

**“They Built a Kingdom”:
Developing a Free Reformed Church Community
in Southern Ontario, 1950-1976**

by

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Author's Declaration

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

Abstract

This thesis investigates the establishment and development of a religious community of immigrants from the Netherlands to Canada, whose lives centered around a small denomination called the Free Reformed Churches of North America (FRC). The purpose of this thesis was to explore major reasons for the insularity of the FRC community in Southern Ontario between 1950 and 1976. Primary sources for the research were the FRC's denominational newspaper, *The Messenger*, and oral interviews of FRC members.

The first chapter draws on the life stories of interviewees to explore the challenges of their early years of settlement in Canada, and the comfort they found in the church community. Chapter two focuses on the history, structure and leadership of the church, the faith and beliefs of members, and the connections between church and faith. The third chapter delves into the FRC's perspectives on and relationships with other churches and Canadian culture. Chapter four considers beliefs about women's roles and the experiences of FRC women at church, home and work. This thesis argues that the following factors contributed to the FRC's sustained insularity and isolation: the church, its activities, leaders and laws; the individual faith of members; the strong ideological resistance of leaders and members to change and 'outside' influence; and the social support and pressure of friends, family, and fellow members of the church community.

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Nick, thank you for asking the right question at the right time. I hope we have a chance to collaborate on a piece of writing in the future. Dayna Yankovich, I could write a 150-page thesis about friendship based on what I have experienced in our adventures together, and learned from you about kindness, patience, good will, humility, honour, selflessness, protectiveness, trust, trustworthiness, hope, perseverance and unfailing love. Thanks for listening, for reading my chapters as I completed them, for making tea and ‘de-lish’ coffee, for purchasing rolls, bags and boxes of *dropjes* and Wilhelmina and King peppermints (essential for writing about Dutch people), and for uncomplainingly doing more than your fair share of the dishes. Finally, I thank God for sustaining me through the last (unexpected but enriching) five years. It seems there was more to be accomplished than the completion of a big paper.

Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to my grandparents,
who courageously immigrated to
and built a life in Canada,
my home and native land:

Cornelia Sophia Verboom
Grietje Johanna Cornelia van Ysseldyk
Josephus Martinus Vandenberg
& Nicolaas Huibrecht Lobbezoo.

Table of Contents

Introduction: “They Built a Kingdom”: Developing a Free Reformed Church Community in Southern Ontario, 1950-1976.....	1
Chapter I: “Impressed with Canada? Not Really!”: Hardship and Comfort in the First Years of Settlement.....	23
Chapter II: “The Centre of our Lives”: The Church, The Faith.....	45
Chapter III: “May We Pride Ourselves on Being Cautious?”: Free Reformed Beliefs and Practices Vis-à-vis the Surrounding Culture.....	69
Chapter IV: “Not Much, Just the Women’s Touch”: The “Indispensible and Important” Women of the FRC	94
Conclusion	120
Bibliography.....	128
Appendix A: Maps of the Free Reformed Churches in North America, 1944-1976	138
Appendix B: Names & Dates of Free Reformed Churches in North America, 1944-1976...	139
Appendix C: Oral Interview Questions.....	140
Appendix D: Reformed Churches in North America.....	142

Preface

In the summer of 2012, my younger sister had her 17th birthday party at our parents' farm. The guests were Dutch-Canadian teens from Rehoboth, the private Free Reformed school she attended. My friend Dayna and I set up, served food, and chatted with the teens, especially with my sister's closest friend. She was tall, pretty and just out of braces, wearing skinny jeans, a snug t-shirt and a stylish scarf. She looked like any other hip young Canadian. At one point in our conversation, she nervously expressed her delight that my friend Dayna was there. "It's so cool to hang out with other people from . . ." she paused, "other . . . races." Dayna is of First Nations and European descent. Had this girl (or her peers) ever conversed with a 'non-white' person before in a social setting? Or even a non-Dutch person? How is it possible that this event occurred in diverse southern Ontario in 2012?

This story, and others like it, exemplify the persistence of a socially insular Free Reformed church community. The FRC is still small and socially distant from the surrounding culture, although naturally changes have occurred since 1976. I grew up in the FRC community, like these young people. I experienced both the pressures of living in such a tightly-knit group, and the enjoyment of its hard-working, caring ethos and incredible, multi-generational friendships. At age twenty-three, I moved away to live overseas, and withdrew my membership from the church several years later. The further I drifted from the FRC, the more unique and unusual it seemed to be in an array of other denominational norms, particularly in its social isolation from Canadian culture and other churches. The opening story, and my memories of being raised in this context, fascinated me and sparked my interest into investigating how and why the community was set up as it was in the first place.

My interest was in the formation of the community and women within the community. I ended up focusing on community establishment because no academic work existed on the FRC from a social history viewpoint; there were only a few pieces on the church's history and leaders. I wanted to keep women in the conversation and an important focus of the study, and

I did so by focusing a chapter on them, and by interviewing women and giving those voices a lot of space throughout. My goal was to better understand the beliefs, practices and values of the FRC community during the first few decades of its existence in Ontario, and to share that understanding with the academic community.

Free Reformed leaders and ‘regular’ members described their community as isolated; their isolation was completely intentional, and intended to protect the values of the community. In interviews, members reflected on whether or not their lived distance from the surrounding culture had been the right decision. The consensus was: maybe, maybe not, but it certainly seemed to have been the safest choice. The purpose here is not to evaluate their decision to set up a separate spiritual kingdom, but rather to uncover and explore factors that contributed to its creation and maintenance in the first quarter-century. My experiences of life in the FRC from 1983 to 2008 sparked my interest in the founding years, 1950 to 1978. This thesis explores the FRC as it was; current members may have insight on what it is now; what it will be remains to be seen.

Writing this thesis has been a long journey. The timeline, from thinking up a thesis proposal for my application to submitting a final draft, has been about five years – for this ‘one year program’! In this time, I encountered significant illnesses and other challenges. Yet it has been a rich, life-shaping experience. I am thankful that I persevered, and for the many people who encouraged me to do so, because I think this story is worth recording. The FRC is a fascinating group in the tapestry of Canadian immigrant and religious history.

The scope of this thesis is limited; I hope others will engage in further academic exploration. Others have helped and offered input, but I take full responsibility for all mistakes in this thesis.

Introduction: “They Built a Kingdom”:

Developing a Free Reformed Church Community in Southern Ontario, 1950-1976

This thesis investigates the development of a small religious community made up of members of a Dutch Calvinist denomination called the Free Reformed Churches of North America (FRC).¹ Individuals and families immigrated from the Netherlands to Canada after World War II, and, displeased with the denominational options, began to form Free Reformed churches scattered across Canada and the United States. The Free Reformed churches deliberately and successfully built up an insular community.

As a former member of the FRC, I was curious to uncover the reasons for this community’s insular subculture, which still exists. I presumed that an academic exploration of the way the community was formed and maintained in its first few decades would offer insight into the nature of this community. This thesis focuses on the lives, beliefs and experiences of the members of FRC church community in Ontario between 1950 and 1976. These themes are explored in topical chapters on immigration and settlement, the church and faith, interactions with the surrounding culture, and women’s lives. Using oral history along with other sources to gain a nuanced understanding beyond the hegemonic view, I have uncovered four distinct but related reasons for the community’s insularity: the rules, governance and activities of the church; committed individual beliefs; hearty resistance to change and outside influence; and the social support and pressure of members.

This introduction will provide a context for the study by briefly outlining the history of these Dutch immigrants to Canada. Then, after outlining the organization and main arguments of this thesis, I will explain my methodology in terms of sources, approach, use of

¹ The name went through various changes, for a time known as the Old and Free Christian Reformed Church as a compromise between differing churches, but as of 1974 was known as ‘The Free Reformed Church of North America,’ which was eventually amended to ‘The Free Reformed Churches of North America’ or FRCNA (in 1993). I will use the latter name and the abbreviation ‘FRC,’ for simplicity’s sake. Arie Baars, “Between ‘Old’ and ‘Free’: The Free Reformed Churches of North America,” in *Morsels in the Melting Pot: The Persistence of Dutch Immigrant Communities in North America*, eds. George Harinck & Hans Krabbendam (Amsterdam: VU Uitgeverij, 2006): 95; William Van Doodewaard, “A Transplanted Church: The Netherlandic Roots and Development of the Free Reformed Churches of North America,” *Canadian Journal of Netherlandic Studies* 26:2 (2005): 22.

oral history, and the insider-outsider dilemma.

History

As the Dutch government assessed its post-World-War-II situation, with an overwhelmed infrastructure, strained economy and overpopulated lands, it decided to encourage emigration.² By 1947, Dutch emigrants were trickling to Australia, New Zealand, Canada, South Africa, Brazil and a few other countries.³ North America was considered a desirable place to settle, and since the United States had a fixed low quota, many people came to Canada. The Dutch were one of the largest segments of a wave of immigrants arriving in Canada between 1945 and 1960, along with Germans, British, Portuguese, Greeks, and Italians.⁴ In size, they followed the British, Germans and Italians; about 200,000 Dutch arrived, mainly between 1946 and 1962.⁵

The religious character of the immigrants is relevant in terms of destination choices and settlement patterns. In the first half of the twentieth century, Holland's major religious groups were Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish, with a small number of other religious and non-religious minorities. The majority of Dutch Protestants were some type of Reformed, or Calvinist.⁶ For various reasons, a high percentage of the Calvinists leaving Holland chose Canada as their destination.⁷

Some Calvinists settled into existing Dutch-Canadian denominations, such as the

² Joanne van Dijk, "The Role of Religion in the Postwar Settlement Patterns of Dutch Canadians," in *Canadian Review of Sociology & Anthropology* 38.1 (2001): 58; Anthony Sas, "Dutch Migration to and Settlement in Canada: 1945-1965," PhD Dissertation (Worcester, MA: Clark University, 1957). For a European perspective, see Pieter Stokvis, "Dutch Mid-Nineteenth Century Emigration in a European Perspective," in *Dutch Immigration to North America*, eds. Herman Ganzevoort and Mark Boekelman, (Toronto: The Multicultural History Society of Ontario, 1983): 35-56.

³ Frans J. Schryer, *The Netherlandic Presence in Ontario: Pillars, Class and Dutch Ethnicity* (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1998), 46.

⁴ Howard Palmer, "Ethnicity and Pluralism in North America: A Comparison of Canadian and American Views," in *The Dutch in North-America: Their Immigration and Cultural Continuity*, Eds. Rob Kroes & Henk-Otto Neuschafer (Amsterdam: VU University Press, 1991), 455.

⁵ Frans Schryer, "Postwar Dutch Immigrants in Ontario: A Re-examination of Immigration and Ethnicity," *Canadian Ethnic Studies* 30.1 (1998): 3.

⁶ The term 'Reformed' refers to the Protestant Reformation, to which these denominations trace their source. 'Calvinist' or 'Calvinism' stems from the influential theologian Jean Calvin, whose teachings shaped this stream of Reformed theology and practice. Calvinism was the major Protestant influence in the Netherlands at this time.

⁷ Between 1948 and 1952, nearly 75% of Calvinists went to Canada rather than Australia, US, New Zealand or elsewhere. van Dijk, "The Role of Religion," 58-9; William Petersen, *Planned Migration* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1955), 187.

Christian Reformed Church or the Reformed Church of America. However, these established churches proved unsatisfactory for some immigrants, and new denominations formed. One of these was the Free Reformed Churches of North America. Initiated by one church in Grand Rapids, Michigan in 1944, groups were meeting in Ontario by 1949. In 1950, the first Canadian Free Reformed church was instituted in Dundas, Ontario, bringing the total membership to nearly four hundred individuals, including children.⁸ Churches grew and new congregations sprang up, in Ontario, Alberta, British Columbia, and the United States.⁹ There were nearly three thousand members in the FRC in total by 1974.¹⁰ Southern Ontario, the regional focus of this thesis, was home to a number of Free Reformed churches, while churches were more scattered in other regions between 1950 and 1976 (see Appendices A, B).

The Dutch Reformed immigration story is quite unremarkable by contrast with many other immigrant groups. Adapting to a new country had its challenges, but racial discrimination was not one of them. Rather, historians have demonstrated that the post-war Dutch immigrants, seen as racially superior Nordics, were beneficiaries of Canada's xenophobic immigration policy and its stated need of farmers.¹¹ Prime Minister Mackenzie King's address to the House of Commons in 1947 expressed Canada's preference for newcomers from Britain, the commonwealth and Northwest Europe. "Oriental" or non-white immigration, according to King, was certain to bring about social, economic and international problems.¹² The white Netherlanders, presumably white Protestant farmers, were considered desirable citizens and expected to assimilate well into the broader Canadian context.¹³

⁸ Although the church of Michigan existed as of 1944, it was a solitary church and not yet considered a denomination. Thus the beginning of the Free Reformed denomination is considered 1950.

⁹ Several churches began in British Columbia and Alberta but did not manage to survive. See Lawrence J. Bilkes, *Free Reformed Churches in the West: A History of the First Fifty Years (1953-2003)*, Brantford, ON: Free Reformed Publications, 2006.

¹⁰ Baars, "Between 'Old' and 'Free,'" 95.

¹¹ Petersen calls these dominant ethnocentric attitudes "irrational sentiments" and "irrational prejudice" disguised as patriotism. Sas, on the other hand, denies any racial prejudice, calling it a "fortunate coincidence of Canadian demand and Dutch supply." Petersen, *Planned Migration*, 138. Sas, "Dutch Migration," 8, 18.

¹² William Lyon Mackenzie King, House of Commons Debates, May 1, 1947, 2644-6.
www.abheritage.ca/albertans/speeches/king_1.html.

¹³ Deliberate preference shown for immigrants from countries with what the Minister of Immigration in 1955 saw as "political and social institutions similar" to Canada's: "we try to select as immigrants those who will have to change their ways least in order to adapt themselves to Canadian life." J.W. Pickersgill, Minister of Immigration, House of

Studies have shown that Catholic Dutch often immigrants joined Catholic churches in Canada, and assimilated voluntarily into Canadian society, while many of the Dutch Protestant newcomers formed separate enclaves.¹⁴ There were no visible racial, ethnic or religious markers of appearance or attire to distance the latter from the predominant society. Socially, this distance was entirely their own choice. Unlike some other conservative religious groups, such as the Old Order Amish, or ethnic groups, who formed Little Italy or Chinatowns, the Dutch Reformed did not cluster geographically, whether by regulation or self-preservation. Yet the FRC, like some other Dutch Reformed denominations, created a community and sub-culture of belief and lifestyle, deliberately detached from the broader Canadian society (aside from the realm of commerce).

With every opportunity to assimilate to Canadian culture, how and why did this tiny religious community develop such a close, closed community and identity? How did the Free Reformed church community resist societal forces of change so successfully, and what motivated this resistance? To provide answers to these questions, this thesis focuses on the FRC community in Southern Ontario between 1950 and 1976, as members arrived in Canada and created an insular, tightly-knit community.

Arguments and Organization of Thesis

Other historians have found reasons stemming from Netherlandic norms or immigrant trends to explain the isolation of Dutch Reformed church communities. I wanted to investigate what happened in Canada that contributed to the FRC's resistance to change, lack of integration with the broader world, and unity within the church community. Questions included: what was life like in the first 26 years of the FRC in Ontario, with respect to the immigration and settlement experience, church and faith, ideology and lifestyle vis-à-vis the world, and women's experiences? How did the community form, and what elements held it

Commons Debates (1955), 1254, in Anthony H. Richmond, *Post-War Immigrants in Canada* (University of Toronto, 1967), 3. www.questia.com/PM.qst?a=o&d=90266857. Sas includes many statistics, but very little analysis.

¹⁴ Joanne Van Dijk, "Ethnic Persistence among Dutch-Canadian Catholics and Calvinists," *Canadian Ethnic Studies* 30.2 (1998): 23-49.

together? What were the experiences and beliefs of regular members in the first quarter century? How did the experiences of women differ from those of men? What explains the exclusivity and isolation of this group? Was it deliberate, or unintentional?¹⁵

Ultimately, my primary question was this: how and why did this group develop and sustain such a close, closed community? This study argues that the FRC's deliberate insularity in Ontario between 1950 and 1976 can be attributed to four main factors: the church, individual faith, resistance to change and outside forces, and the pressures and supports of friends, family and fellow members in the church community. First, the church shaped and informed members' lives. Its leaders instructed members and enforced rules. Church-related programs and activities kept members occupied, and provided a framework for a social network that consisted only of other church members from the same denomination. Second, strong individual religious commitments meant that members regulated themselves to abide by community norms. Faith (or an intellectual commitment or belief in God) was intertwined with the church; therefore, faith could be expressed through loyalty to the church and its rules.

Third, the dominant mindset in the church and community was an ideological resistance to change and 'outside' ideas or influence (from secular culture or other churches), and an emphasis on closely connecting with their church, the only morally safe and correct place. This was expressed in practice by lived distance from 'outsiders.' These beliefs and practices created a chasm of social distance between members and surrounding Canadian culture. Fourth, the church community itself, made up of friends, kin and other FRC members, offered support, familiarity and help, which drew them together. It also entailed a pressure to conform to the strict norms of their faith-based subculture. These elements -- the church, personal faith, ideological isolation, and community pressure and support -- combined to form a 'push' away from evil, dangerous, outside influences, and a 'pull' toward the safe, morally righteous community. Spiritual, social and ideological insularity was prized because it guarded the church community from permanent moral contamination.

¹⁵ My original focus shifted from women in the FRC to a broader question about the FRC's insularity.

These arguments unfold throughout the four chapters of this thesis. Chapter I introduces the interviewees --- all FRC members --- through stories of their first few years in Canada, which proved to be challenging. It also shows how the church community was a source of help and comfort in a time of adjustment. Chapter II focuses on the structures and authority of the church, the meaning of personal faith, and the connection between church and faith. Chapter III explores how Free Reformed members and leaders interacted with and perceived the wider world. Chapter IV turns to women in the FRC community by examining beliefs and practices regarding gender roles at work, at home, and in the church, as well as briefly exploring women's value and fulfillment in these roles. Before proceeding to the historiography, I would like to provide clarification on two important terms, and place the FRC into a broader context of Dutch Reformed churches in North America.

Understanding the FRC

It is important to make a distinction between two terms this thesis uses frequently: *church* and *church community*. The *church* was the organization, complete with buildings, liturgy, official creeds and teachings, services, ministers, members, and so on. The church offered stability in its predictability and structure. It also made demands of its members. The *church community*, on the other hand, was the web of interconnectedness created by members of the church as their lives overlapped in worship, shared beliefs, customs, bartering, collective work, friendships, family, social and leisure, schooling, and more. The church community was life lived within the shared sphere of other church members. It was an immaterial 'space' of belonging. For example, when an immigrant family arrived with connections to the FRC and intentions of joining the church, the pastor or elders might assist or alert members to help the new family with transportation, lodging, supplies, furniture. Although the pastor was involved as the first contact, this was not part of his job description nor official church business. It was a function of the church community, which enfolded members with practical help and social connections.

The church and its membership were visible, the church community unseen. Yet the

latter was real to members. Members sometimes lived quite far from their church, so the community was not spatial. Yet it is as if they pictured an invisible gate around a spiritual community that they lived the majority of their lives inside, exiting only for work, shopping, banking, and vacations. Since most of life (with exceptions in the realm of business, and sometimes education) was spent with members of the church, a certain sacredness was extended to the church community. The church gave structure. It was like the skeleton, whereas the community was its flesh and blood.

FRC members refer to ‘the community,’ ‘the church community’ and ‘our circles,’ meaning the Free Reformed community. For example, member Aaltje de Rooter commented, “no, I never had any real friends outside of my church community.” Saskia De Groot, a member at Dundas FRC, described life in the community: “you stayed in your own circle.”¹⁶ Yet within the denomination, and even within the Ontario churches, there was intense rivalry and antagonism at times.¹⁷ These situations showed that the congregation of each Free Reformed church had a community of its own, so that one could almost speak of the FRC communities. Yet there was a broader community of FRC members from various Free Reformed churches, with many shared values and practices, and for simplicity’s sake, I will call this *the church community*. The church community in Southern Ontario was more concentrated than those in the United States and Western Canada, which were far more isolated (see Appendix A). Ontario’s FRCs had a unique opportunity for community because so many churches were in driving distance of one another. Thus, friends, family and pastors could visit between churches, and multi-church events could easily be held. FRC members in Ontario typically knew or were aware of most other members, including those from other church locations.

Members also mention ‘the Dutch community,’ usually referring to the broader scope

¹⁶ Aaltje de Rooter (pseudonym), Interview with author, Brantford, Ontario, October 16, 2010; Saskia and Willem De Groot (pseudonyms), Interview with author, Ancaster, Ontario, May 26, 2010.

¹⁷ Van Doodewaard, “A Transplanted Church,” 31; Baars, “Between ‘Old’ and ‘Free,’” 94-5; Maria and Jan Vanden Heuvel (pseudonyms), Interview with author, Paris, Ontario, April 1, 2011.

of various Dutch Reformed church communities.¹⁸ It is worth placing the Free Reformed denomination in the context of other Dutch Reformed churches in Canada. Like the Calvinist churches in the Netherlands, the Canadian and American Reformed denominations have a history of dividing, mainly over doctrinal disagreements, leaving an array of splinter denominations.¹⁹ The FRC is one of the smallest of these groups. Dutch Reformed churches in North America before 1976 include the Reformed Church of America (1628), the Netherlands Reformed Congregations (1865), the Christian Reformed Church (1857), the Protestant Reformed Church (1924), the Canadian Reformed Church (1950), the Puritan Reformed Church (1924), and the Free Reformed Church (1950).²⁰ After 1976, several more emerged, including the Orthodox Christian Reformed Church, the Heritage (Netherlands) Reformed Church, and the United Reformed Church, and various independent Reformed churches.²¹

Among these churches, it was not uncommon to develop a separate religious subculture to some degree. Some church communities were more open to Canadian culture than others. Robert Swierenga arranged the North American Dutch Reformed churches into a schematic to demonstrate this (see Appendix D). Some church communities associated more with the host culture and other churches, and believed that a church could Americanize or Canadianize safely and successfully: these are closer to the ‘bridge’ side. ‘Wall’ churches found the most value in isolating themselves, committing to a gulf of separation between them and others.²² Swierenga places the FRC close to the ‘wall’ or insular side.

The FRC was part of a broader array of Dutch Calvinist religiously-based communities. Many contained a “traditional reformed network of family, church and school”

¹⁸ The ‘Dutch community’ has to do with Dutch Reformed theology and church membership, not nationality or ethnicity. A Dutch Catholic, for example, would never be considered part of this ‘Dutch community.’

¹⁹ Vandoodewaard calls it “a long line of dissent” in “A Transplanted Church,” 16.

²⁰ See footnote eight regarding the start date of the FRC. Some of these names are the North American equivalent of a major denomination in the Netherlands; these dates indicate North American beginnings.

²¹ All of the denominations listed began as Dutch immigrant churches in Canada. In present day, some have non-Dutch members or attendees; the focus here is pre-1976.

²² Robert P. Swierenga, “Walls or Bridges? Acculturation Processes in the Reformed and Christian Reformed Churches in North America,” in *Morsels in the Melting Pot*, eds. George Harinck and Hans Krabbendam (Amsterdam: Free University Press, 2006): 33-42.

and functioned as a “closed society . . . where people participated only in those organizations which were associated with their faith community.”²³ The FRC resembles some of the other Dutch Reformed groups mentioned, which also kept fairly closed communities between 1950 and 1976.²⁴

Historiography

In this section, I will trace the evolution of historiography on Dutch-Canadian Calvinist immigration, identifying the major trends and how my study will contribute to the literature. The few first papers and books in the late 1950s focused on economic factors of Dutch-Canadian post-war immigration. Primarily investigating the reasons for immigrating, there was a focus on circumstances in the Netherlands.²⁵ Overall, this was a sparse field until the seventies and eighties, when the Canadian policy of multiculturalism began to impact the practice of history writing.²⁶ Even then, previously untold stories of other marginalized immigrant groups emerged and easily earned more attention in the field, with dramatic exposés of racist treatment and overcoming tremendous odds.²⁷ This was a trend in Canadian history and historical scholarship that limited attention to the Dutch.

Perhaps in response, the Dutch-Canadian historiographical focus turned to issues of identity and cultural retention, questioning the validity of studying this white, western European group. Were the Dutch really an ethnic group worthy of study, or, as Herman Ganzevoort argued, were they fading undistinguished into a general North American culture as “honorary Anglo-Saxons in Canada”?²⁸ The puzzle to historians, ethnic scholars and

²³ Schryer, *The Netherlandic Presence in Ontario*, 127.

²⁴ Even in urban settings. Schryer, *The Netherlandic Presence in Ontario*, 127.

²⁵ Peterson, *Planned Migration*; Sas, “Dutch Migration.” Petersen explores the post-war Holland to Canada immigration rush from economic and sociological perspectives, and studies both the Netherlands and Canada’s policies and attitudes about the migration.

²⁶ Michael Fallon suggests that post-multiculturalism, historians were more able to focus on immigrant groups. Michael Dennis Fallon, ‘People of the Covenant: Dutch Reformed Immigration into Canada After World War II,’ Ph.D. dissertation (University of Guelph, 2000), 7.

²⁷ For example, the Chinese faced the discriminatory Head Tax. Canadian Japanese did not have the franchise until 1948, and were forcibly removed from their homes during World War II.

²⁸ Quotation from Grant R. Cassidy, “Multiculturalism and Dutch Canadian Ethnicity in Metropolitan Toronto,” in Herman Ganzevoort and Mark Boekelman, Eds, *Dutch Immigration to North America* (Toronto: The Multicultural History Society of Ontario, 1983), 201; Herman Ganzevoort, “The Dutch in Canada: The Disappearing Ethnic,” in *The Dutch in America*:

sociologists was that these Dutch-Canadian communities lacked the classic ethnic markers that other cohesive immigrant groups displayed, such as language retention, ethnic press, celebration of old-country holidays, cultural exhibitions, dance and music.²⁹ While ethnic studies offered valuable tools and terminology, this perspective missed the potent religious character of this community.

In the 1980s and '90s, the next wave of historians protested that the Dutch Canadians had been ignored, claiming space for this group. Conferences were held and collections of essays published on an array of themes with the purpose of broadening the field.³⁰ The argument for looking at religion instead of ethnicity as a basis for Dutch Reformed communities grew in strength. Historian Frans Schryer argued that, given the ambiguous nature of ethnicity, it is necessary to observe behaviour and consider the group's own definitions of identity.³¹ For the Dutch Calvinists in Canada, identity was tied up in religious faith, or as Van Hinte put it, "Calvinist vigor."³²

Historians attempted to uncover reasons for the persistence of these communities. Increasingly focused on religion in these communities, a greater number of articles, books and dissertations began to emerge in the 1990s. Identity, ethnicity and persistence continued (and continue) to be major questions in Dutch-Canadian historiography. New questions were asked, such as "was this a social, moral or ethnic community?"³³ New approaches were added as well, including regional and comparative studies.³⁴ The understanding grew that the basis

Immigration, Settlement and Cultural Change, Robert P. Swierenga, Ed., (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1985), 225-229.

²⁹ Will C. Van den Hoonaard, *Silent Ethnicity: The Dutch of New Brunswick* (Fredericton, NB: New Ireland Press, 1991).

³⁰ Such as Robert P. Swierenga, Ed., *The Dutch in America: Immigration, Settlement and Cultural Change* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1985); Herman Ganzevoort and Mark Boekelman, Eds, *Dutch Immigration to North America*. Toronto: The Multicultural History Society of Ontario, 1983.

³¹ Schryer, "Postwar Dutch Immigrants in Ontario."

³² Jacob Van Hinte, *Netherlanders in America: A Study of Emigration and Settlement in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries in the United States of America* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1985), 557; Fred Van Lieburg, "Pietism Beyond Patria: A Dutch Religious Heritage in North America, in *Morsels in the Melting Pot: The Persistence of Dutch Immigrant Communities in North America*, George Harinck & Hans Krabbendam, Eds (Amsterdam: VU Uitgeverij, 2006): 43-54.

³³ Rob Kroes, *The Persistence of Ethnicity: Dutch Calvinist Pioneers in Amsterdam, Montana*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 234.

³⁴ Kroes, *The Persistence of Ethnicity*; Harry A. Van Belle, "The History of the Reformed Dutch in Edmonton," Conference paper for *The Association for the Advancement of Dutch-American Studies (AADAS)*, presented in Ancaster, Ontario:

of Dutch Calvinist immigrant groups was religion rather than ethnicity.³⁵ At times, writers focused on a particular denomination, and in some cases, defended the way the Calvinists constructed their institutions in Canada.³⁶ Other work was more objective, such as Van Drongelen's thesis, which argues that the Dutch are not a disappearing ethnic group in Canada but rather that they must be examined with respect to their religious backgrounds.³⁷

An important theme in the field came out of researching Dutch pre-war society. In *The Netherlandic Presence in Ontario*, Frans Schryer argues that Holland's social structure is important to understanding Dutch immigration, settlement and acculturation patterns in Canada.³⁸ The Netherlandic social system between 1880 and 1960 was strictly stratified by religion. Each of the three major religiously-based blocs – Catholic, Calvinist, and non-denominational – had its own churches, school systems, health care, media, and business and labour associations.³⁹ Essentially, each bloc lived, worshipped, interacted and married within its separate world, with the exception of commerce and employment.⁴⁰ This system was known as *verzuiling*, which Hofstede calls “socioreligious organizatory macrostructure.”⁴¹

Understanding *verzuiling*, the Netherlandic paradigm of separate society and life based on religion, impacted the study of Canadian Dutch immigrants. It was established that, “in order to preserve their religious heritage, the Calvinists voluntarily built institutionally

Redeemer University College, 2009. Comparative studies by Van Dijk, analyzing the differences in settlement patterns and acculturation between Dutch Catholics and Protestants.

³⁵ Van Dijk, “Ethnic Persistence,” 28.

³⁶ Such as Aileen Van Ginkel, “Ethnicity in the Reformed Tradition: Dutch Calvinist Immigrants in Canada, 1946-1960,” MA thesis, University of Toronto, 1982. Harry Kits sets out to show how Dutch Canadians have contributed to Canadian society, and argues that they assimilated “behaviourally” though not “structurally.” Harry J. Kits, “‘Verzuiling’ and Social Involvement: The Canadian Case,” in *The Dutch in North-America: Their Immigration and Cultural Continuity*, Rob Kroes & Henk-Otto Neuschafer, Eds. (Amsterdam: VU University Press, 1991), 338-348.

³⁷ Peter Mark van Drongelen, “Establishing a Covenant Community: Religion as a Basis for Community and Ethnic Separateness among Dutch Calvinists in British Columbia's Fraser Valley,” MA thesis, Simon Fraser University, 1992; Van Dijk, “Role of Religion.”

³⁸ For a more detailed description of *verzuiling*, see Schryer, *The Netherlandic Presence in Ontario*, 25-35, and B. P. Hofstede, *Thwarted Exodus: Post-War Overseas Migration from the Netherlands* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1964), 74-6.

³⁹ Schryer actually argues that there were four pillars, separating the Protestant into two (*hervormden* (Protestant State Church), *gereformeerden* (conservative Calvinist), but other sources indicate that this may have been subsections of a larger Protestant group. ‘Non-denominational’ (also called *neutral*) included atheists, Jews and others; it was essentially a more secular group that was not fully united but gained some measure of unity in its lack of agreement with the other major *zuilen*. Schryer, *The Netherlandic Presence in Ontario*, 24.

⁴⁰ Schryer, *The Netherlandic Presence in Ontario*, 25; Hutten, 16.

⁴¹ Hofstede, *Thwarted Exodus*, 193.

complete societ[ies] soon after their arrival in Canada,” recreating a type of the Netherland’s social system of *verzuiling*.⁴² The concept of *verzuiling* has had a significant impact on the historiography.⁴³ I agree that it was a major contributing factor, though not the only one.⁴⁴ Since *verzuiling* has been well-researched, my interest is in moving to other less explored factors on Canadian soil.⁴⁵

By the end of the eighties and nineties, a better range of primary sources were being employed. With the upsurge of the new social history, more “grassroots” primary sources, such as letters, journals, and oral histories were integrated into analysis to the rich benefit of the field.⁴⁶ In an article that relies heavily on the letters of one Dutch-Canadian woman, Mark Boekelman demonstrated the power of using such sources to make a historical subject and time period come alive, while maintaining an academic approach.⁴⁷ I also attempt to capture the freshness and potency of history by quoting individual voices --- FRC pastors, via *The Messenger*, and members, through the interviews --- rather than primarily summarizing or

⁴²Van Dijk, “The Role of Religion,” 60.

⁴³ Kits, “‘Verzuiling’ and Social Involvement”; Harry A. Van Belle, “From Religious Pluralism to Cultural Pluralism: Continuity and Change among the Reformed Dutch in Canada,” in *The Dutch in North-America: Their Immigration and Cultural Continuity*, eds. Rob Kroes & Henk-Otto Neuschafer. Amsterdam: VU University Press, 1991: 330. Van Belle suggests that the Canada is culturally plural where the Netherlands had been religiously plural. In the Netherlands, religion was a public categorization while Canada found it a private distinction.

⁴⁴*Verzuiling* was a major factor but not the only one. First, the FRC and other churches did not replicate the exact system; in the Netherlands, a *stand* was not made up of a single denomination, but larger groupings (all Catholics, all Protestants, and so on). The Dutch-Canadian churches made their boundaries much smaller. Second, *verzuiling* does not explain the persistence of this social separation for the second, third and fourth generations in the FRC. These generations had never experienced *verzuiling* nor even much of Dutch culture or language. Thirdly, the Netherlands itself did not maintain this system; it was resisted immediately after the war, and in time fell away. The precise dates are debated, but in general consensus, it fell away (through significant effort from various parties) throughout the 1960s and ’70s, precisely when the FRC was articulating even more clear boundaries rather than adapting to Canadian culture and its modernizations.

⁴⁵ There have also been studies of the Dutch in the United States that include some mention of Dutch in Canada, as in Henry Lucas’ chapter entitled “The Dutch Elsewhere on the Continent.” In Henry Stephen Lucas, *Netherlanders in America: Dutch immigration to the United States and Canada, 1789-1950* (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 1989).

⁴⁶ As well, popular histories began emerging, as of the early 1980s, including personal accounts and compilations of stories. While less relevant for academic studies, they may have inspired further enthusiasm for the subject and seem to reflect the growing awareness and pride that Dutch-Canadians were beginning to take in their history. Albert VanderMey, *To All Our Children: The Story of the Postwar Dutch Immigration to Canada* (Jordan Station, Ontario: Paideia Press, 1983); Jean Bruce, *After the War* (Don Mills: Fitzhenry & Whiteside, 1982); Miep Verkley, *A Particular Path: A Collection of Stories about the Experiences of Women Immigrants* (Stratford, Ontario: Swans Publications, 1993); Albert van der Mey and Marten A. Mol, *The Dutch Touch in Ontario* (Toronto: Marten A. Mol, 1997).

⁴⁷ Mark Boekelman, “The Letters of Jane Aberson: Everyday Life on the Prairies during the Depression,” in *Dutch Immigration to North America*, Ganzevoort, Herman, and Mark Boekelman, Eds. (Toronto: The Multicultural History Society of Ontario, 1983), 111-129. Sinke also does this well, in Suzanne Sinke, “Home is Where You Build It: Dutch Immigrant Women and Social Reproduction,” in *The Dutch in North-America: Their Immigration and Cultural Continuity*, Rob Kroes & Henk-Otto Neuschafer, Eds. (Amsterdam: VU University Press, 1991): 410-421. As well, Suzanne Sinke, *Dutch Immigrant Women in the United States, 1880-1920* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2002).

paraphrasing their ideas.

In the twenty-first century, historians continued to consider the identity of Dutch-Canadians, sometimes reaching new conclusions.⁴⁸ While some excellent work was generated, some lacked significant analysis of social customs and beliefs, focusing primarily on theology and church history. Others, like Michael Fallon, successfully combined social and church history. Fallon's PhD dissertation on Dutch Reformed immigrants in Canada looks to the theological concept of covenant as the reason "why this band of Reformed immigrants set themselves apart to the extent they did."⁴⁹ While his answer is theological, his approach stands out, as he integrates individual stories with the institutional perspective. Fallon notes that the historiographical emphasis on immigration and persistence had led to a dearth of insightful research and analysis of settlement and the community, which he begins to allay. Hans Krabbendam also employs thorough research and argues that "the stronger the religious identity of a group the less it has a need for an explicitly ethnic identity."⁵⁰ This was indeed my finding in studying the FRC: that although there were subtle ethnic and cultural elements that united the group, the most vital ties that bound were religious in nature, including the church, personal faith, spiritual boundaries creating divisions between insiders and 'the world,' and peer pressure to maintain morality.

A sometimes problematic factor is that most research in this particular field has been done by scholars of Dutch descent.⁵¹ Along with some other immigrant histories, many books

⁴⁸ Michiel Horn, "Identities Are Not Like Hats': Reflections on Identity Change, Dutch to Canadian," *Canadian Journal of Netherlandic Studies* 26.1 (2005): 33-39. Or broadening the subject, as Hutton did by discussing the impact on the children who immigrated. Anne van Arragon Hutten, *Uprooted: The Story of Dutch Immigrant Children in Canada, 1947-1959* (Kentville, N.S.: North Mountain Press, 2001).

⁴⁹ Michael Fallon, "People of the Covenant," 10. He notes that other ethno-religious groups in Canada also saw themselves as set apart from the world, such as the Hutterites, Scottish Presbyterians and Baptists, and others. Fallon, 16.

⁵⁰ Hans Krabbendam, *Dutch-American Identity Politics: The Use of History by Dutch Immigrants* (Middelburg, The Netherlands: Roosevelt Study Center, 2003), 31. This perspective is taken by most, though not by insider Van Doodewaard, who, in describing the FRC, states that its isolation from Canadian society and surrounding denominations is due to "being an ethnic body." Van Doodewaard, "A Transplanted Church," 23.

⁵¹ Often scholars' last names indicate this: Schryer, Van Belle, Van Dijk, Van Doodewaard, Ganzevoort, Sweirenga, Neuschaffer, Harinck and Krabbendam. Some names have been anglicized, such as Harry Hugh Cook (originally Arie Huyg Kok). Others have more distant ties; Michael Fallon, for example, married a Dutch reformed woman, and William Petersen had a Frisian-speaking German father. One large Calvinist denomination, the Christian Reformed (CRC), has produced a number of MA theses on their denomination.

and articles have a “celebratory or filiopietistic bent.”⁵² While personal interest is an understandable motivator, it has in some cases resulted in a uncritical and subjective approach, seemingly designed to celebrate the history and accomplishments of the church community.⁵³ I deal with the insider-outsider dilemma in greater detail further in this chapter, but it is worth noting that this has been a major criticism of this field, and calls for rigorous, analytical scholarship.

Another issue is that women have mainly been ignored in the historiography.⁵⁴ Their silence in the history books does not mean they were silent; their invisibility does not mean they did not exist.⁵⁵ One of the few historians to focus on Dutch-Canadian Reformed women, Joyce Vander Vliet argues that women of the Christian Reformed Churches (CRC) “whether aware of it or not, have subsumed their individual identities . . . to that of the hegemonic males in their lives.”⁵⁶ Vander Vliet portrays the women of the community as either repressed or rebellious. This limited approach does not leave open the possibility that some of these conservative women might have genuinely and wholeheartedly embraced the theology and lifestyle, and in fact contributed to building an insular community.

As Marlene Epp points out in her study of Mennonite women, to successfully study women within a patriarchal group in which they exercise little structural power or authority, it is necessary to consider both exclusion and victimization of women along with their influence, agency and contributions.⁵⁷ While this thesis does not focus on women or gender, it takes into account FRC immigrant women’s lives, and considers a few ways in which gender

⁵² Franca Iacovetta, *Writing of English Canadian Immigrant History* (Canada’s Ethnic Group Series, Booklet no. 2. Ottawa: Canadian Historical Association, 1997), 3.

⁵³ Particularly those with denominational focus. Jon Huiskens, “The Protestant Reformed Churches: Organization, Roots, and Future” in *Morsels in the Melting Pot* (Amsterdam: VU Uitgeverij, 2006), 79. For denominational examples, see articles in *Morsels in the Melting Pot*, eds. George Harinck and Hans Krabbendam on Canadian Reformed Churches (Frederika Oosterhoff), Netherlands Reformed (Laurens Vogelaar) and others.

⁵⁴ As Schryer points out, and attempts to begin to address. (Schryer, *The Netherlandic Presence in Ontario*, 214.) Nor has gender been considered an important category of analysis. This thesis only touches on gender, and much more could be done.

⁵⁵ Pamela Sugiman, “Passing Time, Moving Memories: Interpreting Wartime Narratives of Japanese Canadian Women,” *Histoire Sociale/Social History*, 36(73):51.

⁵⁶ Joyce Vander Vliet, “Women, Church, and Society: The Christian Reformed Church Case” (Master’s thesis, University of Guelph, 1994), 95.

⁵⁷ Marlene Epp, *Mennonite Women in Canada: A History* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2008).

shaped members' experiences.⁵⁸ My goal was to understand the community, and to integrate women's stories and beliefs into this understanding --- not only regarding women's roles, but on every topic. As such, it is "an exercise in overcoming women's invisibility."⁵⁹

Very little has been written specifically about the FRC, nothing about women in the FRC, and little employing oral sources or a social history approach. The limited study of the Free Reformed has been on theology, leaders and church history.⁶⁰ This thesis, therefore adds to the body of work by investigating the FRC community from a social history perspective, and integrating the stories and thoughts of women and men, using oral history as a tool. Along with other historians, I continue the search for "clues to the secret behind the continued existence of this Dutch community."⁶¹ Others agree that religion is at the core of these communities, but I want to know how that looked in daily lives and beliefs. Like Fallon, I strive to offer the perspectives of "pulpit and pew," seeking to discover how this perspective amplifies, complicates, echoes or contradicts the current 'story' of Dutch-Canadian immigration and settlement.⁶²

Methodology: Sources & Approach

My two main bodies of primary sources were *The Messenger*, the FRC's monthly newspaper, and interviews with first-generation Dutch Free Reformed immigrants. First published in Hamilton in 1954, *The Messenger* featured editorial-style sermons, congregational news, and reports of denomination-wide meetings.⁶³ It also included wedding, birth and death announcements, advertisements for teaching positions at Christian schools, missionary communications, and more. Later editions included Bible-based stories and activities for children.⁶⁴ Its purpose was to instruct members and broadcast news across the

⁵⁸ The best example of Dutch women's history in North America is Suzanne Sinke's work, though she studies American Dutch. See footnote 47.

⁵⁹ Epp, *Mennonite Women*, 6.

⁶⁰ Van Doodewaard, "A Transplanted Church"; Baars, "Between 'Old' and 'Free'"; Bilkes, *Free Reformed Churches in the West*. There have been other internally published articles and books on FRC theology as well.

⁶¹ Kroes, *The Persistence of Ethnicity*, 4.

⁶² Fallon, "People of the Covenant," 39.

⁶³ See for example J. Tamminga, "Synod Report" in *The Messenger* 13: 10 (Oct. 1966): 2-3.

⁶⁴ By July 1976, an expanded *Messenger* included a youth page with crossword puzzle and other word games, all with a biblical theme.

congregations. Initially available by subscription (three dollars a year in 1970), *The Messenger* was eventually offered at no charge to individual members.

Reading each edition from 1954 to 1977, I took notes on subjects that offered insight into the community.⁶⁵ *The Messenger* is theology-heavy. I looked for any mention of women, children, youth, marriage, the family, advice or admonitions, and interactions with the surrounding world and other churches. These types of topics were addressed with increasing frequency by the mid-1960s into the 1970s. Articles were written to address controversial issues that arose in an era of change, demonstrating the FRC's awareness of the surrounding culture, their concerns with that culture, and their response of deliberately working against modernizing forces.

Most articles were written by FRC ministers. Each monthly issue was distributed to the congregations. As such, *The Messenger* is the closest source to represent the voice of the denomination. Other potentially rich sources besides *The Messenger* would be sermons and leadership meeting reports. However, opinions and practices varied between congregations and pastors, so *The Messenger* is more broadly representative of the entire denomination. It offers a revealing glimpse into the church structure and community, its values and beliefs, as well as its responses to and interactions with the surrounding Canadian culture. In *The Messenger*, congregational news and reports indicate what was happening, while teachings did not necessarily indicate what was done, but what was prescribed. Since theology and the role of minister were both highly respected, it is likely that pastoral writings in *The Messenger* were influential in the lives of congregants.

The other main primary source was interviews with FRC members who reflected on their time in the church community between 1950 and 1976. While *The Messenger* described church-related news and prescribed the behaviour of members, these interviews offer 'grassroots' descriptions of members' beliefs and practices. I conducted interviews with sixteen members of the FRC community between 2010 and 2011: five couples, five women,

⁶⁵ One pastor and his wife kindly allowed me to access their well-organized collection of *The Messenger* editions.

and two men. I found potential interviewees in church directories, and called to request an interview.⁶⁶ The sixteen interviewees attended various FRC congregations, came from different areas of Holland, were raised in different churches and schools in the Netherlands, and had a variety of educational levels and occupations. As such, they represent a range of Free Reformed views.

The interviews ranged from 1.5 to 2.5 hours in length.⁶⁷ I guided the interview by asking a series of questions designed to uncover their life stories and gather information.⁶⁸ I asked these questions and sometimes others as needed for clarification or elaboration. Interviewees also had opportunity to share what they thought was relevant about their lives. Often simply asking the first question led to a streaming narrative in which many of my questions were answered without being overtly asked.⁶⁹ The next step was to transcribe each interview and begin gathering information on selected topics. I used pseudonyms to protect the identity of those who generously volunteered to be interviewed.

My two major primary sources complement each other by offering different perspectives and points of comparison between what was taught (in *The Messenger*) and what was believed and lived (in interviews). No one interviewee spoke for the entire group. But each individual experienced life within the community. As such, the interviews have weight, and represent a range of perspectives and experiences that illustrate community life.⁷⁰ The goal was to see the 'big story' (by combining interviews and the official perspective) without losing sight of individual or family stories.⁷¹

⁶⁶ I also used the FRC's Rehoboth Christian school directory. I knew (or knew of) many interviewees through growing up in the community. Some potential interviewees refused to meet with me.

⁶⁷ Initially, I intended to conduct one-on-one interviews, but in several cases both husband and wife were present for the interview. This was ultimately helpful as spouses reminded each other of events and opinions.

⁶⁸ See Appendix C for the questions.

⁶⁹ This approach avoids the problem of oversteering the dialogue as well as the problem of a directionless narrative. Ellen Scheinberg, "In Their Own Words," *Archivaria* 49 (Spring 2000): 211.

⁷⁰ I believe that with a different selection of interviewees, different stories would have emerged, but similar themes. This is not intended to be a full picture, but a beginning to gain insight into the community.

⁷¹ Pamela Sugiman, in her studies of Japanese Canadian women during World War II, notes the importance of searching for and listening to many different narratives. One dominant story of a community in the public understanding is made up of a variety of stories; "One narrative alone may conceal the diverse experiences of people . experiences shaped by age, generation, and one.s location within hierarchies based on gender and social class." Sugiman, "Passing Time, Moving Memories," 56.

Oral history has both limitations and advantages. One advantage is accessing time-sensitive personal narratives. One interviewee, an intelligent, healthy woman, developed an acute illness and passed away suddenly only weeks after our interview. One of my motivating factors for researching and writing this thesis was that my grandparents' generation was passing away without having recorded their stories; this unexpected death illustrated the urgency starkly.

Another asset of oral history is hearing from subjects who would otherwise be unmentioned or lack voice in the historical record. As Linda Shopes notes in her study, oral history helps us understand the past by bringing to light different perspectives that may lead to a very different understanding of history.⁷² In this case also, interviews provided a unique opportunity to hear from the women of the FRC, who were often too busy to keep diaries, were rarely published in *The Messenger*, and never preached. Most other accounts of the Dutch Reformed have failed to consider women, apparently trusting that “male elites . . . represent the community.”⁷³ I do not share this assumption, and oral interviews provided an opportunity to access this demographic.⁷⁴ In the debate over the use of oral history, perhaps the strongest argument is the chance of “doing history from the bottom up.”⁷⁵ The interviewees, both men and women, brought the voices of regular FRC members into the story. For communities such as the Free Reformed, this offers the possibility of challenging the ‘collective narrative’ that has shaped the FRC through its leaders and its newspaper.

One difficulty of oral history is that polite conversation does not always allow the

⁷² Oral history has radically changed the understanding of some events. See an example of this in Bethany L. Rogers, “Teaching and Social Reform in the 1960s: Lessons from National Teacher Corps Oral Histories,” *The Oral History Review* 35: 1 (Winter - Spring 2008): 39-67. Linda Shopes, “Oral History and the Study of Communities: Problems, Paradoxes, and Possibilities,” *The Journal of American History* 89: 2 (Sept. 2002): 588-598.

⁷³ Iacovetta, *English Canadian Immigrant History*, 14.

⁷⁴ Scheinberg, “In Their Own Words”; Susan Geiger, “What's So Feminist About Women's Oral History?” *Journal of Women's History* 2:1 (Spring 1990); Sherna Berger Gluck and Daphne Patai, Eds. *Women's Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History* (New York: Routledge, 1991); Joan Sangster, “Telling Our Stories: Feminist Debates and the Use of Oral History,” in Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson, Eds., *The Oral History Reader* (London: Routledge, 1998), 87-100.

⁷⁵ Iacovetta, *English Canadian Immigrant History*, 5. Paul Thompson argues oral history can lead to a more “socially conscious and democratic history” as it can obtain information from a less “restricted social stratum.” Paul Thompson, “The Voice of the Past: Oral History,” in Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson, eds., *The Oral History Reader* (London: Routledge, 1998), 27.

interviewer to ask questions about uncomfortable or controversial subjects. In some cases, interviewees answered vaguely, and probing for specifics elicited tense or defensive reactions.⁷⁶ Obtaining oral history can be awkward or intense on occasion. Yet, a spirit of critical inquiry is necessary to do history justice. Awkward moments pass, but the valuable material it provides is captured forever.⁷⁷

The problem of memory is also debated in oral history. In many cases, including this one, interviewees have had many years to reflect, consider and reconsider what happened ‘back then.’ Memory can be somewhat fluid.⁷⁸ The onus is on the researcher to direct interviewees to focus on a particular time period, and to sift through the transcription. Would journals and letters more accurately reflect the time frame? They would be an excellent source, yet every source has its limits. For example, some interviewees noted that letters written to family back in Holland were ‘rosy,’ not mentioning the hardships they encountered: they did not want to worry their relatives.⁷⁹

Similar issues are possible with oral interviews. One interviewee, now widowed, reflecting on her marriage and the loss of her husband, stated, “you remember the good things, and try to get go of the less good experiences, because everybody has not-nice experiences, but to be able to let them go. That’s important. We’re all human, we all make mistakes.”⁸⁰ In other words, she admitted that she has tried to forget negative memories. Is her story then skewed? Any source may be flawed or inaccurate; all need academic analysis to be utilized well. In this case, this woman also stated (emphatically) that she and her husband had never argued. In light of her other statement about repressing negative memories, I would not state as fact in the thesis that this woman and her husband never argued.⁸¹ The interviewer

⁷⁶ Interviewees sometimes used another common strategy for difficult subjects: deflect and ask me for my opinion on the matter.

⁷⁷ A minor lingual issue: much of the meaning of spoken language is conveyed by “tone, pacing, and inflection” which can be lost when put on paper. (Shopes, 592) For this reason, where appropriate or helpful, I note the manner in which information was conveyed, or use italics to denote spoken emphasis.

⁷⁸ Shelley Trower, Ed., *Place, Writing, and Voice in Oral History* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 77.

⁷⁹ Marijke Driessen, Interview, (pseudonym), Interview with author, Lynden, Ontario, April 1, 2011.

⁸⁰ Aaltje de Ruyter, Interview, 2010.

⁸¹ If I mentioned it, I would say she said this, but that she also admits to repressing negative memories.

must reflect and sift through the files diligently. Oral historians cannot claim to authoritatively present ‘the truth’ (nor can a historian using print sources) but can analyze what we do know or have come to understand, which “often lies below the surface of the words.”⁸² Certainly, an additional benefit of oral interviews is that an interviewer has the opportunity to interact with and ask for clarification from the interviewee, something that a historic document does not provide.

While a print source such as a newspaper or diary is written in the control of the historical character, the interactive format of interviews leaves the interviewer with a voice.⁸³ For this reason, the perspective of the interviewer in relation to the group being studied has also been an area of discussion within the field of oral history. The insider-outsider dilemma, or “positionality in qualitative research,” has been discussed in history and other fields of study, yielding helpful insights.⁸⁴ As Hasia Diner points out, based on her experiences of studying Jewish communities and Irish women, there are benefits and drawbacks to both approaches. She points out that insiders must be particularly cautious about their own agenda.⁸⁵ On the other hand, while perhaps lacking some openness or objectivity, the insider may know where to look, as it were, or as Diner puts it, have “access to knowledge” that others would have had to do mountains of research to find.⁸⁶

The major issue for insiders is objectivity. Historians must strive to be as objective as possible, yet recognize that there is no such thing as total objectivity.⁸⁷ It is recommended to be open about one’s own perspective, sources and methods to keep the reader aware. That said, like most other historians studying Dutch-Canadian immigrant groups, I was born and raised in the community. I am an insider. I withdrew from the FRC church (and, by extension,

⁸² Linda Shopes, “Oral History,” 593.

⁸³ For more on the issue of the researcher’s voice, see Sonya Corbin Dwyer and Jennifer L. Buckle, “The Space Between: On Being an Insider-Outsider in Qualitative Research,” *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 8:1 (2009): 54-63.

⁸⁴ Dwyer and Buckle, “The Space Between,” 55.

⁸⁵ Hasia Diner, “Insights and Blind Spots: Writing History from Inside and Outside,” in *Strangers at Home: Amish and Mennonite Women in History*, Kimberly Schmidt, Diane Zimmerman Umble, & Steven D. Reschly, Eds. (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), 21-38.

⁸⁶ Diner, “Insights and Blind Spots,” 26.

⁸⁷ Anna-Lina Aschemeyer, “Writing the History of Conservative Mennonites: The Outsider-Insider Question,” unpublished paper (University of Waterloo, 2009), 13.

mostly the community as well) in 2008. So, I am also an outsider.

As an insider, what I *do* know (and my curiosity to better understand the background of what I am familiar with) has motivated me to tackle this research and writing, to persevere through delays and difficulties. Also, being an insider made it easier to obtain interviews, and for interviewees to communicate with me. Sometimes the insider perspective was unhelpful. Knowing that I was familiar with the FRC, interviewees would say things like “you know how it is; you were raised here” or “we have Free Reformed views on that” – not exactly the answers I was looking for!⁸⁸

While the insider-outsider debate continues, a significant theme is now that these categories are perhaps an oversimplification. As Anna-Lina Aschemeyer points out, insider and outsider are not strict categories: many people fit into various categories, as do I.⁸⁹ Sonya Dwyer challenges the dichotomy of insider versus outsider, and suggests a “space between” that she calls insider-outsider, recognizing that in the researcher-researched relationships there will be both similarities and differences. Dwyer argues that the researcher may not truly be an outsider (if only because of one’s familiarity with the field) or insider (because of the distance of being a researcher).⁹⁰ In light of this shift, historians are able to be unapologetic in stating their affiliation, and indeed can bring their insider and/or outsider status to the project as a strength.⁹¹

In my research and writing, I set aside *a posteriori* ideas, and simply explored the research to see what emerged. My approach was to study each interview thoroughly, and compare with other interviews, as well as with *The Messenger*, with the goal of unearthing and highlighting the real-life stories of congregants, to provide fuller and more concrete

⁸⁸ Tineke and Nicolaas Martens (pseudonyms), Interview with author, Brantford, Ontario, May 27, 2010.

⁸⁹ Aschemeyer, “Conservative Mennonites,” 6, 12-13. Other insider/outsider categories could be marital status, education, job, gender, affiliations, generation or age. I experienced this. Interviewees knew my family (insider), but some did not know I had left the community and expressed shock and concern that I had (outsider). Every single one asked me about where I currently attended church (outsider) but many referred to one or more of my grandparents (insider), and several were shocked that I, at the age of mid-20s, was single (not a community norm).

⁹⁰ Dwyer and Buckle, “The Space Between,” 61.

⁹¹ Epp, *Mennonite Women*, xii.

understandings of the community's beliefs, lifestyle, identity and continuity. The next chapter will explore how the early days of settlement and the cooperation of the church community contributed to the FRC's insularity and isolation.

Chapter I: “Impressed with Canada? Not Really!”:

Hardship and Comfort in the First Years of Settlement

So you come here and you couldn't speak the language. And you stick together, and you help one another and support one another. And if there was a funeral, we'd all be there from the congregation. And if there was a wedding, we'd all be there from the congregation. And that's where the church community came in. And all the Free Reformers [from different churches] would come gather together, and have a bit of a speech, and associate with one another too.¹

The Dutch Free Reformed immigrants came to Canada with high hopes of a better life. They faced difficult challenges, yet found comfort in their church community. The intention of this thesis was not to focus on immigration and first years of settlement, but on the Free Reformed church community in Ontario. However, as interviewees shared their stories, it became evident that an important component of their cohesiveness was the shared difficulties they experienced in their first years in Canada. The refuge that the church community represented, as expressed here by interviewee Karel Molenaar --- to help and support each other, attend weddings and funerals, and “stick together” -- can only be fully recognized against the backdrop of their adversity. Therefore, the immigration and settlement experiences were formative in establishing a tightly-knit, isolated Free Reformed community. The shared difficulties in a new, sometimes overwhelming, Canadian environment drew the Free Reformers to find shelter in the insular church community that offered familiar language, help and friendship.

While Dutch Protestants were welcome in Canadian immigration policy, and did not face systemic discrimination as white western Europeans, the first years for the Free Reformers were not easy. Hopes of a better future were met with the bleak realities of inadequate housing, search for employment, learning English, and coping with adjustments and homesickness. These challenges were shared by all, though men and women experienced different degrees of difficulty. Due to their committed faith, attending church was a given.

¹ Karel, in Karel and Sophie Molenaar (pseudonyms), Interview with author, Flamborough, Ontario, October 15, 2010.

With the language barrier, a theology-driven religion, and a heritage of *verzuiling*, it was easier to turn to those of the same faith background for advice, help and support, rather than reaching out to other Canadians or even other established Dutch church communities.² The Free Reformed church community was a haven of support, security and succor for overwhelmed immigrants.

In Part I, this chapter first discusses the decisions of families and individuals to emigrate to Canada. In the next (and largest) section, it tells stories of the challenging first years of settlement. Part II describes the help and comfort members found in each other as the church community. Since immigrants arrived over a period of time beginning in 1948 and continuing over the next two decades, the time frame of this chapter is broad.³ Some arrived by ship, a few by plane. In some ways, it was easier for those who immigrated later in this time period, when the community was well-established. Yet all faced a degree of difficulty.

Part One: Immigration & Challenges of Settlement

The Decision to Immigrate to Canada

Reasons for emigrating included getting out of war-torn Holland, dodging the compulsory draft, and seeking financial opportunities in ‘the New World.’ Often the decision was made by the father or husband figure; consequently, many interviewees did not have a voice in the matter. Four interviewees came to Canada as fiancées or girlfriends (aged eighteen to twenty-one), and only one young man, a twenty-two-year-old, came alone. Twelve came with family: nine as dependents (mostly in their late teens, but as young as twelve and as old as twenty-one), and four as married couples, one just-married young couple and two women who were already mothers.

Working in the technical corps of the army as a blacksmith until a week before emigrating with his family, Karel Molenaar pointed out that “in Europe, everything was badly

² See page twelve of the Introduction for a description of *verzuiling*.

³ The majority arrived before 1962, but some came into the seventies. Frans Schryer, “Postwar Dutch Immigrants in Ontario: A Re-examination of Immigration and Ethnicity,” *Canadian Ethnic Studies* 30.1 (1998): 3.

broken by the war.”⁴ The classic reason for immigration is to find better opportunities for socioeconomic success, and the Dutch were no exception.⁵ Frans and Liesbeth Scholten, who lived across the river from each other in Holland, came as teenagers with their respective families for opportunities, and to “get a fresh start.”⁶ Mother of four children, then aged one to sixteen, Lien de Wit recalled that there was no work, and prices in Holland were rising. When her closest brother decided to go, she and her husband also signed up.⁷ Several other women remarked that there were no jobs in Holland, and “no future for the children.”⁸ Nor a future for working-class adults, according to Karel Molenaar, who pointed out that it was difficult or impossible at that time to advance in Holland: “if you were a workman, you stayed a workman.”⁹

With still-fresh memories of war-time trauma, Pieter Smit recalled that his family feared encroaching communism, and, since three of eleven sons had already been conscripted for the war with Indonesia (1945-1949), it seemed a good time to go. Pieter’s family could not afford the expense of passage, but his oldest brother had dealt on the black market during and after the war, and made enough money to pay for the family’s trip (under the agreement that they would pay him back when they were able).¹⁰

Escaping post-war Netherlands (and possible conscription for another war) for a land apparently filled with opportunity were the major reasons given for families’ decisions to leave Holland. However, most interviewees did not actually have a choice in the matter, being children, dependents, or women in a committed relationship whose significant other wanted to leave at the time. Then-eighteen-year-old Sophie Molenaar’s father decided to leave because “you couldn’t get ahead there.” Her father worked for a farmer and wanted to have his own

⁴ Karel and Sophie Molenaar, Interview, 2010.

⁵ VanDoodewaard lists economic opportunity, threat of soviet expansion, “peace, freedom, and greater social conservatism.” William Van Doodewaard, “A Transplanted Church: The Netherlandic Roots and Development of the Free Reformed Churches of North America,” *Canadian Journal of Netherlandic Studies* 26:2 (2005): 19.

⁶ Frans and Liesbeth Scholten (pseudonyms), Interview with author, Dundas, Ontario, May 13, 2010.

⁷ Lien de Wit (pseudonym), Interview with author, Brantford, Ontario, May 26, 2010.

⁸ Carolina Hoekstra (pseudonym), Interview with author, Brant Region, Ontario, November 15, 2010.

⁹ Karel and Sophie Molenaar, Interview, 2010.

¹⁰ Pieter Smit (pseudonym), Interview with author, Lynden, Ontario, April 14, 2011.

farm but this was not an option in Holland. “I didn’t [want] to go, really,” she stated, and thought her mother would rather have stayed in Holland. Sophie was sad to leave behind her friends and a boyfriend; she corresponded with the boyfriend by mail for a while, but eventually broke up with him because, as she stated resignedly, “there was no point” in continuing.¹¹ Also eighteen at departure, Jan Vanden Heuvel left because his father was interested in pastoral work amongst the new immigrants here. So, “we all came along. They really didn’t *ask* you in those days, you just did [it].” Jan noted that he did not mind, but one of his brothers unwillingly left his secure position as a teacher in Holland to work on a farm in Canada.¹²

For many women, the move was bound up with their marriage or prospective marriage. One woman was already married with children, and several others came as fiancés (one as a five-month-pregnant fiancée). When asked why she came, Tineke Martens pointed to her husband Nicolaas and laughed. She had been reluctant to go, but Nicolaas, her then-fiance “felt so unhappy in Holland.” In addition, her sister had already moved to Canada and encouraged her to come.¹³ Eda Van Leeuwen, another woman who married just prior to emigrating, said she “wasn’t prepared [to leave Holland],” but her then-boyfriend Dirk wanted to go. Therefore, she felt it was inevitable and she slowly got used to the idea. “If you like each other, what you gonna do, right?” she added, as her husband Dirk chuckled in agreement.¹⁴ Apparently it was expected that the woman should adapt and become reconciled to the plans and wishes of her boyfriend, fiancé or husband.

Many women, upon reflection, admitted that they would not emigrate again, given the choice, and many implied or stated that they did not know why they came. In the Calvinist belief system, the father was the leader or ‘head’ of the family. Therefore, children, unmarried youths and young adults would accompany their families, and women should follow their

¹¹ Sophie Molenaar (pseudonym), Interview with author, Flamborough, Ontario, October 28, 2010.

¹² Maria and Jan Vanden Heuvel (pseudonyms), Interview with author, Paris, Ontario, April 1, 2011.

¹³ Tineke and Nicolaas Martens (pseudonyms), Interview with author, Brantford, Ontario, May 27, 2010.

¹⁴ Eda and Dirk Van Leeuwen (pseudonyms), Interview with author, Cambridge, Ontario, April 16, 2011.

fiancés or husbands, regardless of how they felt about it. Certainly some young people were enthusiastic to go. To Karel Molenaar, it seemed like an adventure; when his mother asked him if he was interested in immigrating along with the family, he said yes, “without any hesitation.”¹⁵ For twelve-year-old Pieter Smit, it was “exciting.” Yet, he added, “I had no idea where Canada was, or *what* Canada was, or you know. And I don’t think to this day that even my father and mother knew where Canada was. No. Because, you know, none of us were what you would now call educated.”¹⁶ Whether they came willingly or unwillingly, knowledgeably or blindly, the hope of all was to find a better life for their family and future. With that expectation, most of the immigrants were shocked by the difficulties of the first few years in Canada.

Living Conditions for the New Immigrants

Many interviewees recall stark living conditions. Liesbeth Scholten, who emigrated with her family at age fifteen, commented, “in Holland, we had inside plumbing, but when we first came here we had an outhouse, no plumbing inside, and a water pump which was dry half the summer. When we came home from work, we had to get water from the neighbours to do the washing. That was a struggle.” Her husband interjected, “that was kind of pioneering.” “That was *very* pioneering,” she retorted, “although when I think back, my mom made it always fun, she never complained.”¹⁷

Pieter Smit and his family had to live in a house where the weeds had grown up waist high “through the pine board floors.” The house had “no plumbing, no water, no bathroom, no heating.” During their first winter, only two sisters of the thirteen family members were able to find work, leaving the entire household to live on a monthly combined income of \$52.50. Of this amount, \$15 went toward monthly rent, leaving only \$37.50 to live on.¹⁸ The immigrants struggled with Ontario’s winters as well as the hot, humid summers. Saskia de

¹⁵ Karel and Sophie Molenaar, Interview, 2010.

¹⁶ Pieter Smit, Interview, 2011.

¹⁷ Frans and Liesbeth Scholten, Interview, 2010.

¹⁸ Pieter Smit, Interview, 2011.

Groot found adjusting to the weather very difficult, since Canadian winters were much colder than she had been used to.¹⁹ Frans Scholten, who arrived with his parents in 1949, had to dig holes in the boiling heat of July. He got frequent nosebleeds, and thought, “man, I wish I was back in Holland!”²⁰

In the face of such difficulties, these families and individuals seemed determined to make the best of their situation with an attitude of determination. Aaltje de Ruiter, now a widow, recalled her philosophy: “you’re young, you take it just in stride, and you think ‘hopefully things get better,’ which they did.” They had not been rich in Holland “but at least it was furnished.” Yet, she added, “you didn’t feel deprived or anything; it was no big deal.”²¹ Maria VandenHeuvel noted that their house in the small town of Lynden, Ontario, was ramshackle and filthy. Living there with her husband and six-month-old baby elicited her family’s sympathy, to the point that her brother-in-law came and painted over all the dirt. “My father and mother felt so sorry for me,” she remarked, “but I’m quite easy, hey? Yeah, I don’t like dirt, but I’m not really fussy.”²²

Married in 1956, about two years after her arrival, Saskia de Groot said when they were first married, there was “no heat, no water, no sewers, no toilet. The barn was where we got the water with a pail, and a backhouse to do the laundry. I hung the clothes in the living room. We had an old oil stove in the living room. That was hard but we were happy -- happy with what we had. No conveniences at all.” Her husband Willem added, “we weren’t used to much.”²³ These immigrants faced living situations far worse than what they had been used to in the Netherlands. Yet they remember making the best of it. At least in retrospect, they claim that it was ‘no big deal’ and that they could be content with what they had. Coping was an important skill for these ‘pioneers.’

¹⁹ Saskia and Willem De Groot (pseudonyms), Interview with author, Ancaster, Ontario, May 26, 2010.

²⁰ Frans and Leisbeth Scholten, Interview, 2010.

²¹ Aaltje de Ruiter (pseudonym), Interview with author, Brantford, Ontario, October 16, 2010.

²² Maria and Jan Vanden Heuvel, Interview, 2011.

²³ Saskia and Willem De Groot, Interview, 2010.

Employment

Many came as farmers, especially in the early years, under the program jointly arranged by the Canadian and Dutch governments.²⁴ Most had little money and were required to work for a Canadian farmer for one year upon arrival.²⁵ This arrangement did not always work out satisfactorily. Pieter Smit's family was sponsored by a Catholic farmer in Quebec, who turned them away upon discovering that the Smits were Protestant. The family ended up in Grimsby "in the middle of the fruit time" and worked on a fruit farm instead. So the whole family worked on a fruit farm where they were supposed to make "good money": the parents at two dollars a day, the children picking plums at five cents a basket. But the farmer did not actually pay them, and expelled them from his farm as soon as the fruit season was done.²⁶

Karel Molenaar's family also started their Canadian life at a fruit farm, picking peaches and cherries. "The farmers signed up for a year, so you know you were kind of secure that way. But when it rained, [the farmer] said, 'a holiday today!' But you didn't get paid then, because you got paid so much by the hour for your work."²⁷ The level of financial security in this first year depended on the decisions of the farmer-sponsor.

Another issue for fruit farmers and construction workers was being laid off during the winter months. Carolina Hoekstra and her husband Adriaan immigrated to Chatham, Ontario, in the late sixties. Some acquaintances from their Dutch village sponsored the family and offered Adriaan work at their construction company. However, business was slow in the winter and many employees were laid off, including Adriaan. The Hoekstras had to go on unemployment.²⁸ Being unable to find or retain jobs was one of the most frustrating experiences, since the immigrants were willing and eager to work hard and save their money.

²⁴ One popular program was called "Netherlands Farm-Families Movement" or the "Netherlands-Canada Settlement Scheme." Carrie-Ann Smith, "Dutch Immigration Through Pier 21," Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21. http://www.pier21.ca/wp-content/uploads/files/First_75_Years/research_dutch_immigrants.pdf

²⁵ Hugh Cook, in his excerpt entitled "How I Chose Canada" notes that Holland restricted the amount of money emigrants were permitted to leave with, though many personal reports note that those who had money often smuggled it out creatively. Bruce, *After the War*, 99. Pieter Smit's family brought 500 guilders with them. After one year of hired farm labour, many saved to buy their own farms. Pieter Smit, Interview, 2011.

²⁶ Pieter Smit, Interview, 2011.

²⁷ Karel and Sophie Molenaar, Interview, 2010.

²⁸ Carolina Hoekstra, Interview, 2010.

Karel Molenaar told the story of a family that arrived in Holland Marsh in 1948, and worked seventy-five hours a week in the first weeks, planting and cleaning vegetables and hoeing. As immigrants, he said, “we worked so much. If you had a job and you finished at four o’clock, then you worked for yourself a little bit on the farm or you worked a spare time job, but you wouldn’t go sit home after five o’clock if it’s daylight until 10PM, never! But that’s how it was.” A visiting minister from the Netherlands was amazed by the long, hard hours the new Canadians worked.²⁹ These immigrants did not complain about the work load; they were glad whenever they found steady employment.

Language Learning

One of the biggest challenges to face the new immigrants was language acquisition. This experience varied depending on gender, age, and educational opportunities before and after immigration. Some had studied English before arriving, but rarely had experience beyond the classroom. It is much easier for children to acquire a second language than adults, yet the experience still had its challenges. Neighbour children taught young Pieter Smit and his siblings to say an English phrase. When the Smits went to school and proudly used their newly-acquired language, “son of a bitch,” the teacher was horrified and tried to wash out their mouths with soap. After a brief scuffle with the teacher, the Smit brothers ran away and “played hooky” for four days. Finally admitting what had happened, their parents eventually cleared up the misunderstanding with the school. Aside from this incident, Pieter found most of the village children helpful in the language-learning process, and agreed that it was “*much* easier to learn as a child.”³⁰

For adults, speaking English was necessary for most jobs. Immigrants had to learn along the way, and in creative ways. One man, Willem De Groot, said he learned English initially from the newspaper comics. Despite linguistic barriers, he found a job by taking initiative, and kept it by being observant. As Willem and a friend walked around Hamilton

²⁹ Karel and Sophie Molenaar, Interview, 2010.

³⁰ Pieter Smit, Interview, 2011.

looking for work, they passed a cotton mill, and inquired about opportunities in their broken English. The man said, “‘we have something to unload now,’ so we did it, and they liked that, so they kept us on.” Since the other workers “were all speaking English at the cotton mill, [he] tried to make out and see what they wanted [him] to do. It was not easy.”³¹ Like Willem, most Free Reformed immigrants did not arrive with language skills or have the opportunity to study English in Canada.

Sophie Molenaar had been a housekeeper in Holland and continued to do the same in Canada, initially working for a Dutch woman who was bedridden during her pregnancy. When that job ended, Sophie worked in a Canadian household, taking care of two little boys whose parents were doctors. With no prior English study, she said, “oh, that was awful. I cried so much, I never cried so much in my life. I wanted to go back. But you couldn’t go back.” Because of her previous work experience, Sophie knew what to do to take care of the house and children, and so she “picked up [the language] pretty fast. But at first it was just so awful. I wanted to go back so badly. But,” she repeated, “you couldn’t go back.”³² While able to handle material hardships, Sophie found communication barriers a heavier burden. Saskia De Groot had a similar position as a nanny, but did not find the experience as stressful as Sophie. She “used a lot of sign language” to communicate with her employer, whom she described as “very nice, and patient.”³³ Most of her day was spent with the children so she tried to communicate with them.

Frans Scholten was one of the privileged few with high-school English. An only child, he worked with his father on the grounds and gardens at McMaster University in Hamilton, and was able to take classes there for several years.³⁴ Tineke and Nicholaas Martens took grade twelve English at night school upon arrival in Canada. Tineke had also taken a few business English courses while in Holland, and with this knowledge, was soon able to

³¹ Saskia and Willem De Groot, Interview, 2010.

³² Sophie Molenaar, Interview, 2010.

³³ Saskia and Willem De Groot, Interview, 2010.

³⁴ Frans and Leisbeth Scholten, Interview, 2010.

converse at the office where she worked.³⁵ Maria Vanden Heuvel found that highschool English had equipped her to understand much of what was said, but working with patients in a mental hospital did not provide her with much in-depth speaking practice.³⁶

Even those who had studied English in Holland found oral communication a challenge, since classes often focused on grammar with few opportunities to practice speaking. Taking sufficient English lessons in Canada was nearly impossible for most immigrants. Carolina Hoekstra and her husband Adriaan took a course, but not for long, because there was “not much money available for babysitting” their two small children.³⁷ Many learned what they could by reading the paper or books, and watching television.³⁸

Many of the women mentioned above worked only for a few years before getting married and staying home. Women who stayed at home to care for their young children seemed to have the greatest difficulty. Aaltje de Ruiter only knew how to say “thank you” and “I don’t know any English” upon arrival. Her husband’s family had promised to take her to English lessons, but this did not transpire because she and her husband had no car, and her husband did not want to ask his parents for help. She added, “and then I had more kids, so it just never happened.” Aaltje learned slowly, since her husband’s family spoke only Dutch to accommodate her mother-in-law, who knew no English. At church, most people spoke Dutch, but the services began to be conducted in English and she “picked up her English” through this, and through the television they eventually bought. In time, with some improvement, she started to read English books, but this too was rare since the library was far away and her husband was away with their only car all day at work.

Mother, wife, and, at one point, host of additional boarders, Lien de Wit mentioned her troubles with English eight times without being prompted: “that is the biggest trouble from an immigrant – when you don’t speak English. You can’t speak it and you’re stuck here.

³⁵ Tineke and Nicolaas Martens, Interview, 2010.

³⁶ Maria and Jan Vanden Heuvel, Interview, 2011.

³⁷ Carolina Hoekstra, Interview, 2010.

³⁸ Carolina Hoekstra, Interview, 2010.

I was lucky that my husband talk better than me, and the kids too. And that is for the immigrant the biggest trouble!” She added, “but I’m not so smart. I don’t pick it so fast up, but my husband and the kids faster. But when I was here, I think it was not so easy. But you have to go on, eh!” At another point in her story, she mentioned that her son and husband had English lessons every night, and her other children were young enough upon arrival to become fluent in both languages.³⁹ Her self-deprecation is heart-breaking: her lack of fluency was due to lack of opportunity, not lack of intelligence.

Learning English, at whatever pace, was a struggle that continued long beyond the first few years, especially for women in the position of mother-at-home. School-age children had the best opportunities to learn fluent English. The level of previous education, including exposure to English training, also had an impact on the language-learning process. FRC immigrants shared the challenge of language learning, and found it a relief to spend time with other church community members who shared a common language.

Coping with Change and Homesickness

Considerable adjustments in family life awaited many immigrants in the first years, including hasty marriages and the rapid arrival of offspring. These transitions could be difficult, which seemed to exacerbate the emotions of missing Holland and family back home. It appears the transition was least disruptive for those who came as part of a family unit. However, this could also have its challenges. When Lien de Wit and her family arrived, the Hamilton Free Reformed church kindly took them in and looked for a house for them. The family of six was split into two groups for accommodations, with Lien, her husband and one-year-old staying with the minister, and the other three children with a different family. This lasted until her husband found a job and they could afford their own place. She and her family “had a really nice time” staying with these families, and was grateful for their help, “but still, you like your whole family together.”⁴⁰ There were many families who bunked with another

³⁹ Lien de Wit, Interview, 2010.

⁴⁰ Lien de Wit, Interview, 2010.

family, whether relatives, acquaintances from Holland, or church members, for days, weeks or even months. While extremely helpful, adjusting to Canadian life without privacy and a place of one's own was difficult. Fortunately, it did not usually last long.

Women who came as fiancées had little time to adjust to the new land before adjusting to a new marriage. Adventurous Marijke Driessen, who had already spent a year in England as a nanny, stated, "I didn't realize it at the time, but [immigrating on a fiancée visa] meant I had to be married within a month of arrival, otherwise they would've sent me back. So I was married after three weeks arriving." Not a single family member attended the wedding, since they were all in Holland; in fact, she did not know anyone at her wedding besides her groom. But, she shrugged, "it didn't bother me too much." Marijke had known Sem quite well in Holland, as they had worked together as chef and assistant chef in a restaurant, and this may have helped significantly with the abrupt transition.⁴¹

Aaltje de Ruiter admitted that she did not know her husband, David, quite so well, but found security in being from a common background. They had been "just friends" for two years in Holland as her parents would not permit her to date until she was older (she was 15-17, he was 17-19). David left for Canada at age nineteen, and they wrote to each other for two more years. Returning to Holland in December 1955, he was quickly drafted into the army. To avoid this low-paying, two-year term, he left eight months later, in August 1956. When asked why she decided to go to Canada, Aaltje said that she did not really decide to go, but "was kind of in a bind." The "bind," I discovered after doing some post-interview math, evidently was a pre-marital pregnancy: Aaltje arrived on December 26, 1956, was married two weeks later, and had her first child in May. She and her husband moved in with his parents, who had eight other children, bringing the household total to twelve. David began building a house that spring, and they moved into the unfinished home in November. Without a car for the first three years to "save money and build" their house, they remained heavily

⁴¹ Marijke Driessen, Interview, 2011.

dependent on David's family, who lived nearby, for transportation.⁴²

Aaltje downplayed the challenges of adjustment, stating "some people have horror stories but I don't; I lived with my in-laws and they were pretty settled." David's family may have been settled, but transitioning from being the youngest of two children in her parents' home in Holland to being a twenty-year-old wife, pregnant and living in a household of twelve was significant. She was glad when they moved out "because we had no freedom" prior to that.⁴³

Bearing children soon after marriage was a common story, and had a major impact on women in particular. Marijke Driessen was pregnant after three months of marriage, and went on to have four children at about two year intervals.⁴⁴ Frans and Liesbeth Scholten "got married in 1956, and had three children in three years," 1957, '58, and '59.⁴⁵ Tineke and Nicolaas Martens had their first child two weeks before their first anniversary.⁴⁶ Carolina Hoekstra was seven months pregnant on the voyage, had two young children, and had another baby a year later.⁴⁷ There were obvious physical challenges to these situations; being pregnant with small children underfoot made the rough housing situations all the more taxing. Saskia de Groot reflected that she has often wondered, "how did I manage with no conveniences, the [cloth] diapers, lots of laundry? And in the winter, it was so freezing cold, you had to hang it in the living room."⁴⁸ Yet a greater trial for these women was having children of their own away from their family of origin. Marijke was "homesick the first eight years here. I was. I had ten brothers and sisters. And especially when [my first baby] came. As a young mom, you would like to show your baby to your parents and your sisters and that. Of course, there were some friends. But I had a very hard time; we lived in an awful place. Ice on the walls in the

⁴² Aaltje de Ruiter, Interview, 2010.

⁴³ Aaltje de Ruiter, Interview, 2010.

⁴⁴ Marijke Driessen, Interview, 2011.

⁴⁵ Frans and Liesbeth Scholten, Interview, 2010.

⁴⁶ Tineke and Nicolaas Martens, Interview, 2010.

⁴⁷ Carolina Hoekstra, Interview, 2010.

⁴⁸ Saskia and Willem De Groot, Interview, 2010.

wintertime.”⁴⁹ Marijke readily admitted to being homesick and overwhelmed.

Thus it was important to keep in touch with their relatives back in Holland, which was done through writing letters. Telephone calls were absurdly expensive compared to hourly wages. “You never called, because it was \$2.50 a minute,” Marijke explained, “and every immigrant was poor.” (To give perspective, her husband Sem initially earned fifty cents per hour.) Marijke’s mother and one sister wrote faithfully, but were woefully out of touch with her circumstances. Her sister once asked if Marijke got different carpets and new drapes every time she moved. “I never even had carpeting or drapes,” Marijke laughed, “and very little furniture.”⁵⁰ Yet interviewees admit that they spared their Dutch relatives the harshest details because they did not want to worry them. “You never write the worst things,” Carolina Hoekstra explained. “If things were bad, what would it have helped if you wrote to Holland how bad it was? So people didn’t do that.”⁵¹

Were things truly terrible? Given the fact that many immigrants considered (or wished they could consider) returning, it appears that they found the difficulties of living in Canada and homesickness for Holland too much to bear. “Lots of people,” noted Karel Molenaar, “if they could afford to go back home, half of them woulda went back.” His wife laughed and added, “me too.”⁵² This may be an accurate assessment. Some immigrants mentioned that they would have gone back but they could not afford to. Others flirted with the idea of returning, but decided against it for practical reasons.⁵³ One woman confessed that she wanted to return to the Netherlands, but realized her family and children had become established in Canada, so she decided to “forget about it.” “I did think about it,” she added, “but I didn’t *tell*

⁴⁹ Marijke Driessen, Interview, 2011.

⁵⁰ Marijke Driessen, Interview, 2011.

⁵¹ Carolina Hoekstra, Interview, 2010.

⁵² Karel and Sophie Molenaar, Interview, 2010.

⁵³ After the birth of her first daughter, Marijke Driessen “didn’t have a job” and “was very vulnerable,” alone with her newborn all day in a farmhouse with no hot water. Her difficult labour and delivery had rendered her too weak to walk, even to the outhouse, and her husband had the car all day. Her husband Sem, she said, was very good to her, yet her isolation persisted. In response to her longing to see family in Holland, Sem told her to go back with the baby for a while. If she did not want to return to Canada, he promised to return to Holland instead. After five months in the Netherlands, Marijke returned to Canada: “I’ll try it one more time. I thought, what’s he gonna do [for work in Holland]? Where are we gonna live? There’s no house available [in Holland].” Marijke returned only after realizing that starting over in Holland would have been nearly impossible. Marijke Driessen, Interview, 2011.

nobody about it."⁵⁴ Her desires submitted to what was best for her family.

There appear to have been unspoken rules about admitting to being homesick. These immigrants were determined to make the best of their situation, which meant that some were unwilling to admit to being homesick at that time. Tineke Martens reminisced, "I didn't want to admit it even to myself, but I was homesick, especially the first year. I got all my family in Holland, I still do. I have four sisters and three brothers in Holland. I'm one of eight, and my parents were there, so I left a whole lot, and they never came here. We wrote letters; it was the only thing; telephone was way too expensive, we couldn't afford that. So I wrote to my parents, and my sisters and brothers occasionally."⁵⁵ Leaving a large and close-knit family was a major cause of heartache. When a friend asked Aaltje de Ruiters, if she would "do it again," Aaltje replied "no, I would never immigrate again, for the simple reason that it's not worth the sorrow I gave to my parents." Over the course of her interview, Aaltje mentioned numerous times that she was one of only two siblings, so her departure left a significant void in her family.⁵⁶

Carolina and Adriaan Hoekstra also re-evaluated the immigration decision. "Maybe it's different for a man, but I missed my family very much," said Carolina, adding, "I was very homesick for the family contact."⁵⁷ While many women attempted to 'make the best of it' by toughening themselves against their own homesickness, it was even more unacceptable for men to admit to the label 'homesick' (although by their own descriptions, they were). Frans Scholten stated, "I was not too impressed at first, not saying I was *homesick* -- we made it work. But impressed with Canada? Not really!"⁵⁸ Certainly these immigrants all "made it work" but denying the emotional repercussions was apparently necessary to maintain the appearance of manliness, and resilience for both genders.

Eda Van Leeuwen said that it was hard for their parents to cope with their absence,

⁵⁴ Saskia and Willem De Groot, Interview, 2010.

⁵⁵ Tineke and Nicolaas Martens, Interview, 2010.

⁵⁶ Aaltje de Ruiters, Interview, 2010.

⁵⁷ Carolina Hoekstra, Interview, 2010.

⁵⁸ Frans and Leisbeth Scholten, Interview, 2010.

“but we were never homesick or nothing.” Her husband emphasized, “oh, you wasn’t homesick! Some people *thought* you was, but you *wasn’t*.” “Well,” Eda continued, “that depends how bad you have it. When you’re young, you can take a lot. But it can be so hard that you do become homesick, which we didn’t have.” Dirk added, “yeah, we got over it.”⁵⁹ These throw-away phrases, like ‘making it work’ and ‘getting over it,’ may indicate that in the attempt at surviving and thriving in the new land, little space was allotted for grieving in the adjustment process.

In 1972, *The Messenger* noted that Chatham FRC received three new families from the Netherlands, who were welcomed and assisted by the congregation.⁶⁰ In the 1950s, everyone had just arrived, so this would not have been noteworthy. While the church community did have better capacity to help later arrivals, it appears that latecomers also were not expected to have such a difficult adjustment. Some of the interviewees who immigrated later, like the Hoekstra’s, recounted that some members had said “oh, you just moved, you didn’t *immigrate*.” Carolina Hoekstra defended, “but it was still immigration for us, even though we came by plane and not by boat.”⁶¹ Aaltje de Ruiters in-laws told her the same thing: “they always said ‘you didn’t immigrate, you just moved.’”⁶² Other interviewees made comments about how some people had worked in Holland long enough to get an old-age pension from both countries, and how some families had been subsidized by the government. This demonstrates that, despite good community spirit that the next section will demonstrate, there was a current of comparison or competitiveness (whose experience had been the most difficult, who had the right to complain or be homesick) which may explain why both men and women were often unwilling to admit to homesickness, both then and now.

At any rate, the emphasis was on working hard and making money, and the onus of

⁵⁹ Given the fact that Dirk was overcome with laughter telling the story of his mother and another woman weeping as they left the Netherlands, it seems unlikely that Eda would have permitted herself to admit to being homesick. Eda and Dirk Van Leeuwen, Interview, 2011.

⁶⁰ C. Pronk, “Reports from the Congregations,” *The Messenger* 19:11 (Nov. 1972): 1-2.

⁶¹ Carolina Hoekstra, Interview, 2010.

⁶² Aaltje de Ruiters, Interview, 2010.

this was on the menfolk. The men were supposed to be the providers and protectors, and emotional ‘weakness’ was not compatible with their understanding of masculinity. Women who stayed at home with their young children, especially those newly married and pregnant, seemed the most willing to admit to struggling emotionally. These women were also the most isolated, without colleagues, access to transportation, and opportunities to learn English, and were faced with household duties without time-saving modern conveniences or the support of female relatives. Certainly all individuals and families faced many challenges in Canada. And the greatest support system, aside from families, was the church community.

Part Two: Finding Comfort in the Church Community

The FRC immigrants were deeply committed to their faith. Attending church was integral to life, and church was where they found each other. The church, as the next chapter explores, required significant involvement in functions and activities of its members. The resulting closeness produced a ‘church community.’ The church assisted the immigrants in a number of spiritual and material ways, but more importantly it provided the structure for organic community in which members related to and assisted each other. Part Two discusses the ways that this church and its community were a massive source of comfort for the struggling immigrants, which contributed to the closed nature of the community.

A first feature that contributed to the homogeneity of the church community was that its members were all Dutch. While services eventually were conducted in English, immigrants could count on being able to speak and hear Dutch spoken in this context. Simply being understood in a social setting was an important stress reliever for individuals struggling to learn English. As Karel Molenaar put it, “you come here and you can’t speak all that well, it’s so nice to be able to talk to one another at church, eh?”⁶³

Second, the church proper helped in several ways, particularly with settlement and connections, and occasionally with financial assistance. A number of immigrants recall being taken in by the pastor or a church member’s family upon arrival. Liesbeth Scholten’s family

⁶³ Karel and Sophie Molenaar, Interview, 2010.

had no sponsor, no place to live and no connections. Reverend Hamstra arranged housing for them, and she recalled that the “church was a real support.”⁶⁴ Carolina Hoekstra’s young family had a sponsor through the Chatham church, and the sponsors got the whole church involved. Carolina poignantly remembered being welcomed to their new home, which, to their surprise, was furnished with items supplied by church members until their shipped crates arrived. Chatham members even had Dutch cake and coffee to welcome them: “I remember, I just broke out in tears. It was so enormous.”⁶⁵

Aside from helping members get settled, the church occasionally provided financial assistance or loans. While the newly-established churches were far from wealthy, they could aid members who were in a time of unusual need. When Lien de Wit became ill – she said she was “nervous, I think because I was homesick” – and could not afford to pay the doctor, the church paid the bill.⁶⁶ Truly, the church could provide the only security net available for these immigrants. The church had more resources to do so as it grew more established beyond the first lean years.

Third, while difficulties did not disappear in community, camaraderie could make them more bearable. “We were all in the same boat,” said Frans Scholten, “there was good community spirit. Nobody was above the other, everybody felt equal.”⁶⁷ Equally poor, it would seem. The norm for a family was that all members would work as much as possible and give their income into ‘the family pot.’ This made it possible for large families to save up for a farm, car or house. “We give all the money to our mother, and she run the house, and that’s it,” said Karel Molenaar. “We didn’t mind. That’s how it was done. Like the whole family pitched in to buy a house or farm, and then get a bit established, and then slowly, slowly...” their situation would improve.⁶⁸ Often adult children were permitted to save for

⁶⁴ Frans and Leisbeth Scholten, Interview, 2010.

⁶⁵ Carolina Hoekstra, Interview, 2010.

⁶⁶ She noted that they paid the church back when their income improved. Lien de Wit, Interview, 2010.

⁶⁷ Frans and Leisbeth Scholten, Interview, 2010.

⁶⁸ Karel and Sophie Molenaar, Interview, 2010.

their own household only the week, month or year before they got married.”⁶⁹

Fourth, with each family struggling financially, they still found much to offer each other in the form of relationships, shared resources, practical help, and advice. In fact, being in such need created a unique atmosphere of community. Tineke Martens commented on her experience in the FRC church in Toronto: “Everybody was friends. Everybody helped each other, nobody had a lot of money.” Her husband Nicolaas agreed. “we needed each other.” The Martens told a story of moving to a different home. Nicolaas had asked a few church friends to help move the furniture and boxes while his wife was taking care of their baby and toddler at the new farm. Tineke recalled, “I looked outside (it was a long laneway, half a mile) and I see a car coming, and another car, and another car, and up came all the ladies from the church. Everybody brought a pail, and cloth or whatever, and they came in. It was a big old farmhouse, and everybody attacked a room, and before the movers came, the whole house was clean.”⁷⁰ With the exception of a few who came and stayed with already-established family members, most immigrants would have been on their own: this help was vital.

Another practical help was carpooling. Unlike the Netherlands, where people biked everywhere, traversing Ontario’s landscape required a vehicle. Families saved up to purchase an automobile. Yet some households contained thirteen people or more, so ride-sharing was essential. Liesbeth Scholten’s only option for a ride arrived in the city of Hamilton at six in the morning; her shift did not begin until 9:00 am. But it was her only ride and a chance for social contact, so she was grateful for it.⁷¹

Working for each other was another practical resource that bound the community together. With many men in farming and construction, church members were quick to find whatever skill was needed from within the ranks. My grandfather is a bricklayer, and several interviewees mentioned that he “put the brick on this house.”⁷² When Karel Molenaar decided

⁶⁹ One exception was Frans Scholten, an only child, who had had 73 dollars when he got married: “he could save his money because he was the only child.” Frans and Liesbeth Scholten, Interview, 2010.

⁷⁰ Tineke and Nicolaas Martens, Interview, 2010.

⁷¹ Frans and Liesbeth Scholten, Interview, 2010.

⁷² Willem and Saskia de Groot, Interview, 2010; Dirk and Eda Van Leeuwen, Interview, 2011.

to build a barn on his newly acquired farmland, he hired all “Dutchies” to pour the concrete and build the structure. And when he needed someone to take care of the animals so he and his family could go on vacation, he had another Dutch friend to do that.⁷³

Fifth, and perhaps most crucially, was the social life of these immigrants. Several interviewees noted that the whole focus of the first years was working hard and trying to ‘get ahead’ financially. The only exception was any church-related activities. For most Free Reformers in the early days, life meant work, and church functions. Church members formed the pool from which friends were made. Liesbeth Scholten remarked, “you looked forward to catechism classes, young peoples’ society, because then you could talk to your friends.”⁷⁴ With a morning and afternoon or evening Sunday service, and strict rules about not working on Sunday, many FRC families visited between the services. Carolina Hoekstra said the Chatham church was “very, very friendly. Most of the families asked us to come after church (before we had our car), so they would take us with them to their home, and then bring us home after supper again, because they had an afternoon service. And that was really amazing, because in that way, we met an awful lot of people.”⁷⁵ Visiting between church services was common, leaving the one day off in church and with church friends.

Each fledgling Free Reformed church, Karel Molenaar explained, had its own social life. “At first, when there was a wedding, the whole congregation came. Because at first, the congregation wasn’t that big. The congregations were small, and you stick together, eh? So you visit one another, back and forth. It helped the churches, but it helped the families too.”⁷⁶ Maria and Jan Vanden Heuvel also recalled the entire congregation attending their wedding. Maria found this a change from Holland, where

you went to church every Sunday twice, but you didn’t mix with the people from the church. In Holland, I didn’t hardly know anybody in the congregation -- no, we would just go out of church and go home. Didn’t talk to anybody. And when you came here, there was more; you know, you talked to people. It’s just like you needed each other more here.

⁷³ Karel and Sophie Molenaar, Interview, 2010.

⁷⁴ Frans and Liesbeth Scholten, Interview, 2010.

⁷⁵ Carolina Hoekstra, Interview, 2010.

⁷⁶ Karel Molenaar, Interview with author, Flamborough, Ontario, July 15, 2011.

You had no family here, they were all in Holland, so we had more connection in Holland with the family, aunts and uncles and cousins and so, than with even our neighbours.

Jan added, “it’s true, in Holland, you didn’t mix. But here you needed each other; because you were all a bit lonely without families.”⁷⁷

Indeed, for many people, other church members became like family. Frans Scholten said, “friends became almost like family. Like all four of my kids and all my grandkids, they called our friend Ruth ‘Tante Ruth.’”⁷⁸ When asked if he had any siblings, Frans said no, but told a story of another young Dutch couple, “fresh from Holland too,” who befriended the Scholten’s and visited them every Saturday.⁷⁹ Marijke Driessen had a similar experience. Once a week, on his way to work, her husband would drop her and her daughter off at the home of another Dutch family who were “very kind.”⁸⁰ In other words, fellow church members became surrogate family members. The social support of the church community, with its shared nationality and language, practical help, camaraderie and close friendships, was a great comfort to the struggling new immigrants and contributed to the insularity of the FRC.

Conclusion

Out of the social context surrounding church membership and activities, a church community developed that provided significant practical and emotional help. Deep friendships formed, which helped combat the homesickness and loneliness that the immigrants felt, far from all that was familiar. Though facing various hardships in housing, employment, language-learning, adjustments and homesickness, church members found connectedness and comfort in the context of each other’s homes with familiar language that made the first years more bearable.⁸¹ The immigration and settlement experience promoted

⁷⁷ Maria and Jan Vanden Heuvel, Interview, 2011.

⁷⁸ Tante means “aunt.”

⁷⁹ Frans and Leisbeth Scholten, Interview, 2010.

⁸⁰ Marijke Driessen, Interview, 2011.

⁸¹ Communication was another important element. Finding out where to purchase things, where to find work, and how to do things. Karel Molenaar also noted that in the early days, “the attachment was strong, because you needed one another. Like if you needed to buy a car or something, you asked questions, about this and about that, and some of the answers were no good whatsoever but still you got some information.” Karel Molenaar, Interview, 2011.

unity and insularity as the group faced shared difficulties and found comfort in community.

It is worth noting, however, that these benefits of practical help and friendship found in the church community were considered merely an extra benefit. The real motivator for attending and participating in the church was religious faith, as Carolina Hoekstra's story illustrates. Before emigrating, the Hoekstra's attended an information evening about Canada, and spoke to a couple who had returned to Holland because they felt too isolated in Canada. The couple asked if they were going to join a church, and highly recommended doing so because of the support church people give each other. They had joined a Dutch cultural club but it was not enough.

Carolina laughed, "so they said the best thing was to go to a church, have your support there. We hadn't really thought about that, in the way of getting support. It was more like we *went* to church, we *wanted* to go to church."⁸² The support was secondary; the purpose for attending church was their religious commitment. Motivated by personal faith, these immigrants attended the Free Reformed church, which provided help and connections. Attending the church also meant being part of a community made up of FRC members, which provided practical assistance and relationships. Faith commitment, the church structure and its social support contributed to building the insular and isolated church community. Faced with the sometimes isolating challenges of immigrant life, participating in the church and church community provided stability and comfort, and more importantly to these immigrants, as Chapter II shows, a certainty that they were obeying God.

⁸² Carolina Hoekstra, Interview, 2010.

Chapter II: “The Centre of our Lives”: The Church, The Faith

The church and religious faith played an important role in the development and maintenance of a tight, exclusive FRC community. In the hierarchical church structure, leaders had authority over members, some of whom had little or no voice or vote. Further, salvation and deep personal faith were (in many ways) equated with membership, specific theology, and obedience to the rules. To follow God was to follow the church. Such an institutional structure and personal motivation evoked compliance, which was needed to maintain a small, insular community. This chapter delves into the power dynamics between leaders and members.

Part One focuses on the church, the dominant institution uniting the Free Reformed community and isolating it from the surrounding world. After outlining the history of the denomination, I examine church structure and leadership, paying attention to the honour and power bestowed to leaders, the manner in which they were chosen, and their duties. I also describe the various ways leaders exercised control over members, including a brief section on church discipline. Part Two examines membership and personal faith, arguing that commitment to the Christian faith was expressed by trust in God, as well as submission to the rules of the church. The lives of FRC members were centred around church services and activities, shaped by their specific theology, and motivated by personal faith or obedience to God, which was deeply intertwined with church membership and doctrinal beliefs.

Part One: The Church

Origins and Growth of the Free Reformed Churches in North America

This section explains the origins of the Free Reformed Churches, as well as its numerical and geographical growth. The FRC traces its roots to the first secession from the Dutch Reformed State Church (*Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk*, NHK), which had formed in the 1570s in the Calvinist tradition of the Protestant Reformation. The seceding group formed

the *Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken* (CGKN) in 1834.¹ Fifty-eight years later, the majority of the CGKN united with another (more recent) split, the *Nederduits Gereformeerde Kerk*, to form the *Gereformeerde Kerken* (GKN). Those who did not reunite to form the GKN but chose to remain CGKN are known as the Dutch counterpart to the North American FRC.² According to Aarie Baars, professor at Apeldoorn's Theological University of the CKGN, founding Free Reformers originated from nearly every Reformed denomination in the Netherlands, but primarily from the CGKN and a faction of the NHK.³

The Free Reformed Churches of North America began as an established church in the United States which fostered the first fledgling churches in Canada during its post-war immigration wave.⁴ A number of CGKN immigrants were unaware of or dissatisfied with existing churches they found in Ontario. They did not “feel at home” and complained about the style and content of preaching.⁵ According to interviewees Frans and Liesbeth Scholten, although they had visited United, Presbyterian and other Reformed churches, “there was no church” in Ontario.⁶ Or, more accurately, no church that they found suitable. Those who shared this belief urged on the formation of local ‘preaching stations’ which would become FRC congregations.⁷ Teaching of ‘sound’ theology was a key impetus for these new churches. The Bible was the ultimate authority, while core doctrines were expressed in three detailed, often-used Reformed canons: the Belgic Confession of Faith (1561), the Heidelberg Catechism (1563), and the Canons of Dort (1618-1619).⁸

¹ William Van Doodewaard, “A Transplanted Church: The Netherlandic Roots and Development of the Free Reformed Churches of North America,” *Canadian Journal of Netherlandic Studies* 26:2 (2005): 16.

² Van Doodewaard, “Transplanted Church,” 17-18.

³ Called the *Gereformeerde Bond*. Denominations included the Old Reformed Congregations of the Netherlands, Netherlands Reformed Congregations (NRC), Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland (GKN) and the Gereformeerde Kerken Vrijgemaakt. Arie Baars, “Between ‘Old’ and ‘Free’: The Free Reformed Churches of North America,” in *Morsels in the Melting Pot: The Persistence of Dutch Immigrant Communities in North America*, eds. George Harinck & Hans Krabbendam (Amsterdam: VU Uitgeverij, 2006), 96, 104.

⁴ The U.S. church was in Grand Rapids, Michigan (est. 1944). Another church in Passaic, New Jersey (est. 1921) was connected with Grand Rapids to some extent, but did not officially join the denomination until 1965. Baars, “Between ‘Old’ and ‘Free,’” 94; Van Doodewaard, “Transplanted Church,” 21.

⁵ The CGKN sent a pastor, Rev. J Tamminga, to investigate the Canadian situation in 1950. His exposure to these needs led him to return a year later and permanently pastor in the FRC. Van Doodewaard, “Transplanted Church,” 19; J. Overduin, “The Forty-Year Ministry of Rev. J Tamminga: The Pioneer,” *The Messenger* 18:10 (Oct. 1971), 2.

⁶ Frans and Liesbeth Scholten (pseudonyms), Interview with author, Dundas, Ontario, May 13, 2010.

⁷ Baars, “Between ‘Old’ and ‘Free,’” 94.

⁸ Staple creeds included the Apostles Creed (c. 150 AD), the Nicene Creed (381 AD), and the Athanasian Creed (500 AD).

And thus, in the early 1950s, FRC congregations sprang up in southern Ontario: Dundas (1950), Chatham (1951), St. Thomas (1952), Hamilton (1953), Mitchell (1954), Toronto (1955), London (1958), and Vineland (1958).⁹ The denomination grew from merely 373 members in 1950 to nearly 1,500 members by 1955.¹⁰ In 1960, thirteen churches existed, with just over 2,000 members. By 1974, the FRCNA consisted of 2,983 people.¹¹ The majority resided in Ontario, with several churches in the United States and Western Canada.¹²

The FRC's primary growth came from the 1946-1960 immigration movement. By the mid-1960s, recognizing that the previously steady stream of new members was dwindling, church leaders advertised in "various publications in the Netherlands" to "secure the attention of future emigrants."¹³ In 1969, *The Messenger* reflected a realization that there simply were few new immigrants.¹⁴ After this, Free Reformed church growth came from endogamous marriages, sizeable families, member retention, and transfers from other churches.¹⁵

Church Structure and Leaders

Important decisions in the FRC were made at the denominational level, but most church life happened in each congregation. Therefore, after noting the broader structure, this segment focuses primarily on the leadership of the local church: the selection, qualifications, responsibilities, and authority of elders, deacons and pastors. Like the CGKN, the Free Reformed Churches were organized according to the 'Church Order' (1619), a constitution-like document on church structure and governance, which paired autonomy of local churches

⁹ These dates indicate the official start of each congregation. In some cases, people had been assembling for a time as a 'church plant' or 'preaching station,' but no statistics are available.

¹⁰ Baars, "Between 'Old' and 'Free,'" 95; Van Doodewaard, "Transplanted Church," 19-21.

¹¹ It is worth noting that these statistics include 'confessing members' (adults who had consciously joined the church in a ceremony called Confession of Faith), as well as their children, who became 'baptized members' as infants. Since large families were the norm, membership totals indicated a high percentage of children and youth (baptized members). In 1974, for example, of 2,983 listed members, only forty-five percent were confessing members. FRC Database, *Jaarboek Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken: 1949-1960* (Free Reformed Historical Centre, Grand Rapids, MI).

¹² See Appendices A and B for map and listing of congregations. Since the New Jersey and Michigan churches had been established earlier, they made up a large percentage at first. In the 1960s and '70s, about 18% percent of the FRC population was in the US, with 8% in Western Canada. American congregations dwindled in proportion to Canada's growth.

¹³ J. Overduin, "Synod Report," *The Messenger* 14:12 (Dec. 1967):3.

¹⁴ The advertising campaign continued in case others were arriving but joining other churches. "Brief Report of Synod," *The Messenger* 16:8 (Aug. 1969): 4.

¹⁵ Or, as Van Doodewaard phrases it, "overwhelmingly by natural increase rather than new members." Van Doodewaard, "Transplanted Church," 21.

with accountability to the denomination.¹⁶ Delegates from each church convened regularly for denomination-wide assemblies, including Synod, elders and deacons' conferences, and the regionally-based Classis.¹⁷ Synod, held annually, acted as the governing body of the denomination, with the pastor and one or more elders representing each congregation. Reports were made, ministerial candidates tested, and issues discussed and resolved on a range of topics, including level of connectivity with other denominations, liturgy and music in services, finances, evangelism, and missions.¹⁸

Each local congregation was governed by a 'consistory,' a group of male leaders including pastor, elders and deacons. Some members had some volition in choosing the consistory. Male 'confessing' members elected elders and deacons based on a short list of reputable candidates selected by the existing consistory.¹⁹ Women were not permitted to vote on any church affairs. If they inquired, women were told that their input could be given to their husband, father or elder.²⁰ It is unclear how exactly this would contribute toward the decision. The simple fact was that half of the membership – the female half -- were disenfranchised.

Together with the pastor, the elders (and sometimes deacons, who were primarily involved in financial matters) made decisions for the church. The consistory met regularly, usually weekly or more often if needed, to discuss church affairs.²¹ The congregation was divided into 'wards' with each elder responsible for one ward. Congregants could contact their ward elder in times of need, such as a financial crisis, death or birth in the family, or

¹⁶ "Church Order," *The Psalter*, (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company: Grand Rapids, 2002): 179-189 .

¹⁷ In the first decade, Classis was the main assembly, representing the "association of churches." After (the reunification of) 1961, leaders of the entire denomination met annually at Synod. Classis, at this point, became an additional annual gathering based on geography: Classis East and West. Van Doodewaard, "Transplanted Church," 20; L. Bilkes, "Church Order," *The Messenger* 20:8 (Aug. 1973): 2-3.

¹⁸ J. Tamminga, "Synod Report," *The Messenger* 13:10 (Oct. 1966): 2-3. The North American Free Reformed Churches in this period had few if any non-Dutch members, nor did they appear to seek outsiders to join. Yet they did consider missions and evangelism as part of their religious duty. This was not seen as contradictory, since mission work was typically conducted separately from the church proper, in other more "heathen" nations. Dirk, Eda and Dirk Van Leeuwen (pseudonyms), Interview with author, Cambridge, Ontario, April 16, 2011.

¹⁹ See footnote eleven for a definition of 'confessing' members. Bilkes, "Church Order," 3.

²⁰ Carolina Hoekstra (pseudonym), Interview with author, Brant Region, Ontario, November 15, 2010.

²¹ Article 37, "Church Order," *The Psalter*, 183.

family trouble. Also, elders conducted yearly *huisbezoek* or ‘home visits,’ meeting with each family in their ward.²² Elders asked about the spiritual and church-related life of parents and children. This was also an opportunity for congregants to mention any concerns they had regarding the church. Ministers urged elders to take their responsibility seriously, and congregants to speak openly with their elder about spiritual matters.²³ Home visits could be a source of support for congregants, but also of supervision and control.

Elders and deacons held office for a term of several years, both to protect them from overwork, and to alternate the allocation of authority.²⁴ However, some Free Reformed churches allowed consistory members to be re-elected for numerous consecutive terms, leaving the same group of men governing the church according to their preference without interruption. In one church, according to Karel Molenaar, “that became a permanent group.”²⁵ Carolina Hoekstra agreed that this consolidation of power lent itself to authoritarian governance: “the consistory runs the church and oversees, and that is biblical, but it became a little bit more dictatorial.” “Very little input” was permitted, maintained Carolina; one’s “voice and opinion” were not well-received.²⁶ (Of course, even in churches that maintained a rotation, the consistory in power decided who could stand for office, which allowed for the possibility of rejecting members who might not maintain the status quo.) While interviewees were sometimes willing to voice these concerns half a century later, *The Messenger* reveals that criticism of consistory members was sternly rebuked. Elders and deacons, Rev. Bilkes exhorted, were to be thanked for their labour, not disparaged.²⁷

While elders and deacons were to be respected, the highest reverence was given to ministers. An article introducing a new pastor included the following blessing: “may Rev.

²² F. VandenBout, “Elders and Deacons Conference,” *The Messenger* 16:11 (Nov. 1969): 3-4.

²³ C. Pronk, “Reports from the Congregations,” *The Messenger* 18: 7-8 (Aug. 1971): 1; Bilkes, “Church Order,” 2-3.

²⁴ A term of two years, with half of the consistory retiring each year to provide continuity, according to article 27 of the Church Order. “Church Order,” *The Psalter*, 182.

²⁵ Eventually, perhaps in the 1970s, Karel believes a ruling was made in Dundas FRC that consistory members had to ‘retire’ for a year before they could be re-elected. This forced some change, said Karel, but “it was still the same basic group.” Karel Molenaar, Interview with author, Flamborough, Ontario, July 15, 2011.

²⁶ Carolina Hoekstra, Interview, 2010.

²⁷ Bilkes, “Church Order,” 3.

Stehouwer's work be blessed, and the Lord grant him wisdom and strength to guide these people in the paths of righteousness."²⁸ Ministers were spiritual guides, responsible for shepherding the 'flock.' The primary duties were preaching, administering the sacraments of communion and baptism, and guiding and ruling the congregation.²⁹ In fact, if no preacher was available for a Sunday service, an elder would read a sermon that had been written by an ordained minister. These duties were reserved strictly for ministers.³⁰

The process of choosing a pastor was different from selecting elders and deacons. A church which had no pastor of its own was considered 'vacant' and would invite various ministers to visit and preach. Eventually, the consistory would propose one or two candidates to the congregation and the male members would vote. If the vote passed with a majority, the potential pastor, whether a recently-graduated ministry student or pastor of a different church in Holland or North America, would be 'called' by the congregation. He would then take some time to consider, and accept or reject the call.³¹ In this manner, FRC ministers often pastored one church for a number of years and then transitioned to a different congregation.

Potential new pastors were required to be "full [confessing], or baptized members of one of [the FRC] churches for at least one year" and to have a "testimony of their church consistory, testifying to their godliness and character" and a high school diploma.³² Synod would examine their relationship with God, their reasons for seeking the position, and their knowledge of the Bible and other essential Reformed documents.³³ Untrained candidates were sent to seminary.³⁴

By the 1970s, *The Messenger* frequently contained notices indicating a need for

²⁸ C. Pronk, "Reports from the Congregations," *The Messenger* 19:12 (Dec. 1972): 2.

²⁹ "Form for the Ordination of the Ministers of God's Word," *The Psalter* (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company: Grand Rapids, MI, 2002), 141; Article 16, "Church Order," *The Psalter*, 181.

³⁰ In the early years, ministers were extremely scarce. One way of dealing with this issue was to find or appoint a *voorganger* or 'teaching or exhorting elder.' This was the case with J. Hamstra, who eventually became a fully qualified pastor. Baars, "Between 'Old' and 'Free,'" 94.

³¹ See for example: C. Pronk, "Church News: Dundas," *The Messenger* 19:11 (Nov. 1972): 2.

³² A. Stehouwer, "Admission Exam for the Ministry," *The Messenger* 22:2 (Feb. 1975): 1.

³³ Stehouwer, "Admission Exam," 1.

³⁴ Initially at Calvin Seminary (CRC) in Grand Rapids, Michigan. In the 1970s, due to concern of CRC liberal thinking, most switched to the Theological School of the Protestant Reformed Churches, also in Grand Rapids. More seminary changes occurred in the next decades. Baars, "Between 'Old' and 'Free,'" 98; Van Doodewaard, "Transplanted Church, 31.

pastors and urging young Dutch-Canadian men to consider the position.³⁵ This reflected a shortage of candidates, a more active recruiting technique, and a recognition of the need for pastors who could speak English fluently.³⁶ In a reflective piece, Rev. Tamminga conveyed the respect awarded ministers, who were thought to have “the highest calling.”³⁷ Ministers held a position of authority and honour. Once established as the leader of a congregation, the pastor was a spiritual guide whose teaching should not be questioned. One *Messenger* article demonstrated the spiritual authority of pastor over parishioner:

young Christians need the minister to divide the word for them, as much as little children need their nurse’s help to mince their meat and cut their bread. To leave feeble saints to their own improving of the Word, without the public ministry [of preaching], is to set a whole loaf among a company of little babes, and bid them help themselves. Alas! They will sooner cut their fingers with the knife than fill their stomachs with the bread.³⁸

In this rather patronizing analogy, the laity would get themselves into great trouble without a minister guiding them to biblical understanding.

One of the most important elements required of would-be ministers was the opaque concept of calling, commonly mentioned in *The Messenger* and interviews – “men who feel called to seek the office of Minister of the Gospel” – but never clearly explained.³⁹ It was not the same as being called by a congregation, but spoke to a special sense of being invited or summoned by God to fulfill this unique and highly respected task of pastoring. The esoteric concept of calling, or having a spiritually elite mission from God, may have bolstered the demand for unquestioning obedience.

Interviews confirmed that the ministers had significant power and esteem. Some (quietly) disapproved of this, while others endorsed it. When Lien de Wit’s daughter moved away and joined another non-Free Reformed church, she did not stay long, reporting that “the Reverend there is not his own boss. He has to listen to what the consistory says.” This was

³⁵ It was in the mid 1960s that men began to be trained in North America, such as A. Stehouwer (candidate 1967), C. Pronk (ordained 1968), and L. Bilkes (1971).

³⁶ J. Tamminga, “The Year of our Lord 1970,” *The Messenger* 18.1 (Jan. 1971): 2.

³⁷ J. Tamminga, “1971 in Retrospect,” *The Messenger* 19:1 (Jan. 1972): 3..

³⁸ This is a quotation from W. Gurnall that was put in the bulletin at Grand Rapids. C. Pronk, “Reports from the Congregations,” *The Messenger* 19:11 (Nov. 1972): 2.

³⁹ Tamminga, “1971 in Retrospect,” 3.

unacceptable to Lien's daughter, so she joined a different church. In theory, the pastor was one of the elders, but in practice, the expectation could be that he ruled the church. Certainly this had been the norm in the Netherlands, according to Lien, who recalled that "in Holland, when you have a pastor, that is a high man. You can never *talk* with him!" This was due, at least in part, to more hierarchical social norms, but also to a legacy of elevating clergy. Lien found the Dutch ministers in Canada initially maintained some of this social distance, but the Dutch-Canadians were less pretentious. "Maybe they knew better," she offered, but, quickly correcting herself, added, "now, it's not an error" to elevate the minister.⁴⁰ Whether due to remnants of Dutch social stratification, a common respect for 'men of the cloth,' a unique status of being called by God to teach, deference to higher education, or other factors, Free Reformed pastors wielded considerable influence and power.

Not all congregants appreciated or privately accepted this revering of reverends. When asked if there was anything he would have changed about the way the church was run, Karel Molenaar said, "following the minister was one of them, yeah. The minister was never questioned."⁴¹ While he did not want to generalize, since it was not true of every congregation, he and others were uncomfortable with the heavy-handed leadership style of certain pastors and consistories. While members responded variedly to the leadership style and teachings -- some endorsed and were loyal to it, or quietly resisted -- few made their disagreements known publicly. Congregations were governed by a consistory that was elected by only male members (and based on a list controlled by the consistory in power). The power dynamics of consistory and members created an environment in which some members disapproved of procedures, yet did not feel free to express concerns openly.

Church Discipline

In this environment, pastoral teachings and house visitation were effective ways of

⁴⁰ This perspective parallels Joyce Vander Vliet's study of Christian Reformed women, in which one woman stated "the *dominee* [minister] has studied, he knows best." Joyce Vander Vliet, "Women, Church, and Society: The Christian Reformed Church Case," Master's Thesis (Guelph: University of Guelph, 1994), 95.

⁴¹ Karel Molenaar, Interview, 2011.

governing members. Another tool for keeping order was church discipline. A congregant engaging in sin could be put under ‘church discipline,’ which had various stages, beginning with a verbal admonition, and leading to restrictions such as being barred from attending Communion or teaching Sunday School. In the rare case that the person did not repent or withdraw from the church, he or she would ultimately be excommunicated, expelled from the church and ostensibly from God’s kingdom.⁴² The purpose of this was to avoid putting “the whole body of the Church in danger” from the “pollution of the world,” and ostensibly to bring the sinner back to the church.⁴³ The ‘Form of Excommunication’ purposes to shame the person into repentance; its prayer reads, “that he who is excommunicated may become ashamed of his sins . . . that he may repent and live, and the bosom of Thy church is always open for those who turn away from their wickedness.”⁴⁴

Excommunication was relatively rare: few people desired a life outside of the community, and those who did would usually withdraw their membership before this stage.⁴⁵ Even church discipline was not very common, not, according to Karel Molenaar, “because we behaved so good” but because these young immigrant families were often very occupied with work and home. The most common exception was people who “had to get married” (that is, an unmarried couple who became pregnant).⁴⁶ The discipline in this case was to do ‘confession of guilt’ in front of the consistory and entire congregation, acknowledging a sin against the seventh Commandment.⁴⁷

One couple, new to Ontario, found themselves at odds with the consistory over a very different matter: the issue of Christian education. Carolina and Adriaan Hoekstra wanted to

⁴² Confessing members agreed to submit to church discipline when they joined the church, but baptized members could also be put under discipline. “Excommunication from the Congregation,” *The Psalter* (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company: Grand Rapids, MI, 2002), 131-3.

⁴³ “Excommunication from the Congregation,” *The Psalter*, 132-33.

⁴⁴ “Excommunication from the Congregation,” *The Psalter*, 131-3.

⁴⁵ Karel Molenaar, Interview, 2011.

⁴⁶ According to historian Suzanne Sinke, this was also the case in other Dutch Reformed denominations, including the Christian Reformed Church and the Reformed Church of America. Suzanne Sinke, “Give Us This Day: Dutch Immigrant Women in two Protestant Denominations, 1880-1920,” *Amerikastudien* 38:3 (1993):426-28.

⁴⁷ Karel thought that this changed in about the 1970s, when confession of guilt began to be done only in front of the consistory and then announced by an elder or pastor to the congregation. Karel Molenaar, Interview, 2011.

send their children to an interdenominational school, where they could “work together with other Christians.”⁴⁸ (The FRC’s parochial school did not open until 1978.) They felt this was a step of obedience to their vows made in the baptismal ceremony of “bringing up [the children] in the fear of the Lord.” They were astonished that it was “the most normal thing was to send your kids to public school.” In their first house visitation, they asked the elders about this. The elders replied, “better no Christian teaching than the wrong Christian teaching,” which the Hoekstras found “a very weak argument.”⁴⁹ They sent their children to the interdenominational school despite this and found themselves labeled ‘liberal.’ While not officially put under church discipline, the consistory disapproved and did not permit them to teach Sunday School.⁵⁰

It is rather surprising that members could be punished for what was certainly not considered sinful, and indeed appeared to be a decision of conscience motivated by obedience to God and their vows. Yet, this case also demonstrates that it was not loyalty to God and their personal expression of faith that counted; it was loyalty to the rules of the church and, at times, to the consistory’s preferences. This Dutch immigrant church was structured in such a way that leaders were carefully selected, highly esteemed, and equipped with several tools to maintain membership compliance to rules and norms, including preaching, *huisbezoek* and church discipline. Another factor in maintaining compliance and insularity was personal faith.

Part Two: Membership and Faith

Membership and Church Activities

While leadership in the Free Reformed churches involved certain responsibilities and implications, so did membership. Being a lay member of the FRC entailed various commitments and expectations, including participation in church activities which kept

⁴⁸ Carolina Hoekstra, Interview, 2010.

⁴⁹ *The Messenger* indicates that education was a controversial topic. One Synod included an overture to send children to Christian schools, but strong objections were raised that existing Christian schools did not abide by Scripture and the Three Forms of Unity. As well (and this seemed to stir up the most response), many parents had “serious objections . . . against having ‘plays in the schools.’” Tamminga, “Synod Report,” 2.

⁵⁰ Carolina Hoekstra, Interview, 2010.

individuals and families busy, and their calendars full. One of the most important commitments was ‘the Sabbath.’

The FRC were Sabbatarians, regarding Sunday as ‘the Lord’s Day,’ forbidding entertainment and work, and attending both morning and evening church services.⁵¹ The Belgic Confession of Faith required that “on the Lord’s day the congregation shall assemble at least twice to hear God’s word.”⁵² As other denominations in North America and the Netherlands began to hold one instead of two Sunday services, more space was devoted to defending this tradition in *The Messenger*. Members and leaders perceived holding only one Sunday service as liberal and dangerous for the church. Aaltje, her husband and her husband’s family went to a Reformed church near Kingston. Eventually, “the [church] cut out the second service and we start to have all kinds of problems; they were very liberal, and then we decided to move” to the Flamborough region, recounted Aaltje.⁵³

Worship services, held twice a Sunday, were at the heart of the church and membership obligations. Both services included psalm-singing from *The Psalter*, a lengthy pastoral prayer, and a thirty to forty-five minute sermon.⁵⁴ The Psalter-singing was accompanied by an organist, who could be male or female; no other musical instruments were permitted during Sunday services.⁵⁵ Children attended services and usually sat with their parents, with the exception of babies and toddlers, who were cared for in the nursery by women and girls. Congregants were expected to dress formally (interviewees mention their “Sunday clothes”), and women and girls to always wear skirts or dresses, and head coverings in the form of hats.⁵⁶ The tone of the service was formal and followed a prescribed order. Dirk Van Leeuwen spoke with pride of the quiet and respectful tone of FRC worship services, noting that a visiting pastor had told him that he had “never been in a church where there is so

⁵¹ J. Overduin, Ed, “Statement on the Preservation of the Sunday as a Day of Rest,” *The Messenger* 13: 9 (Sept. 1966): 2-3.

⁵² A. Stehouwer, “From the Congregations,” *The Messenger* 22:2 (Feb. 1975), 3.

⁵³ Aaltje de Ruiters (pseudonym), Interview with author, Brantford, Ontario, October 16, 2010.

⁵⁴ Stehouwer, “From the Congregations,” 3.

⁵⁵ Karel Molenaar, Interview, 2011.

⁵⁶ Saskia and Willem De Groot (pseudonyms), Interview with author, Ancaster, Ontario, May 26, 2010.

much reverence for God.”⁵⁷

Writers for *The Messenger* responded with chagrin to changes in Canadian society that no longer kept Sunday as a day of rest.⁵⁸ In the FRC, the only permissible Sunday work was “works of necessity” including emergency police, fire and medical services. For the many FRC farmers and housewives, animals still needed to be fed, and meals made; the unwritten rule was to plan ahead so that little had to be done on the Sabbath. Interviewees revealed that they embraced and practiced Sabbatarian principles. Marijke Driessen’s husband Sem was offered a high-paying job at a restaurant, but “he said ‘no, I can’t work for you’ because he didn’t want to work on Sunday, and that restaurant was open [on Sundays].” Sem then found a job that did not require Sunday work. The family was also able to live over the restaurant. Marijke added, “that was one of the best times we had.”⁵⁹ Free Reformed members were committed to not working on Sundays.

Sabbatarianism served as a boundary marker between them and ‘the world’ or other less conservative churches. Frans and Liesbeth Scholten recalled driving by a shopping plaza on the way to church. When their children saw people going into a laundromat with baskets of washing, one son piped up, “oh, look at those people! They’re bad! They’re doing their washing on a Sunday!” Liesbeth and Frans joked that they had raised “a bunch of Pharisees,” but then added that this outspoken conviction was “in a way good” because it protected their children from the evil influences of the world.⁶⁰ The FRC perceived those who worked on Sundays as ungodly and a negative influence, and raised their children to believe the same.

The Lord’s Day customs also united the FRC, as it meant spending the one day off together, in church, talking after church, and often visiting with friends from church between morning and afternoon or evening services. It was very common to visit between church services. Liesbeth Scholten noted that her family visited with other families every Sunday,

⁵⁷ Eda and Dirk Van Leeuwen, Interview, 2011.

⁵⁸ A full article on Sabbath in *The Messenger* on June 1976, 2-3. L. Bilkes, “Love for the Church,” *The Messenger* 19:11 (Nov. 1972): 3; Overduin, “Statement on the Preservation of the Sunday as a Day of Rest,” 4.

⁵⁹ Marijke Driessen, Interview, (pseudonym), Interview with author, Lynden, Ontario, April 1, 2011.

⁶⁰ Frans and Liesbeth Scholten, Interview, 2010.

taking turns hosting. In addition to fulfilling an important religious law, therefore, Sabbath-keeping served to demarcate the boundary between the FRC and ‘the world,’ and bound church members together.

As new immigrants, members found the social interaction very meaningful. Church activities and the accompanying social life did not diminish as the church grew more established; quite the opposite, in fact. Besides holding two Sunday services, Saskia de Groot noted that initially churches practiced “the normal [Dutch] style,” including catechism classes for youth, Sunday school for children, and house visitation.⁶¹ Other activities were soon added, including prayer meetings, Bible studies, choir, and church-based social groups, such as Ladies’ Society, Men’s Society, and Young People’s Society.⁶² The framework of church activities left room for a full social life associating with other members, as Chapter III will cover more thoroughly.

How did one become a member? Babies were baptized within a few weeks or months after birth, and were considered ‘baptized members.’⁶³ When baptized members decided to join the church as teenagers or adults, they participated in a church ceremony called “Confession of Faith” in which they stated their belief in the doctrines of the church, committed to live according to these doctrines, and to submit to church discipline if necessary.⁶⁴ These ‘confessing members’ were permitted, among other privileges and responsibilities, to attend Communion, have their children baptized, teach Sunday School classes, and, if male, to vote in membership meetings. Other roles in the church included teaching Sunday school, playing a role in a society, ushering, and babysitting.

Faith Rooted in God’s Sovereignty and Care during Trials

At the core of church membership and involvement was a commitment to God, usually expressed by personal faith. When speaking of their faith, many interviewees spoke

⁶¹ Saskia and Willem De Groot, Interview, 2010.

⁶² C. Pronk, “Reports from the Congregations, *The Messenger* 20:9 (Sept. 1973): 2.

⁶³ If one or both parents were confessing members.

⁶⁴ “Public Confession of Faith,” “Church Order,” *The Psalter*, (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company: Grand Rapids, 2002), 130.

very personally about how God supported them through their trials. Interviewees saw God as caring and involved in their daily lives and personal needs.

Tineke Martens had “god-fearing” parents. She described her upbringing as strict and legalistic, but also with “a lot of love for the Lord” shown by her parents and siblings. As for her own children, she and her husband “pointed them out the way, that the Lord’s the most important thing in our life.”⁶⁵ Tineke spoke warmly of God’s provision for and intervention in their lives. While Holland was occupied by German forces, her family ran out of provisions. While eating the last of their food, her father said that they should ask the Lord for help and led the family in prayer. Just after the meal finished, the doorbell rang. Startled (because it was after curfew), the family went to the door where a stranger handed them coupons to get food the next day.⁶⁶ This and other similar events increased Tineke’s belief in God and his care.

It was not common or considered necessary in FRC circles to have had a distinct salvation experience. Many had been raised in a church setting for as long as they could remember, and could not pinpoint their change of heart. However, several did share a story on this. Lien de Wit spoke of a conversion experience when she was twenty-two: “the Lord worked in my heart.”⁶⁷ She expressed her gladness in having lived “close to the Lord” for most of her life. She saw her relationship with God as experiencing comfort and help in life’s many challenges. Lien first raised the subject of personal faith when asked about staying at home with her children. Noting that it is no longer popular to have large families, she argued that having a big family causes people to rely on God and is good for their faith. Her faith was a comfort to her during the challenging years of raising a family: “you know that you don’t stay alone with the bringing up of your kids, that the Lord is beside you.”⁶⁸

Lien perceived trials not as punishment but as tests of faith from a God who had her

⁶⁵ Tineke and Nicolaas Martens (pseudonyms), Interview with author, Brantford, Ontario, May 27, 2010.

⁶⁶ Tineke and Nicolaas Martens, Interview, 2010.

⁶⁷ Lien de Wit (pseudonym), Interview with author, Brantford, Ontario, May 26, 2010.

⁶⁸ Lien de Wit, Interview, 2010.

best interests in mind. “Every family has some [troubles], and it’s always for your best, to stay strong in your believing. It’s not that the Lord gives you that because He don’t like you – no, He tests you – see Job in the Bible. He take everything from him, and still Job was strong in his believing.”⁶⁹ Lien mentioned her greatest trial -- her husband’s death, followed by the death of her daughter in the same year. She was thankful that her husband had lived to his late eighties, but was shocked by the loss of her daughter. She felt she would die from missing them. Yet, she added, “I felt it so strong that [God] helped me get through it.” When her daughter knew she was dying, she said “mom, don’t cry for me. I [am going] to the Lord.” Personal faith provided a sense of security and, as the Heidelberg Catechism put it, “comfort in life and in death.”⁷⁰ Lien pointed out that, after her daughter’s death, her grandchildren began to go to church again. This was, to her, an example of God bringing a good outcome out of a negative experience. “The Lord is always working,” she added.⁷¹

Lien’s story illustrates her application of the central Calvinist doctrine of the sovereignty of God, the belief that God was firmly in control and nothing happened outside of His will. This doctrine was a source of comfort for believers, and sometimes sounded fatalist, as in a year-end meditation in *The Messenger* by Rev. Tamminga.

1969 was in God’s hand. Further, in the year that passed the Lord continued to write the history of the world and the church. And . . . in this way that His providential hand controls all things, so that nothing happens by chance.⁷²

According to Tamminga, God controlled all circumstances, good or bad. When bad things happened, members accepted them as being from the hand of God, and, like Lien, sought to find evidence of God’s goodness in the midst of the trial, often a blessing of a spiritual nature.

Liesbeth Scholten also spoke of a particularly difficult time as when she came to “know the Lord personally.” After less than a year in Canada, she needed surgery on her back. Although her nurses and doctor were kind, the hospital food and style of care were unfamiliar.

⁶⁹ Lien de Wit, Interview, 2010.

⁷⁰ “The Heidelberg Catechism: Lord’s Day 1,” *The Psalter* (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company: Grand Rapids, MI, 2002): 27.

⁷¹ Lien de Wit, Interview, 2010.

⁷² J. Tamminga, “The Year of Our Lord 1969,” *The Messenger* 17:1 (Jan. 1970): 1.

Lying immobilized on a Stryker frame, she was unable to ask questions about her condition because she “didn’t speak a word of English.” Heavy snowfall that winter prevented her family from visiting her often. At one point, fifteen-year-old Liesbeth spent a week without seeing any family or friends. Yet, she said, “looking back, I would not want to miss what I experienced” because “spiritually it brought me to the Lord” at a young age.⁷³ In pain and stress, in an unfamiliar environment, Liesbeth became a believer. As in Lien and Tineke’s stories, trials were an opportunity for spiritual growth and to experience God’s provision and protection.

Salvation and Theology

What was the nature of salvation or personal faith, the most important element in life to the Free Reformers? Salvation had personal, theological and corporate implications. It was inwardly experienced, theologically driven, and outwardly expressed. According to interviews, salvation meant a private relationship with God, or an intellectual commitment to the truth of God’s existence. It was also bound with certain theological constructions, such as understanding (or emphasizing) one’s sin, and being chosen by God. The belief that one was saved by God’s choice and not one’s own decision, held by all but emphasized in the extreme by some, led to a controversial practice in some churches which questioned the necessity of personal conversion for church membership. Certainly the Free Reformers agreed that God and the church had the highest priority in their lives. Belief in and obedience to the Lord was best expressed by a commitment to the church and its rules; at times, it appears that church and God were so closely associated as to be conflated.

What did it mean to be a believer? For one thing, it was a relationship. Pieter Smit answered, “when you talk about your own personal experience, your relationship between you and the Lord, as it is practically impossible to explain to someone why I love my wife, it is all the more difficult to explain your personal, inner relationship with the Lord.”⁷⁴ For Pieter and

⁷³ Frans and Liesbeth Scholten, Interview, 2010.

⁷⁴ Pieter Smit (pseudonym), Interview with author, Lynden, Ontario, April 14, 2011.

some members, a relationship with God was privately and intimately experienced, difficult to articulate, although it also had public expression in church membership. As Lien, Tineke and Liesbeth exemplified in the previous section, the relationship was one of trust in God and his provision and care, although this did not mean a suffering-free existence.

Salvation meant a relationship with God. Free Reformers also believed that it meant people must understand their intrinsic sinfulness. This frequent subject in *The Messenger* was echoed by interviewees. At Church Day, an annual denominational gathering, Reverend Overduin spoke on the basic Reformed doctrines, one of which was the belief that all humans are fallen and sinful, and need deliverance from “eternal death.”⁷⁵ Interviewees agreed that this was the essence of salvation. When asked about conversion, Dirk Van Leeuwen said that “every child of God learns how great a sinner he is. The deeper you feel that, the more you love Christ.” Dirk defined spirituality as knowledge and experience of one’s own sin. “Some people,” he added, “feel the misery deeper than others, but everybody [must] feel his misery so deep that he needs a saviour.” Unless we know how evil we are, we “don’t need an saviour, you know,” he explained.⁷⁶ For the Free Reformed, understanding one’s sin or “total depravity” was a prerequisite to salvation or experiencing God’s grace.⁷⁷

The often-taught Heidelberg Catechism contained three central themes: guilt, grace and gratitude, or sin, salvation, and service. Following God meant knowing and repenting of one’s guilt, experiencing the forgiving grace of God, and living an obedient life out of gratitude.⁷⁸ Some interviewees emphasized the guilt/sin concept so much that they seemed uncomfortable to mention mercy or grace without another mention of sin. When asked about the most important practices of Christians, Dirk switched back to the topic of theology. He and his wife Eda had seen a roadside sign with the words ‘Jesus loves you’ or ‘God is love.’

⁷⁵ C. Noordegraaf, “Church-Day 1966,” *The Messenger* 13:11 (Nov. 1966): 2-3.

⁷⁶ Eda and Dirk Van Leeuwen, Interview, 2011.

⁷⁷ In Lord’s Day 1 of the Heidelberg Catechism, Question 2 is as follows: “How many things are necessary for thee to know, that thou, enjoying this comfort, mayest live and die happily?” The answer: “Three; the first, how great my sins and miseries are; the second, how I may be delivered from all my sins and miseries; the third, how I shall express my gratitude to God for such deliverance.” “The Heidelberg Catechism: Lord’s Day 1,” *The Psalter*, 27.

⁷⁸ “The Heidelberg Catechism: Lord’s Day 1,” *The Psalter*, 27.

They found this offensive. God is indeed love, they stated, but he is also righteous and a god of war. “Why don’t they put a sign up saying ‘Our God is a Consuming Fire’? That’s in the Bible too,” said Dirk. “Yes, that’s the same God,” Eda chimed in. Their concern, Dirk explained, was that if “you only say ‘God is love’” then the “common people, the people who don’t go to church” might get the idea that God will love them no matter how they live, and therefore not change their behavior.⁷⁹ Some interviewees emphasized the goodness of God, while others did not want a message of God’s love to be spread without sufficient Biblical context.

Understanding personal sin or depravity was key to being saved, as was being selected by God. As mentioned earlier, in the Reformed doctrine of sovereignty, God was in control and people did not have free will. The subsidiary concept of ‘election’ was intimately connected with salvation. In the Free Reformed understanding of election, all humans were called to repent and turn to God, and yet God had chosen in advance whom He would and would not save.⁸⁰ As Saskia put it, in “our churches, it’s not ‘I accepted the Lord.’ Instead, the Lord has to accept you. But your eyes have to be opened for it; you have to pray so He will accept you.”⁸¹ These Calvinists did not want humans to be attributed with saving themselves or contributing in any way to their salvation. “Salvation,” said Pieter Smit, rather belligerently, is “a one-sided deed of God’s love.” The FRC believed that a sovereign God reached down to save sinful human beings; it was not an exercise of the human will.

Some ministers and churches emphasized election so much that it was difficult for congregants to know if they were, in fact, believers. In other words, how could one ever know that she was truly a believer, if it was strictly God’s decision? For this reason, it was a common and respected FRC issue to “struggle with assurance” of salvation. In some churches, it was considered presumptuous for a member to say that he was a believer. Attending church or being baptized did not mean salvation. It did not make a person “a child

⁷⁹ Eda and Dirk Van Leeuwen, Interview, 2011.

⁸⁰ J. Keuning, “From Heart to Heart,” *The Messenger* 16:9 (Sept. 1969): 3.

⁸¹ Saskia and Willem De Groot, Interview, 2010.

of God . . . that's not how it works," commented Aaltje de Ruiter. "If God works that in you, then it's real. If it's only in your head, then it's not real. Just a story."⁸² The difficulty was in determining if God had indeed worked.

When asked to define faith or salvation, Aaltje struggled to answer. "That's not very firm in our circles. I have a problem with that myself too, you know. And I don't know if that's because it's not taught, or maybe it's the Free Reformed way, [to] say, 'well, I *think*, but I'm not *sure* if I'm a real Christian, a reborn Christian.'" In Aaltje's church, being certain of one's faith was called "easy-believism." While she stated that she did not want to judge, Aaltje found calling oneself a believer "overconfident." Yet she also admired the strong faith of her daughter, "how she reacts, how she lives, what [faith] means to her." Aaltje noted that, unlike her daughter, she did not "know how to express herself" regarding faith. She added, "I always come back [to question salvation]. You have to have faith. That sounds so easy but it isn't that easy. But I'm a real doubter, I know I am, which is sad, but that's just how I am, I guess."⁸³ This spirit of doubt and resignation was common among some of the first generation of immigrants: the need of salvation combined with the uncertainty of knowing if they were 'elect' led some to a spiritual stalemate. In some Free Reformed churches, as Aaltje's story illustrates, it was considered more godly to question than to be confident of one's faith.

Pastor J. Overduin labeled the conversion-questioning as extreme, writing that this 'hyper-Calvinism' was a "misuse [of] the doctrine of election."⁸⁴ However, it remained common in some congregations, and was a debated topic in the FRC at large. "There were a big group of doubters, and also a group who know for sure," said Aaltje.⁸⁵ It is ironic that the message of salvation was preached to the same people over and over, year after year, who lived their lives centered around the church and its commandments, yet some congregants did not dare to claim or believe they had a relationship with God. Irony aside, this belief also led

⁸² Aaltje de Ruiter, Interview, 2010.

⁸³ Aaltje de Ruiter, Interview, 2010.

⁸⁴ Noordegraaf, "Church-Day 1966," 2-3.

⁸⁵ Aaltje de Ruiter, Interview, 2010.

to an issue with defining membership.

Only baptized members who had done confession of faith become full or ‘confessing’ members, which entailed voting (for men), attending communion, and baptizing offspring. But if congregants were not sure of being saved, how could they do a confession of faith?⁸⁶ Some Free Reformed churches, such as Dundas, bypassed this dilemma by deciding that confession of faith could simply be a confession of the truth, or, as Karel Molenaar put it, a “confession of the faith of the *church*, not of your own faith.”⁸⁷ One could join the church without being a born-again Christian. In the confession of faith ceremony, baptized members could confess that the beliefs of the church were true without stating that it was a “personal confession of faith.”⁸⁸

This practice was controversial. Carolina Hoekstra and her husband Adriaan were appalled the first time they witnessed the ceremony of profession of faith (or profession of truth, in this case).

I remember after church talking to a lady, and I was very shocked and said, “it really wasn’t a confession of faith, was it?”

She said: No, no, no, but they shouldn’t [require] that.”

And I said, “well, why would they want to have members like that? What value does a church member have if there is no faith required? There *might* be [faith], but it’s not required.”

She said, “well, then a church wouldn’t have members, and then they wouldn’t have membership!”

I said, “well, what good does a membership do if there is no faith?!” That can’t be good for a church.⁸⁹

Carolina believed that membership without personal faith was meaningless. Some churches disagreed, making allowances for ‘doubters’ to assert the truth of the doctrines of the church without claiming a personal relationship, and to have their children baptised. (Within the membership of these churches, it was understood that only true believers would attend

⁸⁶ In which they promised to acknowledge the church’s doctrines “to be the true and complete doctrine of salvation,” to “live and die in accordance” with it, to conduct themselves “conformably to this doctrine, faithfully, honorably, and beyond reproach” and to do good works, and to “submit to admonition, correction and church discipline” if they became “delinquent either in doctrine or in life.” “Public Confession of Faith,” *The Psalter*, 130.

⁸⁷ Karel Molenaar, Interview, 2011.

⁸⁸ Baars, “Between ‘Old’ and ‘Free,’” 98.

⁸⁹ Carolina Hoekstra, Interview, 2010.

communion, which became a statement of one's certainty of personal faith.⁹⁰) This subtle distinction and disputed practice illustrates the murky connection between salvation and church membership.

Although faith was seen as a private, personal relationship, it was also closely tied to the church. Being a Christian and keeping the rules of the church were somewhat conflated at times. When asked how they raised their children to be Christians, Dirk Van Leeuwen declared emphatically, "according to the Bible!" When I asked for an example, he grew irritable, as if it were too obvious to require explanation.

We teach them Sunday is the Lord's day, then you have to go to church and go under the minister. But we teach them too that they have to be converted and have a new heart. And they have to ask the Lord if [they are] converted of the Lord.

His wife Eda interjected:

[God] shows us what we are by nature, and that we need to be changed. But it is the work of the Holy Spirit to do that, and through the work of the preaching, that can happen. You have to go to church, and not once but twice. Some churches, they start to do it only once, and that's the beginning, you know?

Dirk agreed, adding, "that means they don't have nothing. They don't *like* to go to church."

And, Eda concluded, "*that* means they don't have a new heart."⁹¹ The progression of their

logic is interesting. God was able to save people by the work of the Holy Spirit, if He so chose, but only through the preaching of a minister, which happened on Sunday at church.

Therefore church attendance was mandatory. This couple saw no problem with stating that churchgoers who attended only one Sunday service were not Christians at all. The connection between a personal faith and strict observance of church rules, or relationship with God and the church, was almost inextricably close for Free Reformer. Tineke Martens stated, "the Lord's the most important thing in our life"; other members agreed.⁹² They also agreed with Lien de Wit's comment: "I think that is the [most] important thing for your life: the church."⁹³

⁹⁰ Karel Molenaar, Interview, 2011.

⁹¹ Eda and Dirk Van Leeuwen, Interview, 2011.

⁹² Tineke and Nicolaas Martens, Interview, 2010

⁹³ Lien de Wit, Interview, 2010.

God was important. The church was important. The two were often conflated. There was an acknowledged need for individual heart change, but the expression of one's relationship with God was commitment and obedience to the church.

And 'the church' did not mean any church – it meant *their* church in particular. Free Reformers closely tied salvation and Christian practice with correct doctrine. Without fail, members and leaders of the FRC prized the doctrines of their church most highly, believing them to be the most accurate and true to God's Word. When I asked Jan Vanden Heuvel about the greatest strengths of the FRC, he replied, "the doctrine that we were taught, especially the forms, and the [Heidelberg] catechism and all those things." He added, "if you don't have doctrine, you're just like a body without a skeleton. And that is really the trouble with a lot of Canadian churches. Doctrine [isn't] taught to them."⁹⁴ Other churches were perceived as having either incorrect doctrine, or no doctrine at all. The FRC, on the other hand, was perceived as a bastion of truth.

'Sound theology' and preaching were of paramount importance.⁹⁵ The emphasis was on orthodoxy; orthopraxis was also important, and related to religious traditions as well as living apart from the world, as Chapter III will explain. Yet doctrine was so elevated that they believed orthopraxis, or even salvation, could scarcely emerge from flawed teaching. Throughout their interview, Dirk and Eda Van Leeuwen frequently emphasized the significance of "Biblical teaching from the Bible." Dirk gravely acknowledged that there were, in fact, "Christian people, converted people, in many churches." But churches with wrong doctrine, he concluded, did not contain very many Christians.⁹⁶ When asked if there were any weaknesses in the denomination, Pieter Smit replied that "as far as the preaching is concerned, and the way the messages are brought, I would not want to change anything."⁹⁷ The high regard for pastors, seen earlier in this chapter, was underscored by an even higher

⁹⁴ Maria and Jan Vanden Heuvel (pseudonyms), Interview with author, Paris, Ontario, April 1, 2011.

⁹⁵ Maria and Jan Vanden Heuvel, Interview, 2011.

⁹⁶ Eda and Dirk Van Leeuwen, Interview, 2011.

⁹⁷ Pieter Smit, Interview, 2011.

regard for Biblical doctrine, which was conveyed primarily through pastoral preaching. Whatever was taught by the ministers, therefore, would be compelling, and not to be lightly contradicted.

To the Free Reformed, salvation meant God's provision in trials, a personal relationship, an awareness of sin, and God's choice (not a human decision), and was closely tied to the practices and doctrines of their particular church. As interviewees discussed the topic of salvation and faith, various elements of theology emerged, including the sovereignty of God, election, and total human depravity. Theology was of great importance in the FRC in order to be saved and to live a Christian life. Some members pointed to a specific time as a salvation experience, and spoke freely about their relationship with God, while others expressed uncertainty about their position with God. The issue of doubt and election led to controversy over church membership. Not all members claimed to be saved; some merely committed to the truth of God's existence and to the church. Church and faith were at the core of the Free Reformed community; it is impossible to understand the FRC without delving into these two subjects.

Conclusion

How did the church and personal faith contribute to the development of the insular FRC community? Members, in their interpretation of personal faith, were deeply committed to God and the church. The church was truly the centre of their lives – it was *the* major organization, and members arranged their lives around it. The church structure was rigid and highly resistant to change and outside influence, and this message was taught by leaders, who exhorted members to stay away from 'the world' (as Chapter III will show). Leaders, given authority and power, had significant control over members through tools such as voting processes, home visits, and church discipline. This influence was underscored by the fact that the highly motivating personal faith, or at least acquiescence to the faith of the church, was largely equated with allegiance to this particular church, its rules, and doctrine.

To sum up, there was very little room for personal opinion: personal faith meant an

inner relationship with God and an outward obedience and fidelity to the Free Reformed Church, which was tightly controlled. If individual members desired change or to build bridges with the surrounding culture or other denominations, they found few opportunities to do so; and, doing so, as the Hoekstra's discovered, could invoke the leadership's disapproval and censure. Structures, teachings and membership requirements were reinforced in such a way as to maintain control of the church community. In order to sustain an insular community, especially such a small one, acquiescence and commitment were needed from everyone. The next chapter will reveal that one of the strongest faith commitments was to resist the influence of the surrounding context.

Chapter III: “May We Pride Ourselves on Being Cautious?”:

Free Reformed Beliefs and Practices Vis-à-vis the Surrounding Culture

This chapter explores how Free Reformed members and leaders viewed and interacted with the wider world. Between 1966 and 1976, *The Messenger* reflects a growing emphasis on pastors writing about resisting the influence of the surrounding culture. This isolationist, defensive ideology was at times embraced or rejected, and ultimately lived out in varying degrees by church members. The first section of Part One reveals how the church saw itself in relation to other churches and ‘the world,’ defined as everything that was outside of the Free Reformed church. The FRC believed it was uniquely called to stay doctrinally correct in the face of an ungodly, dangerous world and other flawed churches. Members saw themselves as perfectly balanced between overly liberal and conservative extremes. The next section discusses fear-driven motifs common in Free Reformed parlance, based on fear of ‘the world’ and necessity of separation from it. Change, they believed, opened the door for sin, Satan and the world to enter, so themes of fear and resistance to modernity and change were preached by leaders in strong, sometimes coercive language. Resisting the world was an expression of faith and served to reinforce the insular, closed nature of the FRC community. It protected Free Reformers from moral or spiritual contamination.

Part Two focuses on the beliefs and practices of members regarding their religious traditions and relationship with the Canadian environment. In many ways, members embraced the dogmatic stance and hegemonic ideology of the church. They also voiced strong disagreement with certain beliefs and practices, yet, due to social and organizational pressures, were rarely able to discuss their opinions outside of a private setting. Overall, members subscribed to the belief that ‘the world’ was dangerous and the community was safe. As the second section of Part Two reveals, the lived response to this belief meant members lived in close community with each other and avoided relationships with ‘outsiders’ in the workplace and socially. Members were not explicitly taught to avoid all outsider relationships, yet this is how they interpreted and practiced the anti-world teachings. In order

to protect itself from change and worldly influence, the community promoted and practiced a life of insularity regarding all relationships, and most activities outside of the community (besides in the business realm).

While it is not possible to know precisely how efficacious the writings in *The Messenger* of Reverends Pronk, Stehouwer, Noordegraaf, Tamminga, Overduin, and Bilkes were, it is worth noting that each of these articles spoke to the denomination in its official monthly publication, *The Messenger*. Also, recall from Chapter II that ministers were highly respected in the FRC, as was Biblical theology, and the ministers' warnings to resist the world were framed in Biblical themes. These teachings represented mainstream Free Reformed thought that was also common in sermons, Catechism and Sunday School classes. Since immigrants often echoed these thoughts, it appears that the teachings about 'the world' did indeed take root.

Between 1966 and 1976, the FRC increasingly exercised ideological resistance to and lived distance from outside influences and changes. This chapter compares and contrasts prescriptions and lived realities to draw out matters in which members embraced, opposed or negotiated the dominant mindset represented by the church. The messages of church leaders, the social pressures of other Free Reformed members, and a personal faith commitment expressed in loyalty to church teachings contributed to the predominant protectionist stance.

Part One: Prescriptive Views and Warnings

Pastoral Views of the FRC in Relation to Other Churches and 'the World'

By the 1960s and '70s, writers for *The Messenger* began to articulate the boundaries and the purpose of the denomination with increased zeal, a trend that corresponded to a growing familiarity with Canadian culture, exposure of school-age children and teenagers to 'outside' norms, and awareness of the turbulent social changes of the era. The FRC believed it ought to set itself apart to preserve doctrinal purity, that their particular denomination was uniquely correct and thus must be uncompromising in dealing with other church groups, and that the world and sin represented a threat that must be emphatically resisted by preserving the

status quo. Members and leaders perceived their denominational identity as unique, endangered, and deliberately and necessarily isolated from Canadian society.

The FRC was a small denomination, with fewer than 3000 members in 1970, yet they believed they had a distinct purpose. Reverend Noordegraaf acknowledged that, despite their size, they had “a great task, namely: to preserve and defend and proclaim our heritage of the Reformed doctrine.”¹ Reporting on the summer youth rally of 1966, young adult Nellie Salverda similarly remarked: “We have a small denomination . . . we should understand our position and task: to stand apart for the Lord’s sake and for the sake of His Word and Kingdom.”² Terms such as *preserve*, *defend*, and *stand apart* indicate that their calling in Canada was not to evangelize and expand, or influence the culture through involvement, but to set themselves apart from society and maintain their insular community.

This was particularly an important message to convey to the youth, born and/or raised in Canada, fluent in English, and most susceptible to the counterculture of the 1960s and ‘70s.³ At the July 1967 youth rally, held in Vineland and attended by more than eighty people, Rev. Stehouwer spoke on the subject “How can we remain Reformed while we become Canadians.” It was important to adapt to their new environment (such as transitioning from Dutch to English) without “taking over certain customs and modes of living.”⁴ Their lifestyle and beliefs were jeopardized if they did not resist the influence of the surrounding Canadian society. Their calling, Stehouwer stated, was “to preserve [their] rich heritage and to apply its principles to every area of life.” The FRC goal was two-fold: to resist change from the outside world, and to maintain their existing practices and beliefs.

It was not mere Christianity, but their “distinct Reformed doctrinal interpretation” that they “preserved and vigorously defended.”⁵ This philosophy governed their level of contact

¹ C. Noordegraaf, “Church-Day 1966,” *The Messenger* 13:11 (Nov. 1966): 2.

² Nellie Salverda, “Summer Youth Rally 1966 Report,” *The Messenger* 13:7 (July 1966): 2-3.

³ Tamminga wrote that, as part of the human race, they and “especially [their] children come in contact with the outside world.” J. Tamminga, “1971 in Retrospect,” *The Messenger* 19:1 (Jan. 1972): 2

⁴ A. Stehouwer, “Our Denomination and the Changing Situation,” *The Messenger* 14:8 (Aug 1967): 4.

⁵ A. Stehouwer, “The Year of Our Lord 1975,” *The Messenger* 23:2 (Feb. 1976): 4.

with and opinion of other denominations. In 1966, *The Messenger* included a rare article on “the danger of becoming hyper-critical” about other churches and theologies.⁶ An overly critical spirit was recognized as sinful, but far worse was a compromise of conscience. Truth trumped unity.⁷ There was a decided distaste for ecumenicalism, called a “denial of the uniqueness of the Christian message.”⁸ Non-Reformed Protestant churches were so far from the truth that they could be completely discounted, while Catholics were not even considered in the category of ‘Christian.’

In the realm of Reformed churches, the FRC saw itself as perfectly balanced between various extremes, the overly-strict Netherlands Reformed Church and the too-liberal Christian Reformed Church. As member Pieter Smit put it, the “CRC [Christian Reformed] way to the left, the Netherlands Reformed way to the right. And both of them are wrong.”⁹ Other Dutch Reformed denominations were considered flawed in some way. There was a stock phrase highlighting the chief failing of each denomination. The CRC, for example, were “watered down” doctrinally, and were said to wrongly believe in presumptive regeneration.¹⁰ The Canadian Reformed were classified as the “the frozen chosen” who believed that they were the only true church, and that only members of their church could be saved.¹¹

While other churches were criticized, the strongest resistance was reserved for ‘the world.’ In FRC parlance, ‘the world’ was a powerful, frequently-used phrase that conjured up images of all that was unholy, a convenient expression to label anything forbidden. It

⁶ “The Danger of Becoming Hyper-Critical,” *The Messenger* 13:7 (July 1966): 1-2.

⁷ Expressed well by a statement from the current FRC website: “We desire to have unity with all those who distinctly declare that in all things they wish to be gathered as churches in accordance with God’s Word and the Reformed Confessions. Christ prayed for the unity of the church in John 17 and we are enjoined to be concerned about and actively interested in it. *The one thing that is more important than the unity of the church is the truth itself for which the church exists, so that where there is a conflict of interests, truth takes precedence over unity.*” “What We Believe: Unity with Other Reformed Churches,” [frcna.org, http://www.frcna.org/about-us/what-we-believe.html#1](http://www.frcna.org/about-us/what-we-believe.html#1). Emphasis added.

⁸ J. Overduin, “Wider and Still Wider,” *The Messenger* 15:9 (Sept 1968): 4. The only supportive reference to non-Reformed churches that I found in *The Messenger* appeared in a section on the global persecution of Christians. Being imprisoned for Bible distribution was a sufficiently serious situation to identify that their “real enemy” was not other Christians, even Baptists and Pentecostals J. Overduin, “Our Real Enemy,” *The Messenger* 22:2 (Feb 1975): 2-3.

⁹ Pieter Smit (pseudonym), Interview with author, Lynden, Ontario, April 14, 2011.

¹⁰ That is, all ‘covenant children’ (those born and baptized in a family with confessing parents) were presumed to be born again “unless proven differently.” By contrast, the FRC believed that even covenant children were born “in sin and iniquity” and must be born again. Pieter Smit, Interview, 2011.

¹¹ Tineke and Nicolaas Martens (pseudonyms), Interview with author, Brantford, Ontario, May 27, 2010.

sometimes meant ‘worldly’ or non-Christian culture, and at other times seemed to represent anything outside of the community and its norms. Rev. Pronk explained ‘the world’ as

the mass of mankind which is estranged from God through sin and living after the lusts of the flesh, who think only or primarily of this world and neglect the world to come, more of the body than of the soul, more of pleasing men than of pleasing God.¹²

This was a potent condemnation to a group whose daily lives centred around the church and considered God the most important element in life. The term ‘the world’ represented sinfulness, which had three sources: Satan, ‘the world,’ and one’s own heart. Satan was present in and, in fact, governed ‘the world’ or secular society.¹³ Since Satan was an unseen being, it was the world that offered devilish temptations in material form. In the Reformed doctrine of total depravity, all people, even believers who loved God and had been transformed, had a propensity to sin and would be tempted to do evil, especially when provoked by ‘the world.’¹⁴ Thus, great caution was to be exercised to keep the church community on a godly path.

In summary, fear of the influence of ‘the world’ constantly bolstered the need to live together apart from other churches, which had seemingly succumbed to worldly elements that the FRC sought to avoid, and secular Canadian culture. At the core of the FRC’s denominational identity were beliefs of being uniquely doctrinally correct, of being endangered by outside influence (both ‘the world’ and other churches), and of being fiercely protective of their status quo. As the next section will show, the manner in which such messages were shared further enforced this central message of isolation and defensive posture.

The Fear-Driven Motifs and Language Used by FRC Pastors

The FRC’s defensive, isolationist posture was stoked by several pervasive motifs, conveyed in persuasive language. This section presents the prescriptive perspective on change

¹² C. Pronk, “The Christian and the World,” *The Messenger* 21:10 (Oct. 1974): 3.

¹³ J. Keuning, “From Heart to Heart: Sanctification,” *The Messenger* 19:4 (Apr. 1972), 2.

¹⁴ As Rev. Tamminga phrased it, while Christians “delight in the law of God,” they also experience “the tempting and oppressing power” of their pre-Christian nature which “allures to sin, darkens the eye and tempts his soul to evil.” J. Tamminga, “Meditation,” *The Messenger* 13:9 (Sept. 1966): 2.

and moral decline. It begins by examining two of these pervasive beliefs as presented by leaders: first, that ‘the world’ was deteriorating morally, as were non-FRC churches, because of modernizing changes; and second, that one change would inevitably lead to innumerable other changes. This section then looks at the use of discourse, how language was used to stoke fears of change and modernity, to repudiate anything different as ungodly, and to alarm members into obedience. While Free Reformers identified with a strong focus on pure theology, what stands out in *The Messenger* (and interviews) are themes of fear and separatism. These motifs were key elements in forming and enforcing community cohesion, and in creating and cementing distance between the FRC and ‘the world.’

‘The world’ was not only perceived as evil, but also as rapidly deteriorating. Reverend Bilkes wrote that “the declension and departure from the Word of God is taking alarming proportions and is taking place at a very fast pace.”¹⁵ Society’s moral decay was a frequent topic in *The Messenger*, and many stories and statistics were given as evidence of this trend in ‘the world’ and other churches. For example, Reverend Overduin reported that church membership was declining in Holland. Nineteen percent of the population did not attend church in 1960; by 1966, this percentage had grown to thirty-three percent.¹⁶ In the same time frame, membership in the *Hervormde Kerk*, the largest Reformed church in the Netherlands, shrank by ten percent. The Canadian situation, Overduin feared, was following the same trends, with the United Church’s report that it had closed one hundred churches in the past ten years. To the FRC, such news was incontrovertible evidence of increasing evil in ‘the world.’

Free Reformed pastors were quick to link the downfall of these other churches to their failure to maintain conservative traditions. To liberalize was to invite ‘the world’ in. The fate of these shrinking churches would also befall the FRC if they were not careful in guarding against change. Changes in church traditions or lifestyle were to be avoided at all costs.

¹⁵ L. Bilkes, “Love for the Church,” *The Messenger* 19:11 (Nov. 1972): 3.

¹⁶ J. Overduin, “Dutch Survey Reveals Rapid Church Membership Decline,” *The Messenger* 13:12 (Dec. 1966): 3. Based on Petersen and Hofstede’s data, which shows that many Reformed Dutch left the Netherlands in this period bound for Canada and elsewhere, the ten percent drop might simply be attributed to the emigration of many conservative Christians rather than growing worldliness.

Proposed changes, and those who suggested them, were distrusted. The FRC's distaste for change became almost paranoid in some cases, as the controversy over Bible translations demonstrates.

New versions of Scripture were being published in the 1960s and '70s.¹⁷ Reverend Overduin warned against using these updated versions; they could be a crafty strategy of Satan to obscure truth. Overduin feared that "the shadow of the Evil One" would creep in "amid the confusion created by the circulation of new translations, versions, revisions, paraphrases and attempts at modernization." He was certain that pseudo-Christian movements were producing "slanted revisions" to support their heresies.¹⁸ In the eyes of these pastors, even the Bible could become a tool of Satan if changes were introduced. Mistrust of non-King James Bible translations was widely held amongst the FRCNA and sustained over the years.¹⁹

One interviewee argued for use of other Bible translations based on the Reformation principle of allowing 'the common man' to access God and his Word directly.²⁰ "Our people are used to [the KJV], but if you spread it outside of our church, that's where you get the problems," she said. This interviewee's neighbour told her, "I finally got a Bible without those silly words in there."²¹ Her opposition to the dominant viewpoint was ineffective, since the denomination's aim was preservationist, not evangelical. Few, if any, 'outsiders' attended

¹⁷ Such as the *New American Standard Bible* (NASB), 1971, the *New International Version* (NIV), 1973, and the *Good News for Modern Man* (1966). The FRC used the *King James Version* (KJV) only.

¹⁸ J. Overduin, "Good News for Modern Man, Today's English Version," *The Messenger* 19:12 (Dec. 1972): 4.

¹⁹ C. Pronk, "What is the Living Bible," *The Messenger* 21:4 (Apr. 1974), 2-3. In fact, it was not until 2003, amid much controversy, that Synod ruled to allow individual congregations the choice of using the New King James Version in local services, pending each consistory's approval, but required the use of King James Version for all "broad ecclesiastical meetings." (Arie Baars, "Between 'Old' and 'Free': The Free Reformed Churches of North America," in *Morsels in the Melting Pot: The Persistence of Dutch Immigrant Communities in North America*, eds. George Harinck & Hans Krabbendam (Amsterdam: VU Uitgeverij, 2006): 99-100). Even after this ruling, the debate still raged (and rages) on. See a 2007 article in *The Messenger* at <http://www.frcna.org/messenger/item/9274-/9274-.html>.

²⁰ James Dallen and Joseph Favazza, *Removing the Barriers: the Practice of Reconciliation* (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1991), 13. Reformer William Tyndale produced Scriptures in common English, despite being persecuted and eventually murdered for it, famously stating that he would "cause a boy that driveth the plough to know more of the Scripture" than did the Pope. John Foxe, *Foxe's Book of Martyrs*, Marie G. King, Ed, (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Company, June 1978), 169.

²¹ Anonymous interview. One wonders how immigrants learning English coped with attempting to read and understand this form of Old English.

or joined the FRC between 1950 and 1976.²² Thus, members could not effectively argue for change for the sake of outsider accessibility.

There was another concept which often acted to clinch the most conservative position, known to members as “the steep slippery slope.”²³ This common expression meant that any change, however small, was a step down a dangerous incline that would inevitably lead to other rapid changes: “the beginning of the end.”²⁴ The steep, slippery slope concept curbed the potential for free and open dialogue, and as such, it was a significant means of control. To bring up this reasoning during a discussion of an issue instantly raised fear and resistance, quashing any new idea. The concern about language used to address God demonstrates this mentality.

In 1976, Reverend Pronk cautioned members against casually or flippantly referring to God as Father: “addressing God as Father does not mean that He has now become our equal, someone we may treat as our next-door neighbor.”²⁵ If members wanted to refer to God as Father, a frequent Scriptural expression, Pronk exhorted them to do it reverently, as in Heavenly Father, or pairing “Father” with another phrase that indicated God’s power, such as “the almighty One.” While some other churches were changing the way they addressed God in prayer, from the archaic *thee/thou* to *you/your*, the FRC saw this as a step down the slippery slope in a time of “superficiality in religion and turning away from the foundations.”²⁶

In a 1971 article, Reverend Stehouwer argued that *thee* and *thou* were more reverent and respectful than *you*.²⁷ Since World War II, he stated, respect and dignity in language and

²² Baars, “Between ‘Old’ and ‘Free,’” 96, and William Van Doodewaard, “A Transplanted Church: The Netherlandic Roots and Development of the Free Reformed Churches of North America,” *Canadian Journal of Netherlandic Studies* 26:2 (2005): 21. Saskia and Willem De Groot (pseudonyms), Interview with author, Ancaster, Ontario, May 26, 2010.

²³ Karel Molenaar, Interview with author, Flamborough, Ontario, July 15, 2011.

²⁴ Eda and Dirk Van Leeuwen (pseudonyms), Interview with author, Cambridge, Ontario, April 16, 2011.

²⁵ C. Pronk, “Lord, Teach Us to Pray,” *The Messenger* 23:2 (Feb. 1976), 1-2.

²⁶ Pronk, “Lord, Teach Us to Pray,” 2. In all contexts except for a limited sub-dialect of British English in northern England, the term ‘thou’ has not been used in speech since 1650. Entry for “thou” in *Merriam Webster’s Dictionary of English Usage*, Viewed online: www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/thou.

²⁷ A. Stehouwer, “The Readers ask: Thou or YOU?” *The Messenger* 18:4 (Apr. 1971): 2-3.

behaviour had devolved.²⁸ Updating personal pronouns would mean participating in this sinful trend. To exchange *thee* for *you*, and the corresponding grammatical construction (from ‘thou doest’ to ‘you do’) would, Rev. Pronk argued,

more and more separate us from the faith of our fathers. The literature, the confessions, the great songs of faith of our rich Christian heritage will become a foreign and alien culture, I fear. The inevitable result will be that the Confessions, the liturgical forms for Baptism and the Lord’s Supper etc. will have to be reformulated or discarded.²⁹

To Pronk, a slight change in diction would be accompanied by a flood of other changes that “inevitably” would result in losing or altering primary church documents and creeds.³⁰ In slippery slope reasoning, an outdated linguistic form could not simply be changed without the fear of ripples that would usher in secular infiltration. In the FRC, change was not harmless. It was potentially life-altering. Even a well-intended, morally neutral change might be followed by further changes, unintended but (once the first step had been taken down the slippery slope) inescapable.

Like the motifs of moral decay and the slippery slope, the way leaders used language added to the FRC’s ideological isolation. As quotations from *The Messenger* reveal, ministers did not hesitate to use the strongest language to underscore the seriousness of a point. One pastor quoted a Scripture verse in which Jesus told his followers with approval that they had kept his words. The pastor added, “may this be said of our churches too in these *dark days of apostasy*.”³¹ FRC leaders were distressed by social trends such as worldly entertainment, concerned that it would penetrate the church, and at times they used alarmist language to impress the gravity of the situation upon members. Though couched in crisis terms, this discussion neither saw the perceived threats resolve or drastically exacerbate. In *The*

²⁸ Stehouwer, “The Readers ask: Thou or YOU?”, 3.

²⁹ Pronk, “Lord, Teach Us to Pray,” 2.

³⁰ What was behind the determination to cling to the King James Version and *thee/thou* formulation? Dutch language uses two forms of you (*je/jij* and *U*), the latter denoting more respect for one’s social superiors or a deity. This may have been (mis)understood as a parallel to the antiquated English second person singular pronouns ‘you’ and ‘thee.’ An etymological study of the word ‘thou’ shows that in fact this was a fallacy, since the term *thou* was used “to express intimacy, familiarity or even disrespect” while “*you* was used for formal circumstances.” (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thou#cite_note-13 Pressley, J. M. Thou Pesky "Thou". Shakespeare Resource Centre, 8 January 2010.) However, very few second and almost no third generation FRC speak Dutch, so this likely became more about tradition than an understandable mistake.

³¹ “Brief Report of the Synod of the Free and Old Christian Reformed Church of Canada and the United States,” *The Messenger* 16:7 (July 1969): 3. Emphasis added.

Messenger, pastors characterized every year as morally grim. For example, the year 1969 was described as “dark days of apostasy.”³² Six years later, Rev. Stehouwer wrote that “every year we are becoming more aware of the Biblical truth that we are in the world, which ignores God, a world *in which we see more ungodliness with each passing year.*”³³ Such messages of impending doom continued. Whatever the year, there was always fresh evidence of moral decline, liberalizations to lament, and changes to condemn. Issued by highly-respected FRC ministers, these ongoing warnings served to renew resistance to change and ‘worldly’ influence, and likewise to inspire continued insularity in the safety of the church and its community.

So far, the examples of perceived danger and potentially disastrous change have been related to the church and religion. Similar warnings were given in the realm of members’ social lives, particularly regarding entertainment. The official FRC stance eschewed the arts and secular entertainment. Forbidden activities included watching television, movies and plays, listening to or playing secular music, playing cards, and dancing. In writing about these matters, ministers used forceful language to condemn practices that were perceived as ungodly, which promoted ideological isolation.

Reverend Pronk wrote a series of articles about cinema-going, noting that it had unfortunately been “long acceptable” in the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands, as well as in the Canadian CRC. The FRC had resisted this trend for years. Pronk feared that young people were watching films secretly, and that their parents were watching television. He urged members to avoid these harmful worldly practices, warning that those who “love the world” and the things in the world did not love God.³⁴ Playing card games was also unacceptable. According to Rev. Pronk, playing cards led to gambling (which ruined families), were not

³² “Brief Report of the Synod of the Free and Old Christian Reformed Church,” 3. Emphasis added.

³³ A. Stehouwer, “The Year that Went,” *The Messenger* 20:1 (Jan. 1975): 3. Emphasis added.

³⁴ C. Pronk, “What about Movies, Religious or Otherwise?” *The Messenger* 23:1 (Jan. 1976): 2. Parents also secretly, since having a television was frowned on in many FRC churches before 1976.

approved of by Christians in the past, and made a mockery of God.³⁵ Pronk concluded: “knowing all this, can anyone who loves and respects God and His Word approve of such a game? *God must be terribly displeased when people who profess to worship Him take part in this devilish game.*”³⁶ The message was clear: God was angry with card-players and theatre attendees. Condemning a practice with reference to Scripture left members no space to decide for themselves. If they did not follow the rules, they were, according to their ministers, out of God’s favour.

While television, movies and card games were forbidden, religious drama was considered worst of all, as it mixed sacred and secular. Some denominations began to integrate performance arts into church services. Reverend Pronk soundly rebuked such “childishness,” and proudly stated that the FRC emphasized preaching, not “entertainment.”³⁷

In another article on this subject, Pronk warned that

a spirit of worldliness has invaded Bible-believing churches and a new philosophy is attempting to make certain forms of entertainment and cultural expressions in the way of music drama, etc, *incompatible with the true worship of God*. Let us be on our guard against such worldly spirits and unscriptural philosophies.³⁸

In this example, Pronk employed the language of warfare – of invasion and being on guard – to remind readers that they were in a battle, defending their church community against worldly influence. With a phrase like “incompatible with the true worship of God,” no room was left for discussion, debate or difference of opinion. Individual members were not left to choose for themselves unless they wished to be labeled as ungodly. There was no room for personal discernment. The rules were simple and established; anything else was deemed incompatible with godliness. Such cautions and judgements helped to deepen the dichotomy between ‘the world’ and the Free Reformed church.

In 1974, Synod decided to withdraw their ministers-in-training from the CRC

³⁵ According to Pronk, each character (king, queen, joker) represented a twisted portrayal of God and religious persons. Apparently the joker symbolized Jesus. C. Pronk, “What’s Wrong with Playing Cards?” *The Messenger* 21:3 (Mar. 1974): 3.

³⁶ Pronk, “What’s Wrong with Playing Cards?”, 3. Emphasis added.

³⁷ C. Pronk, “What about Movies, Religious or Otherwise?”, 2.

³⁸ C. Pronk, “Reports from the Congregations,” *The Messenger* 19:3 (Mar. 1972): 3.

seminary. “Dangerous elements” were being taught, such as non-literal interpretation of the creation account in Genesis and “increasingly lax stand on worldly amusements, film, [and] drama.”³⁹ A month after the report on this decision, Pronk wrote that Christians must “abstain from amusements” such as theatre attendance or production “which *inevitably lead to sinful thoughts or actions*.”⁴⁰ Rev. Tamminga agreed: Christians should not watch secular entertainment, nor pursue the arts vocationally as “movie makers, dancers, and other similar things.” Not only would this lead to individual sin, it could ultimately destroy the church. As Tamminga wrote, “already the world and the spirit of the world has infiltrated the church at an alarming rate, and if we continue to go [this] way, *ere long there shall remain very little of the church*.”⁴¹ These were ominous words: if members chose such things, their church’s entire existence might be at risk. Pronk agreed, quoting Baptist preacher Charles Spurgeon: “theatre-going . . . will soon prove the death of piety.”⁴² By this logic, personal choices of entertainment or vocation could negatively impact the future of the entire church or Christianity.

Writing about Dutch Calvinists in an enclave in America, historian Rob Kroes describes this style of thought as the “rhetoric of self-defense.” He explains:

Evils ranging from an immoral way of life to objectionable religious views were always depicted as coming from outside; at the same time, any symptom of such evils having taken root within the community could always be presented as an act of treason to the coherence of the community. *Such a set of definitions, so tightly drawn, are a potent means of social control.*⁴³

For the FRC, many beliefs and practices were portrayed as committing treason against the insular community, from preferring a modern Bible translation to playing a game of cards. Like the inhabitants of Amsterdam, Montana, FRC pastors expended significant effort on “defensive movements vis-a-vis the outside world.”⁴⁴ Examples were taken from other

³⁹ C. Pronk, “Committee Training Ministers,” *The Messenger* 21:9 (Sept. 1974): 3.

⁴⁰ Pronk, “The Christian and the World,” 4. Emphasis added.

⁴¹ J. Tamminga, “Out of Concern for the Church, Part 4,” *The Messenger* 18:9 (Sept. 1971): 3.

⁴² Pronk, “What about Movies, Religious or Otherwise?”, 2. Emphasis added.

⁴³ Rob Kroes, *The Persistence of Ethnicity: Dutch Calvinist Pioneers in Amsterdam, Montana* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992): 92. Emphasis added.

⁴⁴ Kroes, *The Persistence of Ethnicity*, 92.

churches and ‘the world’ to show how quickly their beloved denomination could crumble if doctrine and practice were not scrupulously upheld. Fear-driven teachings reinforced the community lines, uniting the FRC, and dividing them from outsiders. To guarantee safety from the evil of ‘the world,’ adherence to the internal rules was required. Lines were clearly drawn through the teaching and the close, closed community by this rhetoric of self-defense: indeed, a “potent means of social control.”

Rev. Tamminga, reflecting on the FRC’s resistance to change compared to other denominations, wrote, “are we then a little dull or just lukewarm? Or may we pride ourselves on being cautious?”⁴⁵ This was a rhetorical question; they did indeed pride themselves on their caution. As they observed churches in North America and the Netherlands growing more liberal, the FRC felt even more isolated in their context and were determined to be the faithful few who held on to the literal teachings of the Bible while many others fell prey to secularism. Looking at statistics on church membership, the debate over Bible translations, and stern warnings about entertainment and the arts, it is evident that pastors presented fear-driven motifs in strong language to inspire obedience. The next section examines church community members’ lives to determine how much the prescriptive reflected reality.

Part Two: Members’ Stances and Social Insularity

Members’ Compliance and Resistance

To what extent was the prescriptive view, as expressed by these pastoral teachings, reflected in the lives of FRC members? This section explores to what extent members adopted, adapted, evaded, dissented or defied the prescribed views and warnings of the church. Interviews reveal that there was a high degree of buy-in, disagreements (that were usually kept private), and a fear of open resistance. Interviewees often reflected dominant FRC beliefs and rhetoric. There was also significant dissent, though it was often repressed in the face of social ostracism.

In many ways, members embraced a dogmatic stance that reflected the denominational

⁴⁵ J. Tamminga, “Out of Concern for the Church,” *The Messenger* 18.4 (Apr. 1971) : 3.

teachings about the FRC versus the rest of the world. For Free Reformed members, life was ‘black and white.’ Lien de Wit averred, “there’s one way, and that’s by the Lord. There’s two ways, the wrong way and the right.”⁴⁶ Often, there was little or no room for different understandings or interpretations. One conversation with a married couple, Eda and Dirk Van Leeuwen, on how they raised their children to follow the Lord and not ‘the world’ went like this.

Eda: Girls had to wear a hat and dresses, and not pants. Not everyone did that, but *we* were teaching them according to the Bible, that they had to have their head covered, and [that women wearing] men’s clothing is an abomination to the Lord.

Dirk: That’s very clear in the Bible.

Eda: *If* you go by the Bible.

Dirk: Men in women’s clothes are an abomination to the Lord – that is not a ceremonial law, but the moral law. And do we have to listen to that or not? What do *you* think [addressing me]?⁴⁷

When I responded that appropriateness of attire can depend on culture, Dirk replied, “that’s [what] you say! [Cross-cultural] missionaries also say ‘That is not the culture,’ but it’s not a good culture. I think we kinda have the culture from the heathens here [in Canada], and we have to bring our culture to the heathens.”⁴⁸ Cultural relevance was of no importance, since the culture of both Canada and other “heathen” countries represented the ungodliness of ‘the world.’ The label of ‘worldly’ or ‘ungodly’ was swiftly, decidedly applied. Dirk’s comments reflect the language of total condemnation based on Biblical texts that FRC pastors employed. In much the same way that church leaders labeled, discounted or condemned certain practices, members adopted this manner for practical, small-scale matters.

Some members disagreed with certain church-sanctioned beliefs and practices, although the judgemental environment made it difficult or impossible for members to disagree with the predominant viewpoint. Those who did stand against the status quo could face backlash from church leaders through house visitations and church discipline, as Chapter II showed. They could also face social alienation. As Rob Kroes put it, “whoever infringed upon

⁴⁶ Lien de Wit (pseudonym), Interview with author, Brantford, Ontario, May 26, 2010.

⁴⁷ Eda and Dirk Van Leeuwen, Interview, 2011. Italics represent their spoken emphasis.

⁴⁸ Note: I was wearing a pair of “abominable” pants at the time. Eda and Dirk Van Leeuwen, Interview, 2011.

the established norms ran the risk of social rejection, of banishment toward a godless outer world.”⁴⁹ Since FRC members found their entire social circle within the church community, it was risky to provoke family, friends and fellow members over controversial subjects. Fear of official and social consequences led many members to stifle their opinions.

One elderly member, on the condition of total anonymity, vented about how forceful other members had been on the issue of Bible versions. “I find they’re too strong in their opinions,” she said, noting that a member could freely state a preference for the King James Version, but if she used the New King James Version, she was “almost a heretic!” She added, “some people go so far that if you have another Bible [translation], you can’t be saved.”⁵⁰ This interviewee’s family and friends used the language of condemnation on this issue, reflecting pastoral writings which called new Bible versions heresy.⁵¹ If members’ views happened to fall in the predominant camp, they could be expressed; if not, members might be labelled heretical or unsaved. This long-time FRC member experienced the effects of the social control emerging from the rhetoric of self-defense.

Fear of consequences from church leadership or the church community kept members silent, even those with a passionate dissenting belief. It was not worth being implicated for openly speaking or acting against the dominant view. This was the case for Aaltje de Ruiter, who commented on “stupid little things like wearing a hat” to church. Women in the FRC were expected to wear hats as head coverings in Sunday services.⁵² “I never disliked it,” said Aaltje, and “I know *they* don’t like it if you don’t, so why make a hassle about it? I wear a hat. I don’t mind. Does it make a difference [spiritually]? I don’t think so!! Not the hat won’t!”⁵³ Some members, like Aaltje, did not truly believe the theology behind a custom, but obeyed the rules as they did not see it as a battle worth fighting. Wearing a hat was a small concession for Aaltje. Other members had issues worth fighting for.

⁴⁹ Kroes, *The Persistence of Ethnicity*, 92.

⁵⁰ Anonymous interview.

⁵¹ Overduin, “Good News for Modern Man,” 4.

⁵² C. Pronk, “Reports from the Congregations, *The Messenger* 20.9 (Sept. 1973): 2.

⁵³ Aaltje de Ruiter (pseudonym), Interview with author, Brantford, Ontario, October 16, 2010.

Carolina and Adriaan Hoekstra endured the censure of the consistory for sending their children to an inter-denominational Christian school instead of public school (Chapter II). They also faced disapproval from the church community. Yet, they found the social pressure bearable because it was not combined with familial pressure. Having come to Canada as a couple without parents or siblings, the Hoekstra's "could really do what [they] thought was the right thing to do, without interference." Carolina stated that many of their friends would have "loved to do things a little different[ly], but they wouldn't dare because of what their family would say. We never had that pressure. So anyway, it was easier for us."⁵⁴ Easier than some, perhaps, but not easy. When the FRC started Rehoboth Christian School in 1978, and the Hoekstras decided to remain with the interdenominational school, they "lost friends over it." The Hoekstras stuck with their decision despite pressures from leadership and membership.

Another couple was unhappy with their experience in the ultra-conservative Dundas church, but remained there for forty years for fear of what others would say if they left. It was not until a close friend became the pastor at a less-conservative Free Reformed church elsewhere that they "had a really good excuse" to leave.⁵⁵ Within the context of rigid expectations, there was little freedom for Free Reformed members to simply make a choice according to conviction or conscience. And, as much as staying in the FRC may have faced troubling criticism or ostracism over debated matters, few considered leaving the church community, which was the sum of their lives. The church community represented safety, while other churches and 'the world' had been cast as dangerous. This kept FRC members from assimilating to Canadian culture and norms, and turned them inward to their community.

The isolationist, reactionary perspective and language groomed by FRC leaders was

⁵⁴ Carolina Hoekstra (pseudonym), Interview with author, Brant Region, Ontario, November 15, 2010.

⁵⁵ Anonymous interview 1. Despite a strong denominational identity against 'the world,' there was also intense internal rivalry between FRC churches, and debates over proposed changes often fell along the lines of the group of FRC churches considered conservative or liberal. Because of this, it was sometimes a controversial decision to leave one Free Reformed church to attend another. See Van Doodewaard, "A Transplanted Church," 31. Van Doodewaard attributes this to two major branches within in the CGKN, the FRC's equivalent in the Netherlands, back in the nineteenth century.

embraced by many members, though sometimes resisted. Ultimately members were highly compliant. Yet outward compliance, while giving the appearance of conformity, did not necessarily indicate inward agreement. At times, members kept their disagreements with the dominant view private, repressed their opinions, or acted on them in the face of church, family and community pressures. Member's lives reflected many of the church-sanctioned norms, yet their cooperation was sometimes due to fear of negative official or social consequences, rather than personal conviction. As the next section will show, Free Reformers had few opportunities to verify or correct the predominant perspective about the evils of the surrounding culture, other churches and 'the world' because they lived in relative isolation.

Social Isolation of Members

A major reason the Free Reformed church community was so insular was the extent of its social separation from 'the world,' along with a tightly-woven internal social network. Since leaders had cast 'the world' as such a frightening realm, it is not surprising that Free Reformed members chose to strictly limit relationships with outsiders they encountered in the workplace or elsewhere, and associate almost exclusively with other Free Reformers. Church activities, family ties, connections from the Netherlands, friendships, and business connections within the FRC created many avenues for Free Reformed relationships. The expectation and the reality was that friendships emerged from the church community, while outsiders were never more than acquaintances. It was relatively easy to define and maintain these boundaries because the FRC was such a small, tight-knit group; essentially, everyone knew (or at least knew *of*) everyone. Members kept track of family connections, marriages and children. While this lifestyle of social exclusivity was initially inspired by the Dutch norm of *verzuiling*, it was also shaped by the isolationist messages of the church leaders and the commitment of members.⁵⁶ This section discusses relationships in the workplace before turning to social relationships with Dutch Reformed and outsiders.

⁵⁶ *Verzuiling* was not the only factor; see footnote 44 on page 13 for further explanation.

Jan Vanden Heuvel expressed the levels of connectivity FRC members experienced:

We didn't mix at all, with Canadians. And the Christian Reformed Church people, they stayed together, and we stayed together [socially]; but business-wise we worked together. A Dutch boy could always find a job with Christian Reformed or Free Reformed, honest, it didn't make a difference.⁵⁷

In other words, the Free Reformed did not connect socially with non-Dutch people at all, and rarely with those from other denominations, including other Dutch Reformed. However, they collaborated with other Dutch-Canadian Protestants when it came to employment. They were also more than willing to take secular jobs. Historian Rob Kroes argues that “increasing enmeshment with the national economy” would in time weaken the insularity of such closed communities.⁵⁸ I disagree; in fact, the FRC (like their Dutch counterparts in the *verzuiling* system) never defined the community by economic separateness, but rather by social separation, and managed to keep this separation clear even in the workplace.⁵⁹

In the first few decades in Canada, common occupations for Free Reformed men were farming, entrepreneurship, construction, horticulture, and factory work. While many had non-Christian employers or colleagues, as much as possible, these immigrants preferred to hire within the community for help in construction, cleaning, farming, and other small businesses.⁶⁰ Secular jobs such as factory work were considered morally neutral, but members resisted forming friendships at work and were sometimes wary of an ungodly environment.

Karel Molenaar did maintenance at an Oakville factory. He quit eventually because he did not enjoy working evening and night shifts with a young family. Also, he was concerned with the ideology of many of the eastern European workers, who had “socialistic Russian ideals in their head.” For “our style of people, a place like the factory was not a good match. It was socialistic,” said Karel. Where the church did not advise Karel to leave his job, Karel

⁵⁷ Jan Vanden Heuvel. Maria and Jan Vanden Heuvel (pseudonyms), Interview with author, Paris, Ontario, April 1, 2011.

⁵⁸ Kroes, *The Persistence of Ethnicity*, 125.

⁵⁹ As explained in the Introduction, in the pre-war Netherlands, *verzuiling* (social separation based on religion) applied to religious, political and social life, but not the economic sphere. Michael Fallon agrees, stating that “economic integration and economic success did not necessarily mean social integration.” Michael Dennis Fallon, 'People of the Covenant: Dutch Reformed Immigration into Canada After World War II,' Ph.D. dissertation (University of Guelph, 2000), 380-1.

⁶⁰ Baars, “Between ‘Old’ and ‘Free,’” 102; Albert VanderMey, *To All Our Children: The Story of the Postwar Dutch Immigration to Canada* (Jordan Station, Ontario: Paideia Press, 1983).

made his own applications of the theology of isolation, deciding that this was not a good setting for the Dutch Reformed “style of people.” Karel ended up buying a farm, and found this “well preferred” to the environment at the factory. When building barns on his new property, he hired Free Reformed businesses to do the construction, “so it was kept within the Dutchies.”⁶¹

Tineke Martens worked at an office in Toronto before she had children. She enjoyed the work but found herself unable to relate to her colleagues. Her husband Nicolaas noted that while other office workers “would go to a party, she never went to one.” Added Tineke, “but they always brought me a present. Those girls were very worldly to my taste. I was a very plain Dutch girl --we [FRC women] were all plain girls -- even though I worked in an office. Those girls wore really much makeup and everything matching, and high heels and all that, and I didn’t feel at all comfortable there. But I liked the work.”⁶² Social and cultural differences perceived as worldliness, including attire and lifestyle, created a barrier that would have been uncomfortable to cross or incompatible with one’s faith. For Free Reformed members who worked in a secular environment, relationships with colleagues could be pleasant but never close.

For many, limited contact with ‘outsider’ colleagues was the extent of their non-FRC social life, and a rare opportunity to see inside the lives of “worldly people.” Karel Molenaar’s days at the factory provided him an unusual and perspective-altering encounter. When discussing where their families would spend their week-long summer holiday, a colleague recommended Picton on Lake Ontario. Karel asked for him to bring details about the place. But

he didn’t bring it. Instead, he said, “come along to my house, and I’ll give it to you. I live nearby.”

So I said “okay.” Now he was French Canadian, Roman Catholic. So I thought, “I’ll go in there and I’ll probably survive.” [laughs] But what do you expect? I don’t know – you didn’t know what to expect! But not all too much, so to speak.

⁶¹ Karel and Sophie Molenaar (pseudonyms), Interview with author, Flamborough, Ontario, October 15, 2010.

⁶² Tineke and Nicolaas Martens, Interview, 2010.

Now I got in there, and he had two young girls, maybe grade six or seven or eight, and they were just coming home from school. And nice?! And polite!! To their mother and father! Ohh! So I thought, “well, I don’t know about the Pope, but these people sure live decent.”⁶³

Reluctant to visit the home of a Catholic colleague, Karel was pleasantly surprised. “I had a nice family,” he continued, “but I thought his family was a bit nicer. Honestly, that’s what I thought!”

This unusual experience was a turning point for Karel and his view of outsiders. “You learn to keep your mouth shut and don’t be so judgmental, because you hear things and you see things, and you’re afraid of this, and you certainly don’t believe in the Pope, but what these people practiced, it was nice. So yeah, so that’s how you learn in life, eh? And that doesn’t mean you become a Roman Catholic, but you don’t treat them like dirt, either.”⁶⁴ One brief experience was enough for Karel to counteract the many negative, fearful judgments about Catholics he had learned in the church community.

FRC ideology in practice meant lived distance from ‘the world.’ Even in a secular or mixed work environment, the norm was to keep one’s social life separate from non-Christian (or non-FRC or non-Dutch Reformed) colleagues. This lack of exposure left little opportunity for stereotypes and fears to be allayed. Many members had a token story, demonstrating, to their shock and surprise, that ‘worldly’ people could actually be quite nice and normal. But with such limited exposure, members did not know if their experience had been an aberration; not all came to the same conclusion as Karel, to be less judgmental and to treat outsiders with greater respect.

Aside from the realm of business (shopping, working, and selling) in which members necessarily interacted with outsiders, Free Reformed social lives revolved around the church and church community, which included many friends and family members. As Chapter II indicated, the church was more than a twice-a-Sunday obligation; it also functioned as a social organization for all age groups. Church events included Sunday services, prayer meetings,

⁶³ Karel and Sophie Molenaar, Interview, 2010.

⁶⁴ Karel and Sophie Molenaar, Interview, 2010.

catechism, Sunday School, and church-based social groups, such as Ladies' Society, Men's Society and Young People's Society. These activities occupied much free time, and provided a structure for natural life overlap with other Free Reformers, a space for friendships to develop.⁶⁵

These were the times, Liesbeth Scholten noted, "when you saw your friends. You looked forward to catechism, Young Peoples' [Society], because then you could talk and you had a lot to tell each other" since not everyone had telephones at first.⁶⁶ For many Free Reformed families, Sunday was a full day with other church members, visiting with each other between morning and evening services, sharing a meal, coffee and dessert, offering hours of playtime for the children. Said Liesbeth, "Sundays meant visiting back and forth. That was a special time." Tineke Martens commented, "I think church has been really the center of our lives, and I think for most families it was so." And, she added, "that's why you get knit together."⁶⁷ Most of one's free time was spent with family (extended or immediate) and other church members, or the "church family." It is easy to see how members became close with so much overlap in life.

When I asked the Martens about making new friends when they arrived in Canada, Nicolaas replied, "well, you're in the church. . . I went to church in Toronto, and St. Thomas." It was so obvious to him that his friends would have been from the church that, when I pressed for clarification ("Were you friends with guys from work or from the church?"), he quickly replied, "oh yeah, yeah, only from the church. Only people from church."⁶⁸ Pieter Smit similarly commented that "the only friends we've ever had were from church. Also true of my parents."⁶⁹ According to Saskia de Groot: "everybody kind of stuck with their own friends [from church], and outside of that you didn't mingle too much."⁷⁰

⁶⁵ K. Ishwaran, *Family, Kinship and Community: A Study of Dutch Canadians* (Toronto: McGraw Hill Ryerson, 1977), 155.

⁶⁶ Frans and Liesbeth Scholten (pseudonyms), Interview with author, Dundas, Ontario, May 13, 2010.

⁶⁷ Tineke and Nicolaas Martens, Interview, 2010.

⁶⁸ Tineke and Nicolaas Martens, Interview, 2010.

⁶⁹ Pieter Smit, Interview, 2011.

⁷⁰ Saskia and Willem De Groot, Interview, 2010.

The Vanden Heuvels agreed. Their friends were from church, although they “had some good relationships with neighbours.” Yes, said Jan, “very good, but that only goes only so far. It’s not that you come over and eat together.”⁷¹ Relationships with neighbours, colleagues or other non-FRC might be cordial but restrained. When asked if she had any friendships outside of the church community, Aaltje deRuiter replied “You know something – I don’t think I did!” But, she added, she and her daughters attended the local 4-H, which is how they “interacted with the other people. We had a few Dutch ladies who were very good at crafts, so I did that quite often and there were different people too.” Aaltje’s encounters with “the other people” or “different people” – that is, non-Dutch Reformed – were in the context of 4-H. Much like the Vanden Heuvels, she noted that her family was friendly with neighbours, but did not spend significant time together or visit one another’s homes. “When you saw them outside you talked to them. But not a real . . . no, I never had any real friends outside of my church community.”⁷²

It was extremely rare for members to experience non-FRC social gatherings.⁷³ Karel and Sophie Molenaar distinctly recalled their experience at the wedding of a Presbyterian neighbour whose first wife had passed away. Following the ceremony, the reception began, “and afterwards, dancing!” “Don’t worry,” interjected Sophie, “*we* didn’t dance!” They sat and watched the dancing and then went home. Comparing it to FRC-style of weddings, Karel was pleasantly surprised that the music for dancing was not very loud, that older people danced, and that it was a rather quiet occasion. Astonished, he noted, “but no liquor! No liquor! And no smoking!”⁷⁴ By contrast, FRC culture permitted smoking cigarettes and drinking alcohol socially, but dancing and secular music were not permitted. It is interesting to hear of a member speak of a non-FRC church that was also conservative but had different

⁷¹ Maria and Jan Vanden Heuvel, Interview, 2011.

⁷² Aaltje de Ruiter, Interview, 2010. With respect to relationships with ‘outsiders,’ interviewees may be reflecting on their entire lives, not only the 1950-1976 period.

⁷³ Other churches as well: some octogenarian members stated that they had attended a non-FRC Reformed church service fewer than ten times in their entire lives.

⁷⁴ Karel and Sophie Molenaar, Interview, 2010.

rules or practices. An outsider might find this arbitrary. Yet, due to the teachings on the FRC's uniquely accurate doctrines and practices and the issues elsewhere, and boosted by a social isolation that provided few opportunities to compare and contrast, the FRC considered their traditions the patent definition of godliness. As Pieter Smit stated, other churches were not different, they were wrong.⁷⁵

When discussing Free Reformed social separateness, some interviewees questioned whether they had done the right thing in living so separately, but always concluded that it was a safer way to live. For the most part, their isolation from 'the world' and insularity within the community was such a norm that it did not seem very significant. "I guess that's the upbringing," Saskia reflected. The FRC "just stay with their own, don't mingle too much with the outside."⁷⁶ Was this merely incidental, a result of how they were raised, as Saskia lightly discounted? In light of the separatist, fearful denominational identity and community acquiescence explored earlier in this chapter, along with the power of leaders and the importance of member compliance seen in Chapter II, it is clear that the choice of ideological and lived isolation was entirely deliberate, and deemed necessary for the spiritual safety of the church community.

One of the greatest indicators of how thoroughly members absorbed pastoral teachings about the danger of 'the world' was that they rarely had relationships with anyone outside of the church community. This section shows that Free Reformers closely associated with each other, and had limited relationships with 'outsider' colleagues and neighbours. Karel Molenaar's interactions give a glimpse of how rare it was to have a meaningful encounter or relationship outside of the church community. His surprise about his Catholic colleague and Presbyterian neighbor's normalcy illustrates how FRC members absorbed, believed and lived many of the pastoral teachings about other churches and 'the world.' While there was no indication that leaders directly ordered members to avoid relationships with non-FRC or non-

⁷⁵ Pieter Smit, Interview, 2011.

⁷⁶ Saskia and Willem De Groot, Interview, 2010.

Dutch people, members regulated themselves, their decisions flowing from general community norms and caustic teaching about the evils of ‘the world.’

Conclusion

This chapter has shown how the isolationist, defensive ideology taught by pastors was taken on and lived out by members. Pastors taught that the FRC was uniquely biblical, that other denominations were flawed, and that ‘the world’ was sinful. In their writings in *The Messenger*, they employed dominant motifs, including the concepts of ‘the slippery slope’ and moral decay, and language of warfare and condemnation, in an attempt to gain member compliance. Debated matters included Bible translations, styles of addressing God, and entertainment and the arts.

In many ways, members adopted the fear-driven motifs and language, and used this language to rebuke others in the community who refused to follow norms. Members developed close relationships with other church community members and strictly limited connections with outsiders. Free Reformed members were tightly linked through social and church events, family networks, and sometimes also work. They did not always agree with every rule that served as a protective measure against change or modernization, but for the most part believed their leaders spoke the truth: that safety was found in isolation and insularity. Rev. Bilkes wrote that ‘the world’ was “cold, loveless, full of hatred.” It was “filled with self-centered people who down deep hate God and their neighbor.”⁷⁷ Members had few opportunities to discover if this teaching was true or not, as the community norm was and continued to be social isolation into the 1960s and 1970s. And, as Chapter II showed, ministers were elevated and doctrine was venerated. Combined with the “risk of social rejection,” this created fertile ground for compliance, or at least the appearance of it.⁷⁸

Immigrants often seek social contact with others of the same language and culture. For Dutch Canadian immigrants, a history of *verzuiling* meant it was not unusual to form ties

⁷⁷ L. Bilkes, “Love for the Church,” 3.

⁷⁸ Kroes, *The Persistence of Ethnicity*, 92.

based on religious beliefs. While culture and history were factors, the Free Reformed church community's insularity was also based on a hearty resistance to change and outside influence, expressed and taught by the leaders of the church, enforced by the social pressure of other church community members, and reinforced by individual commitment to the FRC's particular expressions and traditions of faith. The next chapter explores the prescribed and lived roles of women in the FRC. Women's lives, like the FRC's beliefs and practices vis-à-vis 'the world' and other churches, also contributed to the isolation of the church community.

Chapter IV: “Not Much, Just the Women’s Touch”:

The “Indispensible and Important” Women of the FRC

This chapter considers beliefs about women’s roles and the lives of Free Reformed women. Studying women in the FRC reveals that resistance to change, the social pressure of the community, the church, and personal faith were elements that kept the Free Reformed community isolated and insular. In this chapter, I argue that FRC women, particularly married women with children, helped to build and maintain an insular, isolated community in their work, home and church. They did so by fulfilling their gendered roles according to personal faith, community norms and the church’s teachings, which were articulated more frequently between 1966 and 1976 in response to second-wave feminism.

First, women worked in a variety of ways to contribute financially to their families. They did this without appearing to break the church rules regarding gendered work. While leaders and members stated a clear belief about women’s work – that married women, especially those with children, should not work outside of the home – the community practiced a nuanced version of the rule, with several widely-accepted exceptions. Community members said that women should not and did not work, but that women could and did work under the following circumstances: part-time, in a time of extreme need, only while the children were in school and under the auspices of a family business or a husband’s work. Members understood these elements as legitimate allowances or exceptions to the dominant rule. Keeping to those parameters fulfilled the folk version of the belief regarding women’s roles. In this way, women enabled the economic viability of their families, while maintaining the gendered customs of the Free Reformed church by not taking credit for the work that they did. The cost of this was that women’s work was not recognized or duly valued.

Second, as instructed by pastoral messages and according to their own beliefs, women genuinely focused on their homes. Their homemaking entailed raising their children, supporting their husbands and providing a safe space from the world for families to live out their daily lives. The fact that these women spent much of their time in their homes meant

that, overall, adult Free Reformed members had less exposure to ‘the world’ than if they had all worked in secular environments. Third, by complying with their prescribed roles, these women extended their homemaking tasks, like childcare and food preparation, into the realm of the church, enabling it to continue to function smoothly. In the context of both home and church, women maintained kinship and friendship ties, which served as social glue to the church community.

Much of these three categories falls under what other historians have termed ‘social reproduction,’ including household activities, unremunerated work, kinship work or maintaining friendships, biological reproduction and caring.¹ The way FRC women fulfilled their roles in their work, home life and church helped build an insular church community. This chapter explores these three arguments by examining the teachings of pastors and the beliefs of members regarding women’s roles, and practices of these roles. Part One looks at teachings and beliefs regarding women at home and at work, then at lived practice in the home and at work. Part Two discusses pastoral messages and member beliefs about women in the church before turning to women’s experiences in the church.

Historian Suzanne Sinke argues that immigration has often been an opportunity for change in gender roles and patterns, as communities are established and must be reconfigured.² When the Free Reformed immigrants arrived, they brought along their Dutch lifestyle patterns. In their first decade and a half in Canada, their focus was to survive financially; gender and women were rarely mentioned in *The Messenger*. By the mid-1960s, FRC pastors began to publish messages in response to second-wave feminism.³ Like other

¹ Suzanne Sinke, *Dutch Immigrant Women in the United States, 1880-1920* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2002): 2.

² Sinke, *Dutch Immigrant Women in the United States*, 2. For more on women in religious communities, see also: Marlene Epp, *Mennonite Women in Canada: A History* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2008); Rebecca Merrill Groothuis, *Women Caught in the Conflict: The Culture War between Traditionalism and Feminism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1994); Suzanne Sinke, “Home is Where You Build It: Dutch Immigrant Women and Social Reproduction,” in *The Dutch in North-America: Their Immigration and Cultural Continuity*, Rob Kroes & Henk-Otto Neuschafer, eds. (Amsterdam: VU University Press, 1991): 410-421; Elizabeth Gillan Muir and Marilyn Fardig Whiteley, *Changing Roles of Women within the Christian Church in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995).

³ Women in a number of religious contexts held leadership positions in public ministry in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, including various Quaker, Salvation Army, and Methodist groups. For various reasons, by the 1930s, many opportunities for women in ministry had closed or been drastically altered. ((Ronald W. Pierce and Rebecca Merrill Groothuis, Eds, *Discovering Biblical Equality: Complementarity without Hierarchy* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press,

controversial matters discussed in Chapter III, such as entertainment and Bible translations, ministers issued stern warnings about the dangers of “women’s lib” and the importance of maintaining current gender role divisions.⁴ In 1975, Rev. Stehouwer discussed his concerns about the feminist movement. He wrote that “the world has called this year of our Lord ‘The Year of Women.’” Stehouwer called the FRC to resist such ideas to remain faithful to God’s unchanging Word “in a changing world.”⁵

Part One: Women at Home, Women at Work

Teachings and Beliefs on Gender Roles Regarding the Home and Workplace

This section investigates what was taught and thought about women’s roles in the home and workplace. Pastors and members discussed godly requirements of mothers and wives; the most popular subject related to gender roles was the debate on women working outside of the home. The official view, as expressed by pastors, was that women should not work outside of the home, but instead, focus on homemaking activities. *The Messenger* used several strategies to urge women to comply with these norms. The official view was also stated by members: that women should not – and that FRC women *did* not --- work outside of the home.⁶ But as women and couples shared the stories of their lives, it became apparent that, for FRC members, there were certain exceptions to this rule. Women’s work was acceptable only if it was (or was described as) part-time, in a time of great financial need, gender-appropriate, not a main focus of their lives, not a distraction from their primary duties of homemaking and childcare, or under the auspices of a family business or a husband’s work. Members saw these exemptions as special allowances that did not break the basic rule.

The Free Reformed philosophy on gender was complementarian, the belief that men

2005), 40-52). Second-wave feminism challenged the historic subordination of women and the role of women in churches was hotly debated throughout the 1960s and 1970s in many churches in Canada (Epp, *Mennonite Women in Canada*, 276). Various denominations resisted, negotiated or embraced new roles for women in the church. For example, by 1979, Mennonite women were being ordained as ministers in Canadian denominations (Epp, *Mennonite Women in Canada*, 275).

⁴ J. VanEs, “Women’s League Day – 1974,” *The Messenger* 21:8 (Aug. 1974): 2.

⁵ A. Stehouwer, “The Year of Our Lord 1975,” *The Messenger* 23:2 (Feb. 1976): 3.

⁶ Interviewees did not always speak freely on this topic. Sometimes they made strong statements about their beliefs regarding women staying at home, but then softened their words by noting exceptions. It appears that this tension was due to the fact that many interviewees had daughters and granddaughters who were married with children yet worked outside of the home. This made it difficult for some to reconcile their firm beliefs with their family’s current reality.

and women are ‘equal but different’ – created equal before God, but different in power and roles.⁷ Members did not perceive this as inequality. Describing issues facing missionaries working in South Africa, Reverend Tamminga wrote that in the Bantu tribes, men and women related differently than “we westerners.” Women were not “on the same level” as men, who were “exalted far above” them, and had no voice in married life.⁸ Bantu women had few rights and little voice. The Free Reformed understanding, by contrast, was that men and women both had personal value and access to God, but, in obedience to God, women submitted to their husbands in marriage, had little or no voice in the church, were homemakers and did not work outside of the home.⁹

According to *The Messenger*, the “spirit of secularism” and the dangerous women’s liberation movement were responsible for an increase in unhappy marriages, separations and divorces.¹⁰ In 1974, responding to second-wave feminism, *The Messenger* published a series of articles on ‘The Family,’ promoting the FRC’s godly standards in reaction to developing cultural norms. The writer, Reverend G. Bilkes, took a four-pronged approach: explaining what was expected of married men and women; acclaiming women for keeping their ‘proper place’; expostulating about the dangers of doing otherwise; and warning them to obey the will of God. I will expand on his four points in order to explain the FRC’s approach to addressing women’s roles.

First, what did God require of husbands and wives? In terms of allocation of power in the home, the father/husband was the authority figure, and “lord” of the household.¹¹ However, Bilkes stipulated, it should be “in love to his wife and children . . . not as a

⁷ Dubbed ‘complementarian’ for the idea that these non- interchangeable positions complement each other, like two halves of a whole. Complementarianism contrasts with egalitarianism, another mainstream Christian perspective on gender theology. Groothuis and Pierce, *Discovering Biblical Equality*, 15-16.

⁸ J. Tamminga, “Our Mission Work in South Africa II,” *The Messenger* 18:10 (Oct. 1971): 5.

⁹ Some historians, such as Caroll Smith-Rosenberg, have argued that the more rigidly hierarchical a church is, the less power women have within it. Based her comparative study of women in two churches with very similar hierarchies, Suzanne Sinke suggests that women’s roles are weaker based on the level of male supervision at the congregational level. The FRC had both a rigid hierarchy and a high level of supervision by the male elders. Caroll Smith-Rosenberg, *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986); Suzanne Sinke, “Give Us This Day: Dutch Immigrant Women in Two Protestant Denominations, 1880-1920,” *Amerikastudien* 38:3 (1993): 425-6.

¹⁰ G. Bilkes, “The Family,” *The Messenger* 20:8 (Aug. 1973): 3-4.

¹¹ G. Bilkes, “The Family II,” *The Messenger* 20:10 (Oct. 1973): 2-3.

dictator.” The wife, in exchange, had “the right to his companionship and protection.”¹² In other words, husbands had power but wives received protection.¹³ A feminist woman did not relate in this way to her husband, according to Bilkes; there was a “danger that she begins to place herself above him.”¹⁴ The feminist call for equality was interpreted as subversive and self-centered. Interviewees agreed that the man should be ‘head of the home,’ though some questioned an apparent imbalance in focus on women’s roles as opposed to men’s roles.¹⁵

What did fulfilling these distinct roles look like? Marriage was ordained by God, wrote Rev. Bilkes, so that husbands and wives could be “a help meet to one another.”¹⁶ This ‘help’ was gender-specific. “Of course, the husband’s duty,” he explained, was “to provide for his wife financially,” while the wife’s duty was to “prepare meals for her husband (also for herself), to do his laundry (also her own), clean the house,” and so on.¹⁷ In the face of a world that increasingly called for women to have the right to choose whatever occupation she wanted, FRC pastors attempted to build up the value of women in their capacity as wives, mothers and homemakers. Bilkes wrote that women had a unique ability as homemakers and were responsible for creating a warm home environment: “mother places the furniture and lampstands in such a way that everyone feels at home.”¹⁸ Apparently all women had interior design skills, but only to use in their own homes, not as a career. Added Bilkes, “what a luxury for dad when he can put on a clean shirt in the morning which his own wife has washed and ironed with much care and love.”¹⁹ Messages like this were meant to show that this role was not a limitation but intrinsically valuable and, in fact, what women were

¹² Bilkes, “The Family II,” 2-3.

¹³ Suzanne Sinke, in comparing two Dutch Reformed churches, concludes that the understanding in more hierarchical Dutch Reformed churches with strict systems was that women received no political rights but were offered paternalist protection and care. Sinke, “Give Us This Day,” 438-9.

¹⁴ G. Bilkes, “The Family,” 4.

¹⁵ Carolina Hoekstra’s husband Adriaan noted that sermons contained plenty of focus on the man being “the head of the household.” But there, he said, “they stopped reading,” as the Scripture passage turned to the husband loving his wife as himself. This was just as important, he said, but “they never go on about that!” Adriaan was one man who perceived and disliked the inequality in leadership focus on women’s submission. Carolina Hoekstra (pseudonym), Interview with author, Brant Region, Ontario, November 15, 2010.

¹⁶ G. Bilkes, “The Family VI,” *The Messenger* 21:5 (May 1974): 3.

¹⁷ G. Bilkes, “The Family IV,” 5.

¹⁸ G. Bilkes, “The Family III,” *The Messenger* 20:11 (Nov. 1973): 2.

¹⁹ G. Bilkes, “The Family III,” 2.

designed for, as well as a way of expressing love to their spouses. FRC leadership commended the work of women at home in hopes of inspiring loyalty to this role.

At times, these accolades were combined with admonitions to obey God, and warnings of the dire outcomes of disobedience. Bilkes spoke against the modern trend of women working full-time or part-time outside of the home, contrasting views of ‘the world’ with how members ought to think. While “modern man thinks of ‘homemaking’ as a drab, toilsome and unrewarding life,” and indeed it might be harder financially, Bilkes argued that homemaking was better for the family spiritually. “Therefore, mother, pay attention to the task which the Lord has given you,” he sternly warned, for, according to the Bible, women were created as “a helpmeet for man” and to be good mothers.²⁰

Bilkes also expressed concern about mothers who worked “while other ladies [took] care of their children.”²¹ Sophie, Saskia, and Lien echoed this thought. The daycare centre might not be “bad,” said Saskia, but “they get brought up by strangers.”²² Said Sophie, “I don’t agree with women working when they have small children. They shouldn’t go to babysitters because they’re only small once. That’s what I don’t like.”²³ Lien agreed. With both parents working, she believed nobody would have time for the children, who were sent to daycare, and disconnected from the mother on a daily basis.²⁴ In some cases, she conceded, it might be necessary for the mother to work. But was it “good for the family? No. In my time, the mother stays home and brings up the kids; the father goes out for working. [Women working] is bad for the upbringing for the family.”²⁵ Lien implied that a woman’s primary responsibilities, her children and household, would be neglected if she worked.

Indeed, mothers should not be career-oriented, according to FRC women. Women could work part-time if it didn’t “interfere with their family life,” according to Saskia. But a

²⁰ G. Bilkes, “The Family III,” 2.

²¹ G. Bilkes, “The Family,” 3-4.

²² Saskia and Willem De Groot (pseudonyms), Interview with author, Ancaster, Ontario, May 26, 2010.

²³ Sophie Molenaar (pseudonym), Interview with author, Flamborough, Ontario, October 28, 2010.

²⁴ Lien de Wit (pseudonym), Interview with author, Brantford, Ontario, May 26, 2010.

²⁵ Lien de Wit, Interview, 2010.

woman should not “put [her] career first.” If she wanted to do so, Saskia remarked, she should not get married at all.²⁶ Others agreed. Tineke believed it was fine for women to work outside the home if they had no children to raise and could “manage [the household] fine.” But once they had children, “that’s their priority, their first task.”²⁷ A career was not to take too much of their time or energy. Also, certain vocations were not acceptable for Free Reformed women.

Vocations or careers considered appropriate for FRC women were limited to caregiving, homemaking, or assisting positions, such as nursing, teaching, cleaning, secretarial or taking care of children. Dirk Van Leeuwen laughed when he saw female police officers directing traffic when he first arrived in Ontario. “We thought it was so funny, but now [women] do all kinds of work!” Eda added that policing was not appropriate work for a woman if she had a family. What if there were no children, I inquired. Then a woman could “choose anything,” Eda said, “she could teach . . .”.²⁸ Eda’s “anything” really meant a very small list of potential roles. It was not considered appropriate or feminine for a woman to have a position of power, authority or risk, whether or not she had a family.

In the messages of FRC leaders, there was a strong focus on gendered roles. Men were addressed as leaders, providers, husbands and fathers; women as wives, mothers and homemakers.²⁹ This emphasis on gender instead of the innate value of individuals lent to devaluing at times, particularly for women. An article by Rev. Bilkes mentioned the importance of leisure activities for mothers, who were at home with their children each day, usually with no vehicle.³⁰ Bilkes began by discussing the need for stay-at-home mothers to have some social outlet.

²⁶ Saskia and Willem De Groot, Interview, 2010.

²⁷ Tineke and Nicolaas Martens (pseudonyms), Interview with author, Brantford, Ontario, May 27, 2010.

²⁸ Eda and Dirk Van Leeuwen (pseudonyms), Interview with author, Cambridge, Ontario, April 16, 2011.

²⁹ Bilkes, “The Family III,” 2. What about unmarried individuals, childless couples, or anyone else who did not fit into these roles? Singleness was apparently quite rare and was not mentioned in the interviews or in *The Messenger* between 1950 and 1976. This would be a topic worth exploring in further research.

³⁰ Many interviewees report having one vehicle or even sharing vehicle with another family. This meant the husband took the car to work every day, and the wife had opportunities to go out only in the evening.

An evening out with dad means very much for mom. Who would dare to deprive her of it when she is together with her husband, whom she loves. She gains new impressions, she gathers new strength, and makes new contacts.³¹

Women of the FRC revealed that they did not have much free time: amid all the work they did, “there was no time to go away.”³² Bilkes’ comments seemed intended to advocate for women. But he continued: the purpose of a mother’s recreation was “to be able to perform her task as wife and mother with new energy as well as possible.”³³ Leisure time was a way of refueling for the important work of taking “proper care of her husband and children,” which was “worthy of her full attention and worthy of the fullest exercise of her talents and intelligence.” It was also in that role, Bilkes continued, that her strength lay, and where she could “develop her capacities which God has given to her.”³⁴ Leisure time for mothers, according to Bilkes, was not just for the mother’s sake; it was primarily to enable her good work as homemaker. The outcome of such a significant focus on gendered roles meant that women were seen as wives and mothers, without reference to personhood or innate value.

FRC leaders warned members to obey God’s will and Word regarding proper roles in marriage and the home. The emphasis on women as wives and mothers sometimes overshadowed their intrinsic value as adult individuals with thoughts and meaning beyond their roles. Interviewees agreed that women should not work outside of the home. Yet they made an important distinction: that women could do some work if it did not keep them from caring for their home, children and husband’s needs. This was seen as a permissible allowance to the official rule against women working. The next section will show that many Free Reformed women did work, but it generally fit within the agreed-upon parameters.

Women’s Work

Although leaders and members were committed to the ideal of married women not working outside of the home, women and men’s life stories show that this was not the reality.

³¹ Bilkes, “The Family II,” 2-3.

³² Saskia and Willem De Groot, Interview, 2010. In Saskia’s case, they only had one car, and she did not have her driver’s license for the first ten years in Ontario.

³³ G. Bilkes, “The Family II,” 3.

³⁴ G. Bilkes, “The Family II,” 3.

In fact, many women did work outside of the home in addition to running an often large and busy household. Women contributed to the family economy in various ways, but they and their spouses did not recognize their work as significant. Unlike the work of husbands and sons, women's labour was not considered 'real work.' Women described their work as merely *help, on the side, for extra money, and when things got tight*. This maintained the community's norm of interpreting the church rule governing gender roles, in which men were providers who did not rely on their wives' contributions, and women focused on the home and children. Work for wages was rare, aside from house-cleaning for other Canadians, but working to run a busy household, working unwaged to contribute to a farm or other family business, and/or working to 'help' a husband in his work or contribute to the company were common. These were deemed appropriate because they were part-time, temporary and spouse-assisting rather than career-oriented, as well as limited to certain fields. This section discusses women's work and analyzes the ways their work was perceived and described. It also notes women's perceptions of partnership with their husbands and the potential pressure to assist their husbands.

First, FRC women between 1950 and 1976 took responsibility for the work of the household. This included cleaning, picking fruit and vegetables, gardening, cooking, washing dishes, doing laundry and ironing, and taking care of children, described as "everyday household stuff."³⁵ Care of the home, considered a woman's domain, entailed a significant amount of work, particularly with few time-saving household appliances due to financial hardships. Saskia de Groot reflected on her labour as follows:

you had to do a lot of handwork! Ringer washer, no throw-away diapers. If I look back, it was so different. It was so much more physical labour. No electric kettle, no dryer. Took extra hours, was time consuming. And we always had a big garden, so I always had a lot of canning.³⁶

Eda Van Leeuwen agreed: "you had a lot more things to do, like knitting, sewing. You

³⁵ Saskia, Saskia and Willem De Groot, Interview, 2010.

³⁶ Saskia and Willem De Groot, Interview, 2010.

needed much more time to do everything. You had a big garden.³⁷ Even social time involved domestic chores; for instance, some Ladies' Society meetings included hearing a Bible lesson while all the women knitted.³⁸ Knitting, recalled Liesbeth Scholten, was important because it saved money. "You knitted sweaters and all that, and shared patterns."³⁹ Work was a way of life for these women.

Second, women often worked outside of the home as well, or under the auspices of a farm or other family business. To keep consistent with their gendered ideology, members crafted this as occasional help, as opposed to a vital, income-generating contribution. FRC women themselves employed these terms that minimized the extent and value of this employment. Sophie Molenaar, for example, when asked about women working, commented, "oh, the Dutch, they stayed home, and looked after their kids." She added: "mind you, when we moved to Vineland, my mother used to cut grapes *to make some extra money*."⁴⁰ Her general understanding was that Dutch Reformed women did not work outside the home, even as she remembered a story to the contrary. Other Free Reformers shared Sophie's perspective: they appear to have absorbed the accepted narrative, which they recount, even as they recall and share contradictory information.

Aaltje de Ruiter gave another example of this. "I never worked," said Aaltje, adding, "I only did a little bit of housecleaning." She cleaned an office once a week, and at one point cleaned for a neighbour weekly. This entailed some fairly regular part-time work. But in Aaltje's words, she "never had a job really, just did a bit of housecleaning here and there, *for a little bit of extra*."⁴¹ Terms like 'extra money' or 'a little bit of extra' gave a sense of a rare or unexpected bonus to the family income, obscuring the reality of regular, challenging additional work for these women.

³⁷ Eda and Dirk Van Leeuwen, Interview, 2011.

³⁸ Liesbeth, Frans and Liesbeth Scholten (pseudonyms), Interview with author, Dundas, Ontario, May 13, 2010.

³⁹ Frans and Liesbeth Scholten, Interview, 2010.

⁴⁰ Sophie Molenaar, Interview, 2010. Emphasis added.

⁴¹ In addition to this, she had the responsibility of "finishing" the newly constructed houses her husband would build in their numerous moves. This work included all the painting and more; along with raising five children, this kept Aaltje "busy enough." Aaltje de Ruiter (pseudonym), Interview with author, Brantford, Ontario, October 16, 2010. Emphasis added.

“We worked ’til we were married,” stated Eda Van Leeuwen, “and if you didn’t have children, you could still work *on the side*.”⁴² Evidently, even with children, work “on the side” was done, whether under the auspices of the husband’s farm or business, or otherwise. Carolina Hoekstra agreed. “When things got tight, yes . . . a farmwife always works. I worked in the barn, and I worked out part-time. I did some housework. At one point, my youngest daughter was a little girl and I took her [to work] with me. Later on I worked at [a nearby school] for almost ten years, working in the kitchen.”⁴³ By her actual life story, it appears that either this was a very long period of things being “tight” financially, or that in fact work in the home, on the farm, and outside of the home was a normal, ongoing part of Carolina’s life.

For farming families or those with businesses, participation was a given. Saskia De Groot did not find work after getting married, because her husband purchased a greenhouse and she “helped” him with the produce, which he delivered to Toronto. He also worked at a steel mill at this time, so much of the responsibility for the greenhouse fell on her, along with caring for their young children.⁴⁴ Yet the greenhouse was perceived as her husband’s, and the income it generated attributed to him; Saskia was merely ‘helping’ him.

Some women generated an income within their own homes. Lien de Wit worked as a housecleaner for four years, but quit when her husband got a good job working as a book binder for the government: “I didn’t need it anymore.” But for six years after this, she kept boarders, usually single young men. This entailed a lot of additional laundry, cleaning and food preparation. (The worst burden for Lien was the lack of privacy.) Her work actually produced an income, but was within the context of her home and perceived as an extension of her ‘natural duties.’ Yet Lien proudly reported, “that was a busy time too, and a hard time, but it *brought money in*, you know!”⁴⁵ Although it lacked the status of having a ‘real job’

⁴² Eda and Dirk Van Leeuwen, Interview, 2011. Emphasis added.

⁴³ Carolina Hoekstra, Interview, 2010.

⁴⁴ Saskia and Willem De Groot, Interview, 2010.

⁴⁵ Lien de Wit, Interview, 2010. Italics indicate Lien’s spoken emphasis.

outside of the home, Lien's labour unmistakably generated income, and this gratified her.

A variation of 'helping' was when women did unremunerated work to avoid spending. Early in their marriage, Nicolaas and Tineke Martens moved into an apartment building. "We were superintendant," said Tineke, but Nicolaas worked another job "all day, and I was supposed to take care of the building."⁴⁶ Nicolaas noted that their rent was "free." So they were both known as the superintendants but most work was done by Tineke. Her work did not receive payment but ultimately covered a large portion of their shared expenses. After the Martens moved, they rented a basement apartment in a building where then-pregnant Tineke cleaned and ironed daily for the owner upstairs. Again, they "didn't have to pay rent."⁴⁷ In yet another apartment building, Tineke did the bookkeeping, which she had been trained to do in Holland, in the office where Nicolaas became superintendent. Initially, Tineke brought her child along to the office in a carriage. When the next baby arrived and her first began to walk, she transferred the typewriter to their apartment and worked from there.⁴⁸ This was acceptable because she worked under or alongside her husband, or from home.

One woman told of helping her husband in his many different jobs, yet expressed guilt for not helping him more when he had a shop of his own. "I let him down, I have to be honest," said Marijke Driessen. The shop was cold and she had four young children at home, yet she "should've done the books" at least. Marijke felt guilt despite the fact that she did deliveries for the business, and worked alongside in Sem's other endeavours.⁴⁹ Evidently she felt the pressure of some expectation that the wife ought to 'help' her husband in whatever he was doing. While Eda van Leeuwen applauded the fact that the FRC community did not pressure women to work outside of the home ("if you didn't [work], they didn't think that was wrong"), it appears that the corollary pressure, whether stated or not, may have been to assist one's husband in whatever he was doing, regardless of one's own skill or interest in the

⁴⁶ Tineke and Nicolaas Martens, Interview, 2010. Emphasis added.

⁴⁷ Tineke and Nicolaas Martens, Interview, 2010.

⁴⁸ Tineke and Nicolaas Martens, Interview, 2010.

⁴⁹ Marijke Driessen, Interview, (pseudonym), Interview with author, Lynden, Ontario, April 1, 2011.

task.⁵⁰

Some women, as Eda's positive comment implies, may indeed have been glad to have no expectation to work outside of the home. Saskia de Groot, for example, was one woman who appeared relieved to never have had to work outside the home as they were able to "make ends meet" on one income. Saskia "always stayed home and always enjoyed it."⁵¹ And many women indicated a sense of partnership with their husbands; he generated an income while she upheld things on the home front. When asked about their work over the years, several women initially spoke knowledgeably and in detail about their husband's work, in which they had been at least vicariously involved, demonstrating that the occupation of their spouse was a big part of their life also. Lien de Wit described her husband's struggle to find work when he first arrived in Ontario, and his various part-time jobs ("whatever he could find") until he found a "steady job" for eight years, and then an even better "government job" which he stayed with until retirement. Lien, after narrating her husband's working history, turned to her son's career. When I asked about her daughters, she said "the girls worked for housecleaning, all the girls. That's not too important."⁵² A positive sense of spousal partnership, in which a stay-at-home woman felt connected to the broader world through her husband's work, was often paired with an unfortunate devaluing of women's work by women.

FRC women did not mind referring to their own work as "not too important" and "on the side."⁵³ This was the understanding developed by members of the church community. However, two women reacted to having their work devalued by someone else. As Karel Molenaar recounted his life on the farm while still working at the factory, he said, "now Sophie fed the animals in the morning a bit." Sophie swiftly and emphatically interrupted, "*sometimes?? Every morning!* Before the kids went to school. And when [my youngest son]

⁵⁰ Eda and Dirk Van Leeuwen, Interview, 2011.

⁵¹ Saskia and Willem De Groot, Interview, 2010.

⁵² Lien de Wit, Interview, 2010.

⁵³ Lien de Wit, Interview, 2010; Eda and Dirk Van Leeuwen, Interview, 2011.

was small, I took him along, in a snowsuit.” “Oh yeah?” Karel responded, “yeah, and then at night I cleaned them and got them ready for the next day.”⁵⁴ In the re-telling of their life story, Sophie was offended to see her daily, difficult labour belittled inaccurately. While she had earlier stated that FRC women did not work even as she acknowledged that they did, including her mother, she was unwilling to allow another person to depreciate her contribution.

A similar conversation occurred with another couple. Eda Van Leeuwen had a busy household and “no time for a steady job. Every year you got a baby.” Eda bore twelve children in seventeen years. She did some occasional housecleaning. Her husband’s boss also gave her “some work to do at home, like ironing or fixing clothes.” Like many other FRC women, Eda had a busy household to care for, some part-time housecleaning, and some work under the auspices of her husband’s work. When they moved to a farm in September 1954, Eda was pregnant with her fifth child. I asked if she worked on the farm at all. She replied, “yeah, I helped with the milking and the cleaning and all that.” Her husband Dirk quickly interjected, “the cleaning and the milking, yeah, but otherwise *not nothing* in the barn.”⁵⁵ (The ‘otherwise not nothing’ Dirk meant was “haying or other things like that” which was done by Dirk and farming friends who shared large planting, building and harvesting projects.) Eda defended, “you have to look after the little kids, you can’t leave them alone.”⁵⁶ It appears that these women were comfortable with the commonly-used, diminishing terms (like “extra money” or “in a pinch”), but when their tales were told, they wanted their efforts to be recounted accurately.

Some women reported that not being permitted to work full-time outside of the home after marriage made their experience as new immigrants more difficult. This was true for women who had previously experienced the social connectedness and sense of purpose

⁵⁴ Karel and Sophie Molenaar (pseudonyms), Interview with author, Flamborough, Ontario, October 15, 2010. Italics indicate Sophie’s spoken emphasis.

⁵⁵ Eda and Dirk Van Leeuwen, Interview, 2011. Italics indicate Dirk’s spoken emphasis.

⁵⁶ Eda and Dirk Van Leeuwen, Interview, 2011.

which meaningful employment provided. After the birth of her first daughter, Marijke Driessen was “very vulnerable,” alone with her newborn every day in a farmhouse without hot water, indoor bathroom, or access to transportation. And, Marijke added, she “didn’t have a job.”⁵⁷ It is interesting that amidst her physical privations, she perceived not having a job as part of the hardship. Marijke had been a very active woman, accustomed to hard work in a social environment with colleagues. Being disconnected from the outside world was difficult for her.

For some women, working had provided a sense of belonging in a new environment. Maria Vanden Heuvel had worked at a city library in Holland. When she first came to Ontario, she worked at a mental hospital for over a year before gaining a position in the children’s department at the Hamilton Public Library.⁵⁸ “And then I really started to feel at home in Canada,” she said: “I really liked that work.” After that, Maria got married and quit her job because she moved to her husband’s farm.⁵⁹ While Maria did not complain, it is worth noting that having an enjoyable job is when she began to feel comfortable or ‘at home’ in Canada. Having a meaningful vocation had been a source of joy, income and integration for these women, yet the FRC rules for married women disallowed it.

Eda Van Leeuwen proudly stated that “in those days we didn’t even think about mothers working outside the house. We believed that they belong in the home, raising a family.”⁶⁰ Her comment was belied by her own story of working in the barn on the family farm and housecleaning for others. Yet the work she did fit into the folk version of the FRC’s formal belief regarding gender roles. Members did not see a discrepancy between the prescription – “women should not work outside of the home” -- and their practice, which allowed for plenty of work within certain parameters. Women’s work was acceptable and

⁵⁷ Marijke Driessen, Interview, 2011

⁵⁸ The hospital was an intense job. She recalled patients shaking after having “shock treatment. I had to help . . . when they came out, that was awful.” Her husband added, “you had scratches on your neck sometimes.” Said Maria, “oh yeah, they would fight.” Maria and Jan Vanden Heuvel (pseudonyms), Interview with author, Paris, Ontario, April 1, 2011.

⁵⁹ Maria and Jan Vanden Heuvel, Interview, 2011.

⁶⁰ Eda and Dirk Van Leeuwen, Interview, 2011.

very common in the FRC under the following details: part-time, in a time of need, gender-appropriate, under the auspices of a family business or a husband's work, and not a distraction from their homemaking and childcare.⁶¹ As long as women were primarily focused on caring for the home and family, other work they did was framed as 'helping.' After all, the 'helpmeet' should help. Some women found the transition to homemaking and limited job options a difficult one. Free Reformed women helped maintain the insular church community by contributing to household income within the accepted parameters regarding gender-appropriate work. As the next section will show, women played similar homemaking roles in the church.

Part Two: Women in the Church

Beliefs and Teachings on Women's Role in the Church

As in marriage, the home, and their work, women were to play only a supportive role within the church. This section discusses views on women in the church. The highly-structured church was an important system for keeping women in their place as all its gendered rules were justified by the Bible, and therefore loyally followed by women. Women who were examples of ideal, godly womanliness were praised by leaders. Holding up exemplars was a method to inspire women to resist any inkling of feminism within the church and rather find social acceptance within the community by conforming. *The Messenger* reveals that speaking against feminism provided a few women with the opportunity to actually have a public voice. Since women were seldom mentioned in or were writers for *The Messenger*, I focus on these exceptions as each one proves meaningful. This section looks at beliefs about women and their limited ecclesiastical roles.

In 1973, *The Messenger* was scandalized to report that the Reformed Church in America had ordained a female pastor and had several hundred women working as deacons and elders.⁶² One year later, Mrs. Fredricka Pronk, a pastor's wife, wrote a book review for

⁶¹ Another allowance to the rule appeared when the FRC instituted its parochial school, Rehoboth Christian School. Willem and Saskia de Groot, Interview, 2010.

⁶² J. Overduin, "Reformed Church in America to Admit Woman Pastor," *The Messenger* 20:9 (Sept. 1973): 3.

The Messenger, defending the FRC's stance on women in church. In the Free Reformed Churches, women did not "hold office" or vote. This did not mean women were inferior or without any influence, wrote Pronk. "This view of women's roles in no way inhibits her freedom, privileges, or contribution to the church and society."⁶³ A strong statement, though Pronk did not explain exactly what freedoms, privileges and contributions were in fact open to women, although articles over the next few years provided more detail.

The Messenger featured an article in 1976 written by a woman about a woman. Mrs. Pronk began by discussing women's roles in the church, historically and biblically, before turning to her focus: Lady Selina Hastings, the Countess of Huntingdon (1707-1791). Pronk highlighted Hasting's devotion to God, "unrivalled piety and virtue," and work as a "dutiful mother."⁶⁴ Despite losing two sons and her husband, she grew devoted to the "promotion and encouragement" of gospel preaching.⁶⁵ Her generosity, godliness and hospitality were exemplary: she invited people to her mansion to hear the gospel preached, and sold her jewelry and valuables to free up money for her cause. Pronk concludes:

Lady Huntingdon was never ordained to an ecclesiastical office. Her Calvinistic view of the unchangeable nature of Scripture would have abhorred and rejected such thoughts. Yet God ordained her to hold a position in His Church suited to her talents, birth, and sex. It was a supportive position, but an indispensable and important one.⁶⁶

The purpose of the rare event of a woman writing a prominent article for *The Messenger* about another woman was simply to emphasize the point that women could be influential and important while keeping to a supportive role. Since Free Reformed women were likely not wealthy or titled, they could not relate to Lady Hastings in every respect. Yet they were able to pursue some of the elements for which she was praised: feminine virtue, dutiful motherhood, and, within the church realm, supportive and encouraging endorsement of the men in their ecclesiastical duties.⁶⁷

⁶³ Frederika Pronk, "Books on the Roll [sic] of Women," *The Messenger* 21:8 (Aug. 1974): 3.

⁶⁴ Frederika (Ricky) Pronk, "Life and Times of Lady Huntingdon," *The Messenger* 23:5 (May 1976): 4.

⁶⁵ F. Pronk, "Lady Huntingdon," 5.

⁶⁶ F. Pronk, "Lady Huntingdon," 6.

⁶⁷ E. Muir's thesis on female Methodist itinerant preachers uncovered a different story of Lady Huntingdon. While there is no record of Huntingdon preaching, she exercised an unusual amount of power and was popularly called "the first Methodist

Interviewees, whether couples or individuals, were not always able to easily articulate the reasons for or origins of their beliefs on women in the church, but their convictions, without exception, were strong nonetheless. Saskia de Groot was quite direct: "some churches have women on the pulpit, but it says in the Bible 'definitely no.'"⁶⁸ Sophie Molenaar was quick to state her disagreement with ordaining women. When asked for reasons, she trailed off. "Well, it's always been like that, that the men . . . [silence]. But I guess things change a lot. But I don't agree with it."⁶⁹ Tineke and Nicolaas Martens were not in favour of women becoming pastors or elders. Said Tineke, "We have Free Reformed views on that."⁷⁰ When asked to explain, Nicolaas replied, "it's Biblical." Tineke added, "God's Word says it, how does it exactly say it? [pause] That the woman should be silent in the church, and . . . if they have something, to tell their husbands." Nicolaas added, "and they shouldn't play a leading role." Few interviewees were able to readily articulate beyond their basic view on this subject, perhaps because this was not a commonly discussed topic or because it was rare to explain their views to an outsider.

It is interesting to note the language used when discussing women's roles. For the debate on women in the church, interviewees referred to the Bible, although, like the example of the Martens, interviewees rarely knew exact references for Scriptures prohibiting women in leadership. To discuss women at work and at home, *The Messenger* used Scripture to support its admonitions, but interviewees employed subjective terms, like normal, natural, automatic, and instinctual. For example, Saskia de Groot stated, "back then, it was *automatic*: the girls would go out and do housecleaning, but they would all stay at home and that was *normal*." And Willem remarked, "when kids come home from school, they're looking for

bishop." (Muir, 117) She built and supervised 64 chapels, ran a theological training college for pastors, and appointed and expelled preachers as she saw fit. (Muir, 92) She may or may not have preached -- Muir offers a convincing argument that historical records have been obscured on this matter -- yet she exercised great authority over many churches, ministers and ministers-in-training, significantly more sway than one pastor could have had, and hence her critics named her "Pope Joan." Certainly a different version from Pronk's account. Elizabeth Muir, "Petticoats in the Pulpit: Early Nineteenth Century Methodist Women Preachers in Upper Canada," Master's Thesis, Montreal: McGill University, Sept. 1989.

⁶⁸ Saskia and Willem De Groot, Interview, 2010.

⁶⁹ Sophie Molenaar, Interview, 2010.

⁷⁰ Tineke and Nicolaas Martens, Interview, 2010.

their mom. It's only *natural*." Saskia added, "personally I think it's good for the kids if the mom can stay at home while the kids are growing up. As a motherly instinct, you know."⁷¹ Beliefs about women's place at home were couched in religious and maternalist terms; members also referred to intrinsic mothering abilities and values.

Free Reformed women were to be content with their limited roles in the church – no vote, no leadership roles. And no public voice, except for when condemning feminism and lauding traditional roles for women in the home and church. Women could gain spiritual honour by exemplifying godly, feminine characteristics, never in more than a helping role – like Lady Huntingdon. Female members were convinced that living out their faith commitment meant submitting to these rules, which was reflected in their church involvement.

Women's Involvement in the Church.

If, as Nicolaas stated, women should not play a leading role, what role should they play? Since women in the Free Reformed could become members but had no vote and could not hold positions of leadership, it is important to look at their participation in other realms. As Part I showed, women were to focus on the domestic realm in daily life. By extension, they served the church in appropriately domestic ways. Women's participation in the Free Reformed churches included attending services and Ladies' Society, teaching Sunday school, preparing food and beverages for male leadership gatherings and other events, taking care of children in the nursery, and working as missionaries. Hospitality and visiting within the church community were also considered important tasks for women.

Free Reformed women thoroughly enjoyed their participation in Ladies' Society, a regular meeting with other women of the church, typically centered around a Bible study or meditation. According to Liesbeth Scholten, it was a "really nice outing."⁷² It was a social and spiritual activity: a rare opportunity to socialize with other women minus husbands and

⁷¹ Saskia and Willem De Groot, Interview, 2010.

⁷² Liesbeth, Frans and Liesbeth Scholten, Interview, 2010. Churches held this weekly, bi-weekly or monthly.

children, as well as a chance to “study God’s Word and discuss all kinds of topics concerning daily life in the light of that Word” from a female perspective.⁷³ Tineke Martens reported that the women wrote essays or had Bible studies with discussions from the Netherlands. The evenings were often long and filled with discussion, “because a lot of ladies came from different churches, different areas in Holland, and different backgrounds a bit. It was very interesting.”⁷⁴ These women had much to say about Christian life, and a chance to express their thoughts while with other women.

Women led Ladies’ Society at the local church level. For multi-church gatherings of women, such as Ladies’ League Day, a male pastor typically spoke, sometimes on the topic of women’s roles. One exception was in 1974 when Mrs. Ricky Pronk spoke at the afternoon session of a women’s conference on “Women’s Place at Home, Church, Society.” Noting the unfortunate popularity of “women’s lib,” she commented on women within the home, church and church community. She argued that submission to one’s husband was “not slavery” and that the most important thing for a women was to be a “good wife and mother.” Women could keep busy in the church community, she continued, by welcoming strangers, visiting lonely, ill and elderly people.⁷⁵ Speaking of women serving in the church frequently ended up mentioning the social activity of maintaining connections with other members. Since women did not typically work full-time outside of the home, helping, visiting and making food for other members became part of their sphere. This was common when members arrived as new immigrants, as when the women of Carolina Hoekstra’s church arrived en masse to help her clean her new home.

Besides Ladies’ Society, women participated in a variety of church activities. Women and girls babysat for the nursery every Sunday during services. Women were permitted to teach Sunday School as women could have authority over children. Teens were the limit; male teachers took over at this point because women were not to exercise any authority over

⁷³ “Reports from the Congregations,” *The Messenger* 19:4 (Apr. 1972): 3.

⁷⁴ Nicolaas and Tineke Martens, Interview, 2010.

⁷⁵ VanEs, “Women’s League Day – 1974,” 2.

a ‘man.’⁷⁶ In meetings for Sunday School teachers, women teachers could present a lesson and share ideas or even an essay.⁷⁷ Also, women did much behind-the-scenes work. In fact, some of the few times women are mentioned in *The Messenger* are to thank them for their backstage help. Just as in the home and work settings, also at church women were seen as the ones with maternal and homemaking instincts, and applauded for fulfilling domestic roles within the church.

While the pastors, elders, deacons and delegates met for denominational meetings and Synods, FRC women prepared and served meals. Several issues of *The Messenger* contained thank-you’s. In December 1967, Overduin thanked “the committee of ladies of this church for their excellent services in preparing the various meals.”⁷⁸ Vandebout reported in 1970 that “an excellent lunch was enjoyed which had been prepared by the ladies of the congregation.”⁷⁹ In a 1975 Synodical report, Overduin wrote: “the excellent services of the ladies during that long day enabled the delegates to serve the churches as a whole.”⁸⁰ And Pronk thanked the “local ladies” for providing “the indispensable feminine touch to these all-male gatherings.”⁸¹ In a situation where women were seldom mentioned in the denominational news, it was likely a source of pride or accomplishment to receive these accolades.

There were more backstage activities besides cooking. In a section on church news, Vineland FRC reported that they were nearly finished reorganizing the babysitting facilities. After making some improvements, it did “not require much, just the women’s touch.”⁸² Once again women’s interior decorating skills were called on. The London congregation, reporting that the women had cleaned the church, remarked “when we consider how much work the

⁷⁶ Karel Molenaar, Interview with author, Flamborough, Ontario, July 15, 2011.

⁷⁷ Bert Vos, “Sunday School News,” *The Messenger* 18:11 (Dec. 1971): 2-3.

⁷⁸ J. Overduin, “Synod Report,” *The Messenger* 14:12 (Dec. 1967): 4.

⁷⁹ F. Vandebout, “Elders and Deacons Conference,” *The Messenger* 17:7 (Aug. 1970): 2.

⁸⁰ J. Overduin, “From the Congregations,” *The Messenger* 22:3 (Mar. 1975): 3.

⁸¹ C. Pronk, “Reports from the Congregations,” *The Messenger* 19:11 (Dec. 1972): 2.

⁸² Overduin, “From the Congregations,” 3.

ladies do for the church, we must say that they have an important place in her midst.”⁸³ Their importance lay in playing a supportive role (cleaning, cooking, childcare) that enabled the men to lead and rule the church.

Mission work provided an outlet for some women with leadership or teaching abilities, but female missionaries were still limited to FRC norms. A single woman, Mary Overduin, was sent to South Africa as a missionary in the early 1970s to teach Scripture, life skills (such as sewing) and childcare to women.⁸⁴ Mary’s letters in *The Messenger* described the cute children, the differences in the standard of living, the weather and other light topics.⁸⁵ A report on “Our Mission Work in South Africa” revealed that Ms. Overduin was able to make suggestions and observations, but a committee of men made the decisions about the mission.⁸⁶

Mission work was also subjected to motherhood. One woman, the wife of a missionary to South Africa, reflected FRC beliefs on women’s roles. Her husband was studying Zulu in Johannesburg, so she wrote the update letter on behalf of her family. Mrs. Rebel-Hekkert stated: “I think it is not good for the children when both of us go away for a long time leaving the children alone. The first place of the mother is at home, but perhaps in the future there will be a possibility of helping” with the mission work.⁸⁷ While she would have liked to participate in mission work, she saw her first role as primary childcare provider. However, she did have the opportunity to write the letter on behalf of her family for *The Messenger*. But in it she perpetuates FRC gender norms, and even the letter-writing could be seen as simply supporting her husband. So while women in missions were permitted slightly more opportunity for leadership or voice, they were still limited to perpetuating FRC norms on gender roles in church and home.

A women’s conference on this mission field sounded remarkably similar to the one in

⁸³ A. Stehouwer, “From the Congregations,” *The Messenger* 21:8 (Aug. 1974): 3-4.

⁸⁴ A. Stehouwer, “Mission High Light,” *The Messenger* 20:10 (Oct. 1973):3.

⁸⁵ Mary Overduin, “From the Mission Field,” *The Messenger* 22:8 (Aug. 1975): 2.

⁸⁶ J. Tamminga, F. VandenBout and C. Pronk, “Our Mission Work in South Africa,” *The Messenger* 21:4 (Feb. 1974): 2.

⁸⁷ H. Rebel-Hekkert, “From the Mission Field,” *The Messenger* 23:1 (Jan. 1976): 1.

Ontario. When the FRC-connected church in South Africa hosted a women's day, the morning speaker was a pastor, and the afternoon speaker was a missionary's wife who spoke on "How the Women can Serve the Church." Her examples of women serving included providing food and shelter for missionaries and their helpers, giving and raising money, volunteering for the church, visiting the sick, teaching their children, and babysitting. In this way, she concluded, they would "bring happiness to others and glory to God."⁸⁸ Wives of pastors and missionaries occasionally had an opportunity to speak or write for the denomination – usually to perpetuate traditional women's roles.

Without formal power of any kind, FRC women found some satisfaction in their influence behind the scenes.⁸⁹ Carolina Hoekstra shared about a woman named Janny who spoke out at Chatham's Ladies' Society in favour of deaconesses in the church. Janny thought a woman would better understand members' needs, and members might feel more free to voice their needs.⁹⁰ The minister's wife responded, "no, Janny, we don't need to be in the consistory. Behind the scenes we can have a lot of influence." Carolina reflected, laughing, on the fact that the minister preached on the 'headship' of man, while his wife said she had a lot of influence behind the scenes. Carolina added, "and she was a very strong woman, not in the wrong sense, not at all, but I think her husband believed that he made the decisions but I think . . . he didn't."⁹¹ It was understood that although the men were officially leaders in church and home, women had a measure of influence. When telling about his family's decision to emigrate, Karel Molenaar said, "like in most families, I think mother had the most influence."⁹² In light of this, women had a certain amount of social power in their homes, and by extension in the church community and even the church.

⁸⁸ Tamminga, "Our Mission Work in South Africa II," 5-6.

⁸⁹ Marlene Epp notes that sometimes women in conservative religious groups could "shape customs and decisions" and find this a source of empowerment. Epp, *Mennonite Women in Canada*, 61-62.

⁹⁰ As Carolina recalled, Janny stated, "a woman deacon, yes, I could vote for; an elder, no, I like a man elder." Deacons had limited decision-making power within the church. Their focus was the collection and distribution of monies, which was still subject to the pastor and elders. Carolina Hoekstra, Interview, 2010.

⁹¹ Carolina Hoekstra, Interview, 2010.

⁹² Karel Molenaar, Interview, 2011.

As this section has shown, women had limited ‘voice’ in the Free Reformed churches. They had no vote, and could not hold office. They rarely had the opportunity to speak or write publicly. When they did, it was as a missionary, missionary’s wife, or pastor’s wife, and often with the purpose of arguing for the Free Reformed interpretation of women’s roles. Women were commended for essentially being wives of the church – fulfilling all the domestic needs of the gathered assembly, and for being godly wives and mothers. Ironically, women also received some voice or recognition when they spoke out against feminism. This was a way of gaining the approval of the church leaders and community. Women had no formal power but members believed they had influence on their husbands and in their homes, which was a source of satisfaction and fulfillment.

Conclusion

Joyce Vander Vliet writes that Christian Reformed women were essentially either repressed or rebellious. In determining power, value and roles, reality is often more complicated. Many FRC women genuinely embraced a theology and lifestyle that others might perceive subjection. While sometimes quietly resisting certain aspects of FRC norms, women ultimately contributed to the formation of an insular community by participating in these systems. All of these women’s interests and gifts were limited to the framework of caregiver, housekeeping, childcare and food-preparation roles at church, home and work. Yet many women appear to have found satisfaction in life within these constraints, in partnering with their husbands, finding fulfillment in obedience to and a personal relationship with God, and enjoyment of the lives in the Free Reformed community.

Historian Lynne Marks argues that interpretational binaries can obscure a more complex “lived religion” in which “ordinary people took what they wanted or needed from dominant beliefs, idioms and practices.”⁹³ This “lived religion” is exemplified by Free Reformed women with regards to work and personal faith. While members of the FRC

⁹³ Lynne Marks, “Challenging Binaries: Working-Class Women and Lived Religion in English Canada and the United States,” *Labor: Studies in Working-Class History of the Americas* 6:1: 107-125.

agreed with the prescriptive messages of pastors regarding women's roles, they formed a list of accepted exceptions which allowed women to work in the home and outside of the home. Yet, perhaps in order to not draw attention to women's significant contributions and thereby displace men in their role as providers, their labour was inaccurately belittled. Some women, like Marijke and Maria, indicated that the absence of meaningful career made them feel cut off from the wider world. Yet, on a strictly spiritual level, there was no gender hierarchy. Chapter III demonstrated that many women had strong faith and felt closely connected to God. Women and men were understood to stand equally before God. Both men and women were required to be holy and godly, although the implications of this were different for men and women. Thus, FRC women could have a rich, meaningful, private relationship with God.

Chapter III demonstrated how powerfully leaders argued against anything progressive, modern, or seen as change; the changing roles of women were no exception. If Bible translations could be demonized, how fiercely did they try to thwart any hint of feminism? A line was drawn in the church community, and feminism was on the evil side. In Tineke Martens' words: "feminists -- they don't really take the Bible seriously."⁹⁴ To embrace any feminist or egalitarian ideas was unthinkable; to enact them would probably have meant leaving the church, community, and everything familiar.⁹⁵ Their entire world – a unique expression of religious faith, family, friends, social group – was entirely wrapped up in this church community.

Women in the FRC community had a place. They were key figures in the homes that made up the church community. It was a position of little power, but it had a certain level of respect and influence. And they belonged to this community and its participation in a spiritual battle that the entire church was waging against the evil, encroaching world. Part of that battle was opposing feminism. Women's opportunities to speak or write enabled them only to reinforce normative gender roles. While women had total access to God, the

⁹⁴ Tineke and Nicolaas Martens, Interview, 2010.

⁹⁵ Which some have done, for various reasons. Interviewing people who have left the FRC, particularly in this time period, would be fascinating and probably illuminating additional research.

constraints of the community's religious beliefs left women without voice, vote, recognizable influence, the freedom to choose a career, or due credit for the work they did. This positioning, in turn, helped to reinforce the insularity of their community. Women contributed to the economy of their families, and therefore to the success of the church community. They focused on their homes, providing a spiritually safe space for their husbands and children (who had more interaction with 'the world' through school and work). And they contributed to the smooth functioning of the church and church community by working behind the scenes and maintaining social ties.

Conclusion

Between 1950 and 1976, the Free Reformed Churches of North America were a small denomination scattered across Canada and America, made up of post-World War II immigrants from the Netherlands. Upon arrival, the immigrants faced many physical and financial challenges. But their perceived greatest challenge was spiritual: to maintain faithfulness to God in an unfamiliar, ungodly context. In researching and writing this thesis, my goal was to better understand the group of people who attended the Free Reformed churches, and their experiences – prescribed and lived – within the social network formed by church members. What was life like for church members, specifically in the cluster of FRC churches in Southern Ontario, in their first quarter century in Canada? How did the experiences of women differ from those of men? And, more importantly, what factors shaped the exclusivity and isolation of this group? How and why did they develop such a closed, insular community?

To answer these questions, Chapters I to IV looked at the experiences of settlement in Ontario, of church and faith, of interactions with and beliefs about the surrounding Canadian culture and their own identity, and of women within the community. This thesis has found that the FRC's deliberate insularity between 1950 and 1976 can be attributed to several factors: the structures, rules and leadership of the church, the central organizing body; strong individual religious commitment of members, expressed through loyalty to the church and its rules; an ideological resistance to change and 'outside' ideas or influence; and the church community itself, made up of friends, kin and other members, which was a source of comfort and aid as well as social pressure. In this final chapter, I will summarize and comment on this thesis's arguments and sources, before noting other potential areas of research.

Summary of Findings

The Free Reformed church community deliberately (and more successfully than they realized at the time) built up an insular community. Why and how did this occur? I have uncovered four distinct but related reasons: the church, individual beliefs, resistance to change

and outside influence, and social support and pressure. First, the church and its rules, leaders and structures played an important role. The church was a hub for the newly arrived immigrants, as seen in Chapter I, helping them get settled and providing spiritual, social and sometimes financial support. Chapters II to IV demonstrate that church leaders had extensive power over parishioners, expressed through teachings (powerful to a community that elevated doctrine and pastors), regulated by home visits and enforced by church discipline. Creeds and vows, like the baptismal oath, bound members to obedience. Being a faithful member of church demanded regular involvement for the entire family in various church-related activities and events, as seen in Chapter II.

Secondly, motivating this allegiance to the church was personal faith or religious commitment. This religious faith was tightly connected with their particular church, as other churches were perceived as doctrinally incorrect. Thus, loyalty to the church implied loyalty to God. Hence, commitment to the church was strong even when members objected to certain practices or corrupt leadership. And individual religious commitment was strong, regardless of whether or not one claimed personal faith. Thus faith bound members to the church, to one another and to the norms of the community.

Faith also motivated women to endure or embrace a system that left them with little power, for they believed it was God's will as expressed in Scripture. And, in a highly gendered system, privately experienced personal faith was unfettered. Women were free to have a close relationship with God. Many Free Reformed women spoke openly of experiencing God in their day-to-day lives, especially in hardship. Faith nourished them. As Chapter I demonstrated, while the church and church community provided help and comfort in the early years of settlement, one interviewee clearly expressed that these benefits were incidental to her family. They did not attend church for its social benefits; they simply attended church as an expression of their faith.

Thirdly, the FRC's definition of faithful living included rejecting change and outsider influence. This was motivated by a perception of their own solitary uniqueness and an intense

fear of change and of ‘the world.’ Ministers promoted a closed, fearful mindset by emphasizing the FRC’s uniqueness and the evils of the world. Members believed the same, and had little contact with non-FRC members. In the first decade, the community struggled to survive, and naturally took on a *verzuiling*-like shape, inspired by the religiously-based social stratification of pre-war Holland. Yet as time passed, acculturation did not occur; rather, as Chapter III shows, the FRC belief of an evil surrounding culture seemed to grow in the 1960s and ’70s, in response to changes in the surrounding world.

Fourth, the church community promoted insularity as it offered a familiar haven, close-knit for comfort. Less benign was the social pressure that ensured complicity. Although FRC churches in Ontario were spread out geographically, they were tightly linked through social and church events, family networks, and sometimes also the realm of work. The ideology and practice of separation from the world was made easier because the church community itself was all-encompassing. The church community provided a social network and support in times of difficulty, especially after immigration. It was also a subtle but powerful form of social pressure. In many cases, family members and friends all attended FRC churches. Those who failed to comply with community norms faced criticism, snubbing or even shunning, as with the Hoekstras who lost friends by choosing an interdenominational Christian school. The church community was their world, and to remain in it required keeping many rules that bound the community together. In fact, gaining approval or status in the community entailed living the prescribed lifestyle scrupulously. Their identity was a communal one, bound up in being a separate people of God, and Dutch-Canadian Reformed immigrants.

The third and fourth points, community support and pressure, and fear of change, are closely related. A life had been crafted in which ‘the church community’ encompassed all meaningful parts of life except for commerce and trade: church, family, faith, and so on. Simultaneously, ‘the world’ and outsiders were portrayed as frightening. Hence, it was impossible for most members to imagine a life outside of the circle. In fact, each of the four

arguments interacted to strengthen each other. There was the ‘pull’ of church, faith and social support, and the ‘push’ away from the dangerous world. Religious customs, such as Sabbatarianism, embedded in teachings and religious culture, functioned both to more deeply unite the group and to more sharply divide them from the rest of Canadian society, including other churches. Personal religious beliefs meant people regulated themselves in addition to being controlled by leaders and influenced by family and friends from the same community. These elements led to a cord of many strands binding the community together.

In some cases, these elements worked together in interesting ways. Chapter IV revealed that married women worked in and outside of the home, but in restricted contexts with a priority on homemaking. This religiously-based lifestyle choice meant that a large percentage of the adult population had little influence from the surrounding world. In fact, much of the work of FRC members, beyond the first few years, was low in exposure to the surrounding culture --- farming, family construction businesses, and for women, housecleaning. Leaders did not mandate this, though they did underscore a potent fear of worldly influence. Members interpreted accordingly, perhaps best demonstrated by Karel Molenaar’s decision to quit working at the factory in Oakville because of the secular environment. Some of the conservative practices of the FRC may have been typical of Canadian culture in the 1950s, but what about the 1960s, ’70s, and beyond? As Canadian culture changed, the Free Reformed built higher walls to isolate themselves. To understand this, it was critical to hear from those who established this way of life, not only the authority figures, but also those who validated the teaching by choosing to live it out.

Two sources have informed this thesis. The didactic messages of the denomination’s monthly publication, *The Messenger*, written by various ministers, reflect the ideology, expectations and representations of FRC culture, belief and lifestyle. Interviews offer insight into the lived values and experiences of FRC members. While these two sources vary in form --- *The Messenger* written during 1950-1975, the oral interviews of elderly members reflecting back on this time frame --- their perspectives are complementary. Did members live

just as the pastors instructed them? What messages were members receiving about life and loyalty to God and the church? Together, these sources provide a better understanding of these questions and the environment that nurtured the young Free Reformed church community.

Certainly oral history is fraught with challenges (as discussed in the Introduction), yet it offers a truly unique opportunity to glimpse the past. As historian Linda Shopes notes, oral interviews may well “foster a more nuanced and humane understanding of the way individuals live in history.”¹ Indeed, capturing the thoughts, memories and perspectives of the founders of the FRC church community in Ontario was the impetus for this project. Building on previous studies of Dutch-Canadian Calvinist groups, this thesis extends the field by integrating ‘top-down’ and ‘bottom-up’ sources.

Other Areas for Future Study

This thesis is only a beginning. There are other topics and sources that would be worthy of further study; I did not have space to cover them here. In terms of sources, it would be invaluable to obtain more interviews of the founding generation, which is aging and passing on. Multi-generational interviews would provide new insight for further research, particularly from the second generation which was raised in Canada. How were intergenerational conflicts settled, how much did youth rebel or comply, and were any concessions made by church leaders?² In my research, I discovered only one change that was regarded as necessary and positive by the FRC: the transition from Dutch to English usage in church matters. While some members argued that a language barrier would be an extra level of protection against the world, the necessity of retaining the youth overruled this objection.

¹ Linda Shopes, “Oral History and the Study of Communities: Problems, Paradoxes, and Possibilities,” *The Journal of American History* 89: 2 (Sept. 2002): 597.

² I came across one rather amusing point of intergenerational conflict. The Dutch had brought their European norms of drinking alcohol and smoking, while North American churches, with a history of probation, tended to ban such behaviours. The Canadian-born or raised Free Reformed youth were more sensitive to this. The Mitchell church reported that the young people’s society requested the consistory to ban smoking on church property because they “wish to conform to the Canadian churches who are shocked by our smoking.” This note was combined with concern about a lack of respect in Mitchell’s YPS. In response to the smoking request, the author wondered, “is this also a sign of conformity to the Canadian churches?” (C. Pronk, “Reports from the Congregations,” *The Messenger* 20:9 (Sept. 1973):2.) Indeed, it was a sign of conformity to Canadian churches, though not exactly alarming in its nature.

(As well, maintaining Dutch was not compatible with the economic prosperity that they had immigrated to Canada to achieve.³) In 1971, Rev. Tamminga wrote that church services needed to be held in English otherwise “our young people will alienate [sic] from the church.”⁴ Lien de Wit and others agreed: it was hard for the children and youth to follow sermons taught in Dutch or broken English.⁵ Ultimately, in 1972-3, Synod ruled on an official change to English, concluding that “the time has come to make this change for the good of our churches.”⁶ Other intergenerational topics would be worthy of study. As previously noted, a key element in the community’s perpetuation was keeping the next generation. As the Sabbatarian example in Chapter II demonstrated, raising and training FRC children would offer more insights into the community. A fascinating study might look into kinship ties and how intermarriage strengthened the community base, as well as delving into dating and marriage.⁷

Another useful source base would be those who have left the community. There is a tendency to interview “insiders and people with a long-term relationship with a community. But what about outsiders and newcomers?”⁸ As Linda Shopes suggests in her review of oral history, it is helpful to broaden the scope of narrators. Beyond additional interviews, other possible sources are sermons, consistory and Synodical records, letters written by or to members (or former members), and diaries or journals.

There are also topics that I did not address, or only had the space to touch on,

³ Fluency was key for a prosperous future. Many interviewees, including the Scholtens and Molenaars, had a story of how their first child had language difficulties in English and the family switched to English as a result.

⁴ J. Tamminga, “The Year of Our Lord 1970,” *The Messenger* 18:1 (Jan. 1971): 2.

⁵ Overduin wrote that “many of our readers insist on more articles in English which are also interesting for our children.” This is fascinating because it is the only time I found leadership responding positively to members’ demands for change. J. Overduin, “Meditation for the Very Young,” *The Messenger* 15:11 (Nov. 1968): 1.

⁶ “Brief Report of Synod,” *The Messenger* 19:8 (Aug. 1972): 3; A. Stehouwer, “Postscript,” *The Messenger* 20:1 (Feb. 1973): 2. Many Free Reformed churches had already switched to English as of the early 1960s. Bilkes. *Free Reformed Churches in the West*, 27.

⁷ Endogamous marriage was not explicitly taught, and many interviewees, when asked directly, insisted it was not a major issue if their children found partners outside of the FRC. Yet *The Messenger* regularly reminded of their denominational exclusivity and warned youth against dating outsiders, and parents kept careful track of the church affiliation of their children and others, and hinted at how highly they valued their children staying Free Reformed. The Scholtens – like others – wanted their children to marry within ‘the Reformed circles,’ if not the FRC itself. In discussing the merits of sending their children to a Christian Reformed school, a concern was that they might find a mate there and end up leaving the FRC. Frans and Liesbeth Scholten (pseudonyms), Interview with author, Dundas, Ontario, May 13, 2010.

⁸ Shopes, “Oral History,” 596.

including sexuality, gender, singleness, and church discipline. As well, it would be valuable to look more closely at the interaction between religion and culture. Along with others, my study has shown religion to be *the* determining factor. But what was the impact of culture or ethnicity? This was a religiously specific group, but from a common nation, language, history. Despite inquiries on these topics, my search yielded few clues and no classic ethnicity markers. It is as if religion became a substitute for culture; or that their culture is a religious – not ethnic -- one, their traditions stemming from this.

Religious beliefs, in some cases, even kept them from cultural celebrations – dancing, for example, was forbidden. What about festivals like *Sinterklaas* (Dutch Christmas, held on Dec. 5), which quickly fell away as they adapted to Canada? Why were they not maintained? From my research, it appears that religion and religious isolation, as well as economic advancement, were the foci; anything else that appeared morally neutral they were willing to part with. The Dutch language, for example, fell away swiftly, in the home and church. Yet, while Dutch was lost quickly, it is interesting to note that certain words or phrases were sustained, even to the current fourth generation.⁹ Could this have been an ethnic tie that bound the community together? Yet the particular phrases or words used varied between families. What was significant about a Dutch or Dutch-Canadian culture – anything that was a-religious? These questions and others invite historians to join the fray and commit to further research.

Besides wanting to capture the memories of my grandparents' contemporaries, another motivation for doing this research was to better understand the present-day Free Reformed community by investigating its past. This thesis, which attempts to uncover the main reasons behind the insularity of the community in the first quarter century, leaves the FRC in 1976, defending themselves from a changing Canadian culture. Naturally one could study the seventies, eighties and nineties as well. Perhaps a secret for the FRC's sustained exclusivity into the eighties and beyond, especially in the Flamborough region, was establishing a

⁹ For example, I did not know the English word for a cloth to wipe a table until I was nearly fourteen. We called it a *doek*.

parochial school in 1978, Rehoboth Christian School. Rehoboth undoubtedly was another tie that bound the community together. As a 1976 editorial in *The Messenger* stated, “home, church and school are three links which are to be joined together. Our children, like weak and tender plants, need a special place in this secular age.”¹⁰ Rehoboth Christian School offered an alternative to public or non-FRC private schools, and offered a ‘special place’ for the covenant children of the local Free Reformed churches.

While others have written on Dutch Canadians, there is a paucity of work taking a social history approach. And unfortunately, women have been all but ignored, to the detriment of the field. I hope that this thesis helps to broaden understandings of the nature of religious immigrant communities. It is fascinating to me that although the Dutch Reformed did not have to fight against Canadian discrimination – far from it – they behaved as if Canadian culture was the enemy. This was not a racial or ethnic battle, but a spiritual one: the FRC believed that it was necessary to build an insular community and restrict Canadian cultural norms in order to be safe and righteous. The Free Reformed church community was, and is, a tiny group of people. Though small, it is significant as a story of an immigrant community coming to Canada and creating a separate life for themselves. As interviewee Carolina Hoekstra put it, “they built a kingdom.” It was a kingdom with clear boundaries, clear foes, and known insiders, shaped by the church, the faith of members, fear of change, and social pressures and supports. This small group of Dutch immigrants developed and established an insular, spiritual kingdom in Canada between 1950 and 1976.

¹⁰ A. Stehouwer, “From the Congregations – Clifton,” *The Messenger* 23:1(Jan. 1976): 3.

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Appendix A: Maps of the Free Reformed Churches in North America, 1944-1976

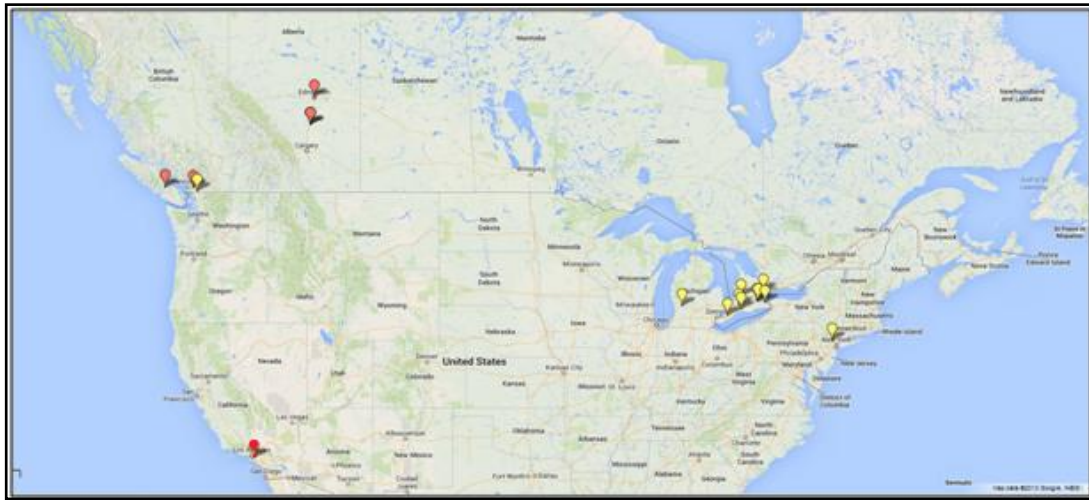


Figure 1: Free Reformed Churches in North America, 1944-1976
Yellow tags indicate churches that continue to exist to present day; red indicates churches that closed. See dates on next page.

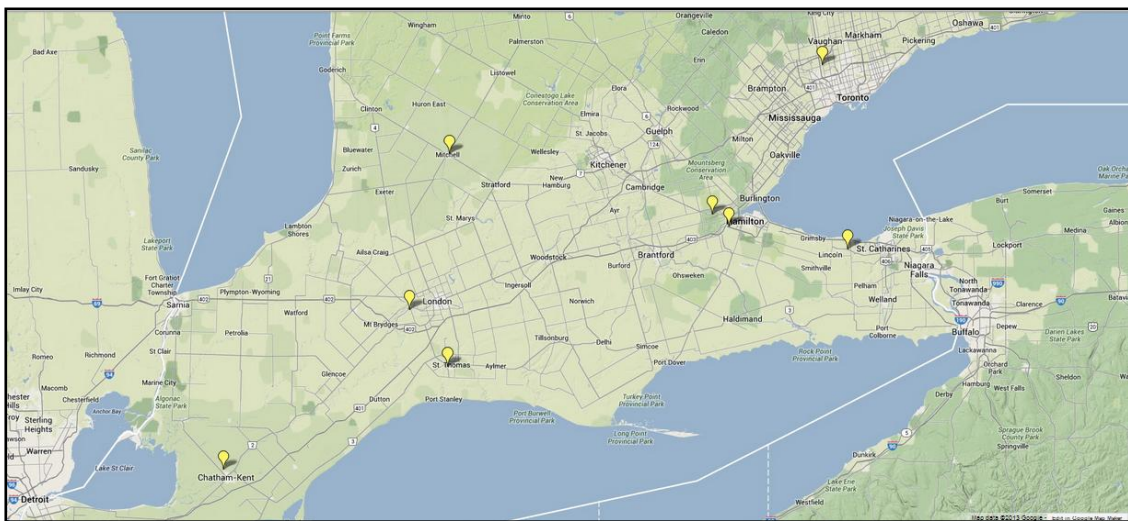


Figure 2: Free Reformed Churches in Ontario, 1944-1976

Appendix B: Names & Dates of Free Reformed Churches in North America, 1944-1976¹

Ontario

Dundas (1950)
Chatham (1951)
St. Thomas (1952)
Hamilton (1953)
Mitchell (1954)
Toronto (1955-2011)
London (1958)
Vineland (1958)

Western Canada

Aldergrove, BC (now Abbotsford) (1955)
Port Alberni, BC (June 1955-June 1958)
Red Deer, AB (June 1955-April 1966)
Edmonton, AB (Aug. 1958-1966)
Pitt Meadows, BC (Mar. 1967-June 1982)

The United States of America

Pompton Plains, NJ (est. 1921, joined FRC 1965)
Grand Rapids, MI (1944)
Artesia, CA (1949-1968)

Note: These dates indicate when a church was officially instituted, although a church plant may have begun before the stated date.

¹ Information on Western Canada and California from Lawrence J. Bilkes, "Free Reformed Churches in the West: A History of the First Fifty Years (1953-2003)," Free Reformed Publications, Brantford, ON, 2006, throughout. (1, 5, 17-18, 20, 24). All other information found in Arie Baars, "Between 'Old' and 'Free': The Free Reformed Churches of North America," in *Morsels in the Melting Pot: The Persistence of Dutch Immigrant Communities in North America*, eds. George Harinck & Hans Krabbendam (Amsterdam: VU Uitgeverij, 2006); William Van Doodewaard, "A Transplanted Church: The Netherlandic Roots and Development of the Free Reformed Churches of North America," *Canadian Journal of Netherlandic Studies* 26:2 (2005), throughout.

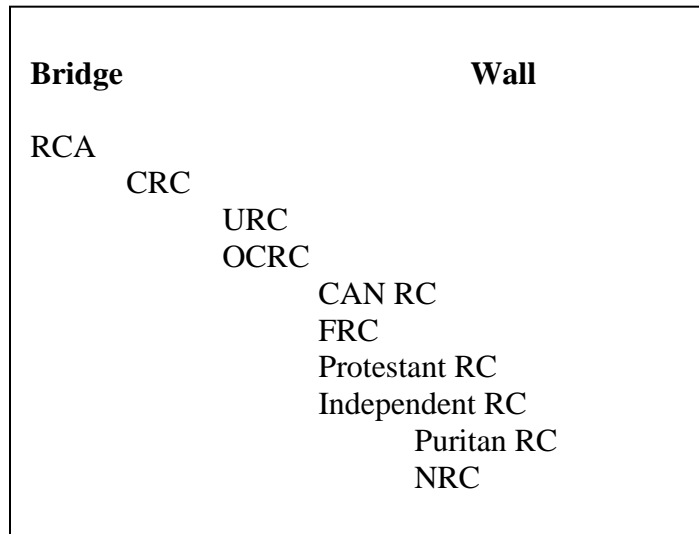
Appendix C: Oral Interview Questions

1. What is your current age, and at what age did you come to Canada?
2. Did you participate in making the decision of whether or not to emigrate?
3. What were the main reasons for choosing to leave the Netherlands and come to Canada?
4. In what area did you settle, and why was this area chosen?
5. What was your occupation in the first years (up to the seventies), whether at home or outside of the home? (if applicable, your husband, father, mother, other family members)? Did many women in the FRC community work outside of the home? What were the expectations?
6. What was life like for you in the early years after you moved to Canada, for example with respect to daily routine, your opinions of the experience and Canada, homesickness, etc?
7. Did you feel like you fit in with Canadian society? Was this a goal? (“In but not of the world” especially in *The Messenger*) Did you consider yourself ‘Dutch’ or ‘Canadian’?
 - a. Dress differently? Family size? Marry outside the community?
8. Do you consider personal faith an important element of your life?
9. What role did the Free Reformed Church (FRC) play in your life in terms of teaching, Sunday services, traditions, socially?
 - a. Did you attend Ladies’ Society? (If applicable) Please describe your experience.
10. Please relate your experience of ‘the Dutch community’ during times of hardship or celebration, such as weddings, births, funerals.
11. (If relevant) Do you have children, and if so, how many?
 - a. How did you choose names for your children? (ie any Dutch reference)
 - b. What about nicknames in your family – were they English or Dutch? Please give me some examples.
 - c. Do any of your children speak Dutch? Please explain why or why not. (If applicable) Do any of their children?
 - d. Whether or not your children spoke Dutch, did you integrate Dutch phrases, jokes, words, sentences or songs into your English-speaking life as a family?
12. Do you think the FRC community had a Dutch culture or identity, and if so, how would you describe that?
13. Specifically for those in the DC who are not Dutch-speaking, do you think they are still culturally Dutch?
14. What has brought the most personal fulfillment to your life?
15. Religious beliefs.
 - a. (If a current church-member) You are a member of an FR church: remembering that this interview is confidential, are there any doctrines or practices of the FRC that you would like to discuss? There may be things that perhaps you disagree with or are uncomfortably with?
 - b. (If a former member) You used to be a member of the FR church: if you are comfortable with doing so, can you tell me some of the reasons you left the FRC?

16. Is the FRC close in belief and practice to any other churches?
17. As you know, according to the teachings of the FRC, women and men have different roles to play in life. What is your belief about men and women's roles and relationships.
 - a. Do you think woman were considered equal to men?
 - b. *The Messenger* has frequently discussed the issue of feminism. What are your thoughts on feminism?
18. Is it accurate to say that when you left the Netherlands, it still had *verzuiling*? In your opinion, has the FRC community created a kind of *zuilen* or *verzuiling* in Canada?
 - a. Do you think this was the intention?
 - b. Looking back, what do you think of the way the FRC 'Dutch community' has taken shape?

Appendix D: Reformed Churches in North America

Diagram by Robert Swierenga²



Data

Reformed Church of America (RCA, 1628)

Christian Reformed Church (CRC, 1857)

United Reformed Church (URC, 1996)

Orthodox Christian Reformed Church (OCRC, 1979)

Canadian Reformed Church (CanRC, 1950)

Free Reformed Church (FRC, 1950)

Protestant Reformed Church (Protestant RC, 1924)

Independent Reformed Churches (Independent RC)

Puritan Reformed Church (Puritan RC, 1924).³

Netherlands Reformed Congregations (NRC, 1865)

²Robert P. Swierenga, "Walls or Bridges? Acculturation Processes in the Reformed and Christian Reformed Churches in North America," in *Morsels in the Melting Pot*, eds. George Harinck and Hans Krabbendam (Amsterdam: Free University Press, 2006): 33-42.

³Some of these names are the North American equivalent of a major denomination in the Netherlands; these dates indicate North American beginnings.