

Comparative analysis of Dutch Reformed communities' coverage in Canadian mainstream and Reformed mass media.

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ABSTRACT

This paper is a comparative study of how Dutch Reformed communities self-represent themselves in their printed media and the ways these communities are covered in Canadian daily newspapers. The cases are chosen from 2005 until 2016. This research demonstrates that mainstream media forms a positive image of Dutch Reformed groups, although it seems dated because the majority of publications refer to the communities' experience of post-war immigration and memories about World War II. Also, mainstream newspapers do not provide the reader with clear comprehension of the social role that Dutch Reformed communities play today. However, Reformed magazines give a deeper understanding of Canadian Reformed communities' worldview, but their target audience is narrower, and, as a result, they cannot transform public perception of these religious groups.

KEYWORDS

1. Dutch ethnicity, Canadian Calvinists, ethno-religious identity, mass media, Christian schools, vaccination.

Introduction

In the postwar decades, because of immigration, the profile of Canadian population has changed dramatically. The fourth largest ethnic group associated with postwar immigration is the Dutch. Approximately 200,000 people left the Netherlands for Canada between 1946 and 1990 (Schryer, 1998, p.1). Despite the fact that Dutch immigrants have common origins, it seems impossible to research them as a group that shares similar values and cultural peculiarities. This is explained by the unique structure of Dutch society at the time of emigration. It is labeled *pillarization* and means a vertical separation of society into “pillars” along class and religious cleavages into four dominant interest groups, which are: Catholics, Protestants, socialists, and liberals. Each of them formed political and social organizations and group affiliations (Lijphart, 1968, p.23).

The majority of the Protestant group was composed of Reformed Christians, who experienced an intense development at the turn of the 20th century due to the neo-Calvinist movement¹. A founder of this movement and later a Prime Minister of the Netherlands (1901 – 1905), Abraham Kuyper maintained the idea of pillarization through the theological concept “*Sphere Sovereignty*”. Therefore, he encouraged Reformed Christians to form their own entities within each of the spheres and fulfill Christian service in society (Goudzwaard, 1986, p.259). The idea of pillarization and some Kuyperian thoughts were transferred by Dutch Reformed immigrants in Canada. Thus, for instance, while the majority of Dutch Canadian Catholics and non-Calvinist Protestants decided to belong to Canadian Churches, Dutch Calvinists² founded a great variety of Reformed Churches on the Canadian religious scene. Also, as in their homeland, Reformed Christians established in Canada their own churches, schools, mass media, etc.

From the beginning the Reformed tradition has emphasized the significance of the written word as an effective tool for communication and teaching. Due to the publication of a regular and popular newspaper, the *Standaard*, theologian and politician Abraham Kuyper strengthened the neo-Calvinist movement itself and gained strong support in the Dutch population. Though today the Reformed community in Canada does not reject other types of mass media, it still appreciates the printed one. In other words, the paper published by Kuyper was for its readers “a sustained induction into politics, culture, and social affairs” (Bratt, 2013, p.83) from a Reformed perspective. A similar role is being played today by Reformed media in Canada.

The goal of this article is to compare self-representation of Dutch Reformed communities in printed Canadian Reformed media and their coverage in mainstream mass media. I employed a thematic analysis (Boyatzis, 1998; Marshall & Rossman, 1999; Pawson, 1995) to compare the chosen articles from mass and Reformed media. The samples for this research were selected from 2005 to 2016 in mainstream media because of the limited number of articles concerning the Dutch Reformed population; due to the wealth of information on Reformed Christians and time constraints of the research, the analysis of Reformed mass media was limited to the period from 2015 to 2016. Because this research focuses on the communities which were significantly influenced by neo-Calvinism and by

the works of Abraham Kuyper, my focus is on newspapers and magazines published by members of the following Churches: 1) Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRCNA, further referred to as CRC), founded in 1857; it has absorbed the largest number of Netherlanders-Reformed and today remains the largest Reformed Church in Canada and publishes a magazine, the *Comment*, and a newspaper, the *Christian Courier*); and two of the Churches which split from CRC because of disagreement with its liberal innovations³; these two churches are currently pursuing a Federative unity; 2) the Canadian and American Reformed Churches (CanRC) created in 1950⁴, which publishes the *Clarion – the Canadian Reformed magazine*; and 3) the United Reformed Churches in North America (URCNA), established in 1996 which publishes the *Christian Renewal*.

All above mentioned media have a long history. The *Clarion*, established in 1964, is published twice per month and covers “events in the Canadian and American Reformed Church” (*Clarion*, 2016, para. 1). The magazine *Christian Renewal* was first released in 1982 (seventeen issues per year). It “was modeled after the work and witness of Dr. Abraham Kuyper”, an emphasis of whose life “was that all things in heaven and on earth are under the authority and ownership of King Jesus”, – and the publisher “aspire[s] to do the same” (*Christian Renewal*, 2016, para. 1). The *Comment*, one of the core publications of the research center *Cardus*⁵, has been published four times per year since 1983 as a journal of “public theology for the common good” (*Cardus*, 2016, para. 1). The *Christian Courier* (firstly titled as *Canadian Calvinist*), originated in 1945, was one of the first editorials to encourage Dutch Calvinists to apply for Canadian citizenship once the war was over, “to take active part in the public life of the nation” (para 1). It is published twice per year and focuses on the life of the CRC community.

With respect to mainstream media, I used the following research tools to collect samples for my study: a collection of Canadian daily newspapers at ProQuest and Communications & Mass Media Collection at Gale Cengage Learning. In the case of both the mass media database and the electronic versions of above mentioned Reformed media, I searched using the keywords related to my study: “Dutch”, “Reformed”, “Calvinist”, “Christian school”. This resulted in a list of articles which comprise at least one of the keywords. After the analysis of the articles selected, I identified three topics which are intensively discussed in either Reformed or mainstream media or in both, and which are significant for the Canadian socio-political domain. These are: the Canadian Reformed communities’ identity; conservative Christian groups’ views on vaccination; and the existence of Christian schools, organized by Dutch Reformed communities, in the Canadian context. As a result, besides four above mentioned Reformed printed media, these topics are mainly discovered in the following national and local daily newspapers: *National Post*, *Ottawa Citizen*, *Globe and Mail*, *StarPhoenix*, *Vancouver Sun*, *Toronto Star*, *Hamilton Spectator*. The Dutch immigrants who joined either CanRC or CRC mainly settled in the Anglophone part of Ontario, in British Columbia and Alberta (Statistics Canada, 2011), which explains why this study includes only Anglophone newspapers. My research explores only Canadian media because its main focus is on socio-political and cultural issues which are important to contemporary Canadian society.

1. Canadian Reformed communities’ identity

Dutch Reformed Christians have been living in North America since the 17th century, when they founded New Amsterdam, later renamed as New York City. A massive migration from the Netherlands to Canada took place after World War II. This migration is partly explained by political and cultural ties between these two countries⁶. In addition, after the war, the Netherlands faced the devastation caused by five years of Nazi occupation, and the government encouraged mass emigration. It was also encouraged by the Canadian government, since there were vast empty spaces for newcomers in the country. The Dutch were welcomed by Canadians because they “were of right ‘racial’ stock, had a reputation for hard work and cleanliness, and were familiar with democratic institutions” (Balthazar et al., 1998, p.92).

The majority of Dutch immigrants “saw it as their mission to work for a “better” Canada; <...> orthodox Calvinists planned to make Canada into a ‘Christian country’” (Schryer, 1998, p.280). Although the Dutch Calvinists that immigrated to Canada in the postwar period preferred to establish “alternative, non-ecclesiastical institutional structures that reflected their distinctive Calvinist heritage” (Groenewold, 1991, p.182), behaviorally, they endeavored to assimilate: therefore, they learnt English quickly (and church services were soon given only in English), and in terms of citizenship, they were ready to become Canadians. Therefore, it is not surprising that the Dutch, and Reformed Dutch in particular, usually have been presented in mainstream media in a positive manner.

During the last decade, the main topics of mainstream newspapers’ articles devoted to the Dutch Reformed community are: the settlement and integration of post-war immigrants in Canada (; De Jong, 2005, p.18; Dekkema, 2015, p.6), and the commemoration of the end of World War II (Hevesi, 2007, p.24; Gessell, 2008, p.4; Kleiss, 2006, p.6; Polak, 2008, p.4). For instance, there are numerous interviews with Dutch veterans who were on the front line or served on the home front. Also, a sizable number of publications which mention Dutch Reformed Christians are dedicated to the anniversary of Reformed communities’ settlement in various parts of Canada (A century in Winnipeg, 2008, p.8; Freeman, 2010, p.7; Neuerbourg, 2009, p.6).

Much more often than in national media, Dutch Reformed communities’ life is covered by local newspapers issued in areas where there is a high concentration of the members of these communities (Southern Ontario is an example). The *Hamilton Spectator* discusses many local news events related to Reformed communities with Dutch roots and their social role in the Hamilton area. For example, the topics include an investigation of the murder of a Hamilton resident and a member of CRC Tim Bosma, and a frequent mentioning of CRC’s support of Bosma’s family (Hayes, 2013, p.7); a three-generation tradition of the Hamilton family Steenbeek⁷ (the youngest donator is a Hamilton District Christian High School⁸ student) to “help save lives” due to regular blood donations (Fragomeni, 2012, p.3). Also, the *Hamilton Spectator* discusses on numerous occasions the case of Redeemer University – a “university institution with a Reformed perspective” (Redeemer University College, 2016, para. 1) - grown “out of the local Dutch Reformed Christian community” (Dunphy, 2011, p.3). A few articles are devoted to Henry De Bolster, “a Christian Reformed minister [of CRC] and a driving force in creating Redeemer”

(Fragomeni, 2016, p.2), who died in spring 2016. He participated in the Dutch resistance during the war and later worked at Redeemer College. He was, according to one article, passionate about Christian education, “encouraging critical and analytic thinking in his students” (Fragomeni, 2016, p.2). In contrast with a number of articles that emphasize the importance given by Henri De Bolster to critical thinking, other articles are more critical of the University. One of them discusses the position of the Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT), which criticizes Redeemer for making its Professors pass a “faith test”⁹. This, the article stresses, “restricts inquiry” (Dunphy, 2011, p.3). A remark made in another article is even harsher: “Just a quick reminder that in the Galilean 1600s, universities, deeply under church influence, were devoted to hiring only teachers who professed Earth was the center of the known universe” (Michalsky, 2011, p.7).

With regards to the coverage offered by Reformed magazines, during the chosen period I found a few articles referencing the ethnic identity of the community. The *Christian Courier* whose focus is on the CRC communities’ life and activities remembers that this church comprises a sizable number of members of Dutch ancestry. Therefore, it contains numerous publications related to Dutch history, including articles devoted to the history of oppression and occupation of the Netherlands during World War II; pieces emphasizing the significant role of the Reformed Church in the settlement of Dutch post-war immigrants in Canada (Rang, 2015, pp.1-2); and others presenting family stories of CRC’s members giving insights into the sufferings and struggles faced by the Dutch people as a result of Nazi intervention. Also, the *Christian Courier* discusses the contribution of CRC to Canadian society. For instance, one of its articles is devoted to the Salaam Project, which was initiated by CRC “to encourage love and compassion for Muslims instead of fear and mistrust” (Dinsmore, 2015, p.1). Thus, in contrast to some other denominations, which seek to evangelize Muslims, the Salaam Project endeavors to build trust and respect with Muslim Canadians. Face-to-face interactions with Muslim neighbors, meetings with imams, visits of mosques – all of these reflect an intention to break down existing stereotypes and overcome alienation and hatred.

The majority of *Clarion* and *Christian Renewal*’s publications that make allusions to the communities of Dutch background are about their theology and history, rather than social life. Some articles give detailed explanation of serious concerns expressed by both CanRC and URCNA relating to their sister Churches in the Netherlands. Because of the liberalization of the latter ones, CanRC and URCNA restricted contact with them which explains the position expressed in several pieces. For instance, the article entitled: “*Developments in our Dutch Sister Churches and Lessons to be Learned*” discusses the “considerable obstacles to a closer relationship with the Netherlands Reformed Churches” (Van Dam, 2015, p.359) faced by CanRC. These barriers toward unity are, according to Van Dam, the result of “the dominant civic culture” impacting Dutch Churches, which triggers: a change in the worship service to make it “more user friendly and more appealing to outsiders” (2015, p.387) and an “acceptance of scientific theory instead of the plain teaching of the Word of God in matters of evolution and creation” (2015, p.389). As a result, Van Dam infers that the experience of Dutch Churches should encourage CanRC to be “vigilant with respect to cultural influences” (2015, p.387). A similar conclusion is presented in a book review¹⁰ published by the *Christian Renewal*: “Our Dutch brothers have not

adequately distinguished between pre-modern foundationalism (employed by Calvin, Beza, and post-Reformation scholastics) and modern foundationalism (essentially redefined and redirected by the Enlightenment). The former is rooted in an appropriate application of reason to interpreting Scripture. The latter has provoked in our day a kind of perspectivalism in postmodern thought that yields intellectual relativism. This inadequate distinguishing leads to some false dilemmas” (Kloosterman, 2015, p.20). Moreover, some articles give historical and theological insights in the ways the CanRC is organized, and why it is separated from the Christian Reformed Church (Bouwman, 2012, pp.551-553 as an example).

In the *Comment*, which usually presents a philosophical or theological approach, one will barely find the word “Dutch” as a reference to ethnic identity of some Reformed denominations in Canada. However, there are numerous allusions to the works of Dutch Calvinist and neo-Calvinist theologians, such as: Herman Bavinck (Bennett, 2015, pp.59-63), Hermann Witsius (Henreckson, 2016, pp.18-24), Abraham Kuyper, etc. Also, there are reminders about the debated question of whether neo-Calvinism justified apartheid in South Africa, or, in contrast, had a liberating influence and became a consolidating force for Black Calvinists in their struggle for freedom (Botman, 2000, p.343)¹¹.

To conclude, in comparison with mainstream newspapers, which often make reference to Dutch ethnicity when talking about various Reformed denominations, Reformed printed media rarely uses the word “Dutch”. It confirms Franc Schryer’s conclusion that for the majority of Dutch Reformed Christians ethnicity does not play an important role: faith but not ethnicity is the main uniting feature of their communities. That is why communities are titled Reformed, rather than Dutch or Dutch Reformed.

Nonetheless, Reformed tradition seems to consolidate and retain ethnic identity across several generations. A high level of endogamy in marriages still takes place in some Reformed Churches. Jason Van Vliet¹² explains that there is a “strong encouragement to look for a husband or a wife in your own Church community, because then you will have a similar understanding of God, of children, of that how Church works” (2015). It is connected with “the understanding of marriage and that husband and a wife should, of course, love each other, but also they should be spiritually and religiously on the same page” (Van Vliet, 2015). This explains why a high number of authors writing for Reformed magazines have Dutch surnames. Also, because CRC, CanRC, and URCNA and their institutions (schools and ARPA as examples) are seriously influenced by Kuyper’s vision of theology and politics, Reformed media alludes to the Dutch background of these Churches and draws on numerous citations of Dutch Calvinist scholars. To sum up, in spite of the fact that Reformed Christians in Canada do not demonstrate explicit attention to the Dutch roots of their Churches, the worldview and socio-political principles, which they share, reflect their Dutch Reformed heritage.

2. Vaccination

The coverage of issues surrounding vaccination by mainstream media perhaps explains some of the negative views in Canada of Dutch Reformed Christians. In 2008 there was a wave of publications about an outbreak of mumps (Vander Beek, 2008, p.14; Todd, 2008, p.3), and in 2014 about an outbreak of measles (Carman, 2014, p.5; Robyn, 2014, p.6; Selley, 2014, p.12). They both took place in Chilliwack, B.C., because of the refusal of some Dutch Reformed Canadians living there to vaccinate their children. The majority of mainstream newspapers do not indicate the difference between various branches of Reformed Churches in Canada in their approach to vaccination. This is illustrated, for example, by articles on vaccination in the *Vancouver Sun*. Some of them qualify the Netherlands Reformed Congregations of North America (which is against vaccination) by the following expressions: “an arch-conservative arm of the Dutch Reformed church”; “traditionalist Protestant Reformed denomination”, “Netherlands Reformed Church”; “highly conservative Protestant sect in southern Ontario”; “Ultra-conservative Dutch Reformed” [church/community] (Todd, 2008, p.3); “Reformed persuasion” (Vander Beek, 2008, p.14); etc. In other words, they do not discuss the fact that NRC is a well-known organized Church with a long history, having been established in the early 1900's (Netherlands Reformed Congregations of Canada and the United States, 2016, para. 1). In addition, the use of a variety of descriptive titles, instead of a focus on the fact that these polemics are the result of the position of one particular Church¹³, may end-up producing a negative and skeptical perception of all Reformed Christians who have Dutch roots by the Canadian population. In fact, the attempts to show a precise distinction between Reformed Christians in their attitude to vaccination are not usually successful and do give a vague and unclear representation of Reformed Christians. In one of the *Vancouver Sun*'s articles Douglas Todd points out that there are several Reformed Churches in Canada, but he classifies those with Dutch roots into two groups, which are: Christian Reformed and Reformed Churches (the principle of this classification is unclear). Also, the journalist does not give a clear understanding to his statement that “some of these [Churches] do not officially oppose vaccinations, although individual members might choose to do so” (2008, p.3). A journalist of *Times – Colonist*, Tara Carman, through interviews with a pastor of the Reformed Congregation of North America Adriaan Geuze and a pastor of the Canadian Reformed Church Abel Pol, presents two points of view on vaccination. In contrast to Adriaan Geuze, who “sees vaccines as an interference with God’s providential care”, but “does not oppose other means of boosting immunity” and “medical treatment when a person is already sick”, the pastor from CanRC admits that “most if not all [his] congregation is in favor of vaccinations”. The latter explains that the refusal of vaccination is due to an incorrect interpretation of a passage of the Bible. However, the journalist does not emphasize that there is a variety of Reformed Churches in Canada and does not explain why she has chosen to compare the interpretations of these two denominations (Carman, 2014, p.5).

In addition, articles focus on a low rate of vaccination among some Christian groups, and Dutch Reformed Christians in particular, without a broader discussion of anti-immunization sentiment among other religious communities in the Bible belt in B.C. or, more generally, about the Vaccination Risk Awareness Network, which includes many secular representatives whose motivations to refuse a vaccination “range from religious beliefs rooted in the Bible to fears of serious side-effects and distrust of pharmaceutical companies” (Blackwell, 2014, p.8).

In fact, neither CRC, nor CanRC or URCNA has an official stance on vaccination. Some of their standpoints are reflected online. For example, the Association for Reformed Political Action (ARPA)¹⁴ notes on one of its website posts that it “does not have a position on the vaccine issue” (ARPA, 2014b, para. 2). Some of its staff members consider that “it is a parent's responsibility to make decisions about what is best for their child” and although there could be “huge consequences - including for our neighbors” in the case of a parent with an anti-vaccination stance, “this is fundamentally a discussion for parents, families, friends, and churches - not the legal system” (para. 3). Other staff members of ARPA favor government vaccination programs and argue that “the government may insist on vaccinating its citizens” if “a disease is fatal or crippling”, the “fatal or crippling disease is highly communicable”, “the vaccination has a proven history of effectiveness”, and “the vaccine is not developed through immoral means” (para. 7). A pastor of CRC Mark Stephenson confirms in his blog post that “the topic of vaccinations was ripping at the unity of [the] church” (2015, para. 2), but he himself “firmly believe[s] that children should be vaccinated, unless they have compromised immune systems that could not handle a vaccination” (para. 3).

I found two articles about vaccination in CRC's Reformed magazines, and none in CanRC or URCNA's printed media. For the latter communities, the question of vaccination does not seem to be a crucial issue and most of the members are in favor of vaccination. The *Comment* points out that although contemporary Western culture is dominated by strict rationalism, there is, at the same time, an increase of “interest in the mythological” interpretation of the world that rejects scientific evidence. As an example of widespread antiscientific attitude, an author alludes to “anti-vaccination campaigns” (Waldron, 2014, pp.21-27). The *Courier*, analyzing the book “*On Immunity: An Inoculation*” by Eula Biss, recognizes that there is a necessity for a large percentage of vaccinated people to keep community immunity. But the problem is that “we are a society that doesn't think of itself as a society” being irresponsible towards others when we refuse vaccination. An author of the article reminds the readers that refusing to vaccinate and “making decisions out of fear” not only makes you unbecoming as a good citizen, but also as a Christian: often forgetting that the church “has been commanded to care for the strangers in our midst”, “individuals will take care of themselves, their families and friends, leaving strangers to deal with their own problems” (Petty, 2015, p.9).

To conclude, mainstream media lacks a precise understanding of differences between various Dutch Reformed communities' views on vaccination. As a result, it forms an image that the majority of them refuse to vaccinate because of some theological reasons. As for Reformed magazines, they usually do not raise this topic, because the researched Reformed communities do not question vaccination.

3. Faith-based schooling

3.1. Image of religious schools in media

After Canadian migration policy was changed in the 1960s¹⁵ (Massey et al., 2005; Palmer, 1991), there has been a rise in the number of religious schools of different faiths. This religiously diverse education system has caused public concern around the potential of faith-based schools to breed intolerance in their students and induce social division (Atkins, 2001; Callan, 2009; Gutmann, 1999; Kymlicka, 2002). Therefore, during the last several decades in Canadian media there are philosophical and juridical debates on the existence of faith-based schools and their government financial support. However, it is important to mention that the education system is under provincial legislation since the Constitution Act of 1867. As a result, faith-based schools' status differs from province to province. My study predominantly explores the situation in Ontario. Views of religious parents on religious school education vary as well. Thus, Michael Buma notices, "as long as there have been Christian schools there have been conversations among Christians as to whether or not we should send our children to these schools" (2015, p.4).

Almost every issue of the Reformed newspapers and magazines that I have analyzed contains at least one article devoted to education: how to teach in a Christian school (Jagersma & Stoffels, 2015, pp.277-279); the main features of a Christian teacher (Jagersma, 2015, pp.311-313); how to evaluate students' knowledge in Biblical studies (Nobel, 2015, pp.162-164; Sikkema, 2015, pp.520-522); etc. In addition, some questions, which are interesting for all parents regardless of their religious affiliation, are also raised: sex education (this topic will be discussed later); positive and negative consequences of using contemporary technologies in the teaching process (Vandervan, 2015, pp.337-339); etc.

Despite drastic differences between CRC and CanRC and URC, these three Churches have a very similar approach to Christian education. Having Dutch roots and being deeply influenced by Abraham Kuyper's theology, members of these Churches support the idea of a religious school system. Kuyper insisted that public schools were unable to be neutral. He argued that they were "sect school (s) of Modernism" and that "naturalism in the curriculum and state monopoly over children – made the whole system 'satanic'" (Bratt, 2013, p.70). Also being a politician, Kuyper promoted the idea of "a free church and a free church school in a free land" (a motto edited by Kuyper's *De Heraut*). This explains why the Anti-Revolutionary Party (that he founded in 1879), in cooperation with the Christian Historical Union and the General League of Roman Catholic Caucuses, engineered the 1917 Dutch Agreement, which "provided equitable funding to a variety of religious and nonreligious school systems" (Mouw, 2012, p.88). Today, this agreement is still enforced in the Netherlands¹⁶. In sum, the central idea that education is the responsibility of the parents and that the state's role is merely to "assist" them is still widely shared by Reformed Christians in Canada.

Further, all Reformed Churches which are analyzed in this paper have been members of the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC) (the CRC's membership was terminated in 2001), which "promotes co-operation wherever feasible on the local and denominational level in such areas as missions, relief efforts, Christian schools, and church education" (CanRC, 2016, para. 8). In other words, this explains why the *Clarion* prints articles on education written by representatives of

other Reformed Churches (for example, the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC)), because being also members of NAPARC, they share “a strong emphasis on Christian education” (Barnes, 2015, p.17).

The magazine *Comment* is actively involved in a philosophical discussion¹⁷ about the public good being advanced by faith-based schools. The *Comment* concurs with the group of scholars that considers that religious schools bring public benefits (Bryk and al., 1993; Thiessen, 2001), in contrast to the scholars who see them as private institutions which promote private values and purposes (Ghitter, 1984; Shapiro, 1985). One of the *Comment*'s articles, citing the Executive Vice President of *Cardus* Ray Pennings, cogently sums up the magazine's position: “the education that takes place in religious schools <...> is *public* education and is producing results that are in the public interest and for the public good” (Smith, 2013, pp.8-12). Moreover, theorists of Reformed schools believe that a Christian school stands between “the church and practical life” (Zylstra, 1997, p.40). Therefore, its main goal is to help the students to graduate and to actualize Calvinist principles in real life, because Christian education is “for Christian life, not just for Christian thought” (Wolterstorff, 1997, p.61). That is why the education given there endeavors not only to provide students with an abstract understanding of concepts and problems, but also to offer solutions to significant problems in society. Matthew Beimers and Darryl DeBoer emphasize that Christian education acquaints its students with a Christian *habitus*: it provides students with “the formation and practicing of habits that point to and participate in the Kingdom”, teaches them to “contribute to the common good”. As a result, they “become beauty creators who delight in making beautiful things for the glory of God” (2015, pp.58-63).

In mainstream media, in contrast to religious media, there are rare references to Christian Reformed schools. By reviewing publications during the last several decades, it is possible to trace peaks of interest in the faith-based school system in Canadian newspapers. These peaks vary depending on time and province. This can be partly explained by the fact that different provinces have different ways of managing faith-based schools. For instance, in Ontario, faith-based schools were the focus of mass media attention in the late 1980s, just after full funding was extended to Catholic schools. The second wave was in 2007 when, during the Ontario provincial election, the leader of the Progressive Conservative Party John Tory promised to extend “funding to all faith-based schools” (Gillespie, 2007, para.7). As such, Reformed schools were mentioned several times among many other religious schools by those journalists, who considered that they also deserved some government funding.

Although, some authors call to “leave the indoctrination to the homes and churches” (O'Neill, 2007, p.5), there are many articles in the media which defend faith-based school system and promote a positive image of it. Thus, the *Globe and Mail* (Toronto edition) journalist Margaret Wenthe considers that “the fight against Catholic schools has turned into a crusade” (2014, p.2), though academic results are often much higher in Catholic schools than in public ones. Thus, referring to the 2012 C.D. Howe study, she points out that “17 of the top 29 schools in Ontario are Catholic, even though the public system is twice the size” (Wenthe, 2014, p.2).

And though most articles discuss faith-based schools in general, I have found a few, which were explicitly dedicated to Reformed schools. One of the articles in the *Toronto Star* shows how a Knox school, which was organized by Dutch post-war immigrants, members of the CRC, reconciles the Ontario curriculum and Christian teaching. Although the article mentions that Knox school's teachers must "refrain from a lesbian or homosexual lifestyle" (Scrivener, 2001, p.1), there are justifications for this position: the Supreme Court of Canada ruling "appears to support the right of private educational institutions to hire staff and train students who have agreed to refrain from "Biblically condemned" activities, including gay sex". Moreover, the author stresses how parents "have worked hard to build this school": "they raised \$1.5 million for the new building. <...> Tuition, including bus transportation, is \$6,050 for one child, \$8,550 for two" (p.1). What is more, journalist Leslie Scrivener challenges prejudice claiming that students of faith-based schools have no contact beyond their religious community: Knox school's students evolve in a multicultural environment, for instance, "in after-school sports leagues and arts classes" (p.1). Also, the journalist emphasizes that tolerance is being taught in that school: in one of the classes, responding to a student's question about whether "we have to respect a right" of "faithful Sikhs to carry daggers and bring traditions that seem unusual to Canada", the teacher responded: "You cannot ride roughshod over the traditions of others" (p.1).

The *Hamilton Spectator* usually refers to Reformed schools when it displays various announcements, for example, regarding summer camps, among which there is a Bible camp organized by CanRC. Also, as many other mainstream media, the *Hamilton Spectator* often demonstrates a connection between the Reformed community (in particular, their schools) and World War II. Thus, in the article devoted to the celebration of Remembrance Day in Hamilton a journalist mentions "children from Calvin Christian School [who] had drawn wreathes on pieces of paper for a class assignment and were reaching across the multi-generational divide to give their pieces of artwork" to veterans (McNeil, 2015, p.3). Another recent article tells a story about a third-generation Dutch immigrant Jordan Slump who, being a student in the Calvin Christian School in Dundas (now Providence Christian School), wrote an essay devoted to his uncle Gaelle Visser – "one of few Canadian soldiers <...> buried in the Holten Canadian War Cemetery" in Overijssel (Mahoney, 2015, p.4). When Jordan was visiting Holland, he placed his essay on the headstone of Private Gaelle Visser. Having found that paper, relatives of Visser decided to build a monument and carve a quote from the essay, and they invited Jordan to the dedication ceremony.

3.2. *The Loyola school court process*

The *Loyola school* court process in Quebec has led to an implicit mentioning of Reformed communities on the pages of mainstream media. In 2008, Loyola, a private Catholic high school in Montreal, tried to receive an exemption from the new secular course *Ethics and Religious Culture* (ERC)¹⁸ introduced as mandatory for both public and private schools in Quebec. In March 2015, in a decision of the Supreme Court of Canada, the ERC Program was determined to be "incompatible with Catholic education", and it was proclaimed that "Loyola would violate the fundamental and mandatory laws of the Catholic Church that govern it by teaching the ERC subject with the program established by the Minister"

(Loyola high school v. Quebec, 2015, para.144). Therefore, the Loyola school was allowed “to teach the ERC Program without sacrificing [its] own religious perspectives” (para.148). Otherwise, there would be an interference with “the freedom of religion guaranteed to Loyola” (para.289).

ARPA participated in this Supreme Court process. It established one of the interveners - the Association of Christian Educators and Schools Canada (ACES Canada¹⁹) - “to represent the interests of independent Christian education and to bring that perspective forcefully to the Court” (2014a, para.2). ARPA filed a Notice of Motion in the Loyola School appeal to the Supreme Court of Canada on behalf of ACES Canada. This document, created by lawyers Ian C. Moes and André Schutten, made allusions to Kuyper’s ideas about the paramount role of parents in the education of their children and *Sphere Sovereignty* concept: “In all areas of education, including religion, ethics and sexuality, parents are the primary decision-makers in, and directors of, their child’s education. These rulings recognize the distinct roles and functions of the institutions of the family and the State” (paragraph 24)²⁰.

Mainstream mass media does not mention ARPA’s role in this court process because many other organizations and associations participated in it. However, there are several articles published in the *Ottawa Citizen* and the *National Post* which are written by ARPA’s Director of Law & Policy André Schutten in defense of faith-based schools. He concurs with those theorists who consider that the state (Quebec in the Loyola case) has its own religion, which is secular humanism and is being promoted in opposition to Christianity or other religions. In fact, based on examples of various court cases and referring to Canadian legislation, André Schutten has already published a number of articles written in an understandable language for a mass readership in mainstream newspapers. His pieces cover a diversity of topics, including: a disdain for religious freedom and “Canada’s current trend toward intolerance of the Christian faith” (2015, p.5); a censorship posed on “a religiously motivated social conservative” expressed his position in public space (2013, p.12); the limited attention drawn to pre-born children in current legal cases (Schutten & Schouten, 2014, p.10). However, in contrast to the articles on legislation issues, which are characterized by coherence and validity, Schutten’s publications on religious schools in mainstream media sometimes need more compelling arguments. Thus, he raises the topic of parental role in education of their children (2014), but he does not present any proof to support his statements. In addition, it seems, there is a shortage of a vivid representation of Reformed communities’ standpoint in his articles (for instance, in the form of interviewees’ responses). In contrast, in the pieces written for the *Clarion*, Schutten refers to the Bible and theological works to confirm parents’ rights and obligations in educating their children. Also, referring to the research by Herman Bavinck, Schutten makes a historical allusion to the Netherlands in the 19th century. He compares the introduction of the ERC in Quebec with “the 1876 Law Concerning Higher Education²¹, which effectively turned university theology faculties into departments of religious studies” (Schutten, 2015, p.245). For Schutten, the ERC, not unlike the 1876 law, has changed “the study of religion into a “neutral”, phenomenological study rather than a confessional one” (p.245).

However, it would be unfair to say that the Reformed community maintains its stance only using theological arguments. It also draws on secular points, which, it could be argued, make an article more

reliable and accessible to a secular readership. Thus, in *Christian Renewal*, Michael Wagner reminds that “the Bible gives parents the ultimate responsibility for the education of their children”, but also shows that there is a secular parental rights theory (2015, p.24). He refers to “*On Educating Children: A Parentalist Manifesto*” written by University of Chicago Professor Stephen Gilles (1996). Gilles has introduced a concept “parentalism” (which “is clearly compatible with Christian assumptions”, p.26) to indicate that “parents should always have the right to make educational decisions for their children, unless there is some glaring reason why they shouldn’t (such as physical abuse)” (p.24).

3.3. Sex-education

Another frequently discussed topic is sexual education. Mainstream media has published many articles on sex-ed, but arguments in opposition to it have been presented in the majority of cases without giving specific information about the religious community that these arguments stem from. Newspaper articles usually refer to Christians in general or to other religious groups in general as well (Ansari, 2015; Class struggle: the sex-ed debate, 2015; Kay, 2015;).

As to the Reformed communities, both CanRC and URCNA are alarmed because of a new sex-ed program in Ontario schools²². For these Churches’ members, explains *Clarion*, “the material is completely age-inappropriate, is psychologically manipulative, does not warn against some of the sex practices discussed, and is implicitly immoral” – so, “the course is clearly hostile to biblical norms” (Van Dam, 2015, p.444). In addition, according to them, this new program corresponds to the general trend of not “assimilating gays into straight culture”, but “assimilating straights into gay culture” (Dykhhoorn, 2015, p.33). At the same time, continues *Clarion*, these Churches do admit that “confessionally Reformed people are woefully unprepared to defend the commonplace assumptions of untold generations of Christians regarding sex, gender, and marriage” (Kingsbury, 2015, p.240). Therefore, it is necessary not to ignore these topics, but they need “to be supplemented by a clear and robust statement of scriptural teaching on sex and gender” (Kingsbury, 2015, p. 239). But, in accord with the Kuyperian approach, it is a task for parents, not the state, “to guide the children in [a] sensitive area” (Van Dam, 2015, p. 444). Thus, it is Christian parents who “have the first responsibility to educate their children in a biblical world view in the fear of the Lord God, also when it comes to sexual matters” (Van Dam, 2015, p.445). Otherwise, Van Dam concludes in *Clarion*, the state is replacing parents in the process of child upbringing, claiming “the children as its own” (p.445) and dictating to children what to do.

While CRC emphasizes the importance of sexual education (in accordance with the Church’s teaching): “As our children grow up it’s important for the church to be a strong voice encouraging a healthy view of sexuality and promoting respectful relationships that honor our Lord” (CRC, 2016, para.1), its printed media seems not to be highly interested in this topic. This issue is covered only by some of the articles posted online. For instance, reflections of the think tank *Cardus* on sex-education are framed within philosophical debates on individualism, pluralism, and public reason. For instance, the author Iain Benson calls Canadian Christians not to enter into “a new round of wars about beliefs” against “the

“new sexual fundamentalists” who “have made “sexual orientation” an identity banner under which to march, [and] wish to impose their conceptions of what is and is not appropriate sexual conduct publicly”. It is necessary to rethink that “set of beliefs that will tear public education apart” and to “drop certain matters out of public education entirely” (2004, para.13-14). Further, Jonathan Chaplin insists on an honest public dialogue between representatives of two opposite worldviews - individualism or pluralism - in order to reach “workable, mutually respectful compromises” instead of “simply lambast[ing] each other as either secular liberal totalitarians or reactionary religious bigots” (2010, para.9).

To conclude, although the topic of sexual education is richly covered only in *Clarion*, the changes in regulations on sex-education in Ontario and Alberta during the last year and future amendment to them may entail an increase of interest in this topic by other Reformed communities.

Conclusion

Overall, Dutch Reformed Christians are represented in Canadian mainstream mass media as caring and hardworking members of the society. However, the practitioners of Reformed Churches with Dutch roots are usually depicted by mainstream journalists as a homogenous group. But in the case of immunization, a vague classification of Reformed Churches with Dutch roots leads to a generalized view that the majority of Dutch Reformed Christians refuse to vaccinate their children.

However, it seems that mainstream media still draws on old perceptions of Dutch Reformed Canadians as post-war immigrants, and usually mentions them during some celebrations or issues of new books related to World War II. Though some local newspapers (the *Hamilton Spectator* is a good example) have a tendency to explore the social role played by Reformed Churches in contemporary Canada, national media does not cover the participation of Reformed Christians in Canadian social life, including their views on various contentious questions. In addition, various ARPA’s activities are not covered. Therefore, mainstream media does not provide the audience with a multivocal representation of Reformed Christians and does not pay enough attention to the role conservative Christians play in Canadian sociopolitical space.

Furthermore, although representatives of ARPA present compelling articles in mainstream media, sometimes these texts lack a narrative storytelling and diversity of voices. In addition, these publications usually present a Christian perspective on an issue, without focus on real actions of Reformed community, coverage of which could change the narrative about Reformed Churches and also heighten an awareness of the role of Reformed Christians in the political realm.

Finally, I believe, there is a strong demand for research on Reformed social media and representation of Reformed Churches with Dutch roots in digital media. This type of research would give a more complex image of these Churches in the Canadian religious landscape; a better understanding of internal

theological conflicts; and a multifaceted understanding of various Reformed communities' approaches to challenges faced by Canadian society today.

¹ The term neo-Calvinism «refers not so much to a theological system, but to an all embracing world view which has a bearing on the whole of human life» (Wolters, 1983, p.117), including science, education, and art. Abraham Kuyper underscores that “the underlying characteristic of Calvinism must be sought not in what it has adopted from the past, but in what it has newly created” (Wolters, 1983, p.102). Kuyper was not an uncritical follower of John Calvin. That is why he added neo- to Calvinism to title his doctrine. For example, Kuyper strongly disagreed with Calvin's decision to sentence Michael Servetus to death by burning because the latter denied the Trinity and infant baptism. But Kuyper insisted that this penalty in fact was not a special feature of Calvinism, but “the fatal after-effect of a system, grey with age, which Calvinism found in existence, under which it had grown up, and from it had not yet been able entirely to liberate itself” (Kuyper, 2009, p.100).

² In this paper the terms “Calvinists” and “Reformed Christians” will be used as synonyms.

³ Liberal innovations mean women's ordination, lack of a tough stance on euthanasia, etc.

⁴ CanRC was organized by post-World war II Dutch immigrants “who had been members of the “liberated” congregation in the Netherlands” (Mouw, 2012, p.236).

⁵ Cardus is “a think tank dedicated to the renewal of North American social architecture”. Its aim is “to enrich and challenge public debate through research, events, and publications, for the common good”. Cardus “conducts independent and original research in key areas of North American public life”: Education and Culture; Health; Social Cities; Work and Economics; Family. It publishes two journals and one podcast, they are: Comment, Convivium; Cardus Audio (Cardus, n.d.a).

⁶ These events include: the fact that the Crown Princess Juliana, heir to the Dutch throne, sought refuge in Canada after 1940 and gave birth to a daughter in the Canadian capital city; the liberation of the Netherlands by Canadian forces, and one thousand Dutch brides brought in Canada after the war strengthened the connection.

⁷ Both surnames Bosma and Steenbeek are of Dutch origin.

⁸ It is an independent Christian school in Ancaster (Ontario), which was established in 1956 by the CRC members.

⁹ CAUT defines “faith test” as a requirement for “academic staff to commit to a particular ideology or statement of faith as a condition of employment” (CAUT, n.d., para.1).CAUT states that imposing “faith test”, “Universities violate academic freedom” (CAUT, n.d., para.1).

¹⁰ A book review by Nelson D. Kloosterman on Mees te Velde and Gerhard H. Visscher's book “Correctly Handling the Word of Truth: Reformed Hermeneutics Today”.

¹¹ Thus, the *Comment* tells about “the vicious implications of Kuyper's views <...> by advocates of South African apartheid” (Henreckson, 2013, pp.57-63); as well as about a role of the Reformed church and the African National Congress in the struggle for social justice (Muloiwa & Dijkema, 2015, pp.46-47).

¹² Professor of Dogmatology at Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary.

¹³ This is a list of Reformed churches in North America and that have roots in the Netherlands.

Reformed Church in America www.rca.org
Christian Reformed Church in North America www.crcna.org
United Reformed Churches in North America www.urcna.org
Canadian and American Reformed Churches www.canrc.org
Protestant Reformed Churches in America www.prca.org
Free Reformed Churches of North America www.frcna.org
Netherlands Reformed Congregations of North America www.netherlandsreformed.org
Heritage Reformed Congregations of North America www.heritagereformed.com

You can find more detailed information about the genealogy of Reformed churches in the Netherlands and North America in a post published by Mchael Zwiep: www.reformedtimeline.blogspot.ca

¹⁴ The Association for Reformed Political Action (ARPA) was organized by members of CanRC more than a half of century ago. In 2007 it was re-organized and has become a national, very fast developing organization. It exists due to donations and unites members of several Reformed Churches. Its main aim is “to educate, equip, and encourage Reformed Christians to political action and to bring a biblical perspective to our civil authorities” (ARPA, n.d., para.1). It has been involved in

various court processes defending the interests of Christian education; in discussions on the change of the legislation on euthanasia; in pro-life movement's events; etc.

¹⁵ Thus, for instance, in 1962 Canadian government "tabled new regulations <...> that virtually eliminated racial discrimination as a major feature of Canada's immigration policy. Henceforth any unsponsored immigrants who had the requisite education, skill, or other qualifications were to be considered suitable for admission, irrespective of colour, race, or national origin" (Government of Canada, Archived, n.d.). Also, introduced in 1967, a point system has been designed to attract high-skilled and well-educated immigrants. They are selected on the base of such factors as education, work experience, knowledge of either the English or the French language and other abilities which could help them to establish themselves successfully as permanent residents (and citizens if they meet several requirements) in Canada.

¹⁶ The 1917 Dutch Agreement is known as the "Pacification of 1917". It established equal funding for private and public schools. Hence, according to some historians, the "Pacification of 1917" gave "the impetus for the process of societal pillarization" (Fokas, 2009, p.405), because it promoted the idea of co-existence of several school systems. This principle has been working until nowadays. Today, most Dutch children attend private schools which compose two-thirds of all schools in the country. 91% of private schools are religious, "and religious schools make up 59 percent of all schools in the country" (Patrinou, 2009, p.20).

¹⁷ According to some scholars, religious schools are excluding institutions, because their students do not come to appreciate and understand other cultures: "no single type of school founded on religion <...> can contribute to the unification of society" (Atkins, 2001, p.7). Others (Kymlicka, 2001; Thiessen, 2001) argue that a statement that separating school system inevitably breeds intolerance has no empirical evidence. In addition, a high level of cultural congruence in these schools may help young people "to find their cultural and religious ways, and build appropriately diverse and distinct identities" (Ahmed, 2013, p.162).

¹⁸ In Quebec, where confessional school boards were replaced by linguistic ones (French and English) in 1998, parents of elementary and secondary school students had to choose between *Moral Education*, *Catholic Religious and Moral Instruction*, and *Protestant Moral and Religious Education* courses (Secular Schools in Québec. A Necessary Change in Institutional Culture, 2006, p.1). Ten years later this three-option system was replaced by *Ethics and Religion Culture* (ERC) program. It teaches students about religious diversity of contemporary society and how "to position themselves <...> with respect to religions and new religious movements" (Consultation on the Draft Ethics and Religion Culture Program, 2007, p.44).

¹⁹ ACES Canada represented "a broad coalition of independent Christian schools from across the country" and "was made up of six different regional umbrella Christian school groups" (Schutten, cited in Konyndyk, 2015, para. 12). It "represented well over 300 schools, which means 70,000 students, 6,500 teachers, and a broader Christian community of a quarter of a million" (Konyndyk, 2015, para. 13).

²⁰ The entire cost of this Supreme Court intervention was covered by ARPA Canada. From its point of view, "schools should be using their resources for teaching the next generation" and the role of ARPA is "to assist by doing the legal and political work" (ARPA, 2013, para.4). The last statement also reflects the realization of the "*Sphere Sovereignty*" principle, which argues that each social institution plays its own unique role.

²¹ It means that "rather than a confessionally normative dogmatic theology, a neutral, phenomenological approach to religion was mandated by law" (Bavinck et al., 2003, p.19).

²² The new Ontario Curriculum for Health and Physical Education has caused a lot of controversy "for the topics being introduced in the elementary school years, particularly teaching students the proper names of body parts in Grade 1, teaching students about different family structures (including same-sex parented families) in Grade 3 and teaching students about reproduction and consent in Grades 4-6". Also, "students will be expected to understand self-concept, gender identity and sexual orientation, and to consider decision-making around sexual activity, contraception and intimacy in relationships in Grade 8"; "for Grade 9, the curriculum focus is on understanding how to prevent pregnancy and STIs as well as understanding factors affecting gender identity and sexual orientation" (Ensslen & Ursel, 2015, pp.11-12).

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