

Van Raalte Institute Lecture Series

**Hope: The Legacy of Van Raalte**

**Rein Nauta**

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## **Hope: The Legacy of Van Raalte**



**Dr. Rein Nauta** spent April and May 2011 at the institute as the *Netherland-America Foundation (NAF) Visiting Research Fellow*. Dr. Nauta is *Professor Emeritus of Pastoral Psychology and Psychology of Religion in the Department of Religious Studies and Theology, Faculty of Humanities, University of Tilburg, the Netherlands*. A native of Enkhuizen, he earned both a BA in Psychology and an MA in Organizational and Industrial Psychology at VU University Amsterdam and a PhD in Social Sciences at the University of Groningen. After eighteen years as a senior lecturer at the University of Groningen, he spent twenty-one years at the University of Tilburg. He is the author of half a dozen books and numerous articles in books and journals in his field. The theme of his research project was “*Religious Leadership and Cultural Change*.” He focused especially on current religious leaders in the city of Holland, many of whom he interviewed in order to assess the enduring impact of Van Raalte’s vision and leadership upon the community that he founded in 1847. Nauta delivered his public lecture on 26 May 2011.

## ***Hope: The Legacy of Van Raalte***

Rein Nauta

While wandering around the campus in the first few days of my fellowship at the Van Raalte Institute, my wife and I were surprised to find two quite different reminders of hope. The first one could not be missed. It was the plaque in front of the anchor, with a reference from the letter from Paul to the Hebrews:

*“We desire that every one of you lay hold of the hope set before us; which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast.”*

The other one is more obscure. It is at the foot of a big rock next to the entrance to the DePree Arts Center. It tells the story of an Indian survivor of the battle of the Platte who, when he arrived at this place, started to build a school in order to save hope:

*After the carnage of the Battle of the Platte, warlord Minotauna Tano surrendered his sword to Nobunaga the Younger and wandered for several years until he came to this spot. Here he had a revelation; he would build a college in the wilderness, hewing the structures himself from the forest, braiding ferns into alumni, and the renten dunes into epiphanies. He called this unpeopled place Nozoimi, which is “HOPE” in the nipponic dialect.<sup>1</sup>*

Hope is not a marginal experience in the history of Hope College, nor a pious word easily used. Therefore in discussing the role of religious leaders in effecting a cultural change, in particular the legacy of Albertus C. Van Raalte in the contemporary religious context of this city, a short analysis of the meaning of hope might be relevant.

Most of my colleagues at the Van Raalte Institute would probably opt for an historical analysis of the concept, an analysis of the effects of hope in the dealings of Van Raalte, or the use and interpretation of that concept in his sermons, diaries, and letters. I, on the other hand, will develop some psychological notions of the concept of hope and will illustrate the relevance of that analysis for understanding Van Raalte’s leadership. I will then analyze Van Raalte’s leadership in more detail, including the conflicts in which he as a leader, and in particular as pastor, would unavoidably be engaged. I will end with an exploration of the legacy of Van Raalte by discussing what it means today to be religious in Holland, Michigan.

### ***Driven by hope: The courage to leave one’s home and family***

When the secessionist minister Albertus C. Van Raalte considered an emigration to the United States of America in the late 1840s, the attraction of freedom and space in the new country, better opportunities for work and welfare, and the wish to escape the

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<sup>1</sup> This “pseudo-historical” plaque was placed at the DePree Arts Center by Eames Demetrios, ca. 2002. It is part of a larger and very extensive project created by Demetrios called *Kymaerica*, which is an “alternate universe,” that reinterprets the American landscape, and whose fictional history is documented by a series of plaques marking many “important sites.” See [www.purecontemporary.com/article/eames-demetrios](http://www.purecontemporary.com/article/eames-demetrios).

harassment and persecution of the political and ecclesiastical authorities in the Netherlands were all relevant to his decision-making process. Such considerations were also relevant to those in his flock who wanted to confess their faith without the restriction of statist regulations and political domination, but rather in the ways of their fathers, on the basis of rules and order decided by the assembled churches together during the National Synod in Dordt in 1618-19. Apart from religious freedom, the possibility for a better life in terms of economic progress and social well-being helped many make the decision to leave the land of their fathers and follow their pastor and guide across the ocean to the land of the free and the home of the brave. This story has been told many times, and each time one reads or listens to a new version, one is in awe of the magnitude of the decision and the poor information on which it was founded. More than economic or even dogmatic considerations, more than expectations based on stories told or letters received, it must have been hope for a new life that led them to leave their country of birth for an uncertain future—a future in which they could truly be who they were, to become in full the person whom they believed themselves to be.

### *Hope and leadership*

If there is a case to be made for the relevance of hope, some knowledge of the particulars of hope may be useful in understanding the motivation of Van Raalte and his flock. There was no preconception of a promised land, of a paradise to be regained when these people took leave of their place of birth and left the graves of their forbears. They just hoped for a better life in which they would be free to confess their religion in the way they deemed right, and in which it would be possible to care for their children like they were cared for by their parents, perhaps even better. They were able to begin their journey to the unknown, because hope helped to conquer the terror of freedom, the threat of uncertainty.<sup>2</sup>

Hope is learned when, as children, helpless and impotent, we are totally dependent on the care of our mothers, on their ever present providence. To be able to defend oneself against the seductive force of grandiose illusions, one should have been able to trust the presence of such a caring parent. Too much trust, however, may lead to the seduction by glorious images of what should happen or to be misled by rosy projections of the future. To be able to hope, however, requires an accommodation to the exigencies of the moment, an adjustment to what is perceived as feasible. In order to be able to hope, that which is desired should be given up and exchanged for what is possible. We hope to make the best of it.

The importance of the mother to Van Raalte might be deduced from some of his last words. Before he died, he mentioned his mother. Sitting in his armchair, fully dressed, from coat to well-shined boots, with his children gathered around him, he longed in his suffering for some comfort: “Oh, if only I could rest my head on Mother’s breast for a while.”<sup>3</sup> Although he meant for his wife to comfort him, it was not uncommon in some families for the father to call his wife “mother” as a term of endearment. Whatever one might think of such a custom, it still expresses the importance of the mother figure in the life of many men, and also for Van Raalte. In this particular situation, when death was calling (7 November 1876), invoking the name of mother expressed the trust and hope that

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<sup>2</sup> Drewermann, “Sünde und Neurose,” 134.

<sup>3</sup> Jacobson, Bruins, and Wagenaar, *Dutch Leader*, 220.

were instilled by the loving care of a providential mother. In the case of Van Raalte, it might have been his wife, Christina de Moen, who provided him with the loving example of the most caring mother. But perhaps even more so his own mother might have been his example of strength and endurance. She, Catharina Harking (1775-1837), bore seventeen children between 1796 and 1822, ten of whom died before they were two years old, only three sons and four daughters survived. Albertus Christiaan was the eleventh child. Given the tragedy of each child's death, the mother might perhaps be better called a mother of sorrows.<sup>4</sup> But because of these tragic experiences, however, Van Raalte's mother might have loved and cared for her surviving children all the more. In an exemplary way she might have instilled in her son *hope* as the necessary basis for the great works he would prepare.

The basis for hope is in the trust relationship with the mother. In order to develop the capacity for hope, however, it is first necessary to give up one's own narcissism and to accept the fact that we are fallible and vulnerable, and in particular, not needed. To solve the paradox hidden in that condition—to be loved but not really worth loving—a transformation is needed in which the unavoidable frustrations of one's own interests are accepted, and the narcissistic indifference for what happens to other people is transformed into compassion for their fate, because one recognizes oneself in what is experienced by one's fellow men.<sup>5</sup> Characteristics of such a transformation of a primary narcissism into a more relative self-love are vital creativity, empathy, recognition of the finality of one's existence, a sense of humor, wisdom, and the ability to confront and accept one's own physical, intellectual and emotional limitations. In such a transformation, grandiose expectations and the need for affirmation lose their tyrannical qualities. Self-acceptance creates room for distance and critique and resists the temptations of over-valuation and self-aggrandizement. Such a ripened self-consciousness in which the transitory nature of life is assented does not include despair and resignation, but instills a humble pride in all the joys that life may still provide and considers with a certain disdain those great expectations that are just substitutes for a life never ending, because death is the most hurtful wound to one's innate narcissism and egoism.<sup>6</sup>

If one loves oneself in this transformed way, then it is possible to love others, too. If that is the case, self-sacrifice is not a necessary element in the performance of neighborly help and assistance, nor should such help be correlated with a spiritual heroism. In such a transformed self-consciousness, leadership is directed toward the welfare of those who are led, and not, as with a more narcissistic form of help and leadership, toward the support of the ailing ego of the leader.<sup>7</sup> I suppose that Van Raalte was a leader in this transformed sense. He was not a hero, nor a saint. To be able to lead others in the right way is perhaps possible only when the hero dies, when one is confronted with one's own mortality and the despair and darkness within oneself and can finally accept the ambivalence and ambiguity of life. Some of the courage of a saint is, however, needed; namely, to be patient, humble and meek. Such saintly courage may be a strong help in the fight against the seduction of

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<sup>4</sup> Bruins et al., *Albertus and Christina*, 192-200.

<sup>5</sup> Capps, "Sin, narcissism, and the changing face of conversion," 246.

<sup>6</sup> Kohut, "Formungen und Umformungen des Narzissmus," 581.

<sup>7</sup> Nauta, "Verleiden: leiden als leugen," 220-47.

idolatry and against ideals set too high. Such courage is not based on self-denial, but on self-acceptance.

Being the leader of the group of compatriots emigrating to the United States, Van Raalte took responsibility for their well-being, both spiritual and material. In particular, during the first years of their settlement in Holland, Michigan, he was the one who made the decisions conducive to the prosperous development of the colony: decisions pertaining to shops, schools, a church, a harbor, a mill, relations with tradesmen, with already settled farmers, with lawyers, and with the United States government. In all these decisions, the community was involved, directly or by representation, although not everybody agreed with his views. But still, Van Raalte was the strong man of the colony. As an intellectual among workers, as a minister of the Word, and as the pastor of his congregation, he was able to keep his fellow immigrants on the course on which they set out before they left: to establish a community which provided for the spiritual and material well being of its inhabitants for years to come. If any success of that endeavor can still be found today, then such a result should be understood as the legacy of Van Raalte. Where hope was central to the foundation of the whole enterprise, hope should also be the main effect of all Van Raalte's deeds and actions. Hope might be the legacy of Van Raalte for today.

### ***Dimensions of hope***

What is hope? Hope is not related to a specific object, but it is characteristic for a particular pose in life. Hope is an "ontic state" of redemption and deliverance.<sup>8</sup> The language of hope is one in which action is subordinated to relation. Hope presupposes some sort of passivity that is more or less identical to the situation in which the young child was cared for by the mother, and her presence could be trusted. Hope is not related to what one wants, or what is desired, but to the reality of what is *possible*. Hope is rather more connected to the *will* than to what one needs or wishes for.<sup>9</sup> Hope is related to the future because it is reinforced by the proof of what comes. For one who is driven by hope, reality is not stable and fixed but fluent and changing, full of unexpected challenges.

Hope is raised by the experience of tragedy, to be living in a wrong world, the experience of the overpowering strength of reality against the futility of the person. Hope presupposes an experience of despair and anxiety. If there were no reality that founded the experience of despair, there would be no reason for hope.<sup>10</sup> Hope is therefore grounded in *reality*. The essence of hope is not, as everyday thinking might perhaps characterize it, a daydream, longing for the impossible. Hope is not equal to an indifferent optimism either. Optimism presupposes some distance to reality. Possible barriers to success are minimized, while chances for positive outcomes are extremely enlarged. Hope is in fact realistic. Hope provides the impulse to make real what is not yet. On the other hand, expectations arising in such a situation of despair, in tragic catastrophes, are directed toward the unreal, the unlikely, the illusionary, the useless and futile—that which is unavailable. Such expectations have the effect of lessening any effort and motivation because expectation becomes a sort of waiting—waiting without effort to change the situation. Hope on the other hand requires work, activity, and action.

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<sup>8</sup> Marcel, 1951, 45.

<sup>9</sup> Carrigan, "Where has hope gone?," 43.

<sup>10</sup> Pruysser, "Phenomenology and dynamics of hoping," 86-96.



Hope is *relational*. The reality of hope is one in which a person is related to others, related to fellow human beings. It is impossible to hope alone, as a solitary person. Hope is not a product of the single person in his solitude. Hope is a gift—given, received, found, and shared. Hope is contagious, as is despair. Hope presupposes a shared dream, and is therefore an act of reciprocity. Sometimes hope is possible only if one can hope in the hope of others, like faith. When hope becomes a private project, it degenerates into an illusion, a daydream, a wish, a desire. The act of hoping is a double act: one hopes that what is hoped for will satisfy that hope, that which is longed for will of itself be given.

Hope is *global*.<sup>11</sup> Hope is not directed toward a particular object. Hope is perhaps better understood as an existential condition of the subject. It is the desire to be freed from the constraints by which one feels imprisoned, to forget the sorrows of everyday life. To hope for something concrete, a particular solution, or a certain satisfaction is rather difficult. In that case hoping is equal to desire and expectations. Hope is endless because of the infinite multitude of needs and shortages. Being non-specific, hope is never trivial: hope that the sun will shine tomorrow makes hope irrelevant. To hope for a particular something equalizes hope to an egocentric desire.<sup>12</sup> Hope supposes waiting, a situation in which modesty reigns.

To summarize: Hope is based on a tragic view of life, a rational interpretation of reality, a certain modesty in relation to the powers of nature and cosmos, a sense of community with others, the ability to resist immediate, impulsive action, and the courage not to deliver oneself to easy yet unrealistic desires.

### ***Mosaic and Pauline charisma***

The ability to instill hope, to express hope as an existential condition of life, may be perceived as an essential characteristic of charisma, as a gift of grace.

The perception of *authenticity* is a necessary condition for the attribution of charisma. Such authenticity in a leader is necessary for one to function as an example and symbol of purpose and value. When lifestyle is authentic, that is, when espoused values are congruent with public behavior, beliefs are recognized as convincing, and their relevance is accepted. If that is the case, because of its compelling integrity and exemplary de-alienation, charisma is attributed. Such authenticity of belief is unmistakably a characteristic of Van Raalte's public performance. In spite of harassment by the authorities, imprisonment, and lack of money, Van Raalte stood for his convictions.

Charismatic leaders are thus not only distinguished by the effectiveness of their behavior but also, as an implied and attributed consequence, by their personality. Charismatic leadership is, as Max Weber defines it, validated by "a certain quality of an individual's personality by virtue of which he is set apart from ordinary men and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities."<sup>13</sup> Although these qualifications of charisma as superhuman and supernatural may be too grandiose in the case of the secessionist minister Van Raalte, the ability to lead his flock safely across the ocean and to persevere in the enterprise that he began, not regarding the many

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<sup>11</sup> Pruysser, "Maintaining hope in adversity," 464.

<sup>12</sup> Marcel, 1960.

<sup>13</sup> Weber, *Charisma and Institution Building*, 48-49.

disappointments and unforeseen mishaps, certainly refers to an extraordinary strength of character and to a high degree of problem solving capacity and social intelligence.

Charisma attaches itself to those individuals or institutions that satisfy the need for an understandable solution of the exigencies of life.<sup>14</sup> The attribution of charismatic quality supposes what is thought to be a connection with some very central feature of man's existence—central because of its formative power in initiating, creating, governing, transforming, maintaining, or destroying what is vital in man's life. Faith was central in Van Raalte's life, but so too was the will to be free in the confession of that faith. This *centrality* coupled with *intensity* makes it extraordinary. That central power has often, in the course of man's existence, been conceived of as God, the ruling power or creator of the universe, or as some divine or other transcendent force controlling or markedly influencing human life and the cosmos in which it exists.<sup>15</sup> Those who represent such a power are usually treated with respect—but not always, as the case of Van Raalte shows.

While conflict, even with charismatic leaders, may be inevitable, charisma also has a collective and *collectivizing* effect—it transforms a group of individuals into a coherent community. While there may always be a danger of regression and overcompliance, commitment to belief and action and a revitalization of identity may still require the influence of a charismatic leader—a leader who integrates or reintegrates the collectivity by his or her personal authenticity and spiritual vision.

Although the provision of a frame of reference, of meaning and orientation, more than just the instrumental coordination of cooperation, is the main function of all kinds of leadership,<sup>16</sup> particularly charismatic leaders do function as guides and coaches providing direction and orientation.<sup>17</sup> If their leadership expresses in a recognizable way what the masses are ready to hear and provides orientation and direction toward a viable way of dealing with life's problems, then a charismatic quality is attributed to this leadership.<sup>18</sup>

When Van Raalte led his people to the shores of Lake Michigan, his leadership showed all the characteristics attributed to a charismatic leader. Not only was he instrumental in finding material resources and providing concrete ways for those farmers and laborers from the old country to establish themselves in the new land, but by doing so, he also gave them spiritual guidance and provided them with biblical interpretations of their endeavors. This helped them to understand and explore the new situation in which they were living and working in terms of the spiritual and biblical notions which motivated their travels in the first place.

Two forms of leadership may be considered to be relevant in interpreting the way Van Raalte guided his people into the New World. Max Weber<sup>19</sup> distinguished a more *prophetic*, exemplary type of charismatic leadership in which the example of the leader shows the way to salvation and redemption. The well known television preacher Robert Schuller from California, at least by his own account, might have been an example.<sup>20</sup> Weber distinguished this form of charisma from a more *missionary* type of leadership in which

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<sup>14</sup> Shills, "Charisma, order and status," 200.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 201.

<sup>16</sup> Smircich and Morgan, "Leadership—the Management of Meaning," 257-73.

<sup>17</sup> Bensman and Givant, "Charisma and Modernity," 28; Nauta, "Het kairologisch misverstand," 138.

<sup>18</sup> Erikson, *Insight and Responsibility*; Wilson, *The Noble Savages*; Stanford, "An examination of the sociological theory."

<sup>19</sup> Weber, *Charisma and Institution Building*.

<sup>20</sup> Stanford, "An Examination of the Sociological Theory."

the leader is the instrument to accomplish the mission prescribed by the gods. In the religious field one could think of evangelist Billy Graham.

Van Raalte should be acknowledged as a missionary type of charismatic leader. Providing support and guidance for those willing to *emigrate* to America, he was instrumental in realizing their wish to worship and confess their faith in the way they considered to be in accordance with the tradition of their fathers. The freedom of religion to be found in America was the main reason for the emigration. The uncertainty of their travels was made bearable by their trust in the divine providence and confidence in the leadership of their minister.

To better understand his leadership, however, a distinction should be made between a Mosaic type of leadership and a Paulinian type of leadership. The Mosaic leadership is directed toward production and output, to generate effects. The goal to be reached is set beforehand and defined in extrinsic, behavioral terms: a change is realized when the relocation to another country is successfully performed. Paulinian leadership on the other hand is directed more toward the process of change, the necessity of conversion. Moses is defined by the superego, the importance of duty, the necessity to objectify the divine into the law, while Paul identifies with Christ, with the grandiose self, a symbol of omnipotence.<sup>21</sup> Paul's *ambition* was to change the world.

Both Moses and Paul share some qualifications which are essential for a charismatic leader. Both are *marginal* men. Moses was a foundling, adopted by a princess; Paul was suspect among his people, because he was a Roman citizen. Van Raalte too was marginal in a certain sense. He was a secessionist preacher, a pastor in a far country, an educated man among ordinary people. The marginality, however, provides them all with a broader perspective on life.

Both Moses and Paul were *eloquent orators*, although Moses had a slight stammer in his speech. Van Raalte delivered hundreds of sermons: weekly on Sundays, on many occasions of joy or mourning, and on ceremonial or festive events; his sermons, however, were rather dull.<sup>22</sup>

Charismatic leaders are men full of *energy* and *decisiveness*. Moses guided his flock in its voyage through the desert to the Promised Land. Perhaps he was not the most professional of guides because the distance which could have been traveled in a few weeks took them forty years. Paul traveled without rest along the coasts of the Near Orient, the Middle East, and the frontiers of the Roman Empire.

Both Moses and Paul were *easily enraged*. Moses killed an Egyptian and broke the stone tablets when he saw how his people were dancing around the golden calf. Paul willingly helped when Stephanus was stoned and opposed Peter's authority. Van Raalte was perhaps better in controlling his emotions, but he was as energetic and directive in his business enterprises and other economic endeavors as Paul and Moses were in theirs.

Both Paul and Moses were very *vital* men, as Van Raalte must have been; they were able to perform well under pressure.

As Moses' leadership was foremost an *ethical* enterprise, Paul's leadership was more *esthetical*, inspired by a notion of the fragmentary.<sup>23</sup> Moses' charisma was *prophetic*,

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<sup>21</sup> Kohut, "Creativeness, Charisma and Group Psychology," 370-425.

<sup>22</sup> Spykman, *Pioneer Preacher*.

<sup>23</sup> Luther, "Identität und Fragment," 317-38.

centered on the introduction of the law, while Paul's charisma was more *mystical*,<sup>24</sup> to the celebration of love as the fulfillment of the law. Moses' charisma, validated by the performance of a particular task, was characterized by the notion of *finality*. Paul's labors are better defined by a sense of the *tentative*, by the provisional, the necessity to change for the better ever and ever again. Mosaic leaders represent *exclusive* values. These values hold together those who are similar because of birth and descent. Such exclusiveness creates a divide between those who belong and those who do not. Exclusiveness may be fundamental to any in-group, but may not sustain a community as a whole.

Paulinian leadership on the other hand represents *inclusive* values like solidarity and tolerance, because belonging depends on an individual decision. Paul, an apostle to the heathens, proclaimed the gospel of love and reconciliation. To those who lived in Galatha he wrote: "There is no longer Jew or Gentile, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus."<sup>25</sup> Inclusive values are the cement of each collective, of the relation between man and wife, and in particular, of the society as a whole. Although Van Raalte's aim in the settlement in Michigan was to keep his flock together, away from the disturbances and seductions of American life, in particular in the frontier area, he was open to use all that the American culture and society had to offer for the development of the colony. After entering the country, Van Raalte immediately contacted representatives of the Reformed Church in America (as the Dutch protestant church founded by the first Dutch colonists in the seventeenth century was later called), made friends with lawyers and fellow ministers from different denominations, and established relations with government officials and businessmen, all in order to promote the well-being of the colony.

In my opinion, then, Van Raalte was a Moses in his goal-directedness, his energy, his ethical orientation, the fulfillment of a given task, and the introduction of the law. But Van Raalte was more Paulinian in his emphasis on the need for conversion, the inclusiveness of values, and the importance of love and reconciliation. Because of this mix of attributes, Van Raalte was not just an American Moses,<sup>26</sup> but perhaps even more, an American Paul.

### ***Leadership and conflict***

Van Raalte's efforts to promote the good of the colony were not accepted without some protests and critical comments. Some considered his actions too costly, some complained about the harsh conditions in which they had to live, and some opposed his more or less authoritarian stance in matters concerning church and state. There were many deaths in the first years of the settlement. The winters were harsh and the money short. Even now it is quite difficult to understand how farmers from the friendly countryside of Drenthe and Overijssel in the Netherlands were able to create a place for themselves in the wilderness, among the thick woods and shallow marshes where, until that time, only Indians could make a livelihood. The beginning of the settlement was not easy; disappointment, mourning, and grief were unavoidable. The leader, **of course**, was perceived as the main cause of their misfortune.

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<sup>24</sup> Barnes, "Charisma and Religious Leadership," 1-18.

<sup>25</sup> Galatians 3:28 (NRSV)

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Bruins, "An American Moses," 19-34.

To understand conflict in organizations, and especially the fact that conflicts are mostly centered on the leadership, some digression must be made to explain the character of organizations. Organizations reflect the personality of the leader. Although structures and processes emerge out of day-to-day necessity in any organization, the form and content of those structures and processes are ultimately traceable to the founder. Miller and Droge have shown that, when other factors are equal, it is the founder's personality that determines organizational structure and identity.<sup>27</sup> This can be quite explicitly illustrated by the particular identities of different monastic orders in the Roman Catholic Church. The Augustine, Franciscan, Jesuit, Benedictine, and Dominican orders all have their own identity and profile due to differences in personality and orientation between their respective founders. Also, the people who work at the Bank of Holland differ from those who work at Meijer or Walgreens, and because of these differences in person and personality, the identity and culture of these organizations are different.

The identity of a congregation is also determined by the attraction between people. It is the people that gather together who determine the identity of congregational life; people who have certain preferences and share them with others. The congregation is, in fact, no more nor less than the religious assembly of "our kind of people." The Christian church provides a rich example of the premise that the people make the place. When the church itself may be identified with the person of Jesus Christ, the particular branches of that church express better the personalities and spirituality of their respective sources of inspiration: Arminius, Calvin, Luther, Zwingli, Wesley or whoever was once the main heretic or schismatic who preferred to start his or her own shop in the domain of the Lord.

Over time, the people attracted to, staying with, and behaving in organizations cause these organizations to be what they are. Through selection and recruitment procedures, organizations can be typed by people sharing many common attributes and differing only with respect to specific competencies. Thus, as an outcome of the attraction-selection-attribution cycle, organizations will have severely restricted the range of types of people in them.<sup>28</sup> In time, an organization can become so ingrown, that it begins to occupy an increasingly narrow ecological niche. When this happens, the organization can fail, even die.

The longer an organization lives, the stronger its identity becomes. But this also makes degeneration inevitable, particularly in the case of non-profit, voluntary organizations. When, with time, people, structures, and processes develop an ever better fit within a more and more circumscribed context, even the smallest change in such an environment can cause a catastrophe, because it disrupts the balance of the system. Moreover, the distribution of competencies and attributes will be such that adjustment turns out to be impossible. The paradox is that, owing to internal adaptation, external accommodation becomes impossible. As people feel at home in an ever smaller world, they become homeless when that world is slightly dislocated. If we assume that people make up an organization's identity, we must acknowledge that it is also the people whose selection and recruitment lead to an organization's inevitable downfall.

### *The inevitability of conflict*

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<sup>27</sup> Miller and Droge, "Psychological and Traditional Determinants of Structure," 539-60.

<sup>28</sup> Schneider, "People Make the Place," 437-53.

If this process also characterizes the dynamics of a church congregation, all congregations are doomed because of this inherent trend of attraction toward homogeneity and the fact that homogeneity is a handicap for adjustment to a changing environment. To survive, conflict is inevitable. Renewal is only possible when new, non-fitting members join the organization. In the case of a religious congregation, it is always the new pastor who disturbs the party. The new pastor, although selected to fit the requirements of the congregation, is always different from what he or she was expected to be. Although change is threatening to all those involved, uncertainty and ambivalence is therefore the result of any succession in the leadership role of a congregation.

In general, two types of responses to the ambivalence and ambiguity resulting from change occur. One is a strong separation between good and evil, blaming others for what has gone wrong, and another is to project onto others the anxieties that are in fact your own. What is striking in the manner of response is the strong tendency to overdo the separation of positive and negative aspects in oneself and in others, with good opposed to evil, liberal to orthodox, right to left, individual to community, friend to enemy.<sup>29</sup> What, in therapeutic practice, is referred to as a “splitting” presents itself in the everyday life of the congregation through the actions of at least two dissident groups. In nearly all congregations, there is one group glorifying the past, painting a rosy picture of things gone by (“when our former vicar was still here . . .” “when we still had afternoon services . . .”).

Such a splitting, a separation of feelings, protects against the threat posed by the ambiguity of everyday existence. In real life, there is never anything entirely good or entirely evil. Living with such ambiguity is not easy and often creates insecurity. As a protection against this insecurity, it is easier to create a world for oneself in which good and evil *are* separated. Such a separation of positive and negative feelings protects the self against the threat posed by one’s own ambivalence. This defence turns into disappointment when those who were invested with the person’s unbearable qualities do not behave in accordance with these projections. It is quite unacceptable and intolerable when somebody who has been made the personification of evil does anything right. Gossip and backbiting, lies and deception, and other kinds of emotional impudence poison the atmosphere and make a rational solution impossible—a rational solution that is not even sought, given the nature of the conflict.

The effect of such structural quarrels is that in any congregation, there is nearly always a group that turns against the minister,<sup>30</sup> and another one who protects the pastor. Such affective turbulence shows how the congregation as a whole is unable to simultaneously put together the positive and negative feelings (love and hate) experienced with respect to the minister, and instead decides to split them up and assign them to separate segments of the whole. The separation of the ‘good shepherd’ and the ‘evil pastor,’ however, erodes the ability to reflect and only exacerbates polarization.

The separation of good and evil is an example of the more general process of projective identification. Although it is a theological theme, it is not without psychological significance, as is evident from the daily trouble in the average congregation. Unpleasant feelings, the attendant ideas, and tendencies to take action are projected onto somebody else, who then subconsciously identifies with this projection. Doing so, that other person qualifies himself as different from myself, while nonetheless a relationship is maintained

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<sup>29</sup> Lyon, “Paranoid-schizoid phenomena,” 273-92.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

in which what is projected is experienced vicariously. It is a process that results in the conflicting parties behaving, against all reason, in such a way that the projections with which they are burdened are validated by their behaviour. Critics of some ecclesiastical policy are becoming ever more radical, feeling forced to take ever more extreme views. Conservatives feel they have to defend old values ever more forcefully, so that at least something of what they hold dear is retained. Those who are accused of being insensitive to the concerns of others become ever chillier. Those who were suspected of error and inconstancy become more insecure and tend to persist in their mistakes. In groups there are always people who, on account of their emotional history, attract certain projections and are willing to avail themselves of that opportunity. Thus, the habitual behaviors and standard preferences in relations with others are taken advantage of and exploited for the benefit of the emotional management of the group as a whole.

It is precisely the entry of a new minister which brings about such polarizing effects: the situation created by the minister's performance is full of uncertainties and ambivalence. In order to counteract that ambivalence (it is, after all, also an expression of one's own uncertainties and doubts), new factions and coalitions arise, creating among the group of like-minded people who had been stunned into speechlessness, a potential for change. This change is believed to be a revolution in thought and feeling. Every minister has an identity, an identity that is communicated to the congregation which has called this pastor to serve their community in good faith. Since supporters will gather around the newly called pastor, and those who disagree or feel disagreeable toward the new minister will leave, eventually, the congregation will become united but different after every succession in its leadership, because a new dominant faction arises with the coming of each new incumbent of the pastor's position. Those members of the congregation who no longer feel at home in their church will resign to the background and wait for a new opportunity, for example, the coming of a new minister, to claim their rights.

The conflict that was most significant in the first years of the colony was the dissent about the orthodoxy of the Dutch Protestant Church in America, of which the Michigan settlement formed the western classis. Given the analysis about congregational conflicts and dissatisfaction centering on the pastor, it is not surprising that in this case also it was the minister who was chosen as the center of the dissatisfaction. Van Raalte was involved in many conflicts: with his parishioners, with his church of origin, with authorities in his fatherland and in his country of choice, and with school supervisors and trustees.

When Van Raalte and his flock arrived in New York, they were met by Dr. Thomas De Witt, a minister of the Dutch Reformed Church in America, the church founded by the Dutch colonists of the seventeenth century. On their way to Michigan they received help and support from Isaac Wyckoff, pastor of the Dutch Reformed Church in Albany. Once settled in Holland, Michigan, Van Raalte intended to secure the support of the brethren in the East by establishing a formal connection by bringing the different Dutch emigrant secessionist churches in western Michigan together as a classis of the Dutch Reformed Church in America. Such a connection, however, was not well received by all the immigrants in the western classis of the RCA. Having left the Netherlands because of a conflict with the *Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk*, Van Raalte and his followers found themselves in America now a part of an apparently more liberal church, which in practice and doctrine was not very different from the church which had caused their emigration. Dissatisfaction with this situation developed into a conflict about the faithfulness to the

Canons of Dordt, and led eventually to a split between those who would found the Christian Reformed Church and those who remained with the Dutch Reformed Church, later in 1867 named the Reformed Church in America. Perhaps it was more than a theological dispute, however, since the secessionists in the early years after the *Afscheiding* had already made their own interpretation of the Dordt-based rules for church government. This latter conflict might be viewed as an expression of a more general feeling of discontent with the leader of the immigration. That feeling of dissatisfaction is quite easy to understand in light of the enormous difficulties that arose in the first years of the settlement. The scapegoat for their disappointments, for the many deaths and the general hardship of their day-to-day existence, was the man who had brought them to this place: Van Raalte. The people murmured against **their** Moses because they dreamt of the Promised Land but could not grasp that the Promised Land was the wilderness in which they lived.

Although Van Raalte was by nature a more Paulinian leader, the disappointed people projected their disappointments on him by calling him a Moses, who had lured them away from the abundance of Egypt. The conflicts were never over. Even the split in the RCA that led to the formation of the CRC may have been more a result of this disappointment in their chosen country and in the leader who had brought them there rather than a religious conflict per se. A conflict with authorities was easily transformed to the religious domain and solved by separation. Religion was the life sphere in which they felt most at home, and they knew the solution: secession. Van Raalte was different from all of the other emigrants not only in terms of birth, education, life style, language, and culture, but also in terms of his position as an ordained minister. Being the leader of the emigration and because of all these differences, Van Raalte was the most suitable person to be chosen as the cause for all that was not well or in some way produced dissatisfaction, the more so because everything that did go well also originated in his plans and efforts. In all this ambivalence, Van Raalte as leader of the colony could perhaps do no good, but never did any wrong.

### ***The legacy of Van Raalte***

What then is the legacy of Van Raalte? Van Raalte intended the Holland Colony to be a God-centered community.<sup>31</sup> In some respects, he succeeded in realizing his intentions, not only in the years immediately after the establishment of the city, but also in the later years of the settlement. Holland was like a city on a hill—so many churches were to be found there. When Americans came to Holland to establish new industries or to start shops or other mercantile enterprises, they introduced into the church scene new ecclesiastical varieties, albeit mostly of a protestant kind. The Catholic Church grew with the influx of migrant Mexican workers in the agricultural industry. Even today Holland is a religious town, although perhaps the characteristic of being God-centered would be too strong a description of all the public and private endeavors therein. The Yellow Pages lists about 150 churches in a variety of denominations. Most religious institutions in Holland belong to the Christian tradition, in many different shades of confession, but even Buddhist congregations are present to serve the needs of the population. Holland may be a religious town, but even so, many of its inhabitants are unchurched and do not confess any particular faith. Statistics for the City of Holland and the surrounding area indicate that 50 percent of

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<sup>31</sup> Bruins, “Albertus C. Van Raalte,” 4-11.



the one hundred thousand inhabitants belong to a church, but only half of this 50 percent will attend a service on Sunday.<sup>32</sup> This is despite the fact that there are quite a few mega churches in the area, both from evangelical and more orthodox origins, where in each of several services three thousand people will be seated.

Van Raalte's theological legacy may reflect both his theological preferences, a scholastic doctrinalism and a romantic pietism, both marking his Calvinist orientation,<sup>33</sup> as well as, perhaps typical of his creative, mission-directed, intellectual personality, his openness for the particular entrepreneurial and enterprising character of the American society.<sup>34</sup> His most enduring contribution, however, may be found in his support for Christian education, which is one of the reasons why he left the Netherlands, resulting eventually in the founding of Hope College. The effects or consequences of these three characteristics can still be recognized in the present-day city which again is attracting many new immigrants from Asia and Latin America, plus American retirees from all over the country. To explore the legacy of Van Raalte during my sojourn at the Van Raalte Institute as Visiting Research Fellow, I interviewed ten ministers of eight different denominations. I asked each of them about the history of their particular church, the critical moments in its development, its strengths and weaknesses, and their perspective of the future. The information about the legacy of Van Raalte that I received from the interviews, from discussions with my colleagues at the institute, from the literature I had read, and from the experience of participation in the daily life of the city and the college, might be ordered into three categories to which Van Raalte made significant contributions: theological, cultural, and educational.

### ***Theological***

Van Raalte was ordained as a minister of the Secessionist Church. He served the congregation of Mastenbroek/Genemuiden, where he, as the first pastor of the newly founded congregation, and his parishioners suffered much harassment and judicial persecution from the civil authorities. During his pastoral work in Ommen, he was involved in quite a few business enterprises in order to provide work for the poor. Although he never pretended to be a great scholar or theologian, most of his time before he went to America was spent teaching at the newly founded Theological School in Arnhem. His sermons were not very lively, at least not for the reader of today; they were rather dogmatic, scholastic explanations of texts from the scriptures or strict confessional explanations of the Heidelberg Catechism. Influenced by the *Reveil* movement during his years at the academy in Leiden, Van Raalte displayed a growing openness to a new Biblical perspective on the reformation of life, with an emphasis on the call to personal repentance and faith, grounded in soteriology, centering on sin and salvation. This was the case for many Secessionist ministers. According to Spykman,<sup>35</sup> his sermons show little or no awareness of the problems facing the community—poverty, sickness and health—or social conflict. He seldom addressed God's word directly to the problems of governmental oppression, the social order, immigration, church union and schism, or the Civil War.

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<sup>32</sup> [www.city-data.com/city/holland-michigan.html](http://www.city-data.com/city/holland-michigan.html).

<sup>33</sup> Spykman, *Pioneer Preacher*, 69.

<sup>34</sup> Krabbendam, "Het is al heel veel als hij blijft, die hij was," 174-94.

<sup>35</sup> Spykman, *Pioneer Preacher*, 70.

The sermons of Van Raalte, therefore, were hardly likely to have produced the munition to start the unrest that led to the separation between the Christian Reformed Churches and the Reformed Church in America. The decision to separate from the Reformed Church was, as discussed above, mainly founded on the suspicion that the Eastern Reformed Churches, who in all kinds of practical problems had been helpful to their brethren in the West, were historically more akin to the *Hervormde Kerk* in the Netherlands, the *Vaderlandse Kerk*, from which they had fled to America. To find themselves members of that church gave the impression that they had fled from rain to drip. The schism between RCA and CRC can be better explained by its historical roots than by the importance of an actual theological controversy; over time, the theological and doctrinal differences have become of lesser relevance, while the institutional effects of the separation have been felt up until now. If there are still theological differences, one of the pastors explained them in these terms: the CRC is against the world, while the RCA confesses to be different from the world.

In the history of any church whose pastor I interviewed, the experience of conflict is quite widespread and has not changed since Van Raalte experienced such tensions in his own congregation. Nearly always the pastor is involved. The reasons for such conflicts are mostly ethical or esthetical: new pews, the design of the church hall, a general feeling of a loss of orthodoxy, the wrong music, the communion of gay people, and other similarly difficult problems.

Although it might be too far fetched to attribute the religious diversity in the city of Holland to the legacy of Van Raalte, the dominance of feeling and emotion in many of the newly established churches confirms the more pietistic streaks in Van Raalte's theology and is in line with his optimistic personality. In Holland nowadays the largest and most optimistic churches are the independent ones. Those congregations belonging to the charismatic and evangelical movements, where the Spirit freely flows, whose utter concern is on saving the souls of sinners, and who expect from their members a substantial contribution to the life of the church and an active outreach to the community, are in some way the theological heirs of Van Raalte. Although far more open to modernity both in the gospel preached and the worship style expressed, they might express most directly the legacy of Van Raalte. Perhaps it might be his openness to new challenges and opportunities that would have made the introduction of contemporary music in the worship culture of the more conservative churches belonging to the Reformed tradition quite agreeable to him also.

### ***Cultural***

Quite opposite to what is generally accepted, the Dutch emigrants to America, those who traveled with Van Raalte, were not conservative.<sup>36</sup> In particular, Van Raalte—their leader—was open to all of what the new land had to offer. During his voyage on the *Southerner*, Van Raalte learned the English language. In New York, Buffalo, and Albany, he met with colleagues from the Dutch Protestant Church in America who advised him and helped his people. He understood the opportunities hidden in the wilderness better than his flock: “Because he was a true leader, he did not simply see a gleaming city and wish for it. Probably only he and his wife Christina with whom he shared his dreams, understood clearly that roughly-built houses and a log church in the forest, by the river, away from

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<sup>36</sup> Krabbendam, “Het is al heel veel als hij blijft, die hij was,” 174-94.

other communities, were the seeds and roots of what would flower in years to come. He also achieved what he considered to be a necessity for the settlement to flower: isolation. His people needed to be where they would have room . . . and not be limited or enclosed by settlers of other nationalities, but keep their unity and principles.”<sup>37</sup> Such a form of isolation might have been well advised for his flock, but cannot be held as a characteristic of Van Raalte himself. He was not a person who sought the solitude and isolation necessary for a contemplative life. He was a man of action. “Albertus van Raalte never envisioned an opportunity that didn’t excite him. He wasn’t perennially optimistic, but he was a spontaneous optimist. Throughout his life his heart leapt at the thought of new challenges, and he reacted to the possibility of new endeavors with the thought: ‘I could do that! I could do that well!’” As an entrepreneur per se he acted as the prototypical outgoing American amidst the closed and inner-directed community of the Dutch emigrants. Not only did he speak the language, but he was also well connected to influential church people in the East and to political figures in the state of Michigan. Because of those contacts, he was the trustworthy person to whom money for the development of the settlement could be lent at a time when the more structural representation—the *Volksvergadering*—of the city of Holland was not yet recognized. Although his business enterprises in the Netherlands before his emigration were not as profitable as they should have been,<sup>38</sup> Van Raalte was still able to take some money with him, to finance his travel to the United States and to use as the financial support for his business enterprises once he arrived. Convinced that he should be ready to take steps to lay the foundation of the settlement as soon as possible, he began to purchase land as soon as the location of the colony was settled. He bought the land to keep the price low, so that the farmers in the community could later purchase the necessary acres for their farms once the trees were felled and the woods cleared, and before the speculation of outsiders would have forced them to buy at inflated prices. But Van Raalte also bought land for his and his family’s private use as financial insurance for his old age. His ministerial salary, which was usually in arrears, was insufficient to keep up a manner of living deemed to be suitable for him and his wife. In the development of the city and of the colony, Van Raalte proved he was a rather sharp businessman, open to all sorts of enterprises. His American immigrant spirit, however, showed itself perhaps at its best when he assembled all forces to rebuild the city after the fire of 1871.

One might say that Van Raalte, as a businessman, was able to profit from all the opportunities that his new country provided; in fact, it might have been that he found his real mission in life here, both as pastor and businessman. Van Raalte was the motor and motivator in all kinds of economic enterprises in the settlement, which were necessary to its enduring welfare. Many sons and grandsons of the first settlers followed him on that path. Holland is not a city of retirees only. Among the descendants of those who traveled with Van Raalte, there are quite a few who have earned millions of dollars in their economic pursuits. That capital, in turn, has also been used for the good of the community.

His entrepreneurial legacy is found not only in the economic sphere but also in the style of leadership in many churches and in the ways they are motivating their congregations. The more independent, evangelical, and non-traditional churches provide the best examples. Those churches who direct their mission to the poor, the new

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<sup>37</sup> Jacobson, Bruins, and Wagenaar, *Dutch Leader*, 156.

<sup>38</sup> Swierenga, “Albertus C. Van Raalte as a Businessman,” 281-317.

immigrants, and blue collar workers have to act as entrepreneurs competing with all sorts of distractions that might mislead their potential clients and consumers. Some of the pastors of these new churches told me about their strategies to compete in the religious market: how to win the lost souls.

That church membership is no longer self-evident was a given to most of the pastors whom I interviewed. A strong and recognizable strategy is required to attract and keep the congregation alive. Not all the churches are equally attractive to potential members. Social and cultural diversification is as influential in determining the mix of participants in a particular congregation as is that church's confession of faith. As everywhere, religion in Holland, Michigan has become a middle class affair. When I interviewed those pastors of different churches, and asked them about the social level of their flock, quite a few said their congregants belonged to the middle- or upper-middle class: teachers, nurses, professional people, and businessmen. None of the pastors included the upper classes, and only three referred to blue collar workers and their families, or to the poor and the broken of heart as the mainstay of their congregation. Such a uni-cultural divide between the churches, however, is a problem in itself. Multi-culturality, in terms of race, income, climate, and status, appears more difficult to realize in practice than is confessed as necessary on all sides.

And when asked about the participation of young people, a few pastors told me that their youth ministry was attracting young families. Young people older than fifteen, however, were not so active anymore. Again, the independent and evangelical churches had developed more programs for keeping their youth interested and attached to the church.

That only a rather small segment of the population in practice forms the market to explore and exploit by the churches should be reflected on. To be a stronger player in that market, likeminded churches should perhaps think more seriously about a merger, notwithstanding differences in culture and denomination.

Holland is still a Reformed city, dominated by an American-Dutch ecclesiastical culture, although the future will be more multicultural and less insular because of the influx of new immigrants from the South and the West, from across the ocean. But even with such an influx of new immigrants and potential new church members, it might be difficult to say if this city is still as God-centered as it used to be. Although more than half of the people of Holland are church members, fewer than half of them attend church on Sunday. Perhaps indicative of a secularizing trend is the fact that the more established churches experience a deteriorating membership and/or expect a net loss in membership in the next few years. One of the pastors I interviewed told me she thought her church would be good for another ten years, because of the influx of retirees. After that period a decision had to be made if and how its future could be secured. It is a question many churches must answer. At least two solutions have been offered: one is active church planting as a challenge for young and eager pastors; the other is a merger between different churches.

### ***Educational***

Although one of the reasons to immigrate to America was the opportunity to establish Christian schools, once the immigrants arrived, they hesitated to make that decision. The first schools which opened in Holland, Michigan were public schools, paid for by the state. In practice, however, they were Christian because the teachers and the parents were Christian. To provide for the need for more well-educated people, and

especially for more ministers who could serve the growing colony, Van Raalte virtually singlehandedly established the Pioneer School, which led to the formation of the Holland Academy in 1857. College classes were inaugurated in 1862 by Philip Phelps, the principal<sup>39</sup>. The college was incorporated as Hope College in 1866 when the first class of young men graduated. Van Raalte worked hard to guarantee the financial basis of this institution by canvassing Dutch Reformed congregations and individuals in the East. Samuel Scheffelin, a prominent and wealthy businessman in New York City, was very generous in funding the colony's commitment to Christian higher education.<sup>40</sup>

Hope College developed over time into a flourishing liberal arts college, well funded, attracting many students from the Midwest and from farther afield, with a strong, highly regarded faculty. Although in the latter part of the last century, the idea that Hope College was a Christian college was not very explicitly marketed nor practiced; in recent years, however, that has changed.

At the beginning of my paper, I told you that when we had just arrived and were wandering around the campus, we found two reminders of hope. A few weeks later I found the third. During the coffee breaks at the institute there had been some ironic talk about the meaning of contemporary worship. To help me make up my mind about the pros and cons of jazz combos versus organ music, and of hymns versus singsong choral contributions, Jack Nyenhuis promised to take me to one of the short student services at Dimnent Chapel, held each Monday, Wednesday and Friday at half past ten for twenty-three minutes. Although without a particular notion about how such a morning service was conducted, I expected not so many students to attend, perhaps a few. When we entered the chapel it was full, bristling with laughter, people talking, embracing each other, music playing. The chapel was full of beautiful young people, many standing in the aisles, hundreds of them, between classes. The singing went along in Swahili, no organ, a jazz band played, then a senior student witnessed his faith, hesitant but convincing, expressing **their** common beliefs and hesitations in his personal confession. Open, active, full of doubts, full of hope, saying what everybody needed to hear.

Perhaps more than his pastoral and theological insights contributed to the spiritual life of his immigrant congregation, and more than his business acumen supported the entrepreneurial culture of the city, Van Raalte's most enduring, expressive, and visible legacy to the colony in the wilderness is Hope College. To prepare the college for the ever necessary adjustments to the changes of time and circumstance, its founder<sup>41</sup> referred to the meaning of hope. Apart from all the efforts in teaching and research, in those twenty-three-minute morning services in Dimnent Chapel, three times a week, all through the academic year, hope is most explicitly practiced.

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<sup>39</sup> Bruins, "Early Hope College History," 1-8.

<sup>40</sup> Bruins, "An American Moses," 29.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Elton J. Bruins and Karen G. Schakel, *"Envisioning Hope College: Letters written by Albertus C. Van Raalte to Philip Phelps Jr., 1857 to 1875"* (Holland/Grand Rapids, MI: Van Raalte Press/Eerdmans, 2011). In this research, Bruins demonstrates that Philip Phelps Jr. was, at the very least, a cofounder of Hope College with Van Raalte.—Ed.

### *A word of thanks*

I express my gratitude to the director and staff of the Van Raalte Institute for awarding me the Van Raalte Research Fellowship 2011. To be able to work among so many learned historians provided me with a strong experience of dedicated scholarship. The research directed toward the life of Van Raalte and to the history of the settlement of Dutch immigrants in the Midwest and in Holland, in particular, is far more interesting and important than the small scale and scope of the domain of study might suggest. As a psychologist I support the thesis that the intense study of the unique makes it possible to hypothesize about what happens in general.

I thank my colleagues for their inspiration, their interest in and support of my work. I thank them for their hospitality and the warm welcome my wife and I received in their midst. In particular I will thank JoHannah Smith, office manager and editorial assistant, for all her efforts to make us feel at home away from home.

I thank also all those pastors who were willing to discuss with me the legacy of Van Raalte in the setting of the modern Holland, of today. I am impressed by the depth of their inspiration and by the fruit of their works.

Once back in the Netherlands, I often remember the not-easily-forgotten daily coffee breaks we shared at the institute, taking more or less an hour. Daily events and business matters were reviewed and church politics were criticized, but most of the time a broad range of historical questions were hotly discussed. It showed me the intellectual mind in action.

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**Mission Statement**

The A. C. Van Raalte Institute is a department of Hope College. Hence, its mission relates directly to and supports the mission of Hope College, an undergraduate liberal arts institution offering academic programs in the context of the historic Christian faith. The institute is closely related to another department of Hope College, the Joint Archives of Holland.

The mission of the institute is to honor the memory and the vision of the Reverend Dr. Albertus C. Van Raalte, the founder of Holland, by studying his life and work. From this mission also is derived the scholarly investigation and publication of materials concerned with the immigration and the contributions of the Dutch and their descendants in the United States of America. Furthermore, the institute is dedicated to the study of the history of all segments of the community throughout its history.

The institute derives its vision from a letter dated 27 November 1846, by A. C. Van Raalte, written shortly after his party landed in New York. As he was headed westward, he declared, "I hope that a large colony can be established here in America which will focus its work on the Kingdom of God." His vision also extended far beyond the boundaries of Holland, Michigan, to other colonies and immigrants throughout the United States. The bold Christian vision that he had for the church, education, and community continues to have an impact on the "colony" that he found on 9 February 1847, and on the college which he helped to establish fifteen years later.

The institute carries out its educational mission not only through research and publication, but also through the sponsorship of lectures and presentations by its members and its invited guests. Through liaison with scholars and educational and cultural institutions in the Netherlands and other countries, the institute seeks to promote the understanding of the history of this community. From time to time, the institute will host visiting scholars from these countries to enable them to engage in research in our local archives and to provide a broader perspective to our own endeavors.

