providential destiny “to lead the way in the moral and political emancipation of the world,” this praise is immediately paired with an exhortation: “it is time she understood her high calling, and were harnessed for the work.”

If America is to secure “civil and religious prosperity,” it will require “universal education, and moral culture, by institutions commensurate to that result: the all-pervading influence of schools, and colleges, and seminaries, and pastors, and churches.” The health of the growing nation will entail “the nurture of schools . . . to rear it up to a glorious and unperverted manhood.” Beecher reminds the audience that

in all ages, religion, has been the former of man’s character and the mainspring of his action . . . It has been the great agitator or tranquilizer of nations, the orb or darkness or of light to the world, the fountain of purity or pollution, the mighty power of riveting or bursting the chains of men.

He notes that all attempts to bring “colleges and schools into being without the intervening influence of religious education and moral principle, and habits of intellectual culture which spring up in alliance with evangelical institutions, have failed.” He warns against allowing the pursuit of wealth “to outrun our literary and religious institutions,” as the latter will not catch up once overtaken, and “we will perish by our own prosperity.” Thriving schools need both books and teachers, instructors who are pious and skilled, not

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123 Beecher, *Plea for the West*, 13 and 17. Why the shift from feminine to masculine pronouns? Is the concept that the young nation is female, but the fully grown nation will be male?
those teachers who floundered in the East, as some groups were sending, because they will fail even more miserably in the West.\textsuperscript{124} Success will demand the work of the pioneering people who are settling the West territory in partnership with support from those living in the already-established and thriving East, though Beecher is certain that in a short while, the West will be able to educate its own and stand on its own two feet. It is ironic that after cautioning against an economic focus, Beecher uses monetary images of speedy return on investment to incite the help of the East:

Considering, too, how quickly and how cheaply the guarantee of a perpetual and boundless prosperity can be secured. The West needs but a momentary aid, when almost as soon as received, should it be needed, she will repay and quadruple both principle and interest.\textsuperscript{125}

Fifty pages into his discourse, Beecher warns that there is a sense of urgency to this project, “for there is a tide in human things which waits not, moments on which the destiny of a nation balances, when the light dust may turn the right way or the wrong.” He assures his audience that “a slight effort now may secure what ages of repentance cannot recover when lost.” The primary threat arises from people with “uneducated minds” which leads to “educated vice,” because “the safety of our republic depends upon the intelligence, and moral principle, and patriotism” of the nation. Beecher goes on to warn that this danger from uneducated minds is augmented daily by the rapid influx of foreign emigrants, the greater part unacquainted with our institutions, unaccustomed to self-government, inaccessible to education, and easily accessible to prepossession, and inveterate credulity, and intrigue, and easily embodied and wielded by sinister design.

\textsuperscript{124} Beecher, \textit{Plea for the West}, 22-24, 32, and 77. “No opinion is more false and fatal than that mediocrity of talent and learning will suffice for the West. That if a minister is a good sort of a man, but somehow does not seem to be popular, and find employment, he had better go to the West. No- let him stay at home; and if among the urgent demands for ministerial labor here, he cannot find employment, let him conclude that he has mistaken his profession. But let him not go to the West. The men who, somehow, do not succeed at the East, are the very men who will succeed still less at the West” (25-26).

\textsuperscript{125} Beecher, \textit{Plea for the West}, 39.
Initially, having shores wide open to immigration was not a problem, but now the “native population” is being inundated and may soon be outnumbered.\footnote{Beecher, \textit{Plea for the West}, 47-52. There is a footnote to this paragraph which reads as follows: “* Our language precludes any reference in these remarks to intelligent, virtuous, and industrious emigrants; nor do we fail to appreciate the many high minded and valuable citizens among this class. Neither are we unmindful of the rapid advance of internal improvements from the physical aid of the poor. But the excellence and intelligence and value of a portion, do not avert the danger to be apprehended from the ignorant and vicious; and the good derived from internal improvements can never be an offset for the moral and political evils which threaten our permanent prosperity and liberty.” I find myself wondering if this caveat was offered out loud during his public orations of this material.}

And it is here that the Catholic specter casts a shadow. Beecher asks a hypothetical question, wondering what it would mean if this tide of people is rolling in “at the bidding of the powers of Europe hostile to free institutions, and associated in holy alliance to arrest and put them down?” Beecher says that up to three-fourths of the people entering in these foreign waves are, because of their religion, under “the control of the potentates of Europe as if they were an army of soldiers, enlisted and officered, and spreading over the land.” They represent the unholy union of European church and state on American soil. Although Protestant ministers neither could nor would wield influence over the views and votes of their adherents, Catholic clergy “have almost unlimited power over the conscience as it respects the performance of every civil or social duty.” And, most disturbingly “the Catholic system is adverse to liberty, and the clergy to a great extent are dependent on foreigners opposed to the principles of our government.” If they were to vote as a bloc, Catholics could “decide our elections, perplex our policy, inflame and divide the nation, [and] break the bond of our union.”\footnote{Beecher, \textit{Plea for the West}, 52, 56, 60-62.}

Here, Beecher pauses to clarify his position and concerns. He is not afraid of the Catholic denomination if it were separated from European principalities. He welcomes a
battle of doctrines in the public arena, and takes the side of American Calvinism. Although some have denounced it as “a severe, unsocial, self-righteous, uncharitable, exclusive, prosecuting system dealing damnation round the land,” Beecher spends no small amount of space defending the Calvinistic system, which “has always been on the side of liberty in its struggles against arbitrary power” as it “fought the colonial battles with Canadian Indians and French Catholics” and “laid the foundations of the republican institutions of our nation.” He includes himself in the Calvinist worldview: “We are not annoyed by scrutiny; we seek no concealment.” Beecher is confident that a close study of the facts will indicate not only that Calvinism has prevailed in America’s history, but also that it will continue to do so. It offers a solid foundation for the republic.

If Catholics are willing to assimilate fully via “common schools and republican institutions,” then they are welcome. He does not want their civil or religious rights violated, and he asserts that they should be given the same legal protections (e.g., property and personal liberty) as other naturalized citizens. He condemns the burning of an Ursuline convent in Massachusetts (August 1834) by those who considered themselves Protestant patriots. For Beecher, the weapons of choice are not torches and violence, but “the overcoming influence of Christian enterprise and Christian love.”

This peaceful vision of beloved community would be possible if Catholics regarded themselves as one Christian denomination among many, with all entitled to equal rights and privileges. But alas, they believe they are “the only church of Christ” outside of which no one can be saved, that heresy against that church is a capital offense, that the infallibility of the Pope should be enforced by civil power, and that it is to him

128 Beecher, Plea for the West, 68.
they swear their primary allegiance. It is the union of church and state “which never
existed without corrupting the church and enslaving the people” that Beecher fears and is
striving to prevent. This is no weak foe. Rather,

it is the energy of an absolute spiritual dominion in corrupt alliance with political
despotism displaying their perverting power and acting out their own nature. It is
the most skillful, powerful, dreadful system of corruption to those who wield it
and of debasement and slavery to those who live under it, which ever spread
darkness and desolation over the earth.

Beecher argues that it is out of “self-preservation” that he brings these things to light. Not
to expose them would be “treason” against the nation. Not heeding the information would
be “folly.”

He eventually returns to the topic of education, responding to the contention that
Catholics have agreed not to interfere with the religion of their Protestant pupils. Here,
Beecher displays an awareness of the power of context (place and practices). The “known
opinions and kind attentions of instructors . . . [and] the constant familiarity with their
example and religious instruction” cannot help but be influential, not to mention the
Catholic prayers, ceremonies, and forms of worship in which the Protestant students
regularly take part are sure to undermine their faith: “you may as well suspend the
attraction of gravity, or intercept the connection between cause and effect, as to prevent
the adverse action of a Catholic education on the minds of Protestant children.” Even if
Catholics do not deliberately desire such influence, “fire will burn, and poisons destroy,
independent of the malignant purpose in the application.” Notice the educational theory
at work here. Religious formation of this sort is caught, not taught. It is in the water of the
Catholic schools and need not be made visible. In an inverse parallel to Catholics in

\[129 \text{ Beecher, } \textit{Plea for the West}, 69-71, 78, \text{ and } 142.\]
common schools and an anachronistic echo of Eisner’s null curriculum, Beecher notes “the entire absence of all Protestant books touching religion, . . . the action of everything Protestant is suspended, and the active, universal, constant action becomes Catholic.”

And why are Protestant children in Catholic schools when Catholic parents would never allow the reverse? Partly because the Catholics have found ways to make their schools “cheap” or free for Protestant youth. Surely this is by design, he muses. Catholics know that their schools are “as wisely and powerfully adapted to do this [convert Protestant students] as a system of means can be; and by long experience they know and admit and exult in it that it produces just this effect, and call upon their European friends to aid them.” Beecher tries to shake people out of their sleep on this subject, because

Nothing fills the Catholics with such amazement and high hopes as the simple-hearted credulity and recklessness of Protestants, in committing their children to their forming hand; and nothing certainly can be more wonderful or more fatal in its influence on our republican institutions.

He does not underestimate the cunning and skill of the European Catholics, who send “swarm upon swarm” of immigrants to America to live in “an insulated condition, as strangers of another tongue” who are prejudiced against Protestants, obedient to their priests, and averse to direct reading of and instruction in the Bible. While Protestant children are heedlessly sent to Catholic schools, members of these Catholic enclaves watch over their children “with a vigilance that never sleeps,” keeping them away from “our republican common schools” and from “Protestant worship,” and from such alliances of relationship that could subvert papal influence. All of these elements make assimilation to American citizenship nearly impossible for Catholics.

130 Beecher, Plea for the West, 97-101.
131 Beecher, Plea for the West, 104.
132 Beecher, Plea for the West, 114 and 126-127.
Then Beecher turns to question his audience, asking whether a Protestant can “covenant to train up his children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, and then deliver them over to a Catholic education, and not violate his vow?” A similar concern is raised by Dutch immigrants when recalling the vows they take upon the baptism of children and then deciding which schools their children should attend. Though Beecher shares their Calvinism, he would not appreciate their selection of a sectarian, private school.

The last section of Beecher’s sermon strives to answer the question: What is to be done? First, there must be courtesy and charity toward immigrants, including those who are Catholics, but there also must be governmental limits on “the influx of immigrant paupers” and tighter regulations on who is allowed to become a citizen. Second, the native (Protestant) populace must educate itself, and for this a book “containing the authentic documents of the Catholic church” is crucial, especially making it accessible to “ministers and intelligent laymen of all denominations.” Finally, what is most needed is education because it “is the point on which turns our destiny, of terrestrial glory and power, or of shame and everlasting contempt, and short is the period of our probation.” If Protestants do not provide schools for “effectual education of the children of the nation, it is perfectly certain that the Catholic powers of Europe intend to make up the deficiency,” the end result of which would be “a Catholic nation.”

Fifteen years after Lyman Beecher’s “Plea for the West,” Horace Bushnell offers a clarifying corrective with his 1847 speech, “Barbarism the First Danger.” He begins by naming the problem, which in the case of westward expansion is that it “involves a

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134 Beecher, *Plea for the West*, 175, 180, 182, and 185.
tendency to social decline” and a potential “relapse toward barbarism,” because when there is transplantation, “a considerable portion of that vital force which is the organic and conserving power of society” is uprooted. And yet “we are a people trying out the perils incident to a new settlement of the social state” with our “religion passing out into the wilds of nature with us, to fortify law, industry and good manners.” Bushnell agrees with Beecher that the spread of “Romanism” is a problem, but he acknowledges that there are people “brought up in Romanism” who manage to become socially-advanced and free-minded, even if they must do so “through the gate of superstition.” The threat of burgeoning “Romanism” is the multiplication of those who “have no private judgment to lose” and who bow to superstition in their search for God. He asserts that human beings are innately religious, and if they cannot “come to God through intelligence,” they will worship the God of their imagination.

For Bushnell, the American exemplar of the “wide and terrible sway” that superstition has over the mind is not Catholicism, but “the great Mormon city and temple [which] rise as visible proof” in the new territories. According to Bushnell, American westward-migration is fueled by “personal interest and adventure” rather than by religion, and its waves of enterprising fortune-seekers carry with it not the “homogeneous or well educated people” of established New England cities, but instead “such hordes of

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135 Horace Bushnell. Barbarism the First Danger: A Discourse for Home Missions. (New York: William Osborn, 1847), 6. His example of an “emigrant family of the Saxon race” already fallen to barbarism are the Dutch Boers in South Africa: “they are scarcely less wild in their habits than the Hottentots themselves. They subsist by pasture, roving from place to place. Lynch law and private revenge are the principal methods of redressing injuries. Their habits are filthy. Their women do the work. Education is forgotten, and the cruelties they practice in their sanguinary wars are such as resemble them to beasts of prey. They are now a race of nominally Christian barbarians—barbarians under the synod of Dort, a standing proof that Protestants, and they too of the Saxon blood, may drop out of civilization, and take their place on the same level of ignorance and social brutality with the barbarous tribes of the earth” (23)

136 Horace Bushnell. Barbarism the First Danger, 4-6, 24.
foreigners, as the over-populated countries of Europe are obliged to spare—men of all habits, characters and religions—and these it pours along in a promiscuous flood, to people the new world”\textsuperscript{137} For Bushnell, the first and most pressing danger in the “new world” is Barbarism:

for if we must have a wild race of nomads roaming over the vast western territories of our land—a race without education, law, manners or religion—we need not trouble ourselves further on account of Romanism; for to such a people, Romanism, bad as it is, will come as a blessing.

The different “languages, laws, manners and religion” of these emigrants make misunderstanding, instability, social decline, and violence more likely. Our country must maintain a condition of peace in order to insure social progress: “War is the proper work only of barbarians—the bane, therefore, of all social order and virtue.” Therefore, it is not a crusade against Barbarism or Romanism that is required, but “genial showers” of righteousness and “the tranquility of love.” Bushnell agrees with Beecher that Christian love is better than violence and that the “strong pillars of high Calvinism” initially held up our country, offering the best “foundation for a grand, massive character in religion,” but he suggests that God now means to move toward unity with “the broader compass of a more catholic and genial spirit.” Our nation is knit together with “Christians of other names and other creeds” and so we cannot “spend our strength upon exclusive and distinctive dogmas,” but must proceed with comprehensive unity, lest we degrade into war with each other and eventual mutually-assured self-destruction.\textsuperscript{138}

The way to overcome violence and ignorance is through education. Bushnell avers that this will be an uphill battle as “a very large portion of the western” settlements

\textsuperscript{137} Horace Bushnell. *Barbarism the First Danger*, 17.
\textsuperscript{138} Horace Bushnell. *Barbarism the First Danger*, 7, 27, and 30-31.
are already so far gone “as to make a pride of ignorance,” and even to decry education as an over-genteel accomplishment.”\(^{139}\) Despite the challenge, Bushnell calls for public schools that are “created and supported principally by the people for whose benefit they exist,” and the provision of “a talented and educated body of Christian teachers” who will foray into the wilderness. This is part of the vision held by American Home Missions; education is “the first and sublimest Christian duty which the age lays upon us . . . Nothing but religion, a ligature binding society to God, can save it.” Bushnell’s discourse against Barbarism was, in fact, published for dissemination by the American Home Missionary Society, which was “hovering over Michigan, Indiana, Illinois, Wisconsin and Iowa” with the capacity to bring religion and civilization.\(^{140}\) This is the ground on which Dutch immigrants to the Northwest Territory would walk less than a decade later.

**Michigan: John Davis Pierce and John Milton Gregory, Superintendents of Public Instruction**

“*Education is the great business of human life . . . Every human being has a right to a good education . . . A perfect school system must have a living soul and the teachers are its life and vital energy, its pervading, animating spirit.*”\(^{141}\)

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\(^{139}\) Horace Bushnell. *Barbarism the First Danger*, 22. Even more troubling to Bushnell is the realization that “a considerable portion of the new west has a social and historical connexion with slavery . . . [which] is an essentially barbarous institution . . . [having] the perpetual distinction of barbarism, that is has no law of progress . . . Slavery is a condition against nature; the curse of nature therefore is on it . . . It produces a condition of ease which is not the reward of labor” As he turns to what should be done, he exhorts the nation to get rid of slavery: “It aggravates every bad tendency we suffer. We cannot, as American Christians, be at peace with it longer. Not forgetting the moderation that belongs to every just cause, we must lift our voices against it, and must not desist from all proper means to secure its removal, till the work is done” (18 and 27).


\(^{141}\) Quotations from Pierce’s educational writings, found in Charles O. Hoyt and R. Clyde Ford. *John D. Pierce, Founder of the Michigan School System; A Study of Education in the Northwest* (Ypsilanti, MI: The Scharf tag, label & box Co, 1905), 151. The act to establish a normal school in Michigan became a law in 1849, but the first such school did not open until 1852 in Ypsilanti.
Michigan became a separate territory in 1805 and the 26th state in 1837. Its early development as a state included a strong focus on education. The first law relating to schools in Michigan was enacted in 1809. It provided for outlining school districts, getting numbers of children between the ages of four and eighteen in those districts, and levying an annual tax of $2-4 for each child. Each school district was required to write an annual report outlining construction and operation costs. In 1827, a law was passed in the Michigan territory that was similar to the Massachusetts ordinance of 1647: every township containing fifty families was required to support a school. In 1828, the law was further amended by providing for the appointment, by the governor, of a superintendent of common schools. The Constitution of 1835 [Michigan’s first] is notable in our nation’s history for its promotion of “Intellectual, Scientifical, and Agricultural improvement” and its provision for the appointment of a permanent Superintendent of Public Instruction.\footnote{Lloyd Jorgenson argues that Michigan’s first state constitution of 1835 was “distinctly secular in tone.” He points to the wording of Article I, section 5, which provided that “No money shall be drawn from the treasury for the benefit of religious societies or theological or religious seminaries.” He notes that in 1842, the Detroit Board of Education excluded the use of the Bible in public schools. After protests, the Board revised the exclusion in 1845, issuing a regulation permitting the reading of either the Douay or the King James Version without note or comment. After the state election of 1852, the tide shifted toward Protestant influence, and resolutions calling for Bible reading and daily prayers in the schools were regularly adopted at the meetings of the Michigan State Teachers’ Association. Lloyd P. Jorgenson, \textit{The State and the Public School: 1825-1925}. (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1987), 101-103.} Under the leadership of a prominent New England transplant, John D. Pierce, a system of district libraries, township boards of school inspectors, and a primary school fund based upon money raised through the sale of lands was established.\footnote{See Michigan Manual, Chapter 1: Michigan History (2001-2002: 3-26). www.legislature.mi.gov. Historians also note the importance of Isaac E. Crary, who was born “of good Puritan stock” in Preston, CT in 1804. He became a lawyer and moved to Marshall, MI in 1832. Crary headed the education committee of the state’s inaugural constitutional convention in 1835.}

John Davis Pierce was born in New Hampshire in 1797. The biographers Charles O. Hoyt and R. Clyde Ford describe Pierce as having “a deep seriousness” and a
“thoughtful, studious bent of mind,” which “made him susceptible to religious impressions, and at the age of eighteen or so he passed through that soul experience which is termed ‘conversion’ . . . The result of this conversion was to beget within him two ambitions, namely, to acquire more education, and finally to become a minister of the gospel.” He graduated from Brown University in 1822, and he attended Princeton Theological Seminary, but only briefly, as relations with the seminary president soured after Pierce wrote an essay “which betrayed an unwillingness to accept certain features of Calvinistic theology.” He was ordained as a Congregationalist minister and then appointed by the American Home Missionary Society to work in Illinois or Michigan as a missionary in 1831. Pierce initially intended to settle in Chicago, “but on his preliminary trip he was so attracted to Marshall (MI), after staying there some three months, that he determined to return east for his family and settle there.”144

Pierce received the appointment as Michigan Superintendent of Public Instruction in 1836, a position he held for five years, and he started The Journal of Education. It was issued monthly and continued for two years: “The highest sentiment pervades every sentence and here [in the journal], as in no other place, does Mr. Pierce show his firm belief in the home and school as the two institutions which should care for the religious teaching of children.”145 There are only a few brief mentions of Horace Mann in its pages. Pierce decided to go east to study the operation of schools. He met with John A. Dix, Secretary of State and Superintendent of Common Schools in New York, and he

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attended the American Institute of Instruction held in Worcester, MA in 1836. Hoyt and Ford suggest that “if Mr. Pierce met Horace Mann at this time and it is doubtful, it was surely at this meeting.” To set the record straight, Hoyt and Ford assert:

And as to being an imitator of Horace Mann the reverse is much more likely to have been the case. Mr. Pierce’s appointment to office preceded Mr. Mann’s by almost a year; and the report in which he outlined his proposed system of education for the state was issued two years before Mr. Mann’s first annual report. He also began the publication of the *Journal of Education* a year before the appearance of *The Common School Journal* in Massachusetts.¹⁴⁶

Michigan’s first superintendent of public schools coordinated the state’s elementary schools, set professional qualifications for teachers, and sold public land for public education. Both Pierce and Mann shaped the educational frontier of the growing nation, but despite his deeply-held faith convictions, Pierce’s primary focus was logistical rather than religious.¹⁴⁷

A few decades later, John Milton Gregory became the Superintendent of Public Instruction for the State of Michigan, a position he held from 1859-1864. His views on the relationship between religion and education were formed at Union College, the first interdenominational Protestant college in the United States.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁶ The two mentions: “In Number 12 of Vol. 1 of the Journal in speaking of some periodicals devoted to the cause of education, we read: ‘Common School Journal, edited by Horace Mann, and published at Boston. First number just issued.’ In the same number we also read: ‘A weekly course of lectures has been commenced in Boston by some of the most distinguished friends of education and chiefly practical instructors. Among them are the Rev. Jacob Abbot and Horace Mann, Esq., Secretary of the Board of Education.’” Hoyt and Ford. *John D. Pierce*, 83, 127, and 149.

¹⁴⁷ Pierce also shaped the racialized frontier. In 1847, he was elected to the Michigan State House of Representatives. “As chairman of the committee on federal relations, Mr. Pierce was instrumental in passing a resolution instructing the Michigan delegation in Congress to oppose the introduction of slavery into the territories. . . He was always uncompromisingly opposed to slavery, and many documents and public addresses testify to this; but he believed some other settlement of the question other than by the sword was possible, and he deprecated the national policy and war.” Hoyt and Ford. *John D. Pierce*, 132.

¹⁴⁸ Union College was “the product of religious cooperation between members of the Dutch Reformed Church and the mainstream evangelical denominations . . . Episcopalians were welcome, but Roman Catholics, Jews, and non-believers would have been uncomfortable in its abounding Protestant culture . . . From an emphasis on commonalities, the officers, faculty, and students were to create a harmonious, religious society whose members were free to develop their talents in order to improve
started Detroit Commercial College, Gregory moved to Michigan with his family and taught in its literary division. During this time (1853), he wrote a series of articles for a Baptist newspaper called *Christian Union* in which he argued against sectarian divisions within Christianity and asserted that “progress toward social perfection could only be achieved by searching for common ground in principle and avoiding divisive issues in practice.”

In the *School Laws of Michigan*, published in 1864 under the guidance of Superintendent Gregory, religion comes up in two distinct places: qualifications of teachers and text selections for libraries. According to the law, if “a person openly derides all religion, he ought not to be a teacher of youth,” in part because such a person “would be considered a grievance by a great portion of the inhabitants of all the [school] districts.” District libraries are not solely for children, but also for adults who have finished their common school education. Books should be selected with the utmost care:

> Works imbued with party politics, and those of a sectarian character, or hostility to a Christian religion, should on no account be admitted; and if they are accidentally received they should be immediately removed … The exclusion of works imbued to any perceptible extent with sectarianism, rests upon the great conservative principles which are at the foundation of our free institutions … It is said that under the above rules, heresy and error are put on the same footing with true religion—that Protestant and Catholic, orthodox and unorthodox, themselves and—after they graduated—the wider society. What was not tolerated was ‘irreligion’”

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Wakefield explains that Gregory’s vision was “evangelical” in that it applied to all Protestant denominations and “millennial” in that it was meant to improve society and hasten the millennial reign of Jesus. Gregory joined the Michigan State Teachers’ Association (MSTA) and became the first editor of *The Michigan Journal of Education and Teachers’ Magazine* in 1854.

150 “In judging the moral character of a candidate for teacher, if the examining officers know of any serious imputation or defect of principle, it is their duty to refuse to certify. . . Every person has a right to the enjoyment of his own religious belief without molestation; and the examining officer should content himself with inquiries to the moral character of the teacher, leaving him to the same liberal enjoyment of his religious belief that he asks for himself.” From *The school laws of Michigan: with notes and forms: to which are added courses of study for common and graded schools, and a list of recommended text books, &c.* Published by authority. John M. Gregory, superintendent of public instruction. Michigan. Lansing, Mich.: John A. Kerr & co., 1864: 161. Italics are original. http://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015071235512
Universalist, Unitarian, Jew, and even Mormon, derive the same immunity! The fact is conceded; and it is averred that each is equally entitled to it, in a government whose very constitution avows the principle of a full and indiscriminate religious toleration.\textsuperscript{151}

Notice Gregory’s desire to cultivate religious tolerance and to protect religious dissent as democratic values. But avoiding sectarian controversy does not mean avoiding religion altogether. In his 1864 annual report, Gregory wrote about the non-sectarian Christian character of public schools. He asserts that religion is an essential component of education:

If the Christian theory of human history be a great verity—if the Divine Being is ruling human affairs in the interest of His own coming kingdom—then it is absurd for mankind to attempt to keep His truth out of their schools, and pretend to train for mere human uses, natures that he has expressly fashioned for divine ends… Shylock’s sentence to cut away a pound of flesh next the heart without taking a drop of blood, was nothing to the task of the educator who is condemned to train the soul of a child and leave his religious nature untouched for either good or evil.

He goes on to argue that as education evolves, it must become increasingly religious or it will fail, and he offers the example of the golden age of Greek art and eloquence paired with its subsequent downfall. Next, he reminds the reader that religious instruction need not be sectarian, because the “sacred world may be read,” assuring us of God’s existence and power. Divine providence and governance may be taught “without approaching those debatable grounds where sects divide.” This instruction will offend none but “the atheist, or the heathen.” Finally, Gregory asserts that “the popular feeling against religious instruction in public schools is neither so deep nor so general as is sometimes thought.” In fact, most schools read the Bible and pray daily “without opposition but with public approval, both of professors and non-professors of religion.” Notice how similar this

\textsuperscript{151} ibid.
sounds to Horace Mann’s arguments for universal support of nonsectarian religion offered in common schools, but Gregory goes further:

Happily in our age and land all the great lines of popular thought are converging Godward . . . If the Bible is a divine truth and not a mere dream, and the world be predestined to Christianity; if the history of the last eighteen centuries has any true significance in it, then the last age of the world must be religious and Christian, and education must conform to, if it does not lead, the general movement . . . I close my official work in the assured hope that Universal Christian Education is the coming heritage as it is the culminating glory of the human family.

This universalizing hope mirrors the Progressive Era and the Social Gospel movement, coming to the forefront of American Christianity at the time.

The United States Department of Education was established in 1867. In order to be readmitted to the Union, southern states had to agree to offer free, public schools open to all, which they all did by 1870. As attention turned from the Civil War and Reconstruction, more states began passing compulsory attendance laws. Michigan’s first compulsory attendance law was passed in 1871, and it required youth aged eight to fourteen to be in school for at least 12 weeks each year, but it had little impact. In the same year, the Republican Party kicked off a national “public school crusade.”

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155 Ward McAfee, “Reconstruction Revisited.” Civil War History. Volume 42, No. 2 (June 1996): 133-153. The Kalamazoo School Case of 1873 was a suit filed by property owners in the city who wanted to prevent the school board from funding the high school with tax money. Their case rested on the fact that Kalamazoo had established its first high school in 1858 before the Michigan legislature passed a law in 1859 that authorized school districts of more than 200 school-age children to elect school board to govern
1874, the Michigan Supreme Court established the legality of levying taxes for secondary schools. The effect was profound: the number of high schools in Michigan increased from 107 in the early 1870s to 278 by 1890.

McAfee argues that this push for public education had both racialized and anti-Catholic roots, evident in the 1889 Bennett Law in Wisconsin, which established compulsory education for all youth aged seven to fourteen. McCluskey notes that what made the law especially problematic and contentious was its stipulations that all schools be approved by local boards of education, that all children attend schools within the boundaries of their public school district, and that all instruction be in English. German Catholics and Lutherans rallied for the repeal of this law, which they got in 1891.

County to vote against the amendment. United States Commissioner of Education, Philander P. Claxton, offered a qualified defense of private schools in 1919:

We believe in the public school system. It is the salvation of our democracy; but the private schools and colleges have been the salvation of the public schools. These private institutions have their place in our educational system. They prevent it from becoming autocratic and arbitrary and encourage its growth along new lines.

Although public schools were given primacy, Claxton argued that private schools would keep the public system from stagnating or from becoming a totalitarian educational regime. A letter from Claxton was read at a meeting in Detroit just before the 1920 Michigan election. He asserted that freedom to establish private schools and to send children to non-public schools “is in thorough accord with our principles of American democracy and should be maintained,” but it is the duty of the state to make sure that all schools which children are permitted to attend “are substantially as good as the public schools,” and “all schools, whether public or private, should be required to give instruction in English.”

Across the state of Michigan, various religious groups worked together to protect the right of private schooling, including Roman Catholics, Lutherans, Episcopalians, Seventh-Day Adventists, and the Dutch Reformed. Calvin College professor B.K. Kuiper reported that nearly $10,000 had been raised to finance the efforts of the Christian Reformed Church committees who were fighting the amendment. The same news article

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157 These words were cited in various places, including Pies, 238 and in the Grand Rapids Press October 9, 1920, but there was no specific citation of where and when the Commissioner of Education offered them.

158 “Claxton Letter Read at Meeting.” Grand Rapids Press 23 October 1920, 14. On a practical note, Grand Rapids Superintendent of Schools, William A. Greeson noted that parochial schools in his jurisdiction had an average enrollment “from 32 to 34 percent of the public school enrollment” so costs would increase by 1/3 and overcrowding would be a likely result if those students were absorbed into public schools. “Head of Public System Against Parochial Issue.” Grand Rapids Press, October 5, 1920, 2.
also noted that “pupils of practically every parochial school in Grand Rapids are
distributing anti-amendment literature.” The *Grand Rapids Press* reported that Rev.
Edward J. Tanis, Pastor of First Christian Reformed Church of Grand Rapids, published a
piece in *The Banner* articulating his rationale against the amendment, including its
inherent conflict with the fourteenth amendment of the United States Constitution. He
went on to write that if the amendment passed, private schools would not close until the
“supporters of these free school have been killed and the buildings burned down.” In his
estimation, Roman Catholic, Lutherans, and Calvinists have proven themselves willing
and able to fight for “liberty of conscience and religious freedom.”

On November 2, 1920, Michigan voters defeated the proposal by almost two to
one: 610,999 against and 353,817 for it. Quashed in the 1920 election, but undaunted
by Public Act 302 (1921), the Wayne County Civic League reorganized as the Public
School Defense League and secured enough signatures to have the same amendment
placed on the ballot in 1924. In this attempt, the PSDL was supported by Baptist and
Methodist clergy, and by the KKK; Americanization and anti-Catholicism make strange
voting-booth-fellows. In November 1924, Michigan voters again rejected the compulsory
public education referendum by a margin of almost two to one.

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159 “Religious Bodies are Battling Ban on Schools.” *Grand Rapids Press*, October 9, 1920, 2.
161 Pies, 231. Cf. “Religious Bodies are Battling Ban on Schools.” *Grand Rapids Press* 9 October
1920, pg. 2. Kent County voted 30, 735 against and 23, 494 in favor, “the biggest ever [vote] cast in Kent
county on any question.” “Kent Against School Issue in Huge Vote” *Grand Rapids Press*, November 3,
1920, 1.
162 Michigan Act 302 of 1921: An act to provide for the supervision of private, denominational
and parochial schools; to provide the manner of securing funds in payment of the expense of such
supervision; to provide the qualifications of the teachers in such schools; and to provide for the
302-of-1921.html
163 Ross, William G. “Pierce after Seventy-Five Years: Reasons to Celebrate.” University of
School Campaigns in Michigan 1920-1924*. 

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Now what we have explored the American educational landscape from the Northeast, the Midatlantic, and into the Northwest Territory, let us turn our attention to Dutch Reformed migration into the Midwest and their development of private, Calvinist schools.
Chapter Two: Dutch Reformed Church, State, School (Netherlands and America)

It is better to be free, if it is possible. I am happy that now I can say to the Separatist congregations in the Netherlands which now enjoy only partial liberty and none at all in the education of their children, “Come here and enjoy this good land of liberty.”

In chapter one, we explored the American educational context: public schools, private schools, westward expansion. The focus of this chapter is on the complex dynamics between Church, State, and School in parallel contexts: Netherlands and America. For each of these settings, we will address denominational splits, tensions with government, and the development of schools for Dutch Reformed folks.

Netherlands: State and Church Background

William of Orange, also known as William the Silent, was a convert to Calvinism and a leader of the Dutch revolt against Spanish Catholic rule, which set off the Eighty Years’ War in 1566 and eventually resulted in the formal independence of United Provinces of Netherlands in 1648 via the Peace of Westphalia. The Dutch Reformed Church originated during the lengthy war; its first general synod took place in 1571. For over two hundred years, the Dutch Reformed Church enjoyed a position of privilege (e.g., public officials had to be communicant members) until the Dutch Republic was overthrown by France in 1795. On July 18, 1796, the National Convention of the

1 Letter from Albertus Van Raalte to Anthony Brummelkamp dated January 30, 1847 in Hyma, 113.
2 A brief word on terminology: Although some use Holland, the name of a province (albeit the wealthiest and often the most powerful province), as a synecdoche for the country, I will use the Netherlands to refer to the country and/or the United Provinces. I will use Dutch to designate both the immigrants from Netherlands to the United States and to the native language of this people group. I am grateful for Prof. James Bratt’s assistance in clarifying these terms. See Appendix B for a map of Netherlands Provinces.
3 William of Orange was declared an outlaw by the Spanish king in 1580, and he was assassinated by Balthasar Gérard (also written as “Gerardts”) in Delft in 1584.
Netherlands decreed the separation of Church and State “on the basis of the principles of liberty, equality and fraternity.”⁴ Thereafter, the Dutch Reformed Church lost its privileged position, including its exclusive rights to public worship and ecclesiastical property.

In 1816, King William I reorganized the church and renamed it the Netherlands Reformed Church (Nederlands Hervormde Kerk or NHK).⁵ Kromminga asserts that “the government of this state-controlled Church shifted the emphasis completely from the maintenance of the truth of God and the gospel to the maintenance of the organization.”⁶ Hyma suggests that in its ecclesiastical constitution of 1816, it permitted NHK preachers and professors in state universities to ignore Calvinist creeds and canons: “No longer were they bound to adhere to the doctrines about original sin, predestination, the virgin birth of Christ, the divine inspiration of the Bible, and the atonement.”⁷ A 19th century government catechism answered “Which religion is most suitable?” with “All religions are equal in the eyes of the wise as long as their doctrines and morals are in agreement with the laws of the State.” Van Brummelen explains that the NHK valorized “tolerance, love of peace and unity, moral improvement, and the practice of virtue” over Calvinist dogmas; “Christianity was reduced to a system of rational, moral rules.” He further argues that these shifts were catalyzed by the influence of Enlightenment values, including replacing the authority of Scripture with Reason, replacing divine grace with

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⁵ Throughout this chapter, I will be using the Dutch acronyms for Netherlands churches and the English acronyms for Reformed churches in America. See Appendix C for an etymology of denominational names.
⁷ Albert Hyma, *Albertus C. Van Raalte and his Dutch Settlements in the United States* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1947), 17
ethical virtue, and replacing Calvinist total depravity with the belief that humans could understand and adhere to natural law, becoming virtuous citizens.  

**Netherlands: Separation of Church from State**

_The concern for the strength of a foundation like that provided in Dort, for symbols that clearly define the orthodox faith, for a form of subscription that holds people to the statement of faith, and for an instrument of dogmatic discipline that makes it possible to deal directly and effectively with dissenters, or with people whose trend seems to be toward dissent—this has been strong in the tradition of those who are the heirs of [1834] Dutch Secession._

In the first third of the 19th century, dissent within the Netherlands Reformed Church (NHK) grew, especially among the theologically conservative members. Causes for dissent included: the introduction of hymns (not sung Psalms), the decline in doctrinal adherence by laity and pastors (e.g., lack of fidelity to canons solidified by the Synod of Dort), and movement of government-supervised schools toward neutrality in matters of religion. As in other historical examples of revival, there was a group that wanted to foment reform from within the church and a group that determined secession was the only option. In this case, the former group was called _het Réveil_ [the Awakening]. Their

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9 George Stob, *The Christian Reformed Church and Her Schools*. Princeton Theological Seminary, Th.D. Dissertation, 1955: 25. French-speaking Reformed Netherlanders, mainly from the south, were called Walloons, and by 1560, there were a number of secret congregations. Guido de Bres wrote their confession of faith in 1559. It was translated into Dutch in 1562, and after a few slight alterations, adopted by the Synod at Antwerp in 1566, known as the Belgic Confession. (Hageman, 44). At least partially in response to the threat of Arminianism within the Dutch Reformed Church, the Synod of Dordrecht (often shortened to Dort) was held from 1618-1619. During this synod, the Heidelberg Catechism and the Belgic Confession were revised, and the Canons of Dordrecht were set forth as part of the Form of Unity standards for the Reformed Church. The Synod of Dort originated the 1637 translation known as the States Bible, which influenced the development of the Dutch language (Kromminga, 36). Cf. Henry Beets, *The Christian Reformed Church in North America: Its History, Schools, Missions, Creed and Liturgy, distinctive principles and practices and its church government* (Grand Rapids: Eastern Avenue Bookstore, 1923), 17.

10 Oppewal, 9 and Beets, 21
primary concerns were inculcating piety and fostering the moral use of knowledge.\textsuperscript{11} The Réveil included leaders such as William Bilderdijk, Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer, and Justinus J.L. Van der Brugghen, and its adherents were often drawn from the upper classes of society.

The latter group, \textit{de Afscheiding} (the Separation or Secession), called for change in five areas: “the old creeds be restored; the ecclesiastical constitution be revised; the Psalms and hymns found in the Bible be considered sufficient for use in churches; the 1816 formula for the ordination of pastors be changed; that unconverted pastors turn to the faith of the primitive Christian church.”\textsuperscript{12} This group objected to the weakening of authority given to traditional confessional standards and the increasingly centralized national authority given to the NHK. Many of the leaders of this group “rejected the humanistic emphasis of the schools of higher learning,” choosing instead to focus on doctrinal orthodoxy.\textsuperscript{13} At the University of Leiden, a group of five students formed a club under the leadership of Hendrik P. Scholte to consider doctrine and church polity. When three left to be preachers in 1832, the number dwindled to two (Anthony Brummelkamp and Simon van Velzen) until they met Albertus van Raalte.

Reverend Hendrick de Cock, a pastor in the village of Ulrum (Groningen province), also became an Afscheiding leader. He gained popularity in the north for his “piety and increasing awareness of traditional Calvinist creeds.”\textsuperscript{14} He was suspended for

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  \item \textsuperscript{11} Van Brummelen suggests that this movement was related to the European religious awakenings in the 1800s, with roots “in eighteenth century Dutch pietism and in the later Genevan revival.” (21-22, 25-26, 29).
  \item \textsuperscript{12} Albert Hyma, \textit{Albertus C. Van Raalte and his Dutch Settlements in the United States} (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1947), 24.
  \item \textsuperscript{14} Van Brummelen, 23.
\end{itemize}
baptizing children of parents outside his parish, and his attacks on the use of hymns (not sung Psalms) also raised ire; he was stripped of his NHK pastorate in 1834. In their acts of secession compiled in October and November of that same year, the *Afscheiding* “registered their secession from the established Church, their loyalty to the Reformed forms of Unity, Liturgy, and Church Order, and their desire for church fellowship with all like-minded Christians.” They were open to reunion if the NHK would reject “teachings, laws, and ordinances which conflict with God’s word and the Forms of Unity which agree with that Word.”\(^\text{15}\) They made it clear that it was separation from government (its control, its secularizing influence) they sought, while continuing to desire fellowship with Reformed adherents. In 1834, with 144 members of his congregation, Rev. de Cock left the national church, founded the Netherlands Christian Reformed Church [*De Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland* or CGKN], and within two years, the new denomination counted 108 congregations with six pastors. In March 1836, the *Afscheiding* pastors held their first synod in Amsterdam, with Hendrik P. Scholte presiding and Hendrick de Cock acting as secretary. They struggled to gain official recognition as a separate denomination until 1870, by which time they counted 107,000 members with 310 congregations.\(^\text{16}\)

**Netherlands: Separation of School from State**

One of the main objections for both groups (*Réveil* and *Afscheiding*) regarded schooling. The Education Law of 1806 encouraged the establishment of schools, introduced a mandatory curriculum, and instated provincial supervision.\(^\text{17}\) In fact, it took


\(^\text{16}\) Hyma, 23-25. Cf. Kromminga, 89-90

\(^\text{17}\) However, the 1806 Act did not introduce mandatory schooling for all children: it was left to the discretion of the parents, and school attendance only became universally legally required in 1901. Michael
the main responsibility for primary education out of the hands of voluntary, charitable, or religious bodies and gave the government a monopoly. Non-public schools needed municipal government approval, which was often denied by school inspectors who were clergymen from the NHK. The agent of national instruction had central authority over all schools, and his duty was to inculcate national character and to produce rational, useful, and virtuous citizens. In terms of religious content, schools were to teach students “all social and Christian virtues” in a setting that was “generally Christian but denominationally neutral; it was to be a school with a Bible, but one where Dutch children of all faiths could meet on equal ground.”\(^{18}\) Notice the parallels to the nationalistic and ethical goals of Horace Mann’s common schooling in the United States.

On the Réveil side, Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer argued that public school’s “so-called neutrality grows into the most pernicious partiality favouring unbelief and ends in proselytism for the religion of reason and nature.”\(^{19}\) A general code of ethics with no doctrinal content was unacceptable. Religious neutrality also ran counter to Article 21 of The Rules of Church Government established in the Synod of Dort, which enjoins churches to make provisions for education and stipulates that “consistories shall see to it everywhere that there are good schoolmasters who shall not only teach the children reading, writing, languages and free arts, but also instruct them in godliness and in the

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\(^{18}\) See Article 22 of Education Act of 1806. Cf. Wintle, 270. Wintle notes that bias against Catholics, who were in a large majority from 1815 to 1830, was also an element of the 1806 Education Act.

\(^{19}\) Unbelief and Revolution, published lectures 8 and 9, qtd in Van Brummelen, 22. Van Prinsterer advocated for sectarian schools of different religions overseen by the State. Oppewal suggests that Van Prinsterer advocated for parental rather than governmental control of schools, but I have not found proof for this assertion.
Catechism.” Swierenga notes that under the 1806 law, Reformed schools that were allowed to exist lost the right to use doctrinal criteria in hiring teachers.\textsuperscript{20}

Justinus J.L. Van der Brugghen (Réveil) favored non-public interdenominational schools operated by parents. He believed that schools controlled by an association of parents would benefit children and would reduce the threat of indoctrination faced when schools were run by churches or the government. In his estimation, schools could be interdenominational because small doctrinal differences were not insurmountable. Van der Brugghen tried to address the religious elements of the curriculum, but he also sought “a more meaningful pedagogy.” Unlike the “receptacle learning” of government schools, Van der Brugghen believed that education should prepare children to apply knowledge, rather than just regurgitate rote learning. In May of 1844 in Nijmegen (Holland province), 116 pupils enrolled at a Christian school approved by the Dutch Minister of the Interior, but governed by an independent association of parents and led by Van der Brugghen. Although the school was begun to allow teachers and students to pray freely and to study Christianity in a meaningful way, enrollment included students of “diverse Protestant as well as Roman Catholic and Jewish backgrounds.”\textsuperscript{21} We will see the move toward parental control of schools in the Dutch immigrant educational policy in America, but interdenominationalism is a much later development in the Christian schools of Michigan.

In 1842 van Prinsterer and others addressed an open letter to the NHK “decrying the use of tax money for the schools they deemed ’pernicious for public morals and

\textsuperscript{21} Van Brummelen, 11-13, 25-26. Van der Brugghen served as Prime Minister of the Netherlands 1856-1858.

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happiness.’” They lobbied from 1843 to 1848 before gaining permission to start a school in The Hague. It was not until 1848 that such schools were given the constitutional right to operate freely, and by 1864, there were 267 such schools throughout the Netherlands.

The 1848 Constitution offered the following language related to Education:

1. The public education is an object of continuing care of the Government;
2. The arrangement of the public education is regulated by law with respect to everyone’s religious standards;
3. Sufficient public lower education is given everywhere in the Kingdom on account of the authorities;
4. With the exception of Government supervision, the provision of education is unrestrained and, moreover, where secondary and lower education is concerned, with the exception of the inquiry into the capability and morality of the teachers; all this to be regulated by law;
5. The King gives an annual extensive report to the States-General on the condition of higher, secondary, and lower schools.

There were three subsequent proposals for revising the Constitution offered between 1849 and 1857 that failed. The first proposed a neutral school, the second called for a general religious school, but opened the possibility of local denominational schools, and the third opted for locally-modified moral and religious schools. The fourth proposal, offering general public schools with the possibility of founding private schools, came from Van der Brugghen in 1857. Initially, the bill proposed state subsidies for confessional schools, but this was removed by a subsequent amendment. After the 1857 Education Act, known as the Schoolwetje, passed, municipal councils were given more responsibility regarding state primary schools, the state schools were still neutral, and there was no funding for confessional or denominational schools, though they could be started without consent of governmental authorities.22

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Afscheiding adherents also wanted their own schools, because they objected to the moral “neutrality” of public school curriculum. VanRaalte wrote that children “were in danger of losing ‘positive Christianity’ and asserted that “all education must be permeated with the teaching of Jesus Christ.”

As we will see in the next section, he repeated this phrase when arguing against public schools in America and trying to cultivate private, Reformed schools in his Michigan colony. Seceders met with governmental resistance when they tried to organize privately owned and operated schools. In Smilde, a town in the province of Drenthe, “a school was started the day after it was decided to form a congregation and even before a church council had been installed.” The school was closed by authorities a week later. In 1840, the Netherlands Christian Reformed Church (CGKN) synod petitioned King William II for freedom to educate children in harmony with the principles of the Word of God. The king appointed a royal commission to look at the issues, and in 1842 a decree permitted voluntary religious instruction after school hours, but did not change the country’s educational structure, leaving governmental officials (who were members of NHK) in charge of overseeing schools. Teachers from the Seceder group were fined if they taught religion, and some were excluded from the classroom.

In 1844, the squelching of private, Christian schools and the liberalism of national education standards in the Netherlands made the CGKN schools symbols “of the unjust treatment accorded the Seceders by the ‘enlightened’ majority.” This discrimination

23 Van Brummelen, 25. He repeated this phrase when arguing against public schools in America and trying to cultivate private, Reformed schools in his Michigan colony.
25 Van Brummelen, 25.
brings issues of class to the forefront, an element highlighted by historians. Van Brummelen describes the Seceders as “labourers, hired hands, small farmers and tradesmen, led by a handful of young clergy.” He goes on to say that “the rural, lower class Seceders were suspicious of culture and of all thought and belief other than that found in the traditional Calvinistic creeds.” Stob agrees that the movement “took place among the lower, uncultured classes in the Netherlands, and largely among those who were affected by the pietist strain in Dutch religious life ... [they were] concerned with a return to a fixed and prescribed orthodoxy.” Oppewal also concurs with the lower class categorization, and posits that “they were congenitally separatistic and anticultural.”

Bratt explains that the Secession of 1834 was “a forthright protest by the lower levels of Dutch society against some of the fundamental social and cultural developments of the nineteenth century,” including liberalism in education and religion. In fact, “there were significant correlations between social status and ecclesiastical direction. The ‘big farmers,’ the local aristocracy, the ‘progressive’ and ‘enlightened’ elements of society ridiculed the movement; the hired hands, the poorer farmers, and the small tradesmen (but not the destitute) composed almost its entire membership.”

The correlation between class and anti-Enlightenment conservatism is one of the shaping forces of VanRaalte’s Dutch settlement in the wilderness of Michigan, since he was one of the Afscheiding and

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27 Stob, 24. Kromminga agrees that although Seceders came “from the humbler walks of life” and were “numerically and economically weak and lacking social prestige, the group developed a spiritual power that in course of time astounded its adversaries. The spring of that power was their common love for the Reformed doctrine and their loyalty to the Reformed formularies as founded on the Word of God.” (Kromminga, D.H. The Christian Reformed Tradition: From the Reformation to the Present (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1943), 88.
most of those who emigrated with him to the United States in 1847 were Seceders from the lower classes.\textsuperscript{29}

As the CHKN denomination grew rapidly, differing visions emerged, based in part upon Netherlands geography. Swierenga summarizes it succinctly: “The northern faction had steel in their bones, while the southern party had rubber.”\textsuperscript{30} The northern element was concentrated in the provinces of Groningen, Friesland, and Drenthe, especially in the rural areas. This group was led primarily by Hendrick De Cock and Simon Van Velzen. Their priorities included a stringent defense of orthodox Dortian doctrine, starkly biblical liturgy, and synodical polity.\textsuperscript{31} The goal was to restore historic Dutch Calvinism; initially, they focused on purifying the NHK, but eventually this group embraced antithesis between themselves and the state church, becoming “stricter, narrower, and more separatistic.”\textsuperscript{32} They stressed the need for catechetical formation and

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\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{29} James D. Bratt, \textit{Dutch Calvinism in Modern America: A History of a Conservative Subculture} (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 3, 7. Bratt is careful to admonish that “Scholars and spokesmen alike have long exaggerated the Secessionist part of the emigration by concentrating almost exclusively on the group migrations between 1846 and 1856 led by Secessionist pastors, thereby coming to think that most immigrants were Seceders fleeing religious oppression. Unfortunately for this view, substantial emigration from the Netherlands began not in the years of religious persecution (1835-40) but a decade later, during a severe agricultural depression brought on by the infamous potato blight . . . less than four percent of the pre-1880 emigrants cited religious reasons for their departure, while over ninety percent declared an economic motive . . . [and yet] Seceders were far more likely to leave the country than were members of any other religious group. Between 1831 and 1877 they composed seventeen percent of all Dutch emigrants, despite the fact that in the terminal year they represented no more than five percent of the total population . . . Between 1844 and 1857 almost ten percent of all Seceders left the Netherlands for America. These represented thirty-five percent of all Dutch Protestant emigrants—proportionally more than eight times the number of other Dutch Protestants. During one brief period, 1846-49, they even constituted a strong majority (sixty-four percent) of Protestant emigrants” (8). It is the case, however, that my research focuses on the group that migrated in 1847 led by a Secessionist pastor and so the contention that they came for freedom of religion and freedom of religious education remains plausible. Cf. Van Brummelen, \textit{Telling the Next Generation}, 24.
\item \textsuperscript{31} Swierenga and Bruins, \textit{Family Quarrels in the Dutch Reformed Churches in the Nineteenth Century}, 27 and 33. Cf. Robert P. Swierenga, \textit{True Brothers}.
\item \textsuperscript{32} Stob, 28. Cf. Bratt, 7.
\end{itemize}
leaned toward separate Christian schools. The southern party was rooted in the urban, cosmopolitan centers of Noord- and Zuid-Holland, Utrecht, Noord-Brabant, Zeeland, and Ost Friesland, and it was led by Albertus Van Raalte and Anthony Brummelkamp. They stressed experiential piety and defended liberty of conscience to the point that some charged them with Arminian leanings. This group did not revel in separation from the Netherlands Reformed Church (NHK), preferring a broad-minded inclusion, but they did increasingly tend toward free-church polity.

The third Seceder contingent was an outlier faction, led by Hendrik P. Scholte, who wanted to restore the pure form of primitive Christianity in a congregational structure. Although he retained some Reformed doctrine, Scholte embraced the premillennial teaching of John N. Darby (founder of the Plymouth Brethren). Scholte rejected Dortian polity, advocating independence at the congregational level, but his focus on the conversion experience and lived piety meant he was willing to subject prospective church members to close inspection and ongoing accountability to insure purity. Although many of the leaders of the Secession were initially part of a close-knit group with Scholte at the helm, relations soured in 1840 when he was charged by Brummelkamp, Van Raalte, and DeMoen with slandering Van Velzen; Scholte was ousted from the Netherlands Christian Reformed Church (CGKN) when he refused to apologize. This separation would continue after emigration, when Scholte settled in Iowa and chose not to align with the Reformed Church in America.

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33 Swierenga & Bruins, *Family Quarrels*, 33.
35 Robert P. Swierenga, “Van Raalte and Scholte: A Soured Relationship and Personal Rivalry.” Swierenga asserts that Scholte moved increasingly to the margins with a non-confessional Christianity -- “no creed but the Bible” which eventually led to “ecclesiastical anarchy” --to use Van Raalte’s words, but he doesn’t cite the source of Van Raalte’s words.
**Netherlands: De Landverhuizing (The Nation Move)**³⁶

After leaving the national church in 1834 to found a new denomination, Dutch Seceders had to pay their own ministers and build their own churches. They endured oppression (religious, political, and economic) and were often treated as insurrectionists. They faced employment discrimination, were condemned in courts of law, fined, jailed (sometimes for failure to pay fines), had their household goods seized, and they were prohibited from gathering from 1834 until 1840 when King William II decided not to use military force to oppose them.³⁷ A national depression during this time, caused in part by a potato blight and a diminished rye crop, leading to hunger and unemployment, hit this group particularly hard since they were often from the lower classes. Economic prospects, along with freedom of worship and freedom of education were all factors pointing toward emigration. In 1846-47, about 7000 Dutch emigrants, most of whom were Seceders, left for the United States of America.

In the decade following their separation from the Netherlands Reformed Church (NHK), two of the leaders of the Netherlands Christian Reformed Church (CGKN), Anthony Brummelkamp and Albertus Van Raalte, noticed the growing number of emigrants to the United States. They formed an emigration society and held several meetings to consider carefully the possibility for and parameters of moving to the United States. On April 14, 1846, they produced a document outlining political and religious priorities, entitled *Principles of the Society for the Dutch Emigration to the United States of North America*. Article 7 of the document asserted

³⁷ Article 191 of the 1815 Constitution only offered protection to already-existing religious bodies and because Articles 291-294 of the Criminal Law forbade gatherings of more than 20 persons.
The first consideration is to make the Colony a Christian community, for which reason the Commission must take care in accepting suitable candidates for emigration and helping them to reach their destination, in order that these persons become a salting salt in the Colony and form a Christian majority among the population. For that reason only Christians will be accepted of whom we may expect that they will gladly submit themselves to the Word of God, in order that not only a Christian church government but also a Christian civil government shall be established. This will have as its task the execution of God’s commandment, which is the basis of every state.\textsuperscript{38}

This document made their hope of founding a Christian church government and a Christian civil government clear. Brummelkamp and Van Raalte also wrote a pamphlet which went through four editions in 1846 titled \textit{Emigration: Why we Favor Emigration to North America and not to Java}. In it, they explained that the government of the East Indies might prohibit the preaching of Separatist pastors and the instruction given in Christian schools, while in the United States, religious liberty was protected by the federal government. The authors also railed against the “manner in which the Christian religion was neglected or even attacked in the [Netherlands] public schools... Emigration became for them a flight from religious intolerance.”\textsuperscript{39} They hoped for religious acceptance in America.

In a letter dated May 25, 1846 and addressed to “Believers in North America,” Brummelkamp and Van Raalte made an appeal to leaders of the Reformed Church in America (which at that time was called the Reformed Protestant Dutch Church of America) for assistance with emigration. Hyma explains that the emigrants wanted to be in relationship with “their brethren in the faith who were living in that part of the United States once owned by the Dutch people and formerly called New Netherland,” though


\textsuperscript{39} Hyma, \textit{Albertus C. Van Raalte and his Dutch Settlements}, 46 and 49-51.
their intent was never to remain on the East coast, but rather to settle in one of the
Midwestern states (e.g., Iowa or Wisconsin) where they could retain their religious ideals.
Van Raalte “had his eyes fixed on a Christian settlement in a suitable climate for
Hollanders, in touch with the cultured East, near thriving cities and busy railroads. At the
same time, he wanted his people to live somewhat apart.”40 The stated objectives in the
letter included: improving the social conditions of emigrants, taking “an active part in the
propagation of God’s truth among the heathen,” living in community with other Dutch
Christians to prevent scattering, and “to enjoy the great privilege of seeing their children
instructed in Christian schools.”41 They gave the letter to Roelof Sleijster, a student of
Brummelkamp and Van Raalte, who arrived in the United States in August 1846.42 He
delivered it to Rev. I.N. Wyckoff, pastor of the Second Reformed Church in Albany, NY,
who translated it into English and published it in The Christian Intelligencer (weekly
paper of the RCA) on October 15, 1846.43 Reverend Wyckoff helped found the Protestant
Evangelical Holland Emigrant Society in Albany. A similar group was also organized in
New York City. Emissaries from these groups met the newcomers at customs; provided
temporary lodging; gave food, clothing, and money to the destitute; and even loaned

40 Hyma, Albertus C. Van Raalte and his Dutch Settlements, 54 and 87. Hyma argues that the
primary reason for separate village communities was so they could found Christian schools. Although the
desire for Christian education was a factor, I have not found ample substantiation for his claim.
Church and Her Schools. 26, 32.
42 Sleijster.com says he settled in Alto, Michigan.
43 Hyma, Albertus C. Van Raalte and his Dutch Settlements, 56. Swierenga notes that Scholte also
wrote positively about overseas emigration for Seceders, publishing it in his periodical, De Reformatie in
May 1846, but it was Van Raalte and Brummelkamp’s letter which Rev. Thomas De Witt of New York’s
Collegiate Church read shortly before visiting the Netherlands, where he met with Scholte to learn more
about the movement.” (Swierenga, “Robert P. Van Raalte and Scholte: A Soured Relationship and Personal
Rivalry.” Paper for the 1997 meeting of the Association for the Advancement of Dutch American Studies
(AADAS), Hope College, 13 June 1997 http://www.swierenga.com/Aadas_pap.html)
several thousand dollars to purchase land.”

Along with garnering financial support, RCA General Synod of 1848 “resolved in view of the great number of Hollanders coming to this country, that the students at New Brunswick Seminary should learn Dutch, to be able to preach to the newcomers in their own language.” These acts of hospitality resulted in close ties between some of the original settlers and the RCA. In an address given in 1872, Van Raalte noted the difficulties upon arrival, which were alleviated by the “loving help” of people like Thomas DeWitt, James Forrester, and Isaac Wyckoff: “To us, they truly were as angels of God.”

The affiliation between the Dutch immigrants and the RCA became an issue a few years later when the settlement in Michigan debated either joining the denomination or remaining separate.

On October 2, 1846, the Van Raalte family and 100 Dutch emigrants left for America aboard The Southerner. About half of the passengers aboard were part of VanRaalte’s group, but Brummelkamp was not among them. Van Raalte and his wife, Christina, learned English while on board, taught by Tutley Crosby, the captain of the ship. The Southerner arrived in New York on November 17. Upon arrival, they traveled from Albany to Buffalo by train and then by steamship to Detroit, Michigan.

Although VanRaalte initially planned to settle in Wisconsin, he began to have doubts

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47 Although he continued to support the emigration project, he decided to stay in the Netherlands, and in 1854, Brummelkamp became a professor of Theology at Kampen, founded in 1854. He maintained active correspondence with Van Raalte.
48 Jacobson, et al. suggest that one mode of learning was to sing American hymns, even though hymns were an issue of contention in Dutch Reformed denominations. Jacobson, Bruins, and Wagenaar, Albertus C. Van Raalte, 96. Cf. Hyma, 74.
while in Detroit when he met with numerous people who promoted the west coast of Michigan as a better settlement location.\textsuperscript{50} On December 16, 1846 he wrote “What is important is the fertility of the soil, climate, healthful conditions for the people, room and variety in the prairies and woods; and especially the means of transportation via railroad or rivers.”\textsuperscript{51} Michigan had more railroads than Wisconsin and was surrounded by lakes that provided another means of cheap transportation. West Michigan was also connected via waterways to the burgeoning cities of Chicago, Milwaukee, and Racine.

Leaving his flock in Detroit, Van Raalte went to Kalamazoo where he met Theodore Romeyn, a Presbyterian minister, and Rev. Ova Hoyt. Hoyt impressed Van Raalte as "a man of influence," and with a cordial interest in the Holland immigration, convinced him first to investigate the area of western Michigan along the Grand River, where government land was still available in large blocks. Hoyt put him in contact with Judge John Kellogg of Allegan, who owned many acres in northern Allegan County and happened to be in Kalamazoo at the time. The judge offered to show Van Raalte potential sites around Ada, Ionia, and Saugatuck.\textsuperscript{52} In a letter written to Brummelkamp dated January 30, 1847, Van Raalte wrote:

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\textsuperscript{50} “Between 1860 and 1900, more than 700,000 immigrants came to Michigan, and nearly 400,000 of these new arrivals were born in foreign countries. In fact, the state began encouraging immigrants to settle in Michigan as early as 1845, when an Office of Foreign Emigration was established in New York. In early years, the Germans and Dutch were the most sought-after groups due to their strong religious beliefs, industriousness, and education. To increase immigration, the state’s New York agent published a small pamphlet glorifying the virtues of the state.” (Michigan Manual, 14) \texttt{www.legislature.mi.gov}; Accessed 5/31/14. “By 1900, Michigan counted one-third of the Dutch-born in the USA . . . One-third of the Dutch in Michigan in 1900 lived in Grand Rapids” in “The Western Michigan Dutch” paper presented to the Holland Genealogical Society by Robert P. Swierenga, December 11, 2004.

\textsuperscript{51} Van Raalte, quoted in Hyma, \textit{Albertus C. Van Raalte and his Dutch Settlements}, 68.

\textsuperscript{52} Swierenga, “Van Raalte and Scholte: A Soured Relationship and Personal Rivalry.” Van Schelven notes that Kellogg served as a member of the State Board of Education for six years. Jacobson, et al include a letter from Judge Kellogg written July 22, 1850, after a visit to the settlement. He notes their progress and their need for a channel and roads, and he advocates for county help with both. Jacobson, Bruins, and Wagenaar, \textit{Albertus C. Van Raalte}, 48.
\end{flushleft}
With his help I examined the region around Kalamazoo, Rabbit, Black and Grand rivers. Such an exploration is by no means a simple task; on several occasions it made me completely exhausted. As a result I was unable to take more than a few steps at a time, and then I have to sit down in the snow.\footnote{Van Raalte, quoted in Hyma, *Albertus C. Van Raalte and his Dutch Settlements in the United States*, 85. Dosker notes that Van Raalte nearly died twice, once when trying “to cross a wooded stream swollen with melted snow along a log covered with ice” that suddenly rolled, and the second time while exploring when his strength failed him, but “Smith and several Indians refused to leave him behind.” Harry Boonstra’s English translation of Dosker’s 1893 biography of Van Raalte, from the Heritage Hall archives at Calvin College, p. 75 of original, p. 29 of translation.}

In the same letter, he explained: “Man weighs but God decides. I had many a bias against Michigan, and in my heart I had selected another region, but in many respects I have changed my mind about Michigan.”\footnote{Van Raalte, quoted in Hyma, *Albertus C. Van Raalte and his Dutch Settlements in the United States*, 75.}

After two weeks of exploration in West Michigan, Van Raalte decided on Ottawa County. He determined who owned the land and made quick work of procuring it. Some was purchased from Native Americans under Chief Wakazoo; some was purchased from Michigan landowners living in New York; some was purchased from the state government in Detroit and the federal government; and some titles were secured by paying long overdue taxes.\footnote{Hyma, *Albertus C. Van Raalte and his Dutch Settlements in the United States*, 92.} Van Raalte rented rooms for his family in the home of Arvilla and Reverend George N. Smith, a Congregational minister working with Ottawa and Ojibway Indians in the area.\footnote{Old Wing Mission, the Smiths’ home, was built for them by Isaac Fairbanks. Reverend Smith began missionary work in 1844. Hyma notes that Rev. George N. Smith left the area in 1849, moving with Indians to the Grand Traverse Bay region. “Unfortunately the treatment given by the Dutch to the Indians [e.g., stealing things from their tents] was not conducive to friendly relations, and so it naturally happened that the Indians became morose... The Congregational missionary [Smith] was their trusted friend, and he began to feel nearly as forlorn as they did. The Hollanders, on the other hand, were no different than the other white settlers. They felt that the immense continent of North America should not remain a wilderness. If the Indians refused to cultivate the soil then the European settlers would do so” (Hyma, *Albertus C. Van Raalte and his Dutch Settlements in the United States*, 131). Smith wrote that they moved because “the Hollanders were good men, but that they would clear up the land and conditions would be unfavorable for the Indians and their mode of life, [and therefore] that they would better take it good naturedly and find another place, for the Hollanders had come to stay.” (Jacobson, Bruins, and Wagenaar. *Albertus C. Van Raalte*, 37).} Van Raalte’s group travelled from Allegan to a log
cabin furnished by Isaac and Ann Fairbanks on Feb 9, 1847. From an item written by Evert Zagers, a member of the group:

When he had the first log house finished we had our wives brought from Allegan and five families lived in it together, namely Zagers, Notting, Lankheet, Laarman, and Fredriks. We lived mutually in peace and had all things in common together ... The Lord gave us courage and caused us to hope and in this hope, to work for a better future.

In Van Raalte’s January 30, 1847 letter to Brummelkamp, he explained “It is better to be free, if it is possible. I am happy that now I can say to the Separatist congregations in the Netherlands which now enjoy only partial liberty and none at all in the education of their children, ‘Come here and enjoy this good land of liberty.’” And the people came.

Kromminga explains that early Seceder emigrants to the United States divided into two groups: “One went with Scholte by way of Baltimore and St. Louis to the prairies between the Skunk and DesMoines rivers in southeastern Iowa and started the prosperous settlement of Pella. The other went under VanRaalte’s guidance over New York and Detroit to western Michigan and settled at what is now Holland on the shores of Black Lake.” Swierenga notes that Van Raalte departed for the United States first because Scholte’s infant child died and his wife became ill. Scholte expected, albeit mistakenly, that Van Raalte would settle in Iowa, the same region his Utrecht society had chosen, and a number of Scholte’s group joined Van Raalte on the earlier trek. After Van Raalte decided on Michigan as his settlement location, he hoped to persuade Scholte to join them in Holland township. In his January 30, 1847 letter to Brummelkamp, Van Raalte wrote of his desire to keep the Seceder emigrants together: “I feel the need of

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57 “Fairbanks was a government agent for the Indians to assist them with farming and to serve as an interpreter.” Jacobson, Bruins, and Wagenaar, Albertus C. Van Raalte, 34.
58 Zagers quoted in Hyma, Albertus C. Van Raalte and his Dutch Settlements, 111.
59 Hyma, 113.
60 Kromminga, 100.
sensible brothers near me; I hope brother Scholte will not go to Iowa; I believe that he cannot do better than to settle in Michigan. If Brother Scholte does not wish to be on the Black River, then there is opportunity on the other rivers--the Grand and Kalamazoo.\footnote{Van Raalte quoted in Swierenga, Robert P. “Van Raalte and Scholte: A Soured Relationship and Personal Rivalry.”}

But when Scholte learned of Van Raalte’s new location, he called it “an unlucky choice” because of its isolation and its unhealthy climate. Scholte landed in Boston on the Sarah Sand in the spring of 1847. He chose not to join VanRaalte’s settlement in Michigan, instead taking 800 Dutch immigrants with him to found the Pella colony in Iowa, where, in contrast to Van Raalte’s colony in Holland, Michigan, the settlers remained separatist ecclesiastically, but quickly Americanized in commerce and in increasingly diverse community population. Swierenga notes that Scholte drew eighty non-Dutch Americans to live in Pella in the first year, and within thirteen years, half of the town’s population was American, thanks to the founding of the Baptist ”Central University” in 1853, which Scholte supported financially and as a trustee. In 1858 five of the eleven stores in Pella were operated by Americans.

By contrast, Ottawa County, Michigan in 1860 had only 52 non-Dutch households, or 12 percent, and only two or three stores were run by Americans. Van Raalte did not want a mixed multitude in Holland. "Americans usually do not possess that certain open heartiness and mutual understanding of each other, which the Dutch possess," Van Raalte wrote to Paulus Den Bleyker of Kalamazoo:

An impassible chasm of language, character, and custom separates you from the Americans... Above all--Americans are disposed to despise Hollanders, and we Hollanders naturally become embittered against them because of their cold selfishness. They may approach us with bold flatteries, but in reality they are after
our money and influence, yes, they actually despise us. They take us for a dull, slow, uncultured people and boldly boast of their own superior intelligence.

Better to "do your business among our own people," Van Raalte opined, "in a community that is developing internally and contains only a few Americans." 62

Another contrast between the two colonies was the wealth of its constituents. Beets explains that most of the people in VanRaalte’s colony were of the poorer class, compared to Scholte’s wealthier followers. 63 Gerrit Van Schelven suggests that this has a great deal to do with marketing, as Scholte sent word to the Netherlands that the open prairie required immigrants with money. 64 Van Raalte sent the opposite message: poor folks were welcome in Holland. 65 Soon after founding his colony, Van Raalte published a lengthy pamphlet in the Netherlands entitled "Holland in America, or the Dutch Colony in the State of Michigan," which explained the rationale for his choice of settlement location, described the advantages of the locale over Pella, noted the economic opportunities in America, and suggested the best travel routes for prospective settlers. Most effective were the testimonials from "trustworthy men" that the forest lands of Michigan were healthier and better served with water supplies than the semi-arid prairies of Iowa. 66

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62 Swierenga, “Van Raalte and Scholte: A Soured Relationship and Personal Rivalry.”
63 Beets, The Christian Reformed Church in North America, 34.
65 Van Schelven, referenced in Swierenga, “Van Raalte and Scholte: A Soured Relationship and Personal Rivalry.”
66 Swierenga, “Van Raalte and Scholte: A Soured Relationship and Personal Rivalry.” Other Midwestern states also have Dutch Reformed enclaves. The Wisconsin settlement was founded by Rev. P. Zonne and Rev. G. Baay in 1847 and 1848. Illinois’ South Holland settlement (just south of Chicago) was founded by John Killewinger and Hendrik DeJong in 1847, and its North Holland settlement (later called Roseland) in Chicago was founded by Peter DeJong in 1849.
Rev. M.A. Ypma reached the Holland colony in June 1847, with 49 others from Friesland, and they founded the Vriesland colony nearby. Soon after, a company of people from the province of Bentheim arrived and founded Graafschap. In the same year, a large group from the province of Zeeland traveled to the United States on three ships, led by J. Steketee, Jannes Van deLuyster, and Rev. Cornelius VanderMeulen, establishing Zeeland settlement a few miles east of the Holland colony. Monsma notes that the Dutch settlers in Michigan had a positive attitude toward civil government and the political process, quickly obtaining citizenship and actively participating in elections. Beets marvels at how quickly the Michigan community grew. By 1849, there were 3,000 souls in those communities. The Michigan settlement also organized itself ecclesially, establishing its first classis in 1847. The first resolutions they passed included allowances for remarriage after the death of a partner within less than half a year and “churches were admonished to take in hand the organization of school districts ... At

67 Notice that these leaders have formal education and wealth. Most Zeeland Seceders had followed Scholte in the early years because Cornelius Van der Meulen had studied for the ministry in his parsonage and Scholte’s church at Doeveren (in the province of Zeeland) was nearby. Beginning in the early 1840s, however, the Zeelanders had a falling out with Scholte over issues of church governance and other matters, and they gradually went over to Van Raalte’s group. This group of Seceders “agreed that all necessary preparations for the journey to America be made with great care, and that fifty acres of land be reserved for a building suitable for a church and a school.” Hyma, Albertus C. Van Raalte and his Dutch Settlements in the United States, 134.

68 Monsma, Timothy M. “The Educational Ideals of 1834 in the Michigan Colony,” in Peter Y. DeYong and Nelson D. Kloosterman, Eds. The Reformation of 1834: Essays in commemoration of the Act of Secession and Return (Orange City, IA: Pluim Publishing, 1984), 64. Jacobsen, et al notes that federal law at the time required immigrants to wait five years before applying for citizenship, but to register intent to become citizens at the midpoint of those five years. They quote the county clerk, Mr. Henry Griffin, who filled out naturalization papers for almost 450 men at the 2 year, 6 month mark. Jacobson, Bruins, and Wagenaar, Albertus C. Van Raalte, 52.

69 “During the summer of 1849 the church at Holland was reported to number 225 families; Zeeland, 175; Vriesland, 69; and Overisel, 135, while Graafschap’s congregation numbered 50 families, Drenthe 45, and Groningen 30. Altogether there were in 1849—928 communicant members and a total of some 3,000 souls.” (Beets, 37).

70 “A classis is a group of churches within a geographical area. It has the authority to deal with matters that concern its churches in common and its decisions are binding on the churches in its region. A minister and an elder (and in some cases a deacon) from each congregation are delegated to attend each classis meeting.” http://www.crcna.org/welcome/christian-reformed-church-governance/classis
its fall session in 1848, the Classis condemned all slackness on the part of the churches in regard to schools, since this matter was deemed an important part of Christian education. Let us deal first with ecclesiastical matters and then with educational ones.

**America: Church Union with RCA and Split of CRC**

In America the immigrants of seceder stock found a new home in which no church establishment by law was allowed. They could continue their independent church life in full freedom. But they did so only for a couple of years. The desire for Christian fellowship in ecclesiastical matters drew the great majority into a union with the Reformed Church in America.

In 1609, Henry Hudson, an English sailor in the service of the Dutch, explored the river that would later bear his name. A rather vast territory was surveyed, and New Netherland was founded. It was bounded on the east by the present city of Hartford (CT), on the west by the Delaware River, on the south by the present town of New Castle (DE), and the northern boundary lay forty or fifty miles north of Albany (NY). In 1628, Jonas Michaelius arrived in New Amsterdam, “the first minister of the [Dutch] Reformed Church to set foot on these shores.” Hageman asserts that the Reformed Protestant Dutch Church of America is the oldest Protestant church in the United States with a continuous ministry. In 1664, the English took over control of New Netherland, but the

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74 Cf. “Brief Outline of RCA History” https://www.rca.org/sslpage.aspx?pid=2181 Accessed May 13, 2014. “In the small colonial town of New Amsterdam, on a Sunday in 1628, about fifty people gathered around a crude table in a mill loft. Their celebration of the Lord's Supper marks the birthdate of the Reformed Church in America. The congregation they founded still continues today as the Collegiate Reformed Church in New York City, the oldest evangelical church in North America with a continuous ministry.”
Dutch Reformed Church in North America (RCA) continued to grow. Beets documents that in 1846, there were 271 RCA churches with 104,098 souls, served by 280 ministers.75

Rev. Dr. Thomas DeWitt of the Collegiate Church in New York City and Rev. Dr. I.N. Wyckoff of the Second Reformed Church in Albany were conduits for Dutch immigrants even before they arrived. DeWitt traveled to the Netherlands in 1846 and met with various members of the Seceder church, including those considering emigration. Back in the United States, he founded “The Netherlands Society for the Protection of Emigrants from Holland” in order to garner funds to assist them. De Witt used The Christian Intelligencer (weekly paper of the RCA), to inform American readers about the Dutch Christian immigrants, including publishing a translation of Brummelkamp and Van Raalte’s “Appeal to the Faithful in America.”

When The Southerner landed in New York, Van Raalte stayed with Rev. Wyckoff before departing for Michigan. The hospitality was reciprocated when Wyckoff arrived in the Holland colony on May 31, 1849, and visited neighboring settlements over the next few weeks. He was sent as a “special agent” by the Board of Domestic Missions of the

75 Beets, 39. As part of the RCA’s mission to the Northwest Territory, they founded First Reformed Protestant Dutch Church of Grand Rapids (MI) in 1840. Frans Van Driele came to the United States with Van Raalte, moved to Grand Rapids July 5, 1848 and settled near Fulton Street and Grandville Avenue (area now known as Heartside). In 1849, the first Dutch-speaking congregation was founded in Grand Rapids on Bostwick Avenue near Lyon Street, Second Reformed, and Van Driele was the cofounder. By June 1850, Grand Rapids was home to 53 Dutch families (about 222 people), Samuelson, 60. When Dutch immigrants arrived in 1846, First Reformed invited them to share their church building and allowed them to hold worship services in Dutch on Sunday afternoons. The new settlers formally organized their own congregation as Second Reformed Church in 1849 with the help of Van Raalte. They built their own church closer to the city center in 1854, in part because they did not want to be “beholden” to the RCA churches of the East. Second Reformed Church experienced burgeoning growth due to an influx of immigrants, but in 1857, more than half of the congregation seceded to join what would become the Christian Reformed Church. See Daniel L. Ballast, “A History of Central Reformed Church of Grand Rapids.” The Joint Archives Quarterly. History Research Center of Hope College & Western Theological Seminary. Volume 16 Number 3. Fall 2006b. Ballast goes on to explain that the remaining congregants of Second Reformed united with First Reformed in 1918 to form Central Reformed Church.
RCA in order “to convey to them assurances of the friendly interest and sympathies of his denomination, to propose to them ecclesiastical union with his own Church, the traditional Dutch Reformed Church of the land, and to offer them whatever assistance was needed or desired by them.”  

Another element of his visit was to inquire ‘into the religious and ecclesiastical relations of this people,” and Wyckoff acclaimed their religious fervor. Five congregations had already built churches, and “their religious habits are very strict and devout. They do all things with prayer and praise ... The appearance and tone of piety is purer and higher than any thing I have ever seen, and seemed like the primitive Christians, and most beautiful.”

Wyckoff’s report notes that he was received with joy, especially since the settlers felt “that the Dutch Church [in the East] had seemed to take almost no interest at all in them. With the exception of a few individual brethren, they mourned that the Dutch Church counted them strangers, and had no word of encouragement, no hand of help for them.” His presence allayed their sense of abandonment, but apprehension and hesitancy toward ecclesiastical union remained, both because of the initial icy welcome from some RCA folks in the East and because the settlers remembered the struggles with the Dutch Reformed Church (NHK) they had only recently left behind. Wyckoff explained: “they have so felt to the quick the galling chain of ecclesiastical domination, and have seen with sorrow how exact organization, according to human rules, leads to formality on the one hand, and to the oppression of tender conscience on the other.” Wyckoff did his best

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76 Kromminga, 103.
77 Beets, 41.
78 Wyckoff quoted in Hyma, 196.
to assure them that there would be “fraternal fellowship” and “Christian union,” rather than “ecclesiastical domineering.” Wyckoff guaranteed,

It was farthest from our thoughts, to bring them to bondage to men, or to exercise an ecclesiastical tyranny over them. And I stated that they would be most perfectly free, at any time they found an ecclesiastical connection opposed to their religious prosperity and enjoyment, to bid us a fraternal adieu, and be by themselves again.  

Although his offer of effortless separation may have been appealing, Kromminga notes that Wyckoff was cautioned by RCA’s Board of Domestic Missions against making such an assurance of easy departure from affiliation.

On June 4, 1849, Wyckoff met with pastors regarding a proposed union, covering topics such as creeds, the difference between joining and affiliation, and about the particular needs of Classis Holland. Members of the colony then began a debate on the issue. Monsma argues that Van Raalte hoped to use the financial backing of RCA members from the East, drawing “close to a church that had already ‘Americanized’ in order that, on the frontier, he could resist ‘Americanization.’” The story is rather more nuanced than this explanation. Van Brummelen asserts that Van Raalte intended ‘to found a kingdom of orthodox Christianity in the primeval forests of Western Michigan.’ Eenigenburg notes that Van Raalte desired union because he had seen their orthodoxy when he visited New Brunswick Seminary a few years earlier. Van Raalte later recounted:

79 Wyckoff quoted in Hyma, 195 and 200.
81 Van Brummelen, 3 – He’s quoting an excerpt of a letter from Albert Hyma to Robert Fakkema dated February 15, 1947. Hyma explains that “Van Raalte had not come to America to make money but to make Christians. He was always exhorting his people to think first of all about their spiritual welfare” (Hyma, 213).
I listened to the teachings and conversation of the Professors, saw the workings of their heart, and understood their love to God and their devotion to His truth. I blessed my God that I there found the faith of my fathers—the historical church of the Netherlands—and because I found it, and I loved it, I determined to bring the immigrants into intimate connection with the Dutch Reformed Church of America.\textsuperscript{82}

Hyma asserts that Van Raalte wanted union with the RCA because they “had remained faithful to the creed of the orthodox Calvinist Church.” He also understood how much “the brethren in the East had done for him and for his people, but not all of his associates were as fully acquainted with this as he had been.”\textsuperscript{83} As might be imagined, Van Raalte’s voice had conviction and power in swaying opinion. Hyma cites Jacob van Hinte, author of the two-volume history titled Nederlanders in Amerika, when he says it was widely understood that Van Raalte was the ruler of the city, the dictator of the local church, and the owner of the whole Classis. Dosker describes him as “the leading spirit, the soul of this settlement, who always commanded respect, always and everywhere.”\textsuperscript{84} Van Raalte set himself to the task of convincing others of the wisdom in denominational affiliation.

A few weeks after Wyckoff’s visit, twenty-four elders and clerical leaders met in Van Raalte’s home. They signed a statement written by Van Raalte and dated July 10, 1849 that expressed their desire to “live in communion” with the RCA. Kromminga notes that “the few men of more than ordinary education which the [Holland] colony could boast were all supporters of the union with the Reformed Church [in America].”\textsuperscript{85}

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\textsuperscript{83} Hyma, 210.

\textsuperscript{84} Harry Boonstra’s English translation of Dosker’s 1893 biography of Van Raalte, from the Heritage Hall archives at Calvin College, original page 1-2, translation p. 3.

\textsuperscript{85} Kromminga, 107.
were the perceived benefits of such an alliance, in the minds of these educated men? Was there an aspiration to connect to the East Coast’s stable and well-developed place in the social order? Was this a desire for religious fellowship after years of feeling isolated both in the Netherlands and in the wilderness of Michigan? Swierenga notes that there were no signatories on the July 1849 document from the Graafschap, South Holland, Drenthe, or Grand Rapids congregations, and Van Raalte was the only elder from his church to sign the document.  

Beets argues that the union was rushed, without consistorial or congregational meetings until later, nor was there “newspaper discussion about it to explain the pros and cons of such an important matter.” According to Beets, this haste can only be explained by the popular impression that the union was merely conditional and could be easily severed.  

It also seems to be an example of a decision made at the top, with the expectation that acceptance would trickle down to the rest of the people. In April 1850, Van Raalte attended the Particular Synod at Albany, in May 1850, General Synod agreed that the Classis of Holland should be received, and on June 5, 1850, Classis

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86 Robert P. Swierenga, from True Brothers: The Netherlandic Origins of the Christian Reformed Church in North America, 1857-1880 http://www.swierenga.com/Kampen_pap.html. Accessed May 13, 2014. “By congregation, thirteen of the twenty-four signatories were from Zeeland, seven represented Friesland, three were from Overisel, and one—Van Raalte himself—was from Holland. . . This fact concerned Van Raalte greatly, according to an eyewitness. ‘Brethren, this is wrong,’ Van Raalte declared, ‘I warn you. If it later proves to be a mistake, then it is our fault. If we refer this to the congregations, and it is a mistake, then it is also the fault of the congregations.’ It appears that Classis heeded this warning and did consult with the individual consistories, but no minutes survive of any congregational meetings except in the Vriesland church. Most likely approved of union, but a later report states that a majority of the Graafschap consistory opposed it.”

87 Beets, 42-43.

88 Hyma, 215. Hyma notes that minor secessions occurred as early as 1852 (e.g, In 1853, Rev. R. Smith withdrew from Classis Holland.), and one cause was “VanRaalte’s repeated attempted to carry though his own desires, regardless of much opposition. He was sometimes referred to as the Pope and his best friends as cardinals” (216). When the Secession of 1857 occurred, many argued that Van Raalte had “sold the church to an impure denomination” (217).
Holland was received under the care of the RCA General Synod and connected to the Particular Synod of Albany.\textsuperscript{89}

Those against the union saw parallels between the RCA and the Dutch Reformed Church (NHK) from which they had seceded only a few years earlier. They were concerned that the Reformed Church in America had changed Church Order, modified the Belgic Confession, and “dropped the negative parts from the Canons of Dort.” They also noted little to no preaching on/from the catechism, lack of observance of feast-days, baptism administered at homes or in the consistory room, rather than in congregational worship, and that “colored communicants were seated apart from the rest at the table of the Lord.”\textsuperscript{90} Gijsbert Haan was one leader of the opposition. Haan arrived in Michigan shortly after Wyckoff’s visit in the fall of 1849, following a residence of two years in New York and New Jersey. Before emigrating, Haan had trained as an elder under Simon VanVelzen, part of the “Northern” school in the Netherlands, which was more separatistic than other seceder groups, more concerned with preservation of Reformed character than with maintaining fellowship. Haan reported events on the East coast of the United States, including an elder who had not had his children baptized so that they could choose their own church affiliation when they were adults (Arminian influence), catechetical instruction replaced by Sunday School curriculum, and many pastors and elders who were Masonic lodge members. Van Raalte, formed in the more evangelical/moderate “Southern” school, defended the toleration of lodge members: “he

\textsuperscript{89} Kromminga, 106. Some immigrants who arrived after 1850 refused to join the RCA, and some congregations left to join the Associate Reformed Church (E.g., R. Schepers and the Graafschap congregation; Rev. R. Smit and 2/3 of the Drenthe congregation).

\textsuperscript{90} Kromminga, 106-07. Classis Holland declared itself against the institution of slavery in the fall of 1855.
described the secrets of the lodge as childish play, and observed that the mutual assistance practiced by lodge members was praiseworthy.”

Rev. Cornelius Van der Meulen, founder of Zeeland township and also in favor of affiliation with the RCA, seconded Van Raalte. Swierenga argues that “the seeds of 1857 were sown in 1834 ... [when] the ecumenical spirit of the south [Brummelkamp and Van Raalte] conflicted with the sterner Calvinism of the north [DeCock and Van Velzen].”

The Masonic lodge issue is certainly one of those seeds. Van Raalte tried to minimize the problem and pushed for continued fellowship; Haan pushed back with a desire to withdraw from dangerous influences.

Gijsbert Haan “informed the people in the Classis of Holland that they had unwittingly joined a modernistic denomination ... [with people] who did not even believe in predestination.” Haan remained distraught about the union of Classis Holland and RCA; even after he moved to Grand Rapids, he continued to foment dissent to the point of separation. On March 19, 1857, Rev. H.G. Klijn led a splinter group from Second Reformed Church of Grand Rapids where Haan was an elder out of the RCA. Soon after, other immigrants joined the movement. In April 1857, Rev. Klijn and Rev. Koene VandenBosch, pastor of the Noordeloos Reformed Church, led about 150 families in four congregations (Grand Rapids, Noordeloos, Graafschap, and Polkton) in seceding from...

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92 Swierenga and Bruins, *Family Quarrels in the Dutch Reformed Churches*, 2.
93 Hyma, 218. Swierenga counters that “the character of the RCA in 1846 . . . can be summarized as conservative, orthodox, and Americanized” *Family Quarrels*, 47
94 variant spelling of his last name: Klyn
95 The 1857 Secession drew in Rev. R. Duiker and the congregants of First Reformed Church of Grand Haven, Rev. Hulst and the majority of congregants at Fourth Reformed Church of Grand Rapids, Rev. J.C. Groeneveld and congregations in Saugatuck and Fijnaart, and 4/5 of First Reformed Church of Holland. It also extended beyond Michigan to include churches from Paterson, NJ; Cincinnati, OH; Lafayette, IN; Steamboat Rock, IA; Riddot, IL.
Classis Holland. According to the current Christian Reformed Church website, reasons cited for the 1857 secession included:

- a perceived lack of sound doctrinal preaching by American pastors;
- a perceived lack of piety and too much accommodation to American culture by these same pastors;
- the use of hymns in worship by the Americans - the seceders insisted on psalm-singing only;
- the practice by the American churches of "open communion," extending an open invitation to all believers to participate in the Lord's Supper;
- the perceived lack of solidarity on the part of the Americans with the secessionist cause in the Netherlands.

This group was “fearful of any association with any American religious body, and desired to remain free of such relations.” The seceded group removed itself from the RCA and from all Protestant denominations with which it had been affiliated since coming to America in order to return to the ideals of the Netherlands Christian Reformed Church (CGKN). They hoped to form a union with that denomination in their mother country and sent letters to the Netherlands Seceder church (CGKN), pleading for recognition and

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96 Swierenga notes that the initial group represented about 10% of the Holland Classis (Family Quarrels, 89). According to Beets, Klyn returned to the RCA soon after, leaving VandenBosch as the only pastor of the 1857 flock until 1863 when Rev. H.W. VanLeeuwen became pastor of the Grand Rapids Church. Rev. D.J. VanDerWerp became pastor of the Graafschap church in 1864, and Rev. W. H. Frielings arrived to pastor the Vriesland congregation in 1866 (Beets, 63). According to Osterhaven, Klijn was back in the RCA by 9 September 1857. After confessing his “error and guilt” for having “offended against fraternal fellowship,” he was warmly received back into the Holland Classis. Gijsbert Haan also had a change of heart and was received back into the Reformed Church in Grand Rapids 10 June, 1868. (M. Eugene Osterhaven, “Saints and Sinners: Secession and the Christian Reformed Church,” in Word and World: Reformed Theology in America. James W. Van Hoeven, Editor. The Historical Series of the Reformed Church in America. No. 16. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986: 56.)

97 “Christian Reformed Church History” http://www.crcna.org/welcome/history. Accessed May 13, 2014. We know about the beliefs and practices of the denomination via two publications. De Wachter [The Guardian] was the official denominational periodical starting in February 1868. The Banner of Truth was started in 1866 as the official organ of the True Reformed Dutch Church, an Eastern denomination that broke from the RCA in 1822 and merged with the Holland Christian Reformed Church in 1890. The Banner was initially published by John Y. DeBaun in New Jersey. In 1887, Rev. De Baun became the first pastor of LaGrave Avenue CRC in Grand Rapids (MI) and brought the magazine along with him. It was purchased by a group of businessmen in 1903 who planned to use it “to convey Reformed teachings in the English language to people in the Christian Reformed Church.” The CRC denomination took over publication of what was now called The Banner in 1914. http://www.thebanner.org/about-us/history/. Accessed May 14, 2014.

98 Stob, 31.
fellowship, but the Dutch Synod chose neutrality in the American dispute. They would not go beyond formal recognition of the new American denomination, stating in 1860 that CGKN recognized all churches holding to Reformed doctrine and church government.99

In its first decade of existence, there was little initial growth in the Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRC). Beets asserts that there were no new denominational churches organized until 1864, and after a quarter century of existence (~1880), there were only 39 congregations with approximately 3,500 confessing members.100 During this time period the majority of immigrants from the Netherlands, especially from the Northern provinces, joined the CRC, in part because of the Lodge issue. The merger with the True Reformed Dutch Church in 1890 also bolstered numbers. Many historians note the positive repercussions of the Calvinist revival in the Netherlands led by Dr. Abraham Kuyper, which soon reached American shores (more on that in the next chapter). Swierenga notes that in the thirty years from 1873 to 1900, the CRC “grew 800 fold,” compared to a 100 fold increase in the RCA.101

This growth occurred despite the logistical reality that “wherever a Christian Reformed church was organized, it immediately confronted a Reformed church consisting of members of the very same ethnic and ecclesial origin, holding the same confessional standards, and practicing essentially the same forms of church government and worship.”102 Although there was tension and animosity between them, rooted in

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99 Hyma, 220; Beets, 49; Zwaanstra, 5.
100 Beets, 60-61. In 1900, there were 144 CRC churches, and by 1920, the number had increased by 70% to 245 congregations (96).
102 Zwaanstra, 14.
strong conviction about what it meant to be Dutch and Reformed in America, there was also regret surrounding the split. In 1884, synods of CRC and RCA met simultaneously in Grand Rapids. They sent letters of fraternal hope to one another, but nothing came of it, and they remain separate denominations. Swierenga asserts that RCA members were “more willing to accommodate themselves theologically, ecclesiastically, and culturally,” while the CRC with its more conservative Northern roots, “continued to look to the mother country for leadership and direction.” He goes on to argue that “RCA members acted like immigrants and CRC members acted like colonists. The CRC desired a transplanted community, a little Holland”\textsuperscript{103} And in that enclaved CRC community, they had their own schools. In 1935, Rev. J.R. Brink explained that “the intensive growth” of the CRC was due to the Christian school.\textsuperscript{104} Calvinism views all of human life as a religious activity, and the Calvinist tradition places a high value on education, noting its

\textsuperscript{103} Swierenga, Family Quarrels, 103. Swierenga uses Robert K. Merton’s local-cosmopolitan theory to explain “alternate nodal points of reference group orientation and of social interaction” – the former “fixes identity with reference to one’s immediate family and church” while the latter is broader, attaching to “impersonal values and perspectives.” He argues that CRC folks more often originated “locally oriented rural communities” in the northern provinces of Drenthe, Groningen, Overijssel and Zeeland whereas the RCA folks often came from “more cosmopolitan, urban” provinces of Noord- and Zuid-Holland and Utrecht. “the comparative data on place of origin show first that the 1857 Michigan Seceders had greater membership from the traditional, localistic regions of the Netherlands than did the Reformed Church, and second, that the traditional habits and customs remained strong for a longer time in the junior denomination.” Swierenga, “Local-Cosmopolitan Theory and Immigrant Religion: The Social Bases of the Antebellum Dutch Reformed Schism.” Journal of Social History 14, no. 1 (Autumn 1980). He also notes that of the 114 clerics ordained in the CRC from 1857 to 1900, every one of them had been affiliated with the Afscheiding and three-quarters (88) originated in the northern provinces. Of the 116 Dutch-born clerics ordained in the midwestern classes of the Reformed Church in America (RCA) in the years 1846-1900, only one-quarter (30) were of the Afscheiding and only 42 percent (49) were from the northern provinces. This was less than half as many as among the CRC ministers. Swierenga, True Brothers: The Netherlandic Origins of the Christian Reformed Church in North America, 1857-1880 http://www.swierenga.com/Kampen_pap.html Accessed 5/13/14.

\textsuperscript{104} Rev. J.R. Brink “Roseland and South” in Banner March 22, 1935, qtd in Swierenga, 350. See also The Banner March 26, 1937 (p. 299); October 13, 1938 (p. 938); and John L. Shaver, “Early History of our Christian School Movement” in The Banner November 17, 1944 (p. 1097).
significance in doctrinal, political, economic and social realms.\textsuperscript{105} It is to the life activity of schooling and Christian formation that we now turn.

**America: Dutch Calvinist Education in Michigan**

*From the point of view of American educational history the most important developments in connection with the Reformation were those arising from Calvinism. While the Calvinistic faith was rather grim and forbidding, viewed from the modern standpoint, the Calvinists everywhere had a program for political, economic, and social progress which has left a deep impress on the history of mankind.*\textsuperscript{106}

In America, there are myriad versions of private, Christian schools. Much has been written about the rise of Catholic schools, starting in the 1840s, after leaders like Bishop Hughes in New York realized that common schools were aimed at Protestant formation of citizens (1840s). When Fundamentalism lost the fight against Modernism in *The State of Tennessee v. John Thomas Scopes* (1925) and the teaching of human evolution found its way into public school curriculum, a number of Fundamentalist communities started their own schools as separatist enclaves against cultural onslaught.\textsuperscript{107}

The focus of this dissertation, however, is on the unique vision of education promulgated

\textsuperscript{105} B.B. Warfield, professor of Theology at Princeton Seminary from 1887 to 1921, offered a useful definition of a Calvinist: “The Calvinist is the [wo]man who has seen God, and who, having seen God in His glory, is filled on the one hand, with a sense of [her/his] own unworthiness to stand in God’s sight as a creature, and much more as a sinner, and on the other hand, with adoring wonder that nevertheless this God is a God who receives sinners. [S/]He who believes in God without reserve, and is determined that God shall be God to [her/him], in all [her/his] thinking, feeling, willing – in the entire compass of his life activities – intellectual, moral, spiritual – throughout all his individual, social, religious relations – is by the force of the strictest of all logic which presides over the outworking of principles into thought and life, by the very necessity of the case, a Calvinist.” Warfield in “Calvinism as a Theologian and Calvinism Today,” p. 23, quoted in Hoogstra, 14.


by Dutch Calvinists who settled in the Midwest and its influence across the nation. Stob notes that Horace Mann, a Unitarian, “greatly deplored the advance of Calvinism in the West,” and Mann lamented that by the time of the Civil War, “the great West has been conquered, religiously speaking, from Black Hawk to John Calvin.” After exploring their secession from the Dutch Reformed Church (NHK), we then traced their sojourn to the United States and their desire to set up churches and schools. Oppewal notes three interrelated elements of Calvinist theology in regard to education. The first is locating the seat of educational authority in the family, which extends beyond the biological family to the spiritual community, based on baptismal covenant. The second is keen awareness that education is never neutral and that a religious world-view can and should be woven throughout school fabric. The third is the assertion that the telos of education is “not evangelization for church membership, nor is it value-free information giving. Rather, its aim is to prepare the learner for living a Christian lifestyle in society, in all the familial, civic and economic areas of life ... [Calvinist] schools are the instruments of social transformation in all areas of life.” In this section, we will look at the educational legacy of Albertus Van Raalte and the Reformed Church in America, and then we will turn to the influence of Abraham Kuyper and the rise of parent-run schools closely tied to the Christian Reformed Church in America.

**Albertus Van Raalte – Educational Legacy**

Even before departing the Netherlands, “The Constitution for the Zeeland Society for the Emigration to the United States” (1847) outlined the importance of Christian

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108 In Mary Mann’s *Life and Works of Horace Mann*, p. 514, quoting letter to Mr. May found in Tewksbury, 69.

109 Oppewal, 86-87

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education as an obligation of parents: “Christian parents cannot answer for it to God that they are without the opportunity to let their children receive instruction in accordance with their religious convictions; yes, every sincere heart trembles when he must swear the oath at the baptism of his seed, because without contradiction, they swear falsely.”110 Part of the parental promise offered at baptism was the obligation “to use every means at their disposal to provide their children distinctively Reformed nurture and training.”111

Securing Christian education in harmony with Calvinist faith was one of the reasons for emigration, and schools (primary, secondary, and higher) remained one of Van Raalte’s priorities from settlement in the Holland colony to his death.

At the first meeting of the Classis Holland in April 1848, the matter of school districts (their regulation and governance) was discussed. At the second meeting in September 1848, by which time a school district had been established, the Classis passed the following resolution: “The schools must be promoted and cared for by the churches, as being an important part of the Christian calling of God’s church on earth. All lukewarmness and coldness toward that cause must be condemned and rebuked.”112

Notice that the schools did not have to be parochial, but the expectation was that even in public schools, the education would be Christian. There were nearly two hundred students in the Holland school district at the time. At a school board meeting in the summer of 1848, “they voted to set aside $900 in tax money for the building of a school. There were 34 votes in favor and none against this proposition.” But in the October 1850 meeting, it was reported that since the September 1850 meeting, “members had refused to

110 Stob, 32.
111 Zwaanstra, 148.
112 Stob, 41.
vote funds for any taxes for the support of the school, neither for the payment of rent for a building, nor the payment of debts ... [and] the district may lose its organization or pay for a lawsuit.”\footnote{Hyma, 156-157.} This threat helped matters, and by the time of the February 1851 meeting, it was decided that a school should be built. Hyma and Stob suggest that their poverty and “elemental struggle for existence” made funding a school difficult, but they also note that the settlers found money for a church building, which was completed in 1848.\footnote{Stob, 37. Cf. Hyma, 158. Compare this to Gerrit Diekema’s praise for their investment in education: “Simultaneously with the building of the log cabin and the log church, we find them laying the foundations of the school house and of Hope College. Think of these poor, half-starved, half-naked immigrants building a college before they had provided for actual personal wants: before they had felled the forests or drained the swamps! Think of these sturdy men bringing the first fruits of their fields and flocks as a willing sacrifice to support students and professors in order that their posterity might wield the power which knowledge gives.” from “Holland Emigration, to Michigan: Its Causes and Results” in \textit{Michigan History Magazine}. Vol. 1. No. 2, October 1917 [Published by Michigan Historical Commission and the Michigan Pioneer and Historical Society] http://hdl.handle.net/2027/njp.32101066151547. P. 106} Van Raalte struggled to get monetary support for erecting a school building and to persuade adults to send their children to school. In a letter written February 11, 1849 from Van Raalte to his brother in law, Rev. C.G. DeMoen, he wrote about the lack of interest people showed in the instruction offered in the public school, remarking “instruction in the English language is neglected, partly because the people do not realize its value and partly because there is not enough money for it.”\footnote{Hyma, 186.} Although limited by economic hardship, this seems to imply that the settlers’ lack of education meant that they did not fully appreciate the importance of education for their children.

When Dr. Wyckoff visited the Holland Colony in the spring of 1849, however, he noted that they were “paying as much attention as possible to schools and Christian education. They have a Dutch [primary] school and an English one in the city.” In 1850, Rev. Dr. John Garretson, Corresponding Secretary of the RCA Board of Education and
Pastor of Reformed Dutch Church of Newtown (NY), made an official visit to Holland and helped garner support from the RCA-East for a Christian high school in Ottawa County, which opened in 1851. In a letter to Garretson written in 1852, Van Raalte offered gratitude for support and described the struggle with his own colonists:

Now a word about our dear object, our school affairs. It relieves, dear brother, my mind very much that you by the goodness of the Heavenly Father did succeed so very well in finding benefactors whose hearts are moved with compassion for this people, who are willing to sacrifice their means for the education of this people. My heart is filled with joy and thanks, that is my anchor of hope for this people in the future... It is a great and difficult work to elevate an ignorant mass of people: a people out of the lower class filled with European prejudices. But we have not only to struggle with the extreme ignorance but also with the rudeness and hardships of emigration and new settlement ... There is more estimation of education than there is usual among the European emigrants. The religion among the people is a sure pledge of the success. One of the greatest obstacles, however, is the poverty, which is increased very much this year on account of a perfect failure of the crops. Many are obliged to send their children out for getting the first necessities of life.\textsuperscript{116}

Van Raalte understood the difficulty of survival, but he warned the Hollanders that “Education alone can save you from complete materialization.”\textsuperscript{117}

In 1853, Holland Academy, which had been founded by Van Raalte, was separated from the public school district and placed under the supervision of the Board of Education of the Reformed Church in America, and in 1862, the first class enrolled at Hope College.\textsuperscript{118} In Van Raalte’s report to the Board of Domestic Missions of the RCA in 1853, he reiterates that “the parochial schools appear essential to us, where, in a mixed multitude, the district schools impart the character of a colorless Protestantism, which not infrequently opens the way for Catholicism ... no sacrifice should be regarded too great,

\textsuperscript{116} Hyma, 149-150 and 264. Cf. Stob, 39. This letter with its reference to an “anchor of hope” is the source of Hope College’s anchor logo.
\textsuperscript{117} Stob, 39.
\textsuperscript{118} Hyma, 260-264. “In 1854 there were four pupils who graduated, in 1855 one, in 1856 none, in 1857 three, in 1858 four, in 1859 seven, and in 1860 five.” Cf. Stob, 64.
to see that the children of the church are trained in the spirit of positive Protestantism, derived from the Bible.” In response to those who believed public schools to be sufficiently Christian, RCA Classis Holland responded in April 1854: “it is the judgment of the assembly that the churches ought to take care that their children are taught in schools where they are brought under definitely Christian influence, and that consequently wherever there is an overwhelming influence of unbelief or superstition, it is emphatically a duty to establish congregational schools.”

In November of 1856, Van Raalte sent a letter to RCA Classis Holland with an ultimatum “either I stay and also the school or I leave and there will be no school.” At the consistory meeting held on December 5, 1856 Van Raalte proposed the organization of a parochial primary school, “to be financed by monthly collections, a small tuition, and subsidy from the Board of Education of the Dutch Reformed Church” and the proposal was adopted on Sunday December 22, 1856. The Bible was to be used as a textbook, instruction was to be given in the Catechism, and Dutch language was one of the subjects of study. And yet the parochial school in Holland did not last long (it closed in April 1862), in part because of finances, in part because of low enrollment, and in part because of lack of perceived need (since local public schools were still Christian in essence, reflecting the character of the community).

Beets explains that this trend follows the broader pattern in the Reformed Church in America: support for public education, at least until college. This is expressed by the

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119 Stob, 42 and 44.
120 Harry Boonstra’s English translation of Dosker’s 1893 biography of Van Raalte, from the Heritage Hall archives at Calvin College, original, p. 130, translation, p. 44.
Committee on Education of the RCA who reported in 1853: “the system of common schools at present prevailing in our country, and in which the Bible is read and our common Christianity acknowledged, is productive of incalculable good ... the establishment of parochial schools would essentially, if not fatally interfere with it.”\(^{122}\)

For the RCA, emphasis was on acculturation, even when it required ecumenical acceptance of general Christianity at the expense of Reformed doctrinal particulars. In the estimation of the RCA, public schools were sufficiently Christian. More importantly, they were vehicles to Americanization. Van Schelven explains that Van Raalte wanted a “healthy Americanization” for the people in his Michigan settlement,

> to safeguard them not only against a possible ‘hyphenated’ future, or against a lamentable though unavoidable extinction through a sluggish and humiliating process of absorption; but, on the contrary, to urge them on through material growth and education assimilation, toward an energetic identity with American institutions and a broad Christian citizenship.\(^{123}\)

Part of this “assimilation” came through affiliation with the RCA, but this was a double-edged sword as that connection also weakened his ability to form private Christian schools, as the denomination was in support of public schools.

In this way, Van Raalte differed from the prevailing opinion in the RCA: “his heart was devoted to the principle of inculcating the Christian religion in all grades,” that “our Christian color might come out everywhere,” and he was disheartened by the bland faith taught in public schools and the lack of support for Christian schools in his own community.\(^{124}\) In a letter to the consistory of his church written in 1856, he

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\(^{122}\) Stob, 51.


\(^{124}\) Hyma, 257. Cf. Stob, 43.
acknowledged that he was considering a ministerial call to the Dutch immigrant community in Pella, Iowa. He asserted that only Christian school education in Michigan could “deliver this people and their confession from irrelevance” and to keep it from “shriveling up,” the community “must cherish and promote learning.” He opined:

I cannot hide the fact that the failure of my efforts to provide for the education of the female as well as the male sex, and the absence of a response in the hearts of the people with reference to this general concern, which is the key to all other concerns, loosens my attachment to and cools my ardor for the so-called calling to serve this people. And if it should happen that no better results could be obtained in Pella, then the history of America has produced for me, in the primary goal of my efforts, only failure.125

On June 29, 1862, Van Raalte wrote to Rev. and Mrs. G. Van de Wall in the Netherlands, frustrated by his current situation and looking for a way out (either back to the Netherlands or in South Africa). He lamented that “parochial instruction lies buried here” and explained

It is impossible for me to continue my work amidst the dissension, for my labors are rendered fruitless by it and my heart turns sour. In the first place, the public school system is extinguishing the parochial schools, and now I am called to promote the cause of the public schools. In the second place, our congregation has become completely indifferent to the Holland Academy.126

Although Van Raalte visited the Netherlands in 1866, he returned to America.127 Van Raalte decided to redouble his efforts to convince others of the need for Christian schools. In a sermon preached at First Reformed Church of Holland, he focused on Christian nurture:

The teaching and admonition of God is the salt of the earth; the only thing through which people can be saved from folly and destruction; the only thing

125 Stob, 35-36.
through which a sinner can be reconciled to his Maker; through which he can live in peace with himself, with his calling, and attain to his eternal destiny. It is only because of the working of that salt that the world is sustained ... Education apart from that teaching and admonition of the Lord means to intensify man’s apostasy, to give Satan free play to corrupt minds and hearts more and more ... The school must be completely permeated with this salt ... Whoever regards religion only or exclusively as a science that stands alongside of other studies, forgets that education leads to God.128

In the final decade of his life until his death in 1876, Van Raalte remained focused on education. Hope College was incorporated under Michigan law in 1866, the same year the first class graduated.129 Attempts were made to form a theological school in 1867, but this did not happen until 1884 (Western Theological Seminary, on the same campus as Hope College). Van Raalte acknowledged the help of the RCA and its eastern churches in supporting education in the Holland settlement: “We owe our culture and character next to God to the old Reformed Church.”130 Stob asserts that Van Raalte had chosen to be dependent on the East for the sake of his Holland colony and to use education to enable its people to render “service to the American community.”131

128 Stob, 47-48.
129 Stob, 64. B.K. Kuiper, a member of the CRC, argued that Hope College was Christian but insufficiently Calvinistic. (Cf. The Banner XLVII, 578 and XLVIII, 202)
130 Hyma, 235.
131 Stob, 69. Samuel B. Schieffelin was a prominent member of the RCA in New York and a friend of Van Raalte. In 1852, he placed $7,000 in a trust fund under the care of the Board of Direction of the RCA for the purpose of establishing a parochial school system. His stipulations about the money included the requirement that schools be under the supervision of an RCA classis, that teachers be members of the denomination, and that curriculum include Scripture and Reformed doctrines. Further, if such a system was not founded within two years, he would give the money to the parochial system of the Presbyterian Church. An RCA committee determined that many classes across the country found establishment of private schools “inexpedient.” Schieffelin tried again in 1854 with a letter that exhorted the RCA to return to the educational policies outlined by Synod of Dort and that warned of the encroaching “Romanist” threat in American public schools. Van Raalte was the recipient of some of these funds, which helped support the development of Holland Academy (the secondary school branch of which remained open until 1938) and Hope College. Elton J. Bruins, “The Educational Endeavors of the Reformed Dutch Church 1628-1866.” Reformed Review Winter 2005/2006. Vol. 59, No. 2:165-183. See also James C. Kenneday and Caroline J. Simon. Can Hope Endure: A Historical Case Study in Christian Higher Education (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 70-74.
At the denominational level, in June 1868, Van Raalte helped write a document issued by the Council of Hope College and addressed to the General Synod of the RCA, urging them “to take to heart the exhortations of Jesus” and to pay attention to Christian education in elementary schools, as the early church and the sixteenth and seventeenth century churches in Geneva, France, and Holland had done. Speaking about the current RCA, he asks

Has she not here forgotten her imperative obligation in relation to the school-going age? Has she not, during all this period, too generally dropped the reins from her hands and abandoned oversight, direction and control to the world—at a period too during which mental and moral habits are formed, when views of men and things, of truth and duty, of right and wrong, are to an unalterable extent implanted? It is a shame that the Reformed Church should leave the whole field of Christian education for children to mere chance, or in general, to Providence.132

Given his life-long endeavor to strengthen Christian education, it is no wonder that historians such as Henry Dosker call Van Raalte “the champion of education” in his 1893 history of the Reformed Church in America. Let us now explore the educational legacy of that denomination.

Reformed Church in America – Educational Legacy

“Most Americans with Protestant leanings have a very reverential regard for the public school. In their affections it holds a firm and prominent place ... to point out the shortcomings in the practice and the results of public education is permissible, but to attack the system as such and the foundation upon which it rests is not at all, or barely, tolerated. To have the courage to do so is to reveal oneself as un-American and by that very token undesirable, perhaps even dangerous to the common weal ... for they cannot erase from their hearts the conviction that public education is essential to the well-being of the republic.”133

Even before the rise of common schools in the 1840s, the Reformed Church in America had developed parochial schools on the East coast (e.g., Collegiate School of

133 VandenBosch, Semi-Centennial Volume, 152.
New York founded in 1638 and Erasmus Hall School founded in 1787, which became part of the New York public school system in 1896). This Eastern network of RCA church-run primary school folded over the course of the nineteenth century as the denomination increasingly turned toward public schools as a unifying force in American society. Along with other mainline Protestant churches, the RCA trusted that public schools offered nonsectarian Christian education and inculcated American democratic ideas and cultural values. Because of the predominance of mainline Protestantism in most American communities, it was argued that public schools were virtually Christian schools. By the mid-twentieth century, the RCA’s institutional ties to educational bodies were largely restricted to three liberal arts colleges: Hope College (MI), Central College (IA), and Northwestern College (IA) and two seminaries: Western Theological Seminary (MI) and New Brunswick Theological Seminary (NJ). RCA General Synod went on record supporting common schools in 1892:

Whereas, The common School is vitally essential to the fusing of the heterogeneous elements of our population into one nation, to the end, that popular suffrage may continue to be a sure buttress of our government, Resolved, … we request our fellow citizens to bear in mind the warning of the farsighted, early statesmen of this land, and especially the words of General [Ulysses S.] Grant, uttered in 1876 [sic]: ‘Encourage free schools and resolve that not one dollar appropriated to them shall be applied to the support of any sectarian school; resolve that any child in the land may get a Common School education, unmixed


135 And yet, as a considerable number of Dutch immigrants arrived in Michigan from 1847 onward, the General Synod of the RCA had to address the need for theological training in the West. The General Synod that met in June 1847 affirmed “that we regard Christian Education to be pre-eminent among the instrumentalities God has placed in the hands of the Church, and that we especially commend it to the attention and fostering influence of all our churches, in relation to the necessities of the West” (qtd in Stob, 63), but this references a seminary, not schools.
with atheistic, pagan, or sectarian teachings. Keep the church and the State forever separate.’

The words of President Grant come from his “Seventh Annual Message” given December 7, 1875. In this address, Grant asserts the importance of compulsory universal education for citizens in order to resist “tyranny and oppression from the educated few.” To secure the institution of democracy, he recommended a constitutional amendment

making it the duty of each of the several States to establish and forever maintain free public schools adequate to the education of all the children in the rudimentary branches within their respective limits, irrespective of sex, color, birthplace, or religions; forbidding the teaching in said schools of religious, atheistic, or pagan tenets; and prohibiting the granting of any school funds or school taxes, or any part thereof, either by legislative, municipal, or other authority, for the benefit or in aid, directly or indirectly, of any religious sect or denomination, or in aid or for the benefit of any other object of any nature or kind whatever.

Grant also wanted part of the amendment to include literacy as a precursor to voting “after the year 1890, disfranchising none, however, on grounds of illiteracy who may be voters at the time this amendment takes effect.” Rev. Wormser of Amsterdam, after a visit to the United States in 1899, observed

As far as I could notice, only the conservative Hollanders send their children to the Christian school. Those who want to get ahead and who are entering into the life of the nation of which they have become citizens, provide American instruction for their children and take care of the Dutch language at home.

Gerrit John Diekema was born in Holland (MI), graduated from Hope College, and maintained a lifelong membership in the RCA. He was an American political success story, serving as mayor, three terms as a state representative, and four years as a member

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136 Acts and Proceedings of the General Synod of the Protestant Dutch Reformed Church, 1892: 661-662. qtd in Swierenga, 355. For RCA critique of private Christian schools, see The Leader, periodical of RCA-West (Bratt, 44).


138 Quoted in Stob, 140.
of Congress. Diekema viewed American public schools “as one of the grandest institutions of our nation and the anchor of our safety.” In 1914, while mayor of Holland (MI), he gave a public address titled “The Christian Character of our Public School System,” in which he noted the beneficial Americanizing influence of public schools on immigrants. Diekema also argued that public schools could be given Christian character, as they were governed by local people. Mr. F. Kniphuizen, who had come to America in 1884 and settled in Grand Haven, took on Diekema. As a disciple of Abraham Kuyper, Kniphuizen was “aware of the limitations inherent in the state-supported and governed public school.” He asserted that the school laws of Michigan prohibited sectarian education, and thus the Christianity of the public school system was “entirely without description, discernable boundaries or clear delimitations.”

Generalized or universal Christianity was not recognizable as Christianity. Despite his preference for public schools, it bears noting that a few years later, during the Michigan political fights surrounding private schools (1920-1924), former congressman Diekema spoke at a mass meeting against the amendment that would make Christian schools

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141 Speech published in De Wachter XXVIII, 38, 1-2. Schrier notes that Diekema knew these views would alienate large groups of voters in Holland, where he was serving as Mayor, but his zeal for Americanization prevailed (32). In February 1918, when Rev. Herman Hoeksema refused to allow an American flag in the sanctuary of an English-speaking CRC church in Holland (MI), Diekema went on the offensive, arguing that because God was using the United States to bring peace and freedom to the world and because the flag represents “all that is pure and noble and good,” Hoeksema’s act was tantamount to treason. Others piled on against Hoeksema, calling him a “Bolsheviki” subject to deportation or the firing squad. Bratt, 88. Diekema’s opinions are record in the Holland Daily Sentinel 15 February 1918. Hoeksema’s response is recorded in the Daily Sentinel 16, 18 and 19 February 1918, and in Gertrude Hoeksema’s biography of him, Therefore Have I Spoken (Grand Rapids, 1969), 81-90.

142 Stob, 100.

143 Quoted in Zwaanstra, 149.
illegal and public school compulsory: “The proposed amendment was conceived in bigotry and born in ignorance and the motives behind it are just those which are responsible for the prevailing lack of Christianity in public life.”

In the 1950s, RCA Synod went further in its support of public schools. They named a Committee on Educational Philosophy to study the pros and cons of Christian day schools and their theological bases, and the report came out strongly on the con side: “It defended public schools as integral to the democratic process, saw Christian pupils as salt and light, and insisted that parental baptismal vows rested on faith and did not require any ‘works’ such as Christian day schools... The [RCA] synod in 1957 adopted this report and distributed it to every minister.” DeJong complicates this assessment when he writes of ambivalence within the RCA. After noting that Christian schools “have been the bulwark of Calvinistic witness among the churches,” he explains that “in some areas of the RCA there is a genuine interest in Christian schools, in other areas there is a strong aversion, almost a hatred for these schools. [But] There is a general feeling that the public schools are sufficient for the task and some Reformed men are more concerned to perpetuate democracy (as they say public schools do) than Christianity.”

Christian Reformed Church in America – Educational Legacy

With a well supported church school system and a strong intellectual and theological tradition nourished by Calvin College and Seminary in Grand Rapids, Michigan, the denomination has become perhaps the country’s most

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144 “School Question in Final Airings.” Grand Rapids Press November 1, 1920, 2.
The Christian Reformed Church is a denomination focused on Calvinist doctrine. Along with the Bible, its confessional position is shaped by the Heidelberg Catechism (1563), the Belgic Confession (1566), and the Synod of Dort (1618-19). The introductory paragraph of the minutes from Synod of Dort’s seventeenth session (November 30, 1618) reads as follows:

In order that the Christian youth may be diligently instructed in the principles of religion, and be trained in piety, three modes of catechizing should be employed. 1. In the house, by parents. 2. In the schools, by schoolmasters. 3. In the churches, by ministers, elders, and catechists especially appointed for the purpose.

All people involved in catechetical formation are bound to these doctrinal statements as well. Securing Christian education was a priority for many Dutch Reformed immigrants; in fact, it was one of the driving reasons for many of those who left the Netherlands in 1847. Once landed, however, the exigencies of survival often took precedence. Furthermore, it was felt by many that the public, common schools could be satisfactorily Christian, especially since local communities had so much control over them (curriculum and administration). Despite Albertus Van Raalte’s best efforts, the seeds for parochial primary schools withered in the Holland colony and in the RCA more broadly, but found fertile soil in the Christian Reformed Church, which started a few miles away in Grand Rapids in 1857.

Rev. Henry E. Dosker, an RCA minister who arrived in 1873, suggested that the success of the Christian school movement in the CRC could be explained by “its

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isolationist spirit.” He was glad Van Raalte’s vision failed, because “if it had succeeded...

... the Americanization of the people, in the good sense, would thereby have been

hopelessly retarded.”

Albert Hyma asserts that the CRC actually caught Van Raalte’s vision of Christian education and brought it to fruition, becoming “the true guardian of his most cherished object: the instruction of the Christian religion in the elementary schools.”

Stob connects Christian education back to Netherlands history and heritage, especially the influence of Abraham Kuyper on immigrants who arrived toward the end of the 19th century.

Beets argues that there were four periods in the history of CRC primary schools, based largely on the language of instruction shifting from solely Dutch, English paired with Dutch, and finally the primacy of English.

Swierenga suggests that there were three eras with different foci, beginning with a desire to inculcate the language and culture of the Dutch homeland, then schools as another catechetical arm of the CRC, “to help church and parents pass on the faith,” and finally schools run by parent-controlled organizations “to train Christian citizens to take their place in the American nation.”

Van Brummelen explores the intersection of religion, ethnicity, and education in the North American Dutch Calvinist community, considers “how religious and moral beliefs, theoretical thought, social and economic influences, and national identities combined to forge school programs,” and argues that all of these elements are intertwined in the development of schools from the first wave of immigrants to settle in the Midwest.

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149 Dosker quoted in Stob, 53-54.
150 Hyma, 274. Quoted, but incorrectly cited in Stob as page 247 (55).
151 Stob, 57.
152 1. 1857-1880: Teaching of Dutch was emphasized 2. 1880-1890: Christian character of the schools was emphasized, “especially through the pleading of men like J. Veltkamp, B.J. Bennink, H. Jacobsma, J.B. Hoekstra, and others” 3. 1890-1900: English was accorded a place next to Dutch 4. 1900-1920: English becomes the language of instruction (Beets, 140-41). See Also John L Shaver, “Early History of our Christian School Movement” in Banner November 17, 1944.
153 Swierenga, Dutch Chicago, 362
in 1846 to 1977. In this section, we will trace the development of CRC Christian schools from ethnic enclaves, centered on the perpetuation of Dutch culture and language, to the shift toward a broader “world and life view” found in Kuyperian theology, and then the movement toward American assimilation.

Second Reformed Church of Grand Rapids established its own parochial school on January 1, 1856 with assistance from the Board of Education of the Dutch Reformed Church (later called the RCA). A year later, about half of Second Reformed’s congregation, Rev. H.G. Klijn, the church’s minister and President of the School Committee, and Mr. Adrian Pleune, the school’s teacher, seceded to form an independent congregation and soon after, a new denomination. The congregation became First Reformed (CRC), and the school went with the new denomination. In 1861 the congregation dedicated the first school building. In 1875, a large two story brick structure was built on Williams Street. This building served as a school, but also eventually as the home for the CRC’s theological seminary. Thus began a movement to establish Christian schools connected to the denomination, but free from state control. Although governance would eventually shift to organizations of parents, the CRC has continued to exert ecclesiastical influence over elementary and secondary schools across the country and across the world, and it has retained control of Calvin College. Let us explore the development of the CRC’s educational system.

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154 Van Brummelen, *Telling the Next Generation.*
155 Stob, 71.
Stage One: Enclave “little Dutch Schools” (1857 – 1890)

In 1870, the General Assembly (as Synod was then called) of the Christian Reformed Church “was deeply persuaded that the school is the nursery of and for the church, and that it must therefore be the calling of each congregation to see to it that they obtain a free school.” F. Kniphuizen, a lay member of the CRC and a fierce advocate for Christian education went further: “We cannot conceive of a Christian church in the future without a Christian school ... Christian schools are the cradle and nursing place of God’s church, without which, in course of time, the coming generation loses its character.” Synod of 1873 tried to “oblige” consistories to establish CRC schools, but very few congregations were willing or able to do so. By 1875, there were Christian schools in Grand Rapids, Grand Haven, Kalamazoo, Muskegon, and South Holland, but the denomination numbered 39 congregations by 1880, which means there were fewer than 15% of churches in compliance. Given the reality that many CRC children were in public schools, Synod advised consistories to insure provision of Reformed and Dutch instruction, be it in parochial or public schools. Synod of 1886 resolved to urge public school boards to introduce daily Bible reading and to insure the use of Christian textbooks in the district schools. But that same year, Synod addressed a pastoral letter to the churches expressing the wish that every congregation establish a Christian school of

156 Quoted in Stob, 95. Cf. Beets, 140.
157 Quoted in Stob, 95. “This has always been and still is one of the strongest elements in Christian school conviction—the belief that the very existence and well-being of the CRC depends upon the maintenance of the Christian school as an agency for the education of the church’s children. It has frequently been said that the greater faithfulness, soundness, and vitality of the CRC, as compared with the RCA, is to be explained by the Christian Reformed espousal and promotion of the Christian school” (Stob 95-96)
158 Kromminga, 120. Beets, 140.
its own.\textsuperscript{159} Despite the exhortation, in 1889, only 14 of the 79 congregations (18\%) in the CRC denomination had schools.\textsuperscript{160}

The goal for each congregation to have its own school was slow coming to fruition, in part because the focus was on the viability of the fledging community (internally and in relationship to the rest of the nation) and also because the public schools had not yet faced secularization; daily Bible reading and prayer were still commonly practiced.\textsuperscript{161} In 1896, Joost and an anonymous writer under the pseudonym Americus wrote against separate Christian schools in \textit{DeWachter}. Reformed Christian schools were too narrow, and “by their very nature could never become national schools, but would remain churchly, parochial, and sectarian.” Broad Christianity should be taught in schools, with specific doctrines taught in the Church. Bennink responded that public schools could not be generally Christian because America was a diverse nation and public schools had to serve the interests of non-Christians as well.\textsuperscript{162} Despite resistance, Zwaanstra cites 20+ articles published in \textit{DeWachter} prior to 1890 in support of separate Dutch Reformed schools. He notes that most argued based on similar principles, including desire for a Christian, Biblical, and Reformed education in order to serve the welfare of the children and desire to avoid moral danger and religious decline:

> the salvation of their souls should be given as much consideration as shaping and forming their minds ...separating the head from the heart and religion from society

\textsuperscript{159} (cf. \textit{DeWachter}, XIX, 22.2 and 25.2-3) [Zwaanstra, 132]

\textsuperscript{160} \textit{Jaarboekje}, 1889, 28-34, 40-41; cf. Zwaanstra f.n. 9 on page 136

\textsuperscript{161} Stob asserts that “in some places, especially in rural communities whose population was predominantly or even exclusively Dutch, it was possible to have a public school which was not only virtually Christian but under the government of school board members who were Reformed.” (132)

\textsuperscript{162} Zwaanstra cites \textit{DeWachter} XXVII 28.2, 37.2, 39.1, and 50.2. (145). If volume 1 was published February 1868 and volume 51 was published August 1918, then volume 28 should be ~1896. Schrier cites from Diekema’s speech delivered on October 31, 1895, published in \textit{De Wachter}, Jaargang 28, Nummer 38, November 13, 1895.
was irresponsible and illegitimate ... the children should be well-grounded in Christian social virtues in order to equip them for life in American society.\textsuperscript{163}

Critique of public schools during this era was usually connected to doctrine, arguing that it was insufficiently Reformed or too ecumenical. Many argued that the neutral approach was in fact a negative. In 1889, Rev. Gerrit E. Boer, then editor of \textit{DeWachter}, wrote promoting Christian schools, arguing that a general Christianity which ignored denominational differences was unacceptable and dangerous, more likely to nurture “modernism and unbelief” than faith.

In its infancy, the Christian school movement of the CRC strove to preserve Dutch language and culture while giving Calvinist religious instruction and fostering piety. The first schools were parochial “in origin, in ownership, in administration, spirit, and objective ... [They were] sponsored by the church, for service to the church ... agencies for preserving the children for the church and for continuing through all the days of the week the spiritual ministry of the church.”\textsuperscript{164} For most of the first four decades, Christian Reformed schools were church schools, based largely on Article 21 of the Dortian Church Order and Lord’s Day 38 of the Heidelberg Catechism, which uses the fourth commandment to connect the ministry of the gospel and schools.\textsuperscript{165} Parents were

\begin{verbatim}
\textsuperscript{163} Zwaanstra, 133.
\textsuperscript{164} Stob, 93-94.
\textsuperscript{165} Article 21: “Consistories shall see to it everywhere that there are good schoolmasters who shall not only teach the children reading, writing, languages and free arts, but also instruct them in godliness and in the Catechism.” Heidelberg Catechism, Lord’s Day 38 (http://www.heidelberg-catechism.com/en/lords-days/38.html) 103. Question. What does God require in the fourth commandment? Answer. First, that the ministry of the gospel and the schools be maintained \textsuperscript{1} and that, especially on the day of rest, I diligently attend the church of God \textsuperscript{2} to hear God’s Word, \textsuperscript{3} to use the sacraments, \textsuperscript{4} to call publicly upon the LORD, \textsuperscript{5} and to give Christian offerings for the poor.\textsuperscript{6} Second, that all the days of my life I rest from my evil works, let the LORD work in me through his Holy Spirit, and so begin in this life the eternal Sabbath. \textsuperscript{2}

1. Deut 6:4-9; 20-25; 1 Cor 9:13, 14; 2 Tim 2:2; 3:13-17; Tit 1:5.
3. Rom 10:14-17; 1 Cor 14:26-33; 1 Tim 4:13.
4. 1 Cor 11:23, 24.
6. Ps 50:14; 1 Cor 16:2; 2 Cor 8 and 9.
\end{verbatim}
reminded of the covenant promise made at the baptism of their children, obligating them to offer instruction in the way of the Lord and in Reformed doctrine.

Since many of these parents were not fluent in English, instruction in Dutch was crucial so that parents could monitor the books their children were reading, and so that the youth could understand what was being preached in churches. English textbooks were suspect because parents could not read them. More specifically, however, “the Dutch language was considered the indispensable medium for teaching that understanding of religion to which the True Dutch Reformed Church was committed, and for preserving it in generations to come against the diluting influences of American types of Christianity.” There was suspicion surrounding use of the English language, as “it was the vehicle through which all the evils of American life might make their way into the community of Christian Reformed believers.” Zwaanstra notes that in some churches, they included a clause stating that without the consent of the entire consistory and ¾ of the members of the congregation, language could not be changed. As such, use of Dutch could be “an effective barrier to unfavorable influences from the American world.” Stob argues that the first generation of immigrants “conceived of themselves as a distinct nationality. No serious attempt was made to identify with America.” It was widely believed that the perpetuation of proper faith and morals must occur in Dutch, lest the youth “go off to the corrupted English speaking churches of the land, and thus be lost for the church.” This is an example of an immigrant group who fears the loss of unique

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166 Zwaanstra, 136.  
167 Stob, 74-75 and 80.  
168 Banner LIII, 164; Zwaanstra, 52  
169 Zwaanstra, 24.  
170 Stob, 85-89.
cultural and religious identity in the American melting pot. Use of the native language, in this case Dutch, “keeps the young people in living communication with their elders and the whole tradition for which their elders stand. And it secures the young people against a too free and easy absorption of the ideas, ideals, and manners of the life of their new land.”171 Religious formation requires a kind of cultural isolation, and having separate schools was one way to bolster the Dutch Reformed enclave, even if it occurred at the expense of broader learning.

Stob laments the educational limitations of these “little Dutch schools.” Teachers were young and often untrained. Those with competency in Dutch language (reading and writing) and basic arithmetic, who could satisfy the consistory as to their character and orthodoxy, were considered qualified. When Adrian Pleune, the first schoolmaster in Grand Rapids, resigned in 1862 to take up farming, his replacement was the church janitor.172 Too frequently, teachers were inept at maintaining order, much less at offering solid instruction. In 1873, Gerrit Boer, pastor of First Christian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, reported that “the instruction in the school is exceedingly lamentable; everything goes on in the greatest confusion.”173 But as poor as the schools were in education, they were nonetheless seen as “the bulwark of protection against the evils of American life and against the influences of the corrupted Christianity of the American churches…the best hope for the preservation of the CRC.”174 Van Brummelen notes that these schools “bolstered the religious and ethnic cohesiveness of the Christian Reformed

171 Stob, 78.
172 Stob, 73.
173 Stob, 75. Stob does not name the minister, but cites consistory minutes of First Christian Reformed from November 10, 1873, when Boer was leading the congregation.
174 Stob, 96.
community,” sustaining Dutch Calvinist consciousness and social ties.\textsuperscript{175} Practical considerations proved another draw for parents, who wanted their children to socialize with “their own kind” and because “the likelihood of marrying within the Dutch community was greatly enhanced by the Christian school experience.”\textsuperscript{176}

Soon, however, tensions arose in the CRC community between those who wanted to remain culturally separate and those who wanted to assimilate into American culture, albeit in limited ways, with the latter group holding increasing sway. Some wanted instruction in Dutch and English. In 1885, F. Kniphuizen, called for “instruction that can satisfy in social as well as religious respect the needs of our children, both as citizens of America and as members of the church. An instruction that can compete in every respect with the usual public instruction, but which has precisely this advantage, that it stands in relation to and in conformity with our Reformed confession.”\textsuperscript{177} In 1891, First Christian Reformed Church of Grand Rapids organized their school into two departments, Dutch and English. Community members were assured that Christian instruction was happening in both departments, and children would no longer need to transfer to public schools for instruction in English.\textsuperscript{178} The school of East Street Church followed suit in 1892. Thus began a gradual shift to having Dutch language instruction by a teacher for a few hours each week.

The 1880s marked a turn in the community’s conception of education, both because the second generation was more inclined toward Americanization and because the second wave of immigrants, influenced by Abraham Kuyper, wanted to apply

\textsuperscript{175} VanBrummelen, 2-3.
\textsuperscript{176} Swierenga, \textit{Dutch Chicago}, 358.
\textsuperscript{177} Quoted in Stob, 90.
\textsuperscript{178} Stob, 125.
Reformed and Calvinist principles in America. There was a greater desire to be culturally relevant, and there was increased concern about curriculum and teaching methodology (e.g., introduction of graded classes). Rather than remaining an enclosed enclave, the school was meant to prepare students for their lives in the broader world. Rev. R.T. Kuiper arrived from the Netherlands in 1870 to take up the pastorate of a CRC congregation in Graafschap, Michigan. In 1883, he wrote that Christian schools should be concerned with forming good Christians and good American citizens: “We want a school in America, in which our children will be trained and nurtured to be American citizens, in the English language, and in all the sciences needful for an enlightened American citizen.”\(^{179}\) Rev. J. Noordewier wrote in 1886 of the necessity as American citizens of learning English: “Whoever is unable to, feels the disadvantage of it; and whoever doesn’t want to, could better have remained in the fatherland.”\(^{180}\) English was the language of this land and the language of the community’s future.

The realization that education must develop was paired with the realization that administration of the schools must expand beyond the church.\(^{181}\) Supervision of schools shifted from the church pastor to a committee of the consistory and then to a board (four members elected by congregation and four members chosen from the consistory). Rev. Gerrit Boer suggested in the July 1875 publication of *De Wachter* that schools should be an extension of the instruction for which parents were responsible.\(^{182}\) Parents had the primary responsibility for educating their children; the Christian school was an extension

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\(^{179}\) Quoted in Stob, 111.

\(^{180}\) Quoted in Stob, 114.

\(^{181}\) Oppewal notes that the actual practices of the CRC in regard to schools have “ranged all the way from careful supervision, even to the point of getting her creeds stated as the creedal basis of the school in the constitution, to simple moral and financial support and cooperation” (16).


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of the Christian home, with both supported by the church. In 1892 Synod emphasized the
duty of all ministers and elders to support vigorously the establishment and welfare of
Christian schools and adopted a resolution urging the organization of a society for this
purpose. Drawing on the example of schools in the Netherlands which were controlled by
parents, but open to the influence of the church and the inspection of the state, a Society
for Christian Education on a Reformed Basis was officially organized. Its first convention
was held in 1900. Soon after Alpine Avenue Christian School was shifted from church-
control to parental-ownership, and other schools followed suit.

*Stage Two: Parent-controlled “free” schools to train Christian citizens to take their place in the American nation (1890 – 1918)*

Zwaanstra asserts that the CRC community was “virtually obsessed with
questions pertaining to its identity and task” from 1890 to 1918. The results included
heightened awareness about their American surroundings and becoming “more self-
consciously Reformed and more articulate in expressing the implications of its faith in a
new environment.” One major influence during this period came from another wave of
Dutch immigrants, many of whom had been shaped by the ideals of Abraham Kuyper
(1837-1920), a Netherlands political and religious leader reformer, as well as an
educational theorist. Bratt and Wells aptly describe his mission:

> to renew Dutch society and culture by dint of Calvinistic critique and constructions… broad and fresh cultural engagement—windows open to the world…Kuyper wanted to take on the reigning mentalities of modern culture at the level of fundamental principle. He demanded that Christians build a comprehensive worldview and pit it in full battle against those of secularism, humanism, and naturalism.

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183 Zwaanstra, 25.
184 For the definitive biography, see James D. Bratt’s *Abraham Kuyper: Modern Calvinist, Christian Democrat*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013.
185 Bratt and Wells, 22-23.
Kuyper presupposed that human beings are directed by a “life principle,” and we naturally congregate around shared visions of reality and patterns of living. On a larger scale, “every civilization was simply the elaboration of a principle or of the conflict of principles.” Kuyper argued that these principles were always and already religious, “commitments to or defiance of God’s will.” He envisioned a just, pluralistic culture where followers of various life principles would found institutions for religion and education, and there would be toleration of difference. He fought to insure that schools would be free in the classical sense, “free of tyranny of the state and free of the tyranny of the church,” by having them run by parent-controlled societies. Kuyper expected, however, that Neo-Calvinism would emerge victorious from the ideological combat.\textsuperscript{186}

Kuyper founded the Free University of Amsterdam not just to produce and teach orthodox theology, but also to place all learning on a Reformed scriptural base. Faith and learning must be integrated. Kuyper believed that knowledge is value-laden:

As truly as every plant has a root, so truly does a principle hide under every manifestation of life. These principles are interconnected and have their common root in a fundamental principle; and from the latter is developed logically and systematically the whole complex of ruling ideas and conceptions that go to make up our life and world-view… Now this [worldview] is not obtained by either Christian works or mysticism but only by going back, our hearts full of mystical warmth and our personal faith manifesting itself in abundant fruit, to that turning-point in history, and in the development of humanity which was reached in the Reformation and this is equivalent to a return to Calvinism.\textsuperscript{187}

Notice Kuyper’s description of a deeply-entrenched root system for ideas and their branches in all areas of life. Long before postmodern debunking of the objectivity myth, Kuyper deconstructs it as a fallacy. There is no such thing as value-free knowledge. In


\textsuperscript{187} From Kuyper’s 1898 Stone Lectures at Princeton University.

the inaugural address at the Free University of Amsterdam in 1880, Kuyper delineated the concept of “sphere sovereignty,” asserting that every area of human investigation operates according to laws created by God, but each has a unique inner structure and a rationale of its own. Every area of life is subject to the all-encompassing sovereignty of God, and no single sphere has the right to exercise lordship over the others (e.g., Church, State, School):

our undertaking implies a protest against the present environment and a suggestion that something better is available...our fight was concentrated in the fight about the public school, when in that school the sovereignty of conscience, the sovereignty of the family sphere, the sovereignty of the pedagogical sphere, and the sovereignty of the spiritual sphere were threatened.

A Christian curriculum must be broad because “there is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human life of which Christ, who is sovereign of all, does not cry, ‘Mine!’” As such, everything can be studied and brought under God’s sovereign control. This is his “world and life view.” During his visit to America in 1898, he exhorted the Dutch immigrants with a grand mission, “to put the stamp of Calvinism on their civilization.”

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188 “Our human life, with its material foreground, which is visible, and its spiritual background, which is invisible, obviously is neither simple nor uniform, but forms an infinitely structured organism. It is so structured that the individual exists only in groups, and the whole can reveal itself only in those groups... . . . There is a domain of nature, in which the Sovereign exerts power upon matter by fixed laws. But there is also a domain of the personal, of the domestic, of the scientific, of the social, and of the ecclesiastical life; each of which obeys its own law of life... in all of these spheres the cogwheels engage one another, and it is precisely because of the mutual interaction of these spheres that there is an emergence of that rich, many-sided, multi-formed human life.”


190 Zwaanstra, 36.
seriously, concentrating on educating their youth, and his language of “world and life view” still pervades their formational work.

Van Brummelen helpfully describes two strains of Calvinism and their impact on Christian schools in America. Most of the first wave of Dutch Reformed settlers in Michigan emphasized Calvinist doctrine and personal piety. They believed their children should be shielded from the corruption of the American environment, and so they constructed a cultural enclave, with schools in which the instruction occurred solely in Dutch. The second wave of Dutch Reformed immigrants, influenced by Kuyper, attached greater importance on engaging with the world (politics, commerce, and education), both to analyze critically and to influence the social order.\textsuperscript{191} And it was this latter group that incited the growth of Christian schools. Based on the outlook that “the whole of life, from center to circumference and back from circumference to center, belongs to God,” it becomes incumbent to develop presupposing

that the child is a religious being, that the teacher is a religious being, that all truth in its relation to God is one, and that education should be the preparation for the whole of life ... [this] calls for a system of education which is Christian from the core outward and from top to bottom, all the way from the kindergarten to the university.\textsuperscript{192}

Educators who came from the Netherlands in this wave of immigration were trained and certified (a professional class), and committed to Christian education. Stob argues that

\textsuperscript{191} Van Brummelen, 3-6. Compare this to the two types of Kuyperians described by Bratt and Wells (23): 1. positive Calvinists: common grace, “a heritage of divine blessing that allowed people of all faiths and none to achieve moral and intellectual good” 2. antithesis Calvinists (Doooyeweerdians): divide between the regenerate and the worldly, “Christians ought therefore to go their own way in all things and stay critical of opposing systems”; they had to moderate their claims about natural revelation to insure it remained below Scripture. For a description of the four most common mentalities of American Calvinists, see Appendix D.

\textsuperscript{192} Vanden Bosch, “The School and Christian Education,” 148. Cf. “The school system can be seen as a reflection of a religio-philosophical way of life which, far from being anticultural, is eager to influence the society at large and to play an active role in the molding of sociopolitical system known as American democracy” (Oppewal, 31).
this group “displaced the ministers as the leaders in the Christian school movement, and helped to turn it from an ecclesiastically governed and conditioned movement to one owned and sponsored by intelligent and responsible lay members of the Christian community.”\footnote{Stob, 106.} We see this ideology in the words of P.R. Holtman, who published the following in the June 1892 edition of \textit{DeWachter}:

\begin{quote}
The Christian school must not be a child of the churches, or live by the grace of the churches, so that it would flourish or decline in the measure that spiritual life of the church rose and declined ... The Christian school requires a life-sphere of its own, with its own rationale, not as concerns principles but as concerns administration.\footnote{Quoted in Oppewal, 15.}
\end{quote}

Notice the Kuyperian language of sphere sovereignty. Let us turn to the Kuyperian examples of one pastor, Rev. Klaas Kuiper, and one lay leader, Mr. B.J. Bennink.

Rev. Klaas Kuiper arrived in America in 1891 to take up a pastorate in Grand Haven, Michigan. B.J. Bennink and Henry Beets call him the father of the Christian school movement.\footnote{L.J. Hulst called Kuiper “a prophet in the wilderness for the cause of Christian education.”\footnote{Based on his Calvinist understanding of covenant, especially baptismal vows, Kuiper pushed for parental control of schools. He argued that Reformed parents should be focused above all things on raising Reformed Christian children.}} Insuring this would require protecting them from confessionally indifferent forms of Christianity readily found in America and immersing them instead in Reformed doctrine in Christian educational settings from primary school through college and into adulthood:

\begin{quote}
Christian education was the most important service one could render to God. For carrying on mission work and works of Christian mercy, Christian education was required. The spirit of Christian love and compassion had to be cultivated as much as possible in children of Christian parents, and this could be done only through
\end{quote}

\footnote{De Wachter, XXXVII, 21, 2}
education ... In brief, Reformed education had to equip the church to recognize, love and carry out the task assigned it.\(^{197}\)

With each sphere fulfilling its task faithfully, the result would be flourishing in all areas. He went so far as to describe the school as the foundation upon which to build the church.\(^{198}\) Kuiper wrote the exhortation issued by CRC Synod in 1898. It stated that “a positive Christian education with Reformed principles is a duty for Reformed Christians” and enjoined “all ministers and elders to work for the cause of Christian education in every place where such is possible.” The document gave four reasons Christian schools were necessary:

1. God’s Word demands that our children be trained in the fear and admonition of the Lord.
2. The promises of the parents at the time of baptism.
3. There may be no separation between our civic, social, or religious life, education and training.
4. The honor of our King demands it, since all power is given him in heaven and earth, also in the realm of education and all other knowledge.\(^{199}\)

With the rise of secularization in public schools, it became easier to make the case that private Christian schools were needed for Christian Reformed families.

Mr. B.J. Bennink came to America in 1886 and became principal of a Christian school in Muskegon, Michigan. Stob explains that Bennink was “at the heart of the Christian school movement” for more than four decades, serving as teacher and textbook writer, organizer and administrator. He led “a tireless crusade for better organization and administration of the schools, for better teaching methods and teaching materials, and for competent teachers, who knew what education meant and who were committed to the

\(^{197}\) Zwaanstra, 137-38 and 161, citing De Wachter XLVII, 33.3.

\(^{198}\) Stob, 102. Kuiper did not forget public schools, but his focus was elsewhere: “Let us all work together to make the public school as Christian as possible, but let us not be satisfied with any other education for our children than that which is based on Reformed principles” (qtd in Stob 137)

cause.” He understood that by law, public schools could not be Christian, but that did not mean Christian schools could not be Americanized. The “little Dutch schools” produced cultural isolation and a sectarian spirit. Christian schools should prepare students to be citizens of America, but they also had to nurture youth as members of a covenant community: “The primary consideration in education was not to teach the children the tremendous advantages of being citizens in America, but rather to instruct them in the incomprehensible benefits of being included in God’s covenant and heirs to the promises of His grace.” In 1896, Bennink argued that Christian education was more important than American Education, and no country had a future without the Cross of Christ, which would not be found in American public schools. For Bennink, the best Christian is also the best citizen. He pushed for “genuine American Christian schools” that were accredited like public schools.

In 1900, the CRC numbered 144 churches and nine regional Classes, but the number of Christian schools was only fourteen, seven of which were in Grand Rapids. After 1900 the focus of CRC Christian education shifted toward “expanding participation and support, better school organization, higher salaries for teachers and generally better education” as the initial battle for justifying the need for separate Christian schools had been won. In 1909 Calvin Professor B.K. Kuiper spoke to graduating CRC

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200 Stob, 104-105.
201 Zwaanstra, 144.
202 De Wachter, XXVIII, 8.1 and XXVIII, 7.2 and XXVIII, 41.2, cited in Zwaanstra, 154. If volume 1 was published February 1868 and volume 51 was published August 1918, then volume 28 should be ~1896.
203 Stob, 127. Oppewal warns “failure on the part of those within the [Christian school] system to understand wherein its theoretical bases differ from those of public education can lead to an unwitting absorption into its own practices and aims of elements that are inconsistent with its own theoretical bases” (Oppewal, 6).
204 Stob, 129. At the time, Grand Rapids had eleven CRC churches.
205 Zwaanstra, 153.
catechumenates, but he directed his words to their parents. He began with the axiom “ALL education should be CHRISTIAN . . . Christian through and through; Christian from beginning to end; Christian in spirit, in method, and in contents.” He then goes further to say that such education must also adhere to Reformed principles, and poses a rhetorical question: “Can you, members of the Christian Reformed Church of Burton Heights, as Christian parents, with a clear conscience before God, send your children to the public schools of Grand Rapids? . . . To put the question is to answer it.”

In 1914, the CRC revised Article 21 of the Church Order of the Christian Reformed Church to read “Consistories shall see to it that there are good Christian schools where parents may have their children instructed according to the demands of the covenant.” Support came through regular offering collections, established diaconal funds for school tuition assistance to parents in need, fundraising concerts, and bake sales. Article 41 of the CRC Church Order delineated four questions that were to be asked at each Classical meeting (occurred four times per year), and the third question asked whether the Christian schools were being cared for and supported by the consistory of each church. By the 1920s, the CRC had an overwhelming majority in favor of Christian day schools.

The National Union of Christian Schools (NUCS) was founded in Chicago in 1920 to unite Christian schools connected to the Calvinist theological bent and to the

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207 In 1965, this article became Article 71, and there was a shift of focus toward congregations: The consistory shall diligently encourage the members of the congregation to establish good Christian schools, and shall urge parents to have their children instructed in these schools according to the demands of the covenant.”

208 Swierenga, 358.
Christian Reformed Church more specifically. The goal of NUCS was to support Christian schools with Calvinist roots, writing and publishing textbooks, maintaining a magazine, holding conventions, and developing standards for teachers (training and salary). These schools are controlled by parent-society organizations because God holds parents responsible for the training of their children, neither the State nor the Church is qualified to give school instruction but the Home holds both religious and secular interests. In 1922, there were 75 Christian primary schools in fifteen states and Canada.

According to 1948 records, there were 125 schools with a combined enrollment of 22,570 students and 723 teachers, the vast majority of whom are members of the CRC, making it “one of the outstanding promoters of Christian education among Protestant denominations in America.” Currently, there are over 300 schools affiliated with the organization, now called Christian Schools International (CSI).

**Calvin College and Grand Rapids Christian High School**

In February 1876, Rev. Gerrit E. Boer formally opened the institution from which Calvin College and Grand Rapids Christian High School would emerge. Classrooms for this CRC theological school were in the same building as the parochial grade school sponsored by his church, First Christian Reformed, in Grand Rapids. Development into a four-year college was slow. CRC Synod in 1896 and 1898 deemed a college desirable, and there was a synodical decision in 1900 “to expand the literary department of the Theological School to an academy with a four year course of study, open also to students

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210 Beets, 142.

with vocational objectives other than the ministry.” Calvin College became a complete four-year degree-granting institution in 1920. Jacob G. Vanden Bosch, who chaired the English Department at Calvin College 1900-1945, noted that “the college grew precisely with the Christian Reformed Church’s Christian day-school movement, the former providing teachers for the latter and the two together rising along with Dutch-American social standing on the one hand and the secularization of the public schools on the other.” Vanden Bosch hoped Calvin would be a place to infuse Calvinism into American civilization, and he warned against separation from American life. And yet through its various stages of development, there has been tension between cultural solidarity, fostered in part by sequestering students from contact with broader ideas and foreign patterns of living, and critical engagement with the world, both in the classroom and after graduation.

When Calvin College’s President, Rev. John J. Hiemenga published his “Education Program” in The Banner (November 13, 1919), one of his stated goals was opening a Christian high school. Grand Rapids Christian High School spun off from Calvin and dates from September, 1920. Its first location was the former Calvin

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212 Zwaanstra, 158.
213 Bratt and Wells, 26.
215 Beets, 133.
216 Across Lake Michigan, Chicago Christian High School was founded in 1918, “the first parent-owned school of its kind in Reformed circles nationwide” (Swierenga, 393). Swierenga notes that “from the outset, school policy was to admit students who sought Christian education, regardless of their background . . . As a result, a rising proportion of the student body over the years were from non-Reformed homes” (Swierenga, 395). He goes on to argue that “the commitment to Christian schooling in Chicago far surpassed that in Grand Rapids, the other Dutch metropolis. The seventeen Chicago-area Christian Reformed churches in 1940 averaged 89% attendance, compared to only 70% in Grand Rapids” (statistics compiled from school attendance percentages by congregation, reported in the National Union of Christian Schools Yearbook of 1940, qtd in Swierenga, 448).
Theological School building, on the corner of Madison Avenue and Franklin Street, and its first faculty numbered ten teachers, with F.J. Driessens as principal. By 1922, enrollment was up to 360 students. Before turning to the ethnographic findings at Grand Rapids Christian High School gathered between August 2012 and January 2013, a warning from Oppewal:

If the Calvinistic school movement is to function best on the American scene, it must keep before itself a sense of its own past. If it is to retain its own identity and if it is not to be swallowed up, it must realize that its educational practice is rooted in quite different disciplines and intellectual traditions than most of the existing school systems in America … decisions made today without a look at the past will tend to be arbitrary (lacking in principle), or aimless (lacking in direction), or still worse, imitative (lacking in originality).

This warning is part of the justification for the preceding (lengthy) historical chapter, and it will echo into the chapter which offers constructive theological and pedagogical responses to the educational community of GRCHS. Writing for the Semi-Centennial of Calvin College, Bouma asked: “For what would it profit our school if it gained the plaudits of the educational world, and enjoyed abundantly all the advantages of equipment, endowment, recognition of scholastic standing, and intercollegiate fame, if in the transaction it lose its soul?” Questions about what has been gained and lost at GRCHS will be explored in chapter five.

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217 Beets, 138.
218 Oppewal, 3.
219 Bouma, 193. Allusion to Matthew 16:26 For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life? Or what will they give in return for their life?
America: Dutch Reformed Immigrants and Americanization

“As one examines the history of Reformed thought in America during the past 200 years, it becomes apparent that Reformed Christians have been comfortable citizens of this nation ... In fact, during the nineteenth century Reformed thought assumed that America was a quasi-established Protestant country... Seldom have Reformed Christians felt out of step with the pervasive sway of culture. Few the prophets who have pronounced a counter-cultural message.”

If Voskuil is correct, then Reformed Christians in America have historically been at the center of history and not on the margins. For Dutch Reformed Christians, “whiteness” was relatively easily to establish, and there was little perceived need to critique a social order from which there was considerable benefit. And yet, Dutch immigrants faced multiple tensions: between Church and World, between Netherlands as Mother Country and America as new homeland, between a desire for fellowship with other like-minded Christians and a desire to maintain purity in doctrine and forms of worship. Using Kuyperian awareness of life principles, Bouma suggests that that the two prevailing philosophies of life in America are Puritanism and Pragmatism. The former is defined by “faith in absolute truth, absolute values, absolute norms, absolute ideals, and all these absolute because rooted in the will of the absolute, the living God, the Supreme Truth.” Pragmatism, the latter and more prominent philosophy, is “found in the achievements of modern science, technology, commerce, industry, and finance,” but this has led to the dominance of an economic worldview where “practical utility” takes precedence over “moral ideals.” Deistic moralism is “the bridge from the idealism of the Puritan to the utilitarianism of the Pragmatist,” and most Americans confess that religion

is “a serviceable commodity to be used on certain occasions.” For Calvinists who believe that all of life is religious, commodification of faith for its ethical utility is unacceptable (perhaps even inconceivable). As such, “the real problem is not so much to become good Americans (though that is part of our task), but to remain and become ever better Calvinists while we make the racial and psychological transition from the Dutch to the American nationality.” Kromminga notes that first generation immigrants feared that Americanization “would open the door for Arminianizing and Methodistic tendencies.” This fear was articulated more fully by Rev. Klaas Kuiper in 1897: “My greatest objection in and against America has always been the fear that our generation will be estranged from the Reformed principles and fall away into superficial Methodism.”

Bratt notes that Dutch Calvinists associated Methodism with its British roots, but also its Americanized manifestation: “To diehards of Dutchness, it connoted the use of organs, choirs, and even the English language in worship ... But all agreed on its salient features: doctrinal indifference, passion for ‘programs,’ impulsive innovation”

Former President Theodore Roosevelt, speaking to the largely Irish Catholic Knights of Columbus at Carnegie Hall (NY) on Columbus Day 1915, asserted that,

There is no room in this country for hyphenated Americanism. When I refer to hyphenated Americans, I do not refer to naturalized Americans. Some of the very best Americans I have ever known were naturalized Americans, Americans born abroad. But a hyphenated American is not an American at all … The one

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221 Bouma, SEMI-CENTENNIAL VOLUME, 191-192, 198-199, 206.
222 Kromminga, 134.
223 Quoted in Stob, 79. Vander Mey believed that Methodism had become the national religion of America, and it was partially responsible for lack of critique of departure from faith. See De Wachter XLI, 28.4; L.J. Hulst argued that Methodism was a utilitarian movement in which religion is used for self-service. See De Wachter XXIII, 14.1 and XXIII, 3.2; Van Lonkhuyzen argued that the Methodist system was diametrically opposed to the Reformed worldview. See DeWachter XLVI 37.2, XLVII 38.2. L 13.2, 41.2, 50.4, 51.2 All cited in Zwaanstra, 43-45.
224 Bratt, 59. In the explanatory footnote for this, Bratt goes on to say that other definitive elements of Methodism were “Arminian theology, a subjective-experiential approach, activist moralism, and a pronounced concern with organization” (248).
absolutely certain way of bringing this nation to ruin, of preventing all possibility of its continuing to be a nation at all, would be to permit it to become a tangle of squabbling nationalities, an intricate knot of German-Americans, Irish-Americans, English-Americans, French-Americans, Scandinavian-Americans or Italian-Americans, each preserving its separate nationality, each at heart feeling more sympathy with Europeans of that nationality, than with the other citizens of the American Republic … There is no such thing as a hyphenated American who is a good American. The only man who is a good American is the man who is an American and nothing else … I ask you to make a special effort to deal with Americanization, the fusing into one nation, a nation necessarily different from all other nations. Pay heed to the three principal essentials: (1) The need of a common language, with a minimum amount of illiteracy; (2) the need of a common civil standard, similar ideals, beliefs, and customs symbolized by the oath of allegiance to America, and (3) the need of a high standard of living of reasonable equality of opportunity and of social and industrial justice.”

President Woodrow Wilson also regarded "hyphenated Americans" with suspicion, saying at a speech given in Kansas City, MO on September 26, 1919: "Any man who carries a hyphen about with him carries a dagger that he is ready to plunge into the vitals of this Republic whenever he gets ready. If I can catch any man with a hyphen in this great country I will know that I have got an enemy of the Republic." Bouma rightly perceives a distinctive group consciousness rooted in “Dutch ancestry and a Calvinistic outlook upon life.” However, most Christian Reformed Dutch Americans did not want to be perceived as a hyphenated group that “insists on remaining a drop of oil on the waters of American life.”

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227 Bouma, SEMI-CENTENNIAL VOLUME, 188-189. Compare to John Dewey: "No matter how loudly any one proclaims his Americanism, if he assumes that any one racial strain, any one component culture, no matter how early settled it was in our territory, or how effective it has proved in its own land, is to furnish a pattern to which all other strains and cultures are to conform, he is a traitor to an American nationalism. Our unity cannot be homogeneous thing like that of the separate states of Europe from which our population is drawn; it must be a unity created by drawing out and composing into a harmonious whole the best, the most characteristic, which each contributing race and people has to offer. I find that many who talk the loudest about the need of a supreme and unified Americanism of spirit really mean some special code or tradition to which they happen to be attached. They have some pet tradition which they would impose upon all. In thus measuring the scope of Americanism by some single element which enters into it they are themselves false to the spirit of America. . . The fact is, the genuine American, the typical American, is himself a hyphenated character. This does not mean that he is part American and that some
Language was another register on which the tune of American cultural identity was composed, albeit in a minor key with many discordant notes. For many of the Dutch Reformed Christians in America, Dutch was both the language of their culture and the language of their faith. English represented a declension from orthodoxy on what could easily become a slippery slope to bland, generalized American Protestantism. There was suspicion surrounding use of the English language, as “it was the vehicle through which all the evils of American life might make their way into the community of Christian Reformed believers.” But English was also the primary language of the nation in which they had settled. Sooner or later, “Dutch Reformed” had to become “American Reformed.” In 1886 the Mission Committee of the CRC Synod decided that “serious attempts should be made to obtain preaching and catechism in the English language where such is necessary.” La Grave Avenue CRC in Grand Rapids became the first congregation to use English in 1887.228

In the midst of World War I nativism, language became a litmus test for loyalty to America. In 1918 Governor Harding of Iowa proclaimed that “English should and must be the only medium of instruction in public, private, denominational and other similar schools. Conversation in public places, on trains, and over the telephone should be in the

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228 Stob, 80 and 91. La Grave Avenue CRC Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan. The second was Broadway CRC, also in Grand Rapids. CRC Churches in the Hackensack Classis already had English-speaking congregations (Beets, 84). It wasn’t until 1934, however, that all Acts of the CRC were published only in English (Zwaanstra, 67).
English language. Let those who cannot speak or understand the English language conduct their religious worship in their home.”

Speaking in Des Moines on May 27, 1918, former President Theodore Roosevelt agreed that English should be the language of America: “This is a nation—not a polyglot boarding house. There is not room in the country for any 50-50 American, nor can there be but one loyalty—to the Stars and Stripes.” These words were repeated as Roosevelt’s last public statement when read to a group in New York on January 6, 1919:

If he [the immigrant] tries to keep segregated with men from his own origin and separated from the rest of America, then he isn’t doing his part as an American ... We have room for but one language here and that is the English language, for we intend to see that the crucible turns our people out as Americans, and American nationality, and not as dwellers in a polyglot boarding house; and we have room for but one soul loyalty, and that is loyalty to the American people.

One wonders if “soul” is a misprint or a pun on homonyms (sole and soul).

At the brink of American involvement with World War I (circa 1916), CRC Synod considered a proposal to address federal authorities in Washington with assurances of loyalty to the country, and prayers for peace and prosperity. They initially rejected this

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230 “Use Only English, Roosevelt Urges,” *The Washington Post*, May 28, 1918. Christian Reformed churches in Iowa with German-speaking or Dutch-speaking congregations “could not obey the advice of the governor without spiritual loss [because they were not prepared for preaching and worship in English], and they could not disregard it without danger from the mob.” In fact, a Christian school in Sully was set alight and both a school and a church in Peoria were burned down. The churches petitioned the governor, who offered a slight concession: they could preach in a foreign language, “provided the same message was brought to the same audience also in the language of our country.” (Kromminga, 135. Cf. Bratt, 89, who explains that Rev. J.J. Weersing refused to allow an American flag in the sanctuary and refused to designate certain Sundays for Red Cross, YMCA, or Liberty Loan. He was run out of town by a band of several hundred patriots.) In Michigan, the small town just northwest of Grand Rapids, which was named Berlin when it was founded in 1852, changed its name in 1919 to Marne, to honor those who fought in the First (September 1914) and Second (July 15 - September 16, 1918) Battles of Marne. When the war ended, many churches returned to Dutch or German, at least partially, but few used it solely anymore, as “a deliberate effort was made to become more thoroughly American.” (Zwaanstra, 3).

proposal as a matter of international law concern “in which field the Church has no call to act and to render opinions,” but when America sent troops into the war two years later, “Synod then unanimously resolved to send a message to the President of the United States pledging him the wholehearted support of the Church.”\footnote{232 Kromminga, 135. Cf. Bratt, 90.} For some, this did not erase national disloyalty. The Leader (a periodical of RCA-West) accused the CRC of unwillingness to become fully American in language or practice. Christian schools did not escape the spray of written shrapnel, characterized as “militaristic,” “Prussian,” and in opposition to the God-preserved nation of America.\footnote{233 Bratt, 87. See also John Van der Beek, \textit{Leader}, January 2 and 16, 1918 (p. 9 of each).} The \textit{Grand Rapids News} described the Christian Reformed Church as “un-American,” “parochial,” and “behind the times” because of their ethnic enclaves and their separate Christian schools.\footnote{234 Bratt, 87.} As such, proponents had to prove that they were dutiful citizens and not outliers. By the mid-1910s, war-generated nativism accelerated Americanization, often to the point of “uncritical devotion to America as the land of liberty and freedom.”\footnote{235 Van Brummelen, 5.} CRC advocates for Christian schools such as J.W. Brink, G. Hoeksema, A. Keizer and Schoolland emphasized that they wanted to prepare children for American citizenship with instruction in English and fully engage with scientific knowledge, not shying away, as some fundamentalist Christian schools might do.\footnote{236 Zwaanstra, 154.}

In March 1917, Henry Beets published a set of editorials in \textit{The Banner} delineating “What we Dutch Calvinists really stand for and why” based on an address he had given at Fountain Street Baptist Church. Both the editorials and the address were
offered in response to allegations from Dr. Wishart of Fountain Street that they were anti-American, guilty of treachery and sedition. Beets “humbly plead guilty” to adhering to scriptural infallibility, as have “all the great historical Protestant denominations,” and to charges of Calvinism. In fact, he asserts that “every true Christian, even though confessionally an Arminian, is a Calvinist when he is on his knees in utter dependence on grace.” He cites history to deny allegations of treachery: The Dutch have been “as patriotic and America-loving as any other part of our great nation. Our people have proved this in the Revolutionary War and the Civil War.”

In the second editorial, Beets denies harboring “antipathy toward our Public Schools,” claiming instead that they are “indispensable for many of our nation,” serving as a melting pot. He explains that CRC church “pray for its prosperity from our pulpits, and have profound respect for the many serious-minded, nation-loving people consecrated to the work of teaching in them.” But America is a nation with “more radically different sects of all kinds than any other people on earth,” so it is impossible to have Christian public schools. Trying to do so would be “un-American, un-republican, un-Christian.” And yet Calvinists “insist on having religion in our schools,” because parents are the “God-ordained educators of their offspring” more than State or Church, and they want “our Christian principles to be a leaven, to leaven the whole lump of education, and not simply a little pepper and salt, to be sprinkled on as a condiment.” He defends CRC support of private schools using Kuyperian reasoning about formation:

We claim that the great things we stand for make up what is the highest and best type of Americanism. . . If it be true that the best “Christian” makes the best citizen—if it be true that it makes better citizens of us if we take the Bible as our guide, bow before a Sovereign God, and our education be truly Christian—and

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who will deny such in a Christian Church? Well, then, by the same token, it will make a better nation of us if we as a people thus bow and thus are trained.\textsuperscript{238}

The question then becomes what it means to be the best American Christian citizen. This will be our focus in chapter five, using Grand Rapids Christian Schools as our case study location.

Vanden Bosch enjoins members of the CRC to market their Christian schools as democratic, practical, and honorable:

\textit{We must make unmistakably clear that a system of schools which, while it meets every legitimate claim of church, state, and society, respects the religious convictions of parents is fundamentally in harmony with the principles at the basis of our democracy... We must point to our denominational colleges and academies which have always held places of honor in our national life... In as many ways as possible must we demonstrate to the practical genius of our people the practicability of the free Christian school.}\textsuperscript{239}

As we continue to trace history, it seems more apt to describe the powerful yeast of American culture, especially its capitalism and materialism, both seen in the halls of Christian schools. There is a danger in the Americanization of CRC Christian schools. Oppewal warns that these educational communities must maintain a sense of history in order to retain identity, remembering that Calvinist educational practices are “rooted in quite different disciplines and intellectual traditions than most of the existing school systems in America.” Forgetting this can lead to a “vacuum ... perfect for the unwitting absorption into the school of values antithetical to those in the school’s tradition.”\textsuperscript{240}

\begin{itemize}
\item\textsuperscript{238} Henry Beets, “What we Dutch Calvinists really stand for and why,” \textit{The Banner}, March 29, 1917:200-201.
\item\textsuperscript{239} VandenBosch, SEMI-CENTENNIAL VOLUME, 152, 156.
\item\textsuperscript{240} Oppewal, 3 and 29.
\end{itemize}
Chapter Three: Whiteness in the water, washing up on the shores - Racialized geography of housing and schools in Grand Rapids

“When in principle (or in myth) nationality in the United States may require only allegiance to abstract forms, in practice citizenship has been understood as achieving competence in a dominant culture. Immigrants remain faced with the need to assimilate to sanctioned cultural norms, to acculturate to an ‘American way’ in which English is the official language and medium of social exchange; Europe (especially England) is the parent culture; and the story of pilgrims, puritans, founding fathers, pioneers, emancipators, and above all, Columbus the Discoverer is the true story of the past . . . White, English-speaking, and Protestant set the terms of practical if not legal identity.”¹

“Segregation in a northern community doesn’t usually arrive full blown, it [is a] creeping paralysis . . . Schools represent the final and crystallized fact of it[its] being.”²

Before we arrive on the shores of Lake Michigan, we need to address a few national currents. First, a brief survey of the relationship between immigration, cultural assimilation, and the shifting categorization of whiteness in America. Next, a quick review of the immigration of Reformed Christians from the Netherlands to the United States, especially the Midwest. Finally, some important details of the Great Migration of African Americans to northern cities.

Cultural Assimilation and Whiteness

In 1907, Henry James published a piece of travel literature titled The American Scene. James casts himself as both the “inquiring stranger” and the “initiated native” who is trying to make sense of what he sees when he stands at the Ellis Island visitors’ balcony watching immigrants arrive. James describes this “looking in” as causing a chill in the heart and an indelible change in the “spirit of any sensitive citizen . . . He has eaten

² Hillary Bissell, a white member of the Grand Rapids NAACP, written in a 1952 letter. (Quoted in Jelks, 142).
of the tree of knowledge, and the taste will be forever in his mouth . . . So is stamped, for
detection, the questionably privileged person who has had an apparition, seen a ghost in
his supposedly safe old house.” 3 The native observer realizes that his American identity is
an “unsettled possession” and begins to wonder "What meaning, in the presence of such
impressions, can continue to attach to such a term as the ‘American’ character?--what
type, as the result of such a prodigious amalgam, such a hotch-potch of racial ingredients,
is to be conceived as shaping itself?” At this national border, travelers from outside are
marked as “inconceivable aliens” by citizens on the inside, until the former become
recognizable to the latter via assimilation. That which we call assimilation, James calls
“mitigation” and explains that “the conversion of the alien goes on . . . not by leaps and
bounds or any form of easy magic, but under its own mystic laws and with an outward air
of quite declining to be unduly precipitated.” Although it is “the operation of an immense
machine, identical after all with the total of American life,” its process “trembles away
into mysteries that are beyond our present notation” and makes analysis nearly
impossible. After receiving the “wholesale varnish of consecration that might have been
applied, out of a bottomless receptacle, by a huge white-washing brush” the immigrant
takes on “a tolerably neutral and colorless image.” James, notes, however, that there are
some categories of foreigners for whom “only a mechanism working with scientific force
could have performed this feat of making them colorless,” such as Italians, Chinamen,
and Negroes. 4

3 Henry James, The American Scene. 1907.
http://www2.newpaltz.edu/~hathawar/americanscene.html. Cf. Roediger, 5-6; f.n. #3 on page 249.
4 David Roediger goes further in his critique: “The extent to which U.S. history has turned on race
and oppression, not voluntary belonging, for huge numbers of residents who were not black can disappear
in a search for optimism. The ways in which race broadly and deliberately structured competition for jobs
and shaped ideas regarding who was a fit citizen or neighbor can get lost in a story that uplifts ethnics and
premises the uplift not on addressing injustice but on Americanization.” in Working toward Whiteness:
Alan Trachtenberg understands that the process of gaining political insider status is also a process of gaining cultural competencies, and there is nothing neutral about the machine at work. Although the United States wants to write its story as one of "universalist" inclusion, rather than employing "culturalist" principles of memberships used by other nations, this requires "a perpetual repudiation of the past," which "overlooks the history of exclusions within which the concept of citizenship slowly took shape."\(^5\) The gaping glitch in the construction of such a story "is that it fails to explain why, if its basis was universalist, the new nation at once became overwhelmingly particularist: "White, English-speaking, and Protestant set the terms of practical if not legal identity," and this was the setting for the arrival of "inconceivable aliens."\(^6\)

The process of becoming American was a movement toward whiteness, an elusive and shifting category, which left some immigrants, especially Eastern and Southern Europeans, in a liminal state of "inbetweenness." Approaching "conclusive" whiteness was gradual and messy, and doing so was complicated by "the total lack of clarity regarding whether the racial categories being bridged were biological or cultural."\(^7\) Matthew Frye Jacobson agrees that defining whiteness and delineating its racial boundaries has been "a fairly untidy affair," yet crucial to America’s cultural history. He warns that "to miss the fluidity of race itself in this process of becoming Caucasian is to reify a monolithic whiteness" and to risk erasing the "competing notions of history, peoplehood, and collective destiny by which power has been organized and contested" in

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\(^{5}\) Trachtenberg, 48 and 52.

\(^{6}\) Trachtenberg, 52.

\(^{7}\) Roediger, 50-52.
America. In fact, the incredible power of race as an ideology lies “in its ability to pass as a feature of the natural landscape.” The “pretty story” of “New World magnanimity” offered to Northern and Western European immigrants who were easily allowed to pass through the Golden Door into America “fades once one recognizes how crucial Europeans’ racial status as ‘free white persons’ was to their gaining entrance in the first place and how profoundly dependent their racial inclusion was upon the racial exclusion of others.”

Becoming American entailed becoming white.

Jacobson delineates three epochs of race in the United States. The first era starts with European settling in the New World in the early 1600s to the early 1800s. During this time, “policies of conquest, Indian removal, slave-trading, and disenfranchisement relied on a logic of ‘civilization’ versus ‘barbarism’ or ‘savagery,’ or of ‘Christianity’ versus ‘heathendom.’” Its legal manifestation can be found in the First Naturalization Law of 1790, which limits naturalized citizenship to ‘free white persons’ and “demonstrates the republican convergence of race and ‘fitness for self-government.’”

The second era is the period of mass European immigration from the 1840s to the Johnson-Reed Act of 1924. Whiteness fractured “into a hierarchy of plural and

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9 Jacobson, 30. A painful and poignant explanation of this epoch can be found in Theodore Roosevelt’s 1894 book, The Winning of the West: The Founding of the Trans-Alleghany Commonwealths, 1784-1790, Volume 3, pg. 44: “Whether the whites won the land by treaty, by armed conquest, or, as was actually the case, by a mixture of both, mattered comparatively little so long as the land was won. It was all-important that it should be won, for the benefit of civilization and in the interests of mankind. It is indeed a warped, perverse, and silly morality which would forbid a course of conquest that has turned whole continents into the seats of mighty and flourishing civilized nations.”
10 The Immigration Act of 1924 limited the number of immigrants allowed entry into the United States through a national origins quota and was founded on racial logic borrowed from biology and eugenics. The quota provided immigration visas to two percent of the total number of people of each nationality in the United States as of the 1890 national census. It completely excluded immigrants from Asia. https://history.state.gov/milestones/1921-1936/immigration-act
scientifically determined white races,” and this scientific vocabulary shifted from beliefs (heathen vs. Christian) to natural capacity.\textsuperscript{11} The third era starts in the 1920s, when whiteness is reconsolidated into categories of White and Black.

One sees the roots of the third era in the work of Dr. John H. Van Evrie, a pro-slavery New York physician and editor, who asserted that the presence of inferior races led to America’s grand success. According to Van Evrie, “the happiest conjunction that ever occurred in human affairs’ was the presence of the Negro in America, because his obvious inferiority had permitted the building of a social and political order built on the ‘natural’ distinctions of race and not the artificial differences of class.”\textsuperscript{12} In his 1853 pamphlet, \textit{Negroes and Negro Slavery}, Van Evrie combined arguments for the biological inequality of the blacks with a vigorous attack on all past or present forms of class privilege and social hierarchy within homogeneous white societies as “artificial.” He argued “that the Negro was so radically inferior to the Caucasian that his destiny in America was either brute servitude or extermination . . . [he] then relegated blacks to abject and perpetual servitude for one reason alone—because they constituted a

\textsuperscript{11} Jacobson, 33. The author goes on to note that this vocabulary retained “an inherent degree of righteousness” though it was now innate. One sees this in Ellwood Cubberley’s 1909 history book in which he explains the remarkable change in the character of immigration in the 1880s when numbers from northern Europe dropped off rather abruptly, while a “great stream” came from elsewhere. “These southern and eastern Europeans are of a very different type from the north Europeans who preceded them. Illiterate, docile, lacking in self-reliance and initiative, and not possessing the Anglo-Teutonic conceptions of law, order, and government, their coming has served to dilute tremendously our national stock, and to corrupt our civic life.” The task, as Cubberley sees it, is to “break up these groups or settlements, to assimilate and amalgamate these people as a part of our American race, and to implant in their children, so far as can be done, the Anglo-Saxon conception of righteousness, law and order, and popular government, and to awaken in them a reverence for our democratic institutions and for those things in our national life which we as a people hold to be of abiding worth.” Ellwood Cubberley, \textit{Changing Conceptions of Education}. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1909: 15-16. https://archive.org/details/changingconcepti00cubbuoft

\textsuperscript{12} George Fredrickson, \textit{The Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny, 1817-1914}. New York: Harper & Row, 1971: 93. Fredrickson describes Van Evrie as such: “Not in any sense a scientist himself, he was blatantly and openly an anti-Negro propagandist, perhaps the first professional racist in American history” (92).
permanently inferior biological species”13 Van Evrie responded to the 1857 Dred Scott decision “with the contention that the Supreme Court had now affirmed that the Declaration of Independence applied to whites only; its opinion was ‘in accord with the natural relation of the races’ and had ‘fixed the status of the subordinate race forever.’”14

Racial liminality was barely an issue for Dutch immigrants, as they were quickly categorized as members of the white “English-speaking race.”15 In the 1910 Dictionary of Races and Peoples offered to Congress by the United States Immigration Commission, the Dutch are categorized as members of the Teutonic racial group, but this matters less than their affinity to the English in social customs. “They have been called the Englishmen of the mainland” in part because, “like the English, the Dutch have been great colonizers.”16 Between 1835 and 1880, about 86,800 Dutch immigrants made their way to America.17 In the previous chapter, I traced the causes for leaving, the trajectory

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13 George Fredrickson, The Black Image in the White Mind: 60-63. When Van Evrie reissued the manuscript in 1868, he changed the title to White Supremacy and Negro Subordination.
14 Fredrickson, 91-92, italics added. Fredrickson explains that Van Evrie’s conception of white equality “was calculated to appeal to socially insecure whites in search of a compensatory foundation for personal pride and status, a sense of identity which would help make the existing social and economic system more tolerable. . . the white skin that guaranteed that they were better than somebody not at the rock bottom of society” (93-95). “His weekly paper, the New York Day Book, was directed in part at the poverty-stricken Irish immigrants, Democrats to a man, who rioted in large numbers in 1863 against being drafted to ‘fight for the niggers,’ venting their rage against a defenseless local black population” (94).
15 This “idea that a language change could announce a racial transformation spoke profoundly to the biosocial definitions of race” (Roediger, 52)
17 Robert P. Swierenga, “Dutch International Migration Statistics, 1820-1880: An Analysis of Linked Multinational Nominal Files,” International Migration Review, Volume 15, No. 3 (Autumn, 1981): 445-470. Swierenga explains, “To obtain an accurate estimate of the true migration flow in the period 1835-1880, three ‘classes’ of migrants must be considered: 1) those bound for North America who are listed in Dutch village records but not in the U.S. ship manifests; 2) those Dutch immigrants listed in the U.S. ship manifests but not in the Dutch village records; and 3) those who are truly linked to both records” (460-461).
of travel, and the settling patterns of Dutch immigrants in Michigan.\textsuperscript{18} In this chapter, we will look at their interactions with others.

**The Great Migration**

Between 1915 and 1970, about 5.5 million African Americans moved across the continent. Some went West, toward California, while others went East to New York, but our focus will be on those in the middle, many of whom made their way to Michigan.\textsuperscript{19}

One of Isabel Wilkerson’s central arguments is that “the Great Migration was an unrecognized immigration within this country,” because its participants displayed immigrant behavior, including plotting a course to places that had “some connection to their homes of origin,” importing the “food and folkways of the Old Country,” including their practice of religion, and simultaneously trying “to instill in their children the values of the Old Country, while pressing them to succeed by the standards of the New World.”\textsuperscript{20}

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\textsuperscript{19} Isabel Wilkerson, *The Warmth of other Suns: The Epic Story of America’s Great Migration*. New York: Random House, 2010. This is a conservative estimate, according to Wilkerson. Detroit’s black population skyrocketed from 1.4% to 44% during this era: from 4,111 in 1900 to 5,741 in 1910 and 660,428 in 1970. (Wilkerson, 190 and 570). “The migration streams were so predictable that by the end of the Migration, and to a lesser degree, even now, one can tell where a black northerner’s family was from just by the city the person grew up in—a good portion of blacks in Detroit, for instance, having roots in Tennessee, Alabama, western Georgia, or the Florida panhandle because the historic rail lines connected those places during the Migration years” (Wilkerson, 178). Southern blacks traveled across the continent into “far-flung regions of their own country,” defying pragmatic sociological assumptions that most people will only migrate short distances. The original seven laws of migration as Ravenstein set forth in 1881 are as follows: 1. Most migrants only proceed a short distance, and toward centers of absorption; 2. As migrants move toward absorption centers, they leave “gaps” that are filled up by migrants from more remote districts, creating migration flows that reach to “the most remote corner of the kingdom.” 3. The process of dispersion is inverse to that of absorption; 4. Each main current of migration produces a compensating counter-current; 5. Migrants proceeding long distances generally go by preference to one of the great centers of commerce or industry; 6. The natives of towns are less migratory than those of the rural parts of the country; 7. Females are more migratory than males. http://www.csiss.org/classics/content/90

\textsuperscript{20} Wilkerson, 536.
partway across the continent to settle in Michigan. Wilkerson notes, however that “nearly
every black migrant I interviewed vehemently resisted the immigrant label. They did not see
themselves as immigrants under any circumstances.”

She explains that the term conjured up “the deepest pains of centuries of rejection by their own country. They had been forced to become immigrants in their own land just to secure their freedom.” Furthermore, they resented being considered immigrants, “because they knew in their bones that their ancestors had been there before there was a United States of America, and that it took their leaving the South to achieve the citizenship they deserved by their ancestry and labors alone.” This transformed the racialized face of America, “recasting the social and political order of every city it touched,” including Grand Rapids.

Also painful was the realization that while immigrants from Western Europe could assimilate rather easily (e.g., change of language, change of surname), black migrants from the south could not unmark their ethnicity or choose for themselves a more favored identity. “They would never be mistaken for English” when “boarding a train, lining up for a foreman’s job, or waiting for a loan officer at a bank.” They could not join trade unions or country clubs, and the “exclusive cul-de-sac lace-curtain neighborhoods” were closed to them, by legislation and by de facto segregation. And this is where we pick up the story of racialized geography of housing and schools in Grand Rapids, a Midwestern “All-American City,” and a microcosm for the nation.

21 Wilkerson, 537-38.
22 Wilkerson, 537-538.
23 Wilkerson, 9-10.
24 Wilkerson, 416-417.
The Roots of Midwestern Racial Prejudice

Eugene Berwanger asserts that “a most unparalleled prejudice” developed in the Old Northwest [now called the Midwest] in the 1820s. In Illinois, George Flowers was “ostracized by his neighbors until he terminated a contract by which he had rented land to two Negroes in 1825.” When he balked on the grounds of contractual obligation, his neighbors explained that “black men had no rights that white men need respect.”25 White Illinois citizens also called for measures which would prevent “free Negroes and mulattoes not born there” from taking up residence and suggested that they should be sent elsewhere.26 Joseph Kitchell, an Illinois state senator, declared that their presence “is productive of moral and political evil . . . [and] the natural difference between them and ourselves forbids the idea that they should ever be permitted to participate with us in the political affairs of our government.”27 Governor James B. Ray of Indiana secured a law requiring “Negroes to have proof of their freedom and to post a $500 bond for their good behavior and self-support.”28 Similar laws were passed in Michigan (1827) and Iowa, and an Illinois law raised the bond to $1000. Midwesterners feared that their states would become “a dumping ground for southern free Negroes and manumitted slaves who were forced by the laws of the slave states to emigrate” or risk being re-enslaved.29 Despite attempts to limit migration to the Midwest, “during the 1820-1830 decade, the Negro population increased 102 percent in Ohio, 195 percent in Indiana, and 258 percent in

26 Berwanger, 30.
27 In Illinois Senate Journa, quoted in Berwanger, 31.
28 Berwanger, 31-32.
29 Berwanger, 36.
Illinois, considerably outpacing growth of the white population.\textsuperscript{30} In response, these states adopted restrictions, excluding Negroes from the militia, denying them the right to give testimony in court cases involving whites, and keeping them from voting.\textsuperscript{31}

Suffrage for African Americans was a fraught issue in the antebellum Midwest. Opponents of enfranchisement wanted to perpetuate whiteness, codified as western-european-ness. The Michigan constitutional convention of 1836 prohibited Negroes from voting because they “belonged to a degraded caste of mankind . . . Nature had marked the distinction [and] Society had recognized and sanctioned it.”\textsuperscript{32} The 1842 Michigan Senate Committee declared that “our government is formed by, for the benefit of, and to be controlled by the descendents of European nations.” Negro suffrage would thus be “inexpedient and impolitic;,” in part because of the inferiority of the black race.\textsuperscript{33} Despite this discrimination, in the 1844 presidential election, African Americans voted by fraudulently swearing they were eligible, “neither party having the hardihood to offer a challenge on the ground of color.”\textsuperscript{34} The Michigan Liberty party and the Michigan State Antislavery Society supported suffrage, and they petitioned that the word “white” be

\begin{footnotes}
\item[30] Berwanger, 31. The white population grew by 62% in Ohio, 127% in Indiana, and 185% in Illinois.
\item[31] Berwanger, 32. In 1850 Ohio, U.S. Congressman William Sawyer expressed his opposition to equal suffrage, claiming, “the United States was designed by God in Heaven to be governed by and inhabited by the Anglo-Saxon race and by them alone.” He went on to assert that the equality offered in the Declaration of Independence did not apply to Negroes because that race “was very little removed from the condition of dumb beasts . . . and there was nothing of civilization in their aboriginal conditions” (Berwanger, 39).
\item[32] Berwanger, 32. Some, like John Bagg, who served as State Printer for the legislature, even suggested that “dark bipeds” were “a species not equal to ourselves;” who should not be allowed to “come into our civil, political, social, conjugal or connubial relations.” In Day v. Owens (1858), a case regarding segregation on steamships, the Michigan Supreme Court found that “the plaintiff, by his color and his race, was excluded from ordinary social and familiar intercourse with white persons by the custom of the country, and that his admission into the cabin of said steamboat would be offensive to the other cabin passengers.” Michigan Reports: Cases Decided in the Supreme Court of Michigan, Volume 5: 520.
\item[33] qtd in Katzman, Before the Ghetto: Black Detroit in the Nineteenth Century, 34; cf. Jacobson, 29.
\end{footnotes}
expunged from the first clause of the second article of the Michigan Constitution on January 8, 1845. During the 1850 Michigan Constitutional Convention, white delegates argued for continued social separation of races and raised the specter of miscegenation, asking “Why not give our daughters to their sons?” The electorate defeated enfranchisement by a vote of 32,026 to 12,840. In 1855, the Michigan legislature enfranchised blacks in school district funding elections because the state constitution required that a majority of property owners support county school budgets and a few townships were predominantly constituted by black residents. Local boards of registration, however, still sometimes refused to enroll those they arbitrarily considered to be “Negro.” By November 1870, there was enough support to narrowly pass an amendment which struck down limiting suffrage to whites by a vote of 54,105 to

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35 From the 1835 Michigan Constitution, Article II, clause 1, regarding the qualifications of electors: “In all elections, every white male citizen above the age of twenty-one years, having resided in the state six months next preceding any election, shall be entitled to vote at such election; and every white male inhabitant of the age aforesaid, who may be a resident of this state at the time of the signing of this constitution, shall have the right of voting as aforesaid; but no such citizen or inhabitant shall be entitled to vote, except in the district, county, or township in which he shall actually reside at the time of such election.” In 1846, congressman Austin Blair presented a report supporting enfranchisement, in part because “we have by the scorn of the community and its oppressive laws driven the colored man in most instances into the most menial employments (none other being left open to him) and thus has he become a blacker of white man’s boots, and a sweeper of white man’s chimneys.” Quoted In Katzman, Before the Ghetto: Black Detroit in the Nineteenth Century, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1973), 33-35. This position cost him the next election, though he later became governor of the state, serving throughout the Civil War. Eric Foner, Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party before the Civil War (NY: Oxford University Press, 1971): 283-284.

36 Indiana, Illinois, Iowa, and Michigan forbade intermarriages and invalidated those that had been performed. (Berwanger, 36) This rhetorical question was asked by Nathan Pierce, who was one of five inspectors of common schools in Michigan. He was elected Supervisor of town of Sylvan, April 1834. He was Supervisor of Lima Township 1872-73 and 1875-76. He was Marshall of Ann Arbor Township in 1867 and 1879. Sergeant-at-Arms of Michigan Senate in 1857.

37 The Illinois Constitution of 1848 went even further than Michigan, mandating that the General Assembly “pass such laws as will effectively prohibit free persons of color from immigrating to and settling in this state.” (Jacobson, 30). In 1851, Iowa legislature prohibited free Negroes from entering the state. Indiana prohibited free African Americans from settling in the state or being hired for contract (Jelks, 5).

50,598.\textsuperscript{39} However, even those who favored suffrage “seldom argued that Negroes were entitled to equal rights . . . More often pro-Negro arguments left the impression that Negroes should be pitied and uplifted by sympathetic action on the part of the white people.”\textsuperscript{40}

On March 10, 1906, The \textit{Grand Rapids Press} published the annual legislative message of Governor James K. Vardaman of Mississippi, whom his supporters called “The White Chief”:

As a race, the negro is deteriorating every day. Time has demonstrated that he is more criminal as a free man than he was as a slave, and that he is increasing in criminality with fearful rapidity . . . You can scarcely pick up a newspaper whose pages are not blackened with an account of an unmentionable crime committed by a negro brute, and this crime, I want to impress upon you, is but the manifestation of the negro’s aspiration for social equality, encouraged largely by the character of free education in vogue.\textsuperscript{41}

The article’s writer then asks “Are the negroes of Grand Rapids growing better or worse? Are they developing greater criminal instincts and deteriorating mentally and physically, or are they gradually climbing upward overcoming popular prejudice and becoming better citizens?” He goes on to assert that “an unprejudiced study of the conditions existing in Grand Rapids seems to prove beyond doubt that whatever the negro may be in

\textsuperscript{39} Katzman suggests that the shift in the electorate was caused in part by continued abolitionist fervor and by white voter apathy, due to the belief that the question had already been decided nationally by the 15\textsuperscript{th} Amendment (37). Two years after the fifteenth amendment was ratified, on April 2, 1872, the \textit{Grand Rapids Eagle} newspaper ran the story of William J. Hardy’s election to county supervisor of Gaines Township, “the first colored man who held office in Michigan.” Despite the “African blood running in his veins,” Hardy was considered a good farmer and a “highly respected citizen.” Hardy was born in 1823 in New Jersey to parents who were slaves. After the family moved west, following migration patterns across the Erie Canal into Washtenaw County, Michigan, William was bound out as a farmhand. He spent years earning his way out of his indenture and by 1846, he had enough money to purchase two tracks of land just south of the city of Grand Rapids through a state land patent. (Jelks, \textit{Furniture City}, 3 and 15.) In 1847, a year after Hardy bought land in Gaines Township, Albertus Van Raalte was procuring land in Ottawa County, just west of Grand Rapids.

\textsuperscript{40} Berwanger, 39.

the south, he is becoming better in this city and probably in nearly every other city in the north.”

The article includes statistics from the Grand Rapids police department showing a steady decrease in the arrests of negroes annually for the previous five years, and those arrests were often for “disorderly conduct or petty thieving” rather than heinous crimes. Meanwhile, the number of arrested white persons arrested increased by more than five hundred. Contrary to fears that black migrants from the south bring indolence and increased need for welfare funds, reports from the city’s poor commission show “there are fewer applications for help made by negroes than by almost any other race or nationality.” In fact, only one negro family was currently on the list. Furthermore, the author notes that many colored people in Grand Rapids own their homes, and they are well-kept. The article concludes by asserting that “an unprejudiced person can gather but one conclusion” from the facts: “The colored man is steadily improving both mentally and morally in Grand Rapids. . . He is gradually uplifting himself, overcoming prejudice and making himself a better citizen.”

The Racial Geography of Grand Rapids, an All-American City

The city of Grand Rapids was chartered in 1850. During the 1880s, numerous furniture companies rose to national acclaim, earning the city the appellation “Furniture
City,” a title which it held through the 1920s. Its history “reflects industrialization, the pull and push of Southern migrants and European immigrants, the formation of ghettos, labor discord, and racial/ethnic antagonisms.” This chapter is about African American migrants and Dutch American immigrants and the racial geography between them. The story of housing and schools are central components of the American Dream. We can see this struggle mapped, literally and figuratively, onto the racial make-up of neighborhoods and schools over time.

Dutch immigrants were among the first Europeans to come to West Michigan. “They began arriving in the late 1840s, and by 1880 made up 71 percent of all foreign born residents of Grand Rapids. By 1900, Dutch immigrants accounted for more than one quarter of the total population of Grand Rapids . . . [and for 1/3 by 1910].” As they

44 Cf. Kleiman, Jeffrey D. Strike: How the Furniture Workers Strike of 1911 Changed Grand Rapids. Ann Arbor: Edwards Brothers, 2006. Kleiman explains that the furniture industry was essential to the economic health of Grand Rapids. “In 1910, Grand Rapids was a city of 110,000 citizens. Furniture factories employed one-third of the city’s wage earners, who turned out more than a third of the total value of the city’s manufactured goods. . . . By 1910 Grand Rapids, which ranked 44th in population among American cities, stood 42nd in a national list of 75 cities in terms of value added by manufacture . . . ranked by the value of its products, Grand Rapids outshone larger cities such as Atlanta, Denver, Omaha, Portland, and Seattle” (2-3). But these manufacturing jobs were not open to black workers. Kleiman focuses on Polish and Dutch workers, who made up a large percentage of the furniture work force. “While the Grand Rapids furniture men and the financier allies formed a tightly knit fraternity of mutual advantage, furniture factory workers were divided along fault lines of religion, class, and ethnicity . . . Language and social customs, together with clearly demarcated neighborhoods, distrust of those practicing the ‘wrong’ religion, and continued hostilities based on old-country traditions produced fractures among workers” (29); “Dutch workers were troubled by the possibility that the strike was contrary to their church’s teachings . . . the Christian Reformed Church began to investigate whether church member participation in the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners was compatible with church doctrine” The CRC classis soon published a report announcing that membership in the union was incompatible with church membership, in part because the former was focused on material rather than spiritual purposes (97, 111).

45 Jelks, African Americans in the Furniture City, xi-xii.

46 Robinson, A City within a City, xiv-xv.

47 Kleiman, 29-30. Vanderstel asserts that 6,500 Dutch immigrant households settled in Grand Rapids between 1848-1900, and Michigan was the state with the greatest proportion of Dutch immigrants from 1860-1900 (Vanderstel, Preface, iii). Vanderstel follows Lucas in naming Michigan. See table on page 131. VanderStel puts the Dutch at 27%, but does not cite the source of his data. From 1846-1857, about 40,000 Dutch immigrants traveled to America (mostly Seceders), many of them settling in the Northwest Territory (Michigan and Iowa), seeking freedom of worship and freedom of education. (Harro Van Brummelen, Telling the Next Generation, 2-33.) Swierenga cites Twelfth Census of the United States: 1900, Population, Vol. 1 (Washington 1901), Table 34. He delineates three classes of migrants: those bound for North
settled, the Dutch often sought cultural and ecclesiastical isolation, so that they might practice their faith freely and avoid “worldly concerns.” In fact, they took it a step beyond creating one “Little Holland” village, as their various neighborhoods around the city were based on the Netherlands province from which they had emigrated (e.g., Zeeland, Friesland, Overijssel) and based on conflicting interpretations of Scripture and church practices. Samuelson delineates twelve different enclaves by 1900.

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48 Kleiman, 30. Kleiman goes on to recount a story from 1888: The Grand Rapids Street Railway Company installed a new line that went past a Christian Reformed church. Congregants objected to the “common rowdism and drunkenness” and the noisy disruption of their Sunday services. When the company ignored their complaints, Dutch men and women repeatedly tore up the tracks until a Kent County Circuit Court forced the rail company to stop running that particular line on Sundays (Kleiman, 30; He cites David G. Vanderstel’s unpublished 1983 dissertation “The Dutch of Grand Rapids, Michigan 1848-1900: Immigrant Neighborhoods and Community Development in a Nineteenth-Century City” page 470).

49 Kleiman, 31; cf Vanderstel 410. Frans Van Driele came to the U.S. with Van Raalte, moved to Grand Rapids July 5, 1848 and settled near Fulton Street and Grandville Avenue (area now known as Heartside). In 1849, the first Dutch-speaking congregation was founded in Grand Rapids on Bostwick Avenue near Lyon Street, Second Reformed, and Van Driele was the cofounder. By June 1850, Grand Rapids was home to 53 Dutch families (about 222 people), Samuelson, 60. DUTCH SETTLEMENT PATTERNS 1860-1900: According to Samuelson, et al, Dutch Neighborhoods, often delineated by Netherlands province from whence they had immigrated, included: 1. Fulton and Wealthy and Sheldon and Ionia – 74 families by 1860; 2. Canal Street and North Division Avenue – many near Coldbrook Street; 3. College Avenue and East Bridge Street (now Michigan St); 4. South Division Ave and Lafayette St – grew especially between 1865-1869 with new immigrants; 5. Grandville Avenue and Clyde Park Ave – from 1888-1900, about 600 households moved there from Groningen; 6. Plainfield Ave and East Leonard Street – by 1900, about 300 households; 7. Knapp Street and Wartrous St (now Lafayette Ave) – about 40 blue-collar households; 8. Wealthy East (now Eastern) and Fifth (now Franklin SE); 9. East Fulton Street and Lake Drive – called “brickyard”; 10. By 1900 within boundaries of Fountain Street, Orchard Avenue (now Baldwin), Hermitage Street, Dennis Avenue, and Fulton Street Cemetery, the area was heavily Dutch. Dutch were ¾ of the population, 75% of which had immigrated to the U.S. since 1880, many from Groningen. And on the West Side of Grand Rapids: 11. West Leonard Street and Alpine Avenue – between 1880-1900, grew from 73 to 1000 households, most from Zeeland and Friesland; 12. West Fulton Street and Straight Avenue – Dutch mainly from Overijssel.
In 1900, United State Census reported that there were about 13,000 Dutch immigrants and about 600 negroes in Grand Rapids. African Americans lived in four primary areas in Grand Rapids circa 1900. Although they represented less than 1% of the city’s total population between 1840 and 1910, African Americans were “observed in a panoptical fashion” more assiduously than their small numbers would seem to have warranted. Trying to bear up under such close scrutiny, they sought middle-class respectability “based on religious notions of equality and self-accountability before God.” The Protestant work ethic, seen so clearly in the Dutch Reformed immigrants,

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50 Image from *Strike* by Kleiman (page 16).
51 United States Census 1900. Table 24 “Native and Foreign Born and White and Colored Population” Worth noting that the census had a category for “Negro” and a category for “Total Colored” which included Negro, Chinese, Japanese, and Indians. See also, Table 34 “Foreign Born Population”
52 1. Comstock Row – just north of downtown Grand Rapids [boundaries of Leonard (N), Ionia (E), Coldbrook (S), and the Grand River (W)]; 2. Grandville Avenue SW and railroad tracks; 3. Southeast side, especially between 1870-1880, mainly those who served white families in the Heritage Hill district [boundaries of Crescent St (N), Union Ave (E), Pleasant St (S) and Lafayette Ave (W)]. And 4. (from Kleiman) – Monroe between Leonard and Michigan, west of Division.
53 Jelks puts it at .7% (*African Americans in the Furniture City*, 7 and 18). Notice the resonances with Foucault.
54 Jelks, *African Americans in the Furniture City*, xii. Although African Americans in Grand Rapids lacked a “collective economic base,” they developed a multi-layered social ecology, which included “cultural nationalism rooted in Protestant Christian faith; organized political affiliation and party activities;
informed the African American community’s belief that respectability could be attained through “religious duty, marital fidelity, sobriety, and honest work.”

Their vision of earning a decent living, owning their own homes, and securing formal education for their children stood in stark contrast to stereotypes of laziness and licentiousness held by whites about blacks during this era.

Reverend A.P. Miller, pastor of Zion A.M.E Church, gave a lecture on “The Black Man’s Burden” in Park Congregational Church in June 1902. The Grand Rapids Press described Miller as “an educated man” who is “able to view all sides of the vexatious race problem” and reported that:

“He asserted that two things were responsible for the black man’s burden, the prejudice of the whites and the ignorance and weak moral standards of the blacks,” but that their “low moral condition” was “attributed to the brutalizing effect of human slavery in this country.” Miller’s solution to the problem was for African Americans to “create more respect for themselves, seek better education and acquire property rights.” If whites “would apply the golden rule in their dealings, the race problem would soon be solved.”

Notice how Miller continues the refrain for striving for respectability, but he also names the systemic evils of slavery and current white social injustice that make the problem nearly impossible to solve on their own. For example, Robinson explains that preferential membership in local democratic civic associations and churches; and functional network of kith and kin.”

Jelks, African Americans in the Furniture City, 22. According to Jelks, “The Masons were one of the strongest black civic associations in Grand Rapids. The Michigan Colored Masons organized in 1872, in part because the members felt unnecessarily restricted by the National Lodge” (19). For Dutch congregants of the Christian Reformed Church, membership in the Masons would add yet another layer of distance from African American Christians.

55 Jelks, African Americans in the Furniture City, 33.
56 “From the moment the black emigrants set foot in the North and West, they were blamed for the troubles of the cities they fled to. They were said to have brought family dysfunction with them, to more likely be out-of-work, unwed parents, and on welfare, than the people already there.” This view has changed in the past twenty years and “contrary to conventional thought, black migrants were actually more likely to be married and to raise their children in two-parent households, and less likely to bear children out of wedlock” lower levels of unemployment, higher incomes, lower levels of poverty and welfare dependency than northern-born blacks (Wilkerson, 14)
57 “Of Race Problem Rev A.P. Miller Treated in His Address Last Night” Grand Rapids Press, June 10, 1902, p.5.
hiring practices, especially for Dutch workers, ensured them employment opportunities. Immigration Commission records of 1911 indicated that on average the Dutch earned nearly 8% more than Polish workers in the furniture industry, while black laborers were barred from employment in those factories. 58

Leadership in the African-American community aligned itself with “the white Protestant establishment in terms of philanthropy and cultural identification,” but this sense of equivalence was not reciprocated. 59 John Burgess, an African American whose grandparents had arrived in the early 1870s and considered themselves “among the old settlers,” describes the relationship of the Dutch to all other groups in Grand Rapids: “The town was so dominated by a Dutch majority that all other racial or ethnic groups underwent certain disabilities as ‘Gentiles.’ . . . [The Dutch] maintained an aloofness from the Negro as from the Italian, from the Methodist as from the Roman Catholic.” 60 Burgess further explains the predicament of living in a place where the lines of racial segregation are not always clearly marked:

58 Robinson, 5-6.
59 Jelks, African Americans in the Furniture City, 43. Robinson compares Grand Rapids to Greensboro, North Carolina, “where the use of the progressive mystique effectively forestalled substantive change.” Both cities were good places to examine William Chafe’s important question: Are civility and civil rights compatible? “It would seem the answer in Grand Rapids, Michigan, as Chafe had also discovered in Greensboro, North Carolina, was no. Managerial racism in Grand Rapids was used to forestall substantive change throughout the long fight for freedom and equal rights . . . The white power structure in Grand Rapids managed to deny equality to blacks yet maintain an image as a progressive city. Business leaders and city officials avoided conflict and even took pride in their efforts to study race relations, yet their benevolent paternalism denied the substance of black civil rights.” (Robinson, 120, 176, 183).
60 John M. Burgess. “This I Believe.” In Many Shades of Black. Eds. Stanton L. Wormley and Lewis H. Fenderson. New York: William Morrow & Co., 1969: 331-340. Burgess (1909-2003) was the son of Theodore Thomas (dining car waiter on Pere Marquette Line) and Ethel Inez (aka Hattie) Beverly, Grand Rapids’ only black teacher [kindergarten at Congress Elementary School from 1899-1902]. He earned his bachelor’s degree (1930) and his master’s (1931) in Sociology from University of Michigan, and graduated from Episcopal Theological School in Cambridge, MA (1934). He returned to Michigan and ministered to working class parishes from 1934-46. From 1946-1956, he served as Episcopal Chaplain at Howard University and was named the first black canon in 1951. Burgess was elected bishop suffrage of the Diocese of Massachusetts in 1962 and retired in 1975, Episcopal Bishop of Massachusetts.
The Negro in a small Northern community is a perfect example of the man without roots or identity in American society. The tragedy is often seen in his unawareness of his predicament. In Grand Rapids, Negroes lived in well-defined areas of the city, defined quietly by politicians and real estate dealers. Enough white neighbors were interspersed so that we were not really aware that we were living in a “Negro district” and that there were areas where we could not live.\(^6^1\)

When another wave of African American migrants came into the city after World War I, Burgess notes that the “old settlers” identified with the white community, rather than offering hospitality: “No welcome mat awaited them from either black or white groups ... Unaware that the white community had, for generations, classified us as Negroes and therefore ‘different,’ we were afraid that these new people would create a ‘problem’ and we would all be the object of the white man’s displeasure.”\(^6^2\) As the lines became more clearly marked, African American leaders in the community, “articulated the viewpoint that achieving respectability meant achieving full desegregation, for only desegregation could ameliorate their social resentments at being excluded and stigmatized by law and custom.”\(^6^3\)

In 1908, *Grand Rapids Herald* reporter Abe Gelhof lauded the myriad nationalities found in schools. He wrote:

> The South Division Street School is a typical Ellis Island in miniature. Practically every nationality represented in the population of Grand Rapids is represented in this school. There is the slanted-eyed Chinese lad who will some day be a rich purveyor of chop suey; there is the representative of darkest Africa, whose ambition at this primitive stage in his life extends even as far as the wearing of the full dress suit of a hotel waiter; there is the dark haired olive skinned little beauty

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\(^6^2\) Burgess, 335. Jelks notes that African American Southerners migrating to the region after World War I chose a different path than assimilation. To them “self-respect meant controlling their own spheres of family life, churches, and civic associations . . . [with] Afro-Southern traditions of Protestant worship” (Jelks, xiv)

\(^6^3\) Jelks, 65. “This quest for middle-class respectability was politically dynamic, interjecting itself into labor and class stratification, denominations and religious communities, and regional identity. It was also the instrument used to reject racial oppression and assert a constructive communal identity” (Jelks, xiii)
from Italy; the fair haired little miss from Stockholm or the land of Macbeth and Hamlet; the rusty-topped lad from Erin; the lass from bonny Scotland, in short, children of all nations.\textsuperscript{64}

21\textsuperscript{st} century ears may cringe at the racist and sexist stereotypes, but I want to draw your attention to the Dutch students who are notably absent from this list. Despite their significant presence in the general population of the city, they remained mostly separate in their enclaved, provincial neighborhoods and their private, Christian schools.

The picture was not nearly so rainbow-rosy according to Reverend S. Henri Browne, minister of Messiah African Baptist Church, who wrote an article published in the \textit{Grand Rapids Press} in April 1913 titled, “The Negro in Grand Rapids.”\textsuperscript{65} Housing was named as one of the primary problems, because “some landlords and real estate owners blandly tell us that they do not sell to negroes.”\textsuperscript{66} We will talk more about redlining in the next section. Reverend Browne also explained that out of the 104 African American students in area schools, only four were in high school, in part because the only

\textsuperscript{64} Abe Gelhof, \textit{Grand Rapids Herald}, 20 December 1908, “Teach Young Ideas of Many Nations: Thirteen Races and Nationalities Represented in the Roster of South Division Street School—Bright and Interesting Little Cosmopolitans,” qtd in Jelks, 41. Compare those sentiments with these from Alfred Schultz, “The opinion is advanced that the public schools change the children of all races into Americans. Put a Scandinavian, a German, and a Magyar boy in at one end, and they will come out Americans at the other end. Which is like saying, let a pointer, a setter, and a pug enter one end of the tunnel and they will come out three greyhounds at the other end. . . The darkest middle ages did not practise nor believe in a witchcraft as absurd and as silly as the public school witchcraft that we believe in and practise . . . [for example, the belief] that the common use of the same language will produce a homogeneous race. . . Many negroes speak English. Have they for that reason become Englishmen? Have their tendencies, ideals, and capacities become akin to those of the Anglo-Saxon race?” (\textit{Race or Mongrel?} Boston: Little Brown, 1908: 261-2, partially quoted in Jacobson, 5).

\textsuperscript{65} Browne was born in Haiti and received his formal education in England, including a doctorate in divinity.

\textsuperscript{66} “Church and Its Work Pastor Browne on the Negro,” Grand Rapids Press, May 5, 1913, page 6. Browne gave the address again at a ministers’ conference in May. \textit{Grand Rapids Press} coverage quoted from it with lines such as “It is said that slaves helped to build the first house of worship in this city” and “It was a Dutch vessel named Jesus the Son of Mary which brought the first slaves to these shores in 1619” In an earlier article, Browne asserted that the “labor conditions in the south were more favorable for negroes than in the north” in part because northern labor unions discriminate against African Americans and “If the tipping evil [a bill against tipping waiters, porters, etc.] is to be established by law or otherwise, not the negro but the white man should take the lead” (“Says Whites Should Take the Initiative Rev S. Henri Browne Tells Church Class of Negroes.” \textit{Grand Rapids Press}, April 7, 1913, p 10.)
jobs available to them were “menial,” [porters, waiters, chauffeurs, servants], and a diploma would not be worthwhile in the marketplace. He further complained that there had been only one black teacher in the area school system.\textsuperscript{67} In fact, Grand Rapids public schools had no black teachers from 1902 to 1919.

**Grand Rapids: Reception of Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. DuBois**

A brief comparison of Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. DuBois, their views on education and their path to racial equality, but also their reception in Grand Rapids as seen in press coverage, tells us something about the city.\textsuperscript{68} Booker T. Washington’s position on race relations, especially those given in the 1895 “Atlanta Compromise” speech, were well-known across the nation. Washington called for black progress through vocational education (e.g., agricultural and mechanical skills learned at places such as Tuskegee Institute), arguing that “no race can prosper till it learns that there is as much dignity in tilling a field as in writing a poem. It is at the bottom of life we must begin, and not at the top,” and he acknowledged that “the wisest among my race understand the agitation of questions of social equality is the extremest folly, and that progress in the enjoyment of all the privileges that will come to us must be the result of severe and constant struggle, rather than of artificial forcing.\textsuperscript{69} No race that has anything to

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\textsuperscript{67} Jelks, 56. That teacher was Ethel “Hattie” Beverly, mother of John M. Burgess, who taught at Congress Elementary School 1899-1902. Another African American teacher would not work in Grand Rapids City Schools for 17 years after Beverly’s departure.

\textsuperscript{68} In a letter to the Chicago Sunday Evening Club dated Jan. 20, 1939 (cited in David Levering Lewis’ *W.E.B. DuBois, Biography of a Race*, p. 11), Du Bois wrote that ”The pronunciation of my name is Due Boyss, with the accent on the last syllable."

\textsuperscript{69} In 1904, William H. Elson, Superintendent of Grand Rapids public schools, was in Atlanta for the National Superintendents convention. While in the South, he visited “Tuskegee Institute, Atlanta University, Spellman seminary, and the negro public schools.” He praised Booker T. Washington’s Tuskegee Institute as “a great trades school . . . such an institution would be a good thing for white students in the North. The students are paid for the work.” He noted that he met “Professor DuBoise [sic], author of ‘The Soul of the Black Folk’ [sic], and a graduate of Harvard,” but offered nothing beyond a statement of credentials. After observing teachers in Atlanta schools, Elson reported that “he saw some negro teachers
contribute to the markets of the world is long in any degree ostracized.” The belief that equality would be earned, gradually and eventually through hard work, surely resonated with the white entrepreneurial-minded folks in Grand Rapids. However, one wonders how they received his call to look to black workers first, before “those of foreign birth and strange tongue,” or his promise to remain separate, but economically useful: “In all things that are purely social, we can be as separate as the fingers, yet one as the hand in all things essential to mutual progress.” When Booker T. Washington visited in 1912, to be one of the speakers at the city’s Lincoln Day Banquet, he described the problem and his proposed solution:

Here in Grand Rapids you are thrown into competition with the sturdy and thrifty Dutch. If you lose out you will come to me and tell me they drew the color line. I will tell you it is nothing of the sort. The white man does not draw the color line in business unless you draw it. You draw the color line by inefficiency . . . You must live moral lives. You cannot create a demand for your services; you cannot be efficient in any undertaking if you spend half the night at the gambling table in the saloon or in the den of vice. Next day your work is not good and this man from Holland here will have your job, as he has a right to have it because he goes to bed decently and lives a moral, frugal life and is the efficient workman.

Notice how the issue is framed as one of individual behavior, and the way Washington blames the “drawing” of the color line on African Americans’ “inefficiency.” Also of

that I would be glad to have in Grand Rapids schools as far as their ability is concerned.” “Negroes of South Superintendent Elson Visited Their Race Schools. Admires Greatly the Methods of Booker.” Grand Rapids Press, February 29, 1904, page 7.


71 Booker T. Washington, Grand Rapids Herald, “Colored People Hear Washington,” 13 February, 1912, 11; qtd in Jelks 52-53. The banquet was organized by United States Senator William Alden Smith, who put Washington on the dais with Senator Albert B. Cummins of Iowa, Congressman Caleb Powers of Kentucky, and the Honorable Dr. J. Louden, minister from the Netherlands. Jelks notes that in newspaper coverage of the event, photographs of Cummins, Powers, and Louden are displayed on the front page, while Washington only appears once and elsewhere (Jelks, 50-51).
note is his awareness that the primary competition for jobs comes from the “sturdy and thrifty Dutch” man, whose employment is assured because he is moral and efficient.72 After Booker T. Washington’s death in 1915, the editor of the Grand Rapids Herald declared that “His skin was black; but his heart was white.”73

Unlike Booker T. Washington, W.E.B. Du Bois was not born in the South as a slave. He grew up in the Northeast and was the first African American to earn a Ph.D. from Harvard. He was part of the Niagara Movement, and he was one of the founders of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). DuBois strongly opposed Washington’s gradualist tolerance of segregation, demanding immediate equality for blacks. In The Souls of Black Folks (published in 1903), he articulates the entangled paradox of African Americans:

It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness,—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.

DuBois advocated for access to the same “classical” liberal arts education offered to elite white students, so that blacks might overcome racism and advance the race into a wide variety of occupations, including national leadership. When W.E.B. DuBois arrived in Grand Rapids in 1917, it was to incite change. He delivered a talk entitled “The World’s

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72 A few months later in Ann Arbor at a speech given in University Hall, Booker T. Washington said “I thank God every day of my life that I am a black man, that I belong to what you call an oppressed and downtrodden people . . . that I belong to a race that has a problem to solve, in the solving of which my soul is as white as yours.” He went on to say that the hardest thing to teach his race was the value of their work, but he claimed that in the fifty years since gaining freedom [Emancipation Proclamation], his people had learned “the disgrace of idleness and the dignity of labor.” “Washington Glad he Belongs to Black Race.” Grand Rapids Press, October 15, 1912. Page 14.

War and the Darker Races.”\textsuperscript{74} The Grand Rapids Press got his name wrong (calling him W.D. rather than W.E.B), and said he had spent his evening “telling the negroes of Grand Rapids how misused the black man is in this country and how the white races have messed up the world.” The paper then offered a corrective to his views:

The negro race, which has at present all the optimism of youth and ambition, will be ill-advised if it turns aside from the path of progress to mourn over its misfortunes . . . the proper attitude is one of mutual helpfulness, with a minimum of backbiting and criticism . . . The more he shares the white man’s burden, even unto death in the common cause of the country [WWI], the more quickly will the black race receive the full mood of justice.\textsuperscript{75}

For many of the white folks in Grand Rapids, justice for African-Americans entailed continuing to shoulder the “white man’s burden,” even unto death on foreign battlefields, while equality at home remained elusive. Dutch CRC pastor, Rev. E. J. Tannis, notes the paradox of fighting for freedom abroad while suffering racial injustice here, displayed in World War I:

We were told that our boys were going to Europe’s battlefields to ‘make the world safe for democracy’ . . . We went to Europe to free its downtrodden peoples, Armenians, Slavs, Poles, etc., but the negro race in our own country complains bitterly of the injustice suffered at the hands of the democratic Americans . . . constant recurring race-riots are a blot upon the civilization of our country . . . Let the negro have the same justice which is extended to the white race. Moreover, let the white race bear in mind that white slave-traders brought the negro to our country and that white men have profited by his unrequited toil for centuries.\textsuperscript{76}

Although there is no mention of W.E.B. DuBois in The Banner, the journal of the Christian Reformed Church, there are multiple editorials and articles that reference Booker T. Washington. The first was written while Reverend Henry Beets (editor of The Banner from 1903 to 1928) was in Alabama visiting Tuskegee Institute. It offers praise

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\textsuperscript{74} Robinson, 14 and Jelks, 67. \hfill \\
\textsuperscript{75} “Sharing the White Man’s Burden,” Grand Rapids Press, May 4, 1917, p. 6. Note that they have his name incorrect in the paper, as W.D. Du Bois \hfill \\
\textsuperscript{76} E.J. Tannis, The Banner August 7, 1919: 488 “The Tumult of the People”
\end{flushright}
for Washington’s legacy of teaching the value of labor and the ways negroes might be directed toward “usefulness for time and for eternity,” and requests continued “prayerful interest in their uplift for this life and the life to come.” In the follow-up article, written upon his return to Michigan, Beets suggests that “the people of the Southland are waking up to the fact that the Negroes among them are a far more valuable asset to them than they had thought, and consequently attempts are being made to give them more of a square deal than formerly.” Negroes are not “shiftless” or fit only for “menial service,” but are entering myriad professions and trades, “something which is brought about largely by the practical education given by Tuskegee Institute and other schools of a similar character whose aim is to uplift the Negro race by teaching it the dignity of labor.” Beets notes that although there are schools for colored people in the South, they are often “miserable and forlorn looking structures” and the conditions for learning are only improving slowly. There is no mention of the schooling situation in Grand Rapids.

Far more troubling than silence about racialized northern schooling is Beets’ speech meant to exonerate the Dutch for the slave trade, offered at the memorial for Booker T. Washington in January 1916. Beets argued that his words were meant to “controvert the assertion so commonly advanced by the rank and file of the American people, that the Dutch are really responsible for the introduction of slavery in the New World” [with the delivery of slaves from a Dutch ship to Jamestown, Virginia in 1619]. After proving that the slave trade had begun long before 1619 (at the behest of Spanish and English rulers), Beets goes on to delineate “a good many [Dutch] services to the

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78 Henry Beets, *The Banner* April 11, 1918: 256-7 Editorial “The Negro in the South”
Negro, many years before other nations showed them similar kindnesses.” These kindnesses included: In the Netherlands, allowing “the black man” to attend University of Leyden, and the Dutch Reformed Classis of Amsterdam ordaining negroes since 1737; In America, Dutch Christians opening their churches and communion tables in 1792 “to the Negro, long before others in our land did so,” condemning slave-holding in 1829 and refusing alliance with slaveholding churches long before the Civil War, and the Dutch Americans fighting in the Civil War, “shedding their life-blood to emancipate the blacks.” While acknowledging that they could have done more for “the black man,” Beets claims that Dutch people have “stood in the front rank in recognizing him in his mental and moral worth, and in seeking his spiritual welfare long before others admitted him to the fellowship and privileges of the white men.” Randall Jelks rightly problematizes this narrative by noting Beets’ omission of the Dutch overtaking of St. Jorge da Elmina (the slave castle off the coast of Ghana) from the Portuguese in the seventeenth century and the “long history of the transatlantic slave trade that Dutch sailing companies, which served as transporters throughout the Americas engaged in,” through the start of the nineteenth century.

In his piece published October 2, 1919, entitled “How to Solve the Negro Problem,” Beets notes that there are more than ten million negroes in the United States,

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80 As early as 1792 it was declared in the Constitution of the Reformed Dutch Church in America (Article 59): “In the Church there is no difference between bond and free, but all are one in Christ. Whenever, therefore, slaves or black people shall be baptized or become members in full communion of the Church, they shall be admitted to equal privileges with all other members.” Monsma, Timothy M. “The Educational Ideals of 1834 in the Michigan Colony.” in DeYong, Peter Y. and Nelson D. Kloosterman, Eds. The Reformation of 1834: Essays in commemoration of the Act of Secession and Return. Orange City, IA: Pluim Publishing, 1984: 64. Dennis Voskuil notes that two of Van Raalte’s sons fought in the Civil War (“Piety and Patriotism,” 127-29). Classis Holland declared itself against the institution of slavery in the fall of 1855.

81 Jelks, African Americans in the Furniture City, 172.
“who must be reckoned with as part and parcel of our nation, with equal rights enjoyed, as well as burdens equally born.”\textsuperscript{82} Beets is aware that mass migration north, especially from 1916-1918, had nearly tripled the African-American population in Grand Rapids. He offers “a constructive program for just inter-racial relations” including, “economic justice, equal opportunity to get and hold work on the same terms as other men, with equal pay for equal work, and with fair working and living conditions.” Beets calls on local, state, and national government to ensure “security of life and of property” and then calls upon “the pulpit, the press, and all good people” to foster public sentiment that will support enforcement. In a line more often heard about white women in the South, Beets also calls upon people “to protect the sanctity of home and womanhood . . . The home of the Negro should receive the same measure of respect and protection as that of other Americans, and the sanctity of his home relation should be safeguarded in every possible way. Swift and impartial action of the law should strike the violator of the sanctity of any home, white or black.”\textsuperscript{83} The editorial also calls for “local committees of white and colored people in towns and communities for the consideration of inter-racial welfare” because “racial understanding and cooperation furnish the only sure basis of race adjustment in a democracy.”

**Grand Rapids: Segregated Schools and Redlined Housing**

Jim Crow was extant in 1920s Grand Rapids, even if it was not overt. Sarah Glover explained: “I came from the South where all we knew was discrimination. When I came here, I thought it wouldn’t be as bad, but I soon found out it was undercover. In the

\textsuperscript{82} *The Banner* October 2, 1919: 613-614 “How to Solve the Negro Problem”

\textsuperscript{83} I could not find *Grand Rapids Press* coverage of assaults on black women in their homes, but Beets seems to be responding to precipitating events of violence.
South you knew where you couldn’t go. Here you had to guess.” Glover, who had been a teacher in Mississippi, discovered the Grand Rapids school board policy against hiring black teachers upon her arrival.\textsuperscript{84} Grand Rapids South High School opened in 1914, with a new building located on Hall Street, between Salem and Jefferson Avenues, and in the fifty-four years before it closed in the heat of desegregation battles in 1968, it produced such graduates as U.S. President Gerald R. Ford (1931) and soul singer Al Green (1966).\textsuperscript{85} On the other hand, the school’s infamous history includes the KKK establishing a “club” there in 1919.\textsuperscript{86} Robinson notes that local law enforcement “permitted public displays of white supremacy, and state laws and city ordinances placed minimal restrictions on parade demonstrations,” such as the Klan procession which was held on Independence Day, July 4, 1925, “complete with a band and multicolored floats promoting its principles,” and attended by over three thousand people during a week of gatherings/meetings in Grand Rapids.\textsuperscript{87} A letter to the editor written by Mrs. Ruth Sergent, published in “The Public Pulse” of the \textit{Grand Rapids Press}, asks

\begin{quote}
Why, with all this agitation going on, do we not consider separate schools for the white and colored children? How can we look to either race for a proper respect of each other’s rights if we continue to raise them together? . . . Everyone knows that the Negroes choose to live in different localities from the white people—why should they be forced to educate their children in our schools? . . . Any right-minded man or woman knows that this system of equality is unjust to the children.\textsuperscript{88}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{84} Robinson, 4. The book says “the South” but migration patterns make it more than likely it was Mississippi.
\textsuperscript{85} The former South High School building at 120 Hall St. SE, is now the location of Gerald R. Ford Job Corp.
\textsuperscript{86} Jelks 71-72; Robinson, 3
\textsuperscript{87} Robinson, 3.
A few blocks away from South High School, Grand Rapids Christian High School opened in 1920.\textsuperscript{90} Calvin College President, Rev. J.J. Hiemenga explained that Christian Reformed schools were founded for “the diffusing of a religious atmosphere in the schoolroom; it means teachers who are consecrated to their mission of bringing the pupils

\textsuperscript{89} 1925 postcard of South High School.

\textsuperscript{90} Its home was the former Calvin Theological School building, on the corner of Madison Avenue and Franklin Street (Address: 415 Franklin). Its first faculty numbered ten teachers, under F.J. Driessens as principal. The enrollment in March 1922 was 360. (Beets, 138). GRCHS moved to its current location on Plymouth in 1966. Grand Rapids Christian Schools, by founding date (according to CSI documents): Williams Street (1857), Baxter (1874), Oakdale (1881?? Centennial information says 1892), West Side (1882 or 1890?), Franklin Street (1890 or 1910?), Creston (1891), Grandville Avenue (1901), Plymouth (1908), Baldwin (1910), Christian High (1920), Seymour (1921), Adams Street (1950), Mayfield (1952), Millbrook (1954), and Sylvan (1956). The Society for Christian Instruction on a Reformed Basis was organized in 1892. From it came NUCS and later CSI. The National Union of Christian Schools (NUCS) was founded in Chicago in 1920 to unite Christian schools connected to the Calvinist theological bent and to the Christian Reformed Church more specifically. The goal of NUCS was to support Christian schools with Calvinist roots, writing and publishing textbooks, maintaining a magazine, holding conventions, and developing standards for teachers (training and salary). These schools are controlled by parent-society organizations because God holds parents responsible for the training of their children, neither the State nor the Church is qualified to give school instruction but the Home holds both religious and secular interests. In 1922, there were 75 Christian primary schools in fifteen states and Canada (Beets, 142). According to 1948 records, there were 125 schools with a combined enrollment of 22,570 students and 723 teachers, the vast majority of whom are members of the Christian Reformed Church, making it “one of the outstanding promoters of Christian education among Protestant denominations in America.” (Edwin H. Rian, \textit{Christianity and American Education}. San Antonio, Naylor Co: 1949: 208.). In 1978, NUCS became Christian Schools International (CSI). http://www.csionline.org/home. CSI should not to be confused with Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI), which serves a broader range of evangelical Protestant schools.
into a spiritual state of mind, and of training in the fundamentals of religion—training which shall result in the development into religious, God-fearing, spiritual men and women.” 91 Who was included in this covenantal vision of Christian faith and education will be explored in the next section.

Where students attended public school depended largely upon where they lived. Although there were some interracial neighborhoods in Grand Rapids, this became increasingly rare. The development of segregated suburban neighborhoods occurred not simply as benign migration patterns, but “as a consequence of organized white efforts to combat black suburbanization and to maintain white-only neighborhoods.” 92

Between 1920 and 1928, the black population had grown 250%. In 1928, R. Maurice Moss conducted a two-week study of the city, sponsored by the National Urban League, which included housing patterns. Moss outlined three sections of the city where African Americans lived. The streets of Wealthy, Market, Cherry, and Division (including King Court) bound the first section; Franklin, Buchanan, Buckley and Jefferson the second; Franklin, Union, Wealthy, and Fuller the third . . . newcomers and the poorer African Americans lived on the southwest side along the railroad tracks . . . [also] increasing black population in the Miller-Grant-Graham district east of the railroad tracks. 93

The practice of “redlining” began with the National Housing Act of 1934, which established the Federal Housing Administration (FHA). “Bolstered by the Federal

91 “Ministers Debate Denominational vs. City Schools” Grand Rapids Press, December 6, 1921, 19.
92 Robinson, 52. Although there were some interracial neighborhoods in Grand Rapids until the mid-1950s, the post-war housing boom allowed whites to capitalize on a suburban growth market which excluded blacks.
93 Jelks, 95.
Housing Administration’s racially restrictive practices, local builders, real estate brokers, bankers, and white homeowners ensured the majority of blacks had minimal access to homes outside the developing ‘black belt’ near the center of the city.”

In 1935, the Federal Home Loan Bank Board (FHLBB) commissioned the Home Owners’ Loan Corporation (HOLC) to look at over 200 cities and create “residential security maps” to help with real-estate investments and securing loans. The desirable neighborhoods—coded with an “A” (colored green)—were restricted to homogeneous communities whose inhabitants were native white citizens with white-collared jobs. Even miniscule “infiltration of a lower grade population” led to a lower code: “It only took one percent black occupancy for a neighborhood to receive a ‘D’ rating (colored red, hence the term redlining), even if the area had favorable influences, such as ‘good transportation’ and location ‘close to school.’”

The racialized mapping supported by the government is also apparent in the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) Underwriting Manual, which “warns against the encroachment of ‘inharmonious racial groups’ into neighborhoods occupied by families of another race.”

94 Robinson, 51
96 Robinson, 68.
97 Robinson, 65.
Racial discrimination was enforced in “structural organizations” like schools, effectively eliminating the possibility of integrated classrooms, as they were deemed “hazardous” to community. The FHA Manual addressed the importance of schools as “fundamental building blocks in the development and maintenance of desirable communities” and went further to assert that “racially homogeneous schools are a critical component of the success of any healthy neighborhood.” Conversely, if “the children of people living in such an area are compelled to attend school where the majority or a goodly number of the pupils represent . . . an incompatible racial element, the neighborhood under consideration will prove far less stable and desirable.”

Despite these structured separations, prior to the third wave of migration (1950-1960) when nearly 8,000 African Americans moved into Grand Rapids, the city had integrated schools. The Campau area (which included Franklin, Maplewood, Vandenberg, Henry, Madison Park, Sheldon and Jefferson schools) comprised the core inner-city elementary schools in the developing ‘black belt’ of Grand Rapids. From 1940-1950, the number of black children in the Campau Area Schools increased from 280 to 836. The Grand Rapids School Board refused to require white students to attend Henry School during the 1950s, choosing instead to establish *de facto* single-race schools through the establishment of selective geographic attendance zones. White parents living

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are intended; h. Appropriate provisions for enforcement. 982 (1). Adequacy of Civic, Social, and Commercial Centers. These elements of comfortable living usually follow rather than precede development. Those centers serving the city or section in which the development is situated should be readily available to its occupants. Schools should be appropriate to the needs of the new community and they should not be attended in large numbers by inharmonious racial groups. Employment centers, preferably diversified in nature, should be at a convenient distance. Source: Federal Housing Administration, *Underwriting Manual: Underwriting and Valuation Procedure Under Title II of the National Housing Act With Revisions to February, 1938* (Washington, D.C.), Part II, Section 9, Rating of Location.

98 Robinson, 66. It was further suggested that in such situations, white parents might well consider paying a fee that would allow their children to attend another school with “similar” students.
near Henry School could send their children to Congress or Hillcrest Elementary, both of which had zero black student enrollment. As the schools became increasingly separated along racial lines, the resources became increasingly unequal: School buildings, teacher staffs, resources, and alienated student bodies reinforced and intensified racial segregation. But because the school board was entirely white, the concerns of the black community did not garner much attention.

“In 1944 a sixteen-year-old black student in Columbus, Ohio, won an essay contest on the theme 'What to do with Hitler after the War' by submitting the single sentence, 'Put him in black skin and let him live the rest of his life in America.'”

In 1947, schools in this area had a combined minority enrollment of 27%. By 1960, that number soared to 74%. In the intervening fifteen years, white flight became

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99 Robinson, 42.
100 Robinson, 46.
101 Jacobson, A City within a City, 112. Regarding Detroit as a city within a city—a black core and a white periphery and the race riots in 1943: Detroit was an important production center during WWII, and it was popularly known as “the arsenal of democracy.” In 1943, the NAACP held an emergency conference in Detroit, accusing the nation of hypocrisy – commitment to personal freedoms abroad and discrimination and segregation at home. White communities guarded lines of housing - “The city’s 200,000 black residents were cramped into 60 square blocks on the East Side and forced to live under deplorable sanitary conditions. Ironically, the ghetto was called Paradise Valley.” Riots began at Belle Isle, an integrated amusement park. During the days of rioting “twenty-five black residents and nine white residents had been killed. Of the 25 African Americans, 17 had been killed by white policemen. The number injured, including police, approached 700, while the property damage, including looted merchandise, destroyed stores, and burned automobiles, amounted to $2 million.” German-controlled Vichy radio broadcasts asserted that the riot revealed “the internal disorganization of a country torn by social injustice, race hatreds, regional disputes, the violence of an irritated proletariat, and the gangsterism of a capitalistic police.” (pbs.org; accessed 7/26/14). For personal details from George Swanson Starling on the Detroit riot of 1943, see Wilkerson, 130-134.

102 Robinson, 41. For a sociological study of de facto segregation in Grand Rapids (not named explicitly as Community X, but the details offered make it plain – for example: “One of the complicating factors in the picture of racial imbalance in the public schools of Community X is the fact that this city has an unusually high percentage of its pupils attending nonpublic schools, which are mostly all-white . . . Close to 15 percent attend schools affiliated with three Protestant denominations, the vast majority of these from a Calvinist denomination with headquarters in the community . . . It may also be observed that the committee found no solid evidence that the nonpublic schools were being used as places of refuge for white students seeking to escape the growing concentration of Negroes in the public school” [36]), see Donald H. Bouma and James Hoffman, The Dynamics of School Integration: Problems and Approaches in a Northern City. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968. The book notes that “the fundamental function of the American public school has been to transmit to the young the values and competencies needed to function significantly in the culture . . . The pattern of segregated education increasingly characteristic of large Northern cities is one of the major roadblocks to the effective operation of the socialization process . . . The
a glaring reality. The black protest movement in Grand Rapids identified educational inequality as the cornerstone of discrimination. By 1950, the Grand Rapids branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) was the second largest in Michigan. This group fought against segregation in Grand Rapids Public Schools (GRPS) and the lack of hiring of black teachers by the Grand Rapids Board of Education since 1920. Hillary Bissell, a white member of the Grand Rapids NAACP, saw redistricting as a form of segregation. In a 1952 letter, Bissell explained: “As you well know, segregation in a northern community doesn’t usually arrive full blown, it [is a] creeping paralysis . . . Schools represent the final and crystallized fact of it[s] being.”

In April 1940, Warren Banner, director of the Department of Research for the National Urban League, did a survey of the African-American community in Grand Rapids. The results estimated that population had grown nearly 20 percent since 1930 to almost 4,000 residents, but this was still less than 2 percent of the city’s total population. Results also showed that over two-thirds of the black population were employed in ‘domestic and personal service, and in unskilled, low-paid occupations.’

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Robinson details the selling of homes in the Franklin and Sheldon School Districts by white families to black families in order to move away from the city center. Some landlords converted single dwelling units into apartments without establishing separate gas or electric facilities for their tenants, if such services were provided at all (75-79). These practices led to overcrowding and myriad unpunished housing violations. Whereas in 1952, there were no schools in Grand Rapids which contained more than 90% non-white students, by 1961, there were four schools with minority student populations of 70-89% and three schools which had more than 90% non-white students. (Robinson, 72.) Statistics are from the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, The 50 States Report Submitted to the Commission on Civil Rights by the State Advisory Committees, 1961, 266.

Jelks, 124.
Jelks, 143-44.
Quoted in Jelks, 142.
Jelks, 108.
African Americans employed in unionized shops until Franklin Roosevelt’s Executive Order 8802 issued in June 1941, which banned racial discrimination in all war plants. When EO 8802 expired in 1945, industrial employers could lay off African Americans without penalties.¹⁰⁸

Paul Phillips arrived in Grand Rapids in 1946 and served as the executive director of the Grand Rapids Urban League (GRUL) for 29 years. In the summer of 1947, he organized a study of the influx of Afro-Southerners into the city. Results indicated that African Americans now represented nearly 4 percent of Grand Rapids’ total population, but 66% of them had been born in Southern states, many having migrated from Mississippi.¹⁰⁹ In his first ten years, he focused on expanding job opportunities for black workers. “He visited factories, banks, and hospitals as well as the employers’ association and, most importantly, the Chamber of Commerce . . . Strengthened by the number of overqualified black applicants, Phillips implored the chamber and its many white businessmen to incorporate racial fairness into their hiring practices.”¹¹⁰ He used charm and patience, negotiating behind the scenes to end discriminatory hiring and to bring about educational reform.¹¹¹

As the complexion of schools changed, so too did the dropout rates of black students. Dr. William Plummer and Rev. John V. Williams, President and Education Committee chairman of the NAACP, respectively, linked the dropout issue to the

¹⁰⁸ Jelks, 129-130.
¹⁰⁹ Jelks, 125. Jelks suggests that the second migration African Americans were less interested in assimilation, preferring instead to maintain a distinct ethnic identity. “They came to the city with a strong Southern sense of family and extended kin networks that provided them with support. Respectability for these Afro-Southerners meant controlling one’s own life outside the overarching purview of a white community . . . [they] were reluctant to interact socially with whites and did so in only the most cursory manner” (127).
¹¹⁰ Robinson, 30-31
¹¹¹ Robinson, 48.
systemic discrimination in the public schools.”

In 1960, Grand Rapids total unemployment rate was 5.3 percent, but for African Americans it was almost triple that number at 14 percent. That reality, coupled with discriminatory hiring practices, meant black students did not see the value in graduating from high school because it would not lead to economic stability or social mobility. In fact, students who stayed in school found themselves a few paychecks behind those who left to obtain menial wages in mediocre jobs. Unfortunately, not much had changed in the complexion of labor inequity since Reverend Browne offered a similar diagnosis in 1913.

In 1950, 60 percent of Christian Reformed families with school-going children sent them to Christian schools. By 1969, that number grew to 80%. A 1956 survey within Christian Reformed schools determined that their Christian education was meant for “Covenant children,” and called the religious education of others “evangelism.” One of the committee’s conclusions was about who could/should attend: “If the Christian schools want Christian education, and not child evangelism, the board and societies face a problem of limiting enrollment in the Christian schools to children from covenant-keeping homes.” Notice the theological and denominational boundaries being enforced here, and the ways that this might lead to racial exclusion as well, since most of the African Americans in Grand Rapids were Baptist or African Methodist Episcopal, not covenantal Calvinists.

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112 Robinson, 95.
113 Robinson, 96.
114 Robinson, 98.
117 Harro Van Brummelen, Telling the Next Generation, 1.
118 In a conversation on July 23, 2014 with Chad Engbers (long-time resident of Grand Rapids, graduate of Calvin Christian High School and Calvin College, where he now works as a professor of English Literature), we talked about the racial lines of social justice as they run through Calvin College. He
Grand Rapids: All American City (?)

In 1960, Grand Rapids was awarded the title of “All American City” by the National Municipal League and Look magazine, but below the proud banners lay racial disparities clearly seen in the well-kept suburbs and the blighted inner city. According to Michigan’s 1961 Report to the Commission on Civil Rights, denying African Americans the right “to live where their economic and educational status would enable them to live, remain[ed] the greatest single barrier to equal opportunity in education, and to integrated participation in other aspects of community life.” Rather than dealing with systemic inequities such as redlining the housing market and biased hiring practices, “whites in Grand Rapids emphasized the behavior and culture of black residents, particularly black youth.” Schools with predominantly black students were seen as sites of crime, rather than sites of learning. Paul Phillips’ election to the Grand Rapids School Board in 1962 marked the first year an African American had ever held that position. After surveying the scene and meeting the state attorney general regarding racial discrimination in the schools, Phillips reported to the GRSB in 1963 that the city school system needed to be carefully examined in all areas, including teacher recruitment, hiring, and placement, as well as the segregation occurring due to school boundaries.

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120 Quoted in Robinson, 72.
121 Robinson, 100.
122 Robinson, 49. Whereas in 1952, there were no schools in Grand Rapids which contained more than 90% non-white students, by 1961, there were four schools with minority student populations of 70-89% and three schools which had more than 90% non-white students. (Robinson, 72). Statistics are from the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, The 50 States Report Submitted to the Commission on Civil Rights by the State Advisory Committees, 1961, 266.
While some praised his political savvy in using subtle moral persuasion, many working-class Dutch residents of the city thought his aims were too radical, and they accused him of being a “communist.” On the other side of the fence, many African Americans considered Philips an “Uncle Tom” because he did not push radical reform and seemed to kowtow to white civic leadership.

Case in point: on Wednesday, November 16, 1966, approximately four hundred black students marched out of South High School to protest a newly implemented ‘good grooming’ policy which banned male students from facial hair, especially moustaches, which had become popular among African Americans. Phillips, still the only black GRSB member, supported the decree. He even went so far as to offer an apology to the white community and issued a plea for conformity to black residents.

In the summer of 1967, across the state, a riot erupted in Detroit, lasting four days. Although reportedly sparked by a police raid on an unlicensed bar on July 23, the 12th Street riot was caused by decades of racial unrest. It left “scores dead and hundreds injured, thousands arrested, untold numbers of businesses looted, and hundreds of buildings utterly destroyed.” Then-governor George Romney sent in thousands of National Guard troops, and President Lyndon Johnson eventually ordered paratroopers from the 82nd Airborne on to the streets to restore order. That same weekend, Grand

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123 Robinson, 96.
124 By 1965, there were over one thousand black students and almost 950 white students enrolled at South High School, which meant that it had the greatest number and highest percentage of minority students. (Robinson, 93). The class of 1968 was the last to graduate. “Due primarily to racial integration efforts, South High School was closed (converted to a middle school) and the high school students were moved (bussed) to the other 3 high schools.” “Grand Rapids Public Library High Schools Collection #316” page 21.
125 Robinson, 107-108.
Rapids experienced its own racial uprising, though with less violence.\textsuperscript{127} For details about response in Michigan after Martin Luther King Jr.’s assassination, see Appendix E.

In the wake of the 1966 South High school walkout and race riots across the state, the Grand Rapids School Board realized it had to act: to redraw elementary school boundaries to promote integration, to reassign some black teachers to predominantly white schools, and to allow students to enroll outside of their neighborhoods. The board decided that “the dangers of integrated schools seemed less ominous than the current unpredictable reality of concentrated black youth.”\textsuperscript{128} One result was a busing program. Phillips spoke at a meeting for Concerned Citizens, where he declared his support and his expectation for “full cooperation of 98% of this community, both black and white to pass the plan.”\textsuperscript{129} He went on to say: “Every school in Grand Rapids, in the suburbs and the private schools if possible, ought to have in its student body children of all races, colors and creeds. In that way, the parent who says he wants his child to go to school only with children of his own kind will have no place to run.”\textsuperscript{130}

Thursday, September 5, 1968, marked a new day in community history: the first day of busing within the public school system. However, busing only went in one direction; students from the inner city were bused out of the center, to schools like Union High School, nestled in a “well-entrenched working-class Polish neighborhood” on the

\textsuperscript{127} Robinson, 122. A few years earlier, “On Sunday, September 22, 1963, more than three thousand Grand Rapids citizens marched in silence to protest the bombing in Birmingham, Alabama.” However, the marchers were segregated by organization, most of which were all-white or all-black: “The gathering illustrated the flawed racial system that had dominated the city’s history for decades” (Robinson, 117-118).
\textsuperscript{128} Robinson, 124.
\textsuperscript{129} Quoted in Robinson, 129.
\textsuperscript{130} Robinson, 133, Phillips quoted in \textit{Grand Rapids Press} April 4 1968
west side of town. The year before busing began, Union had the lowest number of black students in any Grand Rapids high school: two. The demand for local control of “neighborhood schools” became the rallying cry, and three Union High School parents successfully ran for the school board as a voting bloc on the promise of revoking busing. White resistance to school integration is often narrated as a fight “for community control and neighborhood schools,” but within the desire to have such autonomy lies the racial privilege of whiteness.

Inner-city African-American families understood that one-way busing meant their children would have to “shoulder the weight of integration” and that white “neighborhood schools” were an extension of racist policies which denied their children “equal educational justice.” Paul Phillips retired from the GRSB on August 15, 1969, citing his “frustration over the city’s lack of speed in integrating the schools,” in part because “prejudiced attitudes existed” which manifested themselves both in an

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131 GRPL High Schools Coll. Coll. 316 - UNION HIGH SCHOOL 1800 Tremont Blvd. NW - The Union school began in 1855 as a 2-story stone building at Broadway and Turner (a 3rd story was added later). High school classes were begun in 1859, but for many years students went to Central to complete their high school education. As of 1867 there were 50 students at high school level. In 1875 a new 3-story school was constructed at the corner of Turner & Third Street. An addition in 1911 was primarily dedicated to high school work. The first class to graduate from Union High School was the class of 1912. A new Union High School was built in 1967, opening not long before the influx of students from the defunct South High School. An addition was constructed in 1980.

132 “A well-entrenched working-class Polish neighborhood existed on the West-side of Grand Rapids, dating back to the late nineteenth century. A tight-knit and almost secluded area within Grand Rapids, the Westside was home to Union High School, which the year prior to the decision to integrate by means of busing housed only two black students—the lowest number of any high school in Grand Rapids . . . They not only had to share their high school but now were presented with possibly their most perplexing blow—they had to interact with blacks on a daily basis” (Robinson, 132).

133 Terri T. Mileski (nee Timmer) attended South High School and graduated from Union High School in 1970. She says “My first year at Union was the first time in my life that I had ever been ashamed of being white . . . African-American kids I had known since kindergarten were all of a sudden being treated as if they were monsters from another planet. They hatred expressed by many of the white students and adults was reprehensible.” Quoted in “Forever South” an online feature of Grand Rapids Magazine from September 2003. http://www.grmag.com/features/10-03.htm. Accessed 12/4/14.

134 Robinson, A City within a City, 189.

135 Robinson, 152.
unwillingness to recognize the racial problem or to get involved in solving it once acknowledged.\textsuperscript{136} He went on to say that “the Grand Rapids school system is more segregated now than it was in 1947.”\textsuperscript{137}

**Grand Rapids Christian Schools: Consolidation and Its Effects**

In Christian schools, change came by way of consolidation.\textsuperscript{139} The “Committee for Independent Parentally-Controlled Schools” put out ads in May 1967 editions of the

\textsuperscript{136} Robinson, 151.

\textsuperscript{137} Robinson, 151. In 1970, “only 410 black students of the total 60,693 pupils enrolled attended a school in suburban school districts.” Numbers from Kent Intermediate School Office, cited in Robinson, 164. That same year, parents of black students in the GRPS system, along with the Grand Rapids branch of the NAACP initiated a class-action school-desegregation lawsuit against the GRSB. (Robinson, 152 and 162). The judge ruled in 1973 that segregation was not the fault of the schools, but a reflection of the city’s segregated housing patterns. He declined to order busing, but directed the school board to reassign some black teachers to white schools. (Robinson, 165).

\textsuperscript{138} *Grand Rapids Press* advertisement, circa 1970.

\textsuperscript{139} Increased high school enrollment caused the board to split the school in 1963, creating East Christian High School, with the school on Franklin taking the name of Grand Rapids Central Christian High School. In 1973, the Center Christian Highs School building was sold and the school on Plymouth
Grand Rapids Press to raise awareness of the downside of consolidation. They raised the specter of losing local identity of schools, central corporatization and loss of parental control over children’s education:

Are you as a parent ready to have professional educators make your decisions for you?

Do you believe that what may be good for another school on the other side of town is also good for your school?

Why has the Consolidation Committee failed to cite scriptural justification for the change, but instead has used reasons of expediency?140

Expediency won the day, and in 1968, Oakdale joined five other Christian elementary schools to form Grand Rapids Christian School Association. Soon after, debate began about the cost-effectiveness of closing one or more of those schools. Let’s look at Oakdale Christian School as a case study of the geography of racialized Christian education.

Dorothy Westra, who served as Oakdale’s Principal from 1960-1967, wrote about the value of diversity during her tenure:

We welcome into our school those of various cultural, racial or national backgrounds whose parents or guardians are in agreement with the principles of God’s word. Our children learn from classroom contact that the Kingdom includes the Cuban, Indonesian, Negro, Chinese, American, Hungarian, and Indian, as well as the Dutch.141

On September 19, 1973, Dr. Ray Kehoe and Dr. Phil Schoo of the University of Michigan Bureau of School Services gave a report to the members of Grand Rapids Christian School Association after a 3-day visit to the schools.142 As part of their

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(East Christian) became Grand Rapids Christian High School, where it still resides. See Grand Rapids Press coverage from May 16 and May 20, 1967.

141 Dorothy Westra, quoted on p. 17 of Oakdale Centennial Booklet (in Calvin College archives).
142 Information found in CSI archives.
findings, the report suggested that Oakdale was a prime choice for closing because it was an old building, constructed ~1910-1920 [typical estimates for school building life expectancy are about 50 years] and in dire need of expensive renovations, including safety, plumbing, and electrical concerns [Kehoe estimated that renovations to Oakdale would cost $400-500k]. During a Q & A period, one person asked: “whether in coming up with these plans [about which schools to close] you have taken into account the desire of at least some of us . . . to maintain integration carefully,” and then went on to speculate that closing Oakdale might cause “a large number of people to immediately vanish from the area.”143 The Response: “We considered it, but obviously the question of the importance of witness and the funding of witness is something that can be made only by the association members collectively. . . I don’t think you’re going to find very much national or international assistance, and it’s going to be right in this group to determine whether they can carry out an enterprise that goes beyond the offering of quality Christian education and goes into the question of Christian education as a kind of mission to the unfortunate.” A subsequent response went further: “I think you may be able to get a certain amount of money for tuition, but I think it will be more in the nature of tokenism than a real integration effort . . . You are attempting to maintain an integrated school now at Oakdale but that integration has not spread to the other schools.”

Despite the recommendations in the 1973 report of Kehoe and Schoo, Philip Elve, GRCSA Superintendent said that they decided to keep Oakdale open because it is “an

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143 P. 16-17 of report. “Others saw Oakdale as necessary to the broader spectrum of Christian schools because here we were accepting and integrating a diverse community of Christian parents who had a vision for the education of their children in God’s wonderfully rich world” p. 13 of Oakdale Centennial Booklet, written by George Jasperse, Parent and School board member.
anchor to maintain an integrated neighborhood.”

Reasons for keeping the school open included its “unique role in the inner city” and that “the school’s demise would have serious, adverse effects on a significant number of supporting Christian Reformed churches in that area, as well as on the stability of the school’s neighborhood.” The latter points both to schools as foundational in neighborhoods and to the real possibility of continued white flight out of the downtown area.

For a parallel story of race and Christian education in Chicago, see Appendix F.

In 1985, Grand Rapids Christian School Association hired Jim Cannon (“who is black and is a member of Grace Christian Reformed Church”) to work at Oakdale Christian School and Grand Rapids Christian High School, providing “a role model of minority leadership for the two schools, which have a 33% and 5% nonwhite population.” Cannon left Union High School and took a pay cut, saying “I have no regrets. The Lord led me here.” His wife, Joanne Gilbert Cannon, who is white, “welcomed the chance to provide a bridge between black and white students.” He worked with Grand Rapids Christian Schools until 1994. In 2001, Joanne wrote a letter to the editor of the Calvin College Spark, the alumni magazine, in response to an article in which minority alumni urged trustees to make multiculturalism a priority. She wrote with a sense of resignation:


145 The Grand Rapids Press article cited numbers from Superintendent Elve, who said about 15 percent of Oakdale’s students are minorities, 10 percent of them black, and 10 to 15 percent of students are not Christian Reformed. Charles Moore, “Oakdale Christian School Retained” Grand Rapids Press 19 December, 1973: 10-A. One way that diversity was fostered was the founding of the Evangelical Committee for Christian Education (ECCES) in 1973, whose mission was to draw in minority students from non-Christian Reformed families [Larry Borst explained that ECCES has been folded into broader financial aid offerings.]

I have been inter-racially married for 22 years and have four bi-racial children. I cannot in good conscience encourage them to go to Calvin . . . Life is hard enough; being a black, or a hispanic, or an Asian youth in America is particularly hard these days without attending a college where the dominant ethnic culture is given religious superiority.\textsuperscript{147}

In 2008, the Grand Rapids Christian Schools board responded to over a decade of declining enrollment by deciding to consolidate its three remaining elementary schools—Creston, Millbrook, and Oakdale—into one building. On September 2, 2010, at the dedication of the new school, Superintendent Tom DeJonge explained that it “signals a new beginning, maximizes resources to support Christ-centered teaching, strengthens programs, increases access to families from diverse socioeconomic and ethnic backgrounds, and sends a visible message to the community that Grand Rapids Christian Schools is serious about its commitment to the City of Grand Rapids.”\textsuperscript{148}

Not everyone believes that narrative. When the consolidation plan was being discussed, a group from Oakdale Christian School raised a ruckus (again):

Thirty-five years ago, a consultant hired by Grand Rapids Christian Schools recommended closing Oakdale Christian, which had 525 students. Parents and others fought off that closure by touting the school's ‘integrated nature’ and its status as an anchor for the Southeast Side neighborhood for more than 80 years. Now, parents, grandparents, alumni and others are fighting for Oakdale, just as they did in 1973.\textsuperscript{149}

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\textsuperscript{147} Joanne Gilbert-Cannon, “Minority issues still cause for concern,” Letters to the Editor, Calvin College Spark, Fall 2001. The couple moved to New York so that Joanne could attend Colgate Rochester Crozer Divinity School, and she now serves as head pastor at First Baptist Church in Brockport, NY. James Cannon now works in the Brockport Central Public School District. I have tried to contact both of them via LinkedIn, and I emailed Joanne on 8/20/14 (brockportfirstbaptist@frontiernet.net), but have not gotten a response from either of them.


\textsuperscript{149} http://blog.mlive.com/grpress/print.html?entry=/2008/05/parents_resist_consolidation_p.html Parents resist consolidation plan by Grand Rapids Christian Schools By The Grand Rapids Press updated May 01, 2008 at 8:58 AM (Accessed 7/1/13)
\end{flushleft}
Although members of the Millbrook and Creston school communities did not start a campaign, the Oakdale group, calling themselves Friends of Christian Urban Schools, mobilized. They submitted a petition with almost 700 signatures, wrote letters and made phone calls to trustees, contacted churches, and began recruiting new students.

In a blog post from May 2008, Peter Bratt, a 1998 GRCHS graduate, noted the drastic decline in enrollment from the time of his attendance (about 3,300) to the time of his writing (about 2,500). He bemoaned the correlation between rising tuition and “a decline in racial and socio-economic diversity within the school system,” suggesting that the “nearly all-white population with incomes well in the upper middle class” was “on the road to becoming another Detroit Country Day [an elite prep school on the other side of the state]” or an “American Pie High School-with Jesus on the side.”

One person responded to the blog post with the following: “From my understanding and study while at Calvin College, this school system [GRCS] was created to preserve the integrity of the CRC [Christian Reformed Church] doctrinal and cultural standards, which historically are racially ‘white,’ ethnically Dutch, and theologically reformed.” The respondent went on to suggest that another cause of declining enrollment, along with “burdensome tuition rates” was a “decline in the ethnically Dutch's loyalty to the CRC and a reformed Christian education.”

Another blog respondent lamented the lack of diversity (racial and economic), especially with the closing of Oakdale Christian:

I just pulled out my copy of the 1985-1986 Oakdale Christian yearbook. I was in first grade and was one of those inner-city kids that received a Christian education.

http://peterabratt.blogspot.com/2008/05/fall-and-rise-of-grand-rapids-christian.html
The fall (and rise?) of the Grand Rapids Christian School system Posted 1st May 2008 by Peter Bratt. Accessed 7.1.13

http://peterabratt.blogspot.com/2008/05/fall-and-rise-of-grand-rapids-christian.html
The fall (and rise?) of the Grand Rapids Christian School system Posted 1st May 2008 by Peter Bratt. Accessed 7.1.13
thanks to Oakdale. Looking at the faces in that yearbook, it was significantly diverse. It's sad to see no such place in Grand Rapids' Christian education [now]. . . I agree that GRCS, and the CRC in general, have taken steps to further marginalize minorities and lower income folks. You can see that with a lack of churches within city neighborhoods, and where they remain, you see very little interaction with the surrounding neighborhood.152

Now that the Grand Rapids Christian elementary, middle, and high schools are all located on the southeast side of the city, even with marketing that has broadened out for ecumenical diversity, racial and socio-economic diversity remain part of an open and unanswered (perhaps even unasked by many) question about their value.153 For one liberative answer, see Appendix G.

Michigan: The Most Segregated State in the Nation

According to the 2000 U.S. Census, Michigan is the most segregated state in the nation. “Five of the 25 most racially segregated metropolitan regions in America—Detroit, Saginaw, Flint, Benton Harbor, and Muskegon—are in Michigan . . . Two more—Grand Rapids and Jackson—almost made the top 25. Census figures also show that Michigan has the most segregated public school system in the nation.”154

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153 To explain (at least partially) this blindspot, see Michael O. Emerson and Christian Smith, *Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000): Evangelicals are defined as Christians who believe in the Bible as ultimate authority for life of faith and that Scripture calls each person to preach the Gospel of Christ, that Christ died for all individuals, and that anyone who accepts Christ is born again. Emerson and Smith conclude “that religion, as structured in America, is unable to make a great impact on the racialized society. In fact, far from knocking down the racial barriers, religion generally serves to maintain these historical divides, and helps to develop new ones . . . The structure of religion in America is conducive to freeing groups from the direct control of other groups, but not addressing the fundamental divisions that exist in our current racialized society . . . American religion is thus one embodiment of larger American contradictions” (18) Racism is the sinful behavior of individuals, not a societal problem, and it could be solved by right relationship with one’s neighbor.
154 Keith Schneider, journalist and contributor to *New York Times* and *Detroit Free Press* and deputy director of Michigan Land Use Institute wrote “Michigan Apartheid” published in *Detroit Free Press* April 14, 2003 and cited in “The (Im)Possible Goal”
By the time the Great Migration of African-Americans reached its conclusion, sociologists had a name for hard-core racial division. Hypersegregation is a kind of separation of the races that was so total and complete that blacks and whites rarely intersected outside of work. The top ten cities that would earn that designation after the 1980 census were, in order of severity of racial isolation from most segregated to least: 1. Chicago; 2. Detroit; 3. Cleveland; 4. Milwaukee; 5. Newark; 6. Gary, IN; 7. Philadelphia; 8. Los Angeles; 9. Baltimore; 10. St. Louis. In the same census year, across the state from Detroit in Grand Rapids “nearly 30 percent of the black families lived below the poverty level, unemployment for blacks was three times the unemployment for whites, and the median black family income was 61 percent of the median income for a white family.” Between the 1990 and 2000 censuses, Grand Rapids grew 4.6 percent to just under 200,000 residents. White residents declined by 12.8 percent to 62.5 percent of the city’s population, while black population grew 14.8 percent to just below 20 percent of total population. Within the city proper, “almost 70% of Caucasians live in blocks with less than ten percent minority population. Over 25% of African-Americans live in blocks that are more than 90% minority population.” This is the current racialized reality of Grand Rapids. Churches and schools must contend with the city’s (hyper)segregated contours.

155 “After WWII, Chicago, Detroit, Cleveland, and other northern and western cities would witness a fitful migration of whites out of their urban strongholds. The far-out precincts and the inner-ring suburbs became sanctuaries for the battle-weary whites seeking, with government incentives, to replicate the havens they once had in the cities. One such suburb was Dearborn, Michigan . . . By the end of the twentieth century, blacks would make up more than eighty percent of the population of Detroit. Just across the Ford Expressway, the black population of the suburb of Dearborn, the 2000 census found, was one percent” (Wilkerson, 378 and 398).

156 Robinson, 175.

157 “The (Im)Possible Goal: Rowing, Not Drifting, toward Cultural Unity in Grand Rapids Michigan” a report issues Spring 2007 by Greater Grand Rapids National Issues Forums - Their goal is to become racism-free by 2016. In 2010, the population of Grand Rapids was 64.6% white and 20.9% black.
Chapter Four: Grand Rapids Christian Schools - Educational Architecture

“If Christian faith is a kind of temperament, then its formation requires the right environment. And if Christian education is going to form our sensibilities, then Christian churches, schools, and universities need the right wallpaper. They need to be environments in which the Story of the gospel is imaginatively woven in the entire ethos of the institution.”

Academic Architecture

At the Global Learning Environments Summit held in London (June 2006), one of the primary aims was “to explore developing trends in teaching and learning worldwide and how these are supported by the design of learning environments.” Presupposing that “the design of places where we learn matters,” the British Council for School Environments (BSCE) asserts that

What matters is how the schools are planned, and the spirit in which they are founded, funded and run. If new schools are to be little more than machines for producing successful economic units in the guise of teenagers armed with exam certificates, then they will be failures . . . If, instead, they aim at cultivating intelligent, imaginative, graceful souls with a hunger for knowledge and a love of learning, they will have succeeded . . . A school needs to be welcoming, and here its architecture is of prime concern.

The suggestion of the BSCE is that “the architecture of the school itself can work as a friendly and inspiring educational tool,” and the emphasis should be “on creating sociable, enjoyable spaces, rather than machines, for learning in.”

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Unfortunately, the architecture of schools has often been more sterile than social, more factory-esque than user-friendly. According to David Orr, a Professor of Environmental Studies at Oberlin College:

The problem is not just that many academic buildings are unsightly, do not work very well, or do not fit their place or region. The deeper problem is that academic buildings are not neutral, aseptic factors in the learning process. We have assumed, wrongly I think, that learning takes place in buildings, but that none occurs as a result of how they are designed or by whom, how they are constructed and from what materials, how they fit their location, and how—or how well—they operate . . . Academic architecture is a kind of crystallized pedagogy and buildings have their own hidden curriculum that teaches as effectively as any course taught in them.

Orr asks: What might be learned from the way we design, build and operate academic buildings? He answers by suggesting that “the process of design and construction is an opportunity for a community to deliberate over the ideas and ideals it wishes to express and how these are rendered into architectural form.” It is also a chance “to learn something about the relationship between ecology and economics” and “to ask and answer ethical questions about building materials and long-term environmental sustainability in the ongoing operations of the building.” Orr further argues that “good design can extend our imagination about the psychology of learning.”³ Constructing a good building entails consideration of myriad elements, and the design develops from the ground up, literally and figuratively.

In 1982, Michel Foucault did an interview with Paul Rabinow, focused mainly on architecture. Since Foucault was invested in deconstructing structures of power and mapping how they function, their conversation is fascinating. Foucault’s concept of the archaeology of knowledge is useful here: “The process of archaeology excavates and

uncovers grids of knowledge to find the historical and fundamental codes of culture.”

This excavation includes attention to the constructed spaces in which grids of knowledge are inculcated (for good or ill), because “space is fundamental in any form of communal life; space is fundamental in any exercise of power.”

K. Michael Hays explains that architecture does more than merely represent power, it offers “the techniques for practicing social relations which are framed and modulated spatially, that allow for the efficient expansion of power, or alternatively, for resistance…Space is the material wherein discourses about knowledge and power are transformed into actual relations of power.”

Although architects cannot fully resolve social problems, Foucault argues that architecture “can and does produce positive effects when the liberating intentions of the architect coincide with the real practice of people in the exercise of their freedom.”

When material (re)organizations match the values and practices of a community, that synergy can foster transformation. Notice how this dovetails with critical liberative pedagogy, propounded by scholars such as bell hooks, who lament the “assembly-line approach to learning” in schools that function like factories, producing workers.

Paulo Freire denounces the dominant banking model of education as “either misguided or

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4 Joseph M. Piro, “Foucault and the Architecture of Surveillance: Creating Regimes of Power in Schools, Shrines and Society,” Educational Studies, 44 (2008), 32. “For Foucault, school may be a space deliberately designed for supervising, hierarchizing, and rewarding…schools are, by design, spaces where conformity is demanded, locations where hierarchical boundaries are agreed upon” (42). Piro, suggests, however, that this built-in surveillance might serve a pragmatic purpose, especially in a post-Columbine or post-Newtown era. He argues, “it would be simplistic, and probably unfair, to criticize schools because of their focus on control, discipline, and regulation. These features can contribute to the creation of a solid social fabric” (44). One wonders what the weft and weave of such a fabric would be. See also, Michel Foucault, “Space, Knowledge, and Power” Interview with Paul Rabinow, Skyline, March 1982, trans. Christian Hubert, in Architecture Theory since 1968. Ed. K. Michael Hays (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998), 437.


mistrusting of people,” and he counters it with “democratic proposals of problem-posing education.” What might educational spaces that honor bodies, minds, and souls look like? And how might those buildings change the dynamics of learning within them? For the construction of such buildings, we need architects who are aware of the formative power of spaces.

In delineating the three curricula that all schools teach, Elliot Eisner describes the explicit curriculum, which includes items and goals that are publicly stated. The null curriculum includes those things which are not taught or books which are not read. Eisner notes that what is absent may be as important as what is present, because “ignorance is not simply a neutral void; it has important effects on the kinds of options one is available to consider, the alternatives one can examine, and the perspectives from which one can view a situation or problems.” The implicit curriculum includes those goals which are valued, but are often only subtly noticed. Eisner suggests that the implicit curriculum can be seen in school architecture, because buildings “express the values we cherish, and, once built, they reinforce those values. Schools are educational churches, and our gods, judging from the altars we build, are economy and efficiency.” He laments that

Most school buildings, particularly those in cities, are characterized by long vacant halls with nests of well-insulated rooms opening onto them. The rooms are usually identical: strong, rectangular boxes, drab in color and not given to amenities. The rooms speak of functionality but do not address themselves to the aesthetic needs of either students or teachers. They are not places in which one would choose to spend a lot of time. What do such places say to students? What values do they convey? How do they affect the student’s image of the school itself and the experience of schooling? These questions, too, are appropriate ones for educational criticism.9

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If Eisner is correct that “buildings represent our ideals about the ways we want to live,” then they could convey values other than economy or efficiency. They could tell a different story.

James K.A. Smith agrees that “[spaces] have their own cultivating effect on the imagination,” but he goes on to suggest that “environments that are intentionally well adorned are veritable schools for the soul—they create in us both a mood and a temperament. They are part of an embodied paideia, a kinaesthetic education.”  

10 We must “shift our attention and perspective in order to recognize the charged, religious nature of cultural institutions that we all tend to inhabit as if they were neutral sites.” Social places like shopping malls and universities operate with “holistic, affective, embodied anthropology,” and they form us through cultural liturgies which shape “our most basic attunement to the world.”  

11 What we build and how we are moved in those buildings both displays and shapes who we are. As such, a school that is shaped by the imagination of success (academic and financial) will form students who view themselves as creators of destiny and dominion, while a school infused with Gospel imagination will form students who believe they are creatures living in service of a loving Creator who sustains all creation.

Grand Rapids Christian Schools (GRCS) is a learning community literally and figuratively under construction, from curriculum to classroom, and from administrative shifts to structural renovations. Associated in 1920, the school system now educates over

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10 Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 180-181.
11 James K.A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation*. (Grand Rapids; Baker Academic, 2009), 24-25. Italics in the original
2100 students from preK-12 on multiple campuses. All of their buildings are relatively new, are currently being (re)constructed, or are on track for renovations in the immediate future. First, I’ll introduce you to Peter Baldwin, President of AMDG Architects and the principal architect of almost every school in the district, and then give you a brief tour of the schools, as they display GRCS’ desire to balance architectural and academic innovation with Reformed traditions of faith. Since my ethnographic research focused on Grand Rapids Christian High School, we’ll spend most of our time exploring GRCHS and the Richard and Helen DeVos Center for Arts and Worship, located on the same campus, through hallways and into rooms and in conversations with students, teachers, and administrators.

**Interview with Peter Baldwin (AMDG Architects)**

I interviewed Peter Baldwin late on a Friday afternoon at the start of Memorial Day Weekend, but there was no sense that he wanted a vacation. Instead, it is clear that he is energized by the work he does with the team at AMDG and enjoys talking about it. In fact, we lost track of time, and our meeting, which was initially scheduled for 30 minutes, stretched to 2 hours. During this conversation, he explained the four stages of the architectural process:

1. Programming: needs and space are assessed
2. Design: space and organization are conceptualized

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12 Enrollment for 2012-2013 in grades K-12 was 2,085 (per Superintendent’s Report of October 15, 2012)

13 For administrator and faculty interviews, I used their actual names. For student interviews, I went into every Bible class (some more than once) to invite students to have a conversation with me about GRCHS. 28 responded with their availability and signed permission forms. I was able to interview 17 of them; meeting with the others was stymied by snow days, exams, and difficulties with communication follow-up. I realize that this is not a statistically significant sample [with a student body of nearly 900], but it does offer depth and texture to my understanding of the school, and it has given me salient quotations to illuminate some of the other points about which I’ve been speculating. Students selected their own pseudonyms, but I retained their grade level. For the list of questions used in student interviews, see Appendix I.
3. Documentation: design ideas are technically executed
4. Construction: architectural team supports the owner and the builder as plans are implemented

Baldwin understands that architectural spaces both shape and speak to our values. His vocational task is to help institutions match their mission with the space in which that vision is cultivated. His passion “stems from the belief that architecture is for people and has the power to build community through the transformation of space.”

I learned that AMDG is an acronym for *Ad Majorem Dei Glorium* (Latin for “To the Greater Glory of God”), and the firm’s “core calling is to merge religious faith with a successful architectural practice.” In describing how they approach the process, Baldwin explains: “We’ve always seen buildings as a way to serve people. And, ultimately, buildings aren’t just bricks and mortar . . . [they] are ultimately about how people use them.” Done well, built environments can be “powerful tools to strengthen and promote the mission and purpose” of clients.

When focused on schools, AMDG Architects aspire “to understand clients, their educational delivery methods, and their vision and goals” in order to “help them create educational spaces that offer each student a deeper, more engaged learning experience.” Baldwin values education, saying “it’s one of the greatest gifts you can give a person . . . [It] empowers people to live their lives differently. I’ve seen my whole life that education can really open doors and unlock things.”

Peter Baldwin is a product of West Michigan Christian education, having attended Oakdale Christian School, Grand Rapids Christian High School, and Calvin College.

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14 http://www.amdgarchitects.com/about-us/our-team/baldwin/peter
16 http://www.amdgarchitects.com/
before heading to Ann Arbor to study architecture at University of Michigan. He also understands that what makes West Michigan distinctive is the entrepreneurial spirit and “the strong Midwestern work ethic, really wanting to build great stuff, and doing it in an efficient way that is profitable and benefits people.” It is this spirit that started Steelcase, Herman Miller, and Amway. Baldwin’s lived history has positioned him well in helping Grand Rapids Christian Schools implement its educational vision for schools. GRCS has had the intent, from the beginning, of fashioning space for “reflecting our faith” and for spiritual formation, and Baldwin believes they are putting their money where their mission is. Let’s take a tour of their schools.

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20 Steelcase is “the global leader in the office furniture industry” (http://www.steelcase.com/en/Pages/Homepage.aspx); Herman Miller is a century-old furniture company that offers “Inventive designs, technologies and related services that improve the human experience wherever people work, heal, learn and live.” (http://www.hermanmiller.com/about-us/who-is-herman-miller/our-story.html); Amway is “a global leader in health, beauty and outstanding business opportunity for Independent Business Owners.” (http://www.amway.com/about-amway/our-company)
21 Peter Baldwin thinks “reflecting our faith” is a bit static. He prefers “nurturing our faith” – I appreciate his sense that such language also has formative power.
Tour of Grand Rapids Christian Schools

Rockford Christian School (RCS; grades PreK-8) is located a few miles north-east of Grand Rapids. There are approximately 225 students who learn in this $7.4 million building which was completed in 2002. It is the only school in the GRCS system which was not designed by AMDG Architects, but by Visbeen Architects. Wayne Visbeen told me about the live-design charrette, a process meant to gather all of the stakeholders into a room and to build consensus. He recalls about thirty people including board members, faculty and staff, but no students in attendance. This one took place over two days in May of 2000. Visbeen did the design work for free, and then Visser Brothers implemented the plans. Distinctive features of the school include timber-framing to match the rural setting, an indoor octagonal amphitheatre for worship, and a raised elevation for the building so that it might serve as “a beacon on the hill.”23

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22 Colored sketch from the charrette held May 2000; drawn by Wayne Visbeen of Visbeen Architects.
23 Details from phone interview with Wayne Visbeen on March 12, 2015. Visbeen’s children attended GRCS. He also helped design Brookside CRC, where he is a congregant.
At a GRCS board meeting held at RCS, we learned about the 6th grade Grand Rapids Christian School Environmental program, which is eleven years old and has educated 350-400 students, at least 10% of whom were new to Christian education, having transferred from public schools. The program has similarities to the Blandford Nature Center School and to the John Ball Park Zoo School (both public programs), but RCS has a Christ-centered worldview and uses verses such as “The Earth is the Lord's and all that is in it” (Ps 24:1) to guide curriculum and instruction.24

Grand Rapids Christian Middle School (GRCMS; grades 5-8), located at 2036 Chesaning, educates nearly 420 students in southeast Grand Rapids.26 At a Grand Rapids Planning Commission meeting on November 8, 2012, GRCS sought approval to redevelop the former Sylvan Christian School by removing the east wing and replacing it

25 Image from AMDG of proposed GRCMS with courtyard and gymnasium (as of January 8, 2014).
26 The Evergreen Program (a balanced calendar preK-5th grade alternative) operates at 1812 Sylvan, adjacent to GRCMS. Evergreen has the same principal and the same basic curriculum as Grand Rapids Christian Elementary School, but it uses traditional and differentiated instruction, along with experiential, inquiry and project-based learning in multi-age classrooms. Evergreen adds two weeks to both the beginning and end of the traditional school year with a flex week every eight to nine weeks, during which “families can enroll their children in unique enrichment sessions or just take a break.” The balanced calendar reduces the long summer break and simply apportions those days throughout the school year, producing more frequent breaks and limiting long periods of in-session days. http://www.nayre.org/calendar_comparison.htm http://www.grcs.org/netcommunity/page.aspx?pid=567. http://www.grcs.org/netcommunity/page.aspx?pid=1788 and http://www.grcs.org/NetCommunity/Page.aspx?pid=1255, Accessed February 22, 2015.
with a new two-story educational wing and by expanding the gym for a total floor space of approximately 109,000 sq. ft. GRCS held a neighborhood meeting on September 26, 2012, and they brought letters of support from the community to the planning commission session. Site plans prepared by AMDG Architects were approved as of November 12, 2012. The $12 million project will be handled in three phases and should be completed by fall 2015. It is “a learning environment that nurtures students’ faith in an environment designed around the needs and interests of middle school students.”

Tom DeJonge, GRCS Superintendent, explained that this renovation indicates “our reinvestment in Grand Rapids Christian Schools' facilities, education programs, and opportunities about our commitment to a strong system that’s sustainable for future generations.” The (re)building project is connected to the $45.9 million Learning without Limits campaign launched publically in October 2012. The campaign is described as being about “faith and learning, campus and community, teaching practices and learning environments, training and technology, access and opportunities, and affordable Christian education.”

After closing Seymour Christian in 2002 and Sylvan Christian in 2005, the GRCS board responded to over a decade of declining enrollment in 2008 by deciding to consolidate three of its elementary schools—Oakdale, Creston, and Millbrook—into one building. The location for this conjoined elementary school is a 9-acre site at the corner of Alexander Road and Iroquois Avenue in southeast Grand Rapids, where in 1925, the

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27 http://grcity.us/design-and-development-services/Planning-Department/PlanningCommission/11-08-12%20pc%20minutes.pdf
original Ottawa Hills High School was built. It was renovated in 1978, becoming Iroquois Middle School, which closed in 2007. In 2008, GRCS purchased the property for $1.95 million. There was debate about whether to renovate the existing school or demolish it and build something new. GRCS Superintendent DeJonge acknowledged the tension: "It's a beautiful old landmark, but it's enormous and far larger than we would ever need . . . A desire to demolish part and remodel part drove the design process, but we found that would be much more costly than building anew . . . Our buildings are paid for by charitable giving. We have to take a cost-effective route." Peter Baldwin, lead architect for the project, further explained that a new building would not only be less expensive at the outset, but it would also be more energy efficient long-term and would allow for more flexibility with space. Rockford Construction committed to salvage or recycle 95% of the current structure, and AMDG Architects were able to incorporate elements from the old school into the new facility, thereby preserving its legacy. The Grand Rapids Planning Commission reviewed GRCS’ site redevelopment plan at a meeting in February 2009. Three historic preservationists spoke against the demolition, but Planning Commission Chairman James Doezema pointed out that the building was not classified as an historic structure, and as such, the owner could tear it down. The commission voted 6-1 in favor of the GRCS plan; the one vote of dissent came from a commissioner who wanted to require that GRCS prove it had the money to build before beginning demolition.31

100 shovel-carrying future students broke ground for their new $12.5 million elementary school on June 4, 2009. At that event, Grand Rapids Christian Schools’ officials announced the public phase of the project’s capital campaign. Superintendent DeJonge reported that the campaign so far had raised $11.5 million, just $1 million short of its goal. The amount raised is in addition to a $10 million donation by Amway co-founder Richard DeVos and his wife, Helen, to cover the majority of the schools’ previous $12.5 million debt incurred over the past 10 years of building costs and operational deficits. In a letter to GRCS families, the DeVoses said it was the most important gift they could make because it is "something to which most people are unable or unwilling to contribute." Tom DeJonge praised the gift as "absolutely astounding" and "incredibly generous." He went on to say: "It's humbling to be the recipient (of such gifts). People believe strongly in the value of Christian education at GRCS.” Furthermore, it meant Grand Rapids Christian Schools could "plan for the future from a position of strength" and look forward to new construction.  

Across the state of Michigan, the number of nonpublic school students decreased by about 17 percent from 2005 to 2009, according to data submitted by schools to the state’s Center for Educational Performance and Information. In 2010, parochial school enrollments were still declining in Kent County, but at a less dramatic rate than the previous year. Grand Rapids Christian Schools (GRCS), dealing with at least a decade of

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decline, lost 63 students, which was 11 fewer than they had projected. GRCS Superintendent Tom DeJonge explained that the primary reason students leave is because families move out of the area, but he was encouraged by enrollment at “two important entry points . . . Our preschool and kindergarten enrollments are the highest they've been in four or five years, and our freshman class is 246, compared to 218 last year [2009].” DeJonge believed that consolidation of three elementary schools had a positive effect on enrollment, and hoped the impact of the economic recession might be subsiding. In 2012, enrollment rose 4% and again DeJonge pointed to the new consolidated elementary school: "We noticed a significant change in momentum and energy. The number of calls increased, inquiries increased . . . admissions tells me those numbers are even higher than they were at this time last year . . . [so] I’m expecting another four percent growth.”

Grand Rapids Christian Elementary School (GRCES; grades preK – 4th) opened its new 80,000 sq. ft. building in August 2010 for about 500 students. The footprint of the new school is considerably smaller than the old building, which spanned more than 200,000 sq. ft. and could accommodate 1,500 students.\(^{37}\) On September 2, 2010, when GRCS dedicated its new elementary school, Tom DeJonge noted that the consolidation had cut operational triplication caused by running multiple schools; those savings “brought tuition down by as much as $200 per student” and allowed GRCS to direct funds to the instructional program in classrooms.\(^{38}\) David Tiesenga, who served on the Operations and Finance committee of GRCS, said that “with this new energy and state-of-the-art building, there is a renewed sense of commitment” to the school, which was demonstrated in part by increased enrollment.\(^{39}\) Superintendent DeJonge went further: “It really is a rebirth (for Grand Rapids Christian). We’ve really reorganized completely from the ground up.”\(^{40}\) Attending to the past, present and future, DeJonge explained that [it] signals a new beginning, maximizes resources to support Christ-centered teaching, strengthens programs, increases access to families from diverse socioeconomic and ethnic backgrounds, and sends a visible message to the community that Grand Rapids Christian Schools is serious about its commitment to the City of Grand Rapids and continuing the legacy that began more than 100 years ago.\(^{41}\)


GRCS Consolidation Reprise

When the consolidation plan was being discussed, a group from Oakdale Christian School organized a group to fight the closure, as folks had done thirty-five years earlier, by describing the school as an integrated “anchor” for the neighborhood.42 Kevin denDulk, an Oakdale parent and Grand Valley State University assistant professor of Political Science did research which noted a decline in enrollment of about 4% in the two years after previous school closings (i.e., Seymour and Sylvan), and he predicted the student numbers would continue to decline with consolidation. He did acknowledge, however, other factors causing decreased enrollment, including “tuition hikes, charter schools and a decrease in Christian Reformed Church membership,” the latter of which has historically been the prime source of students.43 Alumni lamented the rising tuition and the correlated “decline in racial and socio-economic diversity within the school system.”44

I heard echoes of this in my conversations with current students. Some appreciated the sameness. Bella (grade 11) said that she wanted to meet with me: “I really felt called to like show how good of an experience I have had, because it’s an important thing to have students who like high school.” She especially appreciated the affinity regarding faith: “I love that we can like talk about God so openly and it’s just like really amazing to me that I can be with people that believe the same things as me, and I’m not afraid to talk about it.” She noted feeling a sense of hospitality: “I feel like a lot of people

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43 Ibid.
are just so happy and encouraging so much of the time,” but when I asked her what percentage of students are welcoming to prospective students, she realized that her experience might be better than some: “a lot, I’m not sure. Probably like 75-80%.”

Isabella (grade 10) said GRCHS had made “a very good Christian community. Like I think it’s nice just to have a whole bunch of Christians here.” When I asked her what made the community so good for her, she said this is “a community where you can feel open to be a Christian. You don’t have to be looking for Christians.” On the other hand, Sarah (grade 12) noted potential problems with homogeneity of Christians:

But there are some downsides you know, I mean, like you don’t get to go and experience being with people of different religions and like we have some in our school but it’s not really known um and I’m really good friends with them, and it’s one of the great things to be able to have opportunities to learn um with someone of a different faith and a different view that’s been raised differently. I feel like a lot of my fellow classmates don’t get that opportunity to like really meet those people . . . I just feel like some of my friends who like heard that they weren’t Christian kind of backed off more because they didn’t want to offend them um with what they believe or anything and me I’m like totally open with talking about the questions they have or my own faith. I want to learn about what they believe and um how they came about that and what they think about going to a Christian school [and] not being a Christian.

David (grade 11) acknowledged “there’s a lot of people who will talk about feeling alone at the school. I think I kind of got lucky, meeting some really strong Christians and people who are interested in my faith walk, and I think a lot of people aren’t that lucky.”

Many of the students with whom I spoke noted that the size of the school related to it offering particular kinds of diversity, especially compared to other Christian schools in the area (bigger in size than Northpointe Christian or Calvin Christian, more diverse racially and religiously than Unity or South Christian). Bunny (grade 12) who had to convince her family to allow her to attend GRCHS when her older siblings had all gone to South Christian, appreciated the heterogeneity: “There’s something to say about
different people coming from different backgrounds being all in one [school] community. Because at South Christian, everyone is the same . . . My brothers joke that I go to the ‘public Christian school’ because we’re exposed to so much more here.” David (grade 11) said that he “wanted to be able to experience a little bit more diversity” in high school, and he noted improvement from his experience at Ada Christian Middle School: “I mean we certainly don’t get every diversity you know, but you get a lot more than I ever did in middle school . . . you get to know more like different social classes, you know, racial groups even.”

Racial and denominational diversity are both at least nominally important at GRCHS; they publish annual diversity statistics. In 2010-2011, student diversity is listed as 21% (51 Asian students, 96 African American students [10%], 11 Hispanic or Latino students, 41 Multi-racial students, 4 Native American or Native Alaskan, and 752 white students). GRCHS students represented over 200 churches and 33 denominations; 35% non-CRC. In 2012-2013, student diversity is listed as 23% (54 Asian students, 134 African American students [14.5%], 23 Hispanic students, 2 Native American or Native Alaskan, and 711 white students). GRCHS students represent over 220 churches and 33 denominations; 40.2% non-CRC.45 In the previous chapter on racialized geography, we explored some of the tensions between the founding of Christian schools like GRCS as Dutch CRC cultural enclaves and the call of Christians to make disciples of all peoples, even the next door neighbor with darker skin and different denominational ties. Further complicating this issue is the role of socio-economic class in the constitution of GRCS.

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45 This is according to the Grand Rapids Christian Schools 2010-2011 and 2012-2013 Diversity Statistics. The denominational data I received from GRCHS indicates 56% are CRC, which rises to 63% if other Calvinist denominations are included (RCA, PCA, PCUSA, OPC, IRC).
students. The cost of tuition ranges from $6200 (Kindergarten) to $10,600 (grades 9-12).

In 2009, Superintendent DeJonge said

GRCS plans to raise funds for scholarships and an endowment. So far, it has increased funds available for scholarships by $500,000, a 55 percent increase. . . . We needed to raise resources for additional tuition assistance so we could remain relevant and viable to the families that reside in the city. We're committed to remain and invest in the city of Grand Rapids.46

More recently, DeJonge explained that tuition assistance is available for families who can't afford it at GRCS. Charitable donations that help offset the cost of tuition are up to $1.9 million this year [2012] from $1.2 million three years ago [2009].47

**GRCS: Strategic Planning**

Tom DeJonge is a graduate of GRCHS and Calvin College, but he worked in public education prior to becoming Superintendent of Grand Rapids Christian Schools in 2004. He told me that one of the biggest challenges in the transition has been figuring out how to integrate the Christian worldview into all areas so that it has deep and broad impact without losing ground to other schools. In highlighting what is unique about GRCS, DeJonge told me that its roots are Reformed, but this should not be confused with denominationalism. Since 1969 when Christian schools in the area consolidated into Grand Rapids Christian School Association, “they have been distinct from denominational ties.” He pointed to his dad, who served as President of the GRCS Board, and the pride he took in it being an educational institution, rather than a mission of the Christian Reformed Church. This narrative indicates a particular slant on the history of

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these schools, starting a century into the story and extirpating the deep CRC roots, but it serves to expand who is welcome in this educational community. GRCS has “the privilege of partnering with parents and churches in the training and educating of God’s children,” but the denominational limitations have been removed. And yet, when one goes to the GRCS “About Us” page, one learns that the school’s Christian approach is the one written by the Christian Reformed Church: *Our World Belongs to God: A Contemporary Testimony* (see Appendix H). The tension between CRC roots and evangelical branches is one that I noticed throughout my research.

The strategic plans are rooted in Christian faith, but Superintendent DeJonge also wants GRCS held to high academic standards; he worries that sometimes “grace” is used as an excuse to avoid accountability. Tom DeJonge wants “to energize faith, empower teachers, and transform instruction,” and he has sought out knowledgeable people with national and international scope, engaging with consultants such as Frank Locker Educational Planning and ISM – Independent School Management to research

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49 “We are educational planners, guiding schools to improve teaching and learning. We prepare and position schools for the demands and opportunities of 21st Century learning. Our work is transformational. It restructures school operations and improves educational delivery. It redefines the roles and relationships of teachers and students, improves program delivery, and strengthens the place and relationship of schools in their communities . . . We lead an important consensus-building process that builds support and understanding for school transformation and innovation among administrators, teachers, students, parents and the greater community. Our work is research-based and future orientated. We establish Educational Visions for future school and set up strategies to guide school restructuring, program development, and professional staff development as steps toward that future.” http://franklocker.com/about-us/. Accessed February 18, 2015.

50 “ISM is dedicated to the advancement of school management. ISM provides creative strategies by combining extensive research, proven management techniques, and personalized service. . . Starting in 1975 with *Ideas & Perspectives*, an advisory letter for Heads, Trustees, and other key managers, ISM has grown in direct response to the needs of the independent school community. New services have been added over the years to make ISM the only comprehensive management-support firm for private-independent schools in the United States and abroad. Administrators in schools of all types and sizes turn to ISM for advice and assistance on an array of management challenges, including student recruitment and retention, fund raising, strategic and long-range planning, Board/Head relations, personnel, plant expansion, mergers, and leadership training.” http://isminc.com/article/fast-home-about-ism. Accessed February 19, 2015.
premier schools (how they operate and what they have in common). They then spent three days with faculty to hold break-out sessions on characteristics of specific schools and designing spaces to match their educational goals. *Learning without Limits* was birthed in October 2009 to cast a vision for where the school was headed, both in operations and in teaching & learning. In April 2012, the Grand Rapids Christian Schools Board of Trustees authorized the community-wide launch of the campaign to deliver a 21st century education in a dynamic environment of faith for all children. In the print flyer for the campaign, DeJonge explained that they “begin with God’s Word. His word is the lens through which all learning comes into focus.” The priority of GRCS is to “ensure that every program is directed by scriptural truths and supports the growth of each child’s relationship with Christ.” Education at GRCS “must emanate from a Christian perspective; must be relevant, rigorous, and accessible to all students; must be intentional in fostering relationships within and outside the school community; must engage the community and offer real-world experience; and must have the agility not only to accommodate, but to celebrate various instructional methods and learning styles.” The $45.9 million campaign is unprecedented in size and scope, and its funds will be used to:

- Renovate existing and construct new dynamic, open, and integrated learning spaces that incorporate technology and support best teaching practices.
- Empower teachers to inspire deep student learning through professional development and faculty training in engaging teaching practices.
- Provide resources for tuition assistance in order to ensure access to families who desire a Christian education for their child but who are not able to afford the full cost.
- Increase endowment to strengthen and sustain long-term funding for program support and tuition assistance resources.
On October 2, 2012 nearly 1,600 parents, teachers, students, and friends of Grand Rapids Christian Schools gathered to reflect on where GRCS has been and where it is going, with the public launch of *Learning without Limits.*

### GRCHS: Under Construction

The 14 acre campus of Grand Rapids Christian High School (GRCHS) was under construction during the time of my research (2012-2013). The high school has been at its 2300 Plymouth Avenue SE location since 1966. Over the years, various additions occurred. Part of the goal of this renovation is to unify the facility and “to align instructional spaces with educational program goals.” In August 2012, Rockford Construction went to work on renovations and an expansion to the 165,000 square foot

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51 Along with the print flyer, a set of videos were posted online: *Developing Dynamic Environments of Faith to Transform Hearts* (Kent Dobson) which highlighted GRCS’ desire to connect learning to “the stories of our tradition”; *Empowering Teachers to Inspire Minds* (Jim Primus and Ashanti Bryant) which asserted that the greatest assets of GRCS are the teachers, who play a critical role in inspiring students’ intellectual curiosity and their desire to discover how God makes Himself known through creation; *Transforming Instruction to Deepen Learning* (Holly Windram) which argued that it is vital that we encourage and empower students to be critical thinkers and problem solvers, but we need myriad educational practices; *Removing Barriers to Faith, Learning, Community, and Service* (Nancy Stob, Brad Mockabee, Gord Dekoekkoek); and *Creating Partnerships to Maximize Funding* (Tom DeJonge)

building, guided by AMDG Architects, as part of the five-year strategic plan approved by the GRCS board in 2007. The $22 million project is meant “to deliver a 21st century education in a dynamic environment of faith,” according to Superintendent DeJonge, who suggests that “what truly makes us distinctive is that all our exemplary education programs are integrated with Christian faith and biblical principles.” Nearly 90 percent of the funding has been raised “through the generosity of this charitable community” and the rest will be raised through Learning without Limits, its public capital campaign.\(^{53}\) For the entire 2012-2013 school year, the 925 students in grades 9-12 and their parents, along with the faculty and the staff, had to navigate around construction equipment in the parking lot, portable classrooms, shared lockers, and cramped hallways. The school year was even shortened by a week so that construction could occur unfettered by people in the building throughout the summer. The school is also under construction administratively. In May 2012, Jim Primus transitioned from eight years of being Principal at Grand Rapids Christian High School to the role of Chief Financial Officer for Grand Rapids Christian Schools. Although he was still a figure head for the 2012-13 school year (appearing at major events, like graduation), Assistant Principal Joanne VanderWilp was responsible for the day-to-day details, serving as interim principal until Jim’s replacement was secured.\(^{54}\)

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\(^{54}\) After a lengthy search and extensive interviewing, it was announced that Dr. Randall Morris would become the new principal, starting July 1, 2013. He previously served as principal of Grandville High School (since 1996), located across town from GRCHS, and he is looking forward to the opportunity to “integrate faith and learning” and “to leading one of our area’s most outstanding schools.” As a Lutheran with degrees from state universities, there is some concern about his ability to fit immediately into the predominantly Calvinist school culture at GRCHS, but most are confident that he will immerse himself fully and acclimate quickly. http://www.grcs.org/NetCommunity/grchs-new-principal
I was not able to attend the events surrounding the start of the school year, as car trouble left me stranded in West Virginia for almost a week, but Joanne VanderWilp told me how smoothly it went. Everyone “got on board” with the accommodations that needed to be made due to the construction. Opening with worship (with faculty at In-Service and then with students) was crucial, she explained, because it set the tone of Praise and Thanksgiving, and it gave her the opportunity to articulate the plan for the school year. This combination of worship and information “put people at ease.” She hopes it will become a traditional practice for each new school year. VanderWilp noted that the Senior class was particularly “mellow,” and they managed to “find a steady platform, even in the midst of numerous changes.” Soon, “it’s the new normal.” In fact, the tenor of the place was set by the seniors and then trickled down to other grades. Rather than hazing the new 9th graders, they greeted them with welcome signs and candy.55

In describing what is unique about GRCHS’ building projects, Peter Baldwin noted the high level of intentionality and their desire to integrate faith and learning. As an example, Baldwin said he saw it in the visioning for the renovated high school, in that the process was lengthy, careful, and engaged with various people in the community at all levels. When the GRCS board decided to renovate the high school, Jim Primus (GRCHS Principal at the time) wanted everyone in the learning community included in the visioning process. In 2009, the school held a two day faculty in-service event and then called another meeting six weeks later. People were divided into groups to do research on best practices and to visit various schools. The hope was to expand the imaginative vision

before moving to programming and design. Although involving such a large group was more time-consuming, Baldwin said it helped to develop a sense of active inclusion in the process. He notes, however, that in the past year with its administrative shifts, there has been less communicated to GRCHS faculty about what is happening with the construction, which is especially problematic since those teachers are working around/in the space while it is being (re)built. When it comes to using the completed space, Baldwin notes that people will have to be able to envision multiple uses for the “platforms” that have been built in to the school. There will have to be student and faculty “drivers” to take ownership of the space and to help imagine and implement full and creative use of the space.

Having students invested means having students involved, and Peter Baldwin sat down with Tom DeJonge a year ago to suggest that. Since DeJonge had already been talking to Larry Borst and Mark Kuiper about their newly-formed elective course for fall 2012 called "Chapel and Worship," it was decided that class might be an ideal setting. Along with helping to shape chapel each week and writing devotions for faculty to use in their classrooms, these students were divided into four groups (Intimate, Community, Public, and Legacy). Students took the tasks of programming and design very seriously, and they infused it with their own theological imagination in striking ways. The final result of their work was a presentation to Tom DeJonge and the AMDG team in October.

I attended this meeting, and I was impressed with how careful and insightful many of their suggestions were.56

The Intimate group was focused on the personal, individualized spaces within the

56 They gave a similar presentation to the GRCS Board of Trustees on January 21, 2013.
school. They wanted these areas to allow for quiet reflection, as places where students could “take a deep breath,” and they suggested turning the Quest Courtyard (currently rarely used) into a prayer garden. They also recommended that worship music be played in certain areas (e.g., a section of the library) and in the hallways after school. They noted that “while other areas of the school are more geared towards pushing and challenging students, we thought that the intimate commons areas should give students the sense that they are home and that they belong. It should remind students that this school is the body of Christ and we are a Christian community.” This group understood the value of time alone, buoyed by the awareness of a supportive community. Tangible suggestions for community-building included a telephone pole with student announcements, a community bulletin board, and a posted calendar of school events and ways students could get involved. They also suggested a prayer wall, with prayers on paper rolled up between pieces of wood, similar to the prayers stuck into stone crevices at the Wailing Wall in Israel.

57 PHOTO CREDIT: Larry Borst
The Community group was focused on big spaces and the kinds of daily reminders that could be imbedded to remind people of their place in the community. Because they value teachers, they suggested posting affirming notes from students to teachers on a wall in the teachers’ lounge. These notes would be a frequently changing source of encouragement. They understood that someone would have to be in charge of screening them, though they were not sure who that could/should be. For fixed reminders, the group suggested verses painted on staircase risers or within a glass floor, as “simple reminders of God’s faithfulness” that could be seen over and over.

The Legacy group had the challenging task of tying past, present, and future together. They wanted to honor those who have had an impact on the school, but noted that this will be an ongoing project, as students add their own legacies. A timeline around the top of the doorway, extending down one of the long hallways with space to add future events, would be a visual reminder of the school’s ever-developing history. This group also wanted to bring back the class Bible verse (They were not sure when this fell out of school practices). Each class of students would choose a verse, perhaps in the 9th grade year, that could follow them for the four years of high school, and the senior verse would be painted in a space designated for them.

Their most striking idea was the desire to have elements in the school of “whispershout” – making people think about something without directly telling them. This approach seemed to be a response (at least partly) to overt indoctrination without subtlety. In an email from teacher Larry Borst, he explained the genesis of the term “whispershout.” Peter Baldwin and Amanda Winn from AMDG had given students sheets of paper with lots of words on them. The assignment was to cut out words that
seemed to fit the message for each of the four groups. One of the students, Hannah Burrow, noticed that "whisper" and "shout" were right next to each other. “She liked both words for what she wanted to say . . . [but] she could not explain why until someone suggested that we want a strong message, but we do not want to beat people up with the message.” The group noted that “people do not like being told what to think, but they do not mind being encouraged to think through certain questions,” and this is especially true of high school students. Larry explained that he had been repeatedly reminded of a quotation from T.S. Eliot related to this - - “Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge?/ Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?” - - and the students latched on to these lines of poetry. One of their visual ideas for “whispershout” is a globe fountain made out of metal: “The water would flow into the globe like we are supposed to flow into the world and purify it.” They asserted, however, that there should not be an explanatory plaque, just the evocative art.

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58 “In the year 2008 this globe-fountain was realised by the Austrian metal artist - Herbert Gahr”
http://www.gahr-metalart.com/
It appears that their idea came to fruition, as plans to commission an artist to work with students during Winterim 2013 led to this two-story art installment.

The Public group focused on the messages (implicit and explicit) that visitors would see at the school. With the recent influx of international students, a flag or national token from each country represented in the student body, along with a picture of each international student would be a viable way to develop awareness and help them to feel honored within the GRCHS community. They recommended an International Showcase, in order to “tell people more about other nations and remind people that we are not only studying for ourselves or our own country, we are studying for being used by God on His plan of saving the whole humanity, all the countries in the world.” When I met with

59 Photo Credit: Larry Borst. Some have suggested that this art has more shout than whisper.
Rachel Mulder, Director of International Student Programs, she told me that there are 30-40 international students at the school from China, Korea, Japan, and Hungary. One of the primary challenges she faces is trying to integrate international students fully into the life of the school. They often keep to themselves and focus primarily on academics, rather than relationships or religion. Rachel explained that they enroll in American private schools so that they can attend for more than one year; she’s willing to accept students who are not Christian, but not those who are hostile to religion. While at GRCHS, she hopes international students will be offered opportunities for faith and learning, and that they will broaden the worldview of American students.

For a turn from global to local, the Public group suggested that the Mission Statement be painted at the entrance of the school (which would be useful for those inside and outside of the community to be reminded of the school’s purpose). Many of the people I interviewed did not know the school’s mission statement, so this seems like a particularly apt suggestion.

GRCHS: Mission statement and central foci

At Grand Rapids Christian Schools our mission is to prepare students to be effective servants of Christ in contemporary society. We work to instill a love for learning and a love for Christ in each child. We give our students opportunities to explore, understand, and delight in God’s universe. Our students explore old and new questions through a Biblical perspective. Our school’s teachers and staff convey God’s love and are committed to excellence in His name. We expect our students to be reflective, to ask questions, to discern what is true, and to seek wisdom. Our desire is to join the Holy Spirit in the work of redeeming God’s world through work and service.  

“I think that they try to equip students not only with learning but with spiritual growth.” – Hope (grade 11)

In a 2013 entry of “Superintendent’s Corner” Tom DeJonge wrote about the mission statement: “[It] has withstood the test of time. In anticipation of developing its next five-year strategic plan, the Board of Trustees reaffirmed the mission of our schools last fall [2012], noting that it is as relevant today as it was when originally developed. . . . It guides our work and—in simple terms—clearly articulates to the world who we are and what we are called to do.”61 Unfortunately, the message of the mission is not clear to most students. The few students with whom I spoke who knew the actual mission statement had discussed it in the Chapel and Worship class. Ruth (grade 12) liked her proposed revision and went to get her notebook to show me what she had written down: “Preparing our students to be mature Christians inside and outside our community.” Her sense was that mature faith would manifest itself in sharing the love of Christ to everyone. Sarah (grade 12) also proposed a revision: “I think it needs to be rewritten to something not just about preparing students but preparing faculty and staff, the teachers, because we’re all one community. . . . if the teachers don’t know how to be servants of Christ, then how are we supposed to know what to do when we don’t have an example?” She wasn’t surprised that most people didn’t know the mission statement because “[it] is hidden on the website, so that needs to be more upfront.”

In my conversations with students, if they did not know the mission statement, I asked them to describe their sense of the school’s central focus. Here is a sampling of their answers:

“to make as many students as they can Christian. . . . to help students keep Christianity through high school and as long as they can” – Isabella (grade 10)

“to help students grow in their faith” – Ellison (grade 10)

“trying to build our faith” – Anna (grade 11)

“building of the community . . . having God as the number one basis” – Bella (grade 11)

“building up the servants of Christ and getting them ready to go out into the world” – Stephanie (grade 11).

For Joseph (grade 12), the focus was equipping students for growth: “to educate Christians to build the Kingdom in the world.” For others, it meant maintaining faith: “I think a big idea is trying to cement students’ faith, to make it sturdy enough to survive transitions” (David, grade 11). Elle (grade 9) believes the school is “trying to prepare us for the real world . . . teaching Christians how to act/be godly in the real world.” Jill (grade 10) agreed that students were being equipped for life in “the real world,” which included “trying to strengthen people’s ability to connect with other people in faith . . . trying to get people to lead lives of service, I guess.” Hanna (grade 10) echoed this: “like helping others be like Jesus, I guess . . . being kind to people, reaching out.”

Lynn (grade 10) thought the school’s goal was “to try and like give students a look at Christianity and help build it stronger, but I also think it gives you more opportunities.” These opportunities include strong academics, well-funded fine arts programs (especially music and theatre), and travel (e.g., Winterim).62 Bunny (grade 12) described travel with school groups as “getting Christians out and exposed to new things, trying to build our faith” – Anna (grade 11)

“building of the community . . . having God as the number one basis” – Bella (grade 11)

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but still growing in the faith, like letting our light shine in different areas [e.g. Winterim travel locations].” Stephanie (grade 11) said she’d like to see more opportunities for travel and for service, because “it’s a good way to connect with each other, but in a way that’s not not productive . . . it’s kind of different being able to connect with other people your age while doing something that has faith related to it and that makes you stronger friends. It’s just cool, growing with other people.”

Stacy (grade 12) suggested that “they try to prepare us for the world outside of high school, umm to get us ready for college and working in the real world, but also to be like heirs of Christ . . . finding a balance between working in the real world and being heirs of Christ.” When asked how well the school was doing in terms of faith development, she said, “in general, I don’t think the school is bad by any means about faith, but I also don’t think they try super hard to push us in our faith, but they don’t do anything to harm it either.” Stephanie (grade 11) agrees that there is freedom to choose at GRCHS: “I think the school leaves it open for us to have our own opinion and to decide where we are by ourselves, but they do provide us with ways to find out about faith.”

Ruth (grade 12) acknowledged that in high school, “you can really go down different roads, [but] I feel like having the Christian education helps you go down the right road.” Other students were a bit more direct about the practical mission of the school. When asked about the heart of the school, Katia (grade 11) said, “having a good name for itself.” I asked her what having a good name means, and she explained: “good academics, we excel at multiple different things and we uphold the outward Christian look . . . from the outside, we do very well at everything and that we are known for teaching Christianity, Christian beliefs and stuff.”
When I asked students about the tangible/structural evidence of Christianity in the school, Katia (grade 11) said: “It’s on the sign in front of the building . . . [but] there’s no bible verses anywhere, which I find kind of weird . . . I guess it’s in some classrooms.” Sarah (grade 12) also noted: “we don’t have anything on the walls, even like a Bible verse . . . I feel like if you didn’t know the name of the school, I feel like just walking through the building you wouldn’t see it, and that’s something we need to change.” David (grade 11) agreed:

Honestly, I think the only way you could really tell is through chapel and in religion classes, because in the day-to-day interactions, like in the hallways and stuff, if you were to compare that to a non-Christian school, I don’t think there would be much of a difference . . . If you took off the Christian and wrote Public and had someone walk through the hallways I don’t know that they would necessarily know a difference, based on people’s actions, anyway.

Imbedding the mission in the school’s architectural design was meant to address this problem.

In early May, Simon Jeynes, a consultant from Independent Schools Management (ISM) was in town to meet with GRCHS faculty and students in order to assess the school’s schedule. I joined him for part of this work. As he met with people, he explained that schedule = people, place, time and program. He asked about the needs of each department/area, and he inquired about the school’s mission and how it was integrated.

He presented his findings to the faculty, offering a few different schedule options, all of which have a rotation of classes and extended blocks of vertical time (class periods), a 25 minute recess and a 40 minute lunch, and office hours for teachers to meet with students. One of his suggested schedules was implemented at the start of the 2013 school year.63

63 In 2015, along with a renovated building, Grand Rapids Christian Middle School will launch a new daily schedule geared to the unique learning needs of middle school students. The schedule is the result of a two-year study conducted by staff and supports high-level learning in an environment that builds
Jeynes explained that ISM consulting is research-based, student-focused, and mission-centered. Although school mission is supposed to be the lens through which to view things, he saw no clear signs of it in the GRCHS building. He noted that a visitor would not be able to tell the school was Christian via visual clues. A few members of the Bible & Theology Department tried to explain that Calvinism tends toward iconoclasm, which might explain the dearth of religious symbols, but it nevertheless started a conversation that continued throughout the school year.

**GRCHS: Academics and Faith**

Some students recognized a balance issue with faith and academics. Ellison (grade 10), told me: “I feel like they’re kind of separate . . . I have like my academic classes and they don’t always help build the faith, but like you’ve got your religion class and sometimes your History or Science when you study evolution. In Math and English you don’t really [do that].” Because she didn’t grow up in a Christian school, she said that separation “seems normal.” Stephanie (grade 11) was afraid the balance had tipped too far toward academics:

> It’s a school, so obviously academia is gonna be important, but it almost trumps faith here . . . because there is chapel just once a week which I know it’s hard to schedule that in, but I feel like we should make more time for it and devotions a couple minutes in the beginning of the day, like that’s making a few minutes of time, but if we’re a Christian school, I feel like we should do more . . . There’s more college workshops and focus on the ACT and talk about that sometimes than there is about religion.

What Stephanie noticed is that scheduling and the amount of time given to various activities is an indicator of priorities, even if such is never made explicit.

> “Honestly, teachers are huge.” – Ruth (grade 12)

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Students were unanimous in naming the importance of teachers, both for their academic learning and for their lived formation in faith. Stephanie (grade 11) commended GRCHS for “doing a really good job of carefully picking Religion teachers” who create spaces “where you can bring up issues that are going on in the world and kind of get a biblical opinion on that.” Because students know that teachers have faith, they feel more comfortable with them. Almost every student I interviewed named a teacher who had influenced his/her faith in a positive way, by modelling open-ness and flexibility: “the teachers do a really good job of portraying what a relationship with God should look like” (Hope, grade 11), and “they are open to discussing anything about faith . . . even if it’s not like the curriculum, they’re open to talking about different topics.” (Sarah, grade 12).

Many named a teacher who had come alongside them during a time of struggle: “here I feel like the teachers really strive to have a personal relationship with the students . . . I love to know that my teachers like to talk to me.” (Bunny, grade 12) Some noted, however, that the size of the school prohibited developing meaningful relationships with teachers. Hope (grade 11) expressed concern that some students, like her, might fall through the cracks:

I mean I’m not really close to any of the teachers really I mean they have so many students. It’s not like middle and elementary school where you develop a bond . . . I mean teachers I’ve had probably can’t even remember my name, and it’s not like I sit in the back of class and don’t say anything, I mean I participate. It’s just kinda frustrating. Can you remember me a little bit?

This highlights another tension private schools face: student numbers need to be sufficiently high to pay for operations (and new facilities), but the number of students in each classroom needs to be sufficiently low to distinguish them from giant public schools.
where students get lost in the shuffle. Having a low ratio of students per teacher is part of the marketing package.

For my classroom observations, I spent most of my time with folks from the Bible and Theology Department. I introduced myself to all of the faculty and visited a few other classrooms (International, English, Choir), but teachers were either wary of having another person in their class or too focused on their own work to offer hospitality. I offer the details of two different classrooms as exemplars of general trends: subject knowledge, instructional skill, concern for curriculum and students, and engagement with ideas, questions, and people.

I experienced déjà-vu as I joined the 5th hour Chamber Chorale led by Randy VanWingerden, my choir director at Calvin Christian High School, who remembered me (name and biographical details) decades later when I arrived at GRCHS to do research. There was stretching, bending, and twisting—welcome movement during a mostly sedentary day. As students began humming through patterns, he gave them a number of physical directions for body position and mouth shape to help improve tone. Randy explained that you have to use breath underneath a note to keep it from going flat, and he helped them make vowels taller to shift where sound emanates from their mouths. Before they began to sing an adaptation of Psalm 23, he exhorted them to pay attention to their bodies, to the notes, and to the words, so that they might sing from both head and heart. Though the bell rang, they kept singing to the end of the piece. Beautiful.

After class, we had a lengthy conversation about the shift from one school to another. VanWingerden was at Calvin Christian for over 25 years and has now been at GRCHS for seven years. He described the transition as “not just a new chapter, but a new
book.” The draw of GRCHS included a bigger program, better facilities, and more support for Fine Arts in the community. Former GRCHS Principal Jim Stapert believed Arts were the heart of the school, and there is a tradition of excellence which allows Randy to expect college-level singing from students. They are motivated to improve and to perform well. Not only does the school invest a great deal of money in the program (e.g., staging musicals at the Center for Arts and Worship that reap accolades and profits), but they are receptive to high-brow music. VanWingerden told me that no one balked at twenty minutes of Latin when they sang Vivaldi’s “Gloria” at a concert a few years ago.

On the downside, Calvin Christian had a “tighter knit,” and the community was personally supportive during his first wife’s illness and death. Faculty at GRCHS are friendly, but they don’t meet together as often, there is more turn-over, and the geography of the building doesn’t encourage mixing like “the small square at CCHS” did. In fact, his classroom is located in the Center for Arts and Worship, while other teachers are in the actual school building, so he must make an intentional effort to engage with his colleagues. Although Randy has no regrets about changing schools, he’s still hoping to find more people with whom he can go out for coffee.

**GRCHS: DeVos Center for Arts and Worship**

While we are in this building, let’s take a tour of the $20 million DeVos Center for Arts and Worship (CAW). Richard and Helen DeVos were lead donors in 1999 for the building campaign. The CAW was built in 2002 to be “a state-of-the-art facility

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where students can develop and express their artistic talents and gather in collective worship.”65 It has a 1200 seat auditorium that features a double balcony and a 5000 square foot stage with a hydraulic orchestra pit lift and a fully rigged fly loft. It also has band, orchestra, and choir facilities.

Frederick Gore, the Theater Designer for URS (the architecture firm that designed the DeVos Center for Arts and Worship), explained that his team “worked with administration and faculty . . . but unfortunately there were no students or community members [involved].” He went on to say that he did not personally interact with the DeVos family, but he clearly remembers the request to “find a place to display Mr. DeVos’ car”67 In fact, immediately upon walking through the doors of the CAW, you see the Model A Ford that DeVos and VanAndel used to start Amway.

65 DeVos Center for Arts and Worship, http://dcaw.org/about.php?p=26
66 http://ascribehq.com/dan-vos/portfolio/7164
67 Email correspondence between author and Fred Gore on October 2, 2013.
The plaque posted next to it explains:

*This 1931 Model A Ford is very much like the one Jay Van Andel owned in the 1940s. I paid him 25 cents a week to ride in it with him to Christian High. These rides were the beginning of a lifelong friendship and business partnership, both of which God has blessed. When I graduated from Christian High, my Bible teacher, Dr. Leonard Greenway, wrote in my yearbook, “To a clean-cut young man with talents for leadership in God’s kingdom.” His words about leadership have been an encouragement to me all my life. They have shown me that the lessons we learn can come from both inside and outside the classroom, and the relationships we form at school can have a lasting impact on our lives. Our attitudes and lives are shaped by the atmosphere in which we live. My wife, Helen, and I salute all the staff at Christian High for their commitment to create an encouraging and positive atmosphere for their students.”*

-Rich DeVos Class of 1944 Co-founder, Alticor Corporation (formerly Amway); Owner, NBA Orlando Magic

Notice how “leadership in God’s kingdom” is subtly equated to entrepreneurial striving and success. Those two boys were students at Grand Rapids Christian High, and they propelled themselves forward with an automotive innovation from Detroit and their own ingenuity. One GRCS parent (Patty Liverance) compared the DeVoses to the organic

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68 Picture taken by Elizabeth DeGaynor, May 28, 2013.
liquid cleaner created by Amway that her mother used in the 1970s: "Everything is more beautiful after being touched by them," she wrote in a letter of appreciation.69

Up the stairs in the lobby, you see “Digital Jesus” – a pastiche of 3.5 floppy disks, painted over with an image of Jesus, reminiscent of Warner Sallman’s 1941 painting “The Head of Christ.” 70

What lesson might the juxtaposition of the artwork and the automobile teach? Insofar as art evokes an imaginative response, what kind of vision is invited by this particular piece of art? Are we meant to infer that Jesus is looking down with benign,


70 By far the most popular of Sallman’s pictures, the Head of Christ has been reproduced more than 500 million times according to its publishers (Kriebel & Bates). http://www.warnersallman.com/collection/images/head-of-christ/
technological approval on the car that started a company which reported global sales of 11 billion US dollars in 2012?71

From the lobby, let’s head into the auditorium, where Christian High students gather weekly for Chapel.

On this particular day in late November, the gathering included: lighting an Advent candle; singing “Be thou my vision” and “Come thou fount”; and hearing stories from teachers and students on the theme of “Who is my Neighbor?” Normally, chapel ends with the collective singing of a doxology, the lyrics of which are: “My friends may you grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour . . . and in the knowledge of Jesus Christ; To God be the glory, now and forever. Amen.” All who are present hold hands and raise them above their heads at the chorus of “To God be the Glory.” Rather than being dismissed afterward as usual, however, students sat back down so that athletes

71 http://investing.businessweek.com/research/stocks/private/snapshot.asp?privcapId=1983255
from fall sports could be honored. The centerpiece of this celebration was a fourteen minute highlight video of the 2012 Michigan State Championship (Class A, Division 3) football team.\footnote{Class A represents schools with student enrollment of 882 and above, and the 8 divisions are based on state geography, according to the Michigan High School Athletic Association.}

It opens with Head Coach Don Fellows speaking to his team in the locker room:

“We’ve spent three years getting ready for this . . . Be the team that says ‘We will get this done’ . . . Let’s do this together.” After a few minutes of play footage, we are brought back into the locker room where Rev. Joe Jones, an African American pastor and President/CEO of Grand Rapids Urban League (GRUL), is speaking to the team.\footnote{It is worth noting that Rev. Jones was active in The “Yes for Kids” campaign launched September 2011 with the mission of convincing voters to support Grand Rapids schools 1-mill, 5-year sinking fund tax to pay for improvements at more than 30 school buildings: “The passage of this millage is about more than just improving buildings, it’s about children,” said the Rev. Joe Jones, interim president and CEO of the Grand Rapids Urban League and member of the Citizens for Grand Rapids Public Schools committee. “It’s about ensuring our community’s children have access to the best possible environment in which to learn.” The proposed increase would cost an owner of a home worth $100,000, $54.20 a year. http://blog.mlive.com/grpress/news_impact/print.html?entry=/2011/09/citizens_for_grps_prepare_to_1.html In November 2011, Grand Rapids taxpayers passed a 1-mill, five-year sinking fund tax that generates approximately $4 million annually for building repairs and improvements to keep Grand Rapids schools students “warm, safe and dry.” http://www.mlive.com/news/grand-rapids/index.ssf/2013/01/grand_rapids_plans_school_repa.html. Accessed February 23, 2015.}
In the 6th chapter of Joshua, God instructed Joshua, He said “I will give your enemy over into your hands, but I need you to follow some specific directions. I need you to march around the city of Jericho for seven straight days.” They did that for six straight days. On the seventh day, God instructed them, “I want you to march around the city on this day – seven times.” And He promised them, He said, “If you do as I tell you to do, the trumpet will sound, there will be a shout from the people, and the wall will come down.” Jericho was protected by a wall, which means no one could get in, no one could get out. Stevensville Lakeshore – undefeated. No one’s been able to penetrate that wall. I want to challenge you today: If you listen to the instruction of your coaches—they’ve given you the game plan. Now it’s about execution. If you execute, I believe that wall will come down. And the Bible says, the wall came down. It wasn’t because someone took hammers or swords, it was because of a shout and a trumpet . . . Let’s make the noise . . . Gentlemen, I’m beyond impressed because you have moved a mountain, you have taken down a wall, and we’re this close to the Promised Land. All we gotta do is be strong, be courageous, follow directions, and I promise you that by next week, we’ll be positioned to walk into the Promised Land.”

I’m still not sure what to do with the allegorical use of the Bible in this way, but I can say that I was sitting next to two Bible teachers, and we all winced. The students, however, burst into applause.

GRCHS: Sports and Faith

“Sports and academics are important here, but I think the whole idea is to use that as a form of worship” – David (grade 11)

“The focus is so sports-oriented here that it becomes the main message . . . like they had a celebration about the state championship in chapel” – Jill (grade 10)

When asked about the prospects for the 2012 football season, Coach Fellows said:

We’ve got a brand-new football stadium for $6 million, a brand-new basketball stadium . . . Now we’re doing the school. The DeVosses and Amway and the Van Andels and the Meijers -- all their kids go to school here and there’s just a ton of support for Grand Rapids Christian . . . It’s one of those places no matter if it is band, choir, academics, athletics, curricular, they want to be the best.74

That seems to be a different message than the one offered by Jason Heerema, GRCS District Athletic Director, on the school’s website:

Athletics should enhance the overall educational experience of the student-athletes and remain in proper perspective to all of the obligations God calls us to towards Him, family, church and school.\textsuperscript{75} Although high school sports are important, they are “a privilege that depends on Christian responsibility and sportsmanship.”\textsuperscript{76} There is a delicate balance between playing to win and playing as Christian witness. According to Bella (grade 11), her coach definitely displays the importance of Christian faith in the way he coaches: “Before every one of my lacrosse games, my coach is like, ‘What is the name across our jerseys?’ and it’s Christian and he’s like, ‘We need to show that on the field and wherever we are.’” Bella also appreciates that the Athletic Director intervened during football season: “We wanted to do a hick theme when we played against [a school in a nearby farming community], but our Athletic Director didn’t let us do that because it can like be hurtful to some people. . . . our school is always looking out for other people and other schools.”

For Hope (grade 11), there was a shift in faith focus when the coach of her volleyball team changed. Though both coaches took time to pray before games, the former coach “would do devotions with us and go out for coffee with us, really relate to us that way and I think that’s just as important as praying,” whereas the new coach is “just all volleyball.” After noting the new coach’s favoritism and the ways it has pulled the team apart, Hope told me that she might not play for GRCHS anymore, choosing only to play on “external club team” next season. Isabella (grade 10) raised the concern that sports might overshadow faith at GRCHS:

Sometimes I feel like they make it a bit too much about sports, and they try to incorporate God in that, but I feel like sometimes they just have people come for the sports and it ends up being more of a Good Sports School . . . and people just

want to come here for that and then you kind of lose the Christianity.

The rumor that students were brought into the school on athletic scholarship was rampant while I was there, only partially quelled by a letter from the Superintendent and the Athletic Director, which stated categorically that the school did not recruit athletes: “It is against our policy and against Michigan High School Athletic Association (MHSAA) guidelines . . . We adhere to these rules in letter and in spirit.” The letter also clarified that tuition assistance was based solely on financial need, not on athletic or academic prowess. Isabella (grade 10) said that she’d “heard people say how much they’ve spent on sports,” and her parents talked about “how many people are on scholarships here because of that.” She acknowledged the school’s desire “to be the best all the time” and said “it’s alright to maybe try to be the best, but I don’t think you should be being almost like a college and trying to bring people in to your college for the sports and offering scholarships. Then it becomes more of a college, trying to be the best they can, rather than a high school with a good Christian environment.” Stacy (grade 12) told me that she likes to win and doesn’t think that’s necessarily a bad thing, “but sometimes I feel like our teams might put their sport first and maybe say ‘I don’t have time to pray. I have to go to practice.’ I admit to being guilty of that too.” She said this was especially likely for football “because they are so intense about the program. They have practice 6 days a week. They had practice Thanksgiving morning.” She suggested that practice should have been scheduled at a time when players wouldn’t have missed church. As a friend to lots of football players, Elle (grade 9) told me that “they’ll come back after a game and say ‘our coach cussed us out today.’”

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77 November 2012 letter to parents from Tom DeJonge (Superintendent) and Jason Heerema (Athletic Director) on file.
Both Joseph (grade 12) and Jill (grade 10), talked about the celebration of the football team’s state championship that took place during a chapel. Joseph told me that Girls Cross Country had won a state championship a few years earlier “and it wasn’t nearly as big of a deal.” He named “big football culture” as being “connected to American culture,” and understood that it could “easily become an idol, especially for people on the team.” He suggested “it would be useful to the faith lives of a lot of people if we valued all the extracurriculars equally. So the people feel like they’re just as accomplished if they win the Science Olympiad than if they win in football.” Jill, who suffers from a minor physical disability, complicated the picture:

Being somebody that can’t play sports, it makes you feel left out already, but like if you play a sport, I guess it can be a really uplifting thing, but for people who have nothing to do with it, it’s just like you’re left out and nobody tries to include you because you don’t do what they do, you’re not one of them.

She went on to say that the focus by adults on sports “makes me not want to support it . . . It makes me kind of resent it.”

Students who profess to be Christians and who are active in sports or theater or music and who are doing well academically tend not to notice the shadowed corners of the school. Ellison (grade 10) was effusive: “I love it. This is my favorite school that I’ve ever been to. My friends are great. All of the teachers are fantastic. It’s just a great place to be.” For Hanna (grade 10), “Christian schools are just more friendly and open . . . open to who you are. I bet a lot of people say it’s the other way, but it’s my experience.”

For the students who are ostracized by their classmates due to some particular perceived lack (spiritual, physical, mental) and who have experienced bullying because

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they don’t fit in, the picture of school life is none-too-rosy. Elle (grade 9) told me that she has both witnessed bullying and been bullied herself. Lynn (grade 10) described her experience as a mixed bag: “I’ve made a lot of friends here, so that’s a good point, but there are a lot of people here who make fun of me and other people [last year in P.E., they told her “she sucked”].” She clarified that “there’s not much physical fighting, but I think there’s a lot of verbal [abuse].” Jill (grade 10), also described the pros and cons: “I love the academics, and I love the teachers, but getting along with other students is not . . . [voice trails off] I think teachers try to give the message that you need to be inclusive with other people that don’t always fit in, but other students don’t.” She went on to describe the ways students can be cruel to each other, often in ways that go unseen or are downplayed as “jokes.” She said that she “wants to be the person that Christian High is teaching us to be,” but it struck her as incongruous that “we’re supposed to be Christians,” but that did not always translate into kindness toward one’s classmates.

When I asked her what she’d most like to change about the school, she quickly answered, “the aspect of being judgmental toward other people . . . you don’t necessarily jump to conclusions or jump on someone’s back . . . you see other sides of an argument, of the story.” She explained: “if you changed that, it would change a lot of other stuff too . . . like the joking, not taking things too far anymore . . . calling people bad names or making jokes out of their name,” but she was doubtful that a policy could change the reality: “Students can be cruel to each other . . . people aren’t always going to be good . . . there’s nothing you can do about it.”

Bullying and other forms of suffering were addressed carefully by Nancy Knol, who has taught both Bible and English for over a decade. She says she enjoys the
centrality of story in both and the interconnections between them. For two of the days I observed, they were watching “Faith and Doubt at Ground Zero,” a documentary that focuses on what happens to faith in the course of suffering after 9/11. After listening to people who had lost loved ones describe their sense of where God was (or was not), many of the students responded negatively. One was bothered by the security guard who audaciously dissected the Trinity. Another said that blame on God was misplaced. While one student acknowledged that hearing a retired fire-fighter describe fire as the devil with God absent made her think, another student appreciated those who didn’t question God and who remained hopeful that good might come from their tragedy. Nancy moderated the discussion deftly; mostly, she just listened, especially on the first day.

On the second day, however, she engaged more assertively. She paused the video after the person interviewed said “God was supposed to keep America safe,” in order to explain that this was a dangerous and misguided view of God and His relationship to America. Nancy cycled back to the issue of doubt raised the previous day; she asked if it was the opposite of faith, and if not, what was. Answers from students included: hatred, indifference, and anger. Another student suggested that anger might be a stage in the faith journey, and Nancy nodded and then wondered aloud why some continue to have faith, even in the face of suffering. This was a transition into an article from Christianity Today by Philip Yancey, “A Bad Week in Hell,” which students had read. Yancey names our inclination to lash out against God when tragedy exposes our frailty and mortality, but he turns the question of how God could allow bad things to happen on its head, asking instead how Satan could allow the positive legacy that comes from tragedy.
One student admitted that he was frustrated by folks saying "Why did this have to happen to me?" He clarified that it sounds whiny and self-centered, and is often said about minor things. Another student said that sometimes it's a response to one thing after another, or a response to a big thing. A third student said that the tone of the question matters: some may be asking to try to find what good might come of it, or what God might be trying to teach them, with a focus on understanding why rather than a focus on self. Next, Nancy moved them into a discussion on Job and a worksheet they had filled out as they studied the Bible story. There was some sense that Job’s suffering was “unfair,” and students offered other examples, including extreme poverty (seen on a mission trip to the Philippines), and children born into horrible situations of neglect and abuse. Many students gave examples of family and friends who had suffered illness or disability.

And then things got personal. Nancy asked students to raise hands if they had experienced suffering. Most did. Then, she asked if something good came out of it. One student said it did "good" to him and to his family, but it didn't have to happen. Another student said it brought her closer to God, and gave her a different perspective. A third student admitted that at the time, she didn't feel closer to God, instead she felt distance, but she can now understand the ways God delivered her. A fourth student said that in retrospect she doesn't see the events as suffering, though she did at the time. After listening attentively, Nancy shared that her son, Adam, died of cancer at age seven, and this was the main source of suffering in her life. She struggled with his pain and his death, and her inability to fix either. She wished she could take his place. Finally, she offered an exhortation: "If you witness the suffering of someone else, you need to be
careful in what you say. Don't say things easily like ‘good will come of this.’ Suffering is not wasted if it brings you closer to God, but that doesn't make the suffering good.” She confessed that if she could, she would give up all of the good that has come of her loss to have him back. Students nodded silently, including those who had offered platitudes (“all things work together for good”) the day before. Her genuine candor and quiet warmth taught the lesson of empathy toward those who suffer far better than a reprimand, which is what I had wanted her to give as a response to their naïve oversimplifications. I learned about patience and gentleness from Nancy.

**GRCHS: Culture, Structure and Core Values**

Along with in-service days, there were also seven “late start” meetings scheduled throughout the school year to take faculty through changes (facilities, schedule, instructional) and the rationale for them. Gordon DeKoekekoek teaches Applied Technology, and he is serving as one of the “instructional support coaches,” along with Nancy Stob (Math), and Steve Tuit (English). In my conversation with Gord, he explained that there were multiple sources of potential disruption for the faculty: facility changes with the building project, schedule changes suggested by ISM, and new instructional strategies aligned with state standards, directed by Dr. Holly Windram, Chief Educational Officer for GRCS. At their meeting in October, faculty talked about culture (teachers, students, parents, daily activities) and structure (administrators, policies, initiatives, goals), and the dynamics between them. The educational community is trying “professional learning communities” (a group of educators committed to working collaboratively through shared knowledge to achieve better results for the students they serve) to bridge the gap between culture and structure and to foster
collaboration (influenced by Solution Tree). The goal is consensus-building, where everyone has been heard, the will of the group is evident, even to those who disagree. Areas of inquiry included clarifying Five Core Values of Christ-centered Instruction (learner-focused; collaborative; data-informed; intervention-supported; and instructionally diverse) and discussion of school Mission (“Preparing students to be effective servants of Christ in contemporary society”). Gord noted that in his study of organizations, strong mission (the purpose of an organization) and vision (a picture of how that might look, the ability to live out that purpose) are at the center, but the school’s mission statement is refracted by each person.

A similar conversation about Core Values and Mission is happening at the administrative level. In October, I attended a Grand Rapids Christian Schools Board Meeting, held at Rockford Christian School in a 6th grade Environmental classroom—complete with indoor pond, turtles, and trophy animals on the walls. The meeting began with devotional rumination on glorifying God in all things (Psalm 86:9-12).

The meeting quickly shifted to a darker and more serious tone, with a report from Superintendent DeJonge about circumstances surrounding the alleged sexual misconduct of a former teacher and student years ago. He and Jim Primus met with faculty at all of the schools and gave them a heads-up. GRCHS students had a discussion opportunity during one class period (Teachers were given some talking points: transparency about the

79 Ultimately, what we all want is success for all learners . . . [which] is only possible when educators have developed deep expertise in content: by mastering best practices in curriculum, instruction, and assessment . . . Core content work succeeds best in environments that intentionally nurture learning: safe, culturally aware, well-ordered classrooms where students take ownership of learning . . . The foundation for success in all these efforts is a context that drives continuous improvement: strong leadership, shared vision for school improvement, a system for assessing learning needs, intervening when students struggle, monitoring results, technology to support 21st century learners, a data-driven culture, a professional learning community.” http://www.solution-tree.com/ Accessed February 26, 2015.
topic, appropriate channels for reporting issues, and being respectful of privacy in this case, rather than speculating about details). A letter was sent home to parents notifying them of the credible report they had received “of an improper sexual relationship that occurred a number of years ago between a former teacher and a former student at Grand Rapids Christian High School. School officials did not know of the relationship at the time it occurred, and the teacher who was involved left our employment several years ago.” The school began a “thorough investigation,” and the matter is being handled by law enforcement officials. The letter assured parents that “our primary concern is for the safety of all our students.” Because “silence about sexual misconduct is simply not an option,” they (DeJonge and Primus) would “do our very best to maintain open communication, foster accountability, and ensure a safe and nurturing Christian community.” The letter also told parents that educating faculty and students “about all forms of misconduct/harassment” would continue, along with careful investigation of suspected incidents should they occur. The letter encouraged parents to share any concerns they had with school administrators, but tried to discourage speculation and rumor-spreading. The closing of the letter said, “We are thankful that we are a prayerful community of believers who understand the brokenness of our world and embrace the renewing truth of God’s grace.”

80 Jill Bielema, Chair of the Board, asked how board

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80 Letter dated October 12, 2012, addressed to High School Parents and Students and signed by Tom DeJonge (Superintendent) and Jim Primus (Principal) on file. Although details of the accusation and names of alleged perpetrator and victim were not named in the letter, a few months later, Grand Rapids Press coverage revealed that Mark Vogel (age 33), former GRCHS Science teacher, was facing “two counts of third-degree criminal sexual conduct” with a “17-year-old high school senior.” According to court documents, the alleged relationship was believed to have transpired between December 2006 and March 2007, and none of the criminal sexual activity occurred on school property. “Vogel left full-time employment with Grand Rapids Christian by choice following the 2007-2008 school year, after relocating for his wife’s job.” Vogel pleaded guilty to two counts of fourth-degree criminal sexual conduct, which carries a maximum sentence of two years in prison. “He will have to register as a sex offender and surrender his teaching certificate.” At Vogel’s sentencing in September 2013, Kent County Circuit Court
members should respond if approached. Tom suggested they assure people that the school followed the appropriate guidelines in reporting the issue to the authorities, and direct further questions to him.

The rest of the board meeting focused on strategic planning, led by Jane Eaves, a consultant from Gonser Gerber.\(^1\) The conversation began with a review of terms. Mission Statement describes “what we do; our duty” and Core Values delineate “distinctive characteristics about who GRCS is.” The Strategic Plan offers direction about where GRCS is headed. At the Board Retreat in August, they reviewed core values. They were looking at another draft on this October evening.

- Rooted in Faith
- Educate for Life
- Focus on Learners
- Cultivate Life-long Relationships
- Unite with Home and Church
- In Service to God in Society

Jane explained that it’s crucial for the board to champion them, so she affirmed their ownership of the revision process. Jane divided the group in half and gave them time to discuss what’s good about them and what might be missing. I sat with one of the groups and listened to them discuss the importance of having a Biblical basis for each core value,

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\(^1\) “Gonser Gerber helps your institution reach its full potential by customizing innovative approaches to institutional advancement that take into account your particular opportunities and challenges.” http://www.gonsergerber.com/about/consultants/ Accessed February 19, 2015.
along with a clear definition of terms free of “insider” language, and a clear sense of how each core value will be implemented.

When the entire group came back together, Jane moderated the discussion. Peter Jonker, a local CRC pastor and GRCS board member, reminded the group that words matter as does the theology behind them. For example “rooted in Christ” functions differently than “rooted in God’s Word” or “rooted in faith.” He brought up the fundamental notion that God’s story is ongoing, and we are called to enter into that story. It is not static, and we are not the primary agents in the story. Rather, we are engaging in God’s activity. As such, it’s crucial that the narrative is not just about “being the best they can be, but discovering who God has called them to be,” and what part God has vocationally called them to play. I appreciate that these theological concerns were central to the conversation. By 2013, they had gone through multiple revisions and published them on their website (see Appendix H).

In a subsequent conversation, Peter Jonker and I talked about faith at GRCS and its relationship to church and home. He believe parents send their kids to GRCS to develop “a storied sense of faith” and for excellent academics. Jonker acknowledge the mixed message of being equipped for servanthood and success, but he suspects parents want both. He worries that there may soon be a “critical mass of non-church-goers” in the educational community, in which case the culture could become apathetic or even hostile to faith. Admission policies may run counter to the chief purpose of the school, “which is not missional, but covenantal.” When I asked him to elaborate, Peter described the Kuyperian vision: a transformative version of covenant that points toward new creation in which the elect are called to serve the world. Returning to this may make GRCS “a
sheltered greenhouse,” but with an eye toward growth and preparation for sending students out into the world. He said GRCS is good at fundraising and “delivering and education,” but they have not always thought “intentionally” about faith formation. He wonders who gets up in the morning thinking about it: Teachers do, but on a micro level. Although the school board can “exhort a level of intentionality,” GRCS needs someone to do so on a macro level. Since it’s a top priority in the new strategic plan, he hopes for positive change.82

**GRCHS: Reformed and/or Evangelical?**

The tension between holding the Reformed worldview or moving toward the evangelical position are evident throughout the school. It’s a fault-line that runs from admissions into classrooms and curriculum, and from chapel into administration offices. Lyndi Bell, Director of Admissions, concedes that she is new to GRCHS and could not speak to its history, only the “right now.” In the immediate, the admissions policy is “a lot more open” than other private schools in the area (e.g., Calvin Christian, Holland Christian, South Christian, Unity Christian). When I asked about the religion component of the admissions process, she explained that there are questions on the application about “the family’s faith commitment and church affiliation,” but the latter is primarily important for those who attend CRC churches which offer financial aid to their congregants in Christian schools. The application form includes the following questions for Parents or Guardians:

**How do you see yourself being involved in the education of your child/children?**

**How would you describe the ideal school for your child/children?**

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82 Transcribed interview with Peter Jonker from May 23, 2013.
Why do you want your child/children to be educated in a Christian school?

Do you define yourself as a Christian? If yes, please explain what this means to you.

Are you an active member of a Christian church? If yes, please tell us name of church.

Do you agree to have your child/children educated according to the Statement of Faith of Grand Rapids Christian Schools?83

Bell explained that she makes sure to talk about the religious components of the school so people know that there is a faith formation component (chapel, Bible classes). She also has hard copies of the faith statement and a document about the school’s history and its reformed perspective in her office, but she went on to clarify: “Our student body is so diverse that whatever denomination they are, most likely we have students that are from the same church or denomination. We have Catholic students, students of no-faith, a few Muslim students, and of course a large percent are still coming from some type of reformed background.” In her estimation, the importance of faith will depend largely on the student: “I have heard lots of students who have grown in their faith or come to know Christ through attending here, and others who felt that they could attend here 4 years and manage to kind of skirt the issue or never really dive deep into it outside of class.” She said it was most important that families understand the mission of the school and decide whether or not it is a good fit, though she acknowledges that the motivation for enrolling varies and “better education, safer environment, sports, theater” may trump that it is a Christian school. Bell acknowledged that “as the admissions trend becomes more open, due to the need to fill seats, the strong faith emphasis does get diluted,” but she said she

has yet to run into any families “who didn’t agree with our mission and still decided to
send their kids here.” There is a new 5 year strategic plan being put into place, and
“there is a huge spiritual component that is being emphasized, but there is also a huge
enrollment increase component. I am curious to see if these things will be mutually
beneficial or push against each other.”

Lois Brink has worked in myriad positions during her twenty-five years at GRCS.
She was hired as a librarian “with a mandate to bring technology into the school,” but
that job soon morphed into coordinating curriculum and overseeing the secondary
academic program (e.g., attending to state curriculum integration, determining graduation
requirements, hiring and evaluating staff). For the 2012-13 school year, she’s serving as
Assistant to Interim Principal VanderWilp. She doesn’t mind wearing so many hats
because she has been here for so long and has “insider knowledge,” but she realizes it
would be nearly impossible for someone new to do that. Brink notes that part of the
institutional ethos is that people come into a role with a job description, but that role
often changes given the needs of the school and the unique gifts/skills of the person. New
teachers are assigned a mentor, but Brink believes the best way to get acclimated to
GRCHS is to “listen and learn before you speak,” to discover the currents of the waters
by swimming along with the flow. She believes the process is “real and organic . . . with
less sense of a checklist of things to do,” which occurs in a congenial community. In fact,
that is what she most appreciates about GRCS. She wants to see the “wonderful sense of
community” recognized, valued, and cultivated.

84 Email correspondence, June 2013.
Although the complexion of the school has changed during her time at GRCHS, the mission statement has remained constant, “which is a good thing.” When I asked her to describe the changes, she explained that twenty years ago, the school was “very academic,” and the community was “pretty homogeneous.” The operative ideology seemed to be “the more you know about God, the more you do well, and the more you glorify God,” but that language has been replaced by three Rs: relevance, rigor, and relationships; the most important element is “caring for kids.” When asked about the role of faith, Brink explained:

Faith has always been an essential ingredient . . . your faith and your acceptance of the faith and your knowledge of the faith and your knowledge of the Reformed tradition and your ability to articulate that was all important, but it was important in an academic sense, and now it’s becoming more important in a life – practice, live out your faith, talk about your faith kind of way . . . Just as America has gone, so has the school with that more personalized approach to faith.”

She thinks it is a necessary shift given the times we live in, and it is part of the community they serve, to whom they need to be responsive. Twenty-five years ago, the school was “very Reformed.” Now it is more cautiously Reformed and more ecumenical. She noted that Christian Schools International (CSI) is also dealing with this shift.85

85 Transcribed interview with Lois Brink from January 17, 2013. Christian Schools International (CSI) is headquartered in Grand Rapids. It primarily serves Christian Reformed schools (almost 500 of them), with a combined enrollment of over 100,000 students. “Founded in 1920, we have more than eight decades of experience serving Christian schools throughout North America and the world. Our view of the world is firmly rooted in the Reformed tradition of Christian theology. This world-engaging ethos permeates our philosophy of Christian education and shapes everything we do as Christians and as educators. Christian Schools International is committed to the idea of Christian education. We provide the support, products and expertise that thousands of Christian school teachers and administrators the world over have learned to rely on daily. We get Christian education, and we want to help you and your community get it too.” http://www.csionline.org/home. For a comparison of Grand Rapids Christian High School to Catholic schools, see Mary Reardon, Catholic Schools: Then and Now (Oregon, WI: Badger Books, 2005): 84-93.
GRCHS Bible and Theology Department

GRCHS Bible and Theology Department embodies the tension of this issue. On one hand, you have Larry Borst, a graduate of GRCHS, Calvin College and Calvin Seminary, an active member at Church of the Servant (CRC), and a teacher at the school since 1992. As such, he knows the school’s history – how in the 1970s, influenced by Young Life, GRCHS moved toward “relevance and student centered faith formation.” Now the school is moving toward Christian practices, influenced by nearby Calvin College professors David Smith and Jamie Smith. Borst understands the theology operative in each approach, and he remains committed to confessional Calvinism, even if GRCS is no longer unanimously and wholeheartedly supportive of that position. During the October faculty In-service Day, he offered faculty a review of the Reformed narrative of Creation, Fall, and Redemption (see Appendix J). On the other hand, Frank Padilla grew up in Orange County, California and went to public school and UCSB before getting an MA in Theology from Fuller Seminary. He describes himself as “non-denominational” and attends Mars Hill Bible Church. He’s been teaching at GRCHS since 2002. That he was hired without having ties to CRC is another indication that the school is moving toward a more broadly evangelical demographic. Frank believes that most parents care about the faith lives of their children as much or more than the academics at the school, and he tries to balance the pastoral with the pedagogical. He clearly knows the departmental curriculum (see Appendix K), but he describes his work

86 The mission of Young Life is “Introducing adolescents to Jesus Christ and helping them grow in their faith.” The primary way the organization meets kids where they are is in schools. “Prior to the 1960s, Young Life had directed its ministry almost completely to suburban high school students. By 1972, it had begun ministries in approximately 25 multi-ethnic and urban areas.” http://www.younglife.org/About/Pages/History.aspx. Accessed February 23, 2015.
as “tending to the hearts of students,” and suggests that nurturing faith requires that kids know they are loved before they will buy into ideas. He regularly starts his class with prayer and during a few of my observations, he had worship music playing for the first few minutes.

At that same October meeting, faculty reviewed findings from the Reveal Spiritual Life Survey focused on teenagers and aimed at understanding spiritual growth in high school students and the effect that their Christian high school has on their growth. Data was gathered from approximately 1,300 participants at three Christian high schools in the western Michigan area. GRCS commissioned the Willow Creek Association a few years ago to build on their research with church-going adults and uses The Christian Life Profile Assessment Tool, created by Randy Frazee, senior minister at Oak Hills Community Church in San Antonio. I obtained a copy of the survey and was struck by the description of its origins:

Dozens of church leaders, theologians and others engaged in a rigorous process of biblical inquiry to find the core repeatable characteristics of a follower of Christ. The statements were then tested and refined in a number of forums, including The Spiritual State of the Union, an ongoing benchmark of the ‘spiritual temperature’ in American, sponsored by the Gallup Organization. Among the experts contributing to the comprehensive effort were Dallas Willard, J.I. Packer, and Larry Crabb. The thoroughness of this approach, as well as the caliber of people engaged in the process, prompted us to adopt these statements for use in our research. All of these statements were reviewed and sometimes modified accordingly by the Fuller Youth Institute to apply more directly to teenagers.  

Both the survey designers and the survey items (e.g., Teenagers self-defined depth of intimacy with Christ, with categories ranging from Non-believer “I currently do not believe in Christ and I am not interested in exploring what it means to be a Christian” to Disciple: “I have an intimate relationship with Jesus that drives my flourishing unity with

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87 Page 37 of the spring 2011 results compiled for Grand Rapids Christian Schools.
others”) are decidedly evangelical. The focus is on personal piety and one-on-one love for neighbor, but there is no mention of God’s ongoing redemption of the world or covenantal community.

Findings for GRCS include: the “equally important” role that school and parents play in the faith formation of students; students want to learn how “to articulate and defend personal faith”; “spiritual practices have twice the impact on a student’s faith formation as theological beliefs have”; and “worship experiences at school that are challenging and nurture spiritual disciplines impact student faith formation.” The resulting actions of GRCS include: starting a class focused on Chapel and Worship; changing elements of chapel to lengthen worship time and to add small-group discussion; bringing the Spiritual Life Office into the Bible and Theology Department. The Chapel and Worship class began the year I was doing my research, and it was co-taught by Larry Borst and Mark Kuiper (Director of Spiritual Life Office).

Kent Dobson taught at GRCHS for five years. He left to become head pastor at Mars Hill Bible Church a few weeks into the 2012 school year. In my conversation with him prior to his departure, he described the Spiritual Life Office as “a public relations attempt to answer how the school does faith,” but the outline of its daily work was nebulous. Bringing it within the oversight of Bible and Theology might give it more structure. Regarding chapel, Dobson observed that “emotional honesty” seems to be the top priority, sometimes at the expense of other elements. It often becomes a “public

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88 Kent Dobson was recruited to teach at Northpointe Christian School in 2006. After scandal arose surrounding his participation in Discovery Channel’s “Jesus: The Missing History,” he was forced to resign his position in March 2008. Soon after, he was brought into GRCHS to help run the Spiritual Life Office. http://blog.mlive.com/grpress//print.html?entry=/2008/04/kent_dobson_warned_northpointe.html Accessed February 23, 2015.
forum for testimony.” Kent would like to see more educational content, which would require adults to lead chapel more often.

Throughout the year, I noticed lots of conversation about school chapel (Is it Church? If not, what is it? Is it worship? If so, in what form? What is its telos?) and other elements of spiritual life at the school. Larry Borst hosted a breakfast for a subsection of GRCHS folks (administrators, teachers, athletic department) and invited David Smith to help frame some of the issues. Explaining that practices are historical (done over time, not a one-off), social (done in community), driven by narrative (they cohere within a story that give the practices meaning), and they develop certain dispositions that can push back against secular liturgies was helpful, but trying to figure out what that could/should look like in the daily life of the school remains a challenge.

**GRCHS: Graduation (May 23, 2013)**

Grand Rapids Christian High’s commencement was held at Sunshine Community Church. There was a cross hanging center stage and an American flag on each side. I arrived early and sat toward the back to the left of the stage and on the aisle, leaving a few seats between me and people already seated. Three people came up to ask if the seats next to me were taken. It was a daughter (student), mother, and grandmother, who sat down and struck up conversation. It turns out that the grandmother’s husband, Mr. Gerald Bartlett, was GRCHS Band Director from 1985-1995, which was a bit of a coup, because he was Lutheran.

Faculty processed, not in regalia, and sat toward the front. Students processed in light blue cap and gown. The service began with a round of applause in gratitude for teachers and families. Although the pace of events was relatively quick, there were five
speakers. The first student speaker noted that both graduation and commencement were big words “for a class that has a big heart.” He used Matthew 25:40 to describe how they were kind and considerate to one another, treating even “the least of these” well. Jill Bielema, Chair of the GRCS Board, spoke next and told graduates that they had grown with God’s grace and that they had been given the “ability to intertwine God’s Word in all disciplines,” which is “truly remarkable” as a gift from faculty and staff. The third speaker was a student who tried to be inclusive, noting highlights from academics to forensics, but he also noted that the football team had won the state championship for the first time ever, which garnered hearty applause. The fourth speaker was a student who began with an exchange between Sam and Frodo from *Lord of the Rings – Two Towers*: “Even darkness must pass; a new day will come.” She wove these words with the Apostle Paul’s “I do what I don’t want to do.” She noted that God gave up His son in love, and God is transforming the world, and this should give us hope (though the world expects cynicism). She exhorted her fellow graduates to hold on to the story of Christ in the hope that they will eventually hear “well done, good and faithful servant.”

The final speaker was Jennifer Gunnink, an English teacher. She opened with an allusion to “Dead Poet’s Society,” but explained that she doesn’t like the movie, or any of the heroic teacher movies, because they make her feel ordinary. She acknowledged that there had been and would continue to be extraordinary achievements by graduates, but explained that ordinary lives are just as meaningful. Gunnink used Colossians 3 (“Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord”) and Matthew 25 (“For I was hungry and you gave me food . . .”) to exhort graduates to serve/help/care for “the least of these”: 
Notice that Christ didn’t say that we have to start our own foundation to help the hungry people in the world or win a Nobel Peace prize for our efforts to bring peace to the Middle East. Instead, he is asking us to do the small things to help those people that cross our paths . . . We’re called to show up. We are called to do the work in front of us in the best way that we can . . . Both the amazing actions and the mundane work are important.

She promised that God will take the ordinary and make it extraordinary, if it is done to honor Him. These were powerful words to a group that prides itself on its successes.

The reading of names and the giving of diplomas was surprisingly rapid, as there was almost no cat-calling or cheering. This was surprising to me, but I’m told it’s a distinctive tradition at GRCHS. There was also no professional photographer snapping pictures of graduate as they left the stage. Perhaps most striking to me was how quickly the teachers left the building. Whereas at Covenant, the high school where I taught for over a decade, teachers stayed around to mingle with students and parents, GRCHS faculty members exited post-haste, (many of whom went to Larry Borst’s house for a party). Larry explained that it was hard for him to watch kids celebrate when he was going to miss them, but he also said the time was not for him, but for the families.

In my conversation with Joanne VanderWilp a few days after graduation, she was ebullient about how well things had gone, despite the obstacles. She said, “The whole year feels wrapped in blessing and prayer . . . [it is] a testimony to God’s faithfulness.”

And as the school looks forward to the next school year, they offered five goals:

**Goal A**
*Foster an environment that enables students and staff to grow in Christian faith, engage in Christ-centered relationship with each other, articulate Christian beliefs, and put faith into action.*

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90 Goals pulled from the 22nd draft of the Strategic Plan, dated May 15, 2013.
91 Five elements of this goal, include: Deepen faculty understanding of how to teach all subject areas in a way that is rooted in faith; Foster consistent practices that ground faith in action; Ensure a culture that nurtures the spiritual health of students and staff through engagement in prayer, worship, service, and
**Goal B**
*Ensure a Christ-centered learning community across all schools that utilizes a coordinated curriculum; facilities; and the gifts of students, staff, and community to deliver an exemplary Christian education.*

**Goal C**
*Ensure a dynamic instructional culture that embraces collaboration and continuously strengthens professional competency to maximize staff talents and student learning.*

**Goal D**
*Create a business model for financial sustainability that supports the educational program and advances the mission of Grand Rapids Christian Schools.*

**Goal E**
*Position Grand Rapids Christian Schools in the broader West Michigan community as a highly-respected Christian educational institution worthy of choice for parents, students, alumni, and donors.*

In the concluding chapter, we will move from narration of where the school has been (historically, geographically, theologically) and what is currently happening at the school to constructive suggestions about what might help the GRCS educational community move forward, given its unique history and sense of mission.

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92 The fourth component of this goal is “Equip faculty to understand and serve students from diverse cultural, ethnic, denominational, socio-economic, and spiritual levels.”

93 The fourth component of this goal is “Compensate faculty and staff at levels that attract and maintain high quality administrators, teachers, and support staff.”

94 The fourth component of this goal is “Ensure Grand Rapids Christian Schools’ enrollment reflects diversity including students from a variety of socio-economic levels, racial and ethnic backgrounds, academic abilities, and geographic residences.”
Conclusion: Constructive Response (Theological and Pedagogical)

“In my four years at GRCHS I was challenged spiritually, met great role models both professionally and religiously and was given every opportunity to succeed wherever I chose to go. A GRCHS education is a tremendous blessing . . . The bigger GRCHS gets, the more power it accumulates, meaning more state championships, more academic awards. I really begin to fear that the mission statement is being left further and further behind. As someone who has a sister with autism that doesn’t attend GRCHS because of its lackluster special education program, I beg the question: why in the world is a football team more important than caring for the least of these at a Christian high school? Furthermore, why the obsession with winning everything, always being the best, the brightest, the most attractive, athletic and adjusted? Where does the Bible tell us that’s our calling as servants of the Lord? There’s a fine line between giving kids the chances to succeed they deserve and being a place where the rich get richer. In the minds of many, that line has already been crossed, and I’m starting to align more with that thought.”

In a 2013 Calvin College Chimes editorial, Jacob Kuyenhoven, a GRCHS alumnus details many of the things I found during my years of research: blessings, opportunities, successes, and challenges. By listening to voices of those both inside and outside of the community, areas of concern and potential become clearer.

Legacy of Generational Faith and Family

“I grew up CRC and my parents both did also, and they wanted to send me to a Christian school, and they thought this was the best choice in Grand Rapids” – Lynn, grade 10

It is clear that there is strong familial attendance history at Grand Rapids Christian Schools—siblings, parents, and grandparents:

“I’ve gone to Christian schools my entire life and my parents have sent me here. My whole family has gone here.” Jill (grade 10)

“Both my older siblings went here and they liked it a lot, and it was important to my family to continue Christian education . . . my mom had gone here, and my grandparents.” Stephanie (grade 11)

“Three generations of women in my family have attended GRCHS. We have history here.” Joseph (grade 12)

“My grandparents were missionaries in Africa . . . and one of the reasons they moved back to the states was so my dad and his brothers could go to a Christian school because the nearest one was a boarding school far away, and they didn’t want to be so far away from their kids.” (Ruth, grade 12)

Unfortunately, I did not interview parents, but I wonder why Christian education is so important to families. Are they hoping for preparation to go out into the world to proclaim the Gospel? For protection from the evils of the wider world? For an academic pedigree that will lead their children into a good college, a good job, and a bright, successful future? And what is the relationship between the safety some seek and the risky, often counter-cultural lives that the Gospel fosters? Though it was beyond the scope of my research, I wonder what kind of adults the school is producing. What percentage of GRCHS alumni attend church while in college? What are alumni doing vocationally ten years after graduation? How successful is the school at keeping students in the CRC community? In the Christian faith? Embodying the mission statement? A longitudinal survey of these generations could be a useful tool, indicating some of the ways students are shaped by their formative time in Grand Rapids Christian Schools.²

Generational school ties offer a strong sense of pride and continuity, but they also have a sense of rigidity. A few students told me that they wanted to go to a public school, but their parents wouldn’t let them. Sarah (grade 12) said that she didn’t have a choice about schools “because my parents sent me here – a Christian education is really important to them.” She couldn’t explain why her parents believed it was important, but she recounted a conversation with her mom a week earlier: “My mom was like ‘we pay

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² Dr. Beth Green, Program Director of Education at Cardus, which strives to provide reliable, credible data for non-government types of education (e.g., colleges and school), could be extremely helpful.
more for Christian education a month than we do for our mortgage’ so umm it made me kind of think that maybe there is a good reason.” Then she reflected:

God sent me here to have all these opportunities to make me a better person and a stronger person in my own faith, and I’ve just become so much more appreciative of going to a Christian school because we are so blessed to be able to have these opportunities, to go to chapel, even though it’s not always that great, and we have the opportunity to read our Bibles, and we have the opportunity to pray before class, and we are allowed to talk about our own faith with people and not be looked at weird.

There is a sense of safety at GRCHS, while public school looms like a specter. Isabella (grade 10) told me she wouldn’t want to attend a public school: “I wouldn’t be able to find myself and ways of faith . . . and my parents wouldn’t like it either.” She went on to speculate that if students “were at a public school, it would just be atheists, and they wouldn’t really know even the fear of God.” Stephanie (grade 11) said that being at GRCHS “does help me with my faith because we get to think about issues from a Christian perspective, which you can’t get at a public school.” I found myself wondering how many GRCHS students had close friends at public schools, which might temper (or foment) some of the stereotypical fear of secularization in American public schools.

Hanna (grade 10) attended Grand Rapids Christian Schools since Kindergarten, but transferred to a public school this year because of family finances. She “was having a really hard time with it” and crying almost every night, when gracious benefactors intervened: “We got a call from the principal and he said that there was a family that had heard that I was having a rough time of it and they wanted to help. So, I’m actually going to the school for free, like they’re paying all of my tuition for me.” When I interviewed her in December, she was thrilled and grateful to be back at GRCHS, and she was
thankful for the help from students and teachers getting her up to speed to prepare for exams when she had missed most of the material for that semester.

The value of private schools remains important for many families, despite the cost. Elle (grade 9) told me: “My dad thinks that like if he has the money that he can send us to a Christian education, he’s going to . . . his parents are very Reformed Christians, so I think that’s where he got the mindset from.” Christian schooling makes sense, especially for CRC families, since the denomination has demonstrated valuing private, Christian education, but numbers are diminishing. In 1991, the CRC had 315,086 total members; in 2001, the denomination had 279,068 total members; and in 2011 it had 255,706 total members. This represents a decrease of 11% in that twenty year span.³ In the 1990s, according to GRCHS alumni, roughly 75% of students were CRC. According to documents about the church affiliation of students in 2011, 56% are CRC.

Many students recognize that they are in a sheltered Christian ecosystem, which was articulated clearly by Ruth (grade 12): “growing up constantly in the CRC community . . . [it’s] very much like in this bubble. It’s always there: school, church, and at home and so you just kind of get used to it. You don’t have any doubts.” Bella (grade 11) echoed this: “I’ve always grown up in a Christian home,” as did Stacy (grade 12) who said “I’ve just kind of grown up in the Christian faith, which I’m grateful for. I would not have it any other way” And yet she confessed: “My current state of faith has plateaued. I believe in Jesus Christ and that he’s our savior and all that, but I haven’t personally had something that really pushes my faith.” Her words display a tension in American Christianity manifesting itself in West Michigan.

Although Grand Rapids has long been a bastion of Reformed Christianity, it is also influenced by evangelicalism and American politics. See for example, coverage of the 2005 Calvin Commencement when George W. Bush replaced Nicholas Wolterstorff as speaker. A *Christianity Today* article offered a concise summary: “Bush's visit has added new fuel to the already raging debates at Calvin over the relationship of Reformed Christianity to contemporary American politics and even evangelicalism.” Not only has Grand Rapids found its way onto the national stage as a Republican stronghold, but the contours of American Christianity have been shaped in the few miles that lay between Calvin College and Calvary Church (whose former pastor, Ed Dobson, came from Liberty University and worked with Jerry Falwell in the Religious Right). Evangelicalism shapes politics, but it also has a much more personal focus on faith than the covenantal vision of Calvinism.

**Heritage of Faith and Relationship to the World/Culture**

*Our spiritual heritage, our world and life view, our distinctive principles, these must underlie and permeate all teaching if our school is to be true to its real purpose and is to achieve its highest aim . . . This Christian faith, intellectually grounded, vitally experienced, and practically adapted to the whole sweep of present-day life and culture, must be at the center of all teaching in our school.*

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5 Clarence Bouma, “The School and Christian Education,” in *Semi-Centennial Volume: Theological School and Calvin College, 1876-1926* (Grand Rapids: Tradesman Co., 1926), 208. In Christian Reformed Church Acts of Synod 1936, they clarify questions about what counts as a Christian school and how consistories should support them, concluding that “schools” refers to “the Christian primary and grammar and high schools (or Academies) where the bulk of our children get their general school education as distinguished from technical and professional schools.” And support means “it is the duty of the consistory to use every proper means to the end that a Christian school may be established where it does not already exist, and to give whole-hearted and unreserved moral backing to existing Christian Schools and a measure of financial help in case of need.” Failure to do so would result in admonishment of the church consistory, publically in classical meetings and privately by synodical emissaries visiting the congregation. http://libguides.calvin.edu/crca Synod. Acts of Synod, 1936, pp. 35-36. CRC Church Order of 2013, Article 71: “The council shall diligently encourage the members of the congregation to establish and maintain good Christian schools in which the biblical, Reformed vision of
In 1926, Clarence Bouma reminded the CRC community that embodied Calvinist theology was the foundation of their Christian schools and should remain central. Nearly ninety years later, Donald Oppewal offered a similar exhortation:

If the Calvinistic school movement is to function best on the American scene, it must keep before itself a sense of its own past. If it is to retain its own identity and if it is not to be swallowed up, it must realize that its educational practice is rooted in quite different disciplines and intellectual traditions than most of the existing school systems in America … Decisions made today without a look at the past will tend to be arbitrary (lacking in principle), or aimless (lacking in direction), or still worse, imitative (lacking in originality).6

One of the things I noticed at GRCS is that there are a few people who know the history well (e.g., Larry Borst), and some who offer a particular slant on the history to suit current and future aims (e.g., Tom DeJonge), but there are a number of new people who didn’t grow up swimming in these waters (e.g., Frank Padilla). For all of them, however, the question is not simply what would Abraham Kuyper do, but how should knowledge of history shape present praxis?

In chapter two, we learned that the early “little Dutch schools” produced cultural isolation and a sectarian spirit, but as time went on, the immigrant community found ways to be citizens of America while also nurturing youth as members of covenantal fellowship. In 1896, B.J. Bennink argued that Christian formation was more important than American formation, and no country had a future without the Cross of Christ, which would not be found in American public schools. For Bennink, the best Christian is also the best citizen.7 James Bratt wisely notes that “the question of how much a group has

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7 De Wachter, XXVIII, 8.1 and XXVIII, 7.2 and XXVIII, 41.2, cited in Zwaanstra, 154. It is worth noting, however, that Bennink wanted Christian schools to be accredited by public school standards.
‘Americanized’ must always be paired with an inquiry as to which stream of American life—indeed, which ‘America’—it has joined.” In “Piety and Progress,” James Bratt and Ronald Wells describe the ongoing struggle in the CRC community at Calvin College between flight from or transformation of culture and between Christian commitments and American materialism, noting “it would be cruel irony” if

Calvin turns out world-affirming enough to remain respectably middle class, world-denying enough to keep religion private, and worldly American enough to shop the mall without the guilt or anxiety that Calvinism has always thought the anteroom of conversion.9

This potential irony is highlighted in the troubled relationship between a narrative of success (academic, athletic, financial) and a narrative of Christian faithfulness. Grand Rapids Christian Schools will need to find the beginning of each story and trace through to find the telos of each one. In the places where they diverge, the community will have to discern the most faithful way forward, even if it runs counter to the American dream. There are historical and theological resources for this task. For example, Hyma explains that “Van Raalte had not come to America to make money but to make Christians. He was always exhorting his people to think first of all about their spiritual welfare.”10 For generations, leaders in the CRC critiqued America’s materialism as incompatible with Calvinism because it superseded the spiritual life: “The American dollar was the American god and idol... Money had in effect become the standard of judgment and value. The worth of a man was even based on the amount of money he had.” But these

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8 James D. Bratt, Dutch Calvinism in Modern America: A History of a Conservative Subculture (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), x.
10 Albert Hyma, Albertus C. Van Raalte and his Dutch Settlements in the United States (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1947), 213.
critics also recognized how captivating such a temptation would be for those who had come to America as poor immigrants.\textsuperscript{11} Knowing their history serves to raise awareness of potential pitfalls and to set a course to avoid them. Members of the CRC community continue to debate the proper relationship of a Christian to the nation and to the world.

In \textit{Christ and Culture}, H. Richard Niebuhr outlines five distinct ways Christians have interacted with the world around them. In \textit{Quality with Soul}, Robert Benne uses Niebuhr’s typology to describe the approach of various denominational educational institutions.\textsuperscript{12} The Anabaptist-Mennonite approach is similar to “Christ against Culture” in its exclusivism. This model affirms the sole authority of Christ over culture and rejects culture’s claims to loyalty. There is a clear line of separation between the Christian community and the world.\textsuperscript{13} The Lutheran approach mirrors the dualism of “Christ and Culture in Paradox,” as there is conflict between holy Jesus and sinful culture, but grace in the midst: “God is at work in surprising and sometimes hidden ways—and it is hard to

\textsuperscript{11} Henry Zwaanstra, \textit{Redeemed Thought and Experience in a New World: A Study of the Christian Reformed Church and its American Environment 1890-1918} (The Netherlands: J. H. Kok B. V. Kampen, 1973), 39-40. In future research, I plan to explore the shift away from a critique of accommodation to American norms, such as materialism, and toward championing Christian capitalism, with Richard DeVos held up as an icon of godly success.

\textsuperscript{12} There are two other models that are not covered here. The “Christ above Culture” model is synthesist (and similar to Catholic approaches). In this model, history is a period of preparation under law/reason, gospel, and church for an ultimate communion of the soul with God; it sees the battle as between God and human, rather than Christ and culture. For them, God sustains culture, and harmony (synthesis) between Christ and culture is the best way to address the tension. The Church in this model has both a spiritual purpose and an earthly purpose (being custodian of divine law. The “Christ of Culture” model is accommodationist: “They feel no great tension between church and world, the social laws and the Gospel . . . the ethics of salvation and the ethics of social conservation or progress. On the one hand they interpret culture through Christ, where those aspects that are most like Jesus are given most honour. On the other hand, they understand Christ through culture, selecting from his teaching which best harmonizes with the best in civilization. This corresponds to liberal theology.

\textsuperscript{13} H. Richard Niebuhr, \textit{Christ and Culture} (New York: Harper and Row, 1951), 47-48. Although Fundamentalist churches and schools may also fit this model, the Anabaptist-Mennonite version seems more charitable about the world, despite its lack of willingness to be conformed to it. Although Niebuhr feared this view could lead to a false dichotomy in which the material world represents opposition to Christ and a spiritual realm, the Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition has not denied the good of God’s creation.
predict in advance where truth or grace will suddenly burst forth.”\textsuperscript{14} If education resides within the secular realm, then there should be no substantive difference between scholarship by Christians and non-Christians.

Most important for our purposes here, Benne asserts that the Reformed model aligns with “Christ Transforming Culture.”\textsuperscript{15} This approach stems from the conviction that God is the Creator and human beings were initially good creations of God, but fell into sin. However, there is hope in God’s redemption and ongoing renewal of all creation. Transformation occurs in the interactions between Christ and culture. Calvinism has a hopeful-world-encompassing view of God’s saving action and a critical-world-engaging understanding of the Christian calling.

Nicholas Wolterstorff graduated from Calvin College in 1953 and taught there for thirty years. He is an influential figure in Reformed Christian circles. In a piece written for \textit{The Christian Century}, he describes a Calvinist approach to life in the world:

\begin{quote}
God’s call to those who are Christ’s followers is to participate in the life of the church and to think, feel, speak and act as Christians within the institutions and practices that we share with our fellow human beings. We are not called to go off
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{14} Douglas Jacobsen and Rhonda Hustedt Jacobsen, \textit{Scholarship and Christian Faith: Enlarging the Conversation} (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 84. In \textit{Faith and Knowledge: Mainline Protestantism and American Higher Education} (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994), Douglas Sloan describes the two-realm theory of truth: “On the one side there are the truths of knowledge as these are given predominantly by science and discursive, empirical reason. On the other side are the truths of faith, religious experience, morality, meaning, and value. The latter are seen as grounded not in knowledge, but variously in feeling, ethical action, communal convention, folk tradition, or unfathomable mystical experience” (ix). The strength of this approach is that it creates a space for dimensions of the human experience that the dominant materialistic, mechanistic view does not include. The primary weakness of the approach is that the dualistic way it approaches the world, often dividing concepts into binaries (e.g., object-subject, fact-value, and reason-faith) which invariably result in hierarchy. And, too often, the realm of faith is relegated to the bottom, “constantly put on the defensive and undercut by the incursions of a narrow, positivistic knowledge and its accompanying materialistic worldview” (ix).

\textsuperscript{15} Dennis Voskuil of Western Theological Seminary disagrees: “In terms of the paradigms provided by H. Richard Niebuhr, the Christ of the [Reformed] church has often been the Christ of Culture. It is important to point out, however, that despite some obvious evidence of cultural identity and even cultural captivity, there has always existed an inherent theological tension between the nation and the church” In “Piety and Patriotism: Reformed Theology and Civil Religion,” in \textit{Word and World: Reformed Theology in America}. James, W. Van Hoven, Editor. The Historical Series of the Reformed Church in America. No. 16. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986: 136.
by ourselves somewhere to set up our own economic practices, our own political institutions, our own art world, our own world of scholarship; we are called to participate within our shared human practices and institutions. But we are not to participate within these practices and institutions like everybody else, then adding on our Christian faith. Christian faith is not an add-on. There is no religiously and morally neutral way of participating in these practices and institutions. Everybody participates as *who they are*; and whatever else each of us may be, we are creatures who have convictions about God and the world, about life, about the good and the right. These convictions shape, in subtle and not so subtle ways, what we do when we participate in those shared practices and institutions.\(^{16}\)

There must be neither isolation from nor accommodation to culture, but rather engagement with and critical participation in the world for the sake of the world, shaped by the particularity of being a Christian. In 1906, Rev. Evert Breen declared that God’s purpose in bringing these immigrants to the United States was that their Dutch character and their Calvinist principles would make them a blessing to the religious and moral life of the nation.\(^{17}\) In essays collected for *Educating for Life*, Wolterstorff echoes Kuyper in admitting that the interaction between Christians and culture is mutually influential:

> We never just absorb the world; we always bring to the world ourselves, with our religious commitments, our loves and hates, our social perspectives, and so on. . . What we come to believe [and do] is a complicated amalgam of what we bring to the world and the world’s action on us.\(^{18}\)

But the Christian life lived properly can enable members of the community of Christ to live in the midst of general society as leaven. It is the responsibility of all God’s people “to struggle to revise that structure [fallen society] so that it is closer to the will of God . . . to struggle to change the world . . . [to bring it] closer to *shalom*.” This Christological


community “is wounded when justice is absent,” but presses toward it, with God’s help, seeking right relationships with God, neighbor and self. \(^{19}\) Tangible manifestations of this work include: preaching the Gospel, relieving the suffering and seeking the welfare of others, and caring for nature.

On a microcosmic level, the Christian school can serve as an exemplary community: “[It] must communicate alternative perspectives, perspectives faithful to the biblical vision of reality and God’s purpose for the church in the world . . . [and its goal] is the formation of an alternative lifestyle.” \(^{20}\) It is crucial, however, that this witness be deeply imbedded in the school; it must exhibit Christian practice “in its totality . . . The school as a whole is the educative agent.” \(^{21}\) Wolterstorff moves beyond idealistic vision into practical diagnosis. In the 1970s, he articulated three crises in CRC Christian education as it reached “comfortable middle-age respectability.” The first crisis was a shift away from schools as a “distinctive expression of a way of life” and toward a more general Americanism “to which a bit of piety, spirituality, and morality have been added.” The second crisis was that members and supporters of the educational community no longer understood the school’s fundamental rationale or its primary worth. Addressing this issue requires transparency and full engagement with all members of the educational community as the school system continually negotiates and (re)articulates its vision. And the third was resentment from those who had attended Christian schools, but

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\(^{19}\) Nicholas Wolterstorff, “Teaching for Tomorrow Today,” 103 and 127. He defines *shalom* as enjoyment of living before God and with one another in right, harmonious relationship” and he asserts that “shalom is both God’s cause in the world and our human calling” – a commitment to liberation and justice for all creation, and the divine possibility of present renewal (101-104).


had not seen love of God or neighbor. Instead they felt pressure to conform to a system which seems closed to non-members and acts in contradiction to the Gospel it preaches. As such, graduates remain unconvinc
da that such institutions are worthwhile.

Wolterstorff suggests that they should seek out anyone who embraces education in the Reformed tradition of Christianity, including Lutheran, Methodist, Baptist, Episcopalian, and Catholic teachers and students. This ecumenical shift with its ecclesiastical differences should be viewed “as enriching rather than threatening.”

One of the distinctive attributes of the CRC educational community is that it frequently takes its own pulse. Within the 1956 GRCS survey recommendations lies proof of the tension between turning inward or outward. On the one hand, they suggest that “our Christian schools need greater integration with the life of the Grand Rapids community . . . [and] close contact with every home represented in the school population,” while on the other hand they assert that “a scriptural view of Christian education demands that the enrollment in the Christian school be limited. Only those parents who have committed their children to the Lord and show this by a positive spiritual life in the home, have a right to the Christian school.” In 1957 Cornelius Jaarsma, part of the CRC Synodical Study Committee on the Principles of Education who helped write a 1955 report, clarified the point by suggesting that “Calvinism’s first thought is of schools that are Kingdom schools, school that seek first the Kingdom of

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God and His righteousness. These schools are first of all for Kingdom people . . . but would not exclude others.”

Through the 1956 survey of pastors, parents, faculty, and board members, they also learned that “most of the pastors (like board members) think schooling is merely a process of accumulating knowledge and learning how to think. Many still seem to labor under the impression that head knowledge is the gateway to heart commitment.” Now they have resources from David Smith, James K.A. Smith and others within the community who are focused on cultural liturgies which shape and constitute our identity, and the counter-cultural formation possible when Christian practices (especially liturgical practices of worship) are embodied.

In *Growing in the Life of Faith*, Craig Dykstra asserts that “our most important practices make sense only in the context of some overarching story that reveals to us fundamental convictions about what is ultimately real in and true of the universe in which we live.” They may be stories of victory over “the forces of human evil or the threatening powers of nature” in which “human mastery becomes ultimate virtue and the mark of excellence.” But the Christian story is different. Its point “is rather the right use of gifts graciously bestowed” by God: “This story’s fundamental fact is that the everlasting arms of a gracious and loving God sustain the universe. So our basic task is not mastery and control. It is instead trust and grateful receptivity.” Dykstra warns that if we strive for

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25 See David I. Smith and James K.A. Smith, *Teaching and Christian Practices: Reshaping Faith and Learning* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011); James K.A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009) [“The task of Christian education needs to be reconnected to the thick practices of the church . . . The ecclesial university will extend and amplify the formation that begins and continues in Christian worship, drawing on the liturgical formation of the imagination in order to be able to imagine the world otherwise” (220-222)], and *Imagining the Kingdom: How Worship Works* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013).
control over our own destinies or use education in faith to “secure ourselves before God, we will have missed the mark entirely,” because Christian practices are places inhabited by the Holy Spirit in which we are invited to participate. As such, “education in faith is not ultimately an ethical or spiritual striving but rather participation in the educating work of God’s spirit among us and within us. In this way, education in faith is itself a means of grace.” It is worth considering what kind of narrative is offered by the GRCS Core Values (see Appendix H).

Amy Plantinga Pauw says something similar in “Attending to the Gaps between Beliefs and Practices.” Beliefs make “practices intentional as opposed to random or reflexive actions,” but a good fit between them is “not necessarily an indicator of their truth or goodness.” Furthermore, as much as we might like to ignore “troublesome gaps” between them, the “continual slippage and compromise” that occurs is a central reality of the Christian life. They force us to attend to our imperfect desires and dispositions, and remind us that “no form of earthly religious life entirely escapes disfigurement” caused by the Fall. Pauw also explains that “all human beliefs are culturally and materially situated and inseparable from practice. Religious beliefs are interwoven with a larger set of other beliefs and embedded in particular ways of life. They are couched in the language, conceptuality, and history of a particular people and reflect personal and communal experience and desires.” As such, we need both careful attention to lived context and a robust theology of grace. A deeper understanding of lived faith, “new knowledge and new capacities for perception” can be discovered by ongoing engagement in and reflection on Christian practices. Pauw asserts that “a religious community’s best

insight into the possibilities and deformities of its beliefs and practices often comes from the outside.”

Stephen Fowl and Gregory Jones exhort Christian communities to cultivate interpretive charity in order to have ears to hear the voices of outsiders. Failure to do so makes it more likely that “we will fall into the situation of interpretive arrogance. That is, we will deceive ourselves into thinking that our words are God’s word. The exercise of power and coercion will characterize our communities.” They remind us that we must first be willing to be interrogated by Scripture as a foreign voice. We must read the Bible over-against ourselves, allowing it “to challenge our presuppositions and established interpretations,” and to remind us that “our interpretations are provisional, always open to revision.” Doing this kind of reflective reading will allow “maintenance of interpretive humility and openness to hearing the voice of Scripture afresh.”

Along with listening to the voice of Scripture, we must attend to those on the margins and beyond the borders of our community, beginning with the presupposition that our neighbors may have “coherent yet different systems of belief and practice,” and “even the most essential convictions of Christian faith and practice are cast in very particular terms.” We must not assume that outsiders are basically like us or that everyone essentially believes the same things, and thus try to get them to see things from our perspective or to strip away “inessential elements” to gain their agreement.

Interestingly, Fowl and Jones use the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa (DRC)
and the structures of apartheid as an example of what happens when Christian communities lose the ability to read Scripture in challenging ways or fail to listen to outsiders. “Scripture simply becomes a mirror reflecting a community’s self-deceptions back to itself disguised as the word of God,” and sinful practices of separation and exclusion are justified as protecting the community.  

Homogeneity vs. Diversity

Sarah Lawrence Lightfoot is correct in her assessment of diversity (or its lack):

> Private schools, rarely faced with a diverse range of students or the often conflicting demands of parent and community groups, are better able to focus on academic and curricular matters. Private schools are likely to choose relatively homogeneous student populations to whom they can successfully offer a streamlined, focused curriculum. The vast majority of students come from backgrounds of affluence and privilege, and their high school careers usually follow several years of superior preparatory training in elementary school . . . diversity is limited to token groups of working-class and minority students, but the proportions remain small enough so that the homogeneous culture is largely unchallenged. It is expected that the unusual students, not the curriculum or pedagogy, will have to be transformed.

Although increasing diversity (of race and class) has been stated as a value for GRCS, it has not been made explicit in its mission statement. However, members of the community can collaborate in describing current status, reflect on the findings of research, and then shape a response, which could include a revised mission statement. It is my sincere hope that my research at GRCS could be part of this circle of critique and change.

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30 SEEDS (Students Educating Each Other on Diversity) – started in the early to mid-90s at GRCHS. Larry Borst is trying to bring it back.
Willie Jennings is a liminal member of this community. He is a graduate of Calvin College, but felt like an outsider throughout his time there. The opening vignette of his book *The Christian Imagination* tells the story of “neighbors” from First Christian Reformed Church coming to his family to talk about faith, but never once asking his mother “if she went to church, if she was a Christian or even if she believed in God.” Jennings asks why these “missionaries” did not know “the multitude of other black Christians who filled the neighborhood that surrounded the church.” His answer is that they suffer from obliviousness caused by a distorted social imagination which is “enclosed in racial and cultural difference, inconsequentially related to its geography, [and] often imaginatively detached from its surroundings of both people and spaces.” The distortion occurs when “capitalism and colonialism join to bind territorial vision to people’s imaginations so that imagined nation-time, national history, included imagined nationally segregated space.”

Jennings calls for sustained theological reflection and analysis which can open the possibility of conversation and a (re)visioned Christianity “born of the colonialist wound, speaking to itself in its global reality, pressing deeply inside the miracle of its existence.” This is the space where Christian neighbors might “join hands with God-inspired hope and press with great impatience against the insularities of life . . . seeking the deeper ground upon which to seed a new way of belonging and living together.”

A community that encompasses differences such as racialized existence and stands against the homogeneity that reigns in many Christian communities can only come from “the

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revolution of the intimate constituted by the Holy Spirit” sought with an intentionality of life together.³² A particular challenge for Dutch Calvinists is careful consideration of the ways that the ideology of “covenantal community” informs how people are seen/how bodies are read as insiders or outsiders. When paired with ethnic identity, this vision has stark racialized boundaries which are often violently enforced. However, when steeped in the realization that God institutes and sustains both the divine and the human side of covenant fidelity, there is room for grace and hospitality. GRCS must consider what is at stake theologically and sociologically as it shifts toward diversity in its composition.

One strand of Calvinist theology focuses on growing up in the covenantal community, as seen in the CRC denominational language for infant baptism, which is “the sign and seal of God’s promises to his covenant people.” The liturgy for this service includes an exhortation to parents and a declaration of inclusion for the child:

Do you promise to instruct this child/these children in the truth of God’s Word, in the way of salvation through Jesus Christ; to pray for them, to teach them to pray; and to train them in Christ’s way by your example, through worship, and in the nurture of the church?
(I do, and I ask God to help me)

Name, child of the covenant in baptism, you are sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked as Christ’s own forever. Amen.

In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, the only King and Head of the church, this child/these children of God is/are now received into the visible membership of the holy catholic church, engaged to confess the faith of Christ, and to be God’s faithful servant(s) until life’s end.³³

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³³ http://www.crcna.org/resources/church-resources/liturgical-forms-resources/baptism-children/service-baptism-2013
It is worth noting that this parental promise to raise children “in the nurture of the church” has been a primary reason that many CRC families send their children to Christian schools.

The CRC website carefully describes its position on infant baptism and the ways it differs from infant dedication. First, their position is tied back to the Heidelberg Catechism (Lord’s Day 27, Q/A 74), and then they detail contention about the issue raised in 2007 and 2011 Synod, where the “the church’s commitment to the practice of covenant baptism” was affirmed as normative, and “the practice of infant dedication was discouraged.”34 The theological differences between the two is spelled out clearly:

Infant dedication is usually understood to be an act of parents by which they make their personal commitment to train this child in the ways of the Lord and ask for the blessing of both the Lord and the Christian community. Infant baptism, on the other hand, is an act of the church through which God extends to the child the sign and seal of his covenant promises to be his/her God. This promise is extended through the water of baptism. After God has spoken through the baptism and has given the child the sign of his promise, the parents respond with the dedication of their child to God and the commitment train the child in the ways of the Lord and the church responds with a promise of support and encouragement. Thus, in infant dedication, the parents act, [while] in baptism God acts first and parents respond. If you see baptism first of all as a sign of a person’s faith, you cannot help but end up with believer’s baptism. You will have a radically different outcome if you understand baptism first of all as a sign of the washing away of sins in Christ—what God is doing. . . In this way infant baptism is a precious symbol of the doctrine of the sovereignty of God in any person’s salvation.35

This lengthy quotation highlights the fundamental differences in theology, anthropology, and soteriology between Calvinists and evangelicals who lean toward Arminianism. The former position is literally embodied in Joseph (grade 12) who said, “I’ve come into full

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34 CRC Acts of Synod 2007, Article 71, page 659. For the full response of the Faith Formation Committee to Synod’s request for biblical and pastoral guidance on this matter, see Agenda for Synod 2011, 612. http://www.crcna.org/ministries/initiatives/faith-formation-committee/frequently-asked-questions#What_is_the_difference_between_infant_baptism_and_infant_dedication
acceptance and understanding of the faith over time.” More and more students, however, are coming from non-CRC homes and even from non-Christian homes.

Many students seem steeped in an individualized and emotional sense of spirituality, which mirrors the prevalent theology of evangelical “personal faith.” What GRCHS students wanted most was the “spiritual high” found by “connecting to Jesus” through devotions (personal quiet time and in class), chapels, and classes. Hanna (grade 10) said: “I like it when the students give their testimonies [in chapel]. It speaks more to me personally.” Bella (grade 11) agreed: “I think it’s really cool to see students get up and give some of their testimonies because that takes a lot of nerve and to know that they are in an environment where they can do that, and they won’t be judged about it, that says a lot too.” Hope (grade 11) lamented the contrast between her expectations and the reality of her experience at school: “You know, if you’re at like a youth retreat or something and they give a really powerful message and you just feel like you’re really close to God and you’re on a spiritual high? That doesn’t really happen in these chapels. I don’t think I’ve experienced one yet.” She went on to explain “[that’s] not to say that you need it all the time because obviously that’s not gonna happen, but once in a while you just need to feel that and it kinda helps renew you.” Anna (grade 11) noted the shift in Bible classes from middle school to high school. She loved her 8th grade Bible class, which “was mostly all about your faith and then when I got to 9th grade we didn’t really have any, I mean like Bible class was learning about the Bible, not actually about your faith, so that was kind of hard.” She acknowledged that GRCHS religion courses are “more focused on learning about the Bible . . . which is good, you need to know that, but I think they’re not really focused on you connecting to Jesus.” Lynn (grade 10) agreed that she missed the personal
faith focus in 8th grade: “[It] went from deep emotional spiritual Bible class to we were just studying what happens in the Old Testament . . . facts can enhance your faith, but you can’t build a faith off of facts because if you just read the story of Abraham, that doesn’t make you a Christian, you have to get deeper.” Although some students enjoyed debating issues, the highlight of all Religion classes for many students was the “God glimpse” segment of the curriculum, which gives students the opportunity to tell their classmates the story of a moment when they had seen God. When asked how GRCHS might improve the Religion classes, answers included: more testimonies from students and teachers and “making the classes more focused on personal faith, rather than just studying the Bible.” The GRCHS educational community needs to discern how closely to align to Calvinism and CRC doctrine and/or to what extent it should embrace evangelical piety. How the school approaches Scripture in the classroom and in chapel are inextricably linked to this discernment.

Next Steps

As a way forward, I would suggest attending to present context in order to engage in discernment within the learning community, using Thomas Groome’s shared praxis model for reflection and creative, faithful response. Shared Christian praxis is

participative and dialogical pedagogy in which people reflect critically on their own historical agency in time and place and on their sociocultural reality, have access together to Christian Story/Vision, and personally appropriate it in community with the creative intent of renewed praxis in Christian faith toward God’s reign for all creation.36

Similar to other practical theological approaches, shared praxis enables exploring what is happening, why it is happening, how the Christian story affirms, questions, and calls the

community to move beyond what is currently happening and to make transformative changes. GRCHS would need to determine who might/could/should be part of the conversation (students? faculty and staff? parents? alumni? board members? local pastors? neighbors of the school?) and also to notice which voices/bodies might be absent from the community. Along with creating space for people on the borders of the community, it might be helpful to have someone from outside who is skilled in shared praxis to guide the process. An outsider, especially from the underside of power, might be helpful in naming the corrective/liberative word which the Christian vision has to offer this community. The prophetic voice could also come from a student within the school.

In *Youth Gospel Liberation*, Michael Warren asserts that “the role of the Church-affiliated high school is to be a voice in the wilderness, that is, to offer quality education in the context of counter-cultural values based on the Gospel.” He goes on to argue that the best schools help students achieve some safe distance from which to critique the dominant culture, creating zones of truth where critical consciousness is fostered and offering channels for dissent. In these schools, students are empowered to notice, to speak, and to act toward liberation. Warren admits, however, that most schools avoid giving students agency, choosing instead to steep young people in the consciousness of those who control school policy and to reify status quo.³⁷ Shifting this dynamic requires interrogating sources and deployment of power. Even though schools are not churches, I wonder what would happen if Christian students lived into their baptism, bearing witness

to their baptismal vocation both to embody and to practice the fullness of Christian identity within GRCHS.  

Another theological reparative resource might be found in the dramatic vision of the Gospel offered by Sam Wells. In his book, *Improvisation: The Drama of Christian Ethics*, Wells lays out five acts of the Gospel Story:

- **Act One: Creation** (There is too much love for the Trinity to keep to itself)
- **Act Two: Israel** (God in relationship with Creation)
- **Act Three: Jesus** (God’s revelation of Divine Character)
- **Act Four: Church** (People who continue to be Christ’s body in the world)
- **Act Five: Eschaton** (God’s sovereignty over Creation’s final outcome)

Wells is careful to note that it is not the vocation of Christians either to create or to conclude the story, nor are we the protagonist. Jesus, the Messiah has come, and we, as Christians, are called to follow in Christ’s footsteps. Our place is in Act Four, with a deep understanding of the first three acts, an awareness that the Gospel story is unfolding before us, and anticipation of God’s final act of consummation. Figuring out how to live as disciples in a community of faith requires memory of the Gospel story and theological imagination aimed toward flourishing, both of which are formed (primarily) in the practices of worship. Or, as GRCHS insider Jamie Smith asserts: “We live into the stories we’ve absorbed.”

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38 GRCS could use Fred Edie, “Plunging In: Baptismal vocation and youth’s ministry” in *Book, Bath, Table and Time: Christian Worship as Source and Resource for Youth Ministry* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2007), 213-244.


40 James K.A. Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 32.
Appendices

Appendix A: “Why Freedom Wouldn’t Ring” by Sietze Buning

Christians from miles around came to the Van Roekel farm on the Fourth. In the pasture a makeshift ball diamond—Middleburg against Carnes. My big brother hit a home run for Middleburg with the bases loaded. The after-applause hush demanded eloquence. He flicked the sweat off his forehead and spoke in Dutch: “That’s a right fine breeze out of Van Roekel’s slough!” Middleburg cheered again. Could Patrick Henry have said it better?

But Gerrit Rewarts, a poor neighbor of the Van Roekels, strode through the diamond muttering, “These people call themselves Christians?”

On the speakers’ stand, which fluttered in bunting, the visiting professor compared Patrick Henry to William the Silent, the dominie with the doctor’s title spoke about the rainbow as God’s flag, and the piano tuner led the company in “America” and “Wilhelmus,” “Faith of Our Fathers” and “Open Your Mouth and I Will Fill It, Saith the Lord,” the Christian School principal read a Dutch essay about Columbus, and Dad and three other farmers had a debate: “Resolved: that there be a Christian Farm Bureau.”

In tatters Gerrit Rewarts stood at the fringes: “I’ve had me my fill of Christians.”

After the ballgame and speeches the canteen opened with God’s plenty: choice of hamburgers or fried ham sandwiches, all donated by the butcher; choice of cherrynut ice cream or butterbrickle, all donated by the creamery; every mother brought her fanciest cake. The proceeds were for adding a third year to the Christian High—how else would we revolutionize America? A dominie fried hamburgers, the principal dipped ice cream, the teachers cut cake, and the debaters counted change.

Gerrit Rewarts looked on. He lived on a long, thin farm between railroad and highway. No tractor, no horse and cultivator even, could get into such a thin farm. His wife and he hoed it all by hand.
They carried milk to the creamery
paid them and poured it out.
Their one baby had died;
all they fed it was milk and eggs.
They had quit going to church.
They didn’t have the right clothes.
They weren’t very bright.
Only stupid people would live
on such a narrow farm.
He had no money for the canteen.
“I’m sick of all youse Christians.”

After the canteen, watermelon: free!
Watermelons had been chilling all day
in Van Roekel’s stock tank. Fathers sliced
watermelons for their families on the feed bunk,
on fenders and running boards, on the tops of picnic baskets,
but I had no watermelon,
no cake and ice cream.
Gerrit Rewarts
was following me:
“Some Christian you are.”

See, I knew the day before my brother would be playing ball
and Dad would be debating. What would my Fourth be?
As soon as we got to Van Roekels, I looked for two
chums: “Let’s tip over Gerrit Rewarts’ privy.”
Somebody did it every year. Why not us
this time? I even had some soap
to write bad words on the
windows.
But Gerrit Rewarts chased us away
and now followed me,
all afternoon.

Before we went home
the whole crowd gathered
once more at the speakers’ stand.
Once more the visiting professor prayed
for our nation’s future. Once more everybody
sang “America,”
all but Gerrit Rewarts and me.
Freedom simply would not ring for us.

Three decades later in a black ghetto
a dignified black pastor lectured me on a word
that interpreted my twelfth Fourth of July:
niggerdom.
“All races and communities have it,” he said. “Most black folks are not niggers, most niggers are not black, and a true nigger never gets that way only by his own fault.”

So Gerrit Rewarts’ niggerdom was not his own fault—not entirely—but whose fault was my own niggerdom?

On my twelfth Fourth of July I did not even care to go out at night to see the fireworks behind the Public School.
Appendix B: Map of Netherlands and its Provinces
Appendix C: Etymology of Church Names

Dutch Reformed Church (NHK)
The Dutch Reformed Church (Nederlands Hervormde Kerk or NHK) originated in the 16th century. Its first general synod took place in 1571. For one hundred years, the Dutch Reformed Church enjoyed its position of privilege (e.g., public officials had to be communicant members) until the Dutch Republic was overthrown by France in 1795. On July 18, 1796, the National Convention of the Netherlands decreed the separation of Church and State “on the basis of the principles of liberty, equality and fraternity...The Reformed Church lost its privileged position, its exclusive rights to large portions of ecclesiastical property, and its control over the schools.” In 1816, King William I reorganized the church and renamed it the Netherlands Reformed Church. In 2004 it merged with two other churches—the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland) and the Evangelical Lutheran Church (Evangelische Lutherse Kerk)—to form the Protestant Church in the Netherlands (Protestantse Kerk in Nederland).

Dutch Christian Reformed Church (CGKN)
In 1834, with 144 members of his congregation, de Cock left the NHK national church, founded the Netherlands Christian Reformed Church [De Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland or CGKN], and within two years, the new denomination counted 108 congregations with six pastors.

Reformed Church in America (RCA)
Founded in 1628 in New Amsterdam (founding congregation is now Collegiate Reformed Church in New York City). This group initially sent its ministers to Holland to be ordained and did not hold services in the English language until 1764. Incorporated in the United States in 1819 as the Reformed Protestant Dutch Church of America. Name changed to Reformed Church in America in 1867.1

Christian Reformed Church in America (CRC)
Seceded from the RCA in 1857. The church was “officially nameless until 1859, when it took the title ‘Holland Reformed’ [Hollandsche Gereformeerde Kerk], to be succeeded in 1861 by the name ‘True Dutch Reformed’ [Ware Hollandsche Gereformeerde Kerk] in order to distinguish us from the Reformed Church [America] and to retain Dutch character. This title remained in use, though not without protest, until 1880, when the name ‘Holland Christian Reformed’ [Hollandsche Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerk] was adopted. Ten years later [1890] it was agreed to drop the word ‘Holland’ because American- and German-speaking churches had meanwhile become part of our organization.”2

## Appendix D: Four Mentalities of the Dutch-American Community

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th><strong>Seceders/Pietists</strong></th>
<th><strong>Neo-Calvinists/Kuyperians</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Outgoing, Optimistic</strong></td>
<td>RCA - West</td>
<td>Positive Calvinists</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Publication: <em>The Leader</em>&lt;sup&gt;6&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Publication: <em>The Banner</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Lead the World”</td>
<td>“Transform the World”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Evert Blekkink</td>
<td>B.K. Kuiper&lt;sup&gt;7&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Henry Geerlings</td>
<td>Johannes Groen</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Albertus Van Raalte</td>
<td>Henry Beets</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Rev. Dr. Thomas DeWitt</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Rev. I.N. Wyckoff</td>
<td>John J. Hiemenga</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Gerrit Diekema</td>
<td>F. Kniphuizen</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Robert P. Swierenga</td>
<td>Rev. R.T. Kuiper</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Rev. Klaas Kuiper</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>B.J. Bennink</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Donald Oppewal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Support American common/public schools</td>
<td>Christian schools that can compete with public school standards, but steeped in Calvinist worldview</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| **Introverted, Defensive** | **Confessionalists** | **Antithetical Calvinists** |
| **Suspicion, fear of the “world”** | Publication: *De Gereformeerde Amerikaan*; Willingnes to be “the Worthless of the World” | Publication: *DeWachter De Gids – De Calvinist* |
| **Focus on “the elect”**   | L.J. Hulst            | Klaas Schoolland<sup>8</sup> |
|                           | Rev. Gerrit Boer      | John Van Lonkhuyzen           |
|                           | Gijsbert Haan         |                               |
|                           | Herman Hoeksema       | Separate Christian schools, instruction in Dutch |
|                           | Rev H.G. Klijn        |                               |
|                           | Mr. Adrian Pleune     |                               |
|                           | Founded first CRC Christian schools, instruction in Dutch (initially) |                               |

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3 Hackensack’s Classis, is an evidence of a giving up of the narrowness and exclusiveness of former days” (91). Cf. Kromminga, 116.

4 See Bratt, *Dutch Calvinism in Modern America: A History of a Conservative Subculture*, 47.

5 Supralapsarian: God performed election BEFORE Creation; elect are redeemed at birth, infant baptism assumes regeneration to already have taken place, conversion is not a moment of “rebirth” but the moment when one realizes a previously accomplished fact

6 Voice of normative Americanism; “The Leader’s Christian was always busy harvesting in the Lord’s fields, as a businessman bringing the gospel of honesty to commerce, or as a citizen supporting those statesmen who ruled the national according to ‘moral and religious principles,’ such as ‘the good of all’ and ‘the spirit of true democracy’” (Bratt, 45)

7 In August 1919, B.K. Kuiper resigned as editor of *The Banner* in order to head a normal institute for Christian school teachers (Bratt, 101). See “Separatism,” *The Banner* June 21 and 28, 1919.

8 Zwaanstra suggests that Schoolland wanted instruction in English (48).
Appendix E: Michigan Response to assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr.

Michigan Governor George Romney, who marched with Martin Luther King, Jr. at the Afro-American Freedom March in Detroit (1963) called King’s assassination on April 4, 1968 “a great national tragedy at a time when we need aggressive, nonviolent leadership to peacefully achieve equal rights, equal opportunities and equal responsibilities for all.” He said there was “cause for general mourning and a rededicated effort by everyone to eliminate racial prejudice and injustice in all of its ugly and repressive forms.” Although there were riots across the nation and a few incidents on the east side of the state in Battle Creek, Flint and Detroit, Michigan’s cities escaped “a fire bath” because of a new policy—“early over-reaction”—put together by Gov. Romney, Detroit Mayor Jerome P. Cavanagh, Michigan State Police, and National Guard commanders. By late Friday afternoon, the governor had “put about 9,000 National Guard troops on alert,” urged passing of pending civil rights legislation, and proclaimed a day of mourning for Dr. King. Classes were called off at universities and high schools across the state and numerous memorial services were held.

The west side of the state was peaceful. “Grand Rapids officials recognized, however, that the situation was still touchy Saturday and denied a request for a permit to hold a ‘peaceful, silent march in tribute to Dr. King’ planned for Saturday.” Mayor Sonneveldt said “we must, if we are to have a livable country, be careful that we live in an orderly way at all times.” He claimed that the permit denial was “in the best interest of the city,” but Rev. Marvin Beelen of First CRC, who had requested the permit along with Rev. Peter Huiner of LaGrave Avenue CRC and Prof. Theodore Rottman of Calvin College, was disappointed: “We thought that a march of this kind would give the people of good will in the city a chance for a positive expression of their feeling, as well as an opportunity to address themselves as a moderate group in helping achieve peace and harmony in society.” Calvin College held its own memorial services at both the Franklin and Knollcrest campuses. Calvin Seminary President John Kromminga said “This is a dark and gloomy day for Americans and for Christians, but if through Dr. King’s death we may realize how much we need one another, this great man whose life was taken yesterday will not have died in vain.” Prof. Henry Stob prayed King’s murderer would be found and “converted” and that America would be forgiven for “this dark hour of shame.” Calvin students marched silently, sang and prayed “for the fulfillment of the goals Dr. King stood for.”

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11 Grand Rapids Press, “‘Early Over-Reaction’ Clamps Lid on Violence in Michigan,” 4/6/68, 16.
12 While a crowd of about 100 people gathered in front of the Capitol, Romney was meeting with the State Civil Rights Commission and members of the Michigan Advisory Committee to the US Civil Rights Commission. In a recommendation similar to those we saw in North Carolina, they suggested “that local police forces hire enough Negroes to reflect the percentage of their race in the total population of the community. In the case of Detroit, it would mean hiring at least 1,500 new policemen.” Grand Rapids Press, “Governor Moves Rapidly to Stave off Civil Unrest,” 4/6/68, 1.
Appendix F: Dutch Reformed Response to Race in Chicago

The Timothy-Lawndale Controversy

Cicero, Illinois is a “lily-white” suburb just west of Chicago which “earned a reputation as ‘the Selma of the North’ after the first black family that tried to move into town in 1951 was driven away by a mob of four hundred neighbors.”15 Martin Luther King, Jr., needed National Guard protection when he walked down the tree-lined streets in 1965. When their neighborhood school offered only grades K-4, “a group of parents who belonged to the Christian Reformed mission church in the Lawndale neighborhood asked for admission for thirty of their young children to attend Timothy Christian School, which was the closest church-related school.”16 White Pastors Duane Vander Brug and Peter Huiner urged parents to make this request. Huiner was an alumnus of Timothy who had adopted two interracial children, and he wanted Christian schooling for them and for other children in his church.17 Initially, they petitioned for a branch school to be opened in Lawndale, but when no action was taken, the group tried to enroll their children two weeks before the start of school in the fall of 1965. The Timothy school board delayed their enrollment due to the threat of violence. Although the board agreed in principle that all “covenant children” should be welcomed, they acknowledged it was not feasible given the current circumstances.18 A poll of Cicero families in 1968 was met with an immediate and ugly response: “Of 224 replies to the board questionnaire, 93% opposed integration.” At a meeting, the chair of the school board, Albert “Swede” Kieft, asserted that the school’s ultimate responsibility was to God (not neighborhood), but people bewailed the potential drop in home values, and one resident rejoined “my house is my God.” Swierenga explains that Cicero’s white ethnic populace had already fled the ‘black threat’ in Chicago’s older neighborhoods, and “they would not allow the quality of life and monetary value of their homes to fall again.”19

In 1968 the Christian Reformed Church Synod rebuked the Timothy Christian School board, stating “Fear of persecution or of disadvantage to self or our institutions arising out of obedience to Christ does not warrant denial to anyone, for reasons of race or color, of full Christian fellowship and privileges in the Church or in related institutions, such as Christian colleges and schools.”20 On September 17, 1969, the fourteen CRC churches in Classis Chicago North, rejected the synodical admonition with a vote of thirteen to twelve. The conflict came to a dangerous head on October 22, 1969:

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16 Swierenga, 429.
17 Swierenge, 430.
18 In its position paper distributed on Reformation Sunday 1969, the Timothy school board noted that the Roman Catholic hierarchy had made Cicero the sole exception to its program of integrating city and suburban Catholic schools.
19 Swierenga, 431.
Four of Timothy’s eleven teachers—none natives of Chicago and all new hires—expressed their moral outrage at the board’s refusal to obey the synod. They resigned together the very morning that thirty-five of their supporters came from Calvin College and Seminary in Grand Rapids, Michigan, to picket the school . . . Augmenting the Calvin College contingent were sympathetic Chicago clergy, lay leaders, and students from Trinity Christian College in Palos Heights, which was the capstone of Reformed Christian education in the Chicago area.  

No violence ensued, but ill-feelings remained. The CRC Synod of 1970 ordered the school board and Classis Chicago North to comply with its integration orders of 1968 and 1969, on pain of being “in contempt of synod and in open disregard of the church of Jesus Christ.” Swierenga explains that this is the only time in the denomination’s 150-year history that the synod used the term ‘contempt of synod’ in connection with an entire classis.  

In the end, the further westward migration of Dutch Reformed folks out of the Cicero-Berwyn-Oak Park nexus into Elmhurst and Lombard in DuPage County helped solve the board’s problem. By 1969, only 2% of the Cicero population was of Dutch descent [a drop from 4% in 1959]. In 1972, the elementary school that was the focal point of the protests was sold to the Cicero public school system, and classes were started in a new building in Elmhurst. This move was also catalyzed by a 1971 lawsuit filed in U.S. District Court against the Timothy School Board by Lawndale parents, now constituted as the Chicago West Side Christian School Association. The suit charged the board with racial discrimination, demanded an immediate injunction to compel admittance of all students, and asked actual and punitive damages of $22,000 and $100,000 respectively. The Synodical Committee on Race Relations (SCORR), an agency centered in Grand Rapids (MI) paid filing expenses. The sale of the school made the suit moot.  

Lawndale parents had started their own school in 1970, West Side Christian, but it only offered kindergarten and first grade. “Until the new school offered all grades, [some] Lawndale children continued to travel by school bus to Des Plaines Christian School, despite its great distance, but many more attended the nearby Catholic school.”  

This was a rare and bright example of racial and ecumenical solidarity.

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21 Swierenga, 434-435.  
22 Swierenga, 438.  
23 Swierenga, 440-441.  
24 Swierenga, 442.
Appendix G: The Future of Race and Christian Education in Grand Rapids?

“The Mission of The Potter’s House is to give low-income urban children the opportunity to attend a school where Jesus Christ is presented as Lord and Savior, where values are taught and beliefs are held, and where academic excellence is promoted. TPH provides an atmosphere where children grow in discipleship and decision-making as they are shaped by God’s word to be productive and successful members of society.”

Potter’s House is an “alternative Christian school” in a “transitioning neighborhood.” It is located near a Spanish CRC Congregation (Roosevelt Park Community CRC, 811 Chicago Drive SW, Grand Rapids) historical connections to Southwest Christian School, located in its former building behind Grandville Ave CRC. Potter’s House started ~ 1975 with “Kid Power” ministry in a church. In 1981, Nellene Duimstra and Mark Van Zanten, both Christian Reformed, started teaching 12 urban kids in Grandville Avenue CRC. In 1987, 65% of students lived within a 2 mile radius of the school (a low-income neighborhood); 25% of students from minority backgrounds, and various denominations were represented in the educational community: Pentecostal, Baptist, CRC, and RCA. In 2013, ~500 students in grades preK-12; 60% of families are low income; ~60% of students from minority backgrounds; Parents must volunteer 25 hours/year for the school. A sliding scale tuition policy allows “broad social and ethnic diversity within the student body.”

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25 From “Remember and Believe: Stories of God’s Faithfulness from TPH”
26 Potter’s House Flyer in Heritage Hall Archives of Calvin College, Collection 481, Box 29, Folder 1.
Appendix H: Grand Rapids Christian Schools – About Us

Grand Rapids Christian Schools, the largest member of Christian Schools International (CSI), provides high quality, faith-based education to students in preschool through 12th grade. With five campuses located throughout Grand Rapids and Rockford, Grand Rapids Christian Schools educates nearly 2,300 students annually and nurtures the lives of a spiritually, culturally, and economically diverse student body. We hold ourselves to the highest standards as we strive for excellence in education based on a solid foundation of faith, rich tradition of excellence, and a long legacy of success.

Foundation of Faith
Faith formation in the Grand Rapids Christian Schools is rooted in the premise that God loves us and calls us into relationship with Him. GRCS seeks to develop in students and staff a desire to be actively engaged in God’s Kingdom by being Christian disciples. Grand Rapids Christian recognizes that the school is only one component of a faith formation process shared with the home and the church. While the home is the fundamental and most Biblical arena for faith formation, the Christian school bears an important responsibility in this process as well. Forming faith can be described in a variety of ways – we have found it helpful to discuss it in the context of how we Know God, Love God, and Serve God. This three-fold focus shapes how we nurture faith in academics, worship and service to God.

Our Core Values
Rooted in Christ: Impressing a strong knowledge of God, a love for His word, and an understanding that all we do is in honor of Him are fundamental to a Christian school education. Rather than measuring all aspects of program against worldly standards, we measure program against biblical standards in order to equip students to live out their faith in their relationships, character, and service to others.

Educated for Life: Passionate and dedicated Christian educators develop learning environments and implement effective and relevant instructional practices that engage today’s students and build a love for learning. What, when, and how we teach must effectively transition all learners to be effective servants of Christ in today’s society, which is global, digital and technology rich, and driven by innovation and creativity. What students learn from us must prepare them for what God calls them to do, motivate them to be the best they can be, and instill a love for learning that is lifelong. Further, we must equip them to be Christian leaders within their homes, churches, and communities on a local, national and international level today and for the decades to come.

Connected through Relationships: Relationships are essential to learning, and precede a student’s ability to cognitively engage in the learning process. We must create a community of learning that starts with the student’s personal relationship with Christ. Further, our learners must experience intentional, positive, caring relationships with parents, peers, and school staff. It is through meaningful relationships developed in a Christian context that students mature in their faith, strive to achieve, experience success, and fulfill their God-given potential.
**United with Home and Church**: Strong spiritual foundations are firmly established when Christian home, church, and school work in partnership. Christian schools exist to assist parents to fulfill the biblical mandate to “train up their children in the way they should go” and collaborate with the church in teaching children in God’s truths.

**Called to Serve**: Excellence in God’s eyes is doing one’s best in Glory of Him. As a Christian school, we affirm that all that we do, the culture we establish, the relationships we build, the lessons we teach, and the activities we support must be defined within the context of whether they bring honor and glory to God. Service is an opportunity for Christ to be visibly revealed as the Lord of all things. Through service we engage in worshipping God and extending the love of Christ in transformative ways through our actions.

**Grand Rapids Christian Schools – Statement of Faith**

We believe in one God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, who has revealed himself in the Holy Bible. This God is present today and controls both humankind and history. We believe and confess that:

- God shows himself through all he has made - for God has made everything;
- God shows himself in justice and mercy over against the sin and evil which has invaded God's creation;
- God shows himself and the way of salvation in his Word the Holy Scriptures;
- God shows himself most fully in his Son Jesus Christ who, by a miraculous birth, became a human being for our sake, suffered, died and was raised to conquer the power of sin and the curse of death under which we all live.

Further, we believe and confess that:

- Jesus Christ is now the Lord of all things, both in the created world and in the Church - the fellowship of the redeemed;
- Jesus Christ is now gathering and preserving his Church so that her members may be his servants in this world; Jesus Christ shall return on the day of the Father's choosing to judge all humanity, the living and the dead.

This faith clearly has consequences for the church and the Christian home. It also has special consequences for those involved in Christian day schools, which exist in concert with the home and the church for the nurturing of Christian teaching and life. Because the Lord is Lord of all life, we profess and declare that:

- Our students will be presented with the basic message of Scripture and the redemption that has been given in Christ.
- Our students will be instructed in Scriptural principles that will guide them in mature living - in its spiritual, intellectual, and behavioral dimensions.
- Our students will be encouraged to recognize the greatness and the mercy of our Lord in every area of life.
- Our students will be guided into a true knowledge of God's world, of its history, and its culture.
- Our students will be enabled to assess the values of the age from the perspective of Christ's redemption and rule over all the world.

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Because our Lord is Lord of all life we further profess and declare that:

- Obedience to God involves us in a thorough investigation of all reality, and that students and teachers alike should seek to integrate their personal faith with all areas of learning;
- Obedience to God involves us in an urgency to promote this Lordship of Christ within the communities of our schools and throughout the entire world through the agency of the schools as well as the church and family.

All this we profess and declare in the sure and certain hope that as we nurture our children in the knowledge and love of the Lord, God himself will guide, preserve and bless these efforts through the work of the Holy Spirit.

Our Faith Perspective
“Our World Belongs to God: A Contemporary Testimony” (shared with permission by the Christian Reformed Church in North America) is the Christian perspective that guides Grand Rapids Christian Schools. The Contemporary Testimony provides biblical perspective for the entire curriculum. It also affirms that the purpose of education is to enable students to become spiritually wise, world-engaging citizens of God’s Kingdom.28

Legacy of Success
Grand Rapids Christian Schools’ tradition of excellence in education began in 1969 when nine independent Christian schools joined together as a single preschool - 12th grade system. For more than 40 years, Grand Rapids Christian Schools has focused on its mission of preparing students to be effective servants of Christ in contemporary society. Grand Rapids Christian High School graduates are well-equipped to succeed in colleges and universities across the country. Each year, 95% or more of our graduates are accepted and enter college and move on to live meaningful lives of service at work, at home, in their churches, and in their communities. Loyal alumni remain engaged in Grand Rapids Christian Schools’ events and sustain strong programs and facilities through contributions, prayer, and unwavering support. As Grand Rapids Christian Schools has grown and changed, our mission of preparing students to be effective servants of Christ in contemporary society has remained steadfast. Our commitment to that mission is built on a tradition of faith and the knowledge that all of life and learning belongs to our Lord and Savior.29

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28 For the full document, go to http://www.crcna.org/welcome/beliefs/contemporary-testimony/our-world-belongs-god. “The CRC is a confessional church. We base our faith, teaching, and preaching on the solid, biblical, and Reformed confessions of the 16th century: the Belgic confession, the Canons of Dort, and the Heidelberg Catechism. While these historic confessions anchor the church’s faith, they fail to take into account the changes in church, society, technology, and politics that confront us in the 350 years since the confessions were written. In order to restate the church’s faith in today’s language and address the pressing new issues of the twentieth century, Synod 1986 approved Our World Belongs to God: A Contemporary Testimony. It was called a testimony rather than a confession in order to distinguish it from the historic confessions of the sixteenth century and to preserve their central place . . . There was also the stated hope that, over time, this testimony might gain confessional status.”

Appendix I: Student Interview Questions

1. Tell me something about your journey of faith.

2. Why do you attend GRCHS?

3. How would you define the mission statement of the school?

4. How would you describe the spiritual life of the school?

5. What do you think the school does well in terms of fostering the faith/spiritual lives of students?

6. What does it do poorly? Are there any elements of the school that undermine the faith/spirituality of students?

7. How do you know that Christianity is important at GRCHS (what is the tangible evidence)?

8. What practices, teaching, events, experiences, or relationships have you encountered at the school have helped to support your faith?

9. If you could change one thing about how faith/spiritual function at GRCHS, what would it be?
Appendix J: Grand Rapids Christian High School - Reformed Worldview

A Refresher on Reformed Perspective: What and Why

One: Creation
The reformed worldview starts and ends with creation. God created the world. This world is God’s. Our world belongs to God. This belief implies the following:
1. God created the world to follow certain laws and norms. Nature behaves consistently; humans are given freedom relative to the norms and responsibility to live within limits.
2. Creation is not just the physical world, but also human institutions and social structures. Our families, schools, governments, economic systems
3. Creation is good. The original intent, the structure of creation, is good. The creational order or design is the way things are supposed to be…all this is aimed at shalom, health, peace.
A big part of our job is to recapture a picture of this original goodness. In Genesis God saw that the whole cosmos was good and God blessed the living creatures, the humans, and the Sabbath. This final Sabbath is an artistic picture of Shalom, peace, health, goodness, and vitality: all that is life affirming.

Two: Fall
Look around, read the news, stand in the hallways at morning break. Clearly things are not the way they were made to be. Mysteriously, humans turned away from the good order set in place for them. This was not just a moral failure, but a corruption of the whole world. Seeing how and where things are wrong, how and where we are corrupted is an essential part of reformed Christian education.

Three: Redemption
Sometimes it seems that religious television has stolen our religious language, and we think Jesus died for me, so I can go to heaven. When we look at what Jesus really said and did, we notice that he talked about the coming of God’s Kingdom. This Kingdom restores God’s laws and norms, it reestablishes the creational order, and it renews a fallen world. As members of this creation, we are to be renewed and we are to be agents that participate in that renewal; we hope that this renewal will reach all areas of the creation. The evangelist, plumber, and artist ultimately all have the same goal of renewal.
Appendix K: Grand Rapids Christian High School Bible & Theology Courses

BIBLICAL SURVEY—OLD TESTAMENT (9th GRADE): Focusing on the Old Testament, this course seeks to draw together the themes and ideas that run through the whole Bible. A key point of focus is fostering the ability to see God at work in biblical history, as well as in our own lives. We observe how God has much to say to a world that has so many questions about life, truth, and salvation. There is an emphasis on how the OT sets the stage for the fulfillment of God’s plan found in the Good News of Jesus Christ as Lord.

BIBLICAL SURVEY—NEW TESTAMENT (10th GRADE): Focusing on the New Testament, this class seeks to look at the life and times of Jesus, the teaching of the Gospels, and the growth of the early Church. Key themes will include how we read and understand the Bible and how we apply this text to our lives today. The focus of this course is on how key biblical teachings apply to all areas of life. Students are taught to think biblically about the practical side of Christian social ethics, morals, the church, and personal decision-making.

CHRISTIANITY AND WORLD RELIGIONS (11th GRADE): This class focuses on the history of Christianity and the beliefs of other world religions. The course begins with a study of the Christian Church and the formation of its theology. Specific attention is given to the development of the creeds, denominational structure, and the challenges the Church encountered throughout the ages. Upon setting the foundation of Christian theology, the course examines the major religions of the world. After looking at Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism, and comparing their beliefs and practices to Christianity, the course presents a thoughtful defense, or apologetic, of Christian belief in the light of Christian history. Of particular importance is the question of how our faith relates to these other faiths.

CHRISTIAN WORLDVIEW (12th GRADE): This course provides an understanding of worldview development and then looks at various contemporary worldviews. Upon critical examination of the contemporary worldviews, the course articulates the Christian worldview and provides a thoughtful response to the competing philosophies. Specific attention is given to the Reformed Christian perspective as we confront critical questions such as who we are and what kind of world we live in. Attention is also given to issues such as the brokenness of our society and the ways to bring redemption to our fallen world. The course provides an opportunity for students to individually articulate their faith development and culminates with a project that asks students to engage a controversial issue and analyze it through the lens of a Christian worldview.

ADVANCED TOPICS IN BIBLE AND THEOLOGY (10th–12th GRADE ELECTIVE) The course will address a variety of advanced biblical and theological topics. Focus areas will vary by semester and may include, but are not limited to, such topics as Biblical studies, contemporary literature and film in the Church, significant theological contributors or streams of thought in Church history, etc. This class is an elective but in special cases may be substituted for another course in the department.
CHAPEL AND WORSHIP: This class explores the basics of Christian Worship and how this relates to chapel in particular, and the spiritual life of the school in general. Students will plan chapels, write devotions, and arrange activities within the school that seek to foster the spiritual formation of all students. This class is limited to twelve students who MUST get permission from the Bible and Theology Department Chair PRIOR to course selection.\footnote{http://www.grcs.org/netcommunity/document.doc?id=4244, Accessed 2/21/15. Larry Borst noted that these courses mark a shift that took over a decade from Christian Person (9th), Ethics (10th), World Religions (11th), and Reformed Theology (12th).}

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Biography

Elizabeth DeGaynor was born in Grand Rapids, Michigan. After attending public schools through the third grade, her parents decided to transfer into West Side Christian, and she graduated from Calvin Christian High School. She earned a bachelor of arts in English Literature from University of Michigan in 1993, and a master’s of arts in English Literature from University of Virginia in 1996. She spent over ten years working at Covenant School (Charlottesville, VA) as a high school English teacher and Chair of the English Department, before discerning the call to return to graduate school in order to study Christian Education. In 2009, she earned a masters in Theological Studies (*magna cum laude*) from Duke Divinity School and matriculated into the Doctorate of Theology program the following fall.

She was a participant in and planner for the gathering of doctoral programs in Religious Practices and Practical Theology (Duke, Emory, Vanderbilt) in 2010 and 2012. Her relationship with the Kuyers Institute for Teaching and Learning (Calvin College) began with a summer seminar on Reflective Pedagogy and Christian Practices (June 2011), and she has presented at Kuyers conferences in 2011 and 2013. Her engagement with youth has been fostered by tutoring with America Reads & Counts and her ongoing work with Duke Youth Academy, where she has served as a mentor, a consultant, and now as Academic Life Ministry Coordinator. She is also an active member of St. Philip’s Episcopal Church in Durham where she serves on both adult and youth education committees.