

REFORMED REVIEW

A Theological Journal of
Western Theological Seminary
Holland, Michigan

SPRING 2009

Vol. 62, No. 2

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Introduction to This Issue

Each of the three essays included in this issue of *Reformed Review* stand independent of the other two; we did not prescribe to our authors a theme around which to organize their subject matter. But when we read them together, we saw that they could very well be presented under a common theme. We became convinced that each, indirectly or directly, invites us to reflect on the problem of cultural homogeneity and the other.

We begin with Peter Ester's fascinating study of the oldest generation of Calvinist Dutch-Americans. Ester gives us a profile of a generation whose cultural homogeneity was maintained and reinforced by the customs, beliefs, and practices that were essential to being Dutch and Reformed (or Christian Reformed) in Holland, Michigan. The most extensive section of Ester's essay consists in "oral histories," brief transcripts of face-to-face interviews he conducted with the twenty-one participants in his study. One hears them in their own words reflect on what "Dutch" and "Reformed" meant to them as they moved through the stages in the life cycle. Perhaps not surprisingly, most of them see this cultural and religious heritage fading irretrievably into the past. About the younger generations of Dutch-Americans, a wise 92-year old woman perceptively remarked, "[to them] the world has become so small, we're in touch with all kinds of nationalities. They look to the world as the world. We never talk about being Dutch anymore."

Nationalities in touch with each other form the subject of the familiar Tower of Babel story in Genesis 11:1-9. In her essay, Tiffany Houck-Loomis challenges the traditional interpretation of this story according to which the desire of the peoples of the world to unite constitutes a sin of pride that incurs God's wrath. Houck-Loomis argues that this interpretation is morally destructive, because it serves to legitimate policies of exclusion. The object lesson of the story seems to be that homogeneous groups ought to remain in their self-enclosed enclaves; to go out to meet their other, to live in solidarity with him, is contrary to what God wills. Houck-Loomis proposes an alternative reading that turns the denouement of the story on its head. To be sure, God does shatter the unity of the peoples. But it is not the desire for unity itself that provokes the divine wrath. The dispersal of the peoples creates the condition for the possibility of genuine unity, a differentiated unity of peoples who come to accept one another in their mutual differences. Viewed from this perspective, God's act of judgment is really God's act of grace, through which God drives the people out to fulfill the original creational mandate—to be "fruitful" as they fill the whole earth (cf. Genesis 1:28). Houck-Loomis interprets this mandate as the divine summons to go out and to embrace our other, that is, the one with whom we do not have a natural affinity.

We may ask what kind of man and woman can respond to such a summons. Here it is appropriate to conclude our issue with Allan Janssen's study of the Dutch theologian A.A. Van Ruler. From Janssen we learn that for Van Ruler, creation is the object of God's saving work. God desires to be in relationship with this created man, this created woman. Through the Holy Spirit, in virtue of Christ's atoning work, God constitutes them as full partners, enabling them each to stand on their own two feet. Salvation is the restoration of man and woman as God's creatures. Thus restored, they are freed to live as God intended from the beginning: to give their love to their Other, and invariably to their others.

– Christopher Dorn

Double Dutch?

Formative Years, Youth Memories, and the Life Course of Older Dutch-Americans: The Role of Ethnicity and Religion

Peter Ester

In their classic study on ethnic Americans, Dinnerstein and Reimers show that the massive flow of immigrants from western and northern Europe in the 19th century has largely been absorbed into mainstream American culture.¹ Assimilation is the rule, rather than the exception. The longer immigrant groups have lived in the United States, the more they have given up their original culture and the more they have assimilated. The loss of what Dinnerstein and Reimers call “Old World culture” is above all observed in the abandoning of native immigrant languages in everyday life, in the church, in schools, in ethnic media, and in increasing intermarriage (“the ultimate form of assimilation”).

These trends can be observed among protestant Dutch-American immigrants as well *but* at a much slower pace. Most immigrant groups have been assimilated in three generations. Dutch protestant immigrants “resisted (structural) assimilation until the fourth and even fifth generation thanks to their church-related institutions and still cling to their (symbolic) ethno-religious identity.”² Dutch protestant immigrants in the mid-nineteenth century crossed the Atlantic as a *group* and settled as a *group* in their Michigan and Iowa enclaves.³ They settled as Dutch secessionist Calvinists, bringing their own peculiar history, culture, religion, and identity. Part of their Calvinist way of life was to keep the sinful world at a distance and to carefully regulate cultural borders between themselves and the world. This unique combination of collective emigration and settling, ethnicity, and religion was a major barrier to rapid assimilation and Americanization. The 19th century Dutch immigrants surely wanted to become part of American society but in a self-directed way, i.e. by holding on to their Calvinist convictions and values. Cultural boundary-keeping was the chief strategy in the self-controlled integration approach of Calvinist Dutch-Americans.

Over the years Dutch Calvinist immigrants built strong community networks of social institutions: Calvinist (Reformed) churches, Christian schools, colleges, welfare and mutual-aid societies, social clubs, Dutch (and later English) language press and other media. These networks represent substantial social capital accumulated by Dutch-American communities but had a tendency to be inner-directed.⁴ Building a religiously and ethnically based “exclusive” institutional infrastructure was a vital strategy in the conservation of the Dutch cultural heritage. The community, the church, and the school system were (and to a large extent still are) the preeminent institutional pillars of Dutch-American Calvinist settlements. The gradual transition to using the English language at home, in church, and (earlier) in school was the major step towards further acculturation and integration

of Dutch Calvinists into American society. This transition was slower compared to other immigrant groups, which signifies a form of “decelerated” modernization.⁵

The distinguishing feature of Calvinist Dutch-Americans is the way their Reformed worldview mingles with ethnicity: they are Calvinists *but* Calvinists of Dutch descent. It seems that in essence the Dutch component is the more flexible part of this religion-and-ethnicity blending. Over time the attachment to the Netherlands was gradually replaced by affection for America.⁶ With each new generation, further affective erosion took place of the original strong bonds with the “old country”; the “strangers in a strange land” were not so strange anymore. In many cases this psychological and cultural transition from the old Dutch identity to the new American identity was accompanied by tensions and conflict, not only within but also between generations. Clashes over replacing Dutch by the English language – particularly in the church – clearly illustrate this point.⁷ But in the end (also) the language issue was framed as a practical issue. Dutch immigrants realized that mastering the English language was a central survival and integration strategy and crucial for the upward mobility of the next generations. Maintaining and transferring the Calvinist faith and coping with both internal and external challenges, eventually, was of greater significance than the language it was voiced in. Krabbendam argued that for Dutch-American Calvinist immigrants their Reformed convictions and ways of life were much more important than making ethnic statements with respect to their Dutch identity. “[T]he stronger the religious identity of a group the less it has a need for an explicit ethnic identity.”⁸

Many observers of contemporary Dutch-American culture and lifestyle will, and in fact do, argue that for most Dutch-Americans being of Dutch descent is merely a symbolic part of their Calvinist identity.⁹ Dutch-Americans are first and foremost Americans. Visiting Dutch-American communities (e.g. Holland, Michigan or Pella, Iowa) does indeed reinforce the idea of mere symbolic representations of Dutch heritage. One is greeted with a folkloristic bonanza of commercialized Dutch memorabilia, yearly tulip festivals and Dutch parades (accompanied by obligatory street-scrubbing & clog-dancing), restaurants featuring authentic Dutch food (“*erwtensoep*” and “*boerenkool*”), museums illustrating local Dutch immigration history and displaying local Dutch paraphernalia, and visitor bureaus linking its city to a strong Dutch presence symbolized, of course, by the inevitable windmill and ditto wooden shoes. It is easy to ridicule such folkloric and cliché manifestations of Dutch identity. But that is not the way the professional sociologist looks at these symbolic ethnic expressions. “On the surface these manifestations are business boosters conforming to American stereotypes about ethnic peculiarities, below the surface these invented traditions reinforce ethnic identity and solidarity as well.”¹⁰ Symbolic manifestations of Dutch ethnicity are cultural identity markers too as they convey messages about how a group sees its own ethnic identity: historical and current. This is precisely the subject of my article: the way older Dutch-Americans recall the role that being of Dutch descent played in their personal history (their formative years) and how this affects their current feelings of being Dutch. As I will outline next, there are good, even urgent reasons to focus a study of Dutch ethnicity,

of growing up Dutch-American, on the oldest still living generation of Dutch-Americans.

Generation Replacement and Lost Social Memories

With the passage of each generation of Americans, a generation holding unique memories of the societal events and cultural idiosyncrasies that are characteristic of certain historic epochs disappears. For the historical and sociological understanding of Dutch-American culture, generational replacement implies the vanishing of direct witnesses of (and participants in) societal developments that were crucial for a particular era.¹¹ Historians and sociologists should therefore treasure the oldest living generation of Dutch-Americans as they hold first-hand information and experiences that are by definition unique. This research imperative, however, is not very central to mainstream Dutch-American research. The systematic study of individual and collective memories of Dutch-American seniors is at best a marginal research interest. The downside of this generational neglect is the omission of studying the prime subjects and observers of major social, cultural, and religious events. Those persons that shaped or experienced major historical events are often not part of our study. This is a remarkable conclusion that becomes more pressing with the disappearance of each distinct older generation.

This study aims at correcting this generational neglect by investigating the manner in which the present generation of older Dutch-Americans reflects on its formative years, and more specifically on how this cohort experienced their “Dutchness”, i.e. social, cultural, and religious practices, rituals, and events that constituted and reinforced their Dutch identity. For these purposes, a sample of older (Reformed and Christian Reformed) Dutch-Americans living in Holland, Michigan, has been interviewed regarding their memories of how their ethnic identity as *Dutch* descendants was shaped during the period in which they grew up: the stories they were told about being Dutch, typical Dutch customs, manners, and habits they learned, Dutch folklore they witnessed, religious and church practices that were essential to being Dutch, companionship with other Dutch-Americans, participation in Dutch-American civil and church associations and leisure clubs, typical Dutch phrases they were taught, memories of the “old” country that were conveyed, etc.

Immigration tales (memories, stories, oral traditions, letters) are an important contribution to picture the subjective side of immigrants’ lives and the way they find common ground between their culture and mainstream American culture. As a form of oral history such immigration tales reflect the way specific generations cope with shaping, experiencing, and maintaining their identity and culture in modern American society.¹² How the oldest generation of Dutch-Americans reflects on its Dutch identity and the way these reflections are related to the formative years of their generation is the main theme of this study.

Older Dutch-Americans: An Unusual Civic Generation

Studying the individual and collective memories of the formative years (and its lasting life course effects) of the oldest cohort of living Dutch-Americans is of vital importance because we are dealing with a generation that is now quickly being replaced. The size of the cohort is constantly shrinking and cohort members are reaching the upper age levels, which in combination negatively affects research possibilities. There is a more substantive reason as well. The generation of Dutch-Americans born before World War II was part of a quite specific cohort of Americans, both in terms of the basic beliefs and values they hold and in terms of the societal events and developments they witnessed during their formative (and later) years. In retrospect it turned out to be a decidedly civic generation that was highly engaged in community affairs and well embedded in community life. In a sweeping assessment of the American condition, Robert Putnam argues in his much-debated book *Bowling Alone* that with each new generation civic engagement is on the decline in American society.¹³ Putnam's main message is that in the last quarter-century Americans have become increasingly disconnected from their families, friends, neighbors, communities, social institutions, and public life; in short, American communities are confronted with a serious and painful loss of social capital. Using a wide variety of, though rather conventional, indicators, Putnam shows that Americans are less and less partaking in the political game, are less involved in religious and secular social activities, their civic participation is going down, they attend fewer informal social gatherings, and their social connections have substantially thinned.¹⁴ The "cataclysmic" decline of social capital in American society according to Putnam is first and foremost due to generation replacement: "The more recent the cohort, the more dramatic its disengagement from community life. This is a strong clue that the overall decline in civic engagement in America over the last several decades was rooted in generational differences."¹⁵ The baby boomers and their successors have seriously withdrawn from civic engagement. The prewar generation – the generation born between 1910 and 1940 – is the generation *par excellence* that was directed at advancing the common good, at shaping the civil society: "voting more, joining more, reading more, trusting more, giving more."¹⁶ Thus, the oldest cohort of Dutch-Americans is part of an exceptionally civic generation.¹⁷

Yet there is more. The oldest generation is not only the most engaged in community affairs and embedded in community life, but they (particularly the core cohort born between 1925 and 1930) also witnessed a number of drastic and far-reaching societal events: including the (impact of the) depression years, World War II, postwar prosperity, Cold War, Vietnam, Civil Rights Movement, and the diffusion of major innovations such as the car, television, and later the computer and the Internet. The present generation of older Americans also observed the rise of a booming consumer society, rapid urban sprawl and suburbanization, changing race relations, the expansion of higher education, and the growth of an affluent middle class. These events and developments had a tremendous impact on the beliefs, attitudes, and values of this cohort, an impact that lasted over the life course of its cohort members.

The formative years of the prewar generation were marked by radical contingencies that equally impacted the Dutch-American prewar generation. Their communities were rapidly opening up both economically, socially, and culturally, and increasingly subject to secularization forces, individualism, consumerism, and out-group marriages. Their churches were involved in complicated issues of how to assess their role in the world, how they had to respond to pressing societal issues and technological innovations, how to face revivalist, liberal, and ecumenical movements, how to respond to “worldly amusements,” and how to prepare the next generation for the challenges and temptations posed by a rapidly changing American society.¹⁸

There are, in short, substantive theoretical and demographic grounds to study the way the generation of older Dutch-Americans look back at their formative years: their numbers are declining as their cohort is being replaced, they hold unique information on unique periods, and they were witnesses of major societal events during their lives. Before going into this further, I should introduce some sociological theory: what actually *is* a generation?

Generation Theory

In order to understand the generational features of the oldest living cohort of Dutch-Americans it is important to reflect a little on what constitutes a generation and what makes a generation different from other (older and younger) generations. The issue of the emergence and dissolution of generations – particularly in relationship to social and cultural change – is a classic subject in the discipline of sociology. The foundations for a theory of generations were especially developed by Karl Mannheim (1893-1947), one of the most influential European sociologists of the previous century. In an eminent and still highly relevant article titled “Das Problem der Generationen,” Mannheim advances a sophisticated conceptualization of the role of generations in modern society.¹⁹ He stresses that a generation is not a mere statistical birth cohort, but refers to individuals who are born in the same historical period (*zeitgeist*), living in the same socio-cultural space, who are aware of sharing similar youth experiences in their formative years, who are bonded by a common view on current societal developments, and who above all share a feeling of *belonging* to a generation. Mannheim rejects the positivistic generation approach which links generational replacement to fixed periods (roughly every thirty years, the period needed to become an adult) and which defines generations in a genealogical way (parents and their children). In his view, a generation differs from other generations because their formative experiences – i.e. significant adventures (*schicksale*) between the age of 15 and 25 – have lasting effects over a generation’s life course in terms of how they view the world (attitudes, values, ethics, behavior). In this sense generations build a specific and unique social identity both as a result of how they perceive the world but also as a result of how the world views them. This conceptualization therefore presupposes that generation members subjectively identifying with their generation, are linked by a common biography (a historic *schicksalgemeinschaft*), have an elementary feeling of a joint destiny, and a basic sense

of being different from other generations. Generation membership assumes generation *consciousness* and a belief that one's generation is *distinct* from other generations. And this is precisely why generation theory and oral history are best friends: both are uniquely qualified to conceptualize and tap the essence of generational identification and the way generations look back at their formative years.

Generational awareness, therefore, is a necessary cultural condition for a generation to emerge, an awareness that separates it from other generations. Generations, in the words of C. Wright Mills, develop on the intersection of history and biography, meaning that major societal, political, or economic events such as wars, revolutions, times of poverty or prosperity are fundamental to the formation of a collective generational awareness or *entelechy* as Mannheim would say.²⁰ Mannheim's generation theory has a classic status in the social sciences and features prominently in the rationale underlying this study of the ethnic-religious identity of older Dutch-Americans.

Hypothesis and Methodology

The thoughts and literature review presented so far lead me to hypothesize that the oldest generation of Dutch-Americans *feel* that they are different from other generations in the way their Dutch (ethnic-religious) identity was shaped during their formative years and in the way their identity was reinforced and maintained during their personal life course. They will particularly experience biographical differences in (the saliency of) Dutch identity with younger generations of Dutch-Americans. This generation of older Dutch-Americans grew up in very different times, under very different socio-economic conditions, and with a distinct set of ethnic, cultural, and religious values that are supposed to have had lasting effects on their life course, lifestyle, and ethnic self-identification. This study tests this basic hypothesis by picturing how the oldest generation of Dutch-Americans characterizes its "Dutchness," how its members link their Dutch identity to the formative years of their generation, and which identity differences they accentuate in comparing their generation with other (younger) generations of Dutch-Americans.

Sample and Interviews

The main subjects in this study are older Dutch-Americans from Holland, Michigan, the area where Dutch immigrant leader Van Raalte and his followers settled in the mid-nineteenth century. The Holland, Michigan area (still) has a very strong Dutch presence and because of this fact is an obvious region to conduct a study of Dutch-American identity.²¹ Twenty-one respondents were selected from four local originally "Dutch" churches, affiliated either with the Reformed Church in America (RCA) or Christian Reformed Church (CRC): First Church and Third Church (both RCA), Pillar Church and 14th Street Church (both CRC).²² These four churches cover a reasonable degree of inter- and intra-denominational diversity. The CRC seceded from the RCA in 1857 for issues related to the use of the English language, the speed

of assimilation, Masonic Lodge membership, and a number of theological subjects, among other things.²³ In general the CRC is the more conservative church. Four criteria were used to select potential respondents:

1. Born before 1935;
2. Being at least a third generation Dutch-American;
3. Having spent one's formative years in Holland, Michigan;
4. Being of good health and having a sound memory.

Churches and respondents were carefully selected with the help of Elton J. Bruins, Jacob E. Nyenhuis, and Robert P. Swierenga, research professors at the Van Raalte Institute (Hope College, Holland, Michigan).

In mid-June 2007, respondents received a letter from the Van Raalte Institute explaining the goal of the study, introducing me as the researcher, and asking them to participate in a personal interview with me. Later that month respondents were contacted by phone by the Institute's administration to verify their willingness to participate and, if indeed willing, to set a date and time for a face-to-face interview. Nearly all approached respondents agreed to be interviewed, which is in itself a very positive sign. All interviews were conducted by me and took place in July 2007. Respondents' ages range between 72 and 92 (mean age is 81.3 ; ten respondents are male, eleven are female. Interviews lasted between one and two hours (mean length about 90 minutes). Respondents are well spread over the four local churches and the two Reformed denominations (10 RCA, 11 CRC). No claim for representativeness is made. For a wider range of experiences of this generation of Dutch-Americans – including the ones that deliberately moved out of Holland – one needs a considerably larger and more diverse sample. Such an approach, however, was not feasible given practical constraints.

The questionnaire was semi-structured, leaving ample opportunity for open and follow-up questions.²⁴ Most interviews took place in the morning at respondents' homes and were taped with a digital recorder.²⁵ I will not use respondents' real names in order to assure their anonymity and privacy. Confidentiality of the interviews will, of course, be respected.

The interview started with some demographic questions (age, sex, marital status, ethnic background of spouse, number of (grand) children). Next, a number of issues were addressed related to the saliency of the respondent's Dutch-American background:

- perceived distinctiveness of his or her generation of older Dutch-Americans;
- typical values and beliefs attributed to that generation;
- memories of respondent's Dutch-American upbringing;
- stories, customs, and manners during respondent's youth years;
- ethnic composition of (past and present) peer groups;
- ethnic marriages;
- importance of the church in respondent's childhood;
- the perceived effect of being of Dutch origin on one's later life, such as on

- fundamental beliefs and values;
- respondent's image of and bond with the Netherlands;
- respondent's view on Dutch-American identity among the youngest generation of Dutch-Americans;
- and, finally, expectations on the future of Dutch-American culture and identity.

The interviews, without exception, were very pleasant. Respondents evidently liked to talk about their childhood and youth years, their Dutch-American upbringing, and to reflect on their generation. Respondents were generally well prepared and often showed me various Dutch paraphernalia, memorabilia, and genealogical family histories. Older Dutch-Americans care about their church and culture and are eager – sometimes after a little encouragement – to talk about their youth, life course, and generation.

It has to be stressed that my sample consists of Dutch-Americans sharing a Calvinist and Reformed heritage. As such this article is dealing with a very specific group of religiously and politically quite conservative Dutch-Americans. Their identity might differ substantially from Dutch-Americans who are Catholic or whose roots are going back to the original Dutch settlers of New Amsterdam, the Hudson River Valley, and New Jersey. The sociological template is thus not germane to all Dutch-Americans.

The Personal Interview as Oral History

The methodology used in this study is an exercise in oral history.²⁶ In letting respondents tell their life history, I attempt to reconstruct the ways their generation, their formative years, and their Dutch-American identity are interlinked. It is a method to understand how generations look back at their life course, and the major events and transitions that took place. Storytelling is the approach *par excellence* through which respondents make sense of their personal history, a history that unfolds itself within the wider societal context of the formation and life course of their generation. "Oral history gives history back to the people in their own words."²⁷ Oral history brings back the human dimension in the sociology of generation formation, and the personal aspect in subjective generational membership. Generations are not merely statistical birth cohorts, but groups of people that share a common history.

Particularly given the age composition of the respondents in this study, the role of memory is important. Obviously, people cannot remember all the events and transitions in their childhood and youth years that are related to their Dutch-American upbringing. There is always choice, subjectivity, and bias. But in this study I am not interested in the perfect accuracy of respondents' memory, but in the kind of stories they tell about their Dutch-American background, their formative years, and their generation. Oral history and its narrative methodology are about subjective significance and not about objective precision.

Doing oral history has also implications for the role of the interviewer. He or she needs to show a keen interest in the stories told by the respondent, not to debate or discuss, but to ask in order to get the story behind the story. To achieve this, one needs the right combination of empathy, sensitivity, and subtleness. If the researcher succeeds in doing so, fascinating and sometimes amazing stories will be the result. Listening to people's life stories is one of the most rewarding professional experiences for the social scientist.

Results

The analyses presented are based on a merged data set in which the answers of respondents to the various questions were pooled and classified by respondent's (altered) name, sex, age, and denomination. Reporting the main findings of this study will be structured along the following themes: pride in Dutch heritage, the assumed uniqueness of the present generation of older Dutch-Americans, nature of Dutch-American upbringing at home, composition of Dutch-American peer group, the role of the church in one's youth, Sunday observance, the effects of Dutch-American socialization on one's later life, endogamy and peer group composition, images of the Netherlands, the youngest generation and Dutch-American culture, and the future of Dutch-American culture. This structure follows my main hypothesis that the oldest generation of Dutch-Americans feels that they are distinct in terms of their "Dutchness," which can be traced to the nature of their upbringing, and the lasting effects of the formative experiences over the life course of this generation.

As a rule I will quote respondents literally, and will not change their wording, style, or grammar.

Proud to Be Dutch

Being proud of one's ethnic heritage can be seen as a positive affect in the way people identify with their ethnic background. Appreciating one's cultural ancestry is a significant factor in how people connect to their ethnic group. Are older Dutch-Americans proud of their Dutch descent? Is having a Dutch background important and meaningful to them? This certainly appears to be the case, at first though in a rather straightforward, unconditional way. "Certainly, I'm proud of it" (female, 85, CRC); "I surely am, there is nothing we shouldn't be proud of" (female, 87, CRC); "Oh, I'm proud of it. Oh yes" (female, 80, RCA); "I feel very proud of it" (male, 89, RCA); "Yeah, I am proud that I am Dutch. You know, we have a saying here: If you ain't Dutch, you ain't much" (male, 84, CRC); "Definitely. Definitely proud to be Dutch" (female, 87, CRC). The first reaction is typically a forthright positive one, but further explaining generally needed some extra reflection by respondents. "I don't know why I am so proud of it. I often wondered about that" (female, 87, CRC).

Analyzing the principal arguments underlying their positive attitude towards their

Dutch ancestry and background in more detail shows that distinct basic social and particularly religious values are the main determinants. The predominance of strong values is why older Dutch-Americans take pride in their Dutch heritage. "Most of the Dutch people had values. I think that, in our bringing up, we took those values to heart. Hard work, family, and church" (male, 84, CRC); "The Dutch have strong families" (male, 89, RCA); "It's my roots, and I love the Netherlands" (female, 80, RCA); "Good, honest, hard-working, Christian" (female, 74, CRC); "You know, we've always held God and the church as priority in our life over everything else, and that's the way I was raised, so I have to try not to depart from that" (female, 92, RCA); "I'm proud of the things we live by, I think our ethics are pretty strong. Ethics. You bet. And I just like my way, that I was brought up. We're clean" (female, 85, CRC); "I think, first of all, I have to thank my parents for bringing me up in the religion, the Dutch religion (...) and I think the Dutch people are very clean and neat (...) We take care of our own, you help your own. My Dad always said: charity begins at home" (female, 87, CRC); "We were brought up to think that we were special (...) but we're good Americans" (male, 84, RCA); "For our religion and our stand that we take, and our customs, you know, and our cleanliness, I am proud to be Dutch" (female, 87, CRC); "I am grateful for it, yes. I think my heritage is worthwhile" (male, 76, CRC); "We're clean, we're hard workers, and we've accomplished what we strive for, and we've been successful in our jobs" (male, 76, RCA); "Well, I guess I identify very much with my relatives and friends and people in this community who are Dutch (...) basically I'm proud of the fact that I am Dutch, sure" (male, 76, RCA); "I've always been proud, I loved Holland, I had a wonderful boyhood here, Dutch cleanliness. It means something. On the other hand, I am not so wrapped up in it that I don't appreciate the diversity we're getting in Holland presently" (male, 83, RCA).

It is a special configuration of religious and social values, in short, that illustrates why older Dutch-Americans cherish their Dutch heritage and upbringing: strong religious beliefs and norms, strong work ethic, strong family values, and rigorous cleanliness.²⁸ As we will see in the next section, this peculiar cultural pattern of values and convictions is still widely shared by the present generation of older Dutch-Americans.

Older Dutch-Americans: A Distinct Generation?

An important aspect of classic generation theory, as outlined above, is that a cohort becomes a generation because cohort members were born and raised in the same historical period, under the same socio-economic circumstances, and shares a notion of being special and dissimilar from other birth cohorts. How different does the present cohort of older Dutch-Americans think they are? What are the beliefs and values they have in common and live by? Do they relate the distinctiveness of their beliefs and values to the way they were socialized in their formative years?

The evidence is quite convincing that my sample of older Dutch-Americans feel they share basic outlooks that set them apart from other, particularly younger,

generations. The beliefs and values they point to are precisely those they specified in stating why they are proud of their Dutch heritage: (still) strong adherence to (Christian) Reformed doctrines and active church involvement, an omnipresent work ethic, the centrality of the family, and uncompromising cleanliness. Compared to the generation of their parents, the present generation of older Dutch-Americans may feel they are less strict in their way of life, but the basic religious and cultural ingredients of the Reformed tradition – in their eyes – are still there. “Work ethic is a big thing for my generation. Most of us are still pretty much faithful in church attendance” (male, 79, CRC); “Most of us have stayed pretty much solid in our religion” (male, 72, RCA); “Religious values would be the predominant ones” (male, 76, RCA); “The importance of living a Christian life, the importance of a family and family life, and hard work (...) I wouldn’t buy anything unless I had the money for it, I wouldn’t buy anything on time” (female, 84, RCA); “We attend church, we keep the Sabbath day holy pretty much, although we’ve become a lot more lenient (...) we believe in work, work hard and rest on the Sabbath” (female, 73, RCA); “Church, family, hard work, and Dutch clean” (male, 83, RCA); “We all grew up by the Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic Confession, and the Canons of Dort” (female, 80, RCA); “We expect to work for what we get, and that is pretty much Dutch heritage; and frugal, yeah, we watch our pennies” (male, 78, RCA); “We don’t go into big debts with credit cards and that kind of stuff, we borrowed cash” (male, 84, CRC), “We are known for our cleanliness, we keep our homes and yards and everything. As we say: cleanliness is next to godliness” (female, 76, CRC); “Yeah, I think we do, such as religious things and the upkeep of our homes and values; we’re not spendthrifts but we’re good givers to people in need” (female, 87, CRC); “Our work ethic (...) and the stringent requirements of the church, they have a indelible spot in my heart” (male, 84, RCA); “You work hard for everything. You don’t expect anybody to give you anything. We don’t go to the government (...) and like sending our children to Christian schools, my husband had a second job to pay for their tuition” (female, 87, CRC); “Christian values, neatness, and hard work” (female, 85, CRC); “Well, first and foremost, church attendance, and next the fair dealing with other people, and really feeling you have to provide for yourself and your family” (female, 92, RCA); “Hard workers. We had to work hard for everything we got. Long hours” (male, 80, CRC); “We didn’t figure on anybody else helping us (...) the household of faith needed to look after each other (...) you provided for your family and that was your responsibility” (male, 76, CRC).

The self-understanding of the present generation of older Dutch-Americans – even if they became more flexible over their life course as we will see later – is quite coherent and consistent: you lead a Christian life style, you attend church, you work hard, you take care of yourself, your family, and your property, and you spend money carefully. Did such a basic value system, according to the respondents, affect the way their generation has been doing in life? The issue underlying this question is a major premise of generation theory: the specific psychology of a generation – heavily influenced by their upbringing – conditions the life course of a generation. Here is how older Dutch-Americans experienced the influence of the specific value pattern of their generation. “Absolutely. Because there’s no substitute for a spiritual

upbringing. That's the key. I think my Dutch upbringing was a real gift" (male, 79, CRC); "I would think so. The work ethic is the biggest thing for me. I wouldn't be here if I didn't have a work ethic. I just feel that I've got to get out and go to work and do my part. I have been so blessed, this is my way of paying back" (male, 84, RCA); "I think so. The Dutch are known for their cleanliness, you know, and I think Holland being a Dutch city, basically is a clean city. People keep up their homes and their yards and everything" (female, 76, CRC); "I think an awful lot of us have been very successful. What would be the reason? I think we were aggressive, that's my feeling" (male, 72, RCA); "Well, I think they've kind of shaped the community here in Holland. Because they were in the majority, and could live in a way that was consistent with their values" (male, 76, RCA); "Both our parents and grandparents were Christians. It means a lot. It just becomes a part of you" (male, 84, CRC); "I think we still have our values, but I'm wondering if we've passed them all on to the younger generation" (female, 84, RCA); "Well, I guess so. I know that here in town those firms that have done well have said a lot of it was due to the work ethic of the Dutch employees they could hire. But, the truth is, by this time, a lot of the employees they hire are Mexican or most other ethnic group" (male, 83, RCA). Older Dutch-Americans believe they share similar values, values that they feel have had a strong impact on their lives and how they have been doing in life.²⁹ I will come back to this issue in more detail later in this study.

Dutch-American Culture at Home: Ways and Traditions

As already indicated, Dutch-American colonies were slower than many other immigrant groups in assimilating to American society and its mainstream culture. The main causes were related to the specific Dutch emigration history, particularly the religious *afscheidings*-motives, Reformed theology, the group-wise emigration and group-wise settlement, and the unique linkage of religion, church, and ethnicity. These factors implied that even later generations of Dutch immigrants would hold on to several "Dutch" practices, ways, and traditions. According to Bratt,

Having all the marks of the WASP profile, the Dutch did not melt into American society on schedule; in fact, they vociferously resisted the same. Socioeconomic dysfunction cannot explain the anomaly, for in these areas the Dutch have adjusted well enough. The reason must lie in considerable part in the realm of "outlook," "religion," and "mind."³⁰

But with the further advancement of Americanization, later generations would – almost routinely – adopt American practices, ways, and traditions. Dutch immigrants came here to become American citizens, and not to stick to the culture of the old country. But this takes time, of course. Cultural adjustments do not take place overnight. In this section I will explore what was left of any peculiar Dutch habits and customs during the formative years of the generation of older Dutch-Americans. Did their parents tell them about the Dutch background of the family, did they feel that was important or not, are there typical Dutch words or Dutch lines they remember from their youth, were certain Dutch stories, folklore, or tales being

told, were typical Dutch dishes being served? The findings will show that most of the parents of my respondents were already well into having adopted American habits and customs. Some Dutch ways survived but were typically blended with American conventions. The Americanization of Dutch culture was well on its way during the formative years of this generation of older Dutch-Americans.

It is interesting that being Dutch-American and having a Dutch background was hardly explicitly addressed during the formative years of my respondents. At first this seems counter-intuitive given the strong Reformed values, beliefs, and norms that governed their youth. On second thought, however, the explanation is quite evident: almost *everyone* was Dutch, of Dutch origin, at that time. Ethnic references do not make much sense in a majority situation. Being Dutch “was just obvious (...) we were surrounded by so many of them” (male, 76, CRC); “I think we just took that all for granted, you know (...) the whole community was Dutch. We just knew we were Dutch” (female, 85, CRC); “You can’t kind of avoid it, living in Holland” (male, 83, RCA); “Because it was so real in my family” (female, 92, RCA); “Everyone of the CRC church kids went to the Christian school – so it was pretty much obvious that we were all from Dutch background. And [respondent jokes] we didn’t have many Italians or Jews” (male, 84, RCA); “Now, let’s see – how do you really develop that idea, that you are Dutch? Well, for one thing, you get it from going to church and Sunday School, definitely” (female, 80, CRC); “In Holland at that time most people were” (male, 78, RCA); “I don’t think it ever came up. We just knew” (female, 76, CRC); “I never heard any pride expressed in being Dutch, in the family. ‘You should be proud, you’re a 100% Dutchman’ – no, that just didn’t get said” (male, 83, RCA); “We just grew up in it, you just sort of assumed it” (female, 84, RCA); “Well, I’ll tell you, When I was young I was in the first [1929] Tulip Time parade” (female, 85, CRC). In a more or less ethnically homogeneous community, ethnicity is simply taken for granted.

Language as Cultural Marker

Besides the “because-everyone-was-Dutch” argument, language did play a distinct role. Having parents who still could speak Dutch and who switched to Dutch in certain situations strengthened the awareness of being Dutch too. “When my parents didn’t want us to know something, they’d talk Dutch. My grandparents couldn’t speak English” (female, 85, CRC); “My Dad and mother talked in Dutch a lot in the home, when they had things they didn’t want us to know, then they talked in Dutch. Of course, we picked up on some of it, but never could converse ourselves” (male, 84, RCA); “We had our Dutch church paper, the old “*Wachter*” (male, 76, CRC); “When we sat at the kitchen table eating if our parents didn’t want us to know what they were talking about, they talked Dutch” (male, 72, RCA); “My mother loved to speak Dutch but at home we would speak English” (female, 87, CRC); “When people visited my grandparents at our home, they would speak Dutch. It was very apparent to me that my lineage was from the Netherlands and was Dutch” (male, 76, RCA); “Well, whenever my uncle from East Saugatuck came over, all he talked was Dutch” (male, 84, CRC); “My parents always spoke Dutch to each other. So much I couldn’t

even speak English and the teacher came over and said, 'If you don't teach this boy English, he's not going to learn in school'" (male, 79, CRC); "During the early 1930s, my grandfather lived in Zeeland. When we would go there on Sunday we had to go to the Dutch service, we couldn't understand one thing that was going on" (male, 84, RCA); "My husband's parents spoke the English language with a little Dutch twist to it, and that kept us constantly aware of the heritage. Dress also. Very modest, very dark colors" (female, 92, RCA); "My Dad always prayed in Dutch, the Lord's Prayer in Dutch" (male, 79, CRC). In these cases language functions as a reminder and indicator of being Dutch-American, even if the history of one's Dutch background as such is not being part of the theme. Hearing Dutch even occasionally reinforces the notion of being part of a specific culture. This is even more so in cases in which respondents remember Dutch church services in their youth. Some do. "We had an American service in the morning and a Dutch one in the afternoon, but I always went in the morning" (male, 89, CRC); "My mother would go to church where they still had the Dutch language. I can remember that. They had one service of Dutch at that time" (male, 80, CRC); "For years I attended the Dutch service in Prospect Park. The English service was in the morning and the Dutch service in the afternoon. I can still remember words such as *hemel* (heaven) and *aarde* (earth). I liked the Dutch Psalms" (female, 87, CRC). Sometimes it was more indirectly. "Some of the Dutch people wanted to keep the Dutch in their churches. Not my grandfather. He was one that said, 'No. We're here in the United States.' And he could speak Dutch. But he wanted his kids to learn English, and be Americans, not be Dutch" (male, 83, RCA). And memories of Dutch words can pop up unexpectedly: "I went to Amsterdam airport, when I saw the sign above the escalators that said "*Opgepast*" (be careful), that was used everyday in our home" (male, 76, RCA).

All in all, it seems that a strong and much discussed interest in their Dutch origins, in listening to Dutch family stories and Dutch tales, in developing specific Dutch-American cultural practices was not part of the formative years of the present generation of older Dutch-Americans. Apart from Tulip Time, there were no regular Dutch celebrations or Dutch events. The older generation of Dutch-Americans grew up in a fairly homogeneous Dutch community where cultural differences were much more defined along religious than along ethnic lines. Ethnic distinctiveness isn't very meaningful in the absence of ethnic pluralism, but religious "otherness" is. And the (Christian) Reformed Dutch communities and churches in the Holland, Michigan area have certainly had their share of religious differences and separations.³¹

Later Life

A central assumption of generation theories is that common youth experiences, common exposure to major societal events during its formative years, have lasting effects on the life course of generation members.³² These marked experiences set a generation apart from other generations, and imprint the way a generation looks at the world, at itself, and at other generations. Generations differ because they grew up in different social, economic, political, and cultural circumstances that noticeably shaped their attitudes, beliefs, and life chances. These experiences, so to speak,

“stick” to a generation. In this section I want to explore how older Dutch-Americans experienced the way their upbringing—the way they were socialized in basic Dutch-Americans values, norms and mores—has influenced the next stages of their life course. Respondents were asked whether they feel their Dutch-American background and upbringing had an effect on their later way of life, on their beliefs about what is right and wrong, as well as on their beliefs about society and the world.

Do respondents believe that their Dutch-American background had an impact on their adult years, their later life? This clearly is the case. “Oh yes, I think so. Those values were taught when we were young and they sort of stick with you. They stay with you” (female, 84, RCA); “Sure. The work ethic. It is the work ethic’ (male 84, RCA); “I would say so—I mean, you got the same thing they all say, they all say ‘birds of a feather flock together’ and if you’re Dutch, you kind of get together” (male, 80, CRC); “It did, but I think over the years I’ve kind of mellowed out on it somewhat. When we first got married, I was as strict as my parents had been to me” (male, 72, RCA); “Definitely, definitely” (male, 78, RCA); “Oh yes. You listened to your mom and dad, and you thought what they said was the truth. That’s the way it should go” (female, 89, CRC); “You know, I guess I was forty before I ever had a drop of alcohol” (male, 83, RCA); “It did. But I knew I didn’t want to be that strict. I certainly wanted to lower the bars” (female, 73, RCA); “Oh yes, definitely. Such as church attendance, and attitude towards others. You were very careful what kind of work you did, and you were very loyal to whatever work you had to do. You did the best you could” (female, 92, RCA); “Oh, definitely. Well, not to be wasteful. You know, some people throw everything away—well, I’m not. I—what do you say? The expression is, ‘I’m too Dutch to throw it away’” (female, 87, CRC); “Well, when it comes to Sunday observance, I still do prefer to keep it a church and family day, as much as I can. If we do need to make occasional purchases, we do it. But I’d rather not. I’d really prefer not to” (male, 76, RCA).

God’s Been Good to Us

Do older Dutch-Americans also believe that their Dutch-American upbringing has influenced how well they personally have been doing in life? Here, opinions are somewhat more mixed. “I think so, yes. My father brought me up to be a good business man, and treat everybody the way you’d want them to” (male, 89, RCA); “I don’t know. I’m just thankful for what I have” (female, 84, RCA); “Yes I do. There are a lot of people who are just as smart as me, or smarter than me. But I knew how to do the job, bring it to a conclusion. These are all things I learned from my parents, it was just imbedded in me” (male, 84, RCA); “Yes. Honesty. You have to have an honest business, people have to trust you. God’s been so good to us” (female, 74, CRC); “I worked every Saturday, and I was able to pay my school tuition a year ahead. But how much credit can I take for how I have been doing? I didn’t throw it away, but I can’t take all the credit either” (male, 76, CRC); “During my working years, you had the church and you had the Christian school. I always had a job that

paid good, but I didn't get rich at it, you know. It took all the money that we made to live. All of our kids are college graduates, and we helped them a lot" (male, 72, RCA); "Yeah, I think so. Well ... well, I think the Lord has blessed us. We don't just spend recklessly. You try to be honest. I'm sure our upbringing had a lot to do with that" (male, 84, CRC); "Not really. I think that you are who you are. And that is genetic-wise, it is also environment-wise" (male, 79, CRC); "A little bit, right. You're supposed to work hard. But I don't know that you can just claim that it's inbred" (male, 83, RCA); "Oh, sure. We were taught to work. Everyone should have a job" (female, 73, RCA); "My values? Definitely. What shall I say, always integrity for work. You give an honest day's work for anybody, if you're employed by somebody. So, the work ethic. I still have that – I can't get rid of it. Can't get rid of that" (female, 80, RCA). For most respondents there is a relationship between Dutch-American upbringing and being successful in life but not necessarily in a direct way. It sure helps (particularly in the eyes of those that have been successful), but personal talents and situational factors count too.

Still Don't Go Shopping on Sundays

Do older Dutch-Americans feel that their Dutch socialization influenced their personal beliefs about what is right and wrong? Are their moral convictions related to their Dutch upbringing? It seems so, but quite a number of respondents indicate that they have become more lenient and less strict compared to the generation of their parents. "Oh yes. I tried to bring up my family as a good Christian family, and I think that's been successful" (male, 89, RCA); "I'm sure it had a big influence, on most all moral issues. But a couple of drinks does not bother me as long as you do it in moderation. I still have some qualms about going to a baseball game on Sunday, but my parents would have thought I was going right to hell if I told them I did that" (male, 84, RCA); "Very much so. I was brought up with the Ten Commandments. But we know it is difficult to keep them" (female, 80, CRC); "I think we're more, much more accepting of other people, you know, my parents were prejudiced, I felt that, and I try very hard not to be" (female, 74, CRC); "Yeah, but I think some of it wasn't right. I mean, it was too strict, we reach out more" (female, 88, CRC); "Yes, very much so... You see, the American life, where partying and drinking and so on ... I mean, I like a glass of wine, and I'll drink a glass of beer, but I don't misuse it" (male, 80, CRC); "There was definite rights and wrongs. Never what you could slide by with" (male, 76, CRC); "Yeah. I think you can have it pounded into your head, but you still have to have the mind to decipher it: 'I believe this' or 'I don't believe this.' Later in my marriage I started to mellow: the kids were allowed to go to the pool on Sundays and we go out to dinner on Sunday. I changed myself" (male, 72, RCA); "Yeah, I would say. Some of our values change, you know. We do a lot of things today that my folks never did. We go out – we eat out quite a bit" (male, 84, CRC); "Oh yeah. I wouldn't buy anything on Sundays after we were married. We just didn't do that. That's the way we were brought up. We still don't go shopping on Sunday, I wouldn't fill up my gas tank on Sunday. You just don't do that. But on Sunday night after church we go out for coffee. We do that" (male, 78, RCA); "We sometimes go to a restaurant but we never take a boat out on Sunday"

(female, 80, CRC); "I think my upbringing influenced my present beliefs. But I've made my own commitments. That means there's changes, you know" (male, 79, CRC); "Well, we sometimes go eating out on Sunday. My parents never did that. And as far as movies are concerned, it has changed, because I don't think it's wrong to go" (female, 80, RCA); "I think we started eating out on Sunday when we vacationed in Florida. Then it was okay. But shopping on a Sunday, I still don't like that. It doesn't feel good" (female, 88, CRC); "I think society today is going downhill. I really do. They mow the grass on Sunday, plant their flowers on Sunday, go to the beach and swimming on Sunday, think nothing of it" (female, 89, CRC); "Oh yes, definitely. In the way you dress, the places you go, how you treat other people, what you do with what you have, attitudes" (female, 92, RCA); "I'm not as strict anymore. But church itself has changed so much too, you know" (female, 88, CRC); "Yes, yes. I still believe the way I was brought up. Maybe a little bit more liberal with some of our actions. In those days, how many people in the church were educated? It was the pastor. What he said was it. Today, we have much more educated church members. We are allowed to express ourselves with ideas. I think that's healthy" (female, 80, RCA); and an interesting change by the same respondent about inter- and intra-generational differences in emotional self-presentation: "I learned how to show I cared and loved. Be more friendly to people. My husband was a minister. And I told him to be less self-contained, to open up especially to his congregation. 'They are looking to you as their leader. But they also need to know that you love and care for them. You've got to show them.' And he began to loosen up. That was a big change."

The findings show that older Dutch-Americans clearly feel that their personal life course is deeply affected by the values, norms, and beliefs that were characteristic for the upbringing and socialization of their generation. But they changed too. Maybe not radically but they did. The changes have primarily to do with becoming less strict, especially compared to the Sunday observance by the generation of their parents. For most older Dutch-Americans, Sunday restaurant visits are no longer taboo. Compared to the generations of their parents, they have become less rigorous in this respect.

My Parents Were Republican, I'm Republican

The present generation of older Americans is not known for having caused major political controversies with the generation of their parents. In the political arena, intergenerational relationships were generally at ease. That would be quite different for the political relationships between this generation of older Americans and their children, the baby boom generation.³³ Still, it is interesting to see how the older generation of Dutch-Americans frames the political stands of their parents and how these influenced their own political choices.³⁴ Was there a direct influence, and if so in which direction? "I'm a conservative Republican and that comes right from my parents. Oh yeah, we had that hammered in our heads. And of course, we were all businessmen, you know, and the big difference was union/non-union and we got to abhor unions" (male, 84, RCA); "Yeah, it did. They [the parents] could see it coming

just like I see it coming (...) the world's going to pot, you know" (female, 80, CRC); "My Dad was a staunch Republican. Right now I'm unhappy with everybody. I don't like all this wrangling in the government. It seems like everybody wants their own way and they get nowhere" (female, 84, RCA); "We are Republicans. We still are. And our kids are. I do believe that what you were taught sticks with you. You don't change. There's a lot of bad in politics now. I think money buys offices nowadays. I stick with President Bush because I think he's a Christian" (female, 74, CRC); "I'm a Republican but my father was a strong Democrat. You watch your politics, you watch the ones that are running for it, and if they are true Christians, that's the ones that you pick" (male, 80, CRC); "I can get wound up over politics! I used to think I was fully Republican, but I am not so sure today. Our whole government is a mess in the United States. It really is. Invading Iraq? I'm not sure we should have ever gotten there. I'm tickled pink that I don't have kids over there, you know? And I voted twice for George Bush, and I say 'What's he done for me?'" (male, 72, RCA); "My parents were Republican, I'm Republican. I think that's pretty Dutch. That's pretty Dutch. Whole western Michigan is Republican and that's pretty Dutch" (male, 78, RCA); "My father was a strong Democrat. Well, you know, when you were poor, Franklin Roosevelt was the man that changed everybody's mind. But I believe in capitalism, I'm Republican" (male, 79, CRC); "My parents were Republican, no doubt. Some of Dad's proudest moments were bringing Gerry Ford when he was running for Congress to the Holland Furnace Company. I was very conservative when I was young, but I'm less so today. Of course, our current president doesn't help the conservative cause very much. I'm a switch voter" (male, 83, RCA); "Politics? I don't know. I've never been drastically or dramatically drawn in any other direction than what my parents were. Mom and Dad were always Republican. Most of this western Michigan area has always been Republican, yeah. I think I only ever voted for one Democratic president, and that was John Kennedy. I remember feeling guilty about it" (female, 92, RCA); "I think my father was a Democrat. I voted straight Democrat before, sure. But now I don't anymore. You have to know who you're going to, and a lot of times we didn't do that" (female, 85, CRC); "I always vote a split. Split ticket. I look at the person, I look at their credentials, try to figure out their values, and I will vote for that person" (female, 80, RCA); "I vote Republican just as my parents" (female, 73, RCA); "Politics was not a big deal in our family, and I've never taken a strong interest in that. In most of the presidential elections from high school on, I think the Republicans swept this part of the country" (male, 76, RCA); "Being Dutch-American, Reformed or Christian Reformed, and Republican, that's standard equipment in Holland" (male, 72, RCA). The conclusion is rather apparent. Politically, the present generation of older Dutch-Americans does not deviate markedly from the choices of their parents; their preferences are based on values and traditions, and the dominance of the Republican vote is obvious.³⁵ Though there is political discontent as well, the intergenerational stability and continuity of the Dutch-American vote is remarkable.³⁶

Ethnicity and Endogamy: If You Weren't Dutch, You Weren't Much

Endogamy is the tendency to marry within one's group or subculture. Sociologically

seen, in-group marriage strengthens cultural cohesion, regulates group affiliation, facilitates social control and power over group resources, and helps groups and subcultures to survive in demanding environments.³⁷ Groups and subcultures that (directly or indirectly) favor in-group marriage tend to be inner-directed and closed, and are much stronger in bonding than in bridging with the greater society. Marrying within the group allows subcultures to keep the outside world (and its cultural influences) at a distance. Endogamy limits the sensitivity and willingness to innovation and change. For many generations endogamy was pretty much the standard practice in Dutch-American settlements, a practice which enabled them to slow down assimilation and to direct adjustment to mainstream American society. The peculiar linkage of Dutch ethnicity and Reformed religion within these settlements was a major cultural advantage in facilitating in-group marriage. Moreover, endogamous arrangements were rather unproblematic in communities such as Holland, Michigan as they were predominantly Dutch. Though my sample of respondents is far from being representative, it is highly interesting to see that in-group marriage is almost customary among this generation of older Dutch-Americans. Of the twenty respondents that are (or were) married, only one respondent married a non-Dutch partner, and one has a spouse from a mixed Dutch background. In regard to denomination, seventeen out of the twenty-one respondents stayed in the denomination (CRC or RCA) of their parents. The other four changed from either CRC to RCA or vice versa, usually taking the denomination of their spouses after marriage.³⁸ The older generation of Dutch-Americans is fairly homogenous in terms of its ethnic and denominational composition. I asked a sub sample of twelve respondents about the partner and denomination choice of their children. It turns out that (still) a majority of their children married a Dutch-American partner and attends churches in the Reformed tradition. This is particularly true for children that stayed in the Western Michigan area. However, higher education and the geographical mobility that it often brings changes the parameters of ethnic and denominational partner choices.

From a generational point of view, peer group composition is crucial, not only during the formative years of a generation but also later in the life course. What was (and is) the ethnic and religious base of the intimate personal network of our generation of older Dutch-Americans? Were and are most of their close friends Dutch-American too? One should realize that there is only a limited element of choice in this matter. Holland, Michigan was of course rather homogeneous regarding its ethnic composition when the respondents grew up in the 1920s through the 1940s. I first asked respondents whether most of their friends were Dutch-American (say at high school age). "Yes, I would say. At least 85%, especially in this area" (male, 84, RCA); "I would say all of them. All of them" (male, 79, CRC); "Oh, yeah, most of them" (female, 80, CRC); "In this community, I think you'd have to say yes" (female, 92, RCA); "Oh, yeah. Oh, everybody in the school, they were all Christian Reformed, all Dutch, you know" (female, 85, CRC); "Yes, they were. The only difference we had I guess was the Reformed and the Christian Reformed" (male, 89, RCA); "Well, I never went to high school; in the country school, most of them were Dutch" (male, 84, CRC); "I would say so, yeah. Because, you know, nearly

everybody went to church, everyone in school was either Reformed or Christian Reformed" (male, 76, RCA) "Oh, yeah. All of them. And of course, I went to Christian school, so I kind of stood out because I was a Reformed and almost all of my friends were Christian Reformed back then" (male, 72, RCA). The answers reflect that Holland, Michigan during the formative years of this generation was far from being ethnically and religiously diverse: most if not all of your friends were Dutch, Reformed (and) or Christian Reformed.

You Didn't Date a Catholic

Part of an implicit or explicit endogamy strategy is the existence of an informal rule that prompts one to date your "own kind." Was such a rule operative during their years of adolescence when respondents tried their luck on the relationship market? Were they supposed to date Dutch boys and girls only, preferably from their own denomination? This is a somewhat delicate issue - as it is related to ethnocentrism - and here is how respondents reacted. "I think that was generally the case. I don't think anybody thought about it, it just happened" (female, 84, RCA); "I don't know. I think it was more - marry a good Christian" (female, 74, CRC); "Well, we always did date our own kind you know, more or less. We pretty much stuck to the Dutch. Church is all Dutch background (...) and that's where we get them from" (male, 80, CRC); "Kind of. I mean, yeah. 'Well he's not Dutch' that's what they would say, you know. They wanted you to stay in the Dutch area" (female, 87, CRC); "Oh, you know, at that age, I don't think I was aware of that (...) I did go for a person who was a good Christian. And I felt the Dutch people were very good people" (female, 92, RCA); "Certainly, and from our own church too. I married a girl from Reformed church, and my parents [CRC] had real doubts about that. It was almost like marrying a Catholic girl" (male, 84, RCA); "We could date who we wanted. But they had to be church-going kids. Dad said: long as they go to church" (female, 87, CRC); "Basically, yes. I knew a Polish boy, and we liked each other a lot. But I knew he was Polish and Catholic: I knew that my mother might draw the line right there (...) Catholic people were looked down upon in the community, they were somehow going to go to hell" (female, 80, RCA); "I had a boy that asked me to go to a dance, and I told my mother that I was going, and she said, 'Oh, no, you aren't.' And I said, 'Why not?' And she said, 'Because he is Catholic and you are not to date him.' It was that severe" (female, 73, RCA); "Not so much, I think. It was not referred to as 'Dutch,' but we should stay within our religion" (male, 76, CRC); "I would say so. Oh, yes. We were definitely encouraged to do that, yes" (female, 73, RCA); "This was not a big deal in my family, but it certainly was a big deal in families around us" (male, 76, RCA); "That was a big thing. You didn't date a Catholic. Oh, no, no, that's not good. You stayed there" (male, 72, RCA).

It appears, on balance, that the informal rule of dating within your own group was more related to religion than to ethnicity. Being of the (Christian) Reformed faith was more important than being Dutch. But in real life the two were, of course, nearly inseparable. Holland, Michigan in the formative years of this generation of older Dutch-Americans was largely a Dutch community and that - almost by definition -

meant Reformed and Christian Reformed church people. You looked for a (Christian) Reformed boy or girl, you certainly ended up with a Dutch date. The dating market was an ethnic-religious market but the religious component was the thing that really counted.

At later stages in one's life course, personal friends are likely to be more a matter of choice based on experience and preference. Is the ethnic and denominational composition of older Dutch-Americans' current close friends more diverse than during their younger years? I asked them whether most of their present friends are Dutch-Americans. This is how they responded. "I would say most are. We have some that aren't Dutch. Most of our friends are through church and school" (male, 84, CRC); "Yes they are" (female, 73, RCA); "Most of them are Dutch-American" (male, 89, RCA); "All of them. They all are" (male, 79, CRC); "Not all of them, no. I have many friends from other churches. They're not Dutch. But being here in [retirement home], I would say maybe 85% are Dutch" (female, 80, RCA); "Yeah, they're like me" (female, 87, CRC); "Most of them. I would say all of them" (female, 92, RCA); "Most of them, yes. But we have Spanish friends too" (female, 74, CRC); "I would say my close friends here are ... no, they're not all Dutch. But it doesn't matter to me" (female, 84, RCA); "Yes. You're mostly with your own, your church families and so on, kind of stick to them" (male, 80, CRC); "Probably. A lot of my friends are from my own church" (female, 76, CRC); "The majority are" (male, 72, RCA); "Most of them are Dutch, but I have some Spanish friends" (female, 87, CRC); "Yeah, most of them" (female, 88, CRC); "Yes, but not that I would want it to be that way. Many attend the same church" (male, 76, RCA); "Yes. I think it's the church. We're very active in church" (male, 78, RCA). The conclusion is clear: most present close friends of older Dutch-Americans are Dutch-American too. Again, it is not so much a deliberate ethnic choice but friendships are primarily made through the church. Church is the common denominator. Church is where you make your friends. Church is what matters.

The Netherlands

With each next generation, the emotional attachment of Dutch-Americans with the Netherlands became weaker. Even though Dutch-American immigrant culture resisted fast assimilation, economic and social ties with the Netherlands inevitably eroded.³⁹ The same holds for the relationships between the CRC and RCA and their respective denominational counterparts in the Netherlands: the nature and intensity of mutual contacts is quite different now compared to the late nineteenth and early or mid-twentieth century.⁴⁰ The churches grew apart and follow(ed) their own course. The project of gradual and often unconscious Americanization of Dutch immigrants was accompanied by a declining orientation towards Dutch society among subsequent generations. Immigration was not only a physical act but also a psychological and cultural act. Later generations of Dutch immigrants had simply fewer family bonds with the Netherlands. This is especially the case in places like Holland, Michigan that experienced only modest direct immigration from the Netherlands in the (second half of the) twentieth century. One may assume that for

the average Dutch-American whose family has been over in America for several generations and with few relatives in the old country, the psychological attachment to the Netherlands is not very salient. Is there evidence among our sample of older Dutch-Americans that their personal identification with the Netherlands is quite superficial? Is the Netherlands also psychologically a distant country?

The findings show that many respondents still feel a bond with the Netherlands, though indeed a rather unarticulated and loose one. The bond with Dutch society primarily reflects a symbolic relationship, representing the country where one's forefathers came from. "I think I appreciated being there because my family had come from there" (female, 84, RCA); "I think you feel a bit closer than you would with another country. Mainly because you're family with it" (male, 84, CRC); "We feel a special bond, yeah. That's where we're from. That's where we came from" (female, 74, CRC); "I wish I could go there. That's what I always think" (female, 87, CRC); "Yes, I think we do. And I think most people do, of my age" (female, 92, RCA); "Well, my ancestors came from there. They did. And you do have a connection" (female, 85, CRC); "It's just another country because I haven't been connected with it for so many years" (male, 89, RCA); "I do. Yes definitely, because of the people I know. Any chance I get to go back to the Netherlands, I do" (female, 80, RCA); "Well, not just another country, no. I feel kin to it" (female, 87, CRC); "Um, well, just another country" (female, 73, RCA); "I think so. No, I think I do. I feel closer to it than I would to any other country over there" (female, 76, CRC); "To me it is just another country, though we enjoyed going there. We don't have any relatives there" (male, 78, RCA); "Yeah, I have a special bond. Certainly. But if you were to ask me, if I had a free trip to Europe, where would I go? It'd probably be to Italy or Southern France" (male, 83, RCA).

Furthermore, I asked my sample of older Dutch-Americans about the first image that comes to their mind when thinking of the Netherlands. Their primary associations pretty much stay in line with national Dutch folklore: "windmills," "wooden shoes," "tulips," "canals," "dikes," "bicycles," "Amsterdam as city of sin (window prostitutes)," but also a nation that "took a beating from the Nazis and stayed steadfast," "a small and struggling nation," "an extremely small nation that had just remarkable influence at one time or another," and a country that is "falling away religiously." There is also humor: "Years ago I thought they were either Reformed or Christian Reformed in the Netherlands, but then when I went there ..." (male, 76, CRC). Most of these images do not go beyond the standard tourist repertoire of Dutch stereotypes and do not explicitly relate to emigration tales or histories. In thinking about Dutch society, Dutch-Americans do not associate beyond the mainstream American typecast about the Netherlands. About two-thirds of my sample has visited the Netherlands. None of the respondents stays actively in touch with current developments in the Netherlands. It seems, in conclusion, that most older Dutch-Americans do feel a certain attachment to the Netherlands but it is an attachment that remains superficial. It certainly is a positive feeling, but not one that is deeply rooted. Affection with the Netherlands is primarily of a symbolic nature.

The Next Generation and Dutch-American Culture

Discussing the beliefs of the next generation about the significance of preserving Dutch-American culture is important for two reasons. It tells us how distinct the generation of older Dutch-Americans feels they themselves are in this respect. This element of self-attributed distinctiveness is one of the cornerstones of generation theory. But it also tells us about a likely future of Dutch-American culture in the Holland area: will the next generation – in the eyes of the older generation of Dutch-Americans – be involved in keeping up Dutch-American ways and traditions or is conserving Dutch heritage and Dutch culture simply irrelevant to them? This is how the oldest generation of Dutch-Americans thinks about the feelings of the youngest generation about having a Dutch background. Are those feelings different from their own? “I think so. I don’t think it means as much to them as it did to us” (male, 89, RCA); “Yes. They think nothing of going to the movies on Sundays, planning big beach parties, and having things like that we wouldn’t have thought of doing (...) I think they’re not as faithful as they should be;” “Yes, they’re getting more Americanized as they go along. I don’t think they’re interested at all (...) they’re interested in the church, but not in their Dutch background” (male, 80, CRC); “I think there’s a mixture there, some say ‘Well, I’m not going to worry about that’ and others say ‘Hey, we should preserve some of these heritage things’” (male, 76, CRC); “Yeah, I don’t think it’s as important to them as it was to us, growing up. I think they just wash it aside, you know, they don’t pay attention to that. We were reminded. Dutch heritage back then was a pretty important part of our lives. Today it isn’t. A lot of that comes from the parents themselves, today. Me included” (male, 72, RCA); “Well, yeah. The things they do on Sundays isn’t necessary. To begin with, most of them don’t speak Dutch or understand Dutch. And, they go to high school and college, and nationality doesn’t enter a lot of times” (male, 84, CRC); “I don’t think they put that much emphasis on the Dutch background as I do. We in our generation, were always thinking of getting ahead. Money was the thing. Nowadays students are thinking how can we help the society” (male, 79, CRC); “I don’t think they see any importance. I feel kind of sad that they don’t” (female, 89, CRC); “I think so. Of course, we aren’t as homogeneous a group as we used to be, we’ve been leavened quite well. I think this Tulip Time is kind of a good thing, keeps them reminded of their Dutch background” (male, 83, RCA); “They do not hold much to it. It’s not important to them, no. The world has become so small, we’re in touch with all kind of nationalities. They look to the world as the world. We never talk about being Dutch anymore” (female, 92, RCA); “I think so. The farther away you get, the less inclination you have towards thinking Dutch, or thinking about the Dutch” (female, 73, RCA); “No. I don’t think so. Well, it’s because it is so mixed now” (female, 88, CRC).

The conclusion appears rather obvious: older Dutch-Americans believe that the younger generation is much less conscious of being Dutch than they were; it is simply irrelevant to them. The older generation clearly feels they are different from the youngest generation as far as the saliency of Dutch culture and identity is concerned. But what about their own children and grandchildren? Does the same

conclusion apply here too? So it seems. "No, no. They don't talk about that much. It means more to me" (female, 87, CRC); "A little, I think a little bit different, but not much. I don't think that they bring it up as often as I did" (male, 89, RCA); "Oh yeah, my daughter she's really big into it, but I don't see the rest of them ..." (male, 72, RCA); "Well, I don't know, because they don't talk about it. It's just not the thing to do today. I mean, maybe they realize they're Dutch-American; that's about it" (female, 85, CRC); "Sometimes I bring up a little something, how, when we were kids, how we did things, but ...no, they're not interested. Grandma better just be quiet. Yeah, I wish they would take more interest in their heritage" (female, 87, CRC); "I don't think they have a clue" (male, 79, CRC); "I don't think it's a big deal, no" (female, 76, CRC); "No, I don't think so, but that's the way things go" (male, 84, CRC); "My children, they're Americans. The Dutch means nothing" (male, 84, RCA). But self-criticism applies, too: "I don't know that I communicated Dutch heritage to my kids. I guess I just felt so American, and so part of this country. I think I never told stories about the few things I know of my ancestors. I think that a lot gets lost in each generation in terms of communicating the past, unless you really work hard at it" (male, 76, RCA).

The conclusion is straightforward: according to the older generation of Dutch-Americans their children and grandchildren are hardly or not interested in their Dutch ethnic background and heritage. Ethnicity, in their eyes, seems to have reached the stage of irrelevance. What is the implication of this indifferent ethnic psychological climate for the future of Dutch-American culture? That is the subject of the next section, which reports the final phase of this study.

The Future of Dutch-American Culture

The Holland community is rapidly changing. Once an almost mono-cultural Dutch enclave, Holland is quickly turning into a multi-cultural community, which along with a still substantial Dutch population has a significant number of Hispanic and Asian inhabitants as well. More than one out of three Holland residents is Hispanic, and about fifty percent of the population of Holland under the age of 18 is Hispanic.⁴¹ Combined with the fact that many of my respondents stated that the next generation of Dutch-Americans is less interested in their Dutch heritage and their ethnic background, the cultural psychology of Holland will change considerably. Holland will be less Dutch. Holland will literally be more colorful. How do older Dutch-Americans feel about these developments and changes? Do they fear that Dutch-American culture will gradually fade away and even vanish or do they think that somehow Holland will remain Dutch? How will the future look? Here is what older Dutch-Americans believe about what will happen to their community and its Dutch character. "I don't think it's going to totally fade away. It's diminishing though, we're becoming more of a melting pot. We used to be a Dutch community, but we're not anymore. We have Hispanics, we have Asians, we have blacks ... It's okay! I don't think you can live in your own little world. But there is not a lot of interaction between the groups" (male, 89, RCA); "It's going downhill. That's my feelings" (male, 80, CRC); "It will be gone. I think it will be gone. One more

generation (...) I think that's kind of sad, there's something to heritage" (male, 72, RCA); "Yes, because there's a lot of Spanish here, and none of that when I went to school (...) I don't really think most of us are real happy about it. I mean, that's not very nice to say, I guess, but ... because, it's changed Holland, and we don't like that kind of change" (female, 76, CRC); "I really feel, maybe twenty years from now, they'll hardly remember that this was a Dutch community (...) It will gradually be gone. It's sad. It's very sad" (female, 87, CRC); "I personally do not feel sad about it. But some people are very irritated about that (...) In our day and age, we've got to be acceptable of other people. Learn more about them. Holland has done a good job of that, we have not pushed them out. That's part of our Dutch heritage" (female, 92, RCA); "It will come back, at a certain time in your life, ancestors mean a lot to you. It did to me" (female, 85, CRC); "I think that eventually it will fade away, because of the openness of our society, and the people get around and move in and out. I think it is inevitable. It's going to happen but maybe more slowly than if you're in, maybe other places" (female, 80, RCA); "I hope not. I wouldn't like to see that. But we try to be hospitable. We try to be friendly. Their lifestyles are just different" (female, 73, RCA); "No I am not really sorry. Well, I'd rather stick to our limits you know. Holland's changed just enormously. I work at the hospital delivering flowers, and the number of Spanish babies far outnumbers the Caucasians" (female, 88, CRC); "I see it happening ... Well, people aren't neat and clean like they used to be, they don't have regard for the Sabbath day, or for the church. I can see it dropping away. I feel very sorry about that (...) The Dutch are dying, they're dying, there are a lot less Dutch here than what used to be" (female, 87, CRC); "I think it'll fade away. I think so... I think it is just the way things go. It doesn't bother me so much" (male, 76, RCA).

It is interesting to note that a number of respondents indicate that the Tulip Festival is important in keeping Dutch culture alive. "Our Tulip Festival is what really keeps us with the Dutch. That would be a big change, if it wouldn't be there. I think it would just fade away if we didn't have it" (male, 78, RCA); "Well, it will change, but there'll be a remnant of it left here. They have Tulip Time, and I think they do a terrific job" (male, 79, CRC); "It depends on how they maintain Tulip Time and the attractions they have here. Are we going to continue growing that many tulips that we do? And also, the wooden-shoe makers, you know, if that all continues, that will be something" (female, 80, RCA). These observations on Tulip Time are interesting, because they indicate that when the original cultural expressions of being Dutch disappear, the tourist representations and manifestations of these expressions become much more central to the survival of Dutch culture. Not the culture itself but its portrayal is what is important.⁴² Real culture is replaced by symbolic or portrayed culture.

Respondents are clearly aware of the demographic and social changes that are taking place in Holland and its impact on Dutch-American culture. The Dutch ways and customs will become less prominent and many respondents believe that eventually Dutch culture will fade away. And many respondents feel sad about it, as it regards their culture, their identity, and their heritage. But some take a more matter-of-fact

stand: that is the way things go. The Tulip Festival is seen as a vital and necessary contribution to keep Dutch culture alive. But all agree that Holland is changing, rapidly changing.

Discussion and Conclusion

This study showed the relevance of researching the formative experiences and youth memories of older Calvinist Dutch-Americans with respect to the shaping of their ethnic-religious identity. Given the current replacement of this generation, time is simply running out for tapping their experiences and memories. The study also showed that an oral history approach is very useful in picturing a generation's cultural self-understanding, their formative years, and the way their upbringing influenced their life course. Combining generational theory and the methodology of oral history opens very promising interdisciplinary perspectives.

The findings indicate that the present generation of older Calvinist Dutch-Americans feels that they were clearly socialized in what it means to be Dutch-American, i.e. in Dutch-American values and norms. Key words include Christian lifestyle, church involvement, pronounced work ethic, strong family values, and cleanliness. Particularly the Depression was a major event in the biographical history of this generation, an event that has markedly influenced the life course and the societal outlooks of its members. They feel, in line with classic generation theory, that their cohort is quite special in this manner and different from later (i.e. younger) generations. It is also clear, that their experiences and memories reflect attachment and affection. Older Dutch-Americans cherish their Dutch-American upbringing, and treasure their Dutchness – even if only symbolically.

Of the two basic ingredients of their cultural identity – Dutch descent and Reformed religion – faith is far more important than ethnicity. Though historically these two factors are obviously interlinked, being of the (Christian) Reformed faith is much more determining for the cultural self-understanding of older Dutch-Americans than being of Dutch extraction. In this sense they are not double Dutch. Their Dutch descent is literally a thing of the past; their faith and religion are things of the present and the future. As already indicated, Krabbendam points to an interesting underlying cultural paradox: the stronger the religious identity of an immigrant group, the less it needed an explicit national or ethnic identity.⁴³ The Dutch roots of Calvinist Dutch-Americans help to explain their historic genesis but their Reformed faith, religion, and churches justify their cultural identity and existential consciousness.

Still, being Dutch is important to older Dutch-Americans, though their *Dutch* identity generally is quite superficial. The “Dutch” cultural folklore (tulips, windmills, wooden shoes) exhibited in Dutch colonies such as Holland, Michigan and Pella, Iowa may be seen as illustrative. But I think it is necessary to go beyond this observation of mere ethnic superficiality by pointing to the phenomenon that Herbert Gans has labeled “symbolic ethnicity.”⁴⁴ This form of ethnic identification,

Gans writes, “[i]s characterized by a nostalgic allegiance to the culture of the immigrant generation, or that of the old country; a love for and a pride in a tradition that can be felt without having to be incorporated into everyday behavior.”⁴⁵ Many of the ethnic symbols and signs used by later generations of American immigrants are re-invented in the American context and blended with American ideals, codes, and traditions.⁴⁶ Old and new cultural expressions are combined, leading to novel cultural manifestations. In the words of Pieter Stokvis, “it is a ‘hyphenated’ culture marked by an ambivalent identity.”⁴⁷ Contemporary Dutch-American culture may first seem stereotyped, folklorized, and trivialized in its expressions of being Dutch, but on further thought they function as cultural reinforcers of *Dutchness* – of Dutch identity – within the *American* context. These ethnic expressions strengthen Dutch consciousness and cultural cohesion and as such are instrumental to the preservation of Dutch-American culture.⁴⁸ Many respondents feel and fear that Dutch-American culture will fade away, and to a large extent that will be the case. But new cultural manifestations do and will take form. Contemporary Dutch ethnic expressions reflect the way Dutch-American culture has assimilated into mainstream American culture. These expressions are cultural markers of what Dutch identity means in modern American society, more than one-and-a-half century after immigrant pioneers Van Raalte, Scholte, and their followers set foot on American soil. Each new generation of Dutch-Americans will stew their own Dutch morsels in the American melting pot. This is precisely why the intergenerational study of Dutch-American ethnic and cultural expressions is such a fascinating subject.

¹ L. Dinnerstein and D.M. Reimers, *Ethnic Americans: A History of Immigration*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999).

² P.R.D Stokvis, “Ethnicity in the American Context: The Case of Dutch Calvinists,” in *Roots and Rituals: The Construction of Ethnic Identities*, eds. T. Dekker, J. Helsloot, and C. Wijers (Amsterdam: Het Spinhuis, 2000), 420.

³ See, e.g., H. Krabbendam, *Vrijheid in het verschiet. Nederlandse emigratie naar Amerika 1840-1940* (Hilversum: Uitgeverij Verloren, 2006); R.P. Swierenga, *Faith and Family: Dutch Immigration and Settlement in the United States, 1820-1920* (New York/London: Holmes & Meier, 2000); and J. Van Hinte, *Netherlanders in America: A Study of Emigration and Settlement in the 19th and 20th Centuries in the United States of America*, ed. R. P. Swierenga, trans. A. de Wit (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1985).

⁴ P. Ester, “Still Bowling Together: Social Capital of Dutch Protestant Immigrant Groups in North America” in *Morsels in the Melting Pot: The Persistence of Dutch Immigrant Communities in North America*, eds. G. Harinck and H. Krabbendam (Amsterdam: VU University Press, 2006), 21-32; and “Religion and Social Capital Bonding and Bridging in Dutch-American Calvinist Communities: A Review and Research Agenda” in *Dutch Immigrants on the Plains*, eds. P. Fessler, H. R. Krygsman & R. P. Swierenga (Holland: The Joint Archives of Holland, Hope College, 2006), 181-196.

⁵ And even more so among CRC than among RCA churches, a tendency that holds for many cultural innovations and adaptations. See Krabbendam, *Vrijheid in het verschiet*.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 283-301.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 207-230. See also J. Daan, *Ik was te bissie. Nederlanders en hun taal in de Verenigde Staten* (Zutphen: Walburg Pers, 1987) and R.P. Swierenga, *Dutch Chicago: A History of the Hollanders in the Windy City* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002).

⁸ Krabbendam, “Dutch-American Identity Politics: The Use of History by Dutch Immigrants,” Inaugural lecture, Visiting Research Fellows Program, Van Raalte Institute, Hope College (September 18, 2003), 17.

⁹ Stokvis, "Ethnicity in the American Context." See also F.J. Schryer, *The Netherlandic Presence in Ontario* (Waterloo: Wilfried Laurier University Press, 1998).

¹⁰ Stokvis, "Ethnicity in the American Context," 418. See also S. Sinke, "Tulips Are Blooming in Holland, Michigan: Analysis of a Dutch-American Festival," in *Immigration and Ethnicity* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1992), 3-14.

¹¹ The adjective "direct" should be emphasized here. We do have rather rich collections of letters written by various generations of Dutch immigrants to their family back home. But these are chronicled experiences that unlike living respondents cannot be re-questioned. See e.g. H.J. Brinks (ed.), *Dutch American Voices: Letters from the United States, 1850-1930* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995); H.S. Lucas, *Dutch Immigrant Memoirs and Related Works* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1955; repr. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997); J. Stellingwerff and R. P. Swierenga (ed.), *Iowa letters: Dutch immigrants on the American Frontier*, trans. W. Lagerwey (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004).

¹² See B.S. Elliott, D.A. Gerber, & S.M. Sinke (eds.), *Letters Across Borders: The Personal Correspondence of International Migrants* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2006); D. Fitzpatrick, *Oceans of Consolation: Personal Accounts of Irish Migration to Australia* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1994); D.A. Gerber, *Authors of Their Own Lives: Personal Correspondence in the Lives of Nineteenth Century British Immigrants to the United States* (New York: New York University Press, 2006); W.D. Kamphoefner, W.D., W. Helbich, & U. Sommer, *News from the Land of Freedom: German Immigrants Writing Home*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991).

¹³ *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000).

¹⁴ See also P. Ester & H. Vinken, "Debating Civil Society," *International Sociology*, 18 (2003), 659-680.

¹⁵ Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 251.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 254.

¹⁷ Putnam labels this cohort as the "long civic generation," *Ibid.*, 254.

¹⁸ See J.D. Bratt, *Dutch Calvinism in Modern America: A History of a Conservative Subculture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984); E.J. Bruins, *The Americanization of a Congregation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995); G. Dekker, D. A. Luidens, & R.R. Rice (Eds.), *Rethinking Secularization: Reformed Reactions to Modernity* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1997); R.P. Swierenga, "Walls or Bridges? Acculturation Processes in the Reformed and Christian Reformed Churches in North America," in *Morsels in the Melting Pot*, 33-42.

¹⁹ K. Mannheim, "Das Problem der Generationen," *Kölner Vierteljahresheft für Soziologie*, 1928/1929, 7, 157-185, 309-330.

(1928/1929; 1952) José Ortega y Gasset was a second very influential generation thinker who argued that generation "is the most important conception in history" *The Modern Theme* (New York: Norton, 1933), 15.

²⁰ C. Wright Mills, *The Sociological Imagination* (London and New York: The Oxford University Press, 1959).

²¹ It has to be noted that Holland's demographic composition is rapidly changing. According to the US Census 2000, about one-third of the population of Holland is now Hispanic.

²² For historical and current information on these local churches see E.J. Bruins, *The Americanization of a Congregation*, 2d. ed., (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995) on the history of Third Church; M. De Vries & H. Boonstr, *Pillar Church in the Van Raalte Era* (Holland: Pillar Christian Reformed Church, 2003) on Pillar church; and J.D. Nyenhuis, *Centennial History of the Fourteenth Street Christian Reformed Church, Holland, Michigan 1902-2002* (published privately by 14th street CRC in 2002).

²³ For a recent (survey research based) overview of differences and similarities between these two Reformed denominations see C. Smidt, D. Luidens, J. Penning, & R. Nemeth, *Divided By a Common Heritage: The Christian Reformed Church and the Reformed Church in America at the Beginning of a New Millennium* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006).

²⁴ A copy of the questionnaire can be obtained from the author.

²⁵ Full transcripts were made of each interview, using Express Scribe software recommended by the British Library Sound Archive (www.bl.uk/nsa). Many thanks to Rob Perks, Oral History Department, British Library for his practical suggestions. I asked respondents for their permission to tape the interview. None of them objected.

²⁶ See V. Raleigh Yow, *Recording Oral History: A Guide for the Humanities and Social Sciences*, 2d ed. (Walnut Creek: Alta Mira Press, 2005); D.A. Ritchie, *Doing Oral History: A Practical Guide*, 2d ed. (London and New York: Oxford University Press 2003); P. Thompson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History*, 3rd ed. (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

²⁷ Ibid., 208.

²⁸ The repeatedly observed emphasis on the importance of “clean” and “cleanliness” is remarkable. It needs further research beyond the scope of this project to examine whether this emphasis merely reflects a neat fetish or is also (almost psychoanalytically) related to more theological doctrines of “being pure” and living a “pure life” or even to ethnocentric notions of keeping the community free of outside influences.

²⁹ Many of those values will be found among older non-Dutch-Americans as well, they are not unique features of older Dutch-Americans only. But that is not so much the argument here. Important is that my sample of older Dutch-Americans feels that those values are typical for *their* generation of Dutch-Americans.

³⁰ Bratt, *Dutch Calvinism in Modern America*, 220.

³¹ See R. P. Swierenga & E. Bruins, *Family Quarrels in the Dutch Reformed Churches in the Nineteenth Century* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999).

³² See I. Diepstraten, P. Ester, & H. Vinken, *Mijn generatie. Zelfbeelden, jeugdervaringen en lotgevallen van generaties in de twintigste eeuw* (Tilburg: Syntax Publishers, 1999).

³³ See Putnam, *Bowling Alone*; A. Van den Broek, *Politics and Generations* (Tilburg: Tilburg University Press, 1996).

³⁴ See Krabbendam, *Vrijheid in het verschiet*, for a historical analysis of party preferences of Dutch immigrants and their early shift from the Democratic Party to the Republican Party.

³⁵ According to an investigation by the *Grand Rapids Press* (October 31, 2004), Ottawa County—in which Holland is situated—“arguably one of the most conservative counties in the nation (...) has not voted for a Democrat for president since the time of Abraham Lincoln.”

³⁶ It has to be emphasized that in this study I am dealing with Dutch-Americans who spent most of their adult life in Holland, Michigan. It would be highly interesting to contrast my findings with a sample of Dutch-Americans who grew up in Holland (and in the two main Reformed Churches) but left (for various reasons) and spent their later life elsewhere or who left their childhood church and switched to another congregation or denomination.

³⁷ See R. Shonle Cavan, “Concepts and Terminology in Interreligious Marriage,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 9 (1970), 311-320; H.D. Van Leeuwen, ed., *Marriage Choices and Class Boundaries: Social Endogamy in History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

³⁸ Two respondents shifted from CRC to RCA and two from RCA to CRC.

³⁹ See Krabbendam, *Vrijheid in het verschiet*, 283-301.

⁴⁰ See Bratt, *Dutch Calvinism in Modern America*; H. Zwaanstra, *Reformed Thought and Experience in a New World: A Study of the Christian Reformed Church and its American Environment: 1890-1918* (Kampen: Kok, 1973).

⁴¹ *Holland Sentinel* (June 3, 2006).

⁴² This is what is happening to Amish culture, for instance. See P. Ester, *De stillen op het land. Portret van de Amish-gemeenschap in Amerika* (Kampen: Agora, 2001); John Urry, *The Tourist Gaze* (London: Sage Publications, 1990).

⁴³ Krabbendam, *Vrijheid in het verschiet*, 296.

⁴⁴ H.J. Gans, ed., *On the Making of Americans: Essays in Honor of David Riesman* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1979); H.J. Gans, “Symbolic Ethnicity: The Future of Ethnic Groups and Cultures in America,” in *Theories of Ethnicity: A Classical Reader*, ed. by W. Sollors (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 425-459.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 436.

⁴⁶ O. Handlin has argued that many immigrants groups had a weakly developed national identity in their country of origin, and only after they settled in America they acquired a sense of national consciousness. See *The Uprooted: The Epic Story of the Great Migrations That Made the American people*, 2d ed. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002).

⁴⁷ Stokvis, “Ethnicity in the American Context,” 418.

⁴⁸ In a broader sense, D. MacCanell speaks about “staged authenticity.” See “Staged Authenticity: Arrangements of Social Space in Tourist Settings,” *American Journal of Sociology*, 79 (1973): 589-603.

Homogeneity: Safe or Profane?

The Journey Toward the True Self: A Study of Genesis 11:1-9

Tiffany Houck-Loomis

Genesis 11:1-9 contains the story of the Tower of Babel. In it all the people of the world speak one language. A community traveling from the east decides to build a city and erect a tower on the plains of Shinar in order to make a name for itself and to prevent its dispersion throughout the whole earth. God comes down to see the city and the tower that the people have been building. God's response to the people's action is to confuse their language and scatter them all over the earth.

Traditional interpretation of this text rests on a pride/punishment paradigm, according to which God's response is an act of judgment on the people for attempting to usurp God's dwelling place. I argue that this is a morally destructive interpretation, one that perpetuates the fear of, and inhibits deep communion with, those different from oneself. The new understanding I propose is derived from the hypothesis that the text of Genesis 11:1-9 was constructed by the postexilic as a means of understanding God's true purpose in the exile.¹ The used this story to articulate to the postexilic Israelite community the positive work of God through the trauma of the exile. I show how a fresh exegetical look at Genesis 11:1-9, combined with a psychological analysis both of the community in the text and the community of scholarship responsible for the traditional interpretation of this text, can uncover a way for a morally constructive approach to this passage. I conclude by showing that such an approach is needed to counteract the fear, anxiety, and the unhealthy homogeneity within our faith communities today.

Genesis 11:1-9: A Translation

1 Now in all of the earth there was one language and one speech.

2 And when they journeyed from the east and found a plain in the land of Shinar, there they settled down.

3 And each one said to their companion, "Come, let us make bricks² and burn them" and there was to them the brick for stone and asphalt for mortar.

4 And they said, "Come! Let us build a city for ourselves and a tower³ with its top in the skies and let us make a name for ourselves lest we be scattered upon the face of all the earth.

5 And YHWH came down to see the city and the tower, which the human beings had made.

6 And YHWH said, "Behold, one people and one language⁴ to all of them. And this is defiling⁵ of that which they are making. Now nothing will be withheld from them about which they propose to make.

7Come! Let us⁶ go down there and let us mix⁷ their language so that each one will not hear the language of their companion.

8YHWH scattered them from there upon the face of all the land and they ceased building the city.

9Therefore its name is called "Babel,"⁸ because there YHWH mingled the language of all the land and from there YHWH scattered them upon the face of all the earth.

Genesis 11:1-9: Traditional Scholarship and a Case for Re-interpretation

Much of what constitutes the general theology of those who attend church on Sunday morning has been derived from older scholarship on key biblical texts characterized by the work of Herman Gunkel, U. Cassuto, E.A. Speiser, and Nahum M. Sarna.⁹ The work of Theodore Hiebert provides a comprehensive outline of the history of interpretation of Genesis 11:1-9, in which he shows the influence of the Pseudepigraphic texts of *Jubilees* and *Sibylline Oracles* on early Jewish scholarship.¹⁰ This scholarship in turn influenced the early church fathers (Philo, Augustine, Jerome), as well as the reformers Luther and Calvin, thus setting the paradigm of exegesis for centuries.

The traditional scholarship on Genesis 11:1-9 argues that this text originated from the Yahwist source documents and is rooted in the assumption of hubris present in the people wandering from the east. This hubris, evident in their attempt to build a tower to storm the heavens and approach God's dwelling, leads to severe punishment. Thus the confusion of languages and dispersion upon the earth are understood as punishment for the pride of this people. But is human pride what is at issue in this text?

There is wide consensus in both traditional and recent scholarship that the people have a twofold desire to settle down and to make a name for themselves.¹¹ And recent scholarship for the most part agrees that this first desire is born out of fear of being scattered upon the entire face of the earth.¹² Now the second desire to make a name for themselves can be understood as prideful desire for fame and glory, as traditional scholarship has maintained. But it could also stem from the human need for security and a bounded identity. If we presuppose the perspective of the postexilic community, it is possible to see the story as a way of retelling the journey of the exile. A community that sought unity through homogeneity is scattered by God by means of the exile, to fulfill God's mandate while still remaining God's chosen people. The story of exile then is about God's purposeful actions, actions by which God enables this community to live out God's mandate, rather than the harsh actions of abandonment and destruction likely felt by this community's members. A closer examination of the literary structure of the text, attending to its lexical and grammatical nuances, will serve to confirm this re-interpretation.

David W. Cotter argues this text is more easily understood when analyzed as a concentric diagram—indicating that what humanity has sought to do, God undoes.¹³

- A. v.1: all the earth was of one language
- B. v.2: there
- C. v.3: and they said to one another
- D. v.3: let us make bricks
- E. v.4: let us build for ourselves
- F. v.4: a city and a tower
- X. v.5: YHWH came down to see
- E. v.5: that which the people had built
- D. v.7: come ... let us confuse
- C.v.7: so that they will not understand each other's speech
- B. vv.8,9: from there
- A. v.9: the language of all the earth.¹⁴

I find this concentric diagram helpful but not without limitations. While I agree that this passage is better understood in a concentric pattern to show the human-divine interplay, I believe that the pattern can illuminate that what humanity has sought to do, God reconciles and makes right, thus indicating God's ultimate grace and provision to the postexilic community. Cotter does not see this because he omits v. 6 entirely from his structure. For him the turning point is v. 5 where YHWH comes down to see what the people have built. According to Cotter, YHWH is provoked to come down because the people, rather than fulfilling God's command to fill the earth, sought to challenge their human finiteness and "approach God's own dwelling," a reading which remains consistent with traditional scholarship.¹⁵ But in order to maintain this pride/punishment motif, Cotter has to leave out v. 6 entirely. A more complete concentric or chiasmic structure in which this verse 6 included appears as follows.¹⁶

- A. v.1: all the earth was of one language
- B. v.2: there
- C. v.3: and they said to one another
- D. v.3: let us make bricks
- E. v.4: let us build for ourselves lest we be scattered
- F. v.5: YHWH came down to see
- X. v.6: YHWH saw one people and this was *defiling* what they were making
- F. v.7: come ... let us go down there
- E. v.7: let us mix their language
- D. v.8: they left off building the city
- C. v.7: so that they will not hear one another
- B. v.8: from there YHWH scattered
- A. v.9: YHWH mixed the language of all the earth.

This version of the concentric diagram highlights how God comes down to look at the community and sees first one people with one language and pronounces *this* condition

as defiling or profaning their accomplishments. The emphasis then is not on the accomplishments but on the manner in which they have carried them out. This reading turns on the peculiar form of the Hebrew word *haHilläm* in v.6. This word has consistently been translated as “beginning.” However, a more accurate translation is “to defile, profane, or dilute.” If we accept this alternative translation, we can begin to wrestle with the deeper human problem at work in this story – the problem of homogeneity, the desire for which, as I will argue, stems from fear and anxiety. It is this desire that causes the members of this community to find comfort and security in the sameness of their neighbor, ultimately leading them to profane what they set out to accomplish.

Why would this community’s homogeneity profane or defile their accomplishments? God’s mandate in Genesis 1, a text found in the Priestly source material, is for humankind to scatter upon the entire face of the earth, to be fruitful and multiply. It is impossible to scatter upon the face of the earth if you seek to stay close to your own. Scattering would insure diversity, plurality, and a mixture of cultures and languages. God commands this community to scatter upon the face of the earth, but it has sought desperately to remain intact, refusing to scatter, “*lest we be scattered*” (v. 4). Their homogeneity has defiled the product of its labor because what its members have been making is a way to protect themselves out of fear of living the blessing God has for them. Any community intent on maintaining its homogeneity rather than seeking ways to mix, mingle, reconcile, and build alliances with those different from it is in danger of exploiting and oppressing those unlike it in its midst. In this perspective, the community is in essence laying the groundwork for oppression. And this has defiled what this community sought to accomplish on its own.

As God mixes the language, the members of this community begin to hear the tongue of others. It was in this experience that the Israelite community was able to glean meaning from the exile. As we know today, language is vital for building relationships and alliances with those who are not the same as we are. In the “confusion” of tongues, God gave this community the gift of language. By mixing the languages within their homogeneous community, God offered them the possibility of communicating with outsiders, those against whom they had originally been protecting themselves. God’s “forced integration,” though not understood during the exile, could serve as a way to explain the exile to future generations.

Instead of seeing this as a story of punishment, then, where “Yahweh came down to destroy human unity once and for all,” we can understand it as an act of creation. This way of seeing moves the text from a place of disgrace to a place of grace, from a place of God’s abandonment to a place of God’s ordination.¹⁷ Babel is now a place where God mixed, God created, God made something new, God moved. Traditional exegetes would have the “Tower of Babel” serve as an object lesson whose purpose is to warn humanity against the temptation of pride and arrogance; this new understanding can

allow the “Tower of Babel” story to remind us of God’s presence and direction, and God’s ultimate creativity, love and grace.

The Psychosocial Implications of Human Development found in Genesis 11:1-9

It is not surprising that early interpreters and even modern churches have been resistant to the preceding interpretation. A pride/punishment paradigm is much easier to understand and quite honestly leads us to ask fewer questions. We are given a defined code to live by: do not seek to trump God or you will invite severe and potentially life-threatening punishment.

Those in positions of power have most consistently throughout our history been the ones to interpret the Bible to us. For this reason, little reading has been done in the style of *as if*.¹⁸ *As if* reading causes us to get into the shoes of the other long enough to read about how any given text would speak to those not mentioned, or to those who are the victims of oppression within the text. *As if* reading attunes us to other quiet nuances missed by those who live with a sense of privilege. “To read the Bible with such intention means that we must face up to our habits of reading that have been shaped by the ethos and ethics of ordinary and academic life.”¹⁹ It is precisely the lack of this kind of intention that has allowed us to overlook the crux of Genesis 11:1-9. Until we read this passage *as if* lives depended on it, the lives of those who have been the victims of unconscious oppression resulting from the internalized belief that diversity, variety, plurality, and difference was God’s punishment, we are able to escape our responsibility to our other. Once we begin reading the Bible *as if*, we overcome the tendency to gloss over intricate details that may challenge years of traditional scholarship.

The inability to read *as if* stems from a deeper issue, the issue of self-differentiation. Because scholars have been unable to differentiate from their academic system or perhaps even from their own cultural system, they have missed nuances within biblical texts that can lead to new ways of thinking about God and community as represented in the Bible. Ironically, it is this very issue of self-differentiation, and the inability to do so, that is at the heart of the inability of the community in Genesis 11:1-9 to fulfill God’s creational mandate.

The Community of Genesis 11:1-9: A Model For Introducing Family Systems Theory

To expound on the concept of differentiation and its pervasive effects on our being and the systems within which we live, I propose to use the story in Genesis 11:1-9 as a model for introducing Family Systems Theory (FST), a psychological theory introduced by Murray Bowen.²⁰ FST suggests that when a family has the appearance of extreme togetherness, as the community in our story portrays, it is often due to their emotional “stuck-togetherness.”²¹ The community, which sought to settle down in the plain,

apparently had no dissenters in their mix, creating the illusion of complete harmony. However, often the reality within that system is not so harmonious. Individuals within the system learn to function to maintain the stable functioning of the other members, a pattern of behavior which results in an almost incapacitating anxiety. In such systems, if one member seeks to make an adjustment, the other members become destabilized and have to compensate in order to restore harmony or equilibrium.²²

It is possible that at the time Genesis 11:1-9 was constructed, members of the postexilic community were in danger of becoming deeply enmeshed with each another, due to the trauma of the exile and the loss of identity which inevitably stemmed from it. The story suggests that there was not one person among them willing to challenge the group decision to settle down, although all were presumably aware of the original mandate to be fruitful and multiply. Perhaps those who composed this story were realizing the unity they had strived for and in some ways maintained, at least for a while, was not an actualized, differentiated, healthy unity, but an enmeshed, entangled, and anxious unity. In this perspective, the story serves as a warning, not against striving for excellence in production, but against striving for homogeneous unity as a means to remain protected from being scattered and mingling with the other.

The Community of Genesis 11:1-9 Under Psychoanalysis

We can further illuminate the situation of the community by viewing it from the perspective that psychoanalysis affords on child development. The psychoanalyst Heinz Kohut discusses the development of self in regard to the needs of infants and toddlers from ages 1-3. In this early developmental stage, there is need for an attuned caregiver to provide the necessary components of self-development, components which enable the child to see herself reflected back to her, to develop a strong ego as a safe place in which to begin to find her own self.²³ Without these vital components, the child is in danger of developing a fragmented self. A fragmented self has no benchmark; it is a self that has no way of knowing or gauging her existence and actions on her own; therefore, she must be parasitic on others in order to construct her reality. A fragmented self leaves a child stunted in her ability to know herself and maintain healthy relationships with others until she is able to seek therapeutic attention. Often this fragmentation breeds extreme internal anxiety, which can have many negative consequences, one of which is the inability to emotionally differentiate from family, relationships, or cultural systems to which she has attached to assuage the loss and anxiety felt from lacking a healthy whole self.²⁴

It is possible that the postexilic community responsible for constructing our story has experienced spiritual and psychological stunting. We can only imagine that the trauma of the exile and its repercussions – of having to adopt foreign ways of living and worshiping in order to survive in exile – must have had enormous impact on the psychosocial development of the members of this community.

It is also possible that the priestly community was acting out their own internalized fear, seen more clearly now from the other side. Experiences of such devastating loss – whether they occur during the stages of early development, or as mediated through family stories that can perpetuate a cycle of relating for generations – can lead to fragmentation of the self.²⁵ The fragmented self readily adapts to groups or systems in order to find her “true self.” Loyalty then to those groups becomes paramount and any threat to the unity or identity of the group is sensed as life threatening.²⁶ Therefore the mandate by God to scatter upon the entire face of the earth, given earlier within this community’s history, was regarded in essence as a death sentence by fragmented selves. These selves, enmeshed within a system, were unable to know their true selves in relation to one another in the larger context of God’s plan. It was essential for them to maintain this enmeshment because it was the only thing they had to tell them who they were. Thus it was not out of pride but out of the deep anxiety produced by a fragmented self that the community sought to make a name for itself, which would set it apart from others and give it a firmer sense of identity.

Anxiety causes human beings to act in dysfunctional ways. Rather than building alliances, anxiety causes them to build barriers. Alliances open up the possibility for challenge to the self-enclosed identity human beings tend to create for themselves. But such a challenge threatens the already fragmented self because she has sought security in something outside of herself, in a human-made structure, be it social (the community “from the east”), psychological (“let us make a name for ourselves”) or physical (“let us build a tower”). This story then shows us in essence the dilemma of the human psyche in regard to embracing God’s mandate. And this dilemma did not disappear with God’s act of grace in mixing the language of the people and dispersing humankind. We continue to see consequences of the fear expressed in this community throughout our world today.

Applications of a Morally Constructive Versus a Morally Destructive Interpretation

The paradigm established by early scholarship regarding this text has significantly impacted the missiology of the church.²⁷ As we have seen, the crux of early interpretations is found in the unanimous conclusion that the final punishment of humankind is to confuse their language and disperse them across the face of the earth. This is the result of God’s wrath: unity was abolished and chaos unleashed so that humanity would no longer seek to gain independence from their Creator and would know the consequences of their pride for the rest of time. By believing that God, in God’s wrath, cursed the unity of this community and created different languages so that its members could no longer understand each other, we are left with an understanding of a God who ultimately sees the plethora of languages and cultures as a curse rather than as a blessing.

It is no wonder humanity remains so culturally, ethnically, and racially divided. If we have internalized this myth as it has been constructed by the tradition of interpretation of this text, how can there be any hope or vision of a multicultural and multiracial unified future? The only application from this traditional interpretation is that we should find those who look and talk like us and keep our pride in check! But by critically examining this interpretation, we understand more clearly the harm it has had and may continue to have on the psyche and, therefore, on actions of individuals and entire societies.

Take, for example, the case of Apartheid, a political system in South Africa which was theologically supported by the Dutch Reformed Church on the biblical basis of the division of languages and cultures presumably found in Genesis 11:1-9.²⁸ This harmful institution was dismantled fourteen years ago but to this day, the Dutch Reformed Church of South Africa (NGK) and the United Reformed Church of Southern Africa (URCSA), remain structurally and governmentally segregated as the NGK refuses to unite with the URCSA because of differences in language and culture.²⁹ While there are in fact a few African and Colored congregations under the NGK umbrella and there remains a white minority within the URCSA, governmentally the NGK has refused to unite with the church responsible for the composition and adoption of the Belhar Confession. We must not neglect to see how deeply entrenched in the core of our being – language, culture, and community – such theological interpretation has become, not only within our churches but also within society.

Closer to home we see communities complacent in their homogeneity, continually resisting ethnic and cultural plurality and diversity. Over forty years after the Civil Rights Movement we see racial divides becoming more and more accepted and institutionalized in America.³⁰ Even the attributes which characterize America have become crutches upon which our nation rests in order to avoid the work of integration, diversity, and heterogeneous unity. As Emerson and Smith surmise in their work on evangelicalism and the racial divide,

Choice and freedom are two of the dominant American values that today maintain the racialized society. Contemporaries may view these values as the realization of America's destiny, but these values are at the same time now essential tools in dividing people along socially constructed racial lines.³¹

Where is the church in the midst of this struggle? If we are honest with ourselves, we will have to admit the church too is avoiding this work as evidenced in its homogeneous houses of worship.³² The church has a responsibility to the world. However, it is increasingly apparent that religious communities have become places where individuals become unhealthily attached and rebel when pushed to live out

God's mandate, to scatter and love their other in risky and sometimes life-threatening ways.

It is essential for individuals within a system to become differentiated from it for any hope of change and renewal within that system and within the culture at large. The church has a responsibility to the world to pave the way for justice and reconciliation. However, this is a threatening task if individuals have not properly differentiated. Along the journey toward justice and reconciliation the self will inevitably be threatened because she will come into contact with something different, something other. And if the self cannot stay intact under this pressure, the church must abandon its mission.

This failure has been a recurring theme in the life of the church at work in the world.³³ If the church is to lead culture toward a more just and reconciled society, it must become properly differentiated. Here lies the crux. If the church is filled with undifferentiated individuals, how is the church as a system to lead the way toward cultural change? Churches have, some may argue, regressed back to the state of this community we read about in Genesis 11:1-9, having become enmeshed in their homogeneous community, enjoying their safety and their settled life. At this rate we are in danger of becoming the community God was attempting to prevent by mixing the language of the community from the east. Churches pride themselves in being unified families when in actuality they have become homogeneous institutions in which members assuage their fear by becoming enmeshed with one another and the larger system.

God's mandate to scatter upon the face of the earth and fill it and cultivate it is mirrored in God's commandment to the Israelites as expressed in the *Shema* : to love God with your whole heart and mind and love your neighbor as yourself. This is repeated again in the New Testament when Jesus states that the greatest commandment is to love God and love your neighbor as yourself. One cannot love her neighbor if she is not in community with her neighbor. One cannot properly know himself, in order to love himself, until he is properly differentiated from his family or societal system. Therefore obedience to God's mandate requires a high level of maturity and the ability to transgress – to perpetuate cultural growth. The question for the church becomes "what is our responsibility to human psychological and community development?" If the church has a mandate to scatter upon the face of the earth, how is it to do that when it tends to create comfortable, settled, homogeneous houses of worship? Rather than challenging parishioners' sense of identity and exploring ways to help them differentiate, we tend to foster enmeshment and lack of individuality for fear of the emotional drama such differentiation would ignite.

It is not until we are able to help our parishioners--and ourselves for that matter – to differentiate that we will be able to read the Bible *as if* others' lives depended on it. It is not until we are able to differentiate from our family (societal) systems that we will be

able to mature and transgress, creating authentic cultural change. It is not until those of us in the white community are able to differentiate from our position of power and privilege in society that we will be able to understand the world from the perspective of our other and therefore authentically engage in multi-racial, multi-cultural, multi-lingual communities.³⁴ It is not until these things occur that the work we do will cease to profane the communities we seek to create.

¹ I devote a chapter in my honors thesis at New Brunswick Theological Seminary arguing for the possibility that Genesis 11:1-9 be considered, rather than a Yahwist text, as which it has traditionally been considered, as a Priestly text written through a postexilic worldview. For more on this see chapter four of my thesis entitled, "Homogeneity: Safe or Profane? The Journey Toward The True Self" (the full version of this text).

² "Let us make bricks": this construct chain *nilBünâ lübênîm* literally means *make brick for brick*. Or another way to translate this construct chain could be *let us whiten or cleanse the brick*, which is particularly interesting if we think of this text as a Priestly text – the would be very familiar with the cleansing of elements necessary for temple construction.

³ *ûmigDäl* is found in no other early text – J or E. This is a word only found in later texts (Ex 14:2, Num 33:7, and throughout Judges, 2 Kings, Neh).

⁴ Notice the first thing YHWH observed was the occurrence of one language *wüSäpâ 'aHat lükulläm*.

⁵ And is followed by *haHilläm* this is a hiphil verb which literally means *this (what followed before) is profaning or defiling*. This word occurs only once in the Hebrew Bible in this particular form. However, the Hebrew vowel pointing and sentence construction clearly indicate this is in reference to YHWH's observation that there is one language. This word is traditionally translated as "And this is the beginning;" I believe it is more accurately understood as "And this is defiling that which they are making," which helps us understand the danger of "nothing being withheld from them," for now all that follows and all that is not withheld will be profaned given their "oneness." Even if we use the traditional interpretation of "And this is the beginning" it is still true what God is referring to is their "one language" – their homogeneous way of being together.

⁶ *në | rdâ* with a 1cp prefix – *let us go down*. God is referencing God's self as plural. It has been suggested that this is simply God referring to God and the celestial beings. However, there are two distinct occurrences in the Hebrew Bible of God referring to God's self in a plural fashion – here and in Genesis 1:26, believed to be from the P source material. As I point out in my thesis, I believe this indicates further that Genesis 1 and Genesis 11 are to serve as bookends to the Priestly documents regarding Israel's primeval history. (My thanks to Beth Tanner here.)

⁷ *Wünäblâ*, meaning *let us mix or mingle*, is only once translated as *confuse* and once translated as *confound* – both occur here in the traditional translation of this passage. However this word occurs thirty-eight times throughout the Hebrew Bible other than these two times, and every other time it is mentioned it is translated as *mixed* (as in the mixing of flour and oil to make a grain offering).⁷ This is another example (as with *profaning*, as I will show below) where the traditional translation *confuse* has become institutionalized. It seems our concordances have made special provisions for these translations, which remain unquestioned. This word is more appropriately understood in this text as God *mixing* the language of the people. Mixing the substances for the grain offering is also the work of the priest, which further indicates location of this text within the .

⁸ They did indeed receive a name, or at least the place in which they were sent out of received a name. The name given was *Bäbel* which is perhaps a word play on *Bälal* meaning *mixed* or *mingled* because perhaps God's mixing of the language and scattering of the people upon the entire face of the earth was in fact ordained and intentional, in effect, the point of this story, the point to be remembered and therefore given a name.

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- ⁹ Herman Gunkel, *Commentary on Genesis*, trans. Mark E. Biddle (Macon, Ga: Mercer University Press, 1997), originally written in 1901. U. Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis*, trans. Israel Abrahams (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1961), originally written in 1949. E.A. Speiser, *Genesis* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1964). Nahum M. Sarna, *Understanding Genesis* (NY: Schocken Books, 1970).
- ¹⁰Theodore Hiebert, "Babel: Babble or Blueprint? Calvin, Cultural Diversity, and the Interpretation of Genesis 11:1-9," in *Reformed Theology: Identity and Ecumenicity II, Biblical Interpretation in the Reformed Tradition*, eds. Wallace M Alston and Michael Welker (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 127-145
- ¹¹ Bernhard W. Anderson, "Unity and Diversity in God's Creation: A Study of the Babel Story," *Currents in Theology and Mission* 5, 2 (April 1978): 69-81. Walter Brueggeman, *Genesis* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982). See also Hiebert, "Babel," 127-145. These are a few scholars forging a new path of interpretation regarding Genesis 11:1-9.
- ¹² See especially Anderson, *Unity* and Hiebert, *Babel*.
- ¹³ David W. Cotter, O.S.B, "Genesis," *Berit Olam: Studies in Hebrew Narrative & Poetry* (Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 2003), 69.
- ¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 70.
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 70.
- ¹⁶ Verse six reads: "And YHWH said, 'Behold, one people and one language to all of them. And this is defiling of that which they are making. Now nothing will be withheld from them about which they propose to make.'" Notes on my translation and the nuances of the Hebrew language here can be read above.
- ¹⁷ Gunkel, *Genesis*, 95.
- ¹⁸ Gary A. Phillips and Danna Nolan Fewell, "Ethics, Bible, Reading As If," in *Bible and Ethics of Reading*, eds. Danna Nolan Fewell and Gary A. Phillips (Atlanta: Scholar's Press, 1997), 1-21.
- ¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 3.
- ²⁰ Edwin H. Friedman, *Generation To Generation: Family Process In Church And Synagogue*. (New York: The Guilford Press, 1985), 27.
- ²¹ *Ibid.*, 29.
- ²² *Ibid.*, 42.
- ²³ Andrew Morrison, ed., *Essential Papers on Narcissism* (New York: NYU Press, 1986), 176-177.
- ²⁴ *Ibid.*, 181-186.
- ²⁵ *Ibid.*, 181.
- ²⁶ Alice Miller, *The Drama of the Gifted Child: The Search for the True Self* (New York: Basic Books, 1997), 64-65.
- ²⁷ Hiebert, *Babel*, 127-145.
- ²⁸ For full reference on the development and argument for Apartheid in South Africa, see W.A. Landman, *A Plea For Understanding: A Reply to the Reformed Church in America*, (Cape Town, South Africa: Ned. Geref. Kerk-Uitgewers, 1968).
- ²⁹ "Chances of unity in the church faded late last year, when NG congregations reacted overwhelmingly negatively to the notion of church unity, especially over Belhar. Boesak told the synod they heard the reasons for the rejection of Belhar was that NG Church members saw it as a political document that reminded them of apartheid. Issues like land reform, affirmative action and white people's loss of power also influenced them negatively about unity. Boesak said there was no theological motivation against church unity. As far as he was concerned, the problem was that the NG Church was unable to meet evangelical demands in view of the political views of its members. This meant only one thing: That 'the demon of racism' had not yet fully left the NG Church." Beeld Neels Jackson, "Demon of racism' in NG Church," News 24 South Africa, February 10, 2008, www.news24.com/News24/South_Africa/News/0,,2-7-1442_2403100,00.html. Accessed: 10 February 2008.

³⁰ Michael O. Emerson and Christian Smith, *Divided By Faith* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 154 -168. Emerson and Smith derive information from social and cognitive psychologists to help articulate the growing problem of the racial divide in houses of worship.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 11.

³² Emerson and Smith estimate that “because 90% of African Americans attend predominately black congregations, at least 95% of white Americans – and probably higher – attend predominately white churches,” *Ibid.*, 16.

³³ Emerson and Smith draw a brief but thorough survey of 265 years of race and religion in America highlighting patterns along the way, which help illuminate the systemic presence of racialization in the church, *Ibid.*, 21-49.

³⁴ Adam D. Galinsky, Joe C. Magee, M. Ena Inesi, and Deborah H Gruenfeld, “Power and Perspectives Not Taken,” *Psychological Science* 17, 12 (December 13, 2006): 1068-1074.

A.A. van Ruler and the Point of Connection

Allan Janssen

It is a commonplace to remark that revelation was at the center of theological thought throughout the first half of the twentieth century. The problem of how revelation engaged human existence was provoked and intensified by Karl Barth and his contemporaries. Among them is the Dutch theologian A.A. van Ruler (1908-1970), who addressed the subject first in his doctoral dissertation, "The Fulfillment of the Law: a dogmatic inquiry of the relation of revelation and existence,"¹ only to return later to it a number of times. Recently, the Dutch theological world has been treated to the publication of his collected works (now in the third volume), which include previously unpublished works such as the extended lectures from 1957-1959 on natural and revealed theology. This adds to the few lectures already published that include reflection on such topics as the *aanknopingspunt* ("the point of connection"), and so provides fresh information concerning Van Ruler's position concerning such things as natural theology, the place of philosophy, and the place of reason in the theological project.

Van Ruler's position will be of interest particularly as it responds to the strong *Nein!* that expressed Karl Barth's response to the possibility of natural theology, particularly in reaction to Emil Brunner's affirmation of the possibility of a point of connection. Van Ruler began his theological career in the early 1930s as a Barthian, only to move away from Barth in the mid-forties. This would happen largely because Van Ruler could not remain content with what he saw as Barth's Christomonism. The Spirit was fully part of the Trinity, and fully active not only in salvation, but in the sanctification of the world. This would lead to a more positive valuation of such things as philosophy, and indeed, would lead to Van Ruler's take on the subject of this paper, the point of connection.²

Van Ruler would maintain that a point of connection does in fact exist. The burden of this paper will be to show where that connection exists and how it fits within Van Ruler's larger theological project. It is the case that for Van Ruler, God's action does not reach its destination in Christ, but in the human and in creation. God's concern is for God's beloved creation. Salvation happens for the sake of creation. God does not abandon creation to itself. God wrestles with the human, and that struggle with the human is the connecting point. To see how this is so, we begin with the notion of revelation.

Van Ruler's Concept of Revelation

Presupposed in the notion of revelation is that it discloses both that which stands beyond human knowing *and* the capability of the human to acknowledge and to understand that which is revealed. Hence a point of connection exists of necessity. The

theological problem is to locate that point of connection. Van Ruler does so when he asserts: “God himself – in his wrestling with the human – is the point of connection.”³ This would make philosophy possible, indeed both for the human as she delights in her existence and as reflection on creation in communion with God.

Van Ruler makes this claim in full acknowledgment of the Barth-Brunner contest over the place of natural theology, general revelation, and the possibility or impossibility of a point of connection between God and the human. Indeed, Van Ruler will agree that viewed Christologically, a “no” must be said against a point of connection. However, he claims that *pneumatologically* we must return to ask the question of the point of connection yet again.⁴ This time the answer will be in the affirmative. For it is in the Spirit that God wrestles with the human. Thus the point of connection is made not from the side of the human, but from the side of God. It is nevertheless genuine.

Van Ruler will make this argument because the human lives in relation to God. It is of the essence of the human to be related.⁵ The human does not find God, but is found *by* God. The human cannot find his or her way to God, cannot *climb* toward God. Still, God does not abandon the human. God is and remains permanently with the human. God is active with the human, wrestling with him or her.⁶ This relationship is not limited to the regenerate, but includes all humans; in this context Van Ruler particularly names the pagan.⁷

The *Aanknopingspunt*: Descriptive Analysis of a Concept

I pause to observe how Van Ruler more analytically describes the *aanknopingspunt*. He does so in a part of a series of lectures in 1949. There he makes two sets of distinctions. The first is between a formal and a material point of connection. In regard to the second, he makes a further distinction between a negative and a positive material point of connection. He will find difficulty in each of the resultant three ways of talking about the point of connection, but will return to the notion that it is the Spirit who, wrestling with the human, realizes the connection.

With respect to the first, the *formal point of connection*, Van Ruler points to preaching. The human is a creature of language, receptive to communication through the vehicle of the “word.” There can be no communication from God without this receptivity. However, the word tends to slip into invisibility, and with it the visible church begins to disappear as well. The ever-present danger of Gnosticism reappears.

The “solution to the problem” at this point is that the word as a genuinely human phenomenon is chosen and sanctified to be a vehicle for revelation. That happens in the command and promise that comes from the institution and blessing of Christ. And that occurs not of itself, but is the work of the Holy Spirit. The human is by nature likened to

an “ass at a symphony” (Calvin’s image); nevertheless, “preaching is in essence understandable as the Word of God...only by the activity of the Holy Spirit.”⁸

The second, the *negative material point of connection*, is found in the human consciousness of guilt, in a bad conscience, and in the crisis of existence. These present themselves in the antinomies of reasonable thought, and this as preparation or even as the condition for the proclamation of grace.⁹ In a negative manner, then, the human is receptive to God’s address. The connection is the very impoverishment the human experiences.

The problem is that this construal underestimates the power and reality of sin. He alludes to the Heidelberg Catechism as it reminds believers that they know their misery as they are reminded of the law of God¹⁰ and furthermore that the dynamic of conversion is a work of the Holy Spirit.¹¹ Knowledge of human misery or “falling-short” comes only as the human is addressed by God, thus only through preaching. This, too, is the work of the Spirit as it awakens the human heart to its misery.¹²

The negative material point of connection leads to the *positive material point of connection*. Indeed, the negative implies the positive. The crisis in existence points to the origin, where the human has a memory (perhaps faint) of an original connection with God. The human, as such, knows God.¹³

Van Ruler lists several candidates for this point of connection: nature, history, the human conscience, the world, the unconscious (or collective unconscious), race, but also reason, intuition, and speculation. Such a point of connection could function in one of three ways. It could, first, complete what one does not yet know of God in order to participate in salvation. It could, second, clarify what is thus far unclear or vague concerning the knowledge of God. Or, third, it could function critically, distinguishing that which is foolish in what pretends to be one’s natural knowledge of God.¹⁴

At this point Van Ruler turns to the second article of the Belgic Confession as it speaks of two “books” that give us knowledge of God: the book of nature and the book of Scripture. Does this present us with a positive point of connection? Van Ruler makes a further distinction, this time between the objective aspect and the subjective. The objective aspect asks whether God reveals God’s self in the work of creation, maintenance, and rule, and furthermore gives God’s self to be known. The subjective aspect asks whether the human does in fact know God as God discloses God’s self in the creation.¹⁵

Van Ruler answers the first question positively. God does in fact reveal God’s self so that, objectively, God can be known from the world as God’s creation. Denial of this would lead down the path of Marcionism. It would contradict what Van Ruler sees as the central point of Biblical religion – the denial of a dualism of spirit and matter, the

acceptance of this physical world and our place in it, and the unity of Old and New Testaments.¹⁶

Still, to the second question, the subjective, Van Ruler responds negatively. What God objectively gives to be known cannot in fact be known by the human. Human sin has made it impossible to see what is in fact the case. From the human side and under the condition of sin there is no point of connection. Notice, though, that this is from the human side. It is not the case that God has not established a bridge.

This negative response is not, however, the end of the matter. Van Ruler goes one step further and asks whether something changes with belief. Here he claims that, yes, the regenerate human can “read” the first book. This is not knowledge of salvation, of God’s way in Christ, but *through* Christ’s salvific work it is knowledge of what God gives to be known of God’s self in the world. It is partial and incomplete, but it is an active knowledge of God.¹⁷ Or put more precisely:

We know the Creator not from his work, nor in belief. We know him as Creator only from the Scripture and that from Scripture as witness to Christ, but then: *in* the work of his creation and that in truth: only in the work of his creation.¹⁸

Set within the broader framework of Van Ruler’s theology, we can understand his appreciation of human reason and the place that philosophy might take in the human enterprise. Reason is, after all, a part of the human as creature. Thus it participates in God’s creation. And God’s creation “may not be understood as a fiasco.”¹⁹ Indeed, salvation, in Van Ruler’s construal, is not to replace this creation with a new one, nor is it to perfect an incomplete creation. It is to rescue this creation, to “save” it, and so to enable it to become the creation that God intended from the outset.

Reason, then, is not a source of knowledge of God, nor is it a “natural” knowledge of God’s salvific action. A general revelation may leave the human with the notion that there is a god, and that such a god must be almighty, eternal, etc. This is not, however, a knowledge of the Triune God, of the Messiah, or of God’s way with Israel and the church. Reason (and not only reason, but conscience, culture, etc. as well) is not the subject but the object of salvation.

Salvation as the Restoration of Created Reality: The Work of the Spirit

At issue is *being*. Indeed, the issue is God’s creational intentions. God’s salvific actions serve this good created being. The wonder is not simply that I am saved, but that *I am there* at all. Created reality rests purely on the good favor of God. It exists. And it has a point, a goal, one given by God. “If [creation] has a sense and an end [*telos*], that lies in the fact that the Creator was so friendly not only to call things into existence but to add

a goal.”²⁰ The point of God’s work is not salvation, but in what salvation issues: the saved human as he or she lives now in relation to God.

Said in Trinitarian terms, the work of the Messiah – salvation – becomes the work of the Spirit – sanctification. In a remarkable essay from 1964, “Structural Differences Between the Christological and Pneumatological Perspectives,” Van Ruler distinguishes between categorical ways of thinking of the work of Christ and that of the Spirit. In Christological terms, for example, one uses the notion of *enhypostia* (and its related *anhypostia*). This does not work as it does with thinking of the human in relation to God because, for Van Ruler, the essence of the human is not found in God, but in the human as him or her self. Rather thinking from the perspective of the Spirit, one uses the notion of *unio personalis*.²¹ The human *qua* human is drawn into full partnership with God. Likewise, while Christology uses the category of “assumption,” in that the Son assumes human flesh, pneumatology uses the notion of adoption. We are not assumed, but are adopted.²² Van Ruler asks: “...is it not the *I* that is being saved? There is something about my freedom, my will, my choice that is at stake.”²³

I add two other structural differences (Van Ruler has ten!). First, when we talk about Christology we use the notion of “substitution” or representation, (he is thinking here of the atonement). But that category does not apply in pneumatology. There we think of “reciprocity.” The Spirit frees our will, frees us to become human, mature. God’s business becomes *my* business!²⁴ As he puts it in another essay on the Holy Spirit, “The Word of God that is spoken to me must become my own word that I speak back to God and that I express from myself. That this happens is the essence, or in any case the goal of the work of the Spirit!”²⁵

The second and final structural difference to which I refer is this: when thinking of Christ, we acknowledge his presence as a discrete event, as *eph’ hapax*. This is necessarily so, given Christ’s humanity. The Spirit, on the other hand, having come once at Pentecost, was poured out, so that his coming is what Van Ruler calls “singularity in continuity.” Now we can say that “through the Spirit I now will and do things along with God.” I act together with God. The kingdom is present in the manner of the Spirit, and we, as humans fully participate. This is the “indwelling” of the Holy Spirit.²⁶

It is the Spirit, then, who enables the regenerate human to think and to reason. This is an “enlightened” reason. This is thinking and reflecting now within the creation understood as the theater of the kingdom of God, seen (yes *seen*) as the inbreaking of the eschaton.

Van Ruler would call this “theonomous reciprocity.” It is theonomous because it is the work of God, now through the Spirit. The Spirit works with the human in such a way

that led by the Spirit the human acts in genuine freedom, and so is enabled to think and act for herself. The dynamic becomes one of a work that is both play and love.

And it is a genuine reciprocity because it is the human who acts in partnership with God. This is because the God who created the human in love desires to have the human as a full partner in the relationship of love and work. Van Ruler uses the nearly untranslatable Dutch word *mannetje* here. Perhaps the Yiddish says it best: little *mensch*. This is someone who stands on her own feet; someone who can stand up to another in her full integrity, and who acts out of an integral sense of self. This human, then, engaged by the Spirit now is fully capable of reason and philosophy as she delights together with God. This is the Spirit who has wrestled with the human all along, now wrestling together with her in full delight.

Again, this must be set within the context of the creation. God did not make a mistake with creation. "God is not an angry (*Kaputtmacher*) in his revelation *vis-a-vis* his creation. God acts in creation, but does so with the "soft violence of grace." God is not intent on acting against reason, against the human as a reflective being, but rather in revelation "heals reason."²⁷ The human, then, can engage reason now as a redeemed person and with redeemed thinking.

One sees something of this in a remarkable stretch in Van Ruler's lectures on natural and revealed theology of 1957-59.²⁸ Van Ruler first argues that philosophy has no independent place in the encyclopedia because it is about the development of metaphysics and worldviews. This role has been taken over by theology.²⁹ Consequently, he can find no place for philosophy. But then in a strategy typical of him, he turns the argument around and asks whether there is not a place outside or beyond "particular revelation," where the human might not reflect on reality as it is.³⁰ He asks rhetorically, "Is particular revelation, is God in his particular revelation, is Christ the end of all God's ways and the ultimate destination of the human? Do God and the human thus remain caught in salvation and authority? Or must we propose with Augustine the series: *ratio - fides - intellectus*? Then *intelligere*, insight, understanding, contemplation, reflection, emerge above *credere!*"³¹ "Philosophy then stands originally and ultimately above theology."

One now can see how Van Ruler can make this claim. For the human, now saved, delights in being. And philosophy is reflection on the nature of being - and on the nature of reflection on being, which is itself a way of being. Of fundamental importance is the fact that I am here, that I exist. One hears here an echo of Bavinck's second Stone Lecture, on "Revelation and Philosophy," where Bavinck claims that "in our self-consciousness we are not only conscious of being, but also of being something definite, of being the very thing we are... Before all thinking and willing, before all reasoning and action, we are and exist, exist in a definite way, and inseparable therefrom have a consciousness of our being and of its specific mode."³² Not surprisingly, Van Ruler

would situate his reflections on the place of reason with the creature in his meditations on Ecclesiastes. There he will assert that “the search for the light of Reason in the totality of reality is indeed the best and most honorable thing there is... Eternal life will without a doubt include specifically the fact that we bathe ourselves in the light of this Reason.”³³ The human will enjoy reality with all her senses alert, now redeemed, including thinking along with God in the play of love. This is not yet the case, of course. We still live under the shadow of sin, our minds darkened. But this does not keep us from thinking.

The Spirit wrestles with us. As the Psalmist put it, “I was always in your presence” (Psalm 73). God’s engagement with the human does not end, and so there is a connecting point, not as the human probes the inner self, but as God engages, saves, and – yes – indwells the human creature. Or as a draft confession of the Reformed Church in America, *Our Song of Hope*, has it:

The Spirit leads us into Truth—
the Truth of Christ's salvation,
into increasing knowledge of all existence.
He rejoices in human awareness of God's creation
and gives freedom to those on the frontiers of research.
We are overwhelmed by the growth in our knowledge.
While our truths come in broken fragments,
we expect the Spirit to unite these in Christ.³⁴

¹ *De veroulling van de wet: Een dogmatische studie over de verhouding van openbaring en existentie* (Nijkerk: G.F. Callenbach, 1947).

² For fuller biographical details see my *Kingdom, Office and Church: A Study of A.A. van Ruler's Doctrine of Ecclesiastical Office* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 24-33.

³ “*De theologia naturali et revelata*,” in *Verzameld Werk II* (Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, 2008), 170.

⁴ “*De andere zijde van het vraagstuk van de natuurlijke theologie*,” in *VW II*, 245.

⁵ “*Naturali et revelati*,” 147.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 158.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 169.

⁸ “*Het aanknopingspunt*,” in *VW II*, 122.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 122-123.

¹⁰ Q.A. 3.

¹¹ Q.A. 88-89.

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- ¹² "Aanknopingspunt," 124.
- ¹³ Ibid.
- ¹⁴ Ibid., 125.
- ¹⁵ Ibid. One needs to understand creation in the broadest sense. It would include the human in her culture, reason, etc.
- ¹⁶ Ibid., 126.
- ¹⁷ Ibid., 126-127.
- ¹⁸ "Natuur en genade," in *VW II*, 116.
- ¹⁹ Ibid., 114.
- ²⁰ Van Ruler, *Dwaasheden van het leven*, Eerst deel (Nijkerk: Callenbach, n.d.), 51.
- ²¹ "Structural Differences between the Christological and Pneumatological Perspectives" in John Bolt, ed., *Calvinist Trinitarianism and Theocentric Politics* (Edwin Mellen Press: Lewiston, 1989), 30-31.
- ²² Ibid., 31-34.
- ²³ Ibid., 33.
- ²⁴ Ibid., 35.
- ²⁵ "Hoofdlijnen," 33.
- ²⁶ "Structural Differences," 38-39.
- ²⁷ *VW II*, 179.
- ²⁸ On the following paragraph, see *VWII*, 195-199.
- ²⁹ Among other, Van Ruler cites H. Bavink here, from *De wetenschap der H. Godgeleerdheid*, 35 and *Godsdienst en Godgeleerdheid*, 8-9.
- ³⁰ Van Ruler sometimes uses the image of the ice skater to describe a pattern of thinking. One first thinks in one way, and then shifts the weight to approach a problem from a different, albeit parallel, direction.
- ³¹ *VW II*, 198.
- ³² *The Philosophy of Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953), 66.
- ³³ *Dwaasheden*, 138.
- ³⁴ Eugene P. Heideman, *Our Song of Hope: A Provisional Confession of Faith of the Reformed Church in America* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 9. Interestingly Van Ruler was the doctoral promoter of the principal author of this confession, Heideman, who wrote his dissertation on *The Relation of Revelation and Reason in E. Brunner and H. Bavinck* (Assen, 1959).

Book Reviews

Father, Son and Spirit: The Trinity and John's Gospel, by Andreas J. Köstenberger and Scott R. Swain, Downers Grove: InterVarsity Academic, 2008, 224 pp., \$ 22.00.

Herman J. Ridder: Contextual Preacher and President, edited by George Brown, Jr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008. xv, 461 pp. \$39.00.

The Reformation for Armchair Theologians, by Glenn S. Sunshine, illustrations by Ron Hill, Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005, pp. 247., \$14.95.

The Study of Evangelism: Exploring a Missional Practice of the Church, edited by Paul W. Chilcote and Lacey C. Warner, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008. 488pp., \$35.00.

Why Would Anyone Believe in God, by Justin L. Barrett, Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira, 2004. 160pp., \$19.95.

Father, Son and Spirit: The Trinity and John's Gospel, by Andreas J. Köstenberger and Scott R. Swain, Downers Grove: InterVarsity Academic, 2008, 224 pp., \$ 22.00.

Father, Son and Spirit, is intended to explore the theme of the Trinity and its activity within the Gospel of John. In order to highlight the importance of the Trinity to the structure and character of John's message, the two authors utilize some of the newest and most exciting scholarship regarding Second Temple Judaism and the origins of the church's trinitarian dogma.

The book is divided into three main parts. The first part situates John's Trinitarian teaching within the context of Second Temple Jewish monotheism. Here the authors draw upon the recent works of Larry Hurtado and Richard Bauckham. These two authors have demonstrated in their pioneering studies that Trinitarian theology stands in profound continuity with both Second Temple Judaism and the earliest discernable Christological confessions of the church. Our authors also use the works of A. H. I. Lee and Bauckham to demonstrate that the Trinitarian theology of John is an accurate representation of the self-consciousness of Jesus, of which John is a witness.

Part two describes John's use of the teaching of Jesus and the Old Testament in order to construct his narrative around the unfolding of Triune agency in the event of redemption. The narrative of the Gospel is seen as a revelation of the grace and goodness of the three persons within the drama of the salvific event of the cross and the empty tomb. Triune agency becomes the matrix within which John understands the mission of Jesus and the mission of the church. The church mediates the message of Jesus redemptive act in the power of the Spirit. Similarly, the church mirrors the unity and diversity of the Triune life.

Part three deals with the implications of Triune agency in John's Gospel for the Christian systematic theologian. This section appears primarily to have been written by Swain, who is a systematic theologian. The question is raised as to whether or not the eternal *taxis* of the persons of the Trinity finds its proper expression in the temporal manifestation of Triune persons. Swain believes that eternal *taxis* expresses itself in the *missio Dei* to creation as John portrays it. This means, (following Rahner and Moltmann) that the immanent Trinity is the economic Trinity. This also leads to a greater appreciation of the classical Reformed doctrine of the *pactum salutis* in light of John's Gospel. Even though theologians like Karl Barth have criticized this doctrine for viewing the inner life of the Trinity in a quasi-mythological fashion, Swain believes that the relationship between the persons of the Trinity within John's Gospel gives expression to their covenantal relationship established for the sake of the *missio Dei*.

Overall, this work is a very helpful resource for those wishing to study John's Gospel. It is filled with many fascinating insights into John's doctrine of God and understanding of Triune agency.

Herman J. Ridder: Contextual Preacher and President, edited by George Brown, Jr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008. xv, 461 pp. \$39.00.

Herman “Bud” Ridder was indeed a “knight” in the Reformed Church in the second half of the twentieth century. A denominational executive, seminary president, pastor and preacher, he embodied the spirit of the RCA during this period. This volume includes not only a sketch of his life, but an important essay by Norman J. Kansfield on Ridder’s presidency of the Reformed church seminaries and an essay on preaching from Ridder’s former colleague, George Brown, Jr.

The majority of the volume, however, consists of Ridder’s sermons, most of which were preached at Central Reformed Church in Grand Rapids. “Engagement” was an important notion for Ridder and these sermons are fine specimens of the sermon as engaging the congregation in its context. In fact, Ridder initiated the practice of sending sermon manuscripts to congregants *prior* to their delivery, thereby deepening the engagement between preacher and congregation.

Although good, these sermons were nevertheless preached in a particular context. For that reason, the contemporary reader may not be as engaged. They do, however, offer a glimpse of a particular era in the Reformed church in both style and content. Here are a couple observations from this reader.

First, the content of most sermons reflects the soteriological tone of a church that emerged from the context of both Dutch pietism of the second immigration and the evangelical heritage of American Christianity. The sermons expand from a narrow pietism on the one hand, and no longer follow either an older dogmatic nor expository style on the other. One imagines them as liberating and inviting for the congregations that heard them. Nonetheless, with few exceptions, the topics have to do with personal faith engagement, and in the best sense, they can be read as pastoral. It is not that they do not sometimes engage public events, or that they are not courageous when they do. Such is not, however, the main theme of the sermons.

Second, the sermons live within the context of Scripture, but do not engage in Scriptural interpretation for the congregation. One can correctly assume that the congregations to whom Ridder preached were well-versed in Scripture’s story. Thus the sermons reflect an age that we have just passed. It is difficult to imagine such sermons in the context of the early twenty-first century when congregations need once again to be constituted, challenged, and inspired by the “strange new world of the Bible.”

For those who knew Bud as pastor, mentor or friend, this book will evoke important memories. For preachers, the book will provide material for “how he did it.” And for historians and theologians, it offers a view of Reformed life and thought as it found its way through the turbulent years that followed post-war normalcy.

– Allan Janssen

The Reformation for Armchair Theologians, by Glenn S. Sunshine, illustrations by Ron Hill, Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005, pp. 247., \$14.95.

The Reformation for Armchair Theologians, by Glenn Sunshine, is one in a relatively new series of short cartoon illustrated works from Westminster John Knox Press on the history of Christianity. The intent of this series is to give brief overviews of major topics in church history for laypeople. Previous works in the series have focused primarily on major theologians (notably Luther, Aquinas, Calvin, and Wesley). Therefore this volume represents a break with previously published volumes in that our author focuses on a period of church history and not on an individual thinker. This break is deepened by the fact that Sunshine makes the driving force of his narrative the need for certain political, ecclesiastical, and social reforms between the mid-fifteenth century and the thirty years war. Nevertheless, the views of individual theologians are not totally excluded from the story; rather, they are merely deemphasized in favor of a description of political conflicts.

Though intended to be a light overview of the period, the book itself is full of useful information about how the Reformation really unfolded as a social and political movement. Unlike many introductory texts books, Sunshine does not just give us a series of unrelated facts, but rather delineates clear causal connections between various situations, persons, and events. The book is also very easy to read and clearly written in a conversational style without being overly informal.

This text would serve well within the context of an adult education or introductory college course on the Reformation. It will be particularly useful to Reformed pastors and university professors in these settings. The book gives a strong impression of being written from a Reformed point of view. This can be most strongly felt in its implicit criticism of Luther and the Lutheran Church and its overall focus on Calvin and the southern German Reformers the expense of the Wittenberg Reformers. Therefore, as an introduction to history of the Reformation, this is an excellent work and is highly recommended to Reformed pastors and laypeople alike.

– Jack Kilcrease

The Study of Evangelism: Exploring a Missional Practice of the Church, edited by Paul W. Chilcote and Lacey C. Warner, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008. 488pp., \$35.00.

Paul W. Chilcote and Lacey C. Warner's anthology weaves together thirty essays written by twenty-seven leading scholars from various theological disciplines, offering a plethora of paradigms of evangelism. Dividing the essays into six parts, editors provide a short but very helpful introduction to each section. These illuminating introductions not only provide previews to the chapters in each part but also skillfully stitch together essays which otherwise are only loosely connected to each other.

Definitions of evangelism offered in the first part identify different dimensions of the practice and attest to its complexity and richness. In the second section, authors probe the biblical basis for the practice of evangelism and analyze how its perceptions and practices are shaped by culture. The third part examines the relationship of evangelism with the study of theology and themes, such as Christology, soteriology, and worship. The fourth section locates the practice of evangelism in relation to other ecclesial practices, such as catechesis and pastoral care. The fifth part surveys how different confessional families – Orthodox, Pentecostal, Catholic, Evangelical, and Ecumenical – perceive and practice evangelism. Calling for paradigms of evangelism that are culture-sensitive and yet prophetic, the authors in the final section illustrate how evangelism can be interpreted and practiced in Asia, Latin America, Africa, as well as in the North Atlantic region. The “afterword” brings into the conversation the voices of women, immigrants, and ethnic minorities. It argues that liberation, social justice, and hospitality are inextricably linked to evangelism.

Although the authors differ in their stances toward the tasks of mission – proclamation of the gospel, inviting persons to Christ, disciple-making, witness to God's Reign, and welcoming God's merciful justice – they recognize evangelism as an integral ecclesial practice. They agree that the *evangel* is holistic and multi-faceted. The editors have done a commendable job in compiling these rich resources that are scattered in as many as fifteen journals and four monographs, written over the last thirty-five years and originating from five continents. It is like a melody made out of discordant voices sung on different notes and to varying audiences. Teachers, students, and practitioners of the science and practice of evangelism will find it very helpful.

–James Elisha Taneti

Why Would Anyone Believe in God, by Justin L. Barrett, Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira, 2004. 160pp., \$19.95.

Justin Barrett's book is written to a wide audience of both believers and atheists. He presents his arguments from a scientific standpoint, with conclusions drawn from

extensive research on the psychology of belief. But while his expertise is psychology, Barrett writes like a philosopher in the formulation of arguments, even using Turabian-style citations instead of the APA-style typically used for psychology. The entire seventh chapter is dedicated to “God and other minds,” a classic philosophy of religion argument explaining how belief in God is truly rational belief. The book is properly psychology for philosophers of religion.

Barrett makes no assumptions about the faith of his readers. He spends a good deal of time establishing the process by which human beings form beliefs, supporting his claims with an impressive body of research. While sympathetic with the arguments of atheists, however, his conclusions are definitively on the side of theism. The final sentence of the book sums up his approach well: “Why would anybody believe in God? The design of our minds leads us to believe” (124). The structure and normal functioning of the human mind naturally forms belief in a super-powerful, supernatural God. More specifically, Barrett argues that human minds have the simplest time forming belief in the sort of God found in the Abrahamic traditions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. These three faith traditions hold ideas of the divine that are compatible with the way young children form beliefs about other people. Believing in the theistic God of Abraham readily forms in young minds, requires little effort, and achieves longevity from an early foothold. If they are not placed in an environment with specific influences that counteract these impulses toward faith, people are naturally inclined to believe in God.

In the eighth chapter, Barrett lists those environmental factors that best counteract the mind’s natural inclination toward belief in God. If you are an atheist who wants your children not to fall under the spell of believing in God, there are good tips for helping you choose where to locate. As a pastor, I also appreciated the fifth chapter, where the author explains how certain activities and elements in worship services help strengthen belief in God. Overall, the most remarkable feature about the book is not the conclusion that human minds are designed to believe in God. (This notion can be found in John Calvin and in contemporary philosophers of religion.) What is remarkable about Barrett’s book is the way he supports this conclusion with extensive psychological research.

— Aaron Vriesman

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