

**CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF GUILLAUME GROEN VAN PRINSTERER'S
CHRISTIAN-HISTORICAL PRINCIPLE, WITH A COMPARATIVE CRITICAL ANALYSIS
OF HIS ARGUMENT OF 'HISTORY' WITH THAT OF EDMUND BURKE'S AS USED IN
THEIR CRITIQUE OF THE FRENCH REVOLUTION**



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ABSTRACT

This thesis provides an analytical interpretation of the critique Dutch nineteenth-century statesman-cum-historian Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer (1801-1876) articulated of French revolutionary ideology. It achieves an original reading of Groen's thought as Protestant right-order theory, which connects it to that of a small group of contemporary British-based political theologians and their minority view on the ontological grounding of justice. Using *Overzicht* ('Overview'), Groen's earliest published exposition of his Christian-historical thought, as the foundation for our analysis, we show that his thought presupposes the existence of divine moral order. This order is the expression of God's truth as revealed in Scripture, and while itself intangible, is manifested in tangible experience. Groen's critique of the Revolution pivots on the fact that it denies this moral order and thereby denies 'God's right'. We demonstrate that Groen's concept of 'unbelief' signifies the denial of 'God's right', while upholding 'God's right' in the area of government denotes his concept of the 'divine right of government'. Our analysis of his concept of 'God's right' shows Groen to be a Protestant right-order thinker. Reading Groen as a Protestant right-order thinker achieves a clarification of the functions that Scripture, 'nature', and 'history' have in his thought, disposing long-standing misinterpretations. Our comparison of Groen's argument of 'history' with that of Edmund Burke achieves original critical leverage on their concepts of 'history' and their views of the historical state. It draws out that Burke's critique of the Revolution purposes to re-affirm English common law, while Groen's is an *apologia* for Christianity. Our analysis fills a void in Burkean scholarship that has neglected his concept of 'history', and achieves an original reading of its common law-use. An original translation from Dutch of *Overview* is offered as appendix.

LONG ABSTRACT

This doctoral thesis has sought to achieve three main aims. Firstly, it provides an analytical interpretation of the critique Dutch nineteenth-century statesman-cum-historian Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer (1801-1876) articulated of French revolutionary ideology. This critical analysis aims to achieve an original reading of Groen's thought as Protestant right-order theory. Cognizance of Groen's Protestant right-order stance connects his nineteenth century political thought with that of a small group of British-based twenty-first century political theologians, prominently represented by Joan Lockwood O'Donovan and Oliver O'Donovan. Secondly, this thesis offers a critical analytical comparison of Groen's argument of 'history' as used in his critique of the French Revolution, with that of Edmund Burke's critique of the Revolution. This comparison aims to fill a void in Groenian scholarship that lacks a comparative critical analysis of this rigour. The critical analysis of Burke's concept of 'history' similarly aims to fill a void in Burkean scholarship that has acknowledged the importance of the concept of 'history' in his thought, but has largely neglected it. Thirdly, this thesis seeks to achieve greater awareness of Groen's Christian-historical thought among English-language scholars, who are largely unaware of Groen's political thought, despite the manner it has foreshadowed important later intellectual streams and has had (indirect) influence on North American intellectual life.

As a backdrop for Groen's thought for Anglophone scholars largely unfamiliar with him, this study follows an introduction of Groen's person and work, with a discussion of the Belgian Revolt and the Dutch *Réveil*, two uniquely Dutch experiences that marked Groen's life and were, because of its

ideological dimension and its interpretation of history respectively, catalytic for the development of his thought.

Chapter two provides an analytical critique of Groen's first published exposition of his thought. Using this 1831 publication as the foundation for our analysis, we have argued Groen's thought to be in essence an interpretation of history, which he understands to have both temporal and ideological, intangible aspects. We have argued that he posits the revolutionary era to be driven by the ideological feature of 'unbelief'. Our critical analysis has perceived that Groen's concept of 'unbelief' signifies the denial of 'God's right', of which revolutionary history is a factual expression.

Building on our interpretation that Groen's critique of the French Revolution pivots on its denial of 'God's right', chapter three analyses critically his concept of the 'divine right of government', using primary sources beyond his 1831 publication. Our critical analysis has sought to make clear that Groen's 'divine right of government' denotes upholding 'God's right' in the arena of government. Cognizance of this achieves affirmation of our initial reading of 'unbelief' as the denial of 'God's right', clarifies aspects of Groen's Christian-historical thought that seem contradictory, and reveals Groen's Christian, theocentric constitutional theory to be Protestant right-order theory. By reading Groen as a Protestant right-order thinker we propose an interpretation of his thought that has been neglected by scholarship. It aims to reveal a connection of his nineteenth century Christian-historical thought to that of a small group of twenty-first century British-based theologians, averring the modern-day relevance of his thought. We have proposed three contributions that Groen's right-order thought

makes to the current debate among Christian theologians on the question how justice is ontologically grounded, in which contemporary right-order theorists, notably Joan Lockwood O'Donovan and Oliver O'Donovan, defend the minority position that justice is ultimately sourced in a 'matrix of objective obligations established by God's right', and not in inherent, subjective human rights. The distinctly Protestant stance of Groen's right-order theory offers a different angle of the theory to the debate than that which the O'Donovans' more Scholastic right-order position offers, thus widening the discussion. We have, firstly and secondly, argued that Groen's Protestant right-order stance challenges the debate to acknowledge that rights have political and social context attached to them. His stance elucidates more opaque contemporary right-order theorists' positions, in particular their cultural pessimism and their suspicion of anthropocentric constitutional theory, and widens the parameters of the debate by introducing into it the time-tested Dutch concept of sovereignty of spheres. Thirdly, we have sought to show that Groen offers a model for a hope-filled, optimistic cultural and political engagement that seeks to uphold right order in the context of a political reality that has largely rejected it, propelled by a glad willingness to witness to the Gospel.

In chapter four we have deepened our analysis of Groen's polemical argument of 'history' by comparing it critically to that of Burke as he uses it in his critique of the French Revolution. We have first argued that a fruitful comparison between the two statesmen's critiques is possible because both regard the Revolution as primarily ideological. This makes the important differences in their experiences of the Revolution, Burke at its very start and

Groen after the Congress of Vienna, insignificant for our purposes. Secondly, we have sought to elucidate Groen's and Burke's *concepts* of 'history' by making a comparative analysis of their views of the Dutch and English *historical* state. Our critical comparison has sought to show that in the context of the state both understand 'history' to be a manifestation of the demands of 'nature' and time. Our critical analysis of their use of 'nature' has led us to conclude that both Groen and Burke define 'nature' in terms of the divinely given moral order or right order. For Groen, 'history' is the tangible manifestation over time in events and the fates of people of the intangible right order, of 'nature'. Our reading of Groen as a distinctly Protestant, as opposed to Scholastic, right-order thinker has made apparent what the functions are of Scripture, 'nature', and 'history' in his thought. It has achieved an original clarification of their hierarchical position in relation to each other and thereby disposes long-standing misinterpretations. For Burke, 'nature' or right order finds its expression in the English context in the (unwritten) English ancient constitution. 'Nature', furthermore, determines the normative value of both Groen's and Burke's arguments of 'history' in that its imperative use is restricted to history's 'genuine' expression, which is in turn determined by its alignment to moral order. We have argued that both Groen and Burke assume that a constitution reflects the essence of the historical state in its alignment to right order. Our analysis has led us to conclude that Groen's and Burke's understanding of a state's historical (unwritten) constitution as the expression of God's universal moral order in the particular context of a particular people mirrors that of each other, even if they do not both use reference to the constitution in their critique of the

French unhistorical, revolutionary state. Whereas Burke uses the English ancient constitution as his direct reference point for proof of alignment with right order in the context of the English state, Groen does not point to the Dutch (written) constitution but points instead to the revelation of the Scriptures for the determination of alignment with right order. We have aimed to show that the reason for this difference lies in the fact that the written Dutch constitution of Groen's day no longer gave a local, Dutch, expression to universal right order in the same way that the unwritten Dutch constitution or the combination of historic rights at the time of the Dutch Republic had done. This offers clarity on the question why Groen, in contrast to Burke, does not use the argument of the Dutch constitution in his critique, despite shared presuppositions about the historical constitution. It further explains why Groen contra-poses historic *rights*, which in their unique combination reflect the unwritten constitution of the historical state, against the revolutionary *state*.

In the second half of chapter four our comparative critical analysis of Groen's and Burke's normative *use* of 'genuine history' has sought to show what Groen's and Burke's standard for reform are. We have argued that neither Groen nor Burke is opposed to constitutional changes or progress, and that both insist such change must be done to reform, not abolish, and that in order to preserve. We have argued that alignment to right order is the standard both use, Groen explicitly and Burke implicitly, to determine whether constitutional changes have been made 'historically'. It has revealed the right-order stance of both in their assessment of the value of historical development, and has laid bare their right-order evaluation of the historical

state. For Burke reform needs firstly to preserve the moral unity of the state's multi-generational partnership. Secondly, it needs to steward for posterity the Christian civilisation that the present generation is entrusted with, and thirdly needs to approach reform reverently, in acknowledgment of the sacred nature of the state given by God. For Groen, upholding the 'divine right of government' ensures alignment with right order in the context of the state. While both Groen's and Burke's critiques of the French Revolution pivot on its denial of right order, Groen is, differently from Burke, not categorically dismissive of it and acknowledges that some revolutionary changes should be respected. We have argued that Groen's right-order theory's Protestant emphasis may explain this difference as Burke's more Scholastic leaning right-order theory does not acknowledge the divine *Lawgiver's* personal, direct involvement in history. For Burke, God's role in history is indirect and 'mysterious', along 'unknown dispensations', which fits with the Scholastic, more impersonal 'matrix of obligations'.

We have concluded chapter four's comparative critical analysis of Groen's and Burke's polemical arguments of 'history' by an analytical comparison of the wider purposes both have for using their argument of 'history'. This has led us to argue that Burke's critique purposes the re-affirmation of English common law, which he judged under attack by radical Englishmen, who wished to implement French revolutionary ideology in England. Our analysis has sought to show that Burke's thought is a continuation of seventeenth-century common lawyers'. It recognises Burke's right-order stance in his identification of the English ancient constitution with traditional natural law, and supports the reading of Burke's thought as a

continuation of older common-law ideas. Our analysis of Burke's polemical argument of 'history' hopes to have originally shown that Burke's use of the argument of 'history' is that of the common law. Our analysis of Groen's wider purpose for his use of his polemical argument shows it to be an *apologia* for Christianity. Groen aims to call the Dutch people back to the Christian faith, to submission to God and acceptance of the Gospel, also in the arena of politics. His is an invitation for the Netherlands to yet again uphold 'God's right' in all areas of life.

Drawing together our findings we have concluded that both Groen's and Burke's critique of the French Revolution pivots on its denial of right order, the contours of which Groen mines from Scripture, and Burke mines from English common law. By their critique they seek to defend the right order in their Dutch and English political societies that is attacked by French revolutionary ideology. Burke does so by the re-affirmation of the English common law and Groen by the re-affirmation of Christianity.

As an appendix, an original English translation from Dutch of the earliest published exposition of Groen's thought that acted as the foundation for our study, and that has not previously been translated, is offered.

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INTRODUCTION

Similarly to the rise of Christianity and the Reformation, the French Revolution changed the life of Europe. Like these other great movements in European history, the Revolution 'destroyed the landmarks of the world in which generations of men had passed their lives, because it,' too, *The Cambridge Modern History* explains,

was a movement towards a completer humanity, and because it too was a religion, with its doctrines, its apostles, and its martyrs. It brought on the stage of human affairs forces which have moulded the thoughts and actions of men ever since, and have taken a permanent place among the formative influences of civilisation.¹

In the immediate euphoria of the Revolution's promise of a 'completer humanity' and of a political society marked by '*liberté, égalité, fraternité*', one voice raised a sobering critique: Edmund Burke (1729-1797). Burke's poignant, negative assessment of the Revolution seemed vindicated by the Reign of Terror, and the revolutionary wars and conquests, a few years later. His counter-revolutionary stance was taken up on the Continent, in the Netherlands by Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer (1801-1876).² With Burke, this Dutch statesman-cum-historian regarded the Revolution to be religious in nature and momentous in its propulsion of modern Europe, regressively into barbarism, not progressively towards greater civilisation. Groen, as his name is usually shortened, sounded the

¹ G. P. Gooch, 'Europe and the French Revolution', in *The French Revolution*, ed. A. W. Ward, G. W. Prothero, and Stanley Leathes, vol. 8, *The Cambridge Modern History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1907), 754.

² Groen [ɣru:n] literally means 'green'. In Dutch the 'g' is pronounced like 'loch', the 'r' is guttural, and 'oen' sounds like 'balloon'.

depths of the French revolutionary ‘forces which have moulded the thoughts and actions of men ever since, and have taken a permanent place among the formative influences of civilisation’. These forces, he concluded, are ideologically driven. They are propelled by ‘unbelief’ as the history of the Revolution demonstrates.

a) Aims of this Doctoral Thesis

This doctoral thesis is a critical analysis of Groen’s critique of the French Revolution’s ideological presuppositions, and his argument of ‘history’ for its substantiation. The study seeks to achieve three central aims.

Firstly, it aims to achieve an original reading of Groen’s political thought as Protestant right-order theory. Reading Groen as a Protestant right-order thinker clarifies the functions that Scripture, ‘nature’, and ‘history’ have in his thought, thereby disposing some long-standing misinterpretations. It also connects Groen’s nineteenth-century thought to that of a small group of twenty-first British-based political theologians, prominently represented by Joan Lockwood O’Donovan and Oliver O’Donovan. We will argue that Groen’s ideas make a contribution to the contemporary discussion in Christian political theology on the ontological grounding of justice in inherent human rights or in right order.

Secondly, this thesis offers an original comparative critical analysis of Groen’s argument of ‘history’ with that of Edmund Burke in their critiques of the French Revolution. This comparison aims to fill a void in Groenean scholarship that has given much attention to Groen’s concept of ‘history’, but misses a rigorous

comparative critical analysis of it with that of Burke.³ It similarly aims to fill a void in Burkean scholarship that has acknowledged the importance of the concept of 'history' in Burke's thought, but has largely neglected it. It aims to achieve an original reading of Burke's common-law use of his argument of 'history', and his identification of the English ancient constitution with traditional natural law in this respect. It reveals Burke's right-order stance, and supports the reading of Burke's thought as a continuation of older, pre-revolutionary ideas.

Thirdly, this thesis seeks to achieve greater awareness of Groen's Christian-historical thought among English-language scholars. It hopes to generate interest in his Protestant right-order thought through cognizance of its contribution to the contemporary theological debate on the ontological grounding of justice. The comparative critical analysis of Groen's polemical argument of 'history' with that of Burke's positions his Dutch critique in the context of the Anglophone critique of the French Revolution, aiding the accessibility of his right-order thought to English-language scholars. As an appendix, this thesis offers an original English translation from Dutch of Groen's earliest published exposition of his Christian-historical thought.

³ Studies on Groen's concept of 'history' include: H. Smitskamp, *Groen van Prinsterer als historicus* (Amsterdam: H. J. Paris, 1940); W. G. F. Van Vliet, *Groen van Prinsterers historische benadering van de politiek* (Hilversum: Van Vliet & Uitgeverij Verloren, 2008); G. Harinck and R. Kuiper, eds., *Groen van Prinsterer en de geschiedenis: historische opstellen* (Kampen: Uitgeverij Van den Berg, 1994); R. H. Bremmer, 'Groen van Prinsterer en de geschiedenis', *De Reformatorische School*, 1 March 1977, 3–23; R. Kuiper, 'Wie maakt de geschiedenis? Groen van Prinsterer over Goddelijke ordeningen in de geschiedenis', *Transparant* 3, no. 2 (1992).

b) *Groen's Intellectual Influence in the Netherlands and
Beyond*

Groen's thinking merits broader familiarity among English-language scholars because of the stature of his Christian-historical or anti-revolutionary principle, and its influence on Dutch political and social history, alone. But the (indirect) influence of his ideas beyond Dutch borders, felt particularly in North American intellectual life, also makes it a worthwhile aim to bring his thought out of its anonymity.⁴ The fact that his ideas foreshadowed important later intellectual streams equally merits their wider recognition. Groen was ahead of his time in his anti-totalitarian thinking, many elements of which are worked out in works of twentieth-century thinkers like Eric Voegelin, Raymond Aron, and Karl Popper.⁵ His 1847 classic *Ongeloof en Revolutie* ('*Unbelief and Revolution*'), published a year before *The Communist Manifesto*, preludes the later anti-totalitarian reaction to Marxism-Leninism. It also demonstrates the politically dangerous consequences

⁴ The key figure of this indirect influence is Dutch statesman and theologian Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920), Groen's mentee, whose intellectual impact was importantly felt in North America. Kuyper's famous Stone Lectures on Calvinism, held at Princeton Theological Seminary in 1898, and his articulation of 'neo-Calvinism', partly explain this. His contributions to European Christian Democracy, his importance for Dutch emigrants worldwide, and the way he has been, as Mark Noll points out, 'a guide for many leaders of evangelical higher education in America, a special inspiration for modern Christian philosophers, and a stimulus with his concept of "worldview" to active culture warriors in our own day', is another reason for it: Mark A. Noll, 'Introduction', in *Abraham Kuyper: Modern Calvinist, Christian Democrat*, by James D. Bratt (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2013), x.

Thinkers influenced by Kuyper and the neo-Calvinism he championed include Herman Dooyeweerd, Herman Bavinck, George Marsden, Mark A. Noll, Nicholas Wolterstorff, Alvin Plantinga, J. Gresham Machen and Cornelius van Til.

Institutions associated with neo-Calvinism in the United States include Calvin College and Calvin Theological Seminary in Grand Rapids, Michigan; Dordt College in Sioux Center, Iowa; the Center for Public Justice in Washington, D.C., and Trinity Christian College in Palos Heights, Illinois. In Ontario, Canada, these include Redeemer University College in Ancaster, and the Institute for Christian Studies in Toronto. In particular Calvin College and Calvin Theological Seminary are rooted in Kuyper's theological heritage: Allen Parsons, 'Calvin College', ed. George Thomas Kurian and Mark A. Lamport, *Encyclopedia of Christian Education* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015).

⁵ Of note are Eric Voegelin's *Political Religions* (1938) and *From Enlightenment to Revolution* (1975), Raymond Aron's *Introduction to the Philosophy of History* (1938) and *The Opium of the Intellectuals* (1955), and Karl Popper's *The Poverty of Historicism* (1944) and *The Open Society and Its Enemies* (1945).

Voegelin's *From Enlightenment to Revolution* has been called 'one of the most outstanding parallels' to Groen's *Unbelief and Revolution*, which pre-dates it by nearly 130 years: Bernard Zylstra, 'Voegelin on Unbelief and Revolution', *Anti-Revolutionaire Staatskunde* 46, no. 5/6 (1976): 155.

of the ‘doctrine of perfectibility’, both of man and of society, decries the madness of social engineering and constructivism, and gives a rudimentary analysis of the concept that Jacob Leib Talmon would in the late twentieth century describe as ‘totalitarian democracy’.⁶ Groen’s dismissal of the modern dichotomy between radical liberalism and conservatism, both united in their apostate humanistic assumptions about the goodness of man’s nature, furthermore importantly laid the foundations for the concept of Christian Democracy, and the Christian philosophy of law developed by Herman Dooyeweerd. As this thesis shows, Groen also foreshadowed current-day critique of inherent human rights by nearly a century and a half.

c) *Parameters of this Thesis*

The breadth of Groen’s work makes a disciplined, limited focus necessary. His thought invites critical analysis of more of its aspects than the scope of this thesis allows. This means that important topics such as his views on the church and state relationship, the function of property, education, and the ‘people’, as well as a thorough study of the influences on his thought cannot be included here. They invite further academic research in addition to the excellent work that has been

⁶ Paul Cliteur, *Natuurrecht, Cultuurrecht, Conservatisme: Grondslag van de democratische rechtsstaat* (Leeuwarden: Universitaire Pers Fryslân, 2005), 294–7. Talmon’s work convincingly shows how the ideology of the *philosophes* eventually resulted in Marxist-Leninist thought, by way of Saint-Simonianism and positivism. See Talmon’s *The Origins of Totalitarian Democracy* (1952); *Political Messianism: The Romantic Phase* (1960), and *The Myth of the Nation and the Vision of Revolution* (1981).

done on these topics already.⁷

We will limit our study to the essence of Groen's Christian-historical or anti-revolutionary principle. Our focus centres on its two most distinctive facets: the ideological feature that determines its essence and the role Groen attributes to 'history' as his polemical argument. The latter is his tangible 'proof' so to speak for the accuracy of the former. Our approach is that of a Christian political theologian, not an historian. Our ambition is to bring out Groen's political theory, without asking how factually accurate his assessments of historical events are.

⁷ See Matthijs Pieter Thomassen à Thuessink van der Hoop van Slochterer, 'Kerk en Staat volgens Groen van Prinsterer' (Doctoral Thesis, University of Groningen, 1905); J. A. J. H. S. Bruins Slot, 'Groen van Prinsterer bij het herstellen der hiërarchie in de Rooms-Katholieke kerk in Nederland' (Doctoral Thesis, Free University of Amsterdam, 1931); Jan Willem Kirpestein, 'Groen van Prinsterer als belijder van Kerk en Staat in de negentiende eeuw' (Doctoral Thesis, Free University of Amsterdam, 1993); Johan Zwaan, *Groen van Prinsterer en de klassieke oudheid* (Amsterdam: Hakkert, 1973); Johannes Louis Petrus Brants, 'Groen's geestelijke groei: Onderzoek naar Groen van Prinsterer's theorieën tot 1834' (Doctoral Thesis, Free University of Amsterdam, 1951); T. De Vries, *Mr. G. Groen van Prinsterer in zijne omgeving* (Leiden: Sijthoff, 1908); J. L. Van Essen, *Een ziel van vuur: Opstellen over Groen van Prinsterer en zijn omgeving* (Leiden: Uitgeverij Groen en Zoon, 1992); A. C. Leendertz, 'De grond van het overheidsgezag in de antirevolutionaire staatsleer' (Doctoral Thesis, University of Leiden, 1911); G. J. Vos, *Groen van Prinsterer en zijn tijd, 1857-1876, Studiën en schetsen op het gebied der vaderlandsche kerkgeschiedenis* (Dordrecht: Revers, 1891); G. J. Grashuis, *De Leer van Groen van Prinsterer*, vol. 1, *Geloof en wetenschap in de Nederlandsche Staatkunde: Twee levensbeelden* (Baarn: Hollandia-Drukkerij, 1903).

**CHAPTER ONE: GROEN VAN PRINSTERER: FACTORS CATALYTIC FOR THE
DEVELOPMENT OF HIS CHRISTIAN-HISTORICAL THOUGHT,
WITH AN INTRODUCTION OF HIS PERSON AND WORK**

This thesis is an analytical interpretation of the critique of French revolutionary ideology voiced by Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer (1801-1876), a Dutch nineteenth-century statesman-cum-historian. Groen, whose thought and public service had an enormous impact on the Dutch cultural, religious and political landscape, has been called 'the Dutch Edmund Burke'.⁸ Along with Johan Thorbecke (1798-1872), he is a signpost figure of nineteenth-century Dutch history.⁹ He marked his time in ways that are similar in significance to the ways in which figures like the Princes of Orange William the Silent (1533-1584) and Maurice (1567-1625), and Johan van Oldenbarnevelt (1547-1619) and Johan de Witt (1625-1672) marked their time.¹⁰ His impact and thought deserve wider recognition, also outside Dutch-language circles.

Before we direct our attention to Groen's thought, which is the focus of this study and of the chapters that follow, we will in this chapter give a brief introduction of his country, person and work. We will close by a discussion of two factors that

⁸ Paul Cliteur, 'Conservatisme—een beknopte bibliografie', *Civis Mundis*, no. 26 (1987): 131.

⁹ Johan Rudolf Thorbecke (1798-1872) was one of Groen's close friends at university. He is arguably the most important Dutch political figure of the nineteenth-century.

Thorbecke was one of Groen's fiercest political opponents during the many years both served in parliament. Particularly regarding questions about the emerging new constitutional identity of the Netherlands, Groen and Thorbecke held radically opposing views. Their debates impacted the formation of the modern Dutch state. Remarkably, their antagonism in political life did not detract from their friendship and mutual respect, which they maintained their whole lives. Tiemen De Vries, *Handleiding tot de kennis van het Leven en de Werken van Mr. G. Groen van Prinsterer* (Appingedam, the Netherlands: Van der Ploeg, 1895), 16–7. See on the initial intellectual kinship between Groen and Thorbecke J. B. Manger, *Thorbecke en de historie* (Utrecht: Hes Uitgevers, 1986), 81.

¹⁰ De Vries, *Handleiding Leven en Werken Groen*, 9.

were catalytic for the development of Groen's Christian-historical or anti-revolutionary thought.

I. GROEN'S COUNTRY

A. Early Nineteenth-Century Constitutional Identity of the Netherlands

The country into which Groen was born was a French vassal state. Following the French Revolution in 1789, the French revolutionary army had with the help of French-oriented local progressive activists occupied the Netherlands in 1795.¹¹ The occupation resulted in the fall of the Dutch Republic (1581-1795) and the creation of the Batavian Republic (1795-1806).¹² In 1798 the first Dutch written constitution was adopted, which significantly removed sovereignty from the provinces and centralised government as per French example. In 1806 Napoleon Bonaparte, who had declared himself Emperor of France two years earlier, replaced the Batavian Republic by the Kingdom of Holland and placed his brother Louis Napoleon on its throne. Louis Napoleon was king until 1810 when Napoleon's First French Empire annexed the Kingdom of Holland.

Liberation from French occupation was achieved in November 1813, when the Dutch, in a move that stole a march on approaching Prussian and Cossack liberating troops, liberated themselves. It started the Restoration Period,

¹¹ See R. C. Van Caenegem, *An Historical Introduction to Western Constitutional Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 149.

¹² Strictly constitutionally speaking, the Batavian Republic only lasted from 1795-1801, after which it became the Batavian Commonwealth ('*Bataafsch Gemeenebest*') due to constitutional changes. The Batavian Commonwealth lasted from 1801-1806 but continued to be referred to as the Batavian Republic, also in state publications.

following the return from English exile of William Frederick VI of Orange (1772-1843), son of the last stadholder of the Dutch Republic. During this period, which lasted until 1848, the Netherlands was a country in search of its identity. French occupation had not only looted the country's vast material wealth and conscripted its boys to fight in Napoleon's wars, with many never to return from the Russian front. The years of French occupation had also radically changed the country's constitutional makeup and had neutered its Church. After 1813 the country had to redefine its constitutional and religious identity. The Dutch Republic was not reinstated, nor was the former sovereignty returned to the provinces. Instead, William Frederick declared himself 'sovereign prince' and in 1814 a new constitution was adopted that gave the king centralised powers.¹³ A year later, after Napoleon's defeat at Waterloo, the Great Powers created the united Kingdom of the Netherlands ('*Koninkrijk der Nederlanden*') at the Congress of Vienna.¹⁴ It consisted of the Southern Netherlands, an area roughly equivalent to modern-day Belgium, and the Northern Netherlands and was meant to be a buffer to France.¹⁵ The prince of Orange declared himself King William I of the newly established kingdom. The artificial union only lasted fifteen years, and the

¹³ The 1814 Constitution gave parliament minimal participation in government. It 'provided for a strong monarch, assisted by ministers who were individually responsible to him. Retained of the Napoleonic regime were not only the uniformity in justice, taxation, finance and coinage, but also a strong central government': Harry Van Dyke, *Groen van Prinsterer's Lectures on Unbelief and Revolution* (Toronto: Wedge Publishing Foundation, 1989), 14.

¹⁴ The Dutch fought alongside the British, Prussians and Cossacks at Waterloo and Quatre-Bras, under the command of William Frederick, who had previously fought Napoleon's army in Spain under command of the Duke of Wellington. Recent historical research has contradicted the negative view of Dutch participation in the fight against Napoleon, propagated by William Siborne's *History of the war in France and Belgium, in 1815* (1844). See Louis Ph. Sloos, *Onze slag bij Waterloo. De beleving van de overwinning op Napoleon in Nederland* (Nijmegen: Uitgeverij Vantilt, 2015); Ben Schoenmaker, Jeroen van Zanten, and Jurriën de Jong, *Waterloo: 200 jaar strijd* (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Boom, 2015); Mark Van Hattem, Mariska Pool, and Mathieu Willemsen, *Voor Napoleon. Hollanders in oorlogstijd, 1792-1815* (Bussum, the Netherlands: Uitgeverij THOTH, 2005).

¹⁵ As the Duchy of Luxembourg formed part of the Southern Netherlands at the time, William I also became Grand Duke of Luxembourg at that same time.

Belgian Revolt of 1830 further jolted the Northern Netherlands's identity.¹⁶ The Netherlands' national life transitioned to a 'more modern phase' with the ratification of the 1848 Constitution, which forms to this day the foundation of the modern Dutch state's parliamentary democracy.¹⁷

B. Early Nineteenth-Century Religious Identity of the Netherlands

The period of French occupation from 1795 until 1813 was one of serious spiritual decline in the Netherlands. Following the disbanding of the Dutch Republic and the establishment of the Batavian Republic, a strict separation of church and state was instituted in 1796. As per French revolutionary example, church properties had been nationalised and any public display of religion was forbidden, even the tolling of church bells. When the Netherlands regained independence in 1813, the position of the Church vis-à-vis the state was necessarily re-evaluated. The state returned church properties, albeit not to the local churches that had been their original owners, but to the national Church. While the post-1813 measures restored to the Church some of its former influence on the state, the state maintained its control over the Church, and the Dutch Reformed Church was not re-instated to the privileged position of influence on state policies and government it had had during the Dutch Republic. On the contrary, William I, in true enlightened despotic fashion, imposed his influence on

¹⁶ The Belgian Revolt raged from 25 August until 4 October 1830, when independence was declared. The coronation of Leopold I (1790-1865) as the first king of Belgium on 21 July 1831 marked Belgian independence formally, but the Netherlands only recognised Belgian independence in 1839.

¹⁷ Van Dyke, *Groen van Prinsterer's Lectures*, 7.

The 1848 Constitution importantly limited the power of the king, transferring responsibility for state policy from him to the ministers. This constitution, in conjunction with Thorbecke's Provinces Act and Municipalities Act of a few years later, form the foundation for the three layers of Dutch governmental organisation. In this model government power is effused between the state, the provinces and the municipalities.

the Church. He sought to bring order in the kaleidoscopic medley of loosely connected self-governing church communities by issuing a 'General Regulation for the governance of the Dutch Reformed Church of the Kingdom of the Netherlands', effective as per 7 January 1816.¹⁸ This General Regulation introduced a hierarchical, pyramided structure of top-down, centralised church governance that was monitored by the state. It was a radical departure from the presbyterian principle that had stood at the basis of the Dutch Calvinist ecclesiastical organisation since the Synod of Dordrecht (1618-1619), and had guaranteed the Church's previous autonomy from the state.¹⁹ The General Regulation under the new model accorded the state in the person of the king influence on the national Church.²⁰ It thus relegated the Church to a position similar to that of an association of citizens within the state. The status of the Dutch Church was henceforth no longer that of a unique, spiritual community that independently from the state exerted moral and spiritual influence on it.

The restoration period that followed liberation from the French has been characterised as intellectually and spiritually dull, complacent, sluggish and lethargically stagnant.²¹ This was accentuated by the Northern Netherlands' sense

¹⁸ The Dutch name for 'General Regulation for the governance of the Dutch Reformed Church of the Kingdom of the Netherlands' is '*Algemeen Reglement voor het bestuur der Nederlandsche Hervormde Kerk in het Koninkrijk der Nederlanden*'. The General Regulation changed the name of the Church from Nether-German Reformed Church ('*Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk*') to Dutch Reformed Church ('*Nederlandsch Hervormde Kerk*').

¹⁹ Under the old model the members of the lower ecclesiastical management bodies nominated the members of the higher ecclesiastical management bodies. As per 1816, the (state) Department for Reformed Worship ('*Departement voor Hervormde Eredienst*') nominated the members of the highest bodies, the national assembly of the synod ('*de landelijke synodale vergadering*') and the provincial church governments ('*de provinciale kerkbesturen*').

²⁰ The General Regulation only regarded the governance structure of the Church. It did not touch on any matters of doctrine.

Effectively, the Dutch Provinces that had lost their local sovereignty with the fall of the Dutch Republic in 1798, also in matters of religion and the church, never regained it.

²¹ Van Dyke, *Groen van Prinsterer's Lectures*, 16.

of bewilderment after the Belgian Revolt of 1830.²² Against the backdrop of spiritual decline and the national Church's loss of independence and influence, and political upheaval, three movements came to the fore in the 1830s that importantly marked nineteenth-century Holland. All three sought to positively build up the nation in this time of restoration and search for national identity. All three arose in reaction to the growing rationalism of the age. This rationalism had on a national level infiltrated theology as much as it had taken hold of politics and philosophy. In response, the three movements sought to articulate the essence of Christianity in a new way. They each fostered Christian revival and importantly determined the country's nineteenth-century religious identity. Each also sought to redefine what it meant to have a national Dutch identity, and placed great importance on history. They were the movements of the Groningen Theologians, the Reformed Seceders (*Afgescheidenen*) and the *Réveil*.²³ It goes beyond the

²² Fred Van Lieburg, ed., *Opwekking van de natie. Het protestantse Réveil in Nederland* (Hilversum: Verloren, 2012), 108.

²³ The Groningen Theologians taught that Christ had come to reveal to people what God is like and to educate their divine potential so as to allow them to become like Him. Christianity was not primarily a matter of the mind, they insisted, but rather of the heart. Faith was expressed, they taught, in life and morality, not in doctrine. Hence unity in the Church was to be found in the unity of love, not in a unity of doctrinal understanding. The Groningen Theologians emphasised feeling. This emphasis betrayed the influence of Romanticism on the movement. It also highlighted similarities with Schleiermacher's (1768-1834) thought, which the Groningen Theologians introduced in the Netherlands. But the Groningen Theologians accentuated, contrary to Schleiermacher, that the highest good is not religion as a feeling of dependency but rather a feeling of love. See J. Vree, *De Groninger godgeleerden: de oorsprong en de eerste periode van hun optreden, 1820-1843* (Kampen, the Netherlands: Kok, 1984), 153–60, 338.

The movement's emphasis on the subjective experience of Christianity fostered its latitudinal tendencies. Jesus' person was considered of greater importance than His teachings. The Groningen Theologians never denied the historical reliability of the Gospels and the bodily resurrection of Christ, and did not deny the importance of the Scriptures. This is exemplified by their labours for Bible distribution. However, their interpretation of the Scriptures was less orthodox and they contended that God's revelation was to be found in church history in addition to exegesis of the New Testament. Over the decades the movement became more latitudinarian. It came to deny the doctrine of atonement and the divinity of Christ, who only appeared to be human so as to show the way to God. See John B. Roney, *Culture and Customs of the Netherlands*, Cultures and Customs of Europe (Santa Barbara, Calif.: Greenwood Press, 2009), 62.

ambition of this chapter to discuss these movements critically. Suffice it to note that they demonstrate the importance of Christianity, defined along lesser or more orthodox lines, for nineteenth-century Dutch social and intellectual life. One, the *Réveil* movement, deserves more elaboration, because of the important influence it had on Groen's life.

1. The Réveil

The *Réveil* was an evangelical movement with roots in Scotland and Geneva. It 'was a blend of native Calvinism and the Methodist-inspired revival that appeared in various centres throughout Western Europe.'²⁴ In the Netherlands its way had been prepared by such figures as Willem Bilderdijk and Isaäc da Costa.²⁵ But the

The Seceders ('*Afgescheidenen*') were a group of orthodox Christians who seceded from what they called 'the Church of 1816' out of concern of the Church's loss of orthodoxy, to return to the 'teaching, discipline and worship of the Reformed fathers'. Their concerns regarded not only the latitudinarian preaching that was tolerated in the Church but also the manner in which the Reformed Church had come under the influence of the state following the 1816 General Regulation. Van Dyke, *Groen van Prinsterer's Lectures*, 34. On the draconian disciplinary measures that William I subjected the Seceders to, see Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer, *Handboek der geschiedenis van het vaderland* (Amsterdam: Wormser, 1895), 872–4 (§ 1073–4). Based on Napoleon's *Code Pénal*, state permission was required for the religious gathering of more than twenty persons. Existing and recognised church communities were exempt from this requirement. See Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer, *Briefwisseling, 1808-1833*, ed. C. Gerretson, vol. 1, *Schriftelijke Nalatenschap* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1925), 554, footnote 4. Arguing that the Church of 1816 was the new church body, not their group, the Seceders refused to ask permission for their meetings. As a consequence many Seceders were imprisoned, had their meetings disrupted, were fined and had to endure that soldiers were stationed at their houses. G. J. Schutte, *Mr. Groen van Prinsterer* (Goes: Oosterbaan & Le Cointre, 1976), 56–57. When in the mid 1840s the Netherlands went through economic depression and potato blight, many of the persecuted Seceders decided to emigrate to Iowa and Michigan. Albertus van Raalte and Antonie Brummelkamp were two prominent Secession preachers who lead their congregations to the U. S. A. See also Van Dyke, *Groen van Prinsterer's Lectures*, 33.

Groen published a strong critique of the government's treatment of the Seceders: Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer, *De maatregelen tegen de Afgescheidenen aan het staatsrecht getoetst* (Leiden: Luchtmans, 1837). Only in 1840, when William II had become king did the persecutions stop.

²⁴ Van Dyke, *Groen van Prinsterer's Lectures*, 21.

See for the larger international context of the *Réveil* movement: Ami Bost, *Mémoires peuvent servir l'histoire du réveil religieux* (Paris: Meyreuis, 1845). Timothy Stunt, 'Geneva and British Evangelicals in Early Nineteenth Century', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 32, no. 1 (January 1981): 35–46; Timothy C. F. Stunt, *From Awakening to Secession: Radical Evangelicals in Switzerland and Britain, 1815-1835* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 2000). Robert M. Bigler, *The Politics of German Protestantism: The Rise of the Protestant Church Elite in Prussia, 1815-1848* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972).

²⁵ For Bilderdijk, see below when we discuss Groen's education.

Réveil-proper came to the Netherlands through William I's court chaplain in Brussels, pastor Jean-Henri Merle d'Aubigné (1794-1872) from Geneva.²⁶ This gifted preacher championed the orthodox reformed Christian faith, combined with an emphasis on personal conversion and an inner experience of new life in Christ, which also marked the movement. It was a call to return to the simple faith of the Reformation fathers. The Reformation and the sixteenth century were regarded to hold lessons for today, and were looked to for inspiration. The movement's occupation with history was an important focus alongside its emphasis on simple faith and inner renewal through Christ. The influence of such giant historical minds as Bilderdijk and Merle d'Aubigné at the movement's beginning significantly advanced this interest.²⁷

Groen defined the *Réveil* as 'Christianity's endeavour towards its roots, towards a fuller grasp of the Evangelical system, towards a more rigorous and wide-spread application of Christian principles to life.'²⁸ The emphasis on personal study of the

Isaïc da Costa (1798-1860) was a member of the Sephardic Jewish community of Amsterdam who had attended Bilderdijk's lectures in Leiden while a student there. He had embraced Bilderdijk's Calvinist convictions and had been publically baptised. Da Costa is famous for his *Zeitkritik*, importantly his hotly debated 1823-work *Bezwaren tegen de geest der eeuw* ('Grievances against the Spirit of the Age').

²⁶ Roney, *Culture and Customs of the Netherlands*, 62. Merle d'Aubigné was King William I's chaplain in Brussels from 1828 until 1830. He was originally from Geneva. See on Merle d'Aubigné also John B. Roney, *The Inside of History: Jean-Henri Merle d'Aubigné and Romantic Historiography* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1996).

While in Brussels Merle also became the president of the Consistory of local French and German-speaking Protestant churches. He was a prominent figure in the international *Réveil* movement and the Evangelical Alliance.

See also "Merle d'Aubigné" in T. De Vries, *Mr. G. Groen van Prinsterer in zijne omgeving* (Leiden: Sijthoff, 1908), 47-9.

²⁷ Merle d'Aubigné was a very knowledgeable and accomplished historian, as his five-volume *The History of the Reformation of the Sixteenth Century* (1835-1853) and eight-volume *The History of the Reformation in Europe in the Time of Calvin* (1863-1878) attest. These works brought him an international recognition as (church) historian.

²⁸ Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer, 'Vervolg van Le parti antirévolutionnaire et confessionnel. 1860/1', in *Bescheiden, 1842-1876*, ed. Johan Zwaan, vol. 2, *Schriftelijke Nalatenschap* (The Hague: Instituut voor Nederlandse Geschiedenis, 1991), 275.

'Un effort du christianisme vers sa source, vers une compréhension plus ample du système évangélique, vers une application plus rigoureuse et plus étendue des principes chrétiens à la vie humaine'.

Bible as the divine manual for all of life was a central feature of the *Réveil*. The movement was in many ways a continuation of eighteenth-century Protestant Pietism with its many gatherings for worship in private homes.²⁹ One of the earliest important figures in the movement was Isaäc da Costa, who for many decades held regular ‘Sunday evenings’ at his home in Amsterdam.³⁰ Another significant *Réveil* man was Jean Charles Isaac Secrétan (1798-1875), pastor of the Walloon Church in The Hague, where Groen and his wife went to church and at whose Friday evening Bible studies they were faithful participants. Groen would become an important figure in the movement.³¹

In conformity with its pietistic roots, the *Réveil* originally had a decided focus on personal piety and on staying ‘unpolluted’ by the world. Groen’s 1829-1832 publication of the periodical *Nederlandsche Gedachten* (*Dutch Thoughts*) significantly broadened this inner-looking focus and made the movement more outwards looking. *Dutch Thoughts* advocated the Christian’s responsibility to be involved in public affairs. Political and social activism subsequently also became part of the *Réveil*’s focus.³² Social causes included the organisation of ‘sewing classes for young girls, Christian nursery schools, and tuition-free day schools for children of the lower classes —all of which included in their curriculum a heavy dose of Bible stories and Christian doctrines.’ Christian education was an

²⁹ Laymen often led these gatherings, or conventicles as they were called. The meetings sought to encourage a lively faith in Christ at a time when sermons at the official churches, Reformed, but also Lutheran and Mennonite, were often filled with ‘cold and dry orthodoxy or (increasingly after 1750) optimistic and superficial rationalism’. The erosion of the Calvinist identity of the Reformed Church during French occupation (1795-1813) had made the conventicles all the more popular, drawing Christian people from various walks of life and church backgrounds together: Van Dyke, *Groen van Prinsterer’s Lectures*, 22.

³⁰ Da Costa did so from 1826 onwards.

³¹ Other important names are Cornelis baron van Zuylen van Nijvelt (1777-1833), Willem de Clercq (1795-1844), and Carel Maria van der Kemp (1799-1862).

³² M. Elisabeth Kluit, *Het Protestantse Réveil in Nederland en daarbuiten, 1815-1865* (Amsterdam: H. J. Paris, 1970), 205.

important aspect of the movement, especially so as the so-called 'neutral' state schools began to lose their former Protestant character more and more. Social justice, including the fight for the abolition of slavery, and help for the poor were important points of attention for the movement.³³

In politics, the movement aligned closely with Groen's anti-revolutionary views, perhaps due to his influence in the movement. The *Réveil* galvanised and encouraged evangelically minded believers in the Netherlands across social and ecclesiastical divides, and connected them to an international network of like-minded orthodox believers across Europe.³⁴ Groen called the *Réveil* 'the middle party' between the more latitudinal Groningen Movement and the more orthodox Seceders.³⁵ From humble beginnings, it grew in the years 1834-1867 into an influential party within the Dutch Reformed Church, and consequently also in Dutch society.³⁶

³³ Van Dyke, *Groen van Prinsterer's Lectures*, 21–9. Groen was chair of the Dutch Society for the Promotion of the Abolition of Slavery ('*Nederlandsche Maatschappij ter bevordering van de afschaffing der slavernij*'). He was also member of the State Committee ('*Staatscommissie*') for the abolition of slavery, from 19 July 1853 onwards. While King William I abolished Dutch slave trade by royal decree and under English pressure in 1814, slavery in Dutch-owned colonies continued, only to be abolished in 1859 in the Dutch East Indies, and in 1863 in Suriname and the Dutch Antilles.

An example of Groen's social justice initiatives is his work as a trustee of the Home for Elderly Men, Women and Children ran by the Walloon Reformed Church ('*Waaalsche Gereformeerde Gemeente*') in The Hague, from 1838 onwards.

³⁴ Prominent members of the *Réveil* were also prominently involved with the Evangelical Alliance. A case in point is the fact that Groen gave an address at the fifth general assembly of the Evangelical Alliance, held in Amsterdam in August 1867: Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer, 'La nationalité religieuse en rapport avec la Hollande et l'Alliance Évangélique' (Speech, Fifth General Assembly of the Evangelical Alliance, Amsterdam, 22 August 1867).

³⁵ Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer, *Briefwisseling, 1833-1848*, ed. C. Gerretson and J. L. Van Essen, vol. 2, *Schriftelijke Nalatenschap* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1964), 133.

³⁶ Jasper Vree, 'Het Réveil als partij in de Nederlandse samenleving', in *Opwekking van de natie. Het protestantse Réveil in Nederland* (Hilversum: Verloren, 2012), 63.

II. GROEN'S PERSON

A. Groen's Family Background

Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer, known to his friends as Willem Groen, was born on 21 August 1801 near The Hague, at the estate '*Vreugd en Rust*' ('Joy and Rest') in the beautiful eighteenth-century village of Voorburg.³⁷ He died in The Hague on 19 May 1876. He was the only son of Petrus Jacobus Groen van Prinsterer (1764-1837) and Adriana Hendrika Caan (1772-1832). Father Groen came from a family of preachers but had as the first in his family gone up to Leiden to study medicine. He started his career as a general practitioner in The Hague and as an army doctor, and proved himself a very able medical doctor, successfully propagating new health practices nationally, such as sea bathing and the use of burial plots outside city walls.³⁸

Groen's aristocratic mother, whose full name was Adriana Henrika Caan, Lady of Ushem, was heiress of a Rotterdam banking family and arguably one of the wealthiest women in the country at the time.³⁹ She was a society lady with a zest for life. The couple married in 1797 and had three surviving children of whom

³⁷ See for Groen's younger years particularly P. A. Diepenhorst, *Groen van Prinsterer* (Kampen: Kok, 1941), 6-16.; C. Tazelaar, 'De jeugd van Groen, 1801-1827' (Doctoral Thesis, University of Amsterdam, 1925).; and Johannes Louis Petrus Brants, 'Groen's geestelijke groei: Onderzoek naar Groen van Prinsterer's theorieën tot 1834' (Doctoral Thesis, Free University of Amsterdam, 1951).

For an overview of Groen's life, see Roel Kuiper, '*Tot een voorbeeld zult gij blijven*': *Mr. G. Groen van Prinsterer (1801-1876)* (Amsterdam: Buijten & Schipperheijn, 2001); W. H. De Savornin Lohman, 'Groen van Prinsterer, Mr. Guillaume', ed. P. C. Molhuysen and P. J. Blok, *Nieuw Nederlandsch biografisch woordenboek* (Leiden: Sijthoff, 1912); H. W. J. Mulder, *Groen van Prinsterer: staatsman en profeet* (Franeker: Uitgeverij Wever, 1973), 7-38; A. J. Van der Aa, 'Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer', *Biographisch woordenboek der Nederlanden. Bijvoegsel* (Haarlem: Van Brederode, 1878). See also Groen's autobiographical sketch: Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer, 'Autobiographie', in *Bescheiden, 1842-1876*, ed. Johan Zwaan, vol. 2, *Schriftelijke Nalatenschap* (The Hague: Instituut voor Nederlandse Geschiedenis, 1991), 502-31.

³⁸ Mulder, *Groen van Prinsterer: staatsman en profeet*, 10-15.

³⁹ Van Dyke, *Groen van Prinsterer's Lectures*, 39. Mulder, *Groen van Prinsterer: staatsman en profeet*, 8-11.

Groen was the only son and the middle child.⁴⁰ As the family's wealth, royal connections, aristocratic background and participation at the highest levels of politics suggest, Groen's background was very privileged. It meant that he had a large capital available to him with which to finance his many social justice initiatives and the publications of the many pamphlets and books he wrote.

B. Groen's Education

Groen's education started at home, primarily overseen by his father. Only when he was eight years old, in the fall of 1809 was he sent to school, first in The Hague and later in Utrecht.⁴¹ At almost sixteen, on 29 May 1817, he was admitted to Leiden University, where he simultaneously read Roman and Contemporary Dutch Law as well as Classics.⁴² From early on his favourite topic was the study of history, to which his prize-winning essays and his doctoral theses, both on historical topics, attest.⁴³

At university Groen's extraordinary giftedness, and enormous work ethic, which he exhibited despite his weak health, soon made him legendary, even outside the confines of Leiden University. It gave him the epithet 'a jewel for the University of Leiden'. Two examples paint the unusual nature of his academic prowess. The first is his exceptional proficiency in Latin. His mastery of this classical language was such that it was considered to have surpassed that of his famous teacher,

⁴⁰ Groen's older sister, Cornelia Adriana (1799-1858), 'Keetje', married Marie Aart Frederic Henri Hoffman (1795-1874) and his younger sister, Maria Clasina (1806-1868), 'Mimi', married Johan Antoni Philipse (1800-1884). Groen's brothers-in-law both pursued careers in politics.

⁴¹ De Savornin Lohman, 'Groen van Prinsterer, Mr. Guillaume', 509. See also Diepenhorst, *Groen van Prinsterer*, 9.

⁴² Though Groen was admitted in May 1817 he only started attending lectures the next year, likely because of his young age and frail health. See Groen van Prinsterer, *Briefwisseling, 1808-1833*, 1:11 (footnote 5).

⁴³ Groen van Prinsterer, 'Autobiographie', 502-3.

Professor Bake. The young Groen spoke it so flawlessly that it was as though he was speaking French, causing his debates in Latin to draw students from all over the country.⁴⁴ The second is the fact that in 1821, while still a student, Groen was considered for the Leiden professorship in Ancient History and Literature, after it had become vacant due to Professor Borger's death in 1820. Though he did not eventually pursue this option, likely because his father would not consent to sending him to Germany for the preparatory work, the fact that he was considered for such a prestigious position at such a young age is astonishing.⁴⁵

1. Influence of Plato's Doctrine of Ideas

Groen's time as a student in Leiden had a marked three-fold influence on his intellectual life and development. The first of these influences was Plato's doctrine of ideas. From Plato Groen learned that there were values that existed beyond time and place; ideas that were reflected in earthly reality. Plato became Groen's favourite classics author at this time, and remained so well into his old age.⁴⁶ One reason why Groen appreciated Plato is the historical element of his thought. As he stated in *Autobiography*: 'Plato is mostly appreciated as philosopher and the writer of poetic prose, but not enough for the historical element of his thought.'⁴⁷

⁴⁴ De Savornin Lohman, 'Groen van Prinsterer, Mr. Guillaume', 510.

⁴⁵ It has been speculated that Groen's father came to this decision because of Groen's fragile health. See Diepenhorst, *Groen van Prinsterer*, 16. De Savornin Lohman, 'Groen van Prinsterer, Mr. Guillaume', 510.

⁴⁶ Mulder, *Groen van Prinsterer: staatsman en profeet*, 25.

⁴⁷ Groen van Prinsterer, 'Autobiographie', 503.

'Het kwam my voor dat men in Plato te uitsluitend den wijsgeer en den dichterlijken prozaschrijver geroemd, te weinig op het historische element gelet had'.

2. Influence of the Historical School of Law

The second important influence during university days was Groen's exposure to the Historical School of Law, also called the Historical School of Jurisprudence.⁴⁸ This initially German School, importantly developed by Friedrich Carl von Savigny (1779-1861), was a nineteenth-century movement that stressed the irrationalist element of the organic development of 'history'.⁴⁹ Groen was very much drawn to the study of history and Savigny's approach to 'history' so fascinated him that in 1822 he contemplated whether he might not write his thesis on Savigny.⁵⁰ His writing, as early as 1826, reflected the influence of the Historical School.⁵¹ This influence remained, and in later years Groen continued to acknowledge his kinship to the Historical School. Examples of this are found both in personal letters, like the one written in 1830 to H. J. Koenen, where he wrote: 'I lean much towards the Historical School of Law and am a great admirer of Savigny.'⁵² And in published works, like his 1840 *Opinions in the Lower House*, where he acknowledged his kinship to the Historical School plainly: 'I do not deny that I

⁴⁸ For more on the influence that Von Savigny's Historical School exerted on Groen during his university days, see importantly W. G. F. Van Vliet, *Groen van Prinsterers historische benadering van de politiek* (Hilversum: Van Vliet & Uitgeverij Verloren, 2008), 32-9; Brants, 'Groen's geestelijke groei', 28-55; R. Kuiper, 'Wie maakt de geschiedenis? Groen van Prinsterer over Goddelijke ordeningen in de geschiedenis', *Transparant* 3, no. 2 (1992): 18-20; Van Dyke, *Groen van Prinsterer's Lectures*, 40, 89, 94, 215, 221.

⁴⁹ C. E. Merriam, Jr., *History of the Theory of Sovereignty since Rousseau* (Kitchener, Ontario: Batoche Books, 2001), 21.

The Historical School, though later generally associated with Von Savigny, was originally founded by Gustav Von Hugo (1744-1844). Barthold Georg Neibuhr (1776-1831) was a prominent figure as well. The significant works are Hugo's *Lehrbuch des Naturrechts* ('Manual of Natural Law') (1798) and Savigny's *Vom Beruf unserer Zeit für Gesetzgebung und Jurisprudenz* ('On the Vocation of Our Time for Legislation and Jurisprudence') (1814), and *System des heutigen Römischen Rechts* ('The System of the Modern Roman Law') (1840-9).

⁵⁰ Tazelaar, 'De jeugd van Groen, 1801-1827', 140. Eventually Groen chose to write his thesis on various personalities in Plato's works.

⁵¹ Van Vliet, *Groen's historische benadering van de politiek*, 30. With reference to Groen's 1826 brochure 'Over Codificatie' ('On Codification') where Groen compares historical institutions with products of nature. See also Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer, *Proeve over de middelen waardoor de waarheid wordt gekend en gestaafd*, *Beschouwingen over Staats- en Volkerenregt*, vol. 1 (Amsterdam: Hoveker, 1858), 136.

⁵² Groen van Prinsterer, *Briefwisseling, 1808-1833*, 1:267. Letter to H. J. Koenen of 22 February 1830.

belong to the Historical School.’⁵³ From his personal notes, also, it is clear that his appreciation of the Historical School even deepened after having been introduced to the thought of the Lutheran jurist Friedrich Julius Stahl in 1848.⁵⁴ Groen greatly admired Stahl, an important and vocal follower of the Historical School, and with him positioned himself unapologetically in the tradition of Savigny’s Historical School of Jurisprudence.⁵⁵ His identification with the ideas of the Historical School was in effect so great that he equated anti-revolutionary proponents with the proponents of the Historical School of Law.⁵⁶ Groen’s 1849 note to himself in his *Notes before the beginning of the [Lower] House Industriousness* is indicative in this respect: ‘This choice *between the historical school or the revolutionary philosophy* dominates all political questions regarding forms of government. No utopias, but reality!’⁵⁷

⁵³ Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer, *Adviezen in de Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal, in dubbele getalen* (Leiden: Luchtmans, 1840), 133. The Dutch title of the work *Opinions in the Lower House* reads ‘*Adviezen in de Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal*’.

That Groen considered the Historical School of vital importance on such essential matters for society as constitutional law is shown from the comment that he made following the quotation just given. It reads: ‘With regard to constitutional law I declare candidly that where the Historical School is despised one will accomplish little that can have permanence’.

⁵⁴ Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer, ‘Aanteekeningen vóór het begin der Kamerwerkzaamheid, 1849’, in *Bescheiden, 1842-1876*, ed. Johan Zwaan, vol. 2, Schriftelijke Nalatenschap (The Hague: Instituut voor Nederlandse Geschiedenis, 1991), 209ff.

⁵⁵ For Groen’s assessment of Stahl’s connection to the Historical School see: Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer, ‘Stahl. Studiën. Ten vervolge of in verband met het geschrift “Ter nagedachtenis van Stahl”’, in *Bescheiden, 1842-1876*, ed. Johan Zwaan, vol. 2, Schriftelijke Nalatenschap (The Hague: Instituut voor Nederlandse Geschiedenis, 1991), 367–8. Here Groen noted: ‘Stahl is homogenous with the historical school of law. (...) And what is the relationship between Stahl and this school of law? He is likeminded with it in all its aspects; he represents it more than any other, in constitutional law and politics. “[The school] does not,” he acknowledges, “have a political system, but it has a political view. It is anti-revolutionary.”’

‘*Met de historische regtsschool is Stahl homogeen. (...) En welke is nu de verhouding van Stahl tot deze regtsschool? Hij is in allen deele haar geestverwant; hij is het, meer dan eenig ander, die ze vertegenwoordigt op het gebied van staatsregt en politiek. “Zij heeft”, dus gaat hij voort, “wel geen politiek system, maar allezins een politiek karakter. (...) Zij is (...) antirevolutionair.”*’

⁵⁶ Van Vliet, *Groen’s historische benadering van de politiek*, 47. Groen’s comment that Prussia after 1830 was ruled ‘after the sense and spirit of the historical, the anti-revolutionary School of Law’, is a clear example of this: Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer, ‘Stahl. Studiën. Ten vervolge of in verband met het geschrift “Ter nagedachtenis van Stahl”’, in *Bescheiden, 1842-1876*, ed. Johan Zwaan, vol. 2, Schriftelijke Nalatenschap (The Hague: Instituut voor Nederlandse Geschiedenis, 1991), 372.

⁵⁷ Groen van Prinsterer, ‘Aanteekeningen’, 210. Emphasis added.

The Dutch for ‘Notes before the beginning of the [Lower] House Industriousness’ reads ‘*Aanteekeningen vóór het begin der Kamerwerkzaamheid*’.

While Savigny's influence on Groen's thought is fully acknowledged, some scholars have argued that Groen distanced himself from Savigny's thought in his later years, focusing instead on more outspoken Christian thinkers. Abraham Kuyper has suggested such a divergence of Groen's and Savigny's general stance, as has H. Smitskamp, who has argued that Savigny's importance for Groen's thought was one merely of 'preparation for a more correct insight through his methodology and his challenge of rationalism'.⁵⁸ W. G. F. van Vliet, in his doctoral thesis on Groen's historical approach to politics, has convincingly shown that this position lacks substantiation, especially after 1848.⁵⁹ In response to Kuyper's view, it may further be argued that Savigny's philosophy had a deeply Christian foundation as Savigny insisted that 'the universal aim of all law may be derived from the moral orientation of human nature, as it is represented in the Christian philosophy of life'.⁶⁰

3. Influence of Willem Bilderdijk

The third major influence on Groen's intellectual development during his time at Leiden University was his exposure to Willem Bilderdijk (1756-1831). This gifted poet was an autodidact with a near encyclopaedic knowledge of virtually all subjects of learning. His passionate interest in a plethora of research topics furthered academic learning in nearly every field, while moral failure, often-tragic

⁵⁸ Abraham Kuyper, *Antirevolutionaire Staatskunde*, vol. 1 (Kampen: Kok, 1916), 609. H. Smitskamp, *Groen van Prinsterer als historicus* (Amsterdam: H. J. Paris, 1940), 69.

⁵⁹ Van Vliet, *Groen's historische benadering van de politiek*, 36.

⁶⁰ Friedrich Carl von Savigny, *System des heutigen Römischen Rechts*, vol. 1 (Berlin: Veit, 1840), 53-4. Quoted by John C. H. Wu, *Fountain of Justice: A Study in the Natural Law* (New York, N.Y.: Sheed and Ward, 1955), 24.

It should be noted that Professor Herman Dooyeweerd (1894-1977), one of Holland's great legal philosophers and one-time professor of legal philosophy and jurisprudence at the Free University of Amsterdam, has questioned the importance of the influence of the Historical School on Groen's thought. He judged this influence only of moderate importance: R. Kuiper, 'Christelijke geschiedbeschouwing als duiding van traditie', *Philosophia Reformata* 60 (1995): 90 (footnote 20).

life-events, and unwise financial management marked his personal life. He was exiled from the Netherlands because of his pro-House of Orange views in 1795, to return in 1806 under Louis Napoleon's patronage.⁶¹ Despite Bilderdijk's brilliance, he was never given the professorship he had long hoped for, largely due to his questionable lifestyle, his absolutist monarchical views and his total rejection of the new written constitution. Eventually Bilderdijk settled in Leiden in the same year that Groen entered the university, and there began giving private lectures in Dutch history. It was here, in addition to his poetry, that Bilderdijk's lasting impact on Dutch nineteenth-century culture was made, through his students who propagated his ideas. These ideas marked Bilderdijk importantly as the precursor of the Dutch *Réveil* movement, the modern ecumenical movement, and Kierkegaardian existentialism.⁶²

Groen followed Bilderdijk's private lectures and regarded him 'a great poet and a rare genius'. In *Unbelief and Revolution* he acknowledged: 'I owe a great deal to Bilderdijk, especially since the vehemence of his attacks first made me doubt the things I had hitherto accepted without questioning. Also, I am proud to share in the scorn and abuse aimed at his followers but in fact directed against justice and truth.'⁶³ In his *Autobiography*, looking back on the teachers who marked him, he stated that he was much indebted to Bilderdijk's tutelage. 'It was he,' he posited there, 'who directed me to the concept of unprejudiced research into our national

⁶¹ While under Louis Napoleon's patronage, Bilderdijk taught the French king Dutch. His methods of teaching were not very successful as Louis Napoleon hilariously declared: 'I am rabbit of Olland' ('*Ik ben konijn van Olland*'), instead of 'I am king of Holland' ('*Ik ben koning van Holland*').

⁶² Mulder, *Groen van Prinsterer: staatsman en profeet*, 26–29.

⁶³ Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer, *Ongeloof en Revolutie: Eene reeks van historische voorlezingen* (Leiden: Luchtmans, 1847), 39–41. Van Dyke's translation. This translation is found in Van Dyke, *Groen van Prinsterer's Lectures*.

history, and to doubting the excellence of liberalism.’⁶⁴ But it should be noted that Groen was never a complete and true disciple of Bilderdijk. ‘I am far from subscribing to every one of [Bilderdijk’s] opinions in history and political theory’, Groen informed his audience in *Unbelief and Revolution*, ‘I must protest against being too closely identified with his school (...) I must insist on my independence when defending the truth, and thus do what Bilderdijk himself has taught us.’⁶⁵ In his *Autobiography* toward the later part of his life Groen stated: ‘Only later have I learned to recognise the accuracy of much [of Bilderdijk’s thought], that at the time seemed exaggerated and the fruit only of discontentedness and eccentricity.’⁶⁶ With Bilderdijk Groen shared a deep love for independent thinking, for truth and for history, as well as a strong appreciation for the Historical School. But he disagreed with the poet’s rejection of Plato and Greek philosophy, and did not follow him in his absolute monarchist ideas, or in his total rejection of the new written constitution.⁶⁷

Groen graduated on 17 December 1823, defending in Latin his thesis in Roman and Contemporary Dutch Law, *De juris Justinianeae praestantia ex rationibus eius manifesta*, (summa cum laude), and his thesis in Classics, *Platonica prosopographia, sive expositione iudicii quod Plato tulit de iis, qui in scriptis ipsius aut loquentes inducuntur aut quavis de causa commemorantur*.⁶⁸

⁶⁴ Groen van Prinsterer, ‘Autobiographie’, 502.

‘Het is zoo, ook de lessen van Bilderdijk heb ik gehoord. Veel heb ik daaraan te danken gehad. Door hem vooral ben ik tot een onbevangen onderzoek van de volkshistorie en aan het twijfelen omtrent de uitnemendheid van het liberalisme gebragt’.

⁶⁵ Groen van Prinsterer, *Ongeloof en Revolutie*, 39, 41. Van Dyke’s translation.

⁶⁶ Groen van Prinsterer, ‘Autobiographie’, 502.

‘Eerst later heb ik de juistheid leeren inzien van veel, dat mij toen overdreven en de vrucht enkel van wrevel en zonderlingheid toescheen’.

⁶⁷ Mulder, *Groen van Prinsterer: staatsman en profeet*, 26, 29.

⁶⁸ Diepenhorst, *Groen van Prinsterer*, 12–4.

C. Groen's Marriage to Betsy van der Hoop

On 23 May 1828, Groen married Elisabeth 'Betsy' Maria Magdalena van der Hoop (6 February 1807-14 March 1879), daughter of a Groningen mayor, in Groningen. The marriage was very happy, but childless.⁶⁹ Mr and Mrs Groen started their married life in Brussels, where Groen was stationed in function of his role in King William I's Cabinet. Before the outbreak of the Belgian Revolt, the couple moved back to The Hague, where they lived most of their married life. They were married for forty-eight years.⁷⁰

D. Groen's Early Career

In December 1823 Groen joined the law offices 'J. A. van der Spijck' in The Hague, where he worked as a solicitor and barrister for a few years. In November 1827 he became King William I's Cabinet Court Official ('*referendaris*'), and was not much later appointed as Cabinet Secretary. In October 1831 he was given the position of the king's Keeper of Records at the Royal Archives. This position he held all of his life, until frail health forced him to resign on 5 February 1871.⁷¹ As Keeper of Records he had access to a wealth of historical letters from statesmen and historical heroes that had been hitherto undisclosed. It resulted in the publication of *Archives ou Correspondance inédite de la Maison d'Orange-Nassau*, a

Groen's own translation of these titles reads 'The excellence of Justinian law as is manifested from the historical principles and development' ('*De voortreffelijkheid van het Justiniaansche regt uit de historische beginselen en ontwikkeling blijktbaar*') and 'Plato's own judgement of the personalities that he introduces speaking in his dialogues or mentions in a noteworthy manner' ('*Het eigen oordeel van Plato over de personen die hij in zijn dialogen sprekende invoert of op merkwaardige wijze vermeldt*'). Groen van Prinsterer, 'Autobiographie', 503.

⁶⁹ Groen van Prinsterer, *Briefwisseling, 1808-1833*, 1:nº 152, nº 157, nº 160, nº 183; Mulder, *Groen van Prinsterer: staatsman en profeet*, 35; Diepenhorst, *Groen van Prinsterer*, 34-40.

⁷⁰ For a copy of the funeral card see C. Bremmer, W. F. de Gaay Fortman, and M. N. G. Kool, eds., *Een staatsman ter navolging: Groen van Prinsterer herdacht, 1876-1976* (Goes: Stichtingen Kader-en vormingswerk ARP, CHU en KVP, 1976), 34.

⁷¹ Groen did take some time away from his work at the Royal Archives from January till July 1834 for health reasons, following the death of his mother: De Savornin Lohman, 'Groen van Prinsterer, Mr. Guillaume', 513.

fifteen-volume work published over a time-span of twenty-six years, from 1835 to 1861.⁷² *Archives*, as the title is usually shortened, secured his reputation as historian even beyond Dutch borders, and has been called ‘a great work of patient erudition, which procured for him the title of the “Dutch Gachard”.’⁷³ John Lothrop Motley used the work extensively as a source for his *Rise of the Dutch Republic* (1856), as he acknowledged in the preface.⁷⁴

E. Groen’s Christian Faith

Before we turn our attention to Groen’s work, we will bring the introduction of his person to a close by drawing attention to his Christian faith. This is important because of the significance of his faith for his work and thought.

Groen was baptised in the Walloon Church, a francophone branch of the Dutch Reformed Church.⁷⁵ Groen’s more disinterested, intellectual approach to Christianity became more warmly personal through the influence of his wife Betsy, and three of his *Réveil* friends: Merle d’Aubigné, the William I’s court preacher in Brussels; Secrétan, pastor of the Walloon Church in The Hague, under whose preaching Groen and his wife sat, and Willem de Clercq. Their influence, in addition to his study of the times in which he lived, solidified Groen’s intellectual commitment to the Christian faith. After an inner struggle of some time, and a

⁷² De Vries, *Handleiding Leven en Werken Groen*, 61–2.

⁷³ ‘Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer’, *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 1911.

⁷⁴ It is interesting to note that despite J. L. Motley’s use of Groen’s work, his interpretation of historical facts is very different. The disagreement between the two historians on the interpretation of the role that Johan van Oldebarnevelt (1547-1619) played in the history of the Dutch Republic is a case in point. Groen so disagreed with Motley’s conclusions in his 1874 *The Life and Death of John of Barneveld* that he wrote a polemic response to it, published the year before he died: Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer, *Maurice et Barneveld: étude historique* (Utrecht: Kemink et Fils, 1875).

⁷⁵ It has been said that Groen’s baptism in the Walloon Church explains his French name: G.E.J. Somer, *Groen van Prinsterer: Stamboom en memories van successie* (Assen, the Netherlands: Uitgeverij Groene Somer, 2009), 10.

grave illness, it eventually led, in January 1833, to a heart-felt assurance, as well.⁷⁶ His letters to De Clercq of this period witnessed to the newfound 'religious enthusiasm' that marked his personal life from then on.⁷⁷ It was an enthusiasm that made him very sympathetic to the orthodox Seceders, many of whom were his close friends and many of whose causes he financially supported, while he remained a lifelong member of the Dutch Reformed church. His enthusiasm for the Gospel also propelled Groen in the political work for which he became known. As he referred to himself in later years, he was 'Not a statesman! [But] a confessor of the Gospel.'⁷⁸ We will turn to his work next.

III. GROEN'S WORK

A. Groen's Career in Politics —His Writings

Groen was a prolific writer. He published and edited not only two series of the periodical *Dutch Thoughts*, but in the first half of the 1850's also an anti-revolutionary daily newspaper called *De Nederlander* ('*The Dutchman*'). He furthermore wrote some sixty-five sizeable works, on a wide variety of topics,

⁷⁶ C. Gerretson, 'Introduction', in *Briefwisseling, 1808-1833*, by Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer, vol. 1, Schriftelijke Nalatenschap (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1925), xvii.

⁷⁷ Brants, 'Groen's geestelijke groei', 94.

⁷⁸ After the title '*Een staatsman niet! Een Evangeliebelijder!*' ('Not a Statesman! A Confessor of the Gospel!') of the third pamphlet in the series published as Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer, *Aan de kiezers, I-XX* (The Hague: Van Cleef, 1866).

while maintaining a substantial and consistent personal correspondence that has been preserved and archived.⁷⁹ A few works are of special note.

1. Significant French- and Dutch-Language Works

Arguably Groen's most famous and most scholarly work is his *Archives ou Correspondence inédite de la Maison d'Orange-Nassau*. This masterful and internationally acclaimed fifteen-volume publication shed radically new light on the history of the Netherlands through the publication of hitherto unknown manuscripts, particularly confidential correspondence of Dutch national heroes.⁸⁰ Its importance is reflected by the depth and intensity with which the period of Dutch national history that Groen had opened up was studied in the decades that followed.⁸¹ In the long introductions to the various volumes Groen set out the Christian-historical principles that had guided him in his decisions and conclusions. In 1841 and 1846 he subsequently published his *Handboek der geschiedenis van het vaderland* ('*Manual of the History of the Country*'). *Manual* gave an overview of the history of the Netherlands for a broader, local audience

⁷⁹ Thirty-four bulky volumes of his letters were archived at the Dutch Public Record Office ('*Rijksarchief*') in the nineteenth-century: De Savornin Lohman, 'Groen van Prinsterer, Mr. Guillaume', 513. In the twentieth century, his letters were published as part of the National Dutch Historical Publications ('*Rijks Geschiedenis Publicatiën*') series, in six massive, ten centimetre-thick volumes under the title *Correspondence* ('*Briefwisseling*'): Groen van Prinsterer, *Briefwisseling, 1808-1833*; Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer, *Briefwisseling, 1827-1869*, ed. J. L. Van Essen, vol. 5, *Schriftelijke Nalatenschap* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1980); Groen van Prinsterer, *Briefwisseling, 1833-1848*; Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer, *Briefwisseling, 1848-1866*, ed. H. J. Smit, vol. 3, *Schriftelijke Nalatenschap* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1949); Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer, *Briefwisseling, 1866-1876*, ed. A. Goslinga and J. L. Van Essen, vol. 4, *Schriftelijke Nalatenschap* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1967); Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer, *Briefwisseling, 1869-1876*, ed. J. L. Van Essen, vol. 6, *Schriftelijke Nalatenschap* (The Hague: Instituut voor Nederlandse Geschiedenis, 1992).

A comprehensive overview of all Groen's works, with a brief discussion of the significance of each publication is found in De Vries, *Handleiding Leven en Werken Groen*.

⁸⁰ Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer, *Nederlandsche Gedachten*, vol. 5, Second Series (Amsterdam: Hoveker, 1873), 161, 314. De Vries, *Handleiding Leven en Werken Groen*, 61.

⁸¹ A. Th. Van Deursen, 'Groen van Prinsterer, Guillaume (1801-1876)', *Biografisch Woordenboek van Nederland* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1985).

and was one of his most influential works.⁸² It, too, set out his Christian-historical assumptions.

In addition to *Archives*, Groen wrote several other French-language works that expounded his thought to an international audience: *Maurice et Barnevelt: étude historique* (1875), *Le parti antirevolutionnaire et confessionnel dans l'église réformée* (1860), and *La Prusse et les Pays-Bas* (1867) and *L'Empire Prussien et l'Apocalypse* (1867).⁸³ His speech "La nationalité religieuse en rapport avec la Hollande et l'Alliance Évangélique" at the fifth general assembly of the Evangelical Alliance of August 1867 in Amsterdam is also noteworthy.⁸⁴

Among the plethora of Dutch works several are significant for the clear overview of his thought they provide. Of note is his 1831 *Overzicht* ('Overview'), which was given in several instalments of the political journal *Nederlandsche Gedachten* ('Dutch Thoughts'). His *Proeve over de middelen waardoor de waarheid wordt gekend en gestaafd* ('Essay on the Methods by which the Truth may be Known and Established') (1834), also referred to as *Beschouwingen over Staats- en Volkerenrecht* ('Considerations on Constitutional Law and the Law of Nations'), was his first attempt to develop his principles in a more scientific manner.⁸⁵ The 1847

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ *Le parti antirevolutionnaire et confessionnel* was translated in 2015: Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer, *Christian Political Action in an Age of Revolution*, trans. Colin Wright (Aalten, the Netherlands: Wordbridge Publishing, 2015).

⁸⁴ Groen van Prinsterer, *Maurice et Barnevelt: étude historique*, 159.

See Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer, *Archives ou correspondance inédite de la Maison d'Orange-Nassau*, vol. 1, First Series (Leyden: Luchtmans, 1841), 16–18. Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer, *Archives ou correspondance inédite de la Maison d'Orange-Nassau*, vol. 2, Second Series (Utrecht: Kemink en Zoon, 1858), cxxxix.

⁸⁵ *Beschouwingen* was according to Groen's own assessment 'the fundamentals on which my convictions are built': Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer, *Adviezen in de Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal*, vol. 1 (Utrecht: Kemink en Zoon, 1856), iv.

'... de grondslagen waarop mijn overtuiging rust'.

publication of *Ongeloof en Revolutie* ('Unbelief and Revolution') is his classic work, and the most extensive and precise exposition of his thought.⁸⁶

Before we turn to Groen's parliamentary actions, we must comment on the success of his writings. Despite the fact that many of his publications specifically spoke to the issues of his day and addressed pressing political and constitutional law themes, Groen's aristocratic style, and perhaps also his erudition, meant that he was not very successful at conveying his thought to the general population, even though many agreed with his orthodox-Christian presuppositions. It has been said that just 'like David who had to leave the building of the temple to Solomon,' Groen, too, had to leave it to his successor to bring to larger-scale fruition what he had sown for foundations. It was Abraham Kuyper whom Groen envisioned for this task a few years before his death, and who proved unusually successful at conveying to the masses ideas that were originally Groen's.⁸⁷

B. Groen's Career in Politics —His Parliamentary Actions

1. Membership to the Dutch Lower House

The many constitutional changes that the Netherlands underwent following the liberation from French occupation and the Belgian Revolt solicited Groen's effort to influence his times. He did so not only through his writing, but also through his involvement in Dutch Parliament. He was a member of the Dutch Lower House

⁸⁶ De Savornin Lohman, 'Groen van Prinsterer, Mr. Guillaume', 513–14.

⁸⁷ De Vries, *Handleiding Leven en Werken Groen*, 38–39.

almost uninterruptedly from February 1849 till July 1857, and after a hiatus of five years, from September 1862 until April 1865.⁸⁸

2. No Political 'Programme' or System

With regard to Groen's political career it is important to note that he did not have a 'political programme' in the strict sense of the word. Instead he sought to encourage his country to uphold 'the enunciations of God's word and the lessons of experience' also in its public and constitutional affairs.⁸⁹ To him every Christian was held to uphold these. It was a matter of truth and Christian confession, not one merely of a political view. As we have mentioned above, he was first a confessor of the Gospel, not a statesman.⁹⁰ His aim was to stand for Christian truth, which he considered to be best expressed by the Christian-historical position. This Christian-historical conviction guided his political action as much as it did his political writings. We will keep our analysis of the content of Groen's Christian-historical, also called anti-revolutionary, thought for the chapters that

⁸⁸ De Savornin Lohman, 'Groen van Prinsterer, Mr. Guillaume', 513.

For purposes of accuracy it should be noted that for a month in the summer of 1840 Groen had also been an Associate Member of the Lower House for the constituency of Holland Province. The constituencies he represented from 1849 until 1857 were those of Harderwijk, Zwolle, The Hague, and Leiden, and Arnhem from September 1862 until April 1865.

⁸⁹ Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer, *De Nederlander: Nieuwe Utrechtsche Courant (Algemeen staatkundig nieuws-, handels- en advertentieblad)*, 20 June 1854 (n° 1223). See also Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer, *Brieven van Mr. Isaïc da Costa, medegedeeld door Mr. Groen van Prinsterer*, vol. 2 (Amsterdam: Höveker, 1874), 210–211.

⁹⁰ After the title '*Een staatsman niet! Een Evangeliebelijder!*' ('Not a Statesman! A Confessor of the Gospel!') of the third pamphlet in the series published as Groen van Prinsterer, *Aan de kiezers*, I–XX.

What he meant by the statement, Groen explained some years later: 'that I, in conformity with the Christian-Protestant aspirations of the Dutch people, position the power and aim of my politics in the confession of the Gospel. I do not disdain all politics, but regard praiseworthy only those political positions that are homogenous with the expression of the conscience of the people and with the life-principle of our nationality as it was born or reborn out of the battle for the Gospel': Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer, *Nederlandsche Gedachten*, vol. 1, Second Series (Amsterdam: Höveker, 1870), 213.

'... dat ik, eensgezind met de Christelijk-Protestantsche aspiratiën van het Nederlandsche volk, in de belijdenis van het Evangelie de kracht en het doel mijner politiek stel. Niet elke politiek misprijs ik; maar enkel die politiek acht ik prijzenswaard, welke met de uiting van het volksgeweten en met het levensbeginsel van onze uit den strijd voor het Evangelie geboren of hergeboren nationaliteit homogeen is'.

follow. But we will briefly mention here that his thought regarded not so much specifically determined political goals as much as a posture of reverence for God's ordering, also in matters of politics. In this respect Groen often stressed that it was not the desired political results that marked the difference between him and his political opponents, but rather the manner by which these desired results were obtained.⁹¹ Groen did not wish to ignore or reverse the accomplishments and positive changes that had been the result of the French Revolution. He did not categorically oppose changes in constitutional arrangements. Nor did he seek a return to the past. In this respect he was explicitly not *counter-revolutionary*. It was not the fruits of the Revolution as such that he was opposed to, but rather the man-centred and auto-idolatrous tree from which they grew. It was against the revolutionary presupposition that government and law is ultimately sourced in man's will, instead of in God's, that Groen's *anti-revolutionary* thought was voiced. It was on this point that he drew the distinction between *revolutionary* and *anti-revolutionary* politics. This distinction meant that he disagreed with the common assumption of his day that three parties formed the political landscape, namely 'those who seek to conserve, those who seek moderate progress and those who seek rapid progress'. He argued instead: 'There are not three, but two parties. The one practises the revolutionary doctrine, in many forms; the other fights it in all its shapes and modifications.'⁹²

⁹¹ Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer, *Ter nagedachtenis van Stahl* (Amsterdam: Höveker, 1862), 14. Groen van Prinsterer, *De maatregelen tegen de Afgescheidenen aan het staatsregt getoetst*, 66. See De Savornin Lohman, 'Groen van Prinsterer, Mr. Guillaume', 514.

⁹² Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer, *Grondwetherziening en Eensgezindheid* (Amsterdam: Müller, 1849), 69.

[Er is] gezegd: "Er bestaan hier te lande drie partijen; die van het behoud, die van gematigden vooruitgang, en die van snellen vooruitgang." Ik beweer dat dit, wanneer men van eene algemeene beschouwing uitgaat, eene onvolledige Statistiek is. Geen drie, twee partijen zijn er. De eene, die onder velerlei wijzigingen, de Revolutie-leer in beoefening brengt; de andere welke haar onder alle vormen en wijzigingen, bestrijdt'.

3. Groen's Milestones in the Political Arena

Groen's political activism significantly helped shape not just the parliamentary debates of his time, but also public opinion. His work as a member of the Lower House was multi-faceted. Of particular significance was his influence on the debates on the new written constitution with its several amendments. Some of his propositions have marked the Dutch parliamentary system. A clear example is the way Groen stood at the genesis of the Dutch multi-party parliamentary system, through his advocacy for clearly distinguishable political associations.⁹³ As early as 1840, when the constitution of that year was debated, it was Groen who advanced the view that delegates had to be accountable to their constituents and should have less independence vis-à-vis those who had voted for them. Along a similar line he advocated in the 1852 elections that the electorate deserved more transparency on the various positions and principles the candidates held.⁹⁴ Groen played an influential role in the adoption of the 1850 Voters Act (*Kieswet*).

Another example is Groen's consistent challenge of the so-called 'neutrality' of the democratic state that had become the national aspiration as a consequence of the revolutionary *Zeitgeist*. He denounced this supposed 'neutrality' of the state in two important areas. The first was the way the Dutch 'neutral' state supposedly championed religious liberty, but persecuted the Seceders.

⁹³ Groen van Prinsterer, *De Nederlander*, 16 August 1850.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 28 April 1852. This and previous reference quoted by Ronald De Jong, 'Van standspolitiek naar partijloyaliteit. Verkiezingen voor de Tweede Kamer 1848-1887' (Doctoral Thesis, University of Amsterdam, 1999), 69.

The second was the way the ‘neutral’ education supposedly provided to all by the ‘neutral’ Dutch state meant that Christian parents no longer had the freedom to have their children educated along the lines of their denominational preference. ‘Children are not the property of the state, as the Revolution holds’, he argued.⁹⁵ Especially the matter of Christian education dominated Groen’s political efforts from 1849 onwards.⁹⁶ Both in and outside parliament he kept insisting on the necessity of truly Christian, as opposed to ‘neutral’, schools.⁹⁷ He argued that state schools, because of their ‘neutrality’ could but teach a watered-down, inoffensive Christianity, and could not properly teach those subjects that are importantly influenced by Christian presuppositions, such as history. For this reason he worked towards giving parents the option of different choices of schools, segregated based on religion: what were called schools for the different religious convictions.⁹⁸ Groen’s strategy toward achieving this goal changed over the years. Originally he proposed government schools for different religious convictions; later he championed the establishment of independent Christian schools funded by the government. The question of the format that Christian education was to have was the cause for much debate and division in Christian circles.⁹⁹

⁹⁵ Groen van Prinsterer, *Adviezen in de Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal, in dubbele getalen*, 57.

⁹⁶ Even earlier Groen had argued for specifically Christian education. He did so in passing in 1837, in his work that decried the illegality of the persecution of the Seceders: Groen van Prinsterer, *De maatregelen tegen de Afgescheidenen aan het staatsregt getoetst*, 10.

He also was a member of the State Committee (*‘Staatscommissie’*) for primary education from 12 November 1840 onwards. He addressed the matter of specifically Christian education in the 1842 address to the General Synod of the Reformed Church: Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer, *Adres aan de Algemeene synode der Nederlandsche Hervormde kerk over de formulieren, de academische opleiding der predikanten, het onderwijs en het kerkbestuur* (Leiden: Luchtmans, 1842). In this address Groen, with six other gentlemen from The Hague (for that reason often referred to as ‘the Seven The Hague Gentlemen’) reminded the Reformed Church of its duty to not ignore Christian education.

⁹⁷ Van Deursen, ‘Groen van Prinsterer, Guillaume (1801-1876)’.

⁹⁸ De Savornin Lohman, ‘Groen van Prinsterer, Mr. Guillaume’, 516.

⁹⁹ These divisions also touched Groen in his personal friendships and associations, with perhaps the most obvious example that of the about-turn of J. J. L. van der Bruggen, who had always assumed the posture of one who was against the state school of mixed religious education, but when he had the opportunity to propose an amendment of the law to this effect in 1857 did not do so.

Irrespective of the changing strategies he pursued to accomplish it, his aim remained unswervingly that of providing orthodox Christian education.¹⁰⁰ He insisted that religious liberty was only ensured when a parent had the liberty to educate their child in their own religious views. Groen importantly influenced the 1857 Elementary Education Act (*'Lager Onderwijswet'*) and its later amendments. His role in shaping the educational reforms was such that to this day hundreds of Dutch schools are named in his honour. It is largely Groen's accomplishment that the Dutch state to this day guarantees parents the religious liberty to have their child educated in accordance with their conscience and religious convictions. This liberty is guaranteed through the state's identical allocation of finances to schools run by the state, and those run independently in accordance with their specific religious, educational or philosophical convictions.¹⁰¹

C. Groen's Legacy

Groen has been called a general without an army. He struggled against the spirit of the age, convinced that he had the truth of the Holy Scriptures on his side, but often alone. Generally his Christian position was regarded as exaggerated.¹⁰² It was often ridiculed as belonging to a less enlightened past and misunderstood also by fellow Christians. He often lacked the required unified support of those

¹⁰⁰ Van Deursen, 'Groen van Prinsterer, Guillaume (1801-1876)'. As Van Duersen points out, this narrow Christian aim also meant that the group of Groen's supporters narrowed through the years, with Groen advising the electorate in 1864 to only vote for those who stood for the free Christian school, and going so far as to limit his endorsement to only Abraham Kuyper, L. W. C. Keuchenius and M. D. van Otterloo in 1871.

¹⁰¹ Article 23 of the Dutch Constitution guarantees such 'confessional or general independent education' (*'confessioneel of algemeen bijzonder onderwijs'*).

¹⁰² De Vries, *Handleiding Leven en Werken Groen*, 16, 41-5.

who agreed with his premises for decisive action to further the Christian cause.¹⁰³ Especially in his fight for Christian education Groen experienced the betrayal of close Christian friends.¹⁰⁴ He insisted that ‘in our *isolation*, or if you prefer a Dutch word, in our *independence*, in our *firmness of principle* lays our power.’ ‘This has always been our battle cry!’¹⁰⁵ What Groen’s ‘firmness of principle’ accomplished, was that he awoke his fellow orthodox Christians, who had traditionally been against involvement in worldly politics, to their responsibility to be involved in elections for the defence of the rights of the Church. His triumph lay, as a contemporary expressed it in 1871, ‘not so much in the genesis of an independent political life among his party members, but solely in their incentive to reveal their ecclesiastical life also in political matters. They now know that they can also promote their religious interests in this arena.’ Groen’s legacy was that he opened the Christian’s eyes to his ‘duty to defend the right of the Church, also in politics.’¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³ An example of this is his action to see the confession of the Reformed Church maintained as it had been prior to the regulations for the organization of the synod as per 1816. In this request Groen stood with the Seceders, though himself not a member of their party.

¹⁰⁴ Two examples of betrayal suffice. It regards the case of Groen’s ally in the fight for Christian education J. J. L. van der Brugghen, who in 1857 as member of parliament was set to ensure that the proposed School Act (*‘Schoolwet’*) was amended according to the views Groen had advocated. Instead, he adopted the Act in the format proposed by the opposition, in contradiction to his previous promises and against the king’s personal wishes. It meant Van der Brugghen accomplished what Thorbecke had been unable to do because of Groen’s opposition. Another example is the betrayal of Groen’s Christian friends Van Zuilen and Mijer, who as soon as they had become members of parliament in 1866 issued statements that stood diametrically opposed to the Groenian cause for Christian education they had previously championed. De Vries, *Handleiding Leven en Werken Groen*, 43–5.

¹⁰⁵ Groen van Prinsterer, *Nederlandsche Gedachten*, 1873, 5:71, 138.

‘In ons isolement, of wilt ge liever een hollandsch woord, in onze zelfstandigheid, in onze beginselvastheid ligt onze kracht. Dit was steeds het devies onzer vlag’.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 5:70. Groen added that ‘an independent political life’ would naturally flow out of this foundation, just as it had done at the time of the formation of the Dutch Republic.

‘Hij is eindelijk volkomen geslaagd, maar niet om aan de zijnen een zelfstandig politiek leven in te blazen, maar enkel om er hen toe te brengen hun kerkelijk leven ook op staatkundig gebied te openbaren. Zij weten nu dat zij juist ook op dit gebied hunne geloofsbelangen kunnen bevorderen’.

(...) ‘Ontwikkeling van pligtbesef ter verdediging van het regt der Kerk, ook op staatkundig gebied. (...) “Zelfstandig politiek leven” volgt alsdan (even als in vroeger eeuw bij de formatie van het Gemeenebest) van zelf’.

IV. CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF CATALYTIC FACTORS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF GROEN'S CHRISTIAN-HISTORICAL PRINCIPLE

Before we move to our analytical exposition of Groen's thought in the chapters that follow, we close our introduction to Groen's person and work, with a critical analysis of two influential experiences that were catalytic for his 'conversion' from a 'moderate Liberal' to his anti-revolutionary position.¹⁰⁷

When Groen came to Brussels in September 1828 as the secretary of King William I's Cabinet, he was, as by his own admission, a 'moderate Liberal'.¹⁰⁸ He found himself, particularly in the year that followed, working and living 'in an exceptional era, and in the centre of politics and of polemics, as a civil servant and a publicist'.¹⁰⁹ It was during these years, 'while observing an erupted Revolution; from a position that had been providentially given', as he recalled, that his political views underwent a profound change and reached what he called 'the fixity of an anti-revolutionary polemic'.¹¹⁰ In this process, 1829 marked the 'decisive turning-point'.¹¹¹ It was the year leading up to the Belgian Revolt, which

¹⁰⁷ In addition to the two factors we will analyse in this chapter, the ground for Groen's convictions had also been prepared by earlier intellectual influences, such as those of Plato and of the Historical School, as we have noted above. These and other influences on Groen have been admirably discussed in such scholarly works as Johan Zwaan, *Groen van Prinsterer en de klassieke oudheid* (Amsterdam: Hakkert, 1973); Johannes Louis Petrus Brants, 'Groen's geestelijke groei: Onderzoek naar Groen van Prinsterer's theorieën tot 1834' (Doctoral Thesis, Free University of Amsterdam, 1951); H. Smitskamp, *Groen van Prinsterer als historicus* (Amsterdam: H. J. Paris, 1940); T. De Vries, *Mr. G. Groen van Prinsterer in zijne omgeving* (Leiden: Sijthoff, 1908).

¹⁰⁸ Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer, *Nederlandsche Gedachten*, vol. 5, Second Series (Amsterdam: Höveker, 1873), 281.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 5:345.

'... in een exceptioneel tijdsgewricht en in het centrum van politiek en polemie, als ambtenaar en als publicist...'

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 5:281.

'Uit de sleur van een gematigd Liberalisme, waarin ik, als geestverwant, 's Gravenhage verliet, ben ik in een tijdsgewricht van ongeveer derdehalf jaar, tot vastheid van antirevolutionaire polemie geraakt. Onder het aanschouwen van de losgebarsten Revolutie. Op een mij providentieel te beurt gevallen standpunt.'

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 5:249.

'1829 is voor mij een beslissend keerpunt'.

broke out end of August 1830. Because of Groen's position as secretary to the king, he was present during 'the increasingly violent deliberations of the States General' and watched up close how the Belgian discontent turned revolutionary. He was keenly aware of the instability of the national situation, aggravated by King William I's passive and indecisive response.¹¹² The Dutch public, too, seemed apathetic and unconcerned about the increasing threats to their country. Groen's response to the public and royal passivity was to start a political periodical *Nederlandsche Gedachten* ('Dutch Thoughts') in October 1829.¹¹³ The publication was in essence an opposition magazine, meant to draw the attention of his compatriots to the serious nature of the battle that was raging, and if possible to stimulate the Dutch ruling elite to wake up and take action.¹¹⁴ It was a publication Groen oversaw and personally financed. In it he discussed the situation in the Netherlands and in Europe in a way that required 'study and reflection'.¹¹⁵ *Dutch Thoughts* thereby facilitated his reflection 'on the root causes of the general disturbance' and his articulation of a clear public opinion, which aimed to strengthen his influence on the king's policy.¹¹⁶ The periodicals were for this reason his 'apprenticeship and battlefield'; they helped him articulate his critique of French revolutionary ideas.

¹¹² The king's reaction to the revolution was so characterised by indecisiveness and tactical errors that it is thought to have partly determined the course of the revolution: Els Witte, Jan Craeybeckx, and Alain Meynen, *Political History of Belgium: From 1830 Onwards* (Brussels: Academic and Scientific Publishers, 2009), 23.

¹¹³ Groen van Prinsterer, *Nederlandsche Gedachten*, 1873, 5:161.

'Aldus gaf de dreigende houding der Belgische oppositie mij in October 1829 uit eigen beweging de pen in de hand'.

¹¹⁴ Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer, *Christian Political Action in an Age of Revolution*, trans. Colin Wright (Aalten, the Netherlands: Wordbridge Publishing, 2015), 41.

¹¹⁵ Groen van Prinsterer, *Nederlandsche Gedachten*, 1873, 5:290.

'[De eerste Nederlandsche Gedachten waren] vrucht van studie en overdenking'.

¹¹⁶ Groen van Prinsterer, *Christian Political Action*, 41. Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer, *Briefwisseling, 1808-1833*, ed. C. Gerretson, vol. 1, *Schriftelijke Nalatenschap* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1925), xvii.

'[Zijn invloed bij den Koning tracht Groen] te versterken door het vormen eener openbare mening in zijn geest. Daartoe worden de Nederlandsche Gedachten opgericht'.

The early *Dutch Thoughts* were a ‘consistent effusion’; they functioned almost like the ‘respiration of the soul’, like an ‘almost vital necessity’ that arose ‘from the irresistible need to convey what touches the heart’.¹¹⁷ They were written ‘under the influence of the *Réveil* and in the atmosphere of *Revolution*’.¹¹⁸

Groen’s experience of the *Réveil* movement and of the Belgian Revolution were important catalytic factors for the development of his thought in that characteristic features of both also characterise his thought. A discussion of the Belgian Revolt and the *Réveil* shows why this is so, to which we turn next.

A. Influence of the Belgian Revolt on the Development of Groen’s Thought

Groen’s experience of the Belgian Revolt and its influence on the development of his Christian-historical thought is an aspect of his thought that has generally been neglected.¹¹⁹ That the Revolt is important as a background for the formation of his thought is not surprising when it is noted that Groen’s first published exposition of his thought in *Overzicht* (‘Overview’) was penned from September to November 1831, that is, only very shortly after the Belgian revolution’s outbreak, end of August 1830, and the coronation of Leopold I as the first king of Belgium at the

¹¹⁷ Groen van Prinsterer, *Nederlandsche Gedachten*, 1873, 5:291.

[Deze eerste Nederlandsche Gedachten waren] mij (...) en leerschool, en strijdperk, en, vooral, bij de onweersaanbare behoefte ter mededeeling van hetgeen het hart raakte, gestadige ontboezeming, bijkans zou ik zeggen, levensvoorwaarde, vis vitalis, ademhaling der ziel’.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 5:290.

‘Deze eerste Nederlandsche Gedachten schreef ik onder den adem van het *Réveil* en in de sfeer der *Revolutie*’.

¹¹⁹ C. Gerretson, ‘Introduction’, in *Briefwisseling, 1808-1833*, by Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer, vol. 1, *Schriftelijke Nalatenschap* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1925), xv.

end of July 1831.¹²⁰ *Overview* was thereby written very much ‘in the atmosphere of revolution’, and in the middle of the revolutionary tensions.¹²¹ It reflected Groen’s personal experience of the Revolt and the way he assessed the factual, historical events that led up to its outburst. A brief sketch of the Belgian Revolt and its historical background will clarify what characteristic feature of it returns in his thought.

1. Sketch of the Belgian Revolt’s Historical Background

As we have noted above, the United Kingdom of the Netherlands was an artificial creation at the initiative of the Great Powers. The union chiefly served the allied powers’ wish to create a strong buffer state to the north of France in the aftermath of Napoleonic rule. While the southern and northern provinces of the new Kingdom shared some common history, and had some language overlap, the union brought together two countries with very different social and cultural patterns. As a local ‘Belgian’ newspaper based in Liège assessed it in September 1830: ‘Traditions, opinions, approaches to religion, interests, character, language, customs, tastes, occupations, everything is different. What agrees with us, does not agree with the Dutch, what agrees with the Dutch, decidedly does not agree with us’.¹²² Though not the only factor that hampered the successful union of the

¹²⁰ The coronation of Leopold I (1790-1865) on 21 July 1831, following the Belgian declaration of independence of 4 October 1830, formally marked the Revolt’s success. The Netherlands under William I only recognised the secession under pressure from the Great Powers at the Treaty of London in 1839. In September 1830 the Belgian revolutionaries had started drawing up a new Belgian written constitution. It was adopted in February 1831.

¹²¹ Groen van Prinsterer, *Nederlandsche Gedachten*, 1873, 5:290.

¹²² ‘Le Courrier de la Meuse’ of 5 September 1830, quoted by J. Stengers, ‘Sentiment national, sentiment orangiste et sentiment français à l’aube de notre indépendance’, *Revue Belge de Philologie et d’Histoire* 28, no. 3 (1950): 999.

‘*Mœurs, opinions, culte, intérêts, caractère, habitudes, goûts, occupations, tout est différent. Ce qui nous convient, ne convient pas aux Hollandais; ce qui convient aux Hollandais, ne nous convient point du tout...*’

Northern and Southern Netherlands, the vastly different social and cultural patterns that had historically developed in the North and the South are central in the explanation as to why their integration was very difficult and eventually failed.¹²³ These differences bring out the fragility of the political union between North and South, but they do not suggest systematic abuse or impoverishment of the South by the North. In fact, the union with the North brought substantial economic and educational development, as well as significant advancements in religious freedom for the South. The backdrop of these developments was William I, who in enlightened-despotic fashion, genuinely wished to be a 'father' to all his subjects.¹²⁴ His concerted financial, logistical and educational investments into the Southern Netherlands greatly benefitted the South, to some extent at the expense of the North.

a) Southern Netherlands Benefitted Greatly from the Union

The South experienced significant growth economically and socially because of the union with the North. The king founded three state universities in the Southern provinces in the first years of his reign.¹²⁵ He further built more than 1,500 new 'Belgian' schools, thereby doubling the access to free, state education for 'Belgian' children.¹²⁶ William I's educational policies not only significantly

¹²³ Witte, Craeybeckx, and Meynen, *Political History of Belgium: From 1830 Onwards*, 19.

¹²⁴ On William I's enlightened despotism see A. Goslinga, *Koning Willem I als verlicht despoot* (Baarn: Bosch, 1918).

¹²⁵ It regards the establishment by royal degree of 25 September 1816 of the state universities of Ghent, Liège and Louvain. The latter was a re-establishment of the previously Catholic university dating back to 1425 that had been closed in 1797 under French revolutionary rule.

It should be noted by contrast that William I did not establish any new universities in the North.
¹²⁶ Paul Belien, *A Throne in Brussels: Britain, the Saxe-Coburgs and the Belgianisation of Europe* (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2006), 28.

widened the extent of primary education in the South, but also raised its standard. It meant that in the fifteen years of his rule illiteracy in the South diminished from 59% of the total 'Belgian' population to some 50%.¹²⁷

William I particularly promoted the financial and industrial well-being of the South. He ensured that the Southern Netherlands received four-fifths of the industrial government subsidies, and prioritised Antwerp over Amsterdam as the harbour for Dutch colonial trade. This meant that the number of ships that came through Antwerp nearly doubled between 1818 and 1829.¹²⁸ The king improved the infrastructure of the South significantly, building roads and canals. With the aim to promote the prosperity of the whole Kingdom, and finance his industrial initiatives, especially in the South, he also established the Netherlands' Society for the Promotion of National Industrial Development, a society that functioned as an investment bank, was in charge of the public treasury and issued banknotes.¹²⁹ The United Kingdom of the Netherlands, the South in particular, Groen explained in his history *Manual*, 'owed much to the diligence and perseverance with which the monarch saw to the development of the country's general prosperity and the

¹²⁷ Ernst Heinrich Kossmann, *De Lage Landen, 1780-1980: Twee eeuwen Nederland en België*, vol. 1 (Amsterdam: Agon, 1986), 111. Kossmann refers to A. Sluys, *Geschiedenis van het onderwijs in de drie graden in België tijdens de Fransche overheersching en onder de regeering van Willem I* (Ghent: Siffer, 1912), 394ff.

To give an impression of the discrepancy between the level of education in the North and the South the comparative figures of 1825, which is ten years after the union between the Southern and Northern Netherlands was established, are informative. At that time almost 89 children followed primary education for every 1,000 'Belgians', while for every 1,000 Dutchmen nearly 123 children received primary education: Kossmann, *De Lage Landen, 1780-1980*, 1:111.

¹²⁸ Belien, *A Throne in Brussels*, 28.

¹²⁹ The society here translated as 'the Netherlands' Society for the Promotion of National Industrial Development' was called '*Algemeene Nederlandsche Maatschappij ter Begunstiging van de Volkswlijt*' in Dutch and '*Société des Pays-Bas pour favoriser le développement de l'industrie nationale*' in French. After Belgian independence the society became '*la Société générale de Belgique*' ('*Generale Maatschappij van België*'), which functioned as the Belgian national bank until the establishment of the National Bank of Belgium in 1850.

promotion of its material well-being'.¹³⁰ The period of Dutch rule was a time in Belgian history that saw the country transformed from 'an agrarian society into a fledgling industrial nation'. William I's incentives importantly facilitated this development.¹³¹ The commercial, agricultural and manufacturing prosperity of the South had become so dependent on its union with the North that after the revolt many doubted Belgium's chances of surviving independently.¹³²

Against the backdrop of these concerted efforts by William I to improve the social and economic well-being of the South, it is not surprising that Charles Froment, in his 1834 study on the Belgian revolution stated: 'Fifteen years were sufficient to elevate the new kingdom to the lofty level of moral dignity and material prosperity, that the hard and slow labour of centuries doesn't always bring less fortunate states'.¹³³ The fact that the South benefitted materially from its union with the North was one of the main reasons why such industrial and commercial

¹³⁰ Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer, *Handboek der geschiedenis van het vaderland* (Amsterdam: Wormser, 1895), 830 (§ 1031).

'Het Rijk, België vooral, had veel te danken aan den ijver en de volharding waarmee de Vorst op de ontwikkeling der algemeene welvaart en op de bevordering der materiële belangen bedacht was'.

¹³¹ Witte, Craeybeckx, and Meynen, *Political History of Belgium: From 1830 Onwards*, 21.

¹³² J. Stengers, 'Sentiment national, sentiment orangiste et sentiment français à l'aube de notre indépendance (Suite)', *Revue Belge de Philologie et d'Histoire* 29, no. 1 (1951): 64–7, 90. See also Charles Froment, *Études sur la Révolution belge* (Ghent: Duvivier, 1834), 58.

Stengers quotes articles in Belgian newspapers to substantiate his point. Of interest especially are the articles published on 28 March 1831 by Liège newspaper "l'Echo" and on 26 September 1831 by Ghent newspaper "le Messenger de Gand." He also points out that the French overwhelmingly thought Belgium incapable of sustaining independence and expected the country to be annexed to France. In this respect he quotes a tongue-in-cheek comment by Jean-Baptiste Nohomb (1805-1881), a Belgian statesman and diplomat: 'In the eyes of every French politician that I've known, with the exception of Louis-Philippe and Guizot, Belgium never had more than a fleeting existence'.

'Aux yeux de tous les hommes politiques français que j'ai connus, Louis-Philippe et Guizot exceptés, la Belgique n'a jamais eu qu'une existence transitoire'.

¹³³ Froment, *Études sur la Révolution belge*, 2–3.

'Quinze années avaient suffi pour élever le nouveau royaume à ce haut degré de dignité morale et de prospérité matérielle, que, pour bien de états moins favorisés de la fortune, le rude et lent travail des siècles n'amène pas toujours'.

Charles-Camille Froment (1797-1846) was born in France and had settled as a refugee in the Southern Netherlands in 1819 or 1820. He was an acclaimed poet and publicist, as well as editor of the prominent newspaper "Le Messenger de Gand": Ch. Louandre and Félix Bourquelot, *La littérature française contemporaine, 1827-1844: Dictionnaire bibliographique*, vol. 3 (Paris: Daguin, 1848), 579. Froment was a vocal Orangeist, and opposed to the Belgian revolution.

towns as Ghent, Antwerp and Liège opposed the revolution in 1830. These towns were bulwarks of Orangeist sentiment that did not wish a change in government or a political separation from the Northern Netherlands, often for reasons of pure self-interest.¹³⁴

While William I's changes to the Belgian tax code had resulted in bitter resentment, and his enlightened despotism in matters of state finances had opened him up to the charge of arbitrariness, secrecy and speculation, his rule seemed to have genuinely sought to promote the interests of the South, at times to the detriment of those of the North.¹³⁵ Hence, when in 1830 the Belgian Revolt erupted, it was not fuelled by economic motives or by any discontentment about William I's rule by the Belgian industrial and commercial high bourgeoisie.

The mention of the French Revolution may summon to the mind's eye visions of hungry, oppressed, illiterate, hopeless masses rising up in revolt in response to centuries of abuse and poverty. The Belgian revolution by contrast, was led by an intellectual, educated, politically ambitious middle-class that lived in one of the most prosperous time periods of the Southern Netherlands' history and had, in

¹³⁴ 'Orangeists' as used here are those 'Belgians' who were pro-William I and wished to continue as his subjects, in various different ways. Some wished for the simple restoration of William I as king of the United Kingdom of Netherlands. Others wished for the United Kingdom to be reconstituted so that the North and South were separated administratively, but both remained under William I's rule. The third, and in 1830 very influential, kind of Orangeists wished William I to be king of independent Belgium: Stengers, 'Sentiment national, sentiment orangiste et sentiment français à l'aube de notre indépendance (Suite)', 61–2.

Witte, Craeybeckx, and Meynen, *Political History of Belgium: From 1830 Onwards*, 20–1. Groen van Prinsterer, *Handboek*, 838 (§ 1038).

Stengers points out that in 1830 the call by many in the South, particularly the Orangeists, was for an administrative, not a political, separation from the North: Stengers, 'Sentiment national, sentiment orangiste et sentiment français à l'aube de notre indépendance', 998–1001. Stengers, 'Sentiment national, sentiment orangiste et sentiment français à l'aube de notre indépendance (Suite)', 61–2.

¹³⁵ Groen van Prinsterer, *Handboek*, 825 (§ 1026), 829 (§ 1030), 814 (§ 1016).

the words of Els Witte, professor of contemporary Belgian history, ‘grown up in an environment where they had found *an ideological reinforcement* for their ambitions—as far as liberal and democratic ideas were concerned, they could go back to the late eighteenth century revolutionary era’.¹³⁶ These middle-class intellectuals were driven not by primeval survival or the need to right systemic societal wrongs, but by their political aspirations and their begrudged feeling of being excluded from the exercise of political power. They had been schooled in French revolutionary ideology during two decades of French rule following the French annexation in 1794. This French experience had in both the South and the North begun the process of diminishing and removing religious control from society’s political foundations, and had fostered revolutionary philosophical thinking among the elites. The opposition to William’s enlightened despotic rule came primarily from this ‘group of (*mainly intellectual*) citizens, who wanted to defend the political interests of the bourgeoisie’. They were a group of ‘upwardly mobile citizens’ that included ‘intellectuals, teachers, wealthy craftsmen, journalists, civil servants, [and] merchants’. ‘They were citizens high enough on the social ladder to be able to distance themselves from the real oppressed masses, and at the same time enviously observe the political game of the powerful’, Witte highlights. ‘The Belgian revolution was mainly a lower bourgeoisie and middle-class uprising’.¹³⁷

¹³⁶ Witte, Craeybeckx, and Meynen, *Political History of Belgium: From 1830 Onwards*, 20–22. Emphasis added.

Els Witte is a member of the Belgian Royal Academy and was rector of the (Dutch-language) Free University of Brussels (*Vrije Universiteit Brussel*) from 1994–2000.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 21–22. Emphasis added.

This group joined themselves to the Catholic faction that resented the loss of control of its seminaries, the loss of its former and political control under William I. The Roman Catholic Church in the South had weakened significantly under the French revolutionary rule prior to the union with the North. French rule had been particularly 'instrumental in the political recognition of the bourgeoisie and the overthrow of the feudal and clerical structures', and this trend William I's rule continued.¹³⁸ William's Protestant and more free-thinking rule furthermore introduced a new era of religious liberty and freedom of conscience in the South that further weakened the previous political and religious monopoly of the Catholic Church. In these respects, the king's rule was a continuation of sorts of the liberal political changes that had been brought about by revolutionary rule. Both the Roman Catholic elite and the intellectual elites saw their political power diminished under William, and sought to gain or regain it. The joining of these two groups in their revolt against William I, despite their opposing views is one of the ambiguities of the Belgian Revolt.

An element that may have bonded the two groups despite the seeming incongruities was direct French revolutionary influence. During the occupation of the Southern Netherlands by France from 1794 to 1814 important positions of civil service, including judicial, had been given to Frenchmen who had remained in these important administrative positions after Napoleon's defeat. These Frenchmen would have subscribed to revolutionary ideology, as did the many French radical political opponents of the Bourbons who in 1815 had found

¹³⁸ Ibid., 20.

asylum in the South after they had had to flee the repercussions of their political extremism of the 1790s and later. Among them were so-called 'regicides', surviving members of the first French revolutionary 'parliament' who had ordered the execution of King Louis XVI in 1793.¹³⁹ All bishops in the Roman Catholic South were furthermore Frenchmen who had been appointed during French occupation by the French Emperor, in accordance with the Concordat agreement between the Pope and Napoleon of 1801.¹⁴⁰ This meant that the revolutionary, radical element was well represented among the Catholic and the administrative and judicial elites in the Southern Netherlands.¹⁴¹ The revolutionary viewpoint could thereby exercise important influence, and may well have been the unifying factor that united the bourgeois intellectuals and the Catholic factions. These opposing, yet cooperating, forces gave the 1830 revolution its 'ambivalent role'. As Witte explains,

Some wanted to use the revolution to slow down the rise of modern, mechanised industry and restore the political powers of the Church and the landowners. The bourgeois *intellectuals* who *led the revolution*, on the other hand, made sure the key principles of the liberal society were anchored in the constitution. The political tensions between those two groups—who together ended the regime of William I—dominated the first two decades of Belgium's

¹³⁹ An example of such former member of the *Convention* who had condemned King Louis XVI to the guillotine and now had settled in Brussels was Jean-Pierre Chazal. Chazal had also served under Napoleon and would later along with his son Pierre play a significant role in the Belgian Revolt: Belien, *A Throne in Brussels*, 31.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 29. The most famous was the bishop of Ghent, a French aristocrat called Maurice de Broglie (1766-1821) who opposed 'the 'Europe of Restoration' of Metternich and Castlerleagh', and fiercely opposed the religious liberty guaranteed in the constitution of the Kingdom of the Netherlands: Kossmann, *De Lage Landen, 1780-1980*, 1:123.

¹⁴¹ It is worth noting that unlike the influence of the French bishops of the Roman Catholic Church, which was felt across the South, the influence of the French administrators was diminished in the Dutch-speaking part during William's rule. This was due to the king's linguistic policies. As per 1823 Dutch became the official language of the Dutch-speaking part of the South, which meant that in the provinces of Limburg, Antwerp and Flanders all government and judiciary matters had to be conducted in Dutch. It ensured linguistic emancipation for native Dutch-speakers and had the effect that the French civil servants had to make room for native 'Belgian', Dutch-speaking public servants. See Kossmann, *De Lage Landen, 1780-1980*, 1:110.

political agenda, right up to the mid-19th century when the industrial bourgeoisie finally imposed itself.¹⁴²

The Revolt itself was ignited not in response to an injustice that provoked a massive outcry, but almost by accident after riots broke out on 25 August 1830. The fact that there was no immediate cause or reason for the mayhem to commence is one of the reasons why historians refer to the start of the Belgian Revolt as ‘the Belgian Coincidence’.¹⁴³

2. Groen’s Assessment of the Belgian Revolt

As a member of William I’s Cabinet, Groen had close access to the king both in his professional and personal capacity. As part of his professional responsibilities, he prepared the documents that informed the king of current internal and international affairs and was privy to the deliberations of the court. It allowed him to be exceptionally informed about matters of state and the king’s policies. It also gave him direct influence on the king.¹⁴⁴ It meant that he had a front-row position and a unique overview of the actual political situation in the Southern and Northern Netherlands in the lead-up to, and during, the Belgian Revolt. Since Groen lived part of the time in Brussels, his high-level factual knowledge of the situation in the South was supplemented by personal knowledge of the people and political motivations that were actors in the Revolt. It is therefore fair to say that his geographical location and professional position gave him a profoundly

¹⁴² Witte, Craeybeckx, and Meynen, *Political History of Belgium: From 1830 Onwards*, 20. Emphasis added.

¹⁴³ See on the Belgian Coincidence (*‘het Belgische Toeval’*) Els Witte, *De Constructie van België, 1828-1847* (Leuven: Lannoo, 2006), 51–55; Jeroen Janssens, *De Helden van 1830: Alle feiten en mythes* (Antwerpen: Meulenhoff/Manteau, 2005), 23–33; Peter Rietbergen and Tom Verschaffel, *Broedertwist: België en Nederland en de erfenis van 1830* (Zwolle: Waanders, 2005), 22–24; Froment, *Études sur la Révolution belge*, 11–18.

¹⁴⁴ See also Gerretson, ‘Briefwisseling’, xvii.

informed platform to come to conclusions about the nature and causes of the Belgian Revolt. It meant that he was well aware of the fact that William I ruled in an enlightened-authoritarian way, and that his rule had financially and socially enriched the South. Because Groen had such in-depth factual knowledge of the politics and actions of William I, it would have been clear to him that the situation in the Southern Netherlands in 1830 was not one of hopelessness and injustice in the face of deep poverty and systemic abuse. He would have been aware of the fact that the material situation of the 'Belgian' people under William's rule was one of the best of its history. He would equally have been aware of the fact that William's policies, far from having impoverished the South, had sought to promote its social, economic and educational well-being.

In this respect Groen's assessment that poverty or grave economic injustice was not the main cause for the Revolt, as expressed in *Overview* and his account in *Manual of the History of the Country*, is understandable and credible. In *Overview* he specifically used the prosperity of Belgium in 1830 as an example to contradict the common perception that material interests were the primary cause for in the revolutionary conflicts. He stated: 'Physical prosperity (...) [does not] protect against discord, which is destructive also of that (...) prosperity. (...) Consider France as well as Belgium: both had reached a marvellous level of exterior affluence from 1815 to 1830'.¹⁴⁵ In *Manual* he articulated the general feeling in the

¹⁴⁵ Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer, *Nederlandsche Gedachten*, vol. 3, First Series (The Hague: Vervloet, 1832), 101.

'*Phijsieke welvaart (...) [behoedt] geenszins tegen tweedragt, verwoestend ook voor die (...) welvaart. (...) Frankrijk zoowel als Belgie had, van 1815 tot 1830, eene verwonderlijke hoogte van uiterlijk welzijn bereikt*'.

North that 'the Southern provinces had, under its new government, reached a level of prosperity that seemed unattainable in 1815'.¹⁴⁶

Groen's in-depth knowledge of current internal affairs furthermore reasonably allowed him to conclude that the Belgian Revolt had not been caused by systemic abuse and injustice, ingrained in the political arrangement of the state and endured over a long period of time. This was so *firstly* because he knew well the specifics of William I's policies and the political arrangements and actions of the United Kingdom. These demonstrated factually that the king's rule had not caused the South to suffer such grave, systemic, persistent injustice as to genuinely warrant a violent rebellion.¹⁴⁷

Secondly, the time-span of William I's rule, a mere fifteen years, was too short to objectively support the claim both that any injustice had become ingrained into the political system of the South or that its alleviation had been genuinely attempted through legitimate and non-violent ways.

Thirdly, Groen's exceptional familiarity with the court made him aware to what degree William I had been accommodating the requests made by the South, and how many concessions he had made in response to grievances made known.¹⁴⁸

These concessions negated any suggestion that William I's regime had been

¹⁴⁶ Groen van Prinsterer, *Handboek*, 839 (§ 1039).

'De Zuidelijke Gewesten hadden, onder het nieuwe Bestuur, een trap van welvaart die in 1815 onbereikbaar scheen, bereikt'.

¹⁴⁷ While the Roman Catholic Church lost much of its previous monopoly in the areas of education, politics, and religion under William's rule, and may have considered this a grave injustice, it could still not be considered such grave, systemic, persistent injustice as to genuinely warrant a violent rebellion.

¹⁴⁸ See for an overview of these concessions and positive responses to appeals by the king: Ibid., § 1044–56. See also Froment, *Études sur la Révolution belge*, 15–7.

wantonly unwilling to address concerns raised by the South or had exercised ruthless state coercion. It also negated any reason to doubt the king's good faith towards his subjects in the exercise of his rule. Froment remarks in this respect that in the lead up to the Revolt 'the only fodder for the opposition voiced in the press and on the soapbox' were 'some twelve insignificant grievances, successively remedied'.¹⁴⁹

Fourthly, Groen's knowledge of the inner workings of the Kingdom also meant that he knew that the king, despite his authoritarian leanings and the liberties he had taken in the interpretation of the constitution, had ruled not arbitrarily or oppressively, but under the rule of law. It was precisely this point that Froment argued in his 1834 study of the Belgian Revolt when he explained why history would condemn the 1830 revolution. He maintained that the revolt did *not* erupt because hopes had been disappointed and promises had not been kept, or because the States General had been rudely ignored. With irony he insisted that the so-called 'reason for that great [revolutionary] mayhem is that lawfulness is used in the face of insurrection, that the king keeps his word, that the constitution is applied to intervene between the prince and the people, that public order is established, that the States General assemble'. For this reason he predicted that 'history will declare that the capital of Belgium revolted because the constitutional powers of the kingdom were assembled at its request and for the purpose of its happiness'.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁹ Froment, *Études sur la Révolution belge*, 7.

'Une douzaine d'insignifiants [sic] griefs, successivement réparés, servait seule de pâture à l'opposition de la presse et de la tribune'.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 18.

For the reasons here mentioned, Groen's assessment that the situation in the Southern Netherlands in 1830 and the years leading up to it could not legitimately have led to a defensive act by a systemically and persistently unjustly treated people was reasonable as well as realistic. He could for these reasons also credibly judge the Belgian Revolt to have been an unjustified and premature use of violence by a mere segment of the population for their own political ambitions and not for any common good.

Because of the absence of such genuine reasons for revolt as mentioned above, augmented by the presence of radical French influence in Belgian society, the possibility that the Belgian Revolt was, at least partly if not wholly, motivated ideologically has credibility. It goes beyond the ambition of this chapter to determine to what extent the Belgian Revolt was brought about through ideological, intellectual provocations, and what their contour and development were. But we wish to highlight here that merely material explanations do not sufficiently make the eruption of 'the Belgian Coincidence' intelligible. Ideological, intellectual reasons played a role, whether major or minor, into fanning the flames of Belgian discontent into the wholesale fire of revolution. This factor is acknowledged by the modern-day historical view that 'the intellectual middle class was at the core of the revolutionary action in 1830' with a view not to right

'La cause de ce grand tumulte, c'est la légalité qu'on oppose à l'émeute; c'est le roi qui tient sa parole; c'est la loi fondamentale qu'on fait intervenir entre le prince et le peuple; c'est la tranquillité publique qu'on élabore, ce sont les états-généraux qui s'assemblent. L'histoire dira que la capitale de la Belgique s'est révoltée parce que les pouvoirs constitutionnels du royaume s'étaient réunis, sur sa demande, pour travailler à son bonheur'.

glaring societal wrongs, but to develop politically and gain political power for its own social class.¹⁵¹

Groen found himself in a political climate that was dominated by discontent that was much more ideologically driven than by concerns about material well-being, or the application of due process of law. It elicited in him a practical response, an intellectual offensive of sorts, which he gave shape through the publication of *Dutch Thoughts*. This intellectual counter-offensive required thorough reflection on, and clear evaluation of, contemporary events. This critical assessment confirmed to him that merely material interests alone had not caused the Belgian Revolt. It further allowed him to evaluate the immediate interests that had played a driving role in the development and eruption of the Revolt. It meant he had to articulate for his readers how particular ideas had had particular consequences. His critical analysis thus led him to conclude that the puzzle of the Belgian Revolt could be solved if its ideological dimension, with its driving power, was considered. As he wrote a friend in November 1831: 'the publication of *Dutch Thoughts* (...) forced me to think more and more about the causes of evil, until its main cause (...) became clear to me. Since that time a thousand matters that I used to consider unsolvable riddles have become clear to me'.¹⁵² 'The situation in Europe seemed to me', he wrote many years later, 'to be the consequence of false doctrines, the consequence and price of contempt for the fundamental laws of humanity, and of the systematic undermining of social relations'. This correlation

¹⁵¹ Witte, Craeybeckx, and Meynen, *Political History of Belgium: From 1830 Onwards*, 21–3.

¹⁵² Groen van Prinsterer, *Briefwisseling, 1808-1833*, 1:503 (n° 492).

'(...) de uitgave der *Ned. Ged.*, waardoor ik gedwongen werd meer en meer na te denken omtrent de oorzaken van het kwaad, totdat mij eindelijk de hoofdoorzaak (...) duidelijk werd. Sedert dien tijd zijn duizende zaken mij duidelijk geworden, die ik vroeger als onoplosbare raadsels had beschouwd'.

and causation between revolutionary doctrines and contempt for fundamental laws is what he sought to show his readers in *Overview*, through the exposition of the factual, historical events of his day. He argued that the current situation 'was the fruit of the Revolution, in the strictest and most significant sense of the word'.¹⁵³ To him, the history of his day displayed a pattern of an ideological nature that was like a key to solving the riddle of the political difficulties of the time. As he described it some forty years later, looking back on how he had come to his ideas: 'by surveying the [then] recent woefully fertile fifty years of agitation and misfortune, I tried to follow the thread through this labyrinth'.¹⁵⁴

His experience and knowledge of the Belgian Revolt had led him to identify this thread as a primarily ideological one. It allowed him to forecast more revolutions on a wider European scale at a time when Europe assumed that revolutionary uproars had been fully overcome and that it was on a trajectory of restoration. This meant that many years prior to the Europe-wide 1848 eruption of revolutions, he foresaw their likelihood. He could do so because he insisted that Europe remained dominated by revolutionary ideology, the French revolutionary mind-set, despite the fact that its initial expressions had been stemmed.

The ideological dimension in general and the concept of ideology as a primary cause for historical events in particular is an essential feature of Groen's thought. His experience of the Belgian Revolt and the contemplation of its causes were

¹⁵³ Groen van Prinsterer, *Christian Political Action*, 41.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 42.

catalytic factors for the formation of this aspect of his Christian-historical thinking.

3. Groen's Life-Long Clarion Call to Action a Result of Belgian Revolt Experience

There is another, perhaps less obvious, way in which the experience of the Belgian Revolt was a catalytic factor for the formation of Groen's thought, namely for the way his thought functions as a call to action. An essential feature of his thought is its practical dimension of requiring action in response to it. It claims that neutrality is not possible and insists that each party must choose its colours. It insists that truth must either be rejected or admitted, and that no other option is possible. It views indifference as promoting 'the triumph of evil', and is convinced that 'injustice triumphs when the attempt is made to unite justice and injustice'.¹⁵⁵ All of his writings were published with this undertone of urgency to take action. It flowed from his initial experience of the Northern Netherlands' lack of response to the revolutionary events in the South. The lukewarm, unresolved response that the unfolding of the Belgian crisis elicited from the Dutch monarch and general public opened Groen's eyes to the susceptibility of the Northern Netherlands to the radical-revolutionary thought that had gripped the Southern Netherlands. It made him aware that a neutral position in response to the revolutionary ideology was not possible, and taught him the reality that 'the application of revolutionary principles demands that one takes sides'.¹⁵⁶ The

¹⁵⁵ Groen van Prinsterer, *Nederlandsche Gedachten*, 1832, 3:107.

¹⁵⁶ In the words of Dr C. Gerretson, editor of Groen's literary estate for the series of National Dutch Historical Publications (*Rijks Geschiedenis Publicatiën*): Groen van Prinsterer, *Briefwisseling, 1808-1833*, 1:xv.

‘revolutionary victory’ of Belgium could likely have been thwarted had William I responded more decisively, and had public opinion in the Northern Netherlands been more determined and insistent on the issue.¹⁵⁷ Instead, the Dutch monarch and the Dutch public both responded in a lukewarm and indecisive manner. They did not recognise that the ideas that were being propagated echoed those of revolutionary France and as such could jeopardise the peace and stability of the kingdom. Efforts to confront and halt the ‘Belgian’ journalistic campaigns were hardly made. The unfolding of the Belgian Revolt thus revealed to Groen that the application of revolutionary ideology acted as a catalyst that ‘makes mind-sets evident and gives birth to political factions’.¹⁵⁸

This insight allowed him as early as 1831 to recognise the presence of political dynamics and ideological positions in the Northern Netherlands that would only surface and play out nearly twenty years later. At that time, in 1848, a new constitution would establish the modern Dutch state, based on enlightened, revolutionary principles.¹⁵⁹ By it the Netherlands departed in a radical way from previously held fundamentals of constitutional law, and broke completely with its historical, pre-revolutionary definition of society and state. It was an example of a ‘victory of revolutionary ideas’ as the Dutch state was from 1848 on established on *de facto* revolutionary ideas, even if in name it was not.

‘De praktijk der revolutionaire beginselen dwingt tot stellingnemen’.

¹⁵⁷ Witte, Craeybeckx, and Meynen, *Political History of Belgium: From 1830 Onwards*, 23.

¹⁵⁸ Gerretson in Groen van Prinsterer, *Briefwisseling, 1808-1833*, 1:xv.

‘De geesten worden openbaar en de politieke partijen zien het daglight’.

¹⁵⁹ Groen van Prinsterer, *Briefwisseling*, 1:xv.

Thus Groen's experience of the unresolved and weak Dutch response to the Belgian Revolt made clear to him that a neutral position vis-à-vis revolutionary ideology was not possible. It propelled him as early as 1830 to determine his own political position in response to the application of revolutionary ideology. His experience awoke a sense of calling in him to alert his fellow Dutchmen of the danger of the revolutionary ideology and the necessity to fight it. Armed with these aims he not only set out to explain his 'Christian and historical theory' in *Overview*, but all his later publications also were published in the service of these same aims.¹⁶⁰ *Overview's* publication and Groen's experience of the Belgian Revolt thus propelled him into a life of advocacy for what he called 'the anti-revolutionary principle' that spanned some forty-five years. It is for this reason fair to say that the experience of the Belgian Revolt acted not only as a catalyst for the formation of his Christian-historical thought, but also for his future anti-revolutionary actions as a statesman.

B. Influence of the Réveil on the Development of Groen's Thought

In addition to the influence of Groen's personal experience and interpretation of the Belgian Revolt on his political thought, the *Réveil* movement also played a significant role. Groen referred to this when he stated that the first exposition of his views was written 'under the influence of the *Réveil* and in the atmosphere of *Revolution*'.¹⁶¹

¹⁶⁰ Groen van Prinsterer, *Nederlandsche Gedachten*, 1832, 3:103.

¹⁶¹ Groen van Prinsterer, *Nederlandsche Gedachten*, 1873, 5:290.

'Deze eerste Nederlandsche Gedachten schreef ik onder den adem van het *Réveil* en in de sfeer der *Revolutie*'.

1. Influence of the *Réveil*'s View of History on Groen's Thought

Through his close association with prominent figures in the *Réveil* movement, notably Jean-Henri Merle d'Aubigné, William I's court chaplain in Brussels, and Jean Secrétan, pastor of the Walloon Church he attended in The Hague, Groen was exposed to the movement's ideas about 'history'. The *Réveil* approached history as containing lessons that have value for today. In its emphasis on reformed orthodox faith it preached a return to the simple faith of the reformation fathers. As such the Reformation, and the time in Dutch national history when many closely adhered to the reformed faith, were looked at for inspiration and for instruction. Several assumptions undergirded the *Réveil*'s approach to 'history'. We will highlight these from a talk and sermon that Merle and Secrétan respectively gave in the early 1830s about the lessons of history. Four assumptions are especially noteworthy.

The *first* is that the *Réveil* movement regarded 'history' to function as a data check or observation of the truth. In this view 'history' offered and confirmed actual facts.¹⁶² In the words of Merle: 'History shows us', it 'makes us see' truth. It questions, teaches, reveals and proves. 'History confirms to us the truths that are taught to us by the nature of things.' It is when 'we advance the torch of history that all the phantoms that are created by hostile imaginations instantly vanish'.¹⁶³

¹⁶² J. C. J. Secrétan, 'Les leçons de l'histoire', in *Sermons sur quelques Textes de l'Ecriture sainte* (Amsterdam: Höveker, 1834), 191, 195.

'L'histoire étant (...) le contrôle de la vérité, (...). Les faits [historiques] sont des raisonnemens [sic] qu'il est difficile de contredire. (...) L'histoire offre à notre méditation (...) faits'.

¹⁶³ J.-H. Merle-d'Aubigné, *Discours sur l'Étude de l'Histoire du Christianisme et son utilité pour l'époque actuelle* (Paris: Risler, 1832), 9, 22, 30, 32, 33, 21.

'L'histoire nous le montre (...). L'histoire nous montera (...). Elle nous fera voir (...). L'histoire (...) vous apprendra (...). Elle vous montrera (...). Ici l'histoire du christianisme vous répondra encore. Elle vous montera (...). Ces (...) vérités, que la nature des choses nous enseigne, l'histoire nous les

The *second* assumption builds on the first assumption and pivots on the Christian-orthodox presupposition that the Scriptures convey God's truth. It posits that 'since history is an observation of the truth', and the teachings of Scriptures are true, history necessarily 'confirms the teachings of the Word of God'.¹⁶⁴ A further consequence of the fact that 'history everywhere confirms the teachings of God's Word', is as Secrétan preached, that 'the latter in turn explains history'. Thus 'history' in this view not only has a divinely revelatory dimension to it, its interpretation itself is brought under the scrutiny of the Scriptures. The Scriptures give the needed additional insight to 'history' without which 'history' remains 'an eternal enigma, a closed book, an inextricable labyrinth'. The *Réveil* movement asserted that only when one is 'armed with the torch of the Word of God, can history's mysterious pages be fully understood'.¹⁶⁵

The *third* assumption is that Christ is the centre of world history. Merle worded this as follows: 'Jesus Christ has established among men God's kingdom: from this moment on the history of mankind (...) has had a centre, to which all things can and ought to be related. It is this divine rule that has brought a unity to the people on earth and to their history'.¹⁶⁶ In this view it is the figure of Christ that ultimately gives meaning and coherence to history.

confirmera. Elle nous révélera (...). Elle nous prouvera (...). L'histoire contemporaine elle-même nous instruira'.

'Avançons le flambeau de l'histoire, et tout ces fantômes que créent des imaginations ennemies, s'évanouissent à l'instant même'.

¹⁶⁴ Secrétan, 'Les leçons de l'histoire', 191.

'L'histoire étant (...) le contrôle de la vérité, il est rassurant pour la foi du fidèle de voir que cette histoire confirme les enseignemens [sic] de la parole de Dieu'.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 192.

'(...) si l'histoire vient partout confirmer les enseignemens [sic] de la parole de Dieu, celle-ci à son tour nous explique l'histoire, en sorte qu'on peut dire sans crainte de se tromper, que celle-ci demeure et demeurera éternellement une énigme, un livre fermé, un labyrinthe inextricable, pour tout homme qui ne s'armera pas du flambeau de la parole de Dieu pour en comprendre les pages mystérieuses'.

¹⁶⁶ Merle-d'Aubigné, *Discours sur l'Étude de l'Histoire du Christianisme*, 25.

The *fourth* assumption is that the history of a people and that of an individual alike offer lessons for instruction.¹⁶⁷ This assumption welcomed the study of a nation's interaction with God and looked for God's blessings and curses on a nation in relationship to its obedience or disobedience to Him.

These four assumptions of the *Réveil* movement encouraged the study of history, both that of general history and of the history of Christianity. These assumptions were predicated on the orthodox-Christian presupposition of God's existence and His personal involvement with mankind, as individuals and as nations. For this reason the *Réveil* movement expected to see God at work in 'history'. It equally expected to recognise God's character and ways that are knowable from the Scriptures, to be knowable in 'history'. These same expectations and assumptions play an important role in Groen's Christian-historical thought. It is therefore fair to conclude that his exposure to the *Réveil* and its view of 'history' was a catalytic factor in the development of his thinking.

2. The *Réveil*'s Influence on Groen's Christian Faith

Another aspect that is relevant in the analysis of the catalytic factors for the development of Groen's thought is the influence of the *Réveil* movement on his Christian convictions. We have already discussed these above. Here we wish to

'Jésus-Christ a fondé au milieu des hommes un règne de Dieu : et dès ce moment l'histoire de l'espèce humaine (...) a eu un centre, auquel tout a pu et a dû être rapporté. C'est ce règne divin qui a rapporté l'unité aux peuples de la terre et à leur histoire's

¹⁶⁷ Secrétan, 'Les leçons de l'histoire', 208.

' (...) en traçant l'histoire des peuples nous avons également tracé celle des individus, qui est partout la même à des degrés plus ou moins différents [sic] et sous des formes plus ou moins variées'.

quote from Groen's personal correspondence with close friends to highlight the impact the *Réveil* had on his faith experience.

'My marriage', Groen wrote his friend Anthony van Rappard on 20 November 1831, 'as well as the acquaintance and informal interaction with such men as Merle, Secrétan, and De Clercq', 'brought me to a wholly different view of religion'. Under these men's influence he came to see religion 'as a life-principle, that should be united and interwoven with our whole existence'.¹⁶⁸ His familiarity with the *Réveil*-men, in addition to the influence of his wife, resulted in a deepening of his intellectual assent to the Christian faith. It meant that he became more firmly 'convinced of the truth of the Gospel', as he wrote in another letter to Van Rappard, of 27/28 October 1831.¹⁶⁹ It resulted in his rational persuasion that 'there is no salvation outside the Gospel', as he wrote to Merle on 3 October 1831.¹⁷⁰ His increased intellectual acceptance of the truth and trustworthiness of the Christian faith gave him the conviction that 'unbelief is the great evil that shakes Europe to its core' and that 'the systematic apostasy from Christianity' was the main cause of the evils of his day.¹⁷¹ His deepened Christian conviction meant that 'the whole of history became to him a confirmation of truths that the H.

¹⁶⁸ Groen van Prinsterer, *Briefwisseling*, 1:503 (n° 492).

'(...) terwijl ik de Godsdienst altijd veel meer als een afzonderlijk iets beschouwde, dan als een levensbeginsel, hetwelk met ons gansche bestaan vereenigd en ingeweven behoort te zijn. Een aantal omstandigheden [hebben] zamengewerkt om mij de zaak [godsdienst] uit een gansch ander oogpunt te doen beschouwen. Gij gevoelt, dat ik onder die omstandigheden ook vooral mijn huwelijk tel, voorts de kennismaking en gemeenzamen omgang met mannen als Merle, Secrétan en De Clercq'.

¹⁶⁹ Groen van Prinsterer, *Briefwisseling, 1808-1833*, 1:492 (n° 483).

'(...) dagelijks meer van de waarheid van het Evangelie overtuigd, (...)'.¹⁷⁰

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 1:485 (n° 477).

'(...) ont beaucoup contribué à me donner une conviction plus ferme que hors de l'Évangile il n'y a point de salut'.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 1:485 (n° 477), 503 (n° 492).

'(...) ont beaucoup contribué à me donner une conviction plus ferme (...) que l'incrédulité est le grand mal qui agite l'Europe jusque dans ses fondemen[t]s'.

'De uitgave der *Ned. Ged.*, [dwong mij uiteindelijk] meer en meer na te denken omtrent de oorzaken van het kwaad, totdat mij eindelijk de hoofdoorzaak, namelijk de stelselmatige afval van het Christendom, duidelijk werd'.

Scriptures reveal'. 'For this reason', he summarised it in his letter to Van Rappard of 20 November 1831, 'the conviction of the intellect is stronger than ever before'.¹⁷² Groen's conviction of the veracity of Christianity, his view that 'unbelief' or 'systematic apostasy from Christianity' was at the heart of the evils of his days, as well as the assumption that 'the whole of history' was 'a confirmation of the truths that the H. Scriptures reveal' are characteristic features of his thought. They clearly reflect the influence of the *Réveil* as a catalytic factor for its development.

3. Intellectual Nature of Groen's Faith at the Time of *Overview*

A further aspect of the influence of the *Réveil* movement on the formation of Groen's thought that merits our attention is the discrepancy it highlighted between his own experience of his faith and that of his friends Merle, Secrétan and De Clercq. These prominent *Réveil* figures emphasised the heart-felt aspect of the Christian faith, which was an aspect that was missing in Groen's experience, according to his own assessment. His personal correspondence with close friends at the time that he wrote *Overview* emphasised to what extent he grappled with the fact that he was intellectually convinced of the veracity of the Christian Gospel, but at the same time missed the 'life-giving faith' that he expected to mark the complete renewal of the true Christian. In the letters referenced above, he acknowledged a lack of investment of his heart with regard to Christian matters, along with his deepened intellectual conviction that Christianity is true. As he

¹⁷² Ibid., 1:503 (n° 492).

'(...) de gansche geschiedenis wordt mij eene doorgaande bevestiging der waarheden, die de H. Schrift openbaart. Het ontbreekt mij derhalve thans minder dan ooit aan de overtuiging van het verstand'.

wrote to Van Rappard on 27/28 October 1831: 'For me religion remains too much a matter of the intellect; though daily more convinced of the truth of the Gospel, I so often recognise with sadness that this conviction as yet exerts too little influence on my heart'.¹⁷³ Similarly, in his letter of 3 October 1831 to Merle he followed his statement of being convinced that 'there is no salvation outside the Gospel' with: 'Even so, I do not as yet have the courage to flatter myself as though I possessed this living and life-giving faith by which all our being must undergo the complete renewal that marks the state of a true Christian'.¹⁷⁴ And in his letter of 20 November 1831 to Van Rappard Groen acknowledged that 'the conviction of the intellect is ever becoming stronger', but followed it with:

But should you ask me what influence that conviction has on my heart? Then I would have to confess with shame that that influence is very small. Such faith as makes one a new creation, as allows one to feel fully satisfied and peaceful and happy and blessed while still on earth, such faith I do not have, or if I do in such small measures that I am hardly aware of it.¹⁷⁵

It would be some time later, in January 1833, before Groen found assurance that his faith had reached his heart and had made him a new creation.¹⁷⁶ This point is of interest because it makes *Overview* the only exposition of his thought prior to what he himself considered his conversion. *Overview* thus provides a reference

¹⁷³ Groen van Prinsterer, *Briefwisseling*, 1:492 (n° 483).

'Bij mij is de godsdienst nog te uitsluitend eene zaak van het verstand; dagelijks meer van de waarheid van het Evangelie overtuigd, gevoel ik dikwijls met leedwezen, dat die overtuiging nog veel te weinig invloed heeft op mijn hart'.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 1:485 (n° 477).

'Néanmoins je n'ose nullement encore me flatter de posséder cette foi vive et vivifiante, par laquelle tout notre être doit subir le renouvellement complet qui constitue l'état du véritable chrétien'.

¹⁷⁵ Groen van Prinsterer, *Briefwisseling, 1808-1833*, 1:503 (n° 492).

'Maar nu vraagt gij, welken invloed deze overtuiging heeft op mijn hart? En dan moet ik u met schaamte bekennen, dat die invloed nog zeer gering is. Dat geloof, waardoor men een nieuw schepsel wordt, waardoor men zich volkomen bevredigd en gerust en gelukkig en reeds op aarde zalig gevoelt, dat geloof bezit ik niet, of althans in nog zóó geringe mate, dat ik er mij zelf nog bijna onbewust van ben'.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 1:xvii, 648 (n° 705-6), 649 (n° 710).

point for the question whether his *Christian*-historical views changed after 1833. Interestingly, *Overview* highlights that this was not the case, as it does not offer different Christian presuppositions from Groen's later works. It thus also emphasises the intellectual aspect of his Christian-historical thought. We draw two observations from this intellectual emphasis.

a) *Nineteenth-Century Calvinist Holland Broadly Shared
Groen's Intellectual Assent to Christianity*

The first is that Groen's intellectual assent to the Christian faith was broadly shared across nineteenth-century Dutch culture. Protestantism in particular was very much an essential and principal element of Dutch society, also during the restoration period of 1815-1830.¹⁷⁷ In the Netherlands of the nineteenth century Christianity's validity or veracity was not so much questioned, as were its application and interpretation.¹⁷⁸ For this reason it is not surprising to read Groen's statement in *Overview* that 'there is no other revelation than what is contained in the Holy Scriptures', about which he added in a footnote his conviction that this high view of Scripture was shared by his fellow Dutchmen: 'of this most of our readers are likely convinced: Holland, for all its leniency towards revolutionary dogma, remained attached to the truth of the Gospel by a happy inconsistency'.¹⁷⁹ That he was right in this conviction is further demonstrated by

¹⁷⁷ A. G. Dickens and John M. Tonkin, *The Reformation in Historical Thought* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1985), 189. See also John B. Roney, *The Inside of History: Jean-Henri Merle d'Aubigné and Romantic Historiography* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1996), 17.

¹⁷⁸ James W. Skillen and Stanley W. Carlson-Thies, 'Religion and Political Development in Nineteenth-Century Holland', *Publius* 12, no. 3 (Summer 1982): 43-64. See for a sketch of nineteenth century religion and thought in the Netherlands John B. Roney, *Culture and Customs of the Netherlands*, *Cultures and Customs of Europe* (Santa Barbara, Calif.: Greenwood Press, 2009), 61-66.

¹⁷⁹ Groen van Prinsterer, *Nederlandsche Gedachten*, 1832, 3:94, footnote.

the manner in which one of his fiercest contemporary critics, the renowned Dutch historian Robert Fruin, criticised his Christian-historical thought. Fruin, who was agnostic, did not focus his attack on the Scriptures themselves, but he objected vehemently to the conclusions Groen drew from them. Fruin did not oppose Groen's reverence for God's Word, but the manner in which he used Scripture as, what Fruin termed, 'a manual for constitutional theory and a source of guidance for political matters'.¹⁸⁰

b) Groen's Historical Analysis Uniquely Married to Religious Insights

The second observation is that Groen's study of the historical events of his day, in addition to the influence of his wife and his *Réveil* friends, was the catalyst for his strengthened intellectual adherence to Christianity. *Overview* was a summary 'sketch of *history* since 1789'. It summarised what he had found 'by surveying the recent woefully fertile fifty years of agitation and misfortune'.¹⁸¹ As he had confided to his friend Van Rappard on 20 November 1831, 'It was the publication of *Dutch Thoughts*, which eventually forced me to think more and more about the causes of evil, until its main cause, namely the systematic apostasy from Christianity, became clear to me'. The result, he continued, was that 'since that time a thousand matters that I used to consider unsolvable riddles have become clear to me, and the whole of history is becoming a confirmation of truths that the

'Hiervan zijn waarschijnlijk de meesten onzer lezers overtuigd: in Holland, schoon men dikwijls zeer toegeeflijk ten aanzien der revolutie-leer was, bleef men, door eene gelukkige inconsequentie, over 't algemeen, aan de Evangeliewaarheid gehecht'.

¹⁸⁰ R. Fruin, *Het Antirevolutionaire Staatsregt van Mr. G. Groen van Prinsterer ontvouwd en beoordeeld* (Amsterdam: Gebhard, 1853), 17–53. See also review of *Het Anti-revolutionaire Staatsregt van Mr. G. Groen van Prinsterer ontvouwd en beoordeeld*, by R. Fruin, *Vaderlandsche Letteroefeningen*, 1854, 594–5.

¹⁸¹ Groen van Prinsterer, *Christian Political Action*, 42. Emphasis added.

H. Scriptures reveal'.¹⁸² Hence it was his study of, and reflection on, historical events that confirmed to him the validity of Christianity and Scriptural teachings. From this observation it follows that Groen was able to marry the interpretation of the political-historical events of his time with his religious insights. This ability marks one of the distinct contributions of his thought. It is also what distinguishes him from his nineteenth-century contemporaries who shared his Calvinist-Christian presuppositions but not his interpretation of their present-day political difficulties. Many, if not most, of his contemporaries in fact disagreed with Groen's Christian-historical deductions. It highlights that his analysis of historical events was distinctive. It was this historical analysis, not his Christian presuppositions, that make his thought unique compared to that of his contemporaries. As such his view was consistent both with his Christian understanding of the world, and with the view of history that the *Réveil* movement championed.

The *Réveil* movement's approach to history significantly influenced Groen's thought. The function his Christian-historical principle attributes to 'history' mirrors that of the *Réveil* in that both see history as a 'data check', and a test or an observation of the truth. This view on the role of history is core to Groen's thinking, and allows us to conclude that the influence of the *Réveil* was a very important catalytic factor for the development of his thought.

¹⁸² Groen van Prinsterer, *Briefwisseling*, 1:503 (n° 492).

'De uitgave der Ned. Ged., [dwong mij uiteindelijk] meer en meer na te denken omtrent de oorzaken van het kwaad, totdat mij eindelijk de hoofdoorzaak, namenlijk de stelselmatige afval van het Christendom, duidelijk werd. Sedert dien tijd zijn duizende zaken mij duidelijk geworden, die ik vroeger als onoplosbare raadsels had beschouwd, en de gansche geschiedenis wordt mij eene doorgaande bevestiging der waarheden, die de H. Schrift openbaart'.

4. Groen's Introduction to Edmund Burke's Writings

One more aspect of the influence of the *Réveil* movement on the development of Groen's thought deserves mention. It is Groen's introduction to Edmund Burke's writings, probably at Merle's recommendation. In 1829, while in Brussels, Groen read *Reflections on the Revolution in France* and *Letters on a Regicide Peace*, 'ravenously' according to his own account.¹⁸³ These works articulated Burke's assessment that the French Revolution was primarily ideological in nature; a religious war that had to be countered and stopped. Burke's thought helped Groen to articulate his own, and was catalytic for its development. Groen considered himself Burke's disciple and ally, and regarded his own Christian-historical, or anti-revolutionary, thought to be in full agreement with Burke's thought.¹⁸⁴ Burke was to him a man without 'equal in setting forth the nature and action of the Revolution ideas, and the successful means to combat them.'¹⁸⁵ He was, in Groen's eyes, 'the most excellent of all opponents of the Revolution.'¹⁸⁶ To him Burke always remained 'the anti-revolutionary par excellence. The one who spearheaded Christian-historical politics.'¹⁸⁷

¹⁸³ Van Dyke, *Groen van Prinsterer's Lectures*, 42–3. Groen van Prinsterer, *Nederlandsche Gedachten*, 1873, 5:334.

¹⁸⁴ Groen van Prinsterer, *Briefwisseling, 1827-1869*, 5:634–5. Letter to Kemink and son of 5 October 1865. Groen van Prinsterer, 'De Nederlander', n° 1041. See also R. Fruin, *De Antirevolutionaire Bezwaren van Mr. Groen van Prinsterer tegen onzen Staat en onze Maatschappij overwogen* (Amsterdam: Gebhard, 1854), 43.

¹⁸⁵ Groen van Prinsterer, *Ongeloof en Revolutie (1847)*, 31. Van Dyke's translation.

¹⁸⁶ Groen van Prinsterer, 'Stahl. Studiën', 361. Groen here approvingly quotes Stahl's opinion of Burke.

'Als er van revolutiebestrijders spraak is, (...) is hij, zonder eenige vergelijking, de uitnemendste van allen.'

¹⁸⁷ Groen van Prinsterer, *Nederlandsche Gedachten*, 1873, 5:323.

'Burke is de antirevolutionair bij uitnemendheid. De leidsman op de baan eener Christelijk-historische Politiek.'

V. CONCLUSION

Our discussion has painted the context within which Groen lived and worked, and has given an introduction to his person and work. Our discussion of Groen's experience of the Belgian Revolt and the *Réveil* movement has drawn attention to the ideological aspect of the Belgian Revolt and the view of history of the *Réveil* respectively. We have surmised that these are elements that Groen's thought manifests, and have argued that his experience of the Belgian Revolt and the *Réveil* were catalytic for the development of Groen's thought. It requires a critical analysis of the essence of Groen's thinking to verify if our intuitions are correct. We will proceed to that next.

CHAPTER TWO: CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE EARLIEST PUBLISHED OUTLINE OF GROEN VAN PRINSTERER'S CHRISTIAN-HISTORICAL THOUGHT

As we have discussed in chapter one, Groen reached what he called 'the fixity of an anti-revolutionary polemic', following his providentially given experience of living and working 'in an exceptional era, and in the centre of politics and of polemics, as a civil servant and a publicist'.¹⁸⁸ *Nederlandsche Gedachten* ('Dutch Thoughts') is the publication that reflects this. It is noteworthy for the way it documents the historical events of the time and Groen's interpretation of them. Its value is also found in the way its publication acted as a catalyst for Groen to think through the events of his day deeply and to explain to his readership what the principles were that guided him in the assessment of these historical events and their correlation to each other.¹⁸⁹ This explanation he specifically set out in seven consecutive instalments of *Dutch Thoughts*, in what he called an 'overview of the principles of the *Dutch Thoughts*'.¹⁹⁰ This overview he simply called

¹⁸⁸ Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer, *Nederlandsche Gedachten*, vol. 5, Second Series (Amsterdam: Hōveker, 1873), 281. The Dutch word for 'fixity' is as archaic as the English.

'Uit de sleur van een gematigd Liberalisme, waarin ik, als geestverwant, 's Gravenhage verliet, ben ik in een tijdsgewricht van ongeveer derdehalf jaar, tot vastheid van antirevolutionaire polemieker geraakt. Onder het aanschouwen van de losgebarsten Revolutie. Op een mij providentieel te beurt gevallen standpunt'.

Ibid., 5:345.

'... in een exceptioneel tijdsgewricht en in het centrum van politiek en polemieker, als ambtenaar en als publicist...'

¹⁸⁹ Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer, *Nederlandsche Gedachten*, vol. 3, First Series (The Hague: Vervloet, 1832), 79.

¹⁹⁰ Groen van Prinsterer, *Nederlandsche Gedachten*, 1873, 5:346.

'Overzicht van de beginsels der *Nederlandsche Gedachten*'.

The seven instalments were originally published as *Dutch Thoughts* n° 21-27. The instalments, together with the other 1831 *Dutch Thoughts* pamphlets, were published as a year bundle in 1832, as the third volume of the First Series of *Nederlandsche Gedachten*.

'*Overzicht*' ('*Overview*'). It is the earliest published outline of his Christian-historical thought.¹⁹¹

The publication of *Overview* marked the end of the period of two and a half years in which Groen's thought developed. As such, *Overview*, more than any other of his works points back to the catalytic factors for his thought's development. Our exposition of these factors in chapter one has painted the background of what resulted in Groen's 'fixity of principle' by the time of *Overview*'s distribution. As he stated towards the end of his life: 'In 1831 the anti-revolutionary, the Christian-historical education had been completed'.¹⁹² 'From 1831' onwards, he reiterated elsewhere, 'I have followed the same principle and the same course of action'.¹⁹³ And again: 'In 1831, my beliefs (...) were settled'.¹⁹⁴ *Overview* gives an exposition of these fixed beliefs. It is a polemic in which, as Groen stated in the 1870s, 'is to be found the basic outline of all that I have later written or done'.¹⁹⁵

Since the aim of our study is a critical analysis of Groen's thought, an analytical exposition specifically of *Overview* holds particular promise to bring out his thought in its core assumptions. This is so for several reasons.

¹⁹¹ Tiemen De Vries, *Handleiding tot de kennis van het Leven en de Werken van Mr. G. Groen van Prinsterer* (Appingedam, the Netherlands: Van der Ploeg, 1895), 59.

¹⁹² Groen van Prinsterer, *Nederlandsche Gedachten*, 1873, 5:345–6.

'*Te Brussel en 's Gravenhage, van 1829 tot 1831 (...) ben ik tot beginselvastheid geraakt. (...) In 1831 was de antirevolutionaire, de Christelijk-historische opvoeding voltooid*'.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, 5:396.

'*Ik [heb] van 1831 (...) hetzelfde beginsel en dezelfde gedragslijn gevolgd*'.

¹⁹⁴ Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer, *Christian Political Action in an Age of Revolution*, trans. Colin Wright (Aalten, the Netherlands: Wordbridge Publishing, 2015), 42.

¹⁹⁵ Groen van Prinsterer, *Nederlandsche Gedachten*, 1873, 5:291.

[Referring to *Nederlandsche Gedachten*] '*In deze (...) polemie, (...) zijn de grondlijnen aanwijsbaar van al wat ik daarna schreef en deed*'.

The *first* is that this publication is Groen's first comprehensive exposition of his thought. It presents 'the basic outline' of the ideas that he would hold and defend for the rest of his life and that would inform all that he later wrote or did. *Overview* is for this reason an excellent resource to begin our critical analysis and to articulate the core of Groen's thinking.

Secondly, the more basic format and content of *Overview* compared to more detailed and elaborate later expositions of his thought, such as his classic 1847 *Ongeloof en Revolutie* ('*Unbelief and Revolution*'), promise to bring out the essence of his thinking in a unique way. Because *Overview* presents a 'basic outline', its critical exposition will by definition omit less important elements of Groen's thought and in this way minimise distractions from its essence. Thus a focus on *Overview* as the basis for our critical analysis of Groen's thought will uniquely elucidate its essential characteristics and foundational assumptions. At the same time we do not wish to ignore the nuances and insights of his more mature thinking as expressed in later works. For this reason we will use *Overview* as our initial resource for the exposition of his essential thought and will use our findings as the foundation from which we will broaden and fine-tune our understanding through insights from Groen's later works. This approach promises to be helpful in distinguishing the primary aspects of his thought from the secondary ones.

A *third* reason why a critical analysis of *Overview* is promising is that it offers an original angle to approach Groen's thought. Because his later *Unbelief and Revolution* has always been considered the classic exposition of his ideas,

academic engagement with his thought has generally concentrated on this work. While the detailed and robust nature of *Unbelief and Revolution's* argument warrants the academic attention it has received in the last century and a half, using *Overview* as the starting point of our analysis adds an additional and original layer to the scholarly treatment of Groen's thought.

We will in this chapter firstly give an outline of the argument Groen sets forth in his 1831 *Overview*, followed by a critical analysis of it. Our analysis brings out the basic premises of Groen's thought, which we will further develop and fine-tune in the two chapters that follow. In these subsequent chapters we will also verify our initial conclusions, using resources beyond *Overview*. Our critical evaluation of Groen's ideas we will reserve for these chapters as well.

I. OUTLINE OF THE ARGUMENT GROEN MAKES IN OVERVIEW

Overview gives the reader the earliest published explanation by Groen himself of his Christian-historical principle, what he in 1831 calls his 'Christian and historical theory'.¹⁹⁶ It is, in Groen's words, 'an indisputable anti-revolutionary confession on Christian-historical basis'.¹⁹⁷ This confession he later revived and expanded into his classic *Unbelief and Revolution* lectures presented in the winter

¹⁹⁶ Groen van Prinsterer, *Nederlandsche Gedachten*, 1832, 3:103.

¹⁹⁷ Groen van Prinsterer, *Nederlandsche Gedachten*, 1873, 5:25.

[Ik ben] tot vastheid van beginselen geraakt (...) Tot het leveren, reeds in 1831, van een Schets of Overzicht, waarin een niet twijfelachtige antirevolutionaire belijdenis op christelijk-historischen grondslag, en aldus de kern van het in 1847 verschenen Ongeloof en Revolutie, vervat is'.

of 1845-46 and eventually published for an international audience as *Le parti anti-révolutionnaire et confessionnel dans l'église réformée des Pays-Bas* in 1860.¹⁹⁸

Groen wrote *Overview* to 'elucidate the overall system of Dutch Thoughts'. It opens with these words: 'When history is divided not merely according to time periods, but also according to the course and development of ideas, then every period has a characteristic feature that determines its entire direction. This feature has for more than fifty years been that of *unbelief*'.¹⁹⁹ With this statement Groen marks his present day as radically different from all previous eras in history by its foundational presupposition of unbelief: by its 'denial of a revealed Deity' and its rejection of faith as the foundation of society.²⁰⁰ He explains that religion is no longer, as previously, regarded as the foundation of states and the law of nations. In the same way, divine revelation is no longer, as previously, regarded as the ultimate source of human knowledge. *Overview* develops this view and makes it intelligible. It makes a sharp distinction between on the one hand the contemporary revolutionary era that does not consider religion supremely important for any area of life, including that of politics. And on the other, all preceding eras where even pagan peoples had acknowledged that worldly authority is God's servant. It points out that unbelief rejects the premise Christendom subscribed to, namely that God is the source of all moral principle

¹⁹⁸ For Groen's acknowledgement that *Unbelief and Revolution* was an expansion of *Overview*, see *Ibid.*, 5:25, 158, 351.

Unbelief and Revolution was first published in 1847 and republished in 1868.

Groen's French work, *Le parti anti-révolutionnaire et confessionnel dans l'église réformée des Pays-Bas*, was first translated in English in 2015: Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer, *Christian Political Action in an Age of Revolution*, trans. Colin Wright (Aalten, the Netherlands: Wordbridge Publishing, 2015). Groen considered this 1860 work the 'fleshed-out' version of his 'bare bones 1831 *Overview*': *Ibid.*, 5:348.

¹⁹⁹ Groen van Prinsterer, *Nederlandsche Gedachten*, 1832, 3:81.

This and all further quotations of passages from *Overview* are our original English translation from Dutch. For the complete English text we refer to the Appendix.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 3:93.

and that His revelation as recorded in Scripture has supremacy over human insight and consent. Unbelief elevates man above God, and elevates man's reason above faith in revelation.²⁰¹ The revolutionary period's novel and foundational ideological feature of unbelief has replaced the previously almost universally accepted foundational ideological feature of faith. This former presupposition of faith had characterised European Christendom from the Middle Ages onwards. The replacement of faith by unbelief means that the moral compass and social bond that communal faith in a Higher Being and communal submission to His revealed will and law had given Christendom is lost. In the political arena this has resulted in the perpetual revolutionary conflicts of the day.

A. Ideological Feature of Unbelief Distinguishes Revolutionary from Pre-Revolutionary Periods

1. Nature of Government: Divine or Man-Made

Groen makes his case by pointing out that with regard to worldly authority the historical, pre-revolutionary understanding of government had always been that it is God's servant. The novel revolutionary understanding of government on the other hand is that it is the servant of the General Will. This difference in the understanding of the nature of government directly follows from the eras' differing foundational presuppositions. Because the pre-revolutionary period of European Christendom accepted divine revelation as the foundation of states and the legal code of nations, every government —irrespective of its form— was grounded in the conviction that it was part of God's ordering of the world. Since

²⁰¹ Ibid., 3:81.

God's ordering determined the essence and character of institutions and the mutual nature of relationships, man's fallibility or governmental negligence and rejection of duty could not rescind them. God's ordering —perceived in every state as in every family— meant that it was God's will and law that sanctified authority, ennobled obedience, and determined the duty of both subject and of government. As a consequence, God's benevolence and justice ensured that worldly authority was not arbitrary or unlimited, and that a people's right of defence and of resistance was recognised. Christendom's view that government and its authority is ultimately sourced in God is the teaching of the Christian Church, both Protestant and Roman Catholic.²⁰²

Overview argues that the revolutionary period does not submit to the historical, Christian understanding of the nature of government. It rejects the divine revelation in which this view is grounded and embraces instead the supremacy of human consent and insight. Since it regards human reason as the 'source and touchstone of truth and justice', and man as 'free and equal', 'lord over himself', the revolutionary period grounds worldly authority in the dogma of popular sovereignty. As a consequence, human agreements ('convention') had to ground civil society. In the revolutionary view government and its authority are not ordained of God but made dependent on the consent of man who has made 'a tacit or explicit social contract, in which one submitted oneself to a government as a means of seeing the general will executed'.²⁰³ In this perspective, government originates out of the general will, and is only obedient to the general will. The

²⁰² Ibid.

²⁰³ Ibid.

problem with this novel understanding of government is that irrespective of the kind of man-made arrangement of state that is chosen, 'the so-called *general* will can never at one point in time, let alone over a long period of time, be the will of *all*'. This means that 'a principle of discord and anarchy' is introduced into the fabric of the state that is both developed and halted by violence. Because the theory of a general will breeds inescapable violence the state must be arranged as an artificial, materialist machine in order to contain this violence, 'through centralisation, bureaucracy, and total destruction of all that was left of the old common liberties'. Thus despotism is a consequence of the revolutionary philosophy, which not only starts, but also ends in atheism.²⁰⁴

2. Discovery of Truth: Revelation or Reason

With regard to the question how essential reality or truth may ultimately be discovered and known, how knowledge is acquired, *Overview* shows that the pre-revolutionary and revolutionary periods differ by their contrasting foundational presuppositions about the source of the knowledge of truth.

Christianity's historical stance has always been that the Gospel is the unchangeable 'authority of God', and that this divine revelation has 'supremacy over human consent' or human consensus. The novel revolutionary stance on the other hand denies this supremacy of revelation with its denial of the revealed Deity, and instead elevates man's insights above faith in revelation.²⁰⁵ 'The same reasonings that had inverted constitutional law' by its elevation of man above God

²⁰⁴ Ibid., 3:82.

²⁰⁵ Ibid., 3:81.

and its insistence that government is sourced in man's will, instead of in God's will and law, 'was used on every right and relationship'. It meant that 'one's own opinion, one's own will, one's own interest' henceforth determined one's duties towards other nations, fellow-citizen, and even one's family members.²⁰⁶ Because man is not just fallible but also depraved the theory of the supremacy of man's will based on unbelief had 'perpetual discord as its inescapable consequence'.²⁰⁷ It spelled 'approaching barbarism, also under the guise of civilised forms'. It is the theory of unbelief and its 'natural and unavoidable development' that caused the revolutionary destructions and the multiple revolutions of the time, *not* grievances or abuses.²⁰⁸

In this way *Overview* pinpoints the underlying root cause of the revolutionary upheavals and destructions of the time in the era's foundational presupposition of unbelief. Its analysis of the political problems of the day incorporates an ideological, immaterial dimension and highlights its religious, albeit atheistic, feature.

B. Christianity the Ideological Solution for the Ideological Revolutionary Problems

Having established that the nature of the revolutionary problems is ideological, ultimately grounded in unbelief, *Overview* provides an outline of the revolutionary problems' solution. It states that this solution needs to address the

²⁰⁶ Ibid., 3:82.

²⁰⁷ Ibid., 3:85.

²⁰⁸ Ibid., 3:82.

Revolution's ideological feature, and for this reason needs to be ideological as well.

1. Ideological Solution Has Never Been Tried

Overview argues that if the revolutionary dogma is to be defeated, it 'must be struck at its source, in the principle from which it flows'. An ideological solution has however never been tried: 'not in 1789, not in 1815, nor in 1830. The dogma has not been opposed, only the *degree of its expansion*, and the *mode and timeliness of its application*'.²⁰⁹ By evaluating the historical events of the first French Revolution, the Restoration of 1813 and 1815, and the July 1830 Revolution in France *Overview* shows that the revolutionary 'dogma, though opposed in many ways in its development, has never been attacked at its core'. While the consequences of the revolutionary philosophy have been fought, the historical events of the previous fifty years make clear that the doctrine itself has consistently been honoured — 'despite the fact that the principle was false and its consequences were correct'.²¹⁰ It is for this reason that *Overview* regards Europe as having 'remained completely true to itself in its liberal politics' of the post-1789 years. What has played out has been 'a liberal civil war', a Europe-wide subjection to a revolutionary faction that has not been opposed in 'the *essence* of its confession and fanaticism'.²¹¹

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 3:85.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 3:93, 89.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, 3:91.

2. Only Christianity Powerful Enough to Challenge Unbelief

Overview further shows that only Christian truth is powerful enough to break, or at a minimum challenge, unbelief's undivided rule over minds. To demonstrate that this is so, it brings to mind what a 'communal faith in a Higher Being' has historically had as effect: it is 'the indispensable bond of a well-structured society'. Historically, this 'faith in God's infallible revelation is the bond that united the European states, both to each other and in their internal structure since the beginning of the Middle Ages'. Only because 'religiosity had become tepid from the beginning of the eighteenth century onwards', and because consequently the Christian organisation of society had been adhered to more out of habit than out of conviction, had Christianity's historically beneficial influence on society's bond weakened. Disguised as 'religion of reason' unbelief in Christianity had furthermore gradually resulted in outright unbelief, in utter atheism. This unbelieving philosophy's first concern had been 'the exclusion of revelation (...) from all areas of knowledge and practice'. Along with this abandonment of faith in God, 'every other bond of faith and submission' necessarily also expired so that 'no other guiding principles remained but individual intellect and reason in philosophy, individual taste in the fine arts, the individual will in politics'. In this way 'unbelief only brought about that disastrous anarchy, of which the confusion in politics is merely one of its ubiquitous outworkings'.²¹² This anarchy, this lack of principle, 'is the prevailing disease of the times'. This is so 'because the source of all moral principle is denied; because a doctrine is accepted, the main proposition of which is the rejection of all

²¹² Ibid., 3:93.

principle'.²¹³ It follows that if the revolutionary philosophy is to be attacked in its coronary artery, 'revelation must once again be recognised in all its authority'. As 'there is no other revelation than what is contained in the Holy Scriptures', it means that communal trust and faith in the Scriptures must be restored.²¹⁴ This can only be done by a return to Christianity.

Because there is an inescapable link between politics and Christianity, *Overview* further explains, the revolutionary conflicts are essentially religious conflicts. A religious war is in effect being waged. The difference between this religious war and those of the past is that previously religious wars were fought between conflicting convictions on matters of religious belief, between factions that championed the Gospel on the one hand and superstition on the other, while the current conflict is between the Gospel and unbelief, between faith and atheism.²¹⁵ Precisely because the revolutionary theory denies God and divine revelation and must consequently make man the source and arbiter of all moral principle it fosters selfishness and self-conceit. For this reason the liberal, revolutionary theory inescapably 'generates a war of *all against all*'. The 'anarchy of opinions and of societies' that results will only end by a return to the Christian faith. 'Only a dogma of faith and love can overcome that dogma of selfishness and self-conceit'.²¹⁶ It is the Gospel alone that will eventually triumph over unbelief and its consequences in man and society.

²¹³ Ibid., 3:93–4.

²¹⁴ Ibid., 3:94.

²¹⁵ Ibid.

²¹⁶ Ibid., 3:94, 97.

3. Common Objections to Christianity as Antidote for Revolutionary Problems

The suggestion that both the source and solution of the revolutionary destructions of the time are ideological, and particularly the claim that only the renewed implementation of Christianity as the common foundation for society is powerful enough to counteract the revolutionary problems invites three common objections. *Overview* discredits each.

a) Ideological Solution Too Uncertain

The first is the objection that the assessment of an ideological root cause and solution to the revolutionary problems is invalid since it is futile 'to search out what is hidden and uncertain'. *Overview's* rebuttal is that any attempt to forecast the future is indeed futile, but that it is another matter altogether to 'announce what is already laid up in the present'. It is not uncertain to argue that the revolutionary dogma of selfishness and self-conceit which results from the war of all against all generated by the liberal theory, can only be overcome by the Christian dogma of faith and love.²¹⁷

b) Christianity Could Not Be Contemporary Societal Foundation

The second objection is that Christianity has never been the common foundation of society in the past, and even if it had, it could not be accomplished in the contemporary century. *Overview's* rebuttal to this objection is that it

²¹⁷ Ibid., 3:94.

misrepresents either what *Overview* advocates or the witness of history. It is true that ‘heaven cannot be brought to earth’, and ‘that many unchristian deeds were perpetrated in the most Christian eras’. But in Christian Europe ‘the authority of revelation used to be assumed in all matters’. ‘It was the standard, even if it was not kept’. As to the argument that Christianity does not suit the contemporary century, no time in the past ever seemed very opportune for the flourishing of the faith—not the time of the first Christians, nor that of Luther, Wycliffe, or Hus. For the time being the mere fear to displease holds present-day people back, ‘while no fear of suffering or of death held back those heroes of the faith, including our Dutch forefathers!’ Irrespective of the outcome, it is always our duty ‘to stand for the truth, to recommend and propagate it’.²¹⁸

c) *Admonition to Return to Christianity Too Indeterminate*

The third objection is that the admonition to return to Christianity is too indeterminate, similarly to the indeterminate nature of wishing a sick person to be well. *Overview* argues that the character of Christianity, as well as the effects of its application, effortlessly refute this objection. It points out that Christianity is ‘not a cluster of related lessons in morality, nor a product of speculation and reasoning: it is entirely *historical*; so that (...) it is actually wrapped up in one single well-proven fact that is also the centre-point of world history’. Importantly ‘in its application also it already leads to the realm of essential reality’.²¹⁹ This is what he calls ‘the sure influence of faith’. It is completely practical because return

²¹⁸ Ibid.

²¹⁹ Ibid., 3:95.

to Christianity is 'not limited to reflection, or the lateral effect of mere individual religiosity'. To the contrary, 'it furnishes an indispensable guideline also for common relations and societal matters' and 'it disperses on all aspects of science and practice a beneficial light and life. Christianity destroys the liberal theory'. There cannot but be enmity and incompatibility between on the one hand the dogma of love and self-denial, the faith that derives all from God's will, and on the other hand the dogma that is grounded in selfishness and self-deification, that line of thought that submits all to human caprice. 'Liberalism vanishes where Christianity is expanded and applied. In this one act of Christianity's benevolence is bound up the wellspring of a thousand benefits and the source of overall recovery, which becomes clear as soon as the essence of this false dogma is considered'.²²⁰

C. Further Arguments that Christianity Destroys the Revolutionary Dogma

Driving its point further home that Christianity alone can destroy the revolutionary, liberal theory, *Overview* expands its argument why this is so. A key reason is found in the nature of the revolutionary theory and that of Christianity.

1. Nature of Revolutionary Dogma Not Constructive

The revolutionary theory does not constructively affirm: it 'knows no *authority*, because the power of governments, where it does not rest on the acknowledgement of God's sovereignty, must stem also legally from the fickle

²²⁰ Ibid., 3:97.

approval of subjects'. It 'knows no *liberty*, because it is destroyed in either licentiousness or violence, when the sacred nature of authority is taken away'. It 'knows no *nationality*, since a dogma of selfishness and self-interest must extinguish every sense of kinship and public interest. Nor *enlightenment*'. This is so because the light of religion shines on 'the whole sphere of human skills', and because 'every progress in science and learning presupposes common foundations, and thus a universal, never an individual consent-dependent, premise of faith'. The liberal dogma snuffs out 'the holiness of rights and duties', it 'removes all foundations of learning, all principles of actions'. It results in discord—'in science it results in endless doubt, in its application in restless war and revolution'.²²¹

Christianity by contrast is positively constructive: it sanctifies authority, ennobles obedience, and determines the duty of both subject and of government.²²² Christianity is the most powerful 'source of unification, peace and harmony'. Its service is that it not only 'restrains the all-destructive forces of unbelief, but also stimulates re-building'.²²³ In this way Christianity's constructive power destroys and replaces the non-affirming liberal dogma.

²²¹ Ibid.

²²² Ibid., 3:81.

²²³ Ibid., 3:97.

2. Nature of Revolutionary Dogma in Conflict with Essence of Things

The nature of the revolutionary theory is furthermore 'in conflict with the essence of things'. It 'sets itself against the demands of benevolent and ever returning nature and of continually progressing time' in its effort to 'maintain its self-conceited creation'. The liberal dogma is in essence 'the application of God-denial', the influence of which 'encompasses all human pre-disposition'. As a consequence its influence must inescapably 'arrest the operation of every good principle'. 'It is the struggle of human pride against the laws issued by God. For this reason there will always be a forced situation where this false theory rules that halts every free and gradual development'.²²⁴

Christianity by contrast upholds the laws issued by God and is aligned with the essence of things. It provides 'solid ground', 'an *historical* foundation', and espouses not the merely ideal world the revolutionary dogma envisions, but 'the essential (...) not in the least merely *material* world' of reality. Because of Christianity's recognition of God as revealed in the Scriptures, it is not solely concerned with the question 'what someone *can* or *will* do, but what each *ought* to do'. In this way Christianity recovers 'the principle of rights and duties' that the revolutionary theory has lost. 'Nature and time resume their power, and when mankind subjects itself —though not passively— to their united action, it is possible to augment and perfect what is conserved and preserved'.²²⁵ In this way

²²⁴ Ibid., 3:97–8.

²²⁵ Ibid., 3:98.

Christianity's constructive power destroys and replaces the false and forced liberal dogma.

3. Nature of Christianity Would Have Made Deliverance Possible at Every Important Crisis

Overview proceeds to show that actual deliverance had been possible at every important crisis of the last half century, in 1789, 1813 and 1830, if the Christian principle had been embraced instead of the liberal one.²²⁶ This is particularly clear when one considers 'what the principles of truth and justice that are unchangeable and depend on religion, prescribed at [these] important [historical] moments'. The actions these principles demanded make abundantly clear 'that the application of the anti-revolutionary dogma, of which unconditional faith and submission to God is the heart, exerts an influence that is as beneficial in its scope, as it is incalculable in its size and its power'.²²⁷

D. Nature and Essence of Contemporary World-Crisis Belie Success of Any of the Suggested Solutions Other than Christianity

Having made its case that 'the nature and essence of the contemporary world-crisis is confusion because of unbelief', and consequently that only the return to Christianity will make 'all that that is good and desirable re-emerge on historical and Christian soil', *Overview* proceeds to discredit five commonly suggested other solutions for the crisis.²²⁸

²²⁶ Ibid.

²²⁷ Ibid., 3:99.

²²⁸ Ibid., 3:101.

1. Improvement in Material Well-Being Cannot Solve the Crisis

The first suggested solution for the world-crisis that *Overview* discredits is the assumption that an improvement in material well-being can fundamentally solve the contemporary problems. While material prosperity and the measures that influence it like tax reduction, austerity policies, improvements in financial economy, the reduction of public debt and avoidance of widespread war are important, they are only secondary to moral prosperity. They cannot remove the actual cause of the contemporary disasters and solve the problems that are at the heart of the chaotic situation in Europe. A solution that addresses the primary concern of the moral well-being in a society must be given priority over a solution that addresses merely its material well-being, which is secondary and ultimately depends on society's moral well-being.²²⁹

2. National Interest Cannot Solve the Crisis

The second suggested solution for the world-crisis that *Overview* discredits is the assumption that national interest is an essential element of the crisis, and that for this reason the protection of national interests can fundamentally solve the contemporary problems. While it is true 'that national enmity has been a means of which the revolution has availed itself (particularly in Poland and in Belgium)', *Overview* points out that 'national differences are without actual importance in the face of a conflict about universal theories. In these matters the question is not whether one is English, French or Dutch, but whether one is revolutionary or anti-

²²⁹ Ibid.

revolutionary'.²³⁰ National interests are of lesser importance than the decision that is to be made between the anti-revolutionary recognition of God's existence and with it the moral ought He dictates, or the revolutionary denial of God's existence and man's self-deification, and with it moral choices that are grounded in man's own opinion and will.

3. Changes in Forms of Government Cannot Solve the Crisis

The third suggested solution for the world-crisis that *Overview* discredits is the assumption that an end to the disagreement about forms of government will solve the crisis. *Overview* argues that traditional constitutional law does not exclude any kind of government, similarly to the way revolutionary dogma does not limit itself to monarchic or republican forms. This is so because the title or form of a government is not what determines its essence. A republic can be anti-revolutionary, as the Dutch Republic was, while a monarchy can be revolutionary as the contemporary monarchies of Louis-Phillip I of France and of Leopold I of Belgium were. 'The distinction is found in whether or not essential authority is acknowledged. For this reason Christianity, though compatible with all forms of government, is incompatible with a theory that rejects every dutiful submission and with it in effect God's ordering'.²³¹

²³⁰ Ibid., 3:102.

²³¹ Ibid.

4. Absence of Conflict Between Different Confessions of Faith
Cannot Solve the Crisis

The fourth suggested solution for the world-crisis that *Overview* discredits is the assumption that an end to the various conflicts between the different confessions of faith will solve the present troubles. This is so because the conflict that rages is not between Protestantism and Catholicism but between faith and unbelief. Every Christian, both Protestant and Catholic, every person who believes in revelation, must emphatically resist the atheistic theory that teaches that man's reason is supreme and does not need to recognise any higher principle apart from itself. Irrespective of his particular confession of faith, every Christian is held to resist this dogma sourced in unbelief that 'destroys the essence of both faith and authority'.²³²

5. Moderation as Opposed to Excessive Attachment to the Old
or Infatuation with the New Cannot Solve the Crisis

Where in pre-revolutionary days changeable institutions were grounded in unchangeable foundations, this is no longer the case in the revolutionary era. This means that all present-day approaches to politics, whether attachment to the old, yearning for novelty or a moderate middle way, aim to realise the false revolutionary dogma and have equally departed from the former solid foundation. The contrast is not between the differing approaches to change but between the revolutionary theory and 'the Christian and historical theory'. The Christian is 'not opposed to the progress of human endeavour', but because he is

²³² Ibid., 3:102-3.

illuminated by revelation and history, 'he despises the meagre glow of a prideful philosophy'. He by contrast 'desires unconditional respect and application of those eternal principles that, neither old nor new, have a higher ranking than the influence of location, circumstances and time'.²³³

6. Summarising Remarks

While it is true that the conflicts discussed above, the end of which is commonly suggested as the way forward towards solving the world-crisis, do 'play a role in the great conflict, they equally dissolve in it'. This is so because the principal question to consider is the choice between 'submission to a higher Being, Who desires obedience to His unchangeable laws, or the adoption of one's own law, which must result in inherent arbitrariness'. Both options cannot be united, because God does not tolerate other gods before Him, and hence the choice is by default made against God when the integration of the two is sought.²³⁴

E. Opposition to Revolutionary Dogma Duty Not Impertinence

Overview ends with the statement that the periodical *Dutch Thoughts*' opposition to the revolutionary dogma is not impertinent because of its defence of 'unchangeable *principles* against an *opinion* that in its core is directed against the essence of all truths'.²³⁵ A further development of the view that the revolutionary theory is in effect the dogma of unbelief shows that this is so.

²³³ *Ibid.*, 3:103.

²³⁴ *Ibid.*

²³⁵ *Ibid.*, 3:105.

1. Role of Faith for Accumulation of Knowledge

In the accumulation of human knowledge 'faith, in its broadest and philosophical sense', provides the foundational truths, also called principles, on which the edifice of scholarship is built by the labour and conflict of opinions. This is so, *Overview* explains, since progress in knowledge is achieved by building on foundational truths that cannot be proven to be true, but are intuited or accepted on higher authority to be true. These principles in turn provide the intellect with the confined sphere within which it is held to form its opinions through application, comparison and deduction.

2. Role of Unbelief in Acquisition of Knowledge

The revolutionary theory by contrast has 'completely inverted the structure of things'. It is grounded in 'the deification of the individual, through whom the truth is determined and shaped, instead of received'. The dogma only acknowledges individual man's fallible and finite intellect as the test and measure for truth. The consequence of its supremacy of reason is that 'universal truths are no longer acknowledged and the difference between opinion and principle ceases to exist'. This means that 'for everybody truth is whatever he himself thinks, beauty is whatever pleases him, and justice is whatever he prefers. All knowledge and duty in this scheme of thought are deduced from man's understanding and will'. The 'principle-denying principle' spawns arbitrariness and doubt.²³⁶ The rule of evil will be its ultimate result because man is not only fallible but also fallen and in need of a higher power for restoration. The fact that the theory ultimately leads to

²³⁶ Ibid.

the rule of evil already proves that to oppose it is not impertinent. The issue is not just a difference of opinion or even an attack on principles, but the 'removal of truth itself, denial of God, destruction of the basis of justice, morality and duty and the surrender of mankind to the influences of hell'. The issue is 'the assertion of the eternal truth against a spirit of deceit and destruction'.²³⁷

3. Rule of Public Opinion itself Consequence of Supremacy of Reason

The unconditional rule of public opinion is a consequence of the supremacy and absolute power of the intellect. While public opinion could exercise a healthy influence, for this to be so it needs to be confined to the same sphere that the intellect or reason is confined to. To be a safe guideline public opinion, like all opinion, needs to be measured by 'Revelation, common sense and experience'. Public opinion or crafty arguments do not decide what is truth for the Christian since 'the Christian has the Holy Scriptures'. He acknowledges 'that every act that is contrary to its commandments, is a crime, and every opinion with which its content does not align, is a misconception'. The plumb line of the Scriptures marks nearly every assumption of the new revolutionary philosophy as attacks on the Scripture's principal truths. What is more, it marks the philosophy's essence 'entirely anti-Christian', because of the fact that it 'does not acknowledge any independent, *objective*, truth and hence no Christianity or revelation'.²³⁸ This is all the proof a Christian needs.

²³⁷ Ibid., 3:106.

²³⁸ Ibid.

4. Revolutionary Dogma Condemned Even by Own Standard of Reason

But even if reason were given free rein to pronounce judgement, unshackled from revelation, even then the court of public opinion in its broadest sense would condemn the revolutionary dogma. This is clear when the 'public opinion of the last half-century' is weighed against 'the general conviction of all previous eras'. Never before has 'the dogma that subjects the truth to mankind instead of mankind to the truth' been applied to society. Liberalism is in effect 'an entirely new dogma that revolts against the eternal principles and the common consensus of centuries'. Even though biased and sloppy historical research has suggested that the dogma is not novel, the 'revival of the true study of philosophy and history will soon shatter the vanity of such prejudiced delusion. Experience and all of history perpetually refute and contradict the modern-day composition of the false dogma'. A comparison of 'the world *as it previously was*' with 'the world *it has created*' demonstrates the theory's pernicious nature unequivocally. The consequence of the triumph of liberalism in the past sixty or seventy years has resulted in an epoch 'that does not have its equal in its array of war and revolution, of misery and crime'.²³⁹ Of course other eras knew wars and evils just as all of mankind has experienced these since the fall of mankind, but never before has there been an era that contained such 'an accumulation of vice and misery' in such a short time span. Never before has liberalism ruled, which is the direct cause of these evils. The dogma that previously ruled, which by contrast taught that 'authority and knowledge is received from God', had always been

²³⁹ Ibid.

‘consolation and medicine’. The principle that authority and knowledge is sourced in God historically ‘formed the solid foundation of science and state, was the bond of societies, and had repeatedly established peace out of tumult, order out of confusion, and civilisation out of barbarism’. The triumph of the theory of unbelief on the other hand, has resulted in ‘confusion, despotic authority, war, want; and things would have been far worse had not its influence been softened and halted in many ways through the remainder of Christian civilisation and the obstinacy of nature that is never fully defeasible’.²⁴⁰

5. Nature of Revolutionary Dogma

Precisely because ‘the liberal theory must dissolve’ what it touches, and because ‘this is its only outcome, it can never fully be put into practice. Its absolute development would mean the destruction of the human race. Following the destruction of moral unity, material violence must consequently compensate for its absence as much as possible’. This violence appears not because ‘the dogma has been deviated from, but because it has been fully observed’. In this way ‘the dogma stands condemned even by reason, despite the fact that reason’s supremacy is its first tenet’.²⁴¹

6. Opposition to Revolutionary Dogma is Duty

Overview maintains that from the preceding it must be concluded that it is duty, not presumption to challenge the revolutionary dogma. While the dogma

²⁴⁰ Ibid., 3:107.

²⁴¹ Ibid.

preaches tolerance, its tolerance is not of the kind 'that is severe towards the error, while soft, compliant and forgiving towards the one who makes the error'. To the contrary, it demands that the lie and the truth be given equal footing, an equality that is impossible because of the 'irreconcilable and ever-active enmity that exist between them'. When indifference seeks 'to unite justice and injustice, injustice always triumphs. Truth must be either rejected or admitted. One either joins the ranks of faith and virtue, or one has already joined those of vice and unbelief',²⁴²

7. What May Be Expected for World Future

The future of the world depends on whether the present hegemony of the revolutionary theory will be continued or destroyed. '*Either* the truth will shortly be reinstated in her rights', in which case 'liberty and enlightenment will return with the return of authority and faith, protected by the Christian principle'. In that case 'an era of unprecedented prosperity may be expected. *Or* the revolutionary theory will expand its victories, in which case we will enter an era of either anarchy, or violence, or listlessness, the sleep of death, and near lifelessness'. Anarchy and European wars could very well be the result of the further disintegration of states and the bonds of society. Civilisation is often regarded as 'a vested legacy', but it is religion, and in Europe Christianity, that 'always and everywhere has generated civilisation'. While the outer shell of civilisation still stands, its life-giving force of belief has been lost. It is, for this reason, to be expected that the shell, too, will collapse unless new life is breathed into it.

²⁴² Ibid.

Violence will likely be welcomed as protection against feared anarchy. It is foreseeable that iron chains will need to be forged in the absence of a nobler tie. Equally to be expected is the stolidity that comes from pre-occupation with material comfort to the total neglect of principles. In that case the tyranny will be well disguised and one that rules not by principle but by the need and situation at hand. It would be 'order without principles, which equally excludes what is good, and must therefore lead to deterioration, materialism and dullness. Order is glorious when it is the organisation of principles, disastrous when it becomes the prescription and confirmation of evil'. Man is made to glorify God, not merely to enjoy earthly goods. 'Woe to the world when its arrangement becomes one of systematic disobedience and desecration'.²⁴³

8. Concluding Wish

Though the turbulent revolutionary storm has destroyed many other countries, *Overview* concludes, the Netherlands seems to have been spared as though for a purpose. May it be to defend justice and welfare while upholding the banner of Christianity before the nations! 'May the Netherlands be used in God's purposes to further that Christian rebirth of which mankind has need for victory over unbelief and destruction!'²⁴⁴

²⁴³ Ibid., 3:107–8.

²⁴⁴ Ibid., 3:108.

II. CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE ARGUMENT GROEN MAKES IN OVERVIEW

A. Summary of the Argument

The clarification presented in *Overview* is structured firstly by a definition of the problem of Groen's day, and secondly by its solution and reasons why this solution, and no other, will work.

The argument itself may be summarised as follows. The political and societal upheavals of the last fifty or so years are at their most foundational level caused by a new philosophy that is grounded in, and represents an application of, unbelief. Because the revolutionary problems have this religious, ideological source, they require a religious, ideological solution that directly strikes the problems' coronary artery. The only such ideological corrective that is powerful and adequate enough is Christianity. The application of Christianity, with its unconditional faith and submission to God and reverence for the Holy Scriptures, is the only antidote for the revolutionary application of unbelief, with its deification of man and reason. All other suggested solutions fall short because they cannot address the nature and essence of the crisis.

B. Nature of Groen's Thought

The opening line of Groen's explanation in *Overview* reads: 'When history is divided not merely according to time periods, but also according to the course and development of ideas, then every period has a characteristic feature that determines its entire direction. This feature has for more than fifty years been

that of *unbelief*.²⁴⁵ It invites two important observations on the nature of his thought.

The *first* is that it is an *interpretation of history*.

The *second* is that he understands history to not only have a temporal aspect (division ‘according to time periods’), but also an *ideological*, immaterial one (‘the course and development of ideas’). This immaterial element of history invites two additional observations.

The *first* is that it has a religious dimension, which is understood in the broad sense of the word and includes not only faith’s positive affirmation of God but also unbelief’s negative denial of God. The *second* is that this immaterial element is considered to characterise and determine the entire direction of a certain historical period. It must in this sense be understood to have a directive, propelling influence over the factual, tangible elements of history. It may also be termed ‘the spiritual roots’ or ‘religious driving force’ of an era.²⁴⁶

1. Groen’s Argument of ‘History’

That Groen’s thought is an interpretation of history is not just expressly stated, it also underpins the argument he presents in *Overview*. While *Overview* does not provide any in-depth discussion of past historical events and as such does not

²⁴⁵ Ibid., 3:81.

²⁴⁶ James W. Skillen, ‘From Covenant of Grace to Tolerant Public Pluralism: The Dutch Calvinist Contribution’, in *The Covenant Connection: From Federal Theology to Modern Federalism*, ed. Daniel Judah Elazar and Kincaid (Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books, 2001), 79.

invite a careful study of Groen's interpretation of specific facts of history, the periodicals make clear that he uses the argument of 'history' in a positive way to prove from what has happened in the past that Christianity is the imperative and only solution to the world-crisis that 'unbelief' has caused. As part of his argument he points to the 'witness of history', equating Christianity with 'an historical foundation', and claiming that Christianity 'is entirely *historical*; so that (...) it is actually wrapped up in one single well-proven fact that is also the centre-point of world history'.²⁴⁷ His use of 'history' or 'historical' here is that of a polemical argument for the factual truthfulness of its claims. It argues a practical and straightforward point of real and 'well-proven' facts of actual relevance as opposed to the unproven, abstract assumptions of the revolutionary theory.

Besides Groen's positive use of 'history' as an argument, he also uses it negatively to refute the falsehood of the revolutionary dogma. At the foundation of this negative use of the argument of 'history' is Groen's conviction that the Revolution 'is the struggle of human pride against the laws issued by God'. Because the revolutionary theory is in essence 'the application of God-denial', as an unavoidable consequence, its rule must thereby always result in 'a forced situation' that 'halts every free and gradual development' and 'arrests the operation of every good principle'. 'History' manifests in experience this 'forced situation', this 'arrested operation', this 'conflict with the essence of things', because of 'the obstinacy of nature that is never fully defeasible'. For this reason

²⁴⁷ Groen van Prinsterer, *Nederlandsche Gedachten*, 1832, 3:94–5, 98.

'(...) *hetgeen de geschiedenis getuigt. (...) Het Christendom (...) is geheel historisch; zoodat het eigenlijk (...) in één enkel welbewezen feit, tevens het middenpunt der wereldgeschiedenis, opgesloten ligt. (...) Neem dit beletsel [van toepassing der Godverloochening] weg (...) straks vindt men zich op vasten grond, op historischen bodem. (...)*'

Groen argues that the *study of 'history'* will demolish the vanity of the revolutionary delusion: 'experience and all of history perpetually refute and contradict the modern-day composition of the false dogma'. In other words, 'experience' and 'history' will prove that the revolutionary doctrine cannot work.²⁴⁸

Groen's polemical use of 'history' as an argument resembles the way the *Réveil* movement uses the argument of 'history'. With the *Réveil*, Groen recognises the polemical property of 'history', as well as the assumption that a Christian has unique insights for the evaluation of historical events. These ideas the *Réveil* movement embodied, as we have shown in chapter one. Our initial supposition that Groen's exposure to the *Réveil* was catalytic for the development of his thought is thereby confirmed.

Based on these initial observations we may here conclude that Groen's polemical argument of 'history' seems based on the presupposition that God exists, that Christ's life is a 'well-proven fact', and that 'the essence of things' are manifested in the 'united action' of 'nature and time'. This manifestation he deems observable in society to such an extent that societal actions performed in conflict with the framework of reality that God has given will result in a 'forced situation' within society that hampers its 'free and gradual development'. By contrast, societal actions performed not in conflict, but in harmony with the laws by which God governs the world will display in the 'united action' of 'nature and time' 'the

²⁴⁸ Ibid., 3:97–8, 107.

operation of every good principle'. As such he seems to attribute to 'history' guiding properties for mankind. These conclusions ask what Groen's underlying assumption for such normative use of 'history' is. It begs the question what he means with 'the obstinacy of *nature*', or the '*demands* of benevolent and ever returning *nature* and of continually progressing time'. Is the qualification of 'nature' not too ethereal or vague, and hence too malleable to the historian's personal beliefs and assumptions to have genuine objective guiding and correcting power? Unlike the concept of 'time', which can easily be demarcated and limited to a certain period, the concept of 'nature' seems illusive with regard to drawing boundaries of what should be included and excluded from the concept. Groen's argument as presented in *Overview* is too concise to engage these questions and arrive at a critical evaluation of his concept of 'history'. For this reason we will make Groen's polemical argument of 'history' the focus of chapter four, and will there use resources beyond *Overview* for our analytical critique.

2. Groen's Argument of 'Unbelief'

Groen's thought as historical interpretation is additionally reflected by the way he defines the problem of his day: he presents an interpretive historical comparison of the views held by the revolutionary and the pre-revolutionary periods on the nature of government and the discovery of truth. This comparison leads to his conclusion that 'unbelief' is the feature that distinguishes these eras and that its application is the cause of the revolutionary problems. On this religious, ideological historical element of 'unbelief' hinges Groen's argument, as regards

both the definition of the problems of his time, and their solution. The recognition that there is an ideological dimension to historical events, which can have a propelling and causative power over tangible events is an insight that Groen's experience of the Belgian Revolt prepared him for. As we have shown in chapter one, the Belgian Revolt may credibly be interpreted as importantly determined by ideological factors, both philosophical and religious. Our initial supposition that Groen's experience of the Belgian Revolt was catalytic for the development of his thought is thereby confirmed.

Because of the importance of 'unbelief' as an expression of the ideological feature of Groen's thought, it is a crucial concept for understanding the nature of his thought. We will proceed to a critical analysis of 'unbelief' next.

C. Groen's Concept of 'Unbelief'

In *Overview* Groen explains that the interpretation of contemporary historical events through his lens of history's religious, ideological dimension has led him to conclude that the period of the last half century or so is uniquely distinct from all previous historical eras. This is so because for the first time in history a philosophy that is sourced in 'unbelief' has been applied to society. This raises the question how his concept of 'unbelief' is to be understood. A critical analysis of Groen's explanation of how the ideological feature of 'unbelief' distinguishes the revolutionary from the pre-revolutionary periods clarifies the concept.

Groen makes a two-pronged argument to show that the revolutionary period is fundamentally different compared to pre-revolutionary periods. He discusses

firstly the radically changed views on the nature of government and temporal authority. Secondly, he discusses the radically changed views on how truth may be known and discovered.

1. Nature of Government

With regard to the nature of government he asserts that in pre-revolutionary eras it had always been acknowledged that worldly authority is sourced in God and hence has a divine origin. By contrast, the revolutionary period now assumes that government is sourced in man and responsible to the general will as arranged by social contract. Governmental authority is in other words given by man, who is the one to whom accountability for wielding this authority must be given. This is the dogma of popular sovereignty. According to Groen, man, in the new scheme of thought, is regarded as the originator and end of worldly authority, and thus fulfils the position and role that in previous eras was ascribed to God. This deification of man characterises the revolutionary period.

2. Discovery of Truth

With regard to truth and its discovery or the acquisition of knowledge, Groen reminds his readers that pre-revolutionary periods had accepted the limitations of man's intellect and will, and had considered divine revelation of greater weight than mere human insight or universal consensus. Christendom had regarded the Gospel to be the authority of God. By contrast, the revolutionary period now elevates man above God and by consequence man's insights above faith in revelation. It means that one's own opinion, one's own insight, one's own intellect

determines truth. 'No other guiding principle remain[s] but individual intellect and reason in philosophy, individual taste in the fine arts, the individual will in politics'.²⁴⁹ According to Groen, man, in the new scheme of thought, is regarded as 'the source and touchstone of truth' and thus fulfils the position and role that in previous eras was ascribed to God.²⁵⁰ As observed above, this deification of man characterises the revolutionary period.

Groen's argument hence hinges on the *deification* of the individual. This deification Groen marks as the key distinction between the revolutionary and the pre-revolutionary periods. It is the foundation of the revolutionary dogma, which 'is in actuality the application of God-denial'.²⁵¹ 'Unbelief' as Groen uses it may be understood as the revolt against the premise Christendom previously accepted that it is God who gives worldly authority and who declares what is truth. It is the novel experiment of ascribing to man what had previously always been ascribed to God. In this sense the 'philosophy of unbelief', which 'is revolutionary both in its consequences and its essence, completely reverses the [hitherto accepted] structure of things'.²⁵² This is true for the radically new way the nature of worldly authority is understood and for the manner in which the discovery of truth is approached.

²⁴⁹ Ibid., 3:93.

²⁵⁰ Ibid., 3:81.

²⁵¹ Ibid., 3:97, 105.

²⁵² Ibid., 3:105.

3. Denial of 'God's Right'

Because man is made the source and end of government and of the discovery of truth, what used to 'belong' to God is now ascribed to man. In the era of Christendom God was recognised as the ultimate source of worldly authority and of truth and knowledge.²⁵³ What is more, God also had the sole and absolute authority to both demand accountability for the manner in which worldly authority is stewarded and to declare what is truth. 'Unbelief' as Groen uses it not merely denies God's existence, with the implied denial of the divine source of government and truth. As he uses it, 'unbelief' importantly also denies God His sole and absolute authority to demand things from created man. Groen's concept of 'unbelief' we understand to mean the denial of 'God's right'. It is the denial of God's right to demand and receive that which is owed to Him by man on a personal and societal level, as revealed in the Scriptures. It ignores the existence of a given moral order and the response such order evokes from created man towards their creator God.

It is important to make clear here that Groen never uses the term 'God's right' in *Overview*. But his use of the concept of 'unbelief' as the distinguishing explanation for the differences between the revolutionary and the pre-revolutionary periods makes our reading that it means the denial of 'God's right' its most coherent reading. There are several reasons why this is so. Each illuminates an aspect of Groen's argument that becomes more intelligible if read against the backdrop of 'God's right'.

²⁵³ Ibid., 3:107.

'De leer [van het Christendom is dat] gezag en wetenschap van God afdaalt'.

a) *Revelation Implies Imperative*

The *first* is his definition of ‘unbelief’. In the middle of *Overview*, Groen reiterates that ‘the root of the revolutionary theory is found in *unbelief*, in the denial of a revealed Deity’.²⁵⁴ His definition of ‘unbelief’ is hence not the mere denial of a Deity, but the denial of a *revealed* Deity. The distinction is important because the fact that God has revealed Himself means that His character and attributes are knowable, as are His will and laws. Groen subscribes to the Protestant Christian premise when he states in *Overview* that ‘there is no other revelation than what is contained in the Holy Scriptures’.²⁵⁵ This means that when he refers to the ‘revealed Deity’ he refers to God as revealed in the Scriptures. Consequently, the denial of the God of the Scriptures means the denial also of God’s will and laws as revealed in the Scriptures. God has made Himself and His laws known. This in turn means that there is an expectation that man obeys God’s revealed laws. The wording of the Ten Commandments is an eloquent example of this expectation. This core Scriptural instruction for how people are to behave towards God and towards their neighbour begins with the words: ‘I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery’. It is immediately followed by ten specifically defined behaviours God expects man to exhibit, expressed in the words ‘you *shall* (...)’.²⁵⁶ Man is not free to decide whether or not to keep these commandments. Man *shall* keep them. The fact that God has revealed His law and will implies that man is bound to obey them. It is based on this premise that Groen can summarise the principal question that is before his

²⁵⁴ Ibid., 3:93.

‘De wortel der revolutionaire theorie [is gelegen] in het ongelooft, in het verloochenen eener geopenbaarde Godheid’.

²⁵⁵ Ibid., 3:94.

‘Er is geen andere Openbaring dan die vervat is in de H. Schrift’.

²⁵⁶ Ex. 20:2-17 (ESV)

contemporaries as ‘the choice between submission to a higher Being, who *desires obedience to his unchangeable laws*, or the adoption of one’s own law’.²⁵⁷ Groen’s definition of ‘unbelief’ is that it denies ‘God’s right’ to have His laws and will obeyed.

b) *Antidote’s True Opposite*

A *second* reason why the reading of Groen’s concept of ‘unbelief’ as the denial of ‘God’s right’ is convincing is that it aligns very accurately with his suggested antidote for ‘unbelief’. The solution he offers to counteract the application of the revolutionary dogma is the application of the anti-revolutionary dogma. The ‘heart’ of this anti-revolutionary dogma is in his words, ‘unconditional faith and submission to God’.²⁵⁸ Such ‘unconditional faith and submission to God’ is in fact the affirmation of ‘God’s right’. It gives God what is owed Him by man on a personal and societal level as revealed in the Scriptures.

Elsewhere, Groen defines the revolutionary theory as ‘a theory that rejects every dutiful submission and with it in fact God’s ordering’.²⁵⁹ It means that the theory’s opposite, the anti-revolutionary theory, does not reject but instead accepts every *dutiful* submission and with it God’s ordering. Submission is duty. Man is morally compelled to submit because this is fitting in God’s ordering. Man’s duty to submit

²⁵⁷ Groen van Prinsterer, *Nederlandsche Gedachten*, 1832, 3:103. Emphasis added.

‘De voorname vraag is: onderwerping aan een hooger Wezen, dat eerbiediging zijner onveranderlijke wetten verlangt, of aanneming van eigen wet’.

²⁵⁸ Ibid., 3:99.

‘(...) de toepassing der antirevolutionaire leer, waarvan onvoorwaardelijk geloof en onderwerping aan God het middelpunt is’.

²⁵⁹ Ibid., 3:102.

‘Het onderscheid ligt in het al dan niet erkennen van wezenlijk gezag; en daarom is het Christendom, schoon het alle Staatsvormen duldt, onvereinigbaar met eene theorie, die elke pligmatige ondergeschiktheid en daarmede inderdaad Gods ordening verwerpt’.

is part of 'God's right' to be obeyed. The question is whether this 'essential authority' that is God's that gives Him the right to expect obedience is acknowledged. In the context of discussing different forms of government Groen points to this acknowledgement of essential authority as the key to determine whether a governmental arrangement is revolutionary and sourced in 'unbelief' or whether it is not revolutionary and not sourced in 'unbelief'.²⁶⁰ This acknowledgement of essential authority is an acknowledgement of 'God's right'.

Groen makes the argument that the solution to the revolutionary problems is for 'revelation [to] once again be recognised in all its authority'.²⁶¹ By suggesting the antidote of revelation, he sets revelation up in opposition to 'unbelief'. This is intelligible when his concept of 'unbelief' is understood to mean the denial of 'God's right'. Because revelation sets out God's will and laws, it makes clear what 'God's right' is. The attack on revelation is in this sense an attack on 'God's right'. This in turn makes clear why the revolutionary dogma's 'first concern was the exclusion of revelation', as Groen posits.²⁶² The elimination of God's will and laws as revealed in the Scriptures must inevitably undermine the requirement to give God what is owed Him. It undermines 'God's right'. Its antidote is by consequence found in the reinstatement of the ground for 'God's right'. This ground is found in revelation, which for this reason in Groen's view 'must once again be recognised in all its authority'.

²⁶⁰ Ibid.

'Het onderscheid ligt in het al dan niet erkennen van wezenlijk gezag; en daarom is het Christendom, schoon het alle Staatsvormen duldt, onvereinigbaar met eene theorie, die elke pligtmatige ondergeschiktheid en daarmede inderdaad Gods ordening verwerpt'.

²⁶¹ Ibid., 3:94.

²⁶² Ibid., 3:93.

c) *References to 'Duty'*

A *third* reason why reading Groen's concept of 'unbelief' to mean the denial of 'God's right' is a correct reading, is that it explains his many references to the fact that the consequence of 'unbelief' is that man is no longer held to do his *duty*. If God has the right to be obeyed and to expect moral behaviour from man, man has the duty to give God what is owed Him. The collective recognition of this duty to God is what grounded Christendom's societies. As Groen explains: 'a communal faith in a Higher Being has always been the indispensable bond of a well-structured society. Faith in God's infallible revelation is the bond that united the European states, both to each other and in their internal structure since the early Middle Ages'.²⁶³

Communal 'faith in God's infallible revelation' meant that in the pre-revolutionary era God's claims on man to submit to Him and obey His will and law as revealed in Scripture were communally recognised. It implied the recognition of 'God's right' and with it the corresponding duty that man is to give God what is owed Him. In this way 'God's will and law sanctified authority, ennobled obedience and both determined and required the duty of subject and government'.²⁶⁴ But because faith in God was abandoned and with it 'God's right' was denied, 'every other bond of faith and submission expired' as well. Lack of principle prevailed 'because the source of all moral principle was denied'.²⁶⁵ 'Denial of a revealed Deity' is also the denial of 'the source of all moral principle'. No longer is it God's will that determines what man ought to do, but instead 'all knowledge and duty is deduced

²⁶³ Ibid.

²⁶⁴ Ibid., 3:81.

²⁶⁵ Ibid., 3:93.

from *man's* understanding and will'.²⁶⁶ As Groen states unequivocally: 'With the liberal dogma the sanctity of rights and duties is snuffed out'.²⁶⁷ Rights and duties used to be *sacred* because they were granted by and owed to a holy God. Duty is man's response to 'God's right'. The reinstatement of the recognition of 'God's right', or, as Groen puts it, the removal of the impediment of 'unbelief', spurs man to ask 'not solely what someone *can* or *will* do, but what each *ought* to do, and thus there is recovery of the principle of rights and duties'.²⁶⁸ In other words, removal of 'unbelief' understood as reversal of the denial of 'God's right' reinstates the principle of duty by its reinstatement of 'God's right'. Our reading of 'unbelief' is hence in line with Groen's many references to duty. When faith in God is abandoned, and with it 'God's right' is denied, it removes the most important incentive for man to go against the selfishness and violence that comes natural to him because of his fallen and fallible nature. As a consequence, the 'iron chains of physical force and violence may have to be forged,' in such a society, 'in the absence of a nobler tie'. Consequently, 'material violence will have to compensate for the absence of moral unity as much as possible'.²⁶⁹ Only communal recognition of 'God's right' builds the principle of duty into society. It provides both the limitations and instruction as to what is required of man to his community, and most importantly provides the incentive to act according to it. For this reason too, 'a communal faith in a Higher Being has always been the indispensable bond of a well-structured society'.²⁷⁰

²⁶⁶ Ibid., 3:105. Emphasis added.

²⁶⁷ Ibid., 3:97.

²⁶⁸ Ibid., 3:98.

²⁶⁹ Ibid., 3:107–8.

²⁷⁰ Ibid., 3:93.

d) *References in Unbelief and Revolution*

As we have discussed, we understand Groen's concept of 'unbelief' as the denial of 'God's right'. This is so because of his definition of 'unbelief' as the denial of God as revealed in the Scriptures, because of what he suggests is 'unbelief's' antidote, and because this reading makes intelligible why he views the loss of a sense of 'duty' a consequence of 'unbelief'. Two further comments should be made that strengthen our reading of the meaning of Groen's 'unbelief'.

(i) De Bonald's Statement

The *first* is that while Groen does not use the term 'God's right' in *Overview*, there are two noteworthy references in *Ongeloof en Revolutie* ('*Unbelief and Revolution*'), the classic exposition of his thought first published in 1847, that use the term 'the rights of God'. These accentuate the correctness of our reading of his use of 'unbelief'.

One appears in Groen's discussion of the supremacy of reason and how it 'became the touchstone of the truth', imposing 'the sanction of human approval' on the Scriptures. 'The Christian regards this alone', Groen explains, 'the violation of 'the rights of God', or of the 'Divine prerogative', as Harry Van Dyke translates the term.²⁷¹

²⁷¹ Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer, *Ongeloof en Revolutie: Eene reeks van historische voorlezingen* (Leiden: Luchtmans, 1847), 192. Van Dyke's translation. This and every further translation referenced by 'Van Dyke's translation', is found in Harry Van Dyke, *Groen van Prinsterer's Lectures on Unbelief and Revolution* (Toronto: Wedge Publishing Foundation, 1989). It is a translation based on Groen's 1847 publication of *Unbelief and Revolution* that is at times abridged.

The other appears in the first pages of *Unbelief and Revolution* where Groen explains what he understands by the term 'revolution' and such revolutionary concepts as 'liberty', 'equality', 'popular sovereignty' and 'social contract'. In the same passage he posits that the consequences of these revolutionary concepts 'cannot be combatted with any success unless one places himself outside their influence, on the ground of the anti-revolutionary principles'. He proceeds to state that

This ground is beyond reach, however, so long as one refuses to acknowledge that the foundation of justice lies in the law and ordinances of God. [De] Bonald expressed this truth in the concise and pregnant words, "*The Revolution began with the declaration of the rights of man; it will end only with the declaration of the rights of God.*"²⁷²

Groen here insists that the successful challenge of the revolutionary ideas' consequences is only possible when the challenger removes himself from the influence that the revolutionary ideas exert and forms his ideas on diametrically opposed, what may be called 'anti-revolutionary', presuppositions. This starting-point of 'anti-revolutionary principles', he further clarifies, is to be found in the affirmative acknowledgement 'that the foundation of justice lies in the law and ordinances of God'. In this way Groen contrapositions what man insists is owed to man based on the revolutionary ideas, with what God insists is owed to God based on 'the law and ordinances of God'. He argues that the conflict is a conflict

²⁷² Groen van Prinsterer, *Ongeloof en Revolutie*, 5–7. Van Dyke's translation. Emphasis added.

It should be noted that De Bonald uses the plural 'rights of God'. In order to distinguish God's over-arching right sourced in His moral, created order from modern individual subjective rights of men that are unshackled from any divine order, we do not use 'God's rights' in the plural. Our use of the singular 'right' does not express that there might only be one right but indicates it is the highest, most over-arching right.

Louis Gabriel Ambroise, Vicomte de Bonald (1754-1840), counter-revolutionary French social and political philosopher.

between ‘the rights of man’ and the primary and over-arching ‘right of God’. For this reason, as De Bonald argued, ‘the revolution [that] began with the declaration of the rights of man, (...) will end only with the declaration of the rights of God’. In other words, the presupposition of ‘God’s right’ is the anti-revolutionary starting point. On this ground alone the influence of the revolutionary ideas is eliminated so that their consequences can be successfully challenged. Groen develops this proposition further in *Unbelief and Revolution* without using De Bonald’s term ‘rights of God’. Nonetheless, as the title indicates, the work’s core proposition is the inescapable connection between ‘unbelief’ and ‘revolution’. It is an exposition of ‘the thesis that the cause of the Revolution lies in *unbelief*’.²⁷³ The passage quoted above, found at the outset of the work, lays out the foundational premise from which Groen will mount his challenge in opposition to ‘unbelief’ and its consequence, the ‘revolution’. This foundational premise is the call to affirm ‘God’s right’.

(ii) Divine Right of Government

At this point we must make an important clarification, which is our *second* strengthening comment. We have pointed out above that Groen’s concept of ‘unbelief’ as he uses it in *Overview* means the denial of ‘God’s right’ despite the fact that he does not explicitly use this term. We have furthermore drawn attention to the one mention of ‘the rights of God’ in his later, classic work, *Unbelief and Revolution*. This reference to a comment by De Bonald makes most logical sense when Groen’s concept of ‘unbelief’ is read as we propose. But we

²⁷³ Ibid., 180. Van Dyke’s translation.

need to point out here that in our effort to make De Bonald's comment clear in the wider context of the argument Groen puts forward in *Unbelief and Revolution*, we have kept our focus as pointed as possible, and have for this reason been too simplistic in our discussion of *Unbelief and Revolution*'s reference to 'the rights of God'. While it is correct that the term 'God's right' does not appear in *Overview*, and reference to the term in plural form only appears once in *Unbelief and Revolution*, the latter work does develop in an important way Groen's argument of the 'divine right of government'. This concept of the 'divine right of government' is generally associated with the absolute right of kings but Groen explicitly distances himself from this use. The 'divine right of government', or '*droit divin*', its French legal term, he uses in such a way as to make it a kind of sub-species of 'God's right', namely 'God's right' as regards government. In *Unbelief and Revolution* Groen contrapositions the revolutionary view of government to that of pre-revolutionary Christendom, and argues that the revolutionary arrangement of the state ignores the divine source of authority and law which was hitherto acknowledged as the basis for the state. His objection to the revolutionary state is in this sense effectively an objection to the fact that 'God's right' is denied in the area of government. If Groen's concept for the 'divine right of government' is at its core one that seeks to affirm 'God's right' and challenge its revolutionary denial, it supports our reading of his concept of 'unbelief' as meaning the denial of 'God's right'. While the term the 'divine right of government' is never mentioned in *Overview*, it takes an important place in *Unbelief and Revolution* and is a central aspect of Groen's thinking.²⁷⁴

²⁷⁴ That the 'divine right of government' is hallmark of the Christian-historical principle Groen argued in: Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer, 'De Nederlander: Nieuwe Utrechtsche Courant

A critical analysis of Groen's distinct understanding of the concept of the 'divine right of government' will further show whether our reading of his concept of 'unbelief' is accurate and promises to shed further light on this core tenet of his Christian-historical principle. We will make this analysis the focus of our next chapter. In chapter three we will also evaluate how the concept of 'God's right' clarifies other aspects of Groen's thought, and how it connects his ideas to contemporary theological debate on the ontological grounding of justice in either human rights or right order.

III. CONCLUSION

This chapter has achieved an analysis of Groen's Christian-historical thought as he outlined it in his 1831 *Overview*, its earliest published exposition. We have shown Groen's thought to be an interpretation of history, assessed through the lens of the premise that history has a religious, ideological feature that has propelling and causative power over tangible events.

His study of the historical events of the fifty or so years prior to *Overview* led Groen to identify 'unbelief' to be the ideological feature that distinguishes the revolutionary from the pre-revolutionary eras. We read his concept of 'unbelief' to mean the denial of 'God's right', despite the fact that he does not use this term in *Overview*. Our reading brings into original focus that God's existence and hence a given moral over-arching order is a basic proposition of Groen's thought.

(Algemeen staatkundig nieuws-, handels- en advertentieblad)', n.d., n° 706.

Whether our reading is supported by Groen's later, more elaborate, works is worth exploring. For this reason we will in chapter three analyse critically his concept of the 'divine right of government' which we expect to be a 'sub-species' so to speak of 'God's right' in the area of government. A critical analysis of the doctrine of the 'divine right of government' will confirm whether our reading of Groen's concept of 'unbelief' to mean the denial of 'God's right' is accurate. Because of the doctrine's correlation with a given moral order, its critical analysis also promises to illuminate other aspects of Groen's political thought that, without recognition of the role of this order in his thought, seem contradictory or ambiguous.

Groen's use of 'history' as a polemical argument for Christianity and against the Revolution seems to hinge on the power he attributes to the 'united action' of 'time and nature', without it being very clear or well-defined what this — presumably religiously defined— 'nature' means. Further critical evaluation is needed of this aspect of Groen's concept of 'history', which we reserve for chapter four. In that chapter we will analyse critically Groen's argument of 'history' as used polemically in his critique of the French Revolution by comparing it with that of Edmund Burke's. It will allow us to flesh out our initial findings on Groen's concept of 'history' by using resources beyond *Overview*.

CHAPTER THREE: CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF GROEN VAN PRINSTERER'S CONCEPT OF THE 'DIVINE RIGHT OF GOVERNMENT'

In our discussion of the outline of Groen's thought as he presents it in *Overview* we have come to see that he regards 'unbelief' to be the root of the revolutionary theory and the factor that distinguishes the revolutionary from the pre-revolutionary eras. Our analysis has further shown that he uses the concept of 'unbelief' to mean the denial of that which is owed to God by man on a personal and societal level as revealed in Scripture. We have termed it the denial of 'God's right'. As a supporting argument for our reading of his concept of 'unbelief' we have pointed to the fact that it is in line with the way he uses his concept of the 'divine right of government', which we understand to mean the upholding of 'God's right' in the area of government. Because the term 'divine right of government' does not feature in *Overview* and because the concept it describes is complex and central to Groen's thought, we will devote this chapter to a critical analysis of it.

We will ask whether our reading of Groen's concept of the 'divine right of government' as sub-species of 'God's right' in the area of government is convincing, and in what way our analysis of this concept illuminates the essence of Groen's thought and the role that 'God's right', as we have termed it, has in it. To achieve this, we will firstly ask what explanation there might be for the fact that the concept of the 'divine right of government' is prominently used in *Unbelief and Revolution* while the term does not appear in *Overview*. Secondly, we

will critically analyse Groen's concept of the 'divine right of government'. This analysis will explain why the concept supports our reading of his concept of 'unbelief' and why it may be regarded as sub-species of 'God's right'. Thirdly, we will discuss how this reading makes intelligible various aspects of his thinking that have often been misunderstood and criticised. We will conclude this chapter with a critical evaluation.

I. ABSENCE OF TERM 'DIVINE RIGHT OF GOVERNMENT' BUT NOT ITS CONCEPT IN OVERVIEW

For our critical analysis of the thinking of Groen van Prinsterer we have chosen to concentrate on its outline as first presented by him in his 1831 *Overview*. Our approach is an original one as most studies of Groen's thought focus on his famous lectures, published as *Unbelief and Revolution* in 1847, of which *Overview* is 'the first clear prototype'.²⁷⁵ *Overview*'s earlier publication date and its less elaborate presentation of the argument in comparison to Groen's classic *Unbelief and Revolution* do not undermine the reliability of *Overview* as source for the study of his thinking. This is so because Groen has consistently argued that this outline captures the essence of his thought. Even towards the end of his life he pointed to *Overview* as proof of his 'fixity of principle' and of 'the identicalness of his later writings with that of the *Overview* of 1831'.²⁷⁶ In light of this claimed

²⁷⁵ Harry Van Dyke, *Groen van Prinsterer's Lectures on Unbelief and Revolution* (Toronto: Wedge Publishing Foundation, 1989), 96.

²⁷⁶ Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer, *Nederlandsche Gedachten*, vol. 5, Second Series (Amsterdam: Höveker, 1873), 346.

'Ten bewijze dezer reeds in het Kabinet verkregen beginselvastheid, beroep ik mij op de eenzelveheid mijner latere geschriften met het Overzicht van 1831.'

uniformity it is interesting to note that the term the ‘divine right of government’ which is prominently present in *Unbelief and Revolution* does not appear in *Overview*. This observation is important because the concept of the ‘divine right of government’ is fundamental in Groen’s thinking. It is the aspect of his thought that best expresses its unique characteristic and its strength.²⁷⁷ As Dr Daniël Koorders’ study on Groen’s anti-revolutionary political theory states: ‘The recognition of the divine right of government is what determines the distinctiveness, the nucleus, the essence of the anti-revolutionary political theory.’²⁷⁸

Because Groen does not recognise a discrepancy between his later publications and *Overview*, it may be assumed that the concept of the ‘divine right of government’ as he understands it is not absent from *Overview*, even though the term is. That this is effectively the case is easily demonstrated when we consider that this concept can also be described as the recognition of ‘the sovereignty of God, as He reveals Himself in His Word and in History, as opposed to the revolutionary doctrine of popular sovereignty.’²⁷⁹ Groen’s concept of the ‘divine right of government’ or ‘God’s sovereignty’ is in other words his anti-revolutionary antithesis to the revolutionary concept of ‘popular sovereignty’. For

See also our substantiation of the reliability of *Overview* for a study of Groen’s thought in chapter two.

²⁷⁷ Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer, *De Nederlander: Nieuwe Utrechtsche Courant (Algemeen staatkundig nieuws-, handels- en advertentieblad)*, n.d., n° 706.

‘[Sprekend over goddelijk recht der overheid:] Daarin wordt bij het bestrijden van onze richting het merk van haar eigenaardigheid gezocht. Niet ten onrechte. Daarin ligt haar kenmerk en kracht.’

²⁷⁸ Daniël Koorders, *De anti-revolutionaire staatsleer van Mr. Groen van Prinsterer uit de bronnen ontwikkeld* (Utrecht: Kemink et Fils, 1860), 46.

‘Wat de eigenaardigheid, de kern, het wezen van de antirevolutionaire staatsleer uitmaakt [is] erkenning (...) van het goddelijk recht der Overheid.’

Importantly, Groen regarded this thesis to have accurately portrayed his anti-revolutionary position: Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer, *Ter nagedachtenis van Stahl* (Amsterdam: Höveker, 1862), 112.

²⁷⁹ Koorders, *De anti-revolutionaire staatsleer*, 46.

‘(...) het goddelijk recht der Overheid, of (om het noch-duidelijker te formuleren) van de Soevereiniteit Gods, gelijk Hij zich openbaart in Zijn Woord en in de Geschiedenis, tegenover de revolutieleer van Volkssoevereiniteit’.

Groen, the choice is between popular sovereignty or God's sovereignty. A third option is not available.²⁸⁰ As such his concept of the 'divine right of government' is indirectly present in *Overview* since critique of its counterpart concept of 'popular sovereignty' forms an integral part of *Overview's* argument. An unambiguous example of this is *Overview's* statement that its explanation has 'shown that the root of the revolutionary theory is found in *unbelief*, in the denial of a revealed Deity. This necessarily results (...) in matters of the state [in] the sovereignty of all or so-called popular sovereignty.'²⁸¹ In *Unbelief and Revolution* Groen re-iterates this viewpoint, when he refers to 'popular sovereignty' as an expression of the 'principle of unbelief'.²⁸²

We read Groen's concept of 'unbelief' to mean the revolutionary denial of 'God's right'. By consequence, 'unbelief's' antithesis will be the principle that 'God's right' is to be upheld. Groen's critique of the application of 'unbelief' in the area of the state may in this sense be read as an implied call to uphold 'God's right' in government. This is precisely our understanding of Groen's concept of the 'divine right of government', also called 'God's sovereignty'. The 'divine right of government' or 'God's sovereignty' is the specific application to the state of the general anti-revolutionary principle that 'God's right' is to be upheld. It is the anti-revolutionary opposite to the revolutionary theory of popular sovereignty.

²⁸⁰ Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer, *Nederlandsche Gedachten*, vol. 1, Second Series (Amsterdam: Höveker, 1870), 185.

'Volkssouvereiniteit of Souvereiniteit Gods. Tertium non datur.'

²⁸¹ Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer, *Nederlandsche Gedachten*, vol. 3, First Series (The Hague: Vervloet, 1832), 93.

'In de vorige artikels is getoond dat de wortel der revolutionaire theorie in het ongeloof, in het verloochenen eener geopenbaarde Godheid bestaat: waaruit noodwendig (...) in den Staat de Souvereiniteit van allen of de zoogenaamde Volkssouvereiniteit volgt.'

²⁸² Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer, *Ongeloof en Revolutie: Eene reeks van historische voorlezingen* (Amsterdam: Höveker, 1868), 211.

'Ik heb getracht te bewijzen dat het beginsel van ongeloof (sovereiniteit der rede en volkssouvereiniteit) enkel tusschen radicalisme of despotisme de keus laat'.

The fact that the term 'divine right of government' is missing from *Overview* may point to the fact that in the years after *Overview* the concept became more crystallised in Groen's thinking.²⁸³ When we compare the argument he presents in *Unbelief and Revolution* with that of *Overview*, it is clear that its so-called positive element, namely 'how unbelief gave rise to the new *theory* of liberty, which in turn led to the revolutionary *practice*' is the same.²⁸⁴ In fact, *Overview* may roughly be read as a summary of this part of *Unbelief and Revolution*.²⁸⁵ By contrast, *Unbelief and Revolution* dramatically expands Groen's so-called negative argument why the Revolution cannot be attributed to the principles, constitutions or abuses of the old regime. As part of this argument he notably demolishes the generally assumed stance that 'the revolution arose in reaction to the divine-right monarchy and oppressive absolutism of the *ancien régime*.'²⁸⁶ It is likely that his critical analysis of the period leading up to the Revolution and its many abuses made clear for him that the concept of the 'divine right', generally regarded to mean the hereditary, absolute right of kings, had over the centuries become deformed and unshackled from its original meaning. It is equally likely that in the course of this analysis he arrived at a more clearly defined idea what the genuine concept of the 'divine right', what he would call the 'divine right of government', meant. *Unbelief and Revolution's* elaborate assessment of the principles,

²⁸³ The term '*Gods Souvereiniteit*' ('God's sovereignty') that Groen uses in future publications as a synonym of the 'divine right of government' similarly does not appear in *Overview*, though it should be noted that the words '*Gods oppermagt*', which may be translated as God's omnipotence or God's sovereignty, appear once: Groen van Prinsterer, *Nederlandsche Gedachten*, 1832, 3:97. The passage reads: 'The revolutionary theory knows no *authority*, because the power of governments, where it does not rest on the acknowledgment of God's sovereignty, must stem also legally from the fickle approval of subjects':

'Met de revolutionaire theorie bestaat er geen gezag; omdat de magt der Overheden, wanneer zij niet op de erkenenis van Gods oppermagt berust, ook regtens uit het wisselvallige goedvinden der onderdanen ontspruit.'

²⁸⁴ Van Dyke, *Groen van Prinsterer's Lectures*, 159. Emphasis Van Dyke's.

²⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 96.

²⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 159, 75.

constitutions and abuses of the old regime leading up to the Revolution in this respect probably functioned as a catalyst for Groen's broadened understanding and articulation of the concept of the 'divine right', both in its genuine definition and its deviations, in a way that *Overview* could not. For this reason it is plausible that at the time that Groen wrote *Overview* his grasp of the term 'divine right' may not have been as defined as it was at the time of *Unbelief and Revolution*. This explains the absence of the term from *Overview*, even if its antithetical concept of 'popular sovereignty', which as Groen uses it may be regarded as the denial of 'God's right' in the area of government and the opposite of 'God's sovereignty' in the state, is in an important way present in *Overview*.

Having established the likely explanation for the reason why the term the 'divine right of government' is missing from *Overview*, even if the concept, especially in its antithetical expression, is not, we will now turn to a critical analysis of Groen's concept of the 'divine right of government'. Our analysis will determine whether the concept supports our reading of his concept of 'unbelief' and whether it may be regarded as a sub-species of the broader concept of 'God's right' applied specifically to the state. In the course of this analysis we will also ask how our understanding of the role that 'God's right' plays in Groen's thought illuminates other elements of his thought.

II. GROEN'S CONCEPT OF THE 'DIVINE RIGHT OF GOVERNMENT'

Because the concept of the 'divine right' has generally been understood to mean something different from the meaning Groen attaches to it, we will first set out what his concept does *not* mean.

A. What Groen's Concept of the 'Divine Right' Does Not Mean

When Groen speaks of the concept of the 'divine right' he explicitly does not mean a doctrine that 'function[s] simply as a pretext for despotism', a theory that is, as he points out in *Unbelief and Revolution*, 'almost universally denounced as an antiquated misconception from the dark Middle Ages, as a nonsensical fabrication of princely cunning and priestly self-interest, as a tissue of justice tied to a multitude of fallacies and absurdities'. With the theory of the 'divine right' he decidedly does not mean the kind of 'divine right of kings' which aims 'to pay men homage which belongs only to God', 'to exalt princes to a category of superhuman beings', 'allows the sovereign every injustice' and is 'partial to the autocratic form of government'.²⁸⁷ Neither does he regard ancient Israel's theocracy as the model all states should emulate, or seek to 'wrap worldly-minded intentions in a cloak of authority borrowed from Heaven' that denies 'the subject every resistance'. While he recognises that 'history provides us with examples in abundance of every abuse (...) just recited', he argues that these are deformations of the genuine doctrine of the 'divine right'.

²⁸⁷ The term the 'divine right of kings' conjures up examples of its manipulative, self-serving abuse at the time of the Stuarts. It is worth noting that Groen explicitly distances himself from the Stuarts' use of the concept, branding theirs 'a system of slavery' and remarking on the unrivalled nature of its 'excessively foolish extremes': Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer, 'Studiën voor Ongeloof en revolutie. 1845', in *Bescheiden, 1842-1876*, ed. Johan Zwaan, vol. 2, *Schriftelijke Nalatenschap* (The Hague: Instituut voor Nederlandse Geschiedenis, 1991), 126. See also Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer, *Le parti anti-révolutionnaire et confessionnel dans l'église réformée des Pays-Bas* (Amsterdam: Höveker, 1860), 7, 40; Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer, *Maurice et Barneveld: étude historique* (Utrecht: Kemink et Fils, 1875), clix.

What these deformations have in common is that they ‘restrict the application of a universal truth for the exclusive benefit of the monarchical form of government’. It is the invocation of God’s *sanction* of the sovereign power, as James I with his boast of his absolute right of kings and even Napoleon had done, without at the same time accepting its *regulatory* and *restricting* power on the sovereign power, that to Groen signals the deformation of the doctrine of the ‘divine right’. This partial application opens the door to ‘identify the will of any sovereign with the will of God’ and to idolise any government, ‘as the Romans did under the Emperors’.²⁸⁸ The doctrine of the Divine Right of Kings as the Stuarts had infamously applied was a narrow interpretation of it ‘which a mediæval philosopher would hardly have recognised. In this way,’ legal historian Theodore F. T. Plucknett explains, ‘the old doctrine of the divine origin of civil government became restricted to a particular form of government, that is to say, a monarchy, and to a particular section of that form, the King himself.’²⁸⁹ From such narrow, partial application of the doctrine Groen distances himself. What he understands the doctrine of the ‘divine right’ to signify by contrast, we will discuss next.

B. Government Sourced in God’s Will

When Groen speaks of the ‘divine right of government’ he means a doctrine ‘the cardinal truth’ of which ‘makes up the mortar of the entire building of the state in the diversity of its application’.²⁹⁰ Or, as he words it elsewhere: ‘a truth to which

²⁸⁸ Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer, *Ongeloof en Revolutie: Eene reeks van historische voorlezingen* (Leiden: Luchtmans, 1847), 49–50. Van Dyke’s translation.

²⁸⁹ Theodore F. T. Plucknett, *A Concise History of the Common Law* (London: Butterworth, 1956), 49

²⁹⁰ Groen van Prinsterer, *Ongeloof en Revolutie*, 1847, 56. Emphasis added.

‘(...) de hoofdwaarheid (...) welke in menigvuldigheid der toepassing, het cement van het geheele staatsgebouw is.’

the entire science of politics is subordinate'.²⁹¹ It is the doctrine grounded on the Scripture found in Romans 13 that states: 'Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God.'²⁹² Based on these and similar Scripture references it expresses a 'simple truth that had always and everywhere been supposed undeniable', namely that 'the source of government authority is of a higher order than the will of man'.²⁹³

That the source of the government authority is found in God's will, not man's, is the central tenet of the dogma of the 'divine right of government'. This central tenet spawns three important further tenets. The first is the conviction that a state emerges 'out of the development of natural and varied *relationships of authority and submission*', and not as is assumed in the revolutionary age 'from a situation of general liberty and equality'. The second is that the source of authority gives it its *legitimacy*, so that herein, and not in any specific form of government, lies 'the hallmark of sovereignty'. The third is that 'every sovereign authority', by which is meant 'every authority that, in its sphere of rights, is not accountable and submitted to any higher human authority, finds in God's will in a direct and immediate way its source and direction, *as well as* its security and limitation.'²⁹⁴

²⁹¹ Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer, *Grondwetherziening en Eensgezindheid* (Amsterdam: Müller, 1849), 497.

'[Het hier] eener waarheid geldt, waaraan de geheele politieke wetenschap ondergeschikt is.'

²⁹² Rom. 13:1 (ESV)

²⁹³ Groen van Prinsterer, *De Nederlander*, n° 706, n° 791.

'(...) eenvoudige waarheid die, ten allen tijde en in alle landen, als voor geen betwijfeling vatbaar, ondersteld werd: (...) [dat] het gezag der Overheid een oorsprong heeft hooger dan menschelijke wil.'

²⁹⁴ Groen van Prinsterer, *Grondwetherziening en Eensgezindheid*, 334. Emphasis added.

While we have here summed up these four tenets of the dogma of the ‘divine right of government’ as though they regarded four different notions, we read them to be different angles of the notion of ‘God’s will’ in the context of the state. We understand them to be different expressions of the imperative that ‘God’s right’ is to be upheld as it applies to the different relationships within the state between subjects and between subjects and rulers. Our reasons for this reading are the following.

1. God’s Will Determines Authority’s Source and Legitimacy

At the foundation of the doctrine of the ‘divine right of government’ is the acknowledgement that —to use the phrase of the King James’ translation— ‘the powers that be are ordained of God’. If the governing authorities are instituted by God this means by consequence that they ‘are not just tolerated. They are willed, instituted, sanctified by God himself’.²⁹⁵ The state is in other words a reflection of God’s will and hence of God’s character. Because God has revealed Himself in Scripture, where He has made known the holiness and righteousness of both His will and His character, the state as an expression of His will must align with God’s holiness and righteousness. The state is, consequently, meant to be governed according to God’s principle of justice. This Christian presupposition that there is ‘no authority except from God’ coupled to the Christian understanding of God’s just character and will grounds Groen’s insistence that authority derived from

‘[Wij stellen dat] een Staat te voorschijn treedt, niet uit een toestand van algemeene vrijheid en gelijkheid, maar uit de ontwikkeling der natuurlijke en velerlei betrekking van gezag en ondergeschiktheid; dat, bij verschil der vormen, het kenmerk der Souvereiniteit, in de regtmatige oppermagt ligt; dat elk Souverein gezag (in ‘t algemeen elk gezag dat, in den kring zijner regten, aan geen hooger menschelijk gezag verantwoordelijk en ondergeschikt is) regtstreeks en onmiddellijk, zoowel oorsprong en rigtsnoer als waarborg en beperking in den wille Gods heeft.’

²⁹⁵ Rom. 13:1 (KJV); Groen van Prinsterer, *Ongeloof en Revolutie*, 1847, 51. Van Dyke’s translation.

God must 'be understood in its sound sense of every kind of *legitimate* authority, which in this context demands that God's righteousness and holiness be kept in mind'.²⁹⁶ Only such justified and legitimate authority may to the Christian be considered to genuinely reflect God's will. In this sense, the mere fact of having government power does not inevitably lead to the conclusion that it is legitimate power. As Groen elaborates: '*Power* here is not synonymous with might or force'. His view explicitly does 'not subscribe to any interpretation that would oblige us to be obedient to the villain who holds a dagger under our nose, or to hail today as a power ordained of God the crowned robber who yesterday banished our legitimate prince.'²⁹⁷ The source of government is found in God's will. God's will, because of His righteousness and holiness, consequently provides a plumb line by which worldly authority's legitimacy may be measured. In order to be aligned with God's will the exercise of government authority must be aligned with the universal principles of justice, which reflect God's just character. In 'the justice that springs from God's will and ordering' the only true foundation for the state may be found.²⁹⁸ Because God, as He is revealed in Scripture, is a just and righteous God, the power He bestows on the sovereign as 'God's servant for [the subjects'] good' must be used according to God's justice and righteousness.²⁹⁹ This also means that the legitimate right to exercise worldly power may not exceed the rights received from God. Acknowledgment of God's ordering in the state, as in

²⁹⁶ Ibid.

The words '*wettige Magt*' here translated as '*legitimate* authority', may also be translated as '*lawful or rightful or justified* power.'

²⁹⁷ Ibid. Van Dyke's translation. All further references in this chapter to *Ongeloof en Revolutie*, 1847, use Van Dyke's translation.

²⁹⁸ Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer, *Staatsregt en politiek*, vol. 1, Verspreide Geschriften (Amsterdam: Hoveker, 1859), 289.

'Men [heeft] het eenige ware fundament [van de Staat], heeft het regt, gelijk dit in den wil en in de ordeninge Gods zijn oorsprong heeft, ter zijde gesteld.'

²⁹⁹ Rom. 13:4 (ESV).

the family, results in 'the sanctification of authority, the ennobling of obedience, and the determination of, and insistence on, the duty of subject and government by God's will and law'. For this reason 'authority was not arbitrary and unlimited', in the pre-revolutionary era, 'and the right of defence and resistance was not unknown'.³⁰⁰

Additionally, the 'nature of the submission required of us depends upon the nature of the power granted by God'. A person living in The Hague is 'not obliged to submit to the type of authority that is lawfully exercised in Constantinople or St. Petersburg'. Similarly, a Dutchman is 'not entitled to the liberties and privileges enjoyed by the subjects and citizens of London or Paris'.³⁰¹

Thus we may conclude that God's will determines the legitimate scope of the governing authority God has granted as well as its application in its particular context. Submission to this authority depends on its legitimacy and nature. God's will acts as the motivation and imperative for subjects to submit to their rulers, and for rulers to do good. It presupposes that God has a right to be obeyed. Such recognition of 'God's right' thus fuels subjects' submission as well as rulers' authority within the boundaries of legitimacy.

2. God's Will Determines Authority's Limitation and Security

With regard to the dynamic between ruler and subject, God's will further determines authority's limitation and security. The one who is governed submits

³⁰⁰ Groen van Prinsterer, *Nederlandsche Gedachten*, 1832, 3:81.

³⁰¹ Groen van Prinsterer, *Ongeloof en Revolutie*, 1847, 52.

to the governing authority ‘for the sake of conscience and God’s will’. ‘His obedience is to God’s will, not the caprice of men. In the government he honours God’s servant’. ‘He never submits to earthly governors in anything that goes against the decrees of the Most High’. Similarly, the acknowledgement by the government ‘that it has to give account to Him who knows all things and who cannot be mocked with impunity’ has restraining power.³⁰² ‘A civil power is God’s *lieutenant* and God’s *minister*. In this duality of relation’, Groen explains, ‘—its twofold direction, upwards and downwards— lies the whole theory of divine right. *We* are to obey the higher power for the Lord’s sake; *he* is to be obedient to God.’³⁰³ This obedience is expressed ‘downwards’, towards his subjects, whom the civil power may command, as the apostle writes, for their good, as God’s minister. It is expressed ‘upwards’, towards God, whom the civil power is to obey as a lieutenant does his commanding officer.³⁰⁴ This obedience acknowledges ‘the sacredness of law, as being grounded in the will of God’. This was also the basis for international law, as European treaties would ‘begin with the solemn formula, *In the Name of the Holy Trinity*’. Thus ‘the mightiest men on earth humbled themselves as mortals and sinners before Him with whom there is no respect of persons and sealed their promises to each other as lieutenants of the King of kings, called above others to observe and uphold His laws.’³⁰⁵

³⁰² Groen van Prinsterer, *Verspreide Geschriften*, 1:312–3.

‘Het is niet aan de willekeur der menschen, het is aan de wil van God dat hij [die gehoorzaamt] gehoorzaamheid betoont. In de Overheid eerbiedigt hij Gods dienaars. Het is eene onderdanigheid om der conscientie en om des Heeren wille. (...) Hij onderwerpt zich aan de Magtigen der aarde in niets dat tegen de bevelen van den Almagtige strijdt. (...) Zou men niet den krachtigsten waarborg bezitten, wanneer [de Overheid] rekening en verantwoording schuldig is aan Hem die alle dingen weet en wien men niet straffeloos bespot.’

³⁰³ Groen van Prinsterer, *Ongeloof en Revolutie*, 1847, 52.

The original Dutch here translated ‘God’s lieutenant and God’s minister’ reads: ‘Gods Stedehouderes en Gods dienaars’. It could also be translated as ‘God’s representative and God’s servant.’

³⁰⁴ Rom. 13:4.

³⁰⁵ Groen van Prinsterer, *Ongeloof en Revolutie*, 1847, 114.

In this principle of submission to God's will lies the strength of the concept of the 'divine right of government'. It seeks to align worldly authority with essential authority that is sourced in God, which has as consequence that worldly authority is restrained and inherently limited. In this way the 'divine right of government' not only *sanctions* worldly power but at the same time also *regulates* and *bridles* it.³⁰⁶ It requires not just that subjects 'be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor [*or* 'king'] as supreme, or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good.'³⁰⁷ Importantly, it likewise requires that rulers recognise that they are instituted as 'God's servant for [the subjects'] good'.³⁰⁸ For this reason Groen states that those of his party 'do not wish to exempt sovereignty from restraints but are convinced, rather, that the subordination of rulers and subjects to the Supreme Power above the earth is sufficient restraint, and that it provides the best guarantee for the observance of mutual obligations.'³⁰⁹ The universal truth that God is to be obeyed and submitted to is imperative on rulers and subjects alike.

God's will determines the limitation and security of the governing authority He has ordained. This view presupposes that God exists and that he has a right to see His will and law upheld, also in the context of the state. As a consequence, the state can never be absolute and can never force subjects to violate their conscience.

³⁰⁶ Ibid., 50; Groen van Prinsterer, *Ongeloof en Revolutie*, 1868, 45.

³⁰⁷ I Pet. 2:13-14 (ESV).

³⁰⁸ Rom. 13:4 (ESV).

³⁰⁹ Groen van Prinsterer, *Ongeloof en Revolutie*, 1847, 50.

a) Calvinist Position

Groen's emphasis on 'the duality of relation' of the civil power and his use of the terms 'God's *lieutenant* and God's *minister*' echo John Calvin. This is not surprising since Groen regarded himself to have been 'brought forth from Calvin', and a 'child of the [orthodox, Calvinist and evangelical] *Réveil*'.³¹⁰ Calvin, like Groen, championed the Biblical principle that civil powers are ordained of God and that government functions as God's representative and servant. To Calvin, too, this meant that governing powers were limited in the way they could yield their authority, since they could never possess 'more rights than they have received from God'. As Calvin states: 'just like a lieutenant or "*officier de justice*" ['bailiff'] is subjected to the judge and is placed under his command while he acts only on the authority of his superior, similarly the princes and magistrates —notwithstanding their power— cannot act against God, nor are they able to.'³¹¹

Groen's concept of the 'divine right of government' furthermore is an application of the Protestant tenet that all, subjects and rulers included, may approach God directly, through the intermediary of God's Son only, and without the intermediate action of the Church. It commands not only direct, immediate submission to God's will to subjects and rulers, but also upholds that 'every sovereign authority' 'finds in God's will in a *direct and immediate way* its source and direction.'³¹² It is not a call for theocracy, but it defends the position that the Reformers, too, had defended, namely that worldly authority, in the words of the

³¹⁰ Groen van Prinsterer, *Maurice et Barneveldt: étude historique*, clvi. 'Je suis issu de Calvin, enfant du Réveil.'

³¹¹ Wilhelmus H. Th. Moehn, 'God Calls Us to His Service': *The Relation between God and His Audience in Calvin's Sermons on Acts* (Geneva: Droz, 2001), 108.

³¹² Groen van Prinsterer, *Grondwetherziening en Eensgezindheid*, 334. Emphasis added.

Prussian anti-revolutionary Friedrich Stahl, 'does not derive its power from a mandate, received in a supernatural way through a special act of God, like Christ transferred it to Peter, Peter to the Pope, the Pope to kings'. The doctrine of the 'divine right of government' pivots on the Scriptural commandment: 'Be subject to the governing authorities!' It holds that 'the worldly authority comes *directly from God*, not merely through the mediation of the Pope, and that it has an *independent* authority from God, not subordinate to the Pope.'³¹³ Groen considered the 'divine right of government' for this reason 'the Christian-Protestant doctrine that stands opposed to ultramontanism'.³¹⁴ In his view it is a doctrine that 'the Reformation maintained as guarantee of the *independence* of the government against the *theocracy of the Middle Ages*, and the ever encroaching claims of ultramontanism.'³¹⁵ The "Historisch-politische Blätter für das katholische Deutschland," a principal publication of the Ultramontane party, shared this view, labelling it a 'true and consistently Protestant invention'.³¹⁶ In this respect, Dutch historian Fruin's critique of the doctrine as though it aimed to only find its highest perfection, its unmistakable foundation of the state in the Church of Rome, is undeserved.³¹⁷ It does not require the Pope for the establishment of legitimate governmental authority. It equally does not subscribe

³¹³ Friedrich Julius Stahl, *Der Protestantismus als politisches Princip* (1853), 15-16. Quoted by Koorders, *De anti-revolutionaire staatsleer*, 70.

'(...) die weltliche Obrigkeit ihr Ansehen nicht von eine auf übernatürlichen Weise durch besondere That Gottes empfangen Vollmacht herleitet, dasz Christus sie dem Petrus, Petrus dem Papste, der Papst den Könige übertragen, sondern auf natürliche Weise aus der allgemeinen Ordnung Gottes, aus dem Gebote: "seyd gehorsam der Obrigkeit!" (...) [Und] daraus ergiebt sich, dasz die weltliche Obrigkeit unmittelbar von Gott ist, nicht durch den Papst vermittelt, und dasz sie eine unabhängige Gewalt von Gott hat, nicht untergeben dem Papste.'

³¹⁴ Groen van Prinsterer, *Ongeloof en Revolutie*, 1868, 156 (footnote).

³¹⁵ Ibid., 52 (footnote).

³¹⁶ Koorders, *De anti-revolutionaire staatsleer*, 69. Koorders references "Historisch-politische Blätter," 1852, 402 and Franz Vorländer, *Geschichte der philosophischen Moral, Rechts- and Staats-Lehre der Engländer und Franzosen* (Marburg: Elwert, 1855), 221.

'(...) ächt und konsequent protestantische Erfindung.'

³¹⁷ See R. Fruin, *Het Antirevolutionaire Staatsregt van Mr. G. Groen van Prinsterer ontvouwd en beoordeeld* (Amsterdam: Gebhard, 1853), 40.

to the view that the Church has two swords, a wordly and a spiritual one. It does not consider the worldly government to be subjected and responsible, as a mere *derivative* authority, to a Priest whose office has been directly appointed by Christ Himself. As a consequence it also rejects the conclusion that the Pope, the head of the Church, could discharge subjects of their duty to obey their legitimate government.

3. Sovereign Spheres of Rights

Groen holds that the 'divine right of government' is 'the most natural application of a universal truth', as it pivots on the given —often used as an objection to it— that not just the ruler is 'a lieutenant, minister, and steward of God', but that this 'is the calling of everybody, each in his own sphere. In every rank, in every relation, man has been given a talent, which is at his free disposal— on the understanding that God will call him to account concerning its use'. Groen reminds that all men 'are to walk in the Name and after the commandment of God in the good works which He has ordained for us. The principle is the same for all, in the rights it confers, in the duties it imposes, and in the norm it implies'. Reverence for what is owed to God is the requirement for *all*. The application of what is owed will be different depending on the office to which each is called. Thereby the sovereign bears God's authority with respect to his subjects, and 'so does a father with respect to his child, and a judge with respect to the accused'.³¹⁸ There are different spheres within which different good works are required and different forms of authority are exercised. This was accepted in former days,

³¹⁸ Groen van Prinsterer, *Ongeloof en Revolutie*, 1847, 53.

Groen insists, when 'every family head, every corporation, every estate was entitled, within the sphere of its competence, (...) to exercise a form of government'.

What each sphere has in common is that it consists of social relationships of authority and submission, undergirded by subordination to God and His will. The only difference between a smaller sphere of authority and that of sovereign authority is that the former 'lacks independence, which is the distinguishing mark of sovereignty'.³¹⁹ Or worded differently: the authority exercised in the more restricted spheres of 'various social relationships' differs solely from that exercised by the state in that the latter 'has an independence which recognizes only God above itself'.³²⁰ The former, on the other hand, does have independence, in relation to other spheres and also 'over against the prince', but this independence and authority is limited to its own sphere.³²¹ The prince, though fully independent in his authority, is nonetheless held to uphold all the rights and privileges of the estates³²² that together compose the state, based on reverence for the sacredness of God's law: 'justice and morality dictate that the prince respect and protect all rights'.³²³ These rights, based as they are in the will of God, 'were held sacred until the Revolution came, when they were called scandalous'.³²⁴ Precisely because the doctrine of the 'divine right of government' insists that authority comes from God, the resultant concept of an 'independent princely

³¹⁹ Ibid., 48.

³²⁰ Ibid., 37.

³²¹ Ibid., 83.

³²² By 'estate' is meant here 'anything that has independence over against the prince': Ibid.

³²³ Ibid. For clarification, the 'rights' that are referenced here are not the revolutionary, abstract rights of man, but the historic or acquired rights that flowed from the recognition of God's will for and in the state.

³²⁴ Ibid., 48.

authority' ensured not only protection of the sovereign's authority but along with it protection of all rights. The 'independent princely authority' provided 'the solid foundation' in Christendom's thought of 'a stable monarchy that respected popular liberties'.³²⁵ Thus, when Groen explains why the old regime could have been reformed, he argues: 'Where a matter of personal competence was involved, or private rights, or the rights of corporations, communes and regions, there the king, however powerful, was often powerless, and his subjects, however obedient, were usually unyielding.'³²⁶

Four interwoven points are worth highlighting about Groen's concept of sovereign spheres of rights that clarify the concept.

The *first* is that Groen's concept of spheres of rights affirms what is *in nuce* Abraham Kuyper's doctrine of 'sphere sovereignty'.³²⁷ The concept of 'sphere sovereignty' is an element of Groen's thought that has reached the Anglo-Saxon world through familiarity with the work of his mentee Kuyper, and with Prof. Herman Dooyeweerd, the Dutch philosopher of law who stands in Groen's tradition.³²⁸ Both developed the concept in important ways. While Groen's idea of

³²⁵ Ibid., 89.

³²⁶ Ibid., 99.

³²⁷ Kuyper famously articulated his concept of sphere sovereignty ('*souvereiniteit in eigen kring*' in Dutch) at the inauguration of the Free University of Amsterdam in 1880: Abraham Kuyper, *Souvereiniteit in Eigen Kring: Rede ter inwijding van de Vrije Universiteit den 20sten October 1880 gehouden in het koor der Nieuwe Kerk te Amsterdam* (Amsterdam: Kruyt, 1880). See Abraham Kuyper, 'Sphere Sovereignty', in *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader*, ed. James D. Bratt (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1998), 461–90.

³²⁸ Herman Dooyeweerd (1894–1977) is regarded as the twentieth century's greatest Dutch philosopher. He was one-time professor of legal philosophy and jurisprudence at the Free University of Amsterdam, and is perhaps most famous for his three volume *De wijsbegeerte der wetsidee* (Amsterdam: H.J. Paris, 1935–6). This work was thoroughly reworked in a four-volume English publication *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1953–8). Dooyeweerd stands in the tradition of Abraham Kuyper and hence indirectly in that of Groen. He sought to build a philosophical foundation for a neo-Calvinist worldview and understanding of life.

sovereignty primarily pertains to ‘authority’, Kuyper uniquely broadened sovereignty to mean ‘something delegated to different spheres in society’, as a reflection of the order of creation. It echoes Kuyper’s creed that Christ has sovereignty over all of human existence and endeavour. Dooyeweerd importantly reconstructed the concept and developed it into the robust philosophical theory it is known for today.³²⁹

The doctrine of ‘sphere sovereignty’ is a topic that deserves more attention than the ambition for this chapter allows. We mention the concept here, similarly to how both Groen and Kuyper used it: ‘mainly [as] an instrument to make [our] point’. Groen (and Kuyper) did not introduce the concept as a novel theory, but as an example and application of the universal truth of God’s (delegated) sovereignty. The fact that Groen’s (and Kuyper’s) contemporaries did not scrutinise ‘sphere sovereignty’ as a theory or concept highlights that they understood it as such as well.³³⁰ Dutch familiarity with the doctrine is not surprising when it is considered that the concept had been applied in some form or other since the formation of the Dutch Republic. The Republic’s united Provinces formed a loose confederate structure that meant that ‘a central

³²⁹ See George Harinck, ‘A Historian’s Comment on the Use of Abraham Kuyper’s Idea of Sphere Sovereignty’, *Journal of Markets and Morality* 5, no. 1 (2002): 279, 281.

See Herman Dooyeweerd, *De Strijd om het Souvereiniteitsbegrip in de Moderne Rechts- en Staatsleer* (Amsterdam: H. J. Paris, 1950); Herman Dooyeweerd, *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought*, trans. David H. Freeman and H. De Jongste, vol. 3 (Philadelphia, Pa.: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1957). A noteworthy English-language publication on Dooyeweerd’s legal philosophy, including his theory of sphere sovereignty, is Jonathan Chaplin, *Herman Dooyeweerd: Christian Philosopher of State and Civil Society* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2011).

See also Lael Daniel Weinberger, ‘The Relationship Between Sphere Sovereignty and Subsidiarity’, in *Global Perspectives on Subsidiarity*, ed. Michelle Evans and Augusto Zimmermann, *Ius Gentium: Comparative Perspectives on Law and Justice* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2014); J. D. Van der Vyver, ‘Introduction’, in *Religious Human Rights in Global Perspective: Legal Perspectives*, ed. J. D. Van der Vyver and J. Witte (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1996).

³³⁰ Harinck, ‘A Historian’s Comment on the Use of Abraham Kuyper’s Idea of Sphere Sovereignty’, 279. Harinck refers to Kuyper, but his observations similarly extend to Groen.

bureaucracy was almost non-existent and powerless.’ The absence of centralised government remained a hallmark feature of the Dutch political landscape until 1795, when French annexation enforced centralisation. As James W. Skillen and Stanley W. Carlson-Thies explain, ‘political business among the Provinces was conducted in a climate of constant reciprocal opposition, which fostered the habit of seeking accommodation through slow negotiations and mutual concessions.’ In this political setting the eminent German-born jurist Johannes Althusius (1557-1638), articulated an alternative political theory to Scholastic subsidiarity and Bodinian sovereignty, grounded not in Aristotelian but in Calvinistic metaphysics. This most important Calvinist political thinker of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries ‘understood “sovereignty” as a characteristic of the *political community* rather than as an attribute of the political ruler.’ He ‘believed that the largest political units should be *federated* bodies dependent on smaller political and nonpolitical associations.’³³¹ Althusius, John Witte Jr. emphasises, ‘set forth a comprehensive theory of social, political, and legal order and activity, and the forms and norms of sovereignty, authority, and liberty that obtain within *each sphere*.’³³² The concept of ‘sovereign spheres of rights’ hence traces its practical and intellectual origins to the Dutch Republic and one of the young Republic’s legal architects, Althusius.³³³

³³¹ See on the Dutch Republic also chapter four.

³³² John Witte, Jr., *The Reformation of Rights: Law, Religion and Human Rights in Early Modern Calvinism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 152. Emphasis added. The reference is to Althusius’ massive *Politics* [or: *Politica Methodice Digesta*] of 1603 (revised in 1610 and again in 1614).

³³³ It should be noted that Kuyper never invoked Althusius. Jonathan Chaplin has suggested that the reason for this is that Althusius had become suspect to Kuyper by his contemporary Otto von Guericke’s ‘project of harnessing Althusius to the evolution of the German constitutional state which he postulated, even in its new imperial form, to be the stable middle between French libertarianism and Russian autocracy. Althusius was thus made to serve what Kuyper deemed to be a false hope and a grim danger’: James D. Bratt, *Abraham Kuyper: Modern Calvinist, Christian Democrat* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2013), 134. Chaplin’s suggestion was made in a personal communication to Bratt in November 2003: *Ibid.*, 405.

The *second* point is that Groen's pluralist understanding of society, which views the state as being made up of 'estates' or intermediate bodies, importantly undermines the susceptibility to despotism displayed by the distorted 'divine right of kings' of the Stuarts, and the monarchical absolutism of the seventeenth century more broadly. The rights and privileges of every group limit the rights of the sovereign. 'The advantage of having intermediate bodies in society' that have 'rights and privileges of all kinds', is that it prevents 'absolute rulers from turning into despots'. This insight Groen shares with Tocqueville, who argued that in the old regime 'a strange kind of liberty allowed every group to hold up its head before the royal officials'.³³⁴

It clarifies why Groen abhors centralisation, which destroys the pluralist nature of political society. 'Centralisation', he elucidates in *Unbelief and Revolution*, 'always begins by destroying the rights of provinces and municipalities and, if forced to be consistent, ends by tolerating in fact no right or activity or existence except under its supervision and control, as a benign favour. It has no place for autonomy, for independence within one's own sphere.'³³⁵

A *third* point of note is the importance of the role that intermediate bodies with their rights and privileges, play in defining the *nature* of the state. Since sovereignty is acknowledged to have been received from God, *every* authority that

Dooyeweerd points back to Althusius as the intellectual father of the concept of sphere sovereignty. He does however not trace the concept forward into the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. A possible explanation for this is that the concept did not substantially evolve. See Dooyeweerd, *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought*, 3:623.

³³⁴ Van Dyke, *Groen van Prinsterer's Lectures*, 222. Van Dyke quotes Richard Herr, *Tocqueville and the Old Regime* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1963), 128. Tocqueville seems to share the view that the old regime could have been reformed.

³³⁵ Groen van Prinsterer, *Ongeloof en Revolutie*, 1847, 48.

is sovereign in its sphere, which is 'every authority that does not give account, or is subordinate, to any higher human authority in the sphere of its rights', 'finds directly and immediately in God's will both its source and guidance, as well as its security and limitation'. Within and between the different spheres 'natural and varied relationships of authority and submission' exist. It is out of their development, and not out of 'a situation of general liberty and equality', that the state emerges.³³⁶ The state in this view is not based on a social contract or brought forth by human consent. In 'its actual form' it is a living organism, more like a plant than a machine. The state presents itself, Groen insists,

not as an artificial production but as a product of nature, as the highest form of private rights, a form that meets its counterparts of more restricted orbit in the various social relationships and that differs from the latter solely in that it has an independence which recognizes only God above itself.³³⁷

Because the intermediate bodies in society with their own rights and privileges are essential for the composition of the state, Groen posits that 'the neglect and the rejection of duty does not cancel authority *that is grounded in the nature of mutual relationships*'.³³⁸ The sovereign's independent authority does not exist in a vacuum, but functions in the context of other spheres of authority and rights. The mutual obligations that exist between the sovereign and the subjects as well as between the sovereign spheres of rights form the natural, organic, historic state.

³³⁶ Groen van Prinsterer, *Grondwetherziening en Eensgezindheid*, 334.

[Wij stellen dat] een Staat te voorschijn treedt, niet uit een toestand van algemeene vrijheid en gelijkheid, maar uit de ontwikkeling der natuurlijke en velerlei betrekking van gezag en ondergeschiktheid; (...) dat elk Souverein gezag (in 't algemeen elk gezag dat, in den kring zijner regten, aan geen hooger menschelijk gezag verantwoordelijk en ondergeschikt is) regtstreeks en onmiddellijk, zoowel oorsprong en rigtsnoer als waarborg en beperking in den wille Gods heeft.'

³³⁷ Groen van Prinsterer, *Ongeloof en Revolutie*, 1847, 37.

³³⁸ Groen van Prinsterer, *Nederlandsche Gedachten*, 1832, 3:81. Emphasis added.

‘The best guarantee for the observance of mutual obligations’, and hence for the proper functioning of the state, is ‘the subordination of rulers and subjects to the Supreme Power above the earth’.³³⁹ In this way the ‘divine right of government’ creates the state as a ‘product of nature’ and fosters its continued proper function.³⁴⁰

Our *fourth* point regards the rights and privileges of the sovereign spheres. These rights are more precisely called ‘acquired rights’ or ‘historic rights’. They must not be confused with the revolutionary, inalienable rights of man. The latter are anchored in the French revolutionary Declaration of the Rights of Man, the fruit of human convention. ‘Universal equality is at the heart’ of them. By contrast, the former are sourced in the estates of the historical state. They have developed organically and historically, and are a reflection of the distinctions between the different estates.³⁴¹ They are intimately wedded to ‘authority’ and are a fundamental expression of the sovereignty of God in the state. For this reason Groen states in a letter to Isaäc da Costa, in response to Da Costa’s thoughts on *Unbelief and Revolution*, that ‘the anti-revolutionary constitutional theory is nothing but the recognition of the sovereignty of God, applied to the holiness of authority, freedom, property, marriage—in one word of *objective truth* and *acquired right*’.³⁴²

³³⁹ Groen van Prinsterer, *Ongeloof en Revolutie*, 1847, 50.

³⁴⁰ As an aside, it should be mentioned that the ‘divine right of government’ also (indirectly) ensures general prosperity, which Groen regards to be ‘inseparable from the free development of the orders, of the estates composing the state’: Ibid., 48.

³⁴¹ Ibid., 86.

³⁴² Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer, *Brieven van Mr. Isaäc da Costa, medegedeeld door Mr. Groen van Prinsterer*, vol. 1 (Amsterdam: Hōveker, 1872), 359.

Da Costa (1798-1860) was a prominent member of the *Réveil* movement. Like Groen he had ‘objections to the spirit of the age’, which he articulated in the controversial work: Isaäc Da Costa, *Bezwaren tegen den geest der eeuw* (Leiden: Herdingh, 1823).

The importance of acquired or historic rights within Groen's thought is highlighted also in the role that their combination plays for the historical state. This, as well as their ideological feature, we will discuss next.

a) *Combination of Historic Rights*

We have noted that the application of the doctrine of the 'divine right of government' over an extended period of time results in the organic development of the state as a 'product of nature'. The essence of such a state is undergirded by the fact that subjects recognise the prince's independent authority and that the prince protects and respects all the historical rights and privileges exercised by the different sovereign spheres. The various mutual obligations are fostered by 'the subordination of rulers and subjects to the Supreme Power above the earth', which is the distinguishing feature of the 'divine right of government'.³⁴³

In this setting, the determination of the rights and privileges of the various estates is a process that happens over an extended period of time and in a specific context. In a particular historical, cultural, religious and geographical context God's will must be given practical application. The *just* expression of the rights and duties of rulers and subjects must be determined in the *given context*. This is done in accordance with what is perceived to be God's principle of justice. It results in the development of 'natural and varied relationships of authority and submission'. Historic rights are hence the result of the consistent application of

'Naar mijn opvatting althans, is het anti-revolutionaire staatsregt niet anders dan de erkenning van de Souvereiniteit Gods, toegepast op de heiligheid van gezag, vrijheid, eigendom, huwelijksbetrekking, in één woord van objectieve waarheid en verkregen regt.'

³⁴³ Groen van Prinsterer, *Ongeloof en Revolutie*, 1847, 50.

the principle of justice in a certain historical context. As Groen explains in *Unbelief and Revolution*:

Historic rights were not simply derived from history, from the welter of all that comes to pass, beyond the control of higher powers, but on the contrary, they were respected as the slowly ripening fruits of the principle of justice whose action in time, far from bowing to the events, subjects the unformed mass of facts and circumstances to its regulating and purifying influence. Justice, in a philosophical sense essential and historical par excellence, was placed above History. It was this dominion of Right over fact that gave rise to a whole series of acquired rights.³⁴⁴

Groen's words make clear that historic or acquired rights develop as a practical interpretation of God's will in a particular context of a particular state. Their development is ultimately propelled by the aim to apply God's will and submit to it. God's will and character, revealed in Scripture to be righteous and just, is reflected in the 'unchangeable and religiously based' principle of justice.³⁴⁵ It is an application of 'God's right'. In this respect it is worth observing not only the *method* but also the *motivation* for the interpretation and establishment of historic rights. The method is that of applying 'the principle of justice', of 'Justice (...) placed over History', and the 'dominion of Right over fact'. Equally noteworthy is the motivation that acts as the propelling agent for the consistent application over time and hence its 'regulating and purifying influence'. Both method and motivation pivot on the willingness and discipline to render 'God's right'. Their dual action also highlights that historic rights not only bestow rights but equally call forth duties and demands. They are a practical expression of man's moral duty before God and hence also before his fellow man to act

³⁴⁴ Ibid., 45–6..

³⁴⁵ Groen van Prinsterer, *Nederlandsche Gedachten*, 1832, 3:99.

according to God's principle of justice in a certain historical context. Historic rights are hence derived from God's primal 'right'. They are not inalienable. Inequality or differentiation of role and 'distinctions between estates' are at their core, not the assumed 'universal equality' of the French rights of men.³⁴⁶ 'God's right' grounds 'the entire existing order of acquired rights'.³⁴⁷

We have noted above the important role that intermediate bodies with their rights and privileges play in defining the *nature* of the state. In extension of this point, it is worth noting what the role of historic rights is for the *character* of a particular state. This is an important observation since historic rights in their 'particular combination', as they have grown naturally or organically over time among a particular people, importantly and uniquely determine 'the distinctiveness of a state, forming its natural constitution'.³⁴⁸ The combination of historic rights determines the unwritten constitution of a particular historical state.³⁴⁹ The state in this scheme of thinking is understood to 'germinate and grow out of society itself, as its unique pattern, as a natural product of the *soil of justice and morality*'. It is not 'the artificial product of human deliberation and convention, the result of popular sovereignty and social contract'.³⁵⁰

³⁴⁶ Groen van Prinsterer, *Ongeloof en Revolutie*, 1847, 86.

³⁴⁷ Groen van Prinsterer, *De Nederlander*, n° 1422.

³⁴⁸ Groen van Prinsterer, *Ongeloof en Revolutie*, 1847, 46.

³⁴⁹ For Groen's view on how the written constitution that is ultimately grounded in man's will may be aligned to the unwritten, historic constitution that is ultimately grounded in God's will, see: Groen van Prinsterer, *Grondwetherziening en Eensgezindheid*, 335–8.

³⁵⁰ Groen van Prinsterer, *Ter nagedachtenis van Stahl*, 9, 10. Emphasis added.

[De miskennis dat] de Staat niet het kunstmatig gewrocht van menselijk overleg en afspraak, niet het uitvloeisel van volkssouvereiniteit en contrat social [is], maar veeleer uit de zamenleving zelve, als haar eigenaardige vorm, als natuurproduct in het gebied van regt en zedelijkheid, ontspruit en opwast.'

Thus God's will is the catalytic factor that determines the development of historic or acquired rights in that the imperative to obey God's will, to render to God His right, provides the impulse and creative response to determine what justice and morality demand in a particular context. The imperative force that propels the process by which historic rights develop over time is hence the recognition of 'God's right' by all.

b) Ideological Feature

Here we must point out a detail that we have so far left out of our discussion of historic rights and the role God's will plays in their unique development over time. In our critical analysis of the various aspects of Groen's concept of the 'divine right of government' we have presented its tenets, including the role of historic rights in the doctrine, in the present tense. While this does not influence the accuracy of our analysis it does obscure the fact that when Groen discusses historic rights he speaks of them in the past tense, referring to the historical era before the revolutionary period, when historic rights and their importance for the constitution of a state were more universally recognised and understood. This is significant because his reference to the past contextualises historic rights as belonging to the pre-revolutionary era of Christendom, when 'unbelief' had as yet not denied 'God's right' in government. Groen regards every historical period to have a characteristic ideological feature that determines its direction, as we have shown in chapter two. This means that his reference to the pre-revolutionary period of Christendom implies acknowledgement of the influence of Christendom's characteristic ideological feature. This ideological feature was not

that of revolutionary ‘unbelief’ or the denial of ‘God’s right’, but one that sought to honour and uphold ‘God’s right’. Our analysis that the recognition that God has a right that is to be upheld, and that this recognition is the imperative impulse at the core of the development of historic or acquired rights, is in line with Groen’s assertion that history is subjected to ideological influences. During Christendom this ideological feature at play was the imperative thrust to do God’s will, also in the arena of government. Since the development of historic rights over time in a specific context occurs in response to the tension of how best to apply God’s will, it is important to note that this tension only exists because there is recognition that ‘God’s right’ is to be upheld by rulers and subjects. This is an important observation as it highlights the motivation to seek to do God’s will, which produces this tension. The question whether God’s will was effectively and consistently done is a secondary one. Groen’s emphasis is on the ideological feature, the religious impetus that is the motivating factor. His is an exposition of the larger religious principle at work, not a blind defence or overly positive interpretation of pre-revolutionary eras.³⁵¹

Groen’s reference to the way Christendom used to understand historic or acquired rights is an implied reference to the generally accepted ideological feature of the time that in contrast to the revolutionary era sought to do God’s will

³⁵¹ This is a point that many of Groen’s critics seem to have missed, as much of their critique has focused on the factual inaccuracies of his assessment of the old regime and pre-revolutionary eras. A case in point are the two earliest reviews of *Unbelief and Revolution*. One expressly states ‘that this review will disregard all theological digressions in the book’: J. De Witte van Citters, review of *Ongeloof en Revolutie*, by Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer, *Themis*, no. 9 (1848): 114. The other similarly ignores the ideological message of the work. Its critique pivots on the assertion that Groen’s ‘perception of the pre-revolutionary era is too rosy’, and that ‘the anti-revolutionary principles and historical states as presented by Mr Groen cannot be found in actual history’: J. de Bosch Kemper, review of *Ongeloof en Revolutie*, by Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer, *Nederlandsche Jaarboeken van Regtsgeleerdheid en Wetgeving*, no. 11 (1849): 194–5.

and hence uphold 'God's right'. It highlights the findings of our analysis that the principle that 'God's right' is to be upheld forms the basis of Groen's concept of the 'divine right of government'. It equally underlines the religious foundational nature of the state. It also shows that Groen seems to be preoccupied with society's pre-revolutionary motivation or intent to obey God's will, more so than its actual success in doing so. This is in line with his frank avowal that pre-revolutionary Christendom was marked by much injustice and unrighteousness, and his aversion to return to any of the pre-revolutionary abusive situations.

4. Role of Man's Will

Before we draw this part of our critical analysis to a close, we will consider one more question: Within the concept of the 'divine right of government' with its emphasis on the principle that government must be sourced in God's will, what is the role of man's will? With all the emphasis on 'God's will' as the source of government according to the doctrine of the 'divine right of government' the impression could reasonably be formed that man's will is artificially ignored. That this is artificial is clear since it is indisputable that God's will while determined in heaven, must be implemented by fallible man on earth. The fact that the dogma of the 'divine right of government' posits that 'every sovereign authority', as Groen words it, 'finds *in God's will in a direct and immediate way* its source and direction', does not mean that the dogma leaves no role for man and man's will to play.³⁵² From our discussion above about the establishment and development of historic rights it is clear that the doctrine of the 'divine right of government' does

³⁵² Groen van Prinsterer, *Grondwetherziening en Eensgezindheid*, 334. Emphasis added.

not deny that man's will is creatively involved in the acquisition of these rights and hence in the formation of the state. Man's particular interpretation of God's will over time for his particular situation and his particular context brings about historic rights, and through their unique combination brings about the state's natural or unwritten constitution. Thus, by virtue of his need to interpret God's will, man uses his will to accomplish God's will. God's will is expressed *by way of* man's will. Importantly, man's will in this process is understood to function as a secondary, mediate vehicle for the application of God's will, what in German is expressed by the word '*mittelst*'. This stands in contrast to man's will functioning as an independent and immediate vehicle for the application of his own will, what in German is expressed by the word '*durch*'.³⁵³ Thus a differentiation must be made between the use of man's will in order to give expression to God's will, however fallible and faulty this expression may be, and the use of man's will in order to give expression to no higher guideline than his own insights and will. The former is the expression of the doctrine of the 'divine right of government's' understanding of the function of man's will. It highlights Groen's emphasis on impetus or motivation: the 'divine right of government' pivots on man's posture of humble reverence towards God, epitomised in the statement 'Thy, not my, will be done'. It reflects the Christian posture of man's will surrendered to God's will. It displays a humility that acknowledges that man's own reason and wisdom is not enough, and that the added wisdom of God's will, as revealed in Scripture, is

³⁵³ The English translation of the German words '*mittelst*' and '*durch*', read 'by means of, through, by, with, on' and 'due to, because of, as a result of which, at the hands of' respectively.

Ibid., 499, 500. See also Koorders, *De anti-revolutionaire staatsleer*, 55–7. The reference is to Stahl's *Die Staatslehre*.

required for society's well-functioning. It stands opposed to a self-sufficient, self-idolatrous posture that centres in man's own will.

From our analysis we may conclude that Groen's concept of the 'divine right of government' is an expression in the realm of the state of the larger concept that 'God's right' is to be upheld. This supports our initial reading of Groen's concept of 'unbelief'. We will ask next in what way recognition of the emphasis on 'God's right' in his thought illuminates other elements of it.

III. EMPHASIS ON 'GOD'S RIGHT' CLARIFIES GROEN'S THOUGHT

Groen's concept of the 'divine right of government' upholds that essential authority that must determine worldly authority. The concept pivots on the principle that God's sovereignty is to be acknowledged in the state. The imperative nature of this acknowledgement we have expressed by the term 'God's right', which is the clearest expression of the anti-revolutionary antithesis of Groen's concept of 'unbelief'. The term conveys not only the presupposition that God exists, but also that God is entitled to man's obedience to His unchanging laws.³⁵⁴ Consequently, how man responds in the face of 'God's right' lays bare his individual or societal willingness to render or deny what is owed to God. This subjective element of impetus or motivation we take to be at the core of Groen's anti-revolutionary principle. It conveys a response to God. It is the defining factor that determines whether the ideological feature of history is revolutionary or not. It acts as a shibboleth of sorts to determine the 'tone' of the age. Groen's argument

³⁵⁴ Groen van Prinsterer, *Nederlandsche Gedachten*, 1832, 3:103.

is that in the era following the French Revolution the general impetus of society's institutions had for the first time in history turned from one that sought to honour the divine as their first duty, as understood in Christendom and even in antiquity, to one that honoured man, unshackled from God. In this revolutionary era man fulfils the role that previously God fulfilled; he becomes source and end of authority. No longer is God's existence recognised and with it the framework of God's revealed moral requirements as essential for the proper functioning of society. This expression of 'unbelief', this denial of 'God's right', is at its heart a man-centred credo, which idolises man and categorically refuses to admit or submit to any other god, including the God revealed in Scripture. Its antidote is Christianity with its core tenet that God's will 'be done, on earth as it is in heaven'.³⁵⁵ Reading Groen with cognizance of the pre-eminence he gives to 'God's right' clarifies several aspects of his thought that are open to misunderstanding. Five should be mentioned here.

The *first* is the fact that Groen does not offer a system or a so-called 'anti-revolutionary constitution' to remedy the concerns he has raised in his critique of the French Revolution and the constitutional changes it brought about in the Netherlands. This is an aspect of Groen's thought his critics did not understand.³⁵⁶ His own defence against this charge is that he diagnoses the underlying cause of the contemporary troubles and proposes a remedy at a more profound level than

³⁵⁵ Matt. 6:10 (ESV).

³⁵⁶ See for Groen's own, almost annoyed response to the demand for his system of political theory: Groen van Prinsterer, *Grondwetherziening en Eensgezindheid*, 179–80. See also Johan Zwaan, *Groen van Prinsterer en de klassieke oudheid* (Amsterdam: Hakkert, 1973), 239; P. A. Diepenhorst, *Groen van Prinsterer* (Kampen: Kok, 1941), 306–9; G. J. Grashuis, *De Leer van Groen van Prinsterer*, vol. 1, *Geloof en wetenschap in de Nederlandsche Staatkunde: Twee levensbeelden* (Baarn: Hollandia-Drukkerij, 1903), 118–22.

a mere constitutional change. He argues that an amended constitution would avail little for the health of a building of state that was subject to 'principles that make chaos and caprice unavoidable', in the same way that a change of coat would not benefit a sick person whose illness was not diagnosed and treated, or a change of wallpaper would not save a staggering building from collapse.³⁵⁷ Groen does not defend a system, but rather defends principles. As he states: 'In the war of principles that divides Europe and the Netherlands I have made my choice; it is to principles that I have dedicated my life.'³⁵⁸ That Groen does not propose a practicable system is brought into focus when it is considered that his core principle is that God's will should be done in society, that 'God's right' must be upheld. His emphasis is on the underlying impetus or motivation, not on a particular format. Against the poison of the revolutionary principle of 'unbelief' that denies 'God's right' he positions the Christian, humble antidote of reverence for 'God's right'. This essentially Christian posture firstly towards God and secondly towards fellow men is his proposed strategy. For this reason, when pressed to align himself to a political system, he states that he is willing, in as far as the term 'system' 'coincides with the simplicity of the Christian confession', to concede that its 'cardinal principle' 'is found in the slogan *The Gospel against the Revolution*. Or, should you wish for a different shibboleth, in the contraposition of *Social Contract* and *Holy Scriptures*. And, should you wish for a third, in the choice between the *worship of man* and of *the Living God*.'³⁵⁹ All three shibboleths pivot

³⁵⁷ Groen van Prinsterer, *Grondwetherziening en Eensgezindheid*, 179–80.

³⁵⁸ Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer, 'Vrijheid van Christelijk-Nationaal Onderwijs in verband met Scheiding van Kerk en Staat: Parlementair Fragment' (1863), 22. Quoted by F. J. Fokkema, *De godsdienstig-wijsgeerige beginselen van Mr. G. Groen van Prinsterer: Eene beschrijving en beoordeeling* (Groningen: Riemersma, 1907), 13.

³⁵⁹ Groen van Prinsterer, *Nederlandsche Gedachten*, 1873, 5:52.

on the recognition of 'God's right' as opposed to its denial. They reflect the difference between a posture that submits to God and one that exalts itself as an all-knowing, all-sufficient god. For this reason Groen states that the difference of political views ultimately does not regard 'the extent to which certain freedoms can be attributed under certain circumstances. The dispute regards the source of all freedoms and rights. It boils down to the question of whether the foundation of every freedom and of every authority is found in *the submission to the Highest Lawgiver, or not.*'³⁶⁰ Groen's emphasis is on the essential Christian posture of submission to God. It is primarily an inner impetus or motivation to render 'God's right', not a closed system of political theory.

In this light, it should *secondly* not be surprising that Groen is not categorically against or for any form of government. The *form* in which governing authority is exercised is not the key for Groen, the *manner* in which it is done is: whether 'God's right' is upheld or not. The question, to put it in his own words, is whether the 'origin of *every* authority, regardless of how it is formed, is grounded in the convention of people or in the institution of God.'³⁶¹ In this respect it is worth noting that even though Groen opposes the revolutionary theory of 'popular sovereignty', he is not against it as a form of government. He is not opposed to the sovereignty of the people as it functions in the United States of America and in

'Het grondbeginsel van ons systeem, zoo deze benaming met den eenvoud der Christelijke belijdenis overeenkomt, ligt in de zinspreuk Het Evangelie tegen de Revolutie. Of, wilt ge nog een ander shibboleth, het ligt in de tegenstelling van Contrat Social en H. Schrift. En, wilt ge nog een derde, het ligt in de keus tusschen Menschvergoding en den Levenden God.'

³⁶⁰ Groen van Prinsterer, *Ter nagedachtenis van Stahl*, 25 (footnote). Emphasis added.

'Het verschil loopt niet over de mate waarin deze of gene vrijheid, onder deze of gene omstandigheden, kan worden toebedeeld; het loopt over de bron van alle vrijheden en regten; over de vraag of, al dan niet, in de onderwerping aan den Hoogsten Wetgeer, de grondslag zoowel van elke vrijheid als van elk gezag ligt.'

³⁶¹ Groen van Prinsterer, *Grondwetherziening en Eensgezindheid*, 541.

some Swiss cantons.³⁶² What he opposes is the radical-revolutionary *principle* that denies that government must be sourced in God to be legitimate, but instead locates the source of justice and authority in the general will of equal and free inhabitants of a country.³⁶³ Similarly, he is not opposed to the Dutch Republic while he is opposed to the French Republic. The reason for this is that though both states were structured as a republic, the Dutch Republic acknowledged that its civil powers originated from God, while the French Republic did not. As he wrote his friend H. J. Koenen, as early as 10 June 1831, in a personal letter: 'In my view a republic is as legitimate as a monarchy and all forms of government should have the principle of legitimacy applied to them.'³⁶⁴ Groen states in *Overview*: 'Constitutional theory, as per its pre-revolutionary meaning, does not exclude any kind of government, just like the revolutionary dogma does not limit itself to monarchic or republican forms. The distinction is found in whether or not essential authority is acknowledged.'³⁶⁵ In response to the proposition that a certain *form* of a government guarantees its righteous functioning and just treatment of its subjects, Groen would argue that the internal motivation so to speak, to act justly and to understand what righteousness requires, is of more essential importance than the outward appearance of a government's form. Recognition of the source of authority, and hence of 'God's right', furnishes the

³⁶² On Groen's endorsement of the sovereignty of the people as it functions in North America, see Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer, *Handboek der geschiedenis van het vaderland* (Amsterdam: Wormser, 1895), § 692. The American concept of popular sovereignty is not revolutionary in Groen's view because it does not 'invert society' by looking to man instead of to God for its source of authority. See also J. de Bruijn and G. Harinck, eds., *Groen van Prinsterer in Europese context* (Hilversum: Verloren, 2004), 65–71.

³⁶³ Groen van Prinsterer, *De Nederlander*, n° 326. Quoted by Koorders, *De anti-revolutionaire staatsleer*, 18.

³⁶⁴ Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer, *Briefwisseling, 1808-1833*, ed. C. Gerretson, vol. 1, Schriftelijke Nalatenschap (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1925), 449.

³⁶⁵ 'Naar mijn inziens is eene republiek even wettig als eene monarchie en moet het principe van legitimiteit op alle soorten van regeringsvormen worden toegepast.'

³⁶⁵ Groen van Prinsterer, *Nederlandsche Gedachten*, 1832, 3:102.

required propelling motivation. The cardinal question to ask is not what form a state should have but whether there is 'submission or resistance to God's ordinances'.³⁶⁶ It is clear that the question of form has no primary importance for Groen when it is acknowledged that the reverent posture before God he prizes is not fettered to a specific form of government.

Thirdly, the recognition that Groen's assessment of his times and its problems ultimately hinges on the question whether 'God's right' is denied or upheld, clarifies why he is not categorically opposed to revolution and is not a 'contra-revolutionary, [who] seeks to recapture the situation of the past, if need be by revolutionary means.'³⁶⁷ Groen plainly acknowledges that some revolutions are 'as lawful in their origin as they are in their scope'.³⁶⁸ Examples of what he regards as lawful revolutions are the Dutch Revolt and the German Revolution or Reformation. When we remember that the pivotal question is whether 'God's right' is upheld or not, then it is clear why the Dutch Revolt and the Reformation meet with Groen's approval since both were motivated by the desire to render to God the things that are God's. It also explains why Groen seemingly lacks nuance in his appraisal both of the Reformation and the French Revolution. His focus is not so much on the actual events that form the whole of both, and make both equivocally 'right' or 'wrong', but rather on the posture towards God that buoyed each. It further explains why Groen, in all his revulsion for the French Revolution and the 'unbelief' from which it sprang is not by default opposed to the fruit of the

³⁶⁶ Groen van Prinsterer, *Ter nagedachtenis van Stahl*, 37.

'... ondergeschiktheid of weêrstand aan de ordinantiën Gods.'

³⁶⁷ Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer, *Narede van vijffjarigen strijd* (Utrecht: Kemink en Zoon, 1855), 3.

³⁶⁸ Groen van Prinsterer, *Nederlandsche Gedachten*, 1832, 3:131. See also Groen van Prinsterer, *Ter nagedachtenis van Stahl*, 26–7, 29; Groen van Prinsterer, *Le parti anti-révolutionnaire*, 1860, 42ff.

Revolution era. He readily grants that there are things that are true in the ideas of the Revolution, and that 'they are the answer to the most noble aspirations and to legitimate wishes of the human heart'. But he warns that 'they are branches that are cut from the evangelical tree. The corruption of the best is the worst of all.'³⁶⁹ Groen makes a differentiation between the fruits produced by the principle of the Revolution, the denial of 'God's right', and those produced by the Revolution period itself.³⁷⁰ He explicitly does not advocate a complete reversal of all changes and a return to the pre-revolutionary situation. His embrace of certain revolutionary accomplishments stems from his conviction that 'one cannot re-do the past' or pretend the French Revolution has not happened.³⁷¹ It also stems from his conviction that 'God's right' is to be upheld in society. All that is accomplished in accordance with God's moral order, he supports. 'I am not one of the categorical friends of all that is old', he explains, 'I, too, am pleased with what is new, that is *as long as it is not in conflict with truth and justice*.'³⁷² Cognizance of Groen's plumb line of truth and justice elucidates why he accepts that the Revolution brought about worthy accomplishments and righted 'wrongs that furnished the grounds for bitter and reasonable complaint'.³⁷³ It explains his acknowledgement that 'good fruits had resulted from the Revolution-era' and that 'in the midst of the follies of revolutionary application, dogmas and institutions of

³⁶⁹ Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer, *De anti-revolutionaire en confessionele partij in de Nederlands Hervormde Kerk*, trans. A. J. Dam (Goes: Oosterbaan & Le Cointre, 1954), 77.

'Zij zijn een antwoord op de nobelste aspiraties en op legitieme wensen van het menselijk hart, maar het zijn takken die gekapt zijn van de evangelische boom. *Corruptio optimi pessima*.'

³⁷⁰ Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer, *Verscheidenheden over Staatsrecht en Politiek* (Amsterdam: Müller, 1850), 232.

³⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 241, 232-3.

'*On ne refait pas le passé*.'

³⁷² *Ibid.*, 242. Emphasis added.

'Ik behoor (...) niet tot de onvoorwaardelijke vrienden van al wat oud is. Ook mij bevalt wat nieuw is; namelijk wanneer het niet tegen waarheid en recht strijdt.'

³⁷³ Groen van Prinsterer, *Handboek*, § 971.

great value had appeared.’³⁷⁴ This aspect of his thought has puzzled his critics as they could not understand how Groen could be categorically opposed to the Revolution, but not to the changes it had brought about. His own answer to the question whether all revolutionary-inspired change needs to be overturned, is unambiguous: ‘Not in the least. Overthrow is not required. Most of the institutions may be maintained’. His reason for this is that ‘it all comes down to the principle that permeates and animates it’.³⁷⁵ Groen is not opposed to change and progress and actively desires ‘healing and restoration’ of society’s ills. He posits emphatically: ‘I have no aversion to healing, but I am convinced that the radical [revolutionary] healing that is recommended to us, is death’. The healing he proposes is found ‘in respect for justice and history, and in the Christian principle’.³⁷⁶ That which is planted in accordance with this Christian principle is to be honoured. Examples are the notions of ‘justice, liberty, toleration, humanity and morality’, all of which are ideas ‘that had not been cultivated on its own acre, but in Christian soil’. In his view, these modern ideas actually ‘belong to the Gospel’.³⁷⁷ They must be maintained and championed in as far as they align with God’s moral order.

Recognition of the preeminent importance of ‘God’s right’ in his thought thus makes intelligible why Groen argues on the one hand that ‘even though the

³⁷⁴ Groen van Prinsterer, *Verscheidenheden*, 231–2.

‘De Revolutie is het bederf geweest ook der goede beginselen die zij aan het Christelijk Europa ontleend had. Dit neemt de waarheid en het gewigt der opmerking niet weg dat, te midden van de dwaasheden der revolutionaire toepassing, leerstellingen en inrigtingen te voorschijn kwamen, van groote waardij, inrigtingen welke niet ten onderste boven gekeerd, maar van het Revolutie-beginsel ontdaan en met historie en regt in overeenstemming moeten worden gebracht.’

³⁷⁵ Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer, *De maatregelen tegen de Afscheidenen aan het staatsregt getoetst* (Leiden: Luchtmans, 1837), 66.

³⁷⁶ Groen van Prinsterer, *Verspreide Geschriften*, 1:285, 303, 304.

³⁷⁷ Groen van Prinsterer, *Ongeloof en Revolutie*, 1847, 187. See also Groen van Prinsterer, *Verspreide Geschriften*, 1:254–326.

revolutionary principle should be renounced', one is nonetheless 'held to respect all rights, also those acquired in the revolutionary era'.³⁷⁸ Genuine historic rights may develop against the backdrop of a revolutionary age. His proposed course of action in response to established revolutionary changes is 'to retain what remains; restore what belongs to the essence of the societal order; absorb and confirm what the revolutionary era has accomplished.'³⁷⁹ The fact that Groen abhors the principle of 'unbelief' that has brought forth the revolutionary era does not consequently mean that he cannot see any valuable accomplishment or positive result that it has brought. This seeming inconsistency in his thought is no longer mystifying when it is considered that the question whether God is submitted to is paramount. This question whether 'God's right' is upheld or denied is the plumb line by which everything, including revolutionary changes, is measured. Groen has no problem to admit that the Christian principle of justice was often denied in the *ancien régime*. Equally, he has no wish to see old abuses continued in the present era, or to bring back 'institutions that have become obsolete and cannot without contortion be made compatible with the existing situation'.³⁸⁰ But he insists that 'God's right' be upheld. This means that he seeks to maintain those revolutionary changes that have become established in line with

³⁷⁸ Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer, *Proeve over de middelen waardoor de waarheid wordt gekend en gestaafd*, Beschouwingen over Staats- en Volkerenregt, vol. 1 (Amsterdam: Höveker, 1858), 170 (footnote).

³⁷⁹ Groen van Prinsterer, *Nederlandsche Gedachten*, 1832, 3:51.

'Behouden wat overgebleven is; herstellen wat tot het wezen der maatschappelijke orde behoort; opnemen en bevestigen hetgeen het revolutie-tijdperk voorgebragt heeft; dat is de regel die bij het wederopbouwen moet worden gevolgd.'

³⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

'Hernieuwing van oude misbruiken is geenszins het doel; evenmin terugroeping van instellingen die verouderd en met het bestaande niet zonder gedwongenheid vereenigbaar zijn.'

the Christian principle.³⁸¹ This seeming contradiction in his thinking that vehemently opposes the Revolution with its changes sourced in the application of ‘unbelief’, but also regards some of these changes a beneficial and a necessary correction of the old abuses, is resolved when the pre-eminent role of ‘God’s right’ in his thought is taken into account.

Fourthly and in line with our previous observation, cognizance of the importance of ‘God’s right’ equally explains how it is that despite Groen’s strong respect for rulers, whom he regards as recipients of the civil power God has bestowed, he is nonetheless free to be critical of king and ministers.³⁸² This apparent paradox is again solved when it is remembered that for Groen all pivots on the question whether ‘God’s right’ is denied or upheld. It means that rulers, also in their function of God’s servant, may be criticised should they not live up to their highest calling of honouring ‘God’s right’.

The *fifth* is a clarification of the role of historic or acquired rights in Groen’s constitutional theory. Our reading is that it is the communal, disciplined respect for ‘God’s right’ over an extended period of time that propels the creation and reverent sustaining of historic or acquired rights. This respect is expressed when ‘Justice [is] placed above History’, above the mere ‘welter of all that comes to pass’. As a consequence it is through ‘this dominion of Right over fact’ that historic rights are produced ‘as the slowly ripening fruits of the principle of

³⁸¹ A reflection of this attitude is Groen’s acceptance of the liberal Constitution of 1848—to the consternation of several of his conservative friends—the fact that he stood for a seat in parliament according to the new election rules, and, once elected, participated whole-heartedly in its debates.

³⁸² W. G. F. Van Vliet, *Groen van Prinsterers historische benadering van de politiek* (Hilversum: Van Vliet & Uitgeverij Verloren, 2008), 72–3.

justice'.³⁸³ The imperative of 'God's right' imposed by the 'divine right of government', provides the impetus for the creation and upholding of acquired rights. It illuminates the fact that historic rights are the result of the application of the doctrine of the 'divine right of government'. It negates the reading that understands the 'divine right of government' as a 'species' of the more general 'genus' of historic rights.³⁸⁴ The primal *intention or motivation* to see that 'God's right' is rendered not only propels the *process* of discovering over time how this right is to be practically applied in a specific context, but also furnishes the *method* by which its content is decided. Hence the principle that 'God's right' must be rendered is foundational and instrumental for the development of historic or acquired rights. These rights flow out of the doctrine of the 'divine right of government', and not the other way around. The 'divine right of government' demands reverence, not only for the governing authority, but also for 'the entire existing order of acquired rights'.³⁸⁵ Both pivot on the willingness and discipline to render 'God's right'.

IV. 'DIVINE RIGHT' IN CONTEMPORARY THEOLOGICAL DISCUSSION

It is worth observing that Groen's political thought as it relates to his description of the genuine doctrine of the 'divine right of government' is not original, as indeed it did not seek to be. It appears to be an accurate representation of the early patristic and medieval political theory that was commonly accepted in

³⁸³ Groen van Prinsterer, *Ongeloof en Revolutie*, 1847, 45–6.

³⁸⁴ Van Vliet proposes this disputed reading: Van Vliet, *Groens historische benadering van de politiek*, 72.

³⁸⁵ Groen van Prinsterer, *De Nederlander*, n° 1422.

Christendom up until the fourteenth century. A description by Joan Lockwood O'Donovan of Christendom's pre-fourteenth century political theology reads almost as a summary of Groen's views.³⁸⁶ 'In earlier patristic and medieval political theology', O'Donovan elucidates,

God's right established a matrix of divine, natural and human rights or objective obligations that determined the ordering justice of political community. Justice (*iustitia*) was synonymous with objective right (*ius*) —i.e. the objectively right action in any situation— and objective right was what accorded to law, to legal right (*lex, ius*). Political authority or government was primarily a matter of divine institution, appointment and authorization; and the central moral-political act on the part of ruler and ruled alike was to consent to the obligations inhering in communal life according to divine intention and rationally articulated as laws. The ruler commanded, gave laws, issued binding judgements, but he was to command obediently; his judgements were to conform to the binding revelation of God's will in Scripture. The subject was obliged to obey the ruler's commands, not only because of his rightful authority, but because of their intrinsic conformity to the requirements of justice. And there were, of course, unjust commands that the subject was obliged by God's law never to obey.³⁸⁷

The central role 'God's right' played in medieval political theology appears to have lost some of its universal acceptance from the fourteenth century onwards, but seems to have regained its moral centrality in the political thought of the Reformation.³⁸⁸ As O'Donovan makes clear, the so-called "'heresies" of John Wycliff and Martin Luther', and we would add, of John Calvin, 'gave moral

³⁸⁶ Lockwood O'Donovan is an Honorary Fellow at the University of Edinburgh's School of Divinity, and an Honorary Senior Lecturer at the University of St. Andrews' School of Divinity.

³⁸⁷ Joan Lockwood O'Donovan, 'Rights, Law and Political Community: A Theological and Historical Perspective', *Transformation: An International Journal of Holistic Mission Studies* 20, no. 1 (2003): 31–2.

³⁸⁸ A factor for this loss of universal acceptance seems to have been the rise from the fourteenth century onwards of voluntarism and Ockhamist nominalism. There is debate as to the scope of this loss of acceptance of divine-right doctrine. That natural-law doctrine continued to be unequivocally affirmed, also after the fourteenth century, is demonstrated by theologians of the School of Salamanca, most famously Francisco de Vitoria (1483-1546) and Francisco Suárez (1548-1617).

centrality to gospel freedom and divine right —indeed, they viewed all right as God’s in Christ and refused to develop an independent concept of natural law and subjective rights.’³⁸⁹ In these respects, Groen’s concept of the ‘divine right of government’ is in line with the Reformers. It stands firmly in the Protestant tradition.³⁹⁰

The concept of divine right has gained more recent academic traction through the work of English-based theologians Joan Lockwood O’Donovan, her husband Oliver O’Donovan, and John Milbank.³⁹¹ On the question whether ‘justice’ is ultimately sourced in inherent, subjective human rights or in a ‘matrix of objective obligations established by God’s right’, they have defended the latter, also called ‘right order’.³⁹² These right-order theorists disagree with the position

³⁸⁹ O’Donovan, ‘Rights, Law and Political Community’, 34.

³⁹⁰ The tradition goes back to Augustine, whose thesis that ‘there can be no “right” in a society that does not acknowledge the right of God’ was uncontroversial until the early twentieth century: Oliver O’Donovan, *The Ways of Judgement* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2005), 76. With reference to Augustine, *City of God*, XIX, 21. See also Robert Dodaro, *Christ and the Just Society in the Thought of Augustine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008). ‘Justice’ for Augustine, Dodaro explains, ‘expresses a series of right relationships which escalate in value in proportion to the order willed by God.’ Augustine understood justice as the right ordering of the soul and of human loves (*ordo amoris*). Ibid., 4–5.

It is interesting to note that Augustine in *City of God*, XIX, 21 (echoing Cicero’s *De Republica*) correlates the people with ‘an assemblage associated by a common acknowledgement of right and by a community of interests’. He argues that ‘where there is not true justice there can be no assemblage of men associated by a common acknowledgment of right, and therefore there can be no people’: Augustine, *The City of God*, trans. Marcus Dods, vol. 2, *The Works of Aurelius Augustine, Bishop of Hippo: A New Translation* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1878), 330–3.

³⁹¹ Oliver O’Donovan is an Honorary Professor of Divinity at the University of St Andrews and Professor Emeritus of Christian Ethics and Practical Theology at the University of Edinburgh. He was Regius Professor of Moral & Pastoral Theology and Canon of Christ Church at the University of Oxford.

John Milbank was Research Professor of Religion, Politics and Ethics at the University of Nottingham. He is one of the founders of the ‘Radical Orthodoxy’ movement.

³⁹² See John Milbank, ‘Against Human Rights: Liberty in the Western Tradition’, in *The Meanings of Rights: The Philosophy and Social Theory of Human Rights*, ed. Costas Douzinas and Conor Gearty (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Oliver O’Donovan, ‘The Language of Rights and Conceptual History’, *Journal of Religious Ethics* 37, no. 2 (2009): 193–207; Oliver O’Donovan, *The Desire of the Nations: Rediscovering the Roots of Political Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); O’Donovan, ‘Rights, Law and Political Community’; Joan Lockwood O’Donovan, ‘Historical Prolegomena to a Theological Review of “Human Rights”’, *Studies in Christian Ethics* 9, no. 2 (1996): 52–65.

that justice is ontologically grounded in the natural, inherent right of individuals, and disagree with theologians who regard inherent rights to be 'entirely compatible with Christianity'.³⁹³ They oppose the view defended by such Christian thinkers as Nicholas Wolterstorff and Nigel Biggar that inherent rights have their theological grounding in the Christian conviction that the love of God confers human worth and thereby inherent human rights, and that the concept of individual rights is compatible, and not dismissive of, a larger, objective order of moral right.³⁹⁴

A. Groen's Views Coherent with those of Right-Order Theorists

Groen in effect does not use the term 'right order', and calls for 'unconditional submission to the highest Lawgiver and King' more so than to a right order of transcendent law.³⁹⁵ In this sense, while the argument of right-order theorists is ultimately one of traditional, Scholastic natural law, Groen's is not.³⁹⁶ But in good

It seems Nicholas Wolterstorff coined the term 'right order' to distinguish between two ways of thinking about justice: '*justice as inherent rights*' and '*justice as right order*'. The latter he defines as the conviction that 'natural law for the right ordering of society is what ultimately grounds justice, (...) not the inherent rights of members of society': Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Justice: Rights and Wrongs* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2008), 11.

³⁹³ Milbank, 'Against Human Rights', 46. Milbank suspects that many of these theologians are American Christians 'who wish to defend the deep consistency of the American legacy with their Christian commitment, and who take Americanism to imply a commitment to liberalism and to liberal democracy'.

³⁹⁴ Wolterstorff, *Justice: Rights and Wrongs*; Nicholas Wolterstorff, 'Justice as Inherent Rights: A Response to My Commentators', *Journal of Religious Ethics* 37, no. 2 (2009): 261–79; Nigel Biggar, 'Nicholas Wolterstorff, Justice: Rights and Wrongs', *Studies in Christian Ethics* 23, no. 2 (2010): 130–37; John Witte, Jr., *God's Joust, God's Justice: Law and Religion in the Western Tradition* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2006); Max L. Stackhouse, 'Why Human Rights Need God: A Christian Perspective', in *Does Human Rights Need God?*, ed. Elizabeth M. Bucar and Barbra Barnett (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2005), 25–40; Esther D. Reed, *The Ethics of Human Rights: Contested Doctrinal and Moral Issues* (Waco, Tex.: Baylor University Press, 2007).

³⁹⁵ Groen van Prinsterer, *Narede van vijfjarigen strijd*, 13. Emphasis added. See also Groen van Prinsterer, *Ter nagedachtenis van Stahl*, 25 (footnote).

³⁹⁶ By traditional, Scholastic natural law we mean the pre-modern doctrine that holds to 'an eternal, unchangeable, and universal ethical norm or standard' that is wholly independent of man's will and is binding on men because it emanates from God's reason and will: Peter J. Stanlis, *Edmund Burke and the Natural Law* (Lafayette, La.: Huntington House, 1986), 7.

right-order fashion he, too, emphasises the importance of the acknowledgement 'that the foundation of justice lies in the law and ordinances of God.'³⁹⁷ He also regards historic or acquired rights as having developed over time through the 'dominion of Right over fact', and as 'the slowly ripening fruits of the principle of justice'.³⁹⁸ This concept of rights is, in Lockwood O'Donovan's phrase, 'a secondary language of justice, subordinate to and continuous with (...) objective right and duty.'³⁹⁹ Groen aligns with right-order theorists in his understanding of justice as primarily constituted by the obligations that God's right and law establish, not by the will or inherent right of those who make up political society. He subscribes to the premise defended by right-order theorists that an overarching moral order

While the distinction between the 'Scholastic' and 'Protestant' right-order stance does not influence the parameters of the debate between Christian theologians whether right order or inherent rights ground justice, Groen's Protestant right-order angle has characteristics that make it different from the Scholastic right-order angle. Five inter-related characteristics of his stance are particularly noteworthy.

The *first* is that whereas Groen with Scholastic right-order theorists views the world as 'well-ordered and graded', and whereas he does not locate its starting point in the individual, he, in contrast to Scholastic right-order theorists, does not locate this starting point in 'the Cosmos', but instead in God as revealed in Scripture. See on the Scholastic position A. P. D'Entrèves, *Natural Law: An Introduction to Legal Philosophy* (London: Hutchinson University Library, 1967), 46.

The *second*, related to the first, is that Groen does not use natural-law reasoning to bring out the contours of the moral order. Instead he leans primarily on Scripture for this.

The *third* is that the created order is not Groen's incentivising argument to foster evangelical obedience. His accent is on the loving and just *person* of God, who desires that His unchangeable laws be obeyed: Groen van Prinsterer, *Nederlandsche Gedachten*, 1832, 3:103. Obligation from this perspective is a response to a personal, immediate involvement of God with society as revealed in Scripture, not merely a response to an impersonal 'matrix'. It avoids deism.

The *fourth* is that Groen's emphasis on Scripture and the person of God, as opposed to an emphasis on an impersonal matrix, makes his right-order stance less of a 'divine ideal' or 'cosmic norm' by which justice is measured. The latter is more characteristic of the Scholastic right-order stance, which has been described as 'Christian Platonism'. See Joan Lockwood O'Donovan, 'Natural Law and Perfect Community: Contributions of Christian Platonism to Political Theory', *Modern Theology* 14, no. 1 (1998): 19–42. Groen's Protestant stance by contrast is less 'idealistic' in the sense of Platonic realism. This seems to align with Dutch classicist Johan Zwaan's conviction that the influence of idealistic Platonism on Groen's thought has been exaggerated. Cognizance of the Protestant angle of Groen's right-order stance may further substantiate Zwaan's reading. See Zwaan, *Groen van Prinsterer en de klassieke oudheid*, 132–61. See also Van Dyke, *Groen van Prinsterer's Lectures*, 230.

The *fifth* is the importance of God's sovereignty in Groen's thought, which finds a clear expression in his concept of the 'divine right of government'. The principle of the sovereignty of God importantly divides Scholastic and Calvinist interpretations of right order. See Constance Youngwon Lee, 'Calvinist Natural Law and Constitutionalism', *Australian Journal of Legal Philosophy* 39 (2014): 17, 22.

³⁹⁷ Groen van Prinsterer, *Ongeloof en Revolutie*, 1847, 7.

³⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 45–6.

³⁹⁹ O'Donovan, 'Rights, Law and Political Community', 38.

exists that is sourced in God's will and independent of man's will. Groen, too, is profoundly suspicious of anthropocentric political society.

There is no reference to the 'rights of man' in *Overview*, and only sporadic reference to it in *Unbelief and Revolution*.⁴⁰⁰ In his neglect of the topic of subjective natural rights Groen remains in step with early medieval Christian-political thought, which 'functioned virtually without any concept of subjective natural rights'.⁴⁰¹ Groen's omission of any substantial treatment of French human rights, despite the fact that the 1789 Declaration of the Rights of Man forms such an integral part of the French Revolution and the fact that the folly of abstract rights received considerable attention from Edmund Burke in *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, is fully coherent with the right-order orientation. So is his focus on 'various social relationships' of authority and submission undergirded by subordination to God's will. But Groen's approach is also sufficiently unique from that of the twenty-first century right-order theorists that his Christian-historical principle can offer three contributions to the current debate. Furthermore, because his right-order stance is Protestant, while that of the O'Donovans is more Scholastic in its leaning, Groen's thought broadens the right-order theory position that can be offered to the debate.

⁴⁰⁰ The only discussion of rights and the Declaration of the Rights of Man is Groen's argument that 'the revolutionary state destroys *civil liberty* —by rights': Groen van Prinsterer, *Ongeloof en Revolutie*, 1847, 246–9.

⁴⁰¹ O'Donovan, 'Rights, Law and Political Community', 31.

As Leo Strauss reminds us, if man's rights were considered at all in this medieval scheme of thinking, they were conceived 'as essentially derivative from his duties': Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History* (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 1953), 182.

B. Groen's Contribution to the Current Debate

1. Exercise of Rights is Attached to Political Context

The first contribution to the current debate Groen offers is the profoundly practical given that rights, however they are ontologically defined, must be *enforceable* to actually be rights. They must have some *power* behind them to make others act or refrain from acting in a certain way. Rights, even if conceived as inherently attaching to individuals based on their worth before God, can never exist in a vacuum or in isolation. They always exist in a context within which they are respected or violated. The political context within which they are exercised is for this reason not a secondary matter, but of primary concern.⁴⁰² It is the state's constitutional theory that determines how and whether rights are actually upheld, and how the members of its political community must be understood. Groen acknowledges this in his emphasis on the 'divine right *of government*'. He expounds the concept of 'God's right' in the specific context of the political community within which it must find its expression, and from which he judges it to have been expelled and replaced by the revolutionary doctrine of popular sovereignty.

What Groen makes clear is that there are two distinct, mutually exclusive, ways to ground constitutional theory. One is an approach that upholds 'God's right'. It is theocentric and includes God as a 'member' so to speak of the political community. It is marked by *inequality* as all members of this society are under

⁴⁰² This is also true on an international plane. Milbank makes a noteworthy comment in this respect: 'human rights remain tied to the political —it is just that the political is internationalising itself, moving (unpredictably and problematically) beyond its nation-state idiom': Milbank, 'Against Human Rights', 70.

God's authority. Not only God's so-called 'membership' of political society makes the inherent inequality among members a given. The members of this society are also under differing (unequal) levels of delegated authority within the different spheres of sovereignty that they are a part of, and in relation to the different estates as these estates interact with each other.

The other way to ground constitutional theory is anthropocentric. It denies 'God's right', and membership of this political community is composed of equal individuals whose wills ground it. There are no gradations of authority exercised by different estates as all sovereignty is delegated by the general will to the state.

Because rights have to be enforceable in order to be actual rights, their political context is attached to them. It exposes a weakness of rights undergirded by the anthropocentric constitutional theory in that it makes them ultimately defined by, and dependent on, changeable man. Groen highlights this point in his brief discussion of the Declaration of the Rights of Man in *Unbelief and Revolution*. He states:

Supposedly beyond the reach of government, [the 'imprescriptible, inviolable, sacred Rights' of man] are the toy of every regime that is in power. What the one hand gives, the other takes away. The liberties are exhibited, not conferred. Everything is allowed, with one fatal proviso: everything *insofar as* the state, the collective despot, is pleased to grant. I would not be misunderstood. That the rights are restricted does not offend me; this is inherent in every right. The cause of my complaint is that whereas rights used to be circumscribed and confirmed by the unchangeable laws and ordinances of God, they are now made to depend on the good

pleasure of the State, that is to say, on the will of changeable men, and for that reason must, by definition, perish.⁴⁰³

The idea Groen expresses here is that rights ‘made to depend on the good pleasure of the State’ are in danger of being dissolved into the right of the absolute state, i.e. the state assumes the essential authority that belonged to God — ‘God’s right’ becomes ‘the state’s right’. It foreshadows the concept of ‘totalitarian democracy’ that was convincingly advanced by Israeli historian Jacob Leib Talmon one hundred years later.⁴⁰⁴ It is also an idea to which John Milbank signals when he argues that ‘an absolutist account of the sovereignty of the centralised state’ is correlated to the ‘idea of individually based natural rights’.⁴⁰⁵ It goes beyond the ambition of this chapter to elaborate on this point, but Groen’s thought brings into focus that political context is attached to rights and that logically (as well as historically) a correlation exists between state absolutism and natural rights.⁴⁰⁶

Groen’s thought acts as a reminder in the contemporary debate on the ontological grounding of justice that rights are realistically and practically correlated to the political context within which they are exercised (or violated), and that the contemporary debate must be careful not to discuss (international) rights in the

⁴⁰³ Groen van Prinsterer, *Ongeloof en Revolutie*, 1847, 248–9.

⁴⁰⁴ The phrase ‘totalitarian democracy’ was coined by Jacob Leib Talmon (1916–1980), Professor of Modern History at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. See Jacob Leib Talmon, *The Origins of Totalitarian Democracy* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1952). With regard to Groen foreshadowing Talmon’s critique of the ideology of the French Revolution and its link to Marxism, see Paul Cliteur, *Natuurrecht, Cultuurrecht, Conservatisme: Grondslag van de democratische rechtsstaat* (Leeuwarden: Universitaire Pers Fryslân, 2005), 294–7.

⁴⁰⁵ Milbank, ‘Against Human Rights’, 39–40.

Milbank points to work by John Neville Figgis and Leo Straus on this connection, and to Jean Bethke Elshtain, *Sovereignty: God, State and Self* (New York, N.Y.: Basic Books, 2008).

⁴⁰⁶ It is worth clarifying that the absolutism discussed here is that of the centralised state, not that of the individual’s rights. The latter also have absolutist tendencies in their propensity to always trump social obligation as we will discuss below.

abstract without cognizance of varying political contexts within which they are exercised.

2. Determination of Rights is Attached to Social Context

Milbank's comment on 'the sovereignty of the centralised state' brings out a second point. It is the fact that centralisation requires destruction of the rights of intermediate political bodies, what Groen calls estates or smaller spheres of sovereignty, and what Milbank calls 'an intervening network of mediating organic relationships'.⁴⁰⁷ Groen's assertion that 'centralization always begins by destroying the rights of provinces and municipalities and, if forced to be consistent, ends by tolerating in fact no right or activity or existence except under its supervision and control, as a benign favour' underscores this point.⁴⁰⁸ It circles back to the difference between the society envisioned by a constitutional theory based on the doctrine of popular sovereignty, and the society based on the divine right of government. The latter acknowledges the differentiation of roles and hence inequalities between the different estates and those within them, whereas the former does not.

a) *Inequality or Differentiation of Role*

By the term 'inequality', it is worth clarifying, we mean the different, unequal *roles* and levels of authority that members of political society have in their social

⁴⁰⁷ Milbank, 'Against Human Rights', 47.

⁴⁰⁸ Groen van Prinsterer, *Ongeloof en Revolutie*, 1847, 48.

'When we forget the 'association' in the crucial Christian political legacy of 'free association' (which is far older and more fundamental for western liberty than any of the notions of liberalism),' Milbank notes, 'then a perverted solipsistic freedom will always require alien and draconian enforcement': Milbank, 'Against Human Rights', 42.

contexts. It does not regard the *personhood* of each of its members or the innate worth of people before God. 'Differentiation of role' is perhaps a less loaded term than 'inequality'. Oliver O'Donovan's explanation of the concept is helpful: 'differentiation of role' expresses the idea of 'a functional precedence that is necessary for a given social purpose in a given social context (like the distinction between 'first' and 'second' violins in an orchestra).' It is predicated on the assumption of order in society, and rejects the idea of 'equality as pre-social'.⁴⁰⁹

(i) Spiritual or Essential Equality

Our focus is political and social inequality, not spiritual or essential inequality. Scripture upholds spiritual equality between believers in Christ that erases the barriers of difference that exist between Jew and Greek, slave and free, male and female, circumcised and uncircumcised, because all are 'one in Christ Jesus' and 'Christ is all, and in all'.⁴¹⁰ But spiritual equality does not erase the political and social inequalities or differentiations of role that continue to exist between the different 'situation[s] the Lord has assigned to [each person]'. These situations of inequality may be accepted as ordered by God and transformed with new spiritual meaning. The apostle Paul uses the example of a slave and a free person, arguably the situation of the most extreme inequality, when he writes:

Each person should remain in the situation they were in when God called them. Were you a slave when you were called? Don't let it trouble you—although if you can gain your freedom, do so. For the one who was a slave when called to faith in the Lord is the Lord's freed person; similarly, the one who was free when called is Christ's

⁴⁰⁹ O'Donovan, *The Desire of the Nations*, 280.

⁴¹⁰ Gal. 3:28; Col. 3:11 (ESV).

slave. You were bought at a price; do not become slaves of human beings. Brothers and sisters, each person, as responsible to God, should remain in the situation they were in when God called them.⁴¹¹

Paul acknowledges the different social contexts between a slave and a free person. Their inequalities remain even if their evaluation is radically recalibrated in Christ: the one who is a slave is the Lord's freed person, while the one who is free is Christ's slave. Similarly, such roles as master and servant are not erased by Christ but given a radically transformed meaning, as Jesus teaches:

You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave, even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.⁴¹²

According to these and other Scriptures, not all is as it seems: on a spiritual or essential level a slave may very well be more free than a free person because of their faith in the Lord, and the last of all may very well be the greatest of all in the eyes of the Lord.

(ii) Political and Social *Inequality*

While members of political society have essential or spiritual equality in their personhood, in their social contexts they have different, unequal *roles* and levels of authority. A society constitutionally constructed on the doctrine of the divine right of government acknowledges this differentiation of roles and the

⁴¹¹ I Cor. 7:17, 20-24 (NIV).

⁴¹² Matt. 20:25-28 (ESV).

inequalities between the state's various estates or smaller spheres of sovereignty, and those within them. This acknowledgment is important because the distinctions between the estates and their members provide the context within which historic rights are determined and developed. Acknowledgement of inequality or differentiation of role is an expression of a view of society that differs markedly from the idea of society as conceived by the constitutional theory of popular sovereignty. It regards society as made up of people who are *not* principally individual entities, in theory equal to each other and like atoms, abstractly separate from each other. Instead it regards society as made up of people who are essentially connected to each other as they bear varying levels of (unequally) delegated authority from God and hence stand over and under each other.⁴¹³ It means a man is never 'merely' a man: he always stands in relation to others. He is a son in relation to his parents, a husband in relation to his wife, a father in relation to his children, a member of his guild, an inhabitant of his town, etc. His rights are in this scheme of understanding his person, not merely rights he 'owns' as a form of property which others may not infringe, while they, too, own such rights in the same, equal measure. On the contrary, his rights are *social expectations* as the principle of justice calls them forth in particular social contexts that vary.⁴¹⁴ A right therefore is, in Milbank's words, 'a grant to the right kind of person to exercise according to right judgement a certain restricted

⁴¹³ Milbank's reminder is noteworthy that the contemporary 'excessive stress upon the isolated individual (...) is in reality a dethronement of a true western valuing of the individual, derived from the Judaic and Christian (...) valuing of 'the person', with its double understanding that the person is shaped through all her interrelationships and yet as a unique 'character' is transcendentally of more value than any conglomerated whole:' Milbank, 'Against Human Rights', 43.

⁴¹⁴ In this respect the emphasis by French historian Michel Villey on the fact that 'right is only subjective right when it ceases to be a *relational* matter and becomes something grounded in an isolated individual capacity' is telling: Ibid., 59. With reference to Michel Villey, *La formation de la pensée juridique moderne* (Paris: PUF, 2006).

authority in specific circumstances and with respect to certain *intrinsic relationships* in which he or she stood to certain other people.’⁴¹⁵ As a father a man is to provide food and clothing for his children and may expect obedience and honour from them. As a guild member he is expected to abide by guild protocol and submit to guild leadership and discipline, while receiving the protection and benefits that the guild bestows. As a guild member he is held to follow guild protocol with respect to his craft. He is not held to obey directions from the guild as to how to raise his child. As a father he has autonomy with regard to his parental rights. There are different spheres of sovereignty that do not overlap. In this view a man’s rights and his obligations vis-à-vis others are intrinsically tied to his (and their) position in society, to the role God has called them to in their respective spheres of sovereignty. Groen’s thought emphasises that a person’s social context, their different roles and positions, is importantly contoured by inequality. It is in each particular social context that rights and obligations are uniquely and practically defined by what the principle of justice demands, and has historically been understood to demand, in that specific context. In this theocentric constitutional theory, the determination of rights is attached to the social context within which they are exercised.

b) Social Obligations Correlated to Differentiation of Role

Groen’s contribution to the current debate is a clarification of the importance of the various estates or spheres of sovereignty that make up this social context for the determination of rights, and the correlation between these spheres and rights.

⁴¹⁵ Milbank, ‘Against Human Rights’, 53.

This contribution is important because it speaks to an intrinsic weakness of inherent human rights that is exposed when the accessory function is acknowledged that inequality, or differentiation of role, and social context have for the identification and determination of rights.

Since social context is made up of social relationships —what Groen calls ‘authority that is grounded in the nature of mutual relationships’ or ‘mutual obligations’, and what Milbank calls ‘mutualist bonds of trust’— the premise of man’s *equality* corrodes his social obligations.⁴¹⁶ This is so because man’s inherent right is grounded in himself, not derived from the social expectations of reciprocal relationships that the principle of justice evokes. Inherent rights are a form of property that man is regarded to have had as a pre-social or non-social being. In this anthropocentric scheme of thinking man’s position in society is irrelevant for his rights, which do not lodge in his social context but in his nature. The focus is on *the self* that *owns* a right, not on *doing justice in relation to others*. Each man’s inherent right must therefore ultimately be defined narrowly as that to which he is entitled, unshackled from his role and social responsibility in society. Biggar, who is sympathetic to the concept of inherent human rights, has signalled this tendency in much rights-talk that insists that ‘the individual’s rights always come first,’ without ‘talk about social obligation’. Biggar locates the reason for this ‘absolutising distortion’ of rights, as he calls it, in the fact that ‘the right is specified or determined in advance of moral deliberation’. His critique is that the ‘absolute and clear and incontrovertible nature’ that is attributed to an inherent

⁴¹⁶ Groen van Prinsterer, *Nederlandsche Gedachten*, 1832, 3:81; Groen van Prinsterer, *Ongeloof en Revolutie*, 1847, 50; Milbank, ‘Against Human Rights’, 43.

right distorts it because it does not allow ‘the motives and intentions and judgement of the agent’ to determine whether a right is violated or not.⁴¹⁷ The omission of moral deliberation prior to the identification of a right which Biggar decries is an implied critique of rights understood as detached from their social context. Groen’s contribution clarifies the correlation between rights and their various social contexts, which in turn makes clear why moral deliberation is required for their determination. He elucidates that rights are not unconditionally and absolutely attached to equal, individual persons but are instead attached to social expectations defined by the principle of justice and born out of societal inequalities. As Groen pointedly asks: ‘why dwell on the distinctions between estates, when universal equality is at the heart of the inalienable rights of man? But I come to you, gentlemen, to appeal against the verdict of revolutionary wisdom.’⁴¹⁸

3. Way Forward as Opposed to Cultural Pessimism

The third contribution to the current debate that Groen’s Christian-historical principle offers is his hopeful approach to a political situation that present-day right-order theorists mostly regard with pessimism.⁴¹⁹ Indicative of this cultural pessimism is Lockwood O’Donovan’s answer to the question whether there is ‘a way forward for secular liberal-democratic-rights polity?’ She bluntly states that her ‘answer must be “no”’. Her reason for this is that the two principles that

⁴¹⁷ Biggar, ‘Nicholas Wolterstorff, Justice: Rights and Wrongs’, 134. The context of Biggar’s comment is attributive justice, but also applies more widely.

⁴¹⁸ Groen van Prinsterer, *Ongeloof en Revolutie*, 1847, 86.

⁴¹⁹ The articles already mentioned each demonstrate this pessimism: Milbank, ‘Against Human Rights’; O’Donovan, ‘The Language of Rights’; O’Donovan, ‘Historical Prolegomena’; O’Donovan, ‘Rights, Law and Political Community’. See also O’Donovan, ‘Natural Law and Perfect Community’.

define modern liberal democracy ‘necessarily entail the modern liberal conceptualization of [human] rights.’ These principles are ‘the maximization of individual and collective freedom, and the equality of individuals in respect of freedom’.⁴²⁰ Because of her approach to justice as either exclusively ontologically grounded in right order or exclusively in inherent rights, the fact that the concept of subjective rights of individuals has become completely ‘woven into the civilizational fabric of politics in [the twentieth] century —the fabric of democratic, pluralistic, technological liberalism’ signals a dead end of sorts. O’Donovan does not see a way forward to build on this faulty foundation. For her the ‘social anomie, moral confusion, and ideological fatigue’ of contemporary political society can only be remedied by a stop to the wholesale political enthusiasm for human rights and an acceptance of right order.⁴²¹ Return to the original right-order situation of Christendom, where ‘the objective right of divinely revealed and natural law [functioned] as the primary or exclusive basis of political authority, justice and law’ seems to be her only remedy against the ‘danger of collapsing into legal and political incoherence’ that ‘the secular liberal-democratic rights culture of today’ is faced with.⁴²² Yet the concept of human rights has become so entrenched ‘in contemporary political and legal discourse and practice’ that to O’Donovan it seems depressingly ‘beyond dispute’, perhaps ‘even beyond discussion’.⁴²³ This view seems to be shared by Oliver O’Donovan who interprets ‘the decision of [seventy] years ago to base post-war reconstruction, self-consciously critical of positive justice, on a *Universal*

⁴²⁰ O’Donovan, ‘Rights, Law and Political Community’, 37. Lockwood O’Donovan acknowledges that there are other rights traditions, but these do not aspire to ‘freedom and equality that marks liberal democratic rights culture’: Ibid., 38.

⁴²¹ O’Donovan, ‘Historical Prolegomena’, 65.

⁴²² Ibid., 55; O’Donovan, ‘Rights, Law and Political Community’, 38.

⁴²³ O’Donovan, ‘Historical Prolegomena’, 52.

Declaration of Human Rights’ to have fortified this entrenchment.⁴²⁴ To the O’Donovans’ chagrin even Christian theologians seem to share the ‘universal political enthusiasm for rights in the civilised world’. They appear to have wholly accepted the concept ‘as adequately expressing the moral attributes of a theologically conceived humanity’ and as ‘a virtually unassailable datum of the Christian social conscience,’ despite its ‘questionable parentage’.⁴²⁵

The O’Donovans seem to regard human rights as irredeemable, and seem unwilling to recognise any positive contribution to society from inherent rights. While Groen shares the O’Donovans’ right-order focus and in that sense resonates with their distrust of the concept of inherent rights, Groen’s assessment of human rights as championed by and resulting from the French Revolution is markedly more positive. This is so in two illuminating ways.

a) *Groen Recognises the Greatness of the Ideas of 1789*

The first is his acknowledgement that human rights ‘echo, in part, the noblest aspirations and legitimate desires of the human heart.’ His answer to the questions whether ‘we must then renounce the hopes we had in 1789? Must we consign freedom, equality, brotherhood, tolerance, humanity, and progress to a systematic condemnation? Is there no truth in these ideas?’ is irrevocably clear: ‘It would be absurd to suppose so. (...) In and of themselves these [great ideas of 1789] were irreproachable and in complete conformity with the source of all

⁴²⁴ O’Donovan, ‘The Language of Rights’, 202.

⁴²⁵ O’Donovan, ‘Historical Prolegomena’, 53, 55, 65.

genuine truth.’⁴²⁶ Groen’s recognition of the greatness of the revolutionary hopes does not mean he has no reservations about them.⁴²⁷ But here we wish to point out that Groen is not unconditionally dismissive of human rights or what they seek to accomplish. His appreciation for human rights challenges the O’Donovans’ outright pessimism. His appreciation for rights also gives him a somewhat shared vantage point from which to engage in dialogue with inherent-rights proponents on the pros and cons of human rights, despite his right-order stance.

b) *Groen Differentiates Between Rights That Are the Fruit
of the Revolutionary Principle and of the Revolutionary
Period*

The second way in which Groen’s approach is markedly more positive than that of the O’Donovans is that he proposes to move forward within a context that is dominated by denial of ‘God’s right’ in a way that Lockwood O’Donovan in particular does not seem able to. In this Groen demonstrates a hopeful realism that allows him to act in ‘defence’ of God’s right in a political situation that appears to have yielded fully to its denial. He is able to do so because he differentiates in a characteristic manner between the fruits produced by the principle of the Revolution —the denial of ‘God’s right’— and those produced by

⁴²⁶ Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer, *Christian Political Action in an Age of Revolution*, trans. Colin Wright (Aalten, the Netherlands: Wordbridge Publishing, 2015), 46–7.

⁴²⁷ Groen warns that ‘if our happiness is to be assured, it is not enough profusely to scatter fine maxims that have been divorced from the supreme truth that alone can make them effective. The Revolution that proclaimed them infused them with sterility, or to be more exact, it denatured them. These ideas, branches detached from the Gospel tree and poisoned by revolutionary sap, bear but deadly fruit. In the service of an anti-Christian philosophy, even a panacea only compounds the evil, it does not heal. *Corruptio optimi pessima* [the corruption of the best is the worst of corruptions]. (...) In and of themselves these ideas were irreproachable and in complete conformity with the source of all genuine truth, but because of their ties to the unbelief that ruled the mind of the times, they were nevertheless bound to turn out fatal’: Ibid.

the Revolution period itself.⁴²⁸ His is not an unequivocal dismissal of all that has been established on revolutionary grounds, including its rights and freedoms. Nor does he assume that the sphere of politics is so colonised by the denial of 'God's right' that all its freedoms, rights or institutions must necessarily also fall outside God's moral order.

The important role played by the ideological dimension attributed to history in Groen's thought makes him keenly aware that recognition of 'God's right' by society is a thing of the past. Unlike O'Donovan, Groen's call is not simply to return to the situation of the pre-revolutionary era, as though civic salvation were only to be found in a golden past. He is 'not one of the categorical friends of all that is old. I, too,' he explains, 'am pleased with what is new, that is *as long as it is not in conflict with truth and justice*.'⁴²⁹ Alignment with truth and justice is the plumb line Groen uses to assess accomplishments of the Revolution. It allows him to recognise that the Revolution for all its false ideology righted 'wrongs that furnished the grounds for bitter and reasonable complaint'.⁴³⁰ It permits him to acknowledge that good fruits had resulted from the Revolution-era and that 'in the midst of the follies of revolutionary application, dogmas and institutions of great value had appeared.' These he furthermore does not wish to see reversed, but rather 'stripped of the revolutionary principle and brought in alignment with history and justice.'⁴³¹

⁴²⁸ Groen van Prinsterer, *Verscheidenheden*, 232.

⁴²⁹ Ibid., 242. Emphasis added.

⁴³⁰ Groen van Prinsterer, *Handboek*, § 971.

⁴³¹ Groen van Prinsterer, *Verscheidenheden*, 231–2.

[Het revolutionair bederf] neemt de waarheid en het gewigt der opmerking niet weg dat, te

In the phrase ‘stripped of the revolutionary principle’ lies perhaps the vital difference between Groen’s approach and that of O’Donovan. The fact that in Groen’s view revolutionary accomplishments may be stripped of their ideological impetus indicates that he does not share O’Donovan’s pessimistic assessment that contemporary culture does not offer much that is redeemable. It equally contradicts the view that justice conceived of as ontologically grounded in inherent rights must exclude in a totalitarian, complete way any grounding of justice in right order.⁴³² Groen by contrast assumes that the accomplishments of the Revolution, of which the conception of human rights forms an important aspect, may be brought into *alignment with justice*. Even though rights are anthropologically conceived of as sourced in convention, man’s will and man’s worth in the revolutionary era, this given cannot negate the reality of the theocentric position. Groen argues that ‘to deny God is not to destroy Him’, just like the sun is not removed by a blind person’s inability to see it.⁴³³ God’s goodness and justice can never be fully suppressed despite the anti-Christian posture of an era. Such French revolutionary ideals as ‘justice, liberty, toleration, humanity and morality’ may be examples of God’s justice and therefore may be genuinely celebrated. They are in Groen’s view ideas ‘that had not been cultivated on its own acre, but in Christian soil’. They effectively ‘belong to the Gospel’.⁴³⁴ Hence they may be rescued or ‘stripped of the revolutionary principle’. The key to

midden van de dwaasheden der revolutionaire toepassing, leerstellingen en inrigtingen te voorschijn kwamen, van groote waardij, inrigtingen welke niet ten onderste boven gekeerd, maar van het Revolutie-beginsel ontdaan en met historie en regt in overeenstemming moeten worden gebracht.’

⁴³² See also O’Donovan, ‘The Language of Rights’.

⁴³³ Groen van Prinsterer, *Ongeloof en Revolutie*, 1847, 224.

⁴³⁴ Ibid., 187; Groen van Prinsterer, *Verspreide Geschriften*, 1:304. See also Ibid., 1:254–326.

how this is done lies ‘in respect for justice and history, and in the Christian principle’, in a posture of ‘submission to the Highest Lawgiver’.⁴³⁵

Groen’s vision is thus one that seeks to bring Christian influence on political society as he finds it. Perhaps his focus on submission to the *person* of the Highest Lawgiver more so than on submission to (an impersonal) matrix of obligation or a moral order of transcendent law makes such a redeemable view of society possible. Similarly to his insistence that the posture of willing submission to God is what legitimises government, not its specific form, this same posture may redeem rights that in their current justification seem antithetical to justice grounded in ‘God’s right’.

Groen’s aim to exert Christian influence on political society as he finds it reflects the apologetic nature of his thought. It highlights that his propelling motivation and identity is, as he himself insisted, foremost that ‘not [of] a Statesman! [but of] a Confessor of the Gospel!’⁴³⁶ Groen’s Christian-historical principle is in essence an *apologia* for Christian belief. He makes a case for God, particularly in the arena of politics. It is an approach that may prove inspirational for O’Donovan. As a witness for the Gospel, it seeks to lift up Truth, in response to Christ’s call to do so and irrespective of likely results. Perhaps consciousness of the far-reaching influence that Groen’s *apologia* has had on the political and constitutional history

⁴³⁵ Groen van Prinsterer, *Verspreide Geschriften*, 1:304; Groen van Prinsterer, *Ter nagedachtenis van Stahl*, 25 (footnote).

⁴³⁶ Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer, *Aan de kiezers, I-XX* (The Hague: Van Cleef, 1866), n° 3, 16; Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer, *Nederlandsche Gedachten*, vol. 1, Second Series (Amsterdam: Höveker, 1869), n° 27 (7 April 1870).

of the Netherlands may infuse contemporary right-order theorists with fresh optimism in following his example.

V. CONCLUSION

Our analysis leads to the conclusion that Groen's concept of the 'divine right of government' does indeed express in the context of the state the universal truth that 'God's right' must be upheld. As such it is an application in the arena of government of the broader principle of 'God's right'. It supports our reading, articulated in chapter two, that Groen's concept of 'unbelief' means the revolutionary denial of 'God's right'.

We have demonstrated that Groen's concept of the 'divine right of government' is a formulation of Christian, theocentric constitutional theory that is a Protestant expression of right-order thinking. It places his thought alongside that of contemporary right-order theorists Joan and Oliver O'Donovan and John Milbank, even if theirs is a more Scholastic application that leans on traditional natural-law doctrine, not Scripture, to reveal the contours of the moral order.

Cognizance of Groen's right-order stance achieves a fresh, hitherto neglected, interpretation of his thought.

It also opens up the possibility of a dialogue between Groen and contemporary political theologians. More specifically, Groen's thought offers a contribution to the current theological debate on the ontological grounding of justice. In this

framework, his concept of the 'divine right of government' challenges Christian political theologians to acknowledge that political context is always attached to rights, however they may be conceived of ontologically. It brings into focus that the constitutional theory that dominates the political context in the West is anthropocentric, which has replaced Christendom's historic theocentric constitutional theory. Cognizance of this clarifies two right-order theorists' positions that are often misunderstood. Firstly, it gives context to right-order theorists' cultural pessimism, seeing that the starting point of the anthropocentric constitutional theory that Western politics has more or less uniformly accepted is the denial of 'God's right'. Why this is so Groen's thought elucidates.

Secondly, it gives coherent reasons for right-order theorists' suspicion of anthropocentric constitutional theory with its premise of *equal*, isolated, individuals. It does so by demonstrating the possibility for tyranny that is latent in this anthropocentric theory, both in its potential descent towards totalitarian democracy and in the absolutising propulsion it gives to human rights. This totalitarian distortion is possible because the context of 'equality' means that rights are regarded as having been conferred in isolation, unshackled from the moral deliberation or obligation that is inherent in social context. Groen's 'divine right of government' makes the intellectual connection between political 'equality' and political absolutism clear. It engages this important weakness of justice-as-rights thinking by contending that rights have a social context attached to them. Groen's contribution thus expands the parameters of the contemporary theological debate on the ontological grounding of justice and introduces to the debate the time-tested Dutch concept of sphere sovereignty, with its distinctive

recognition of people's *unequal* differentiations of roles in political society as the context of their (derived) rights. In so doing, it introduces into the debate an alternative concept that has historically proven to be a unique, and successful, mechanism for ensuring political liberty.

Our analysis has also brought out what may arguably be Groen's greatest contribution to the contemporary theological debate. It is the way forward which he models in a context that invites cultural pessimism. Groen's response to a political reality that has largely rejected right order and is characterised by the denial of 'God's right' is one of hope and optimism. His thought reminds the Christian political thinker that God's person and truth are not destroyed by their denial, just as a blind person's inability to see the sun does not make the sun disappear. Because God's goodness and justice can never be fully suppressed, even in a political context that denies God, there are achievements to be affirmed that manifest God's good character and will. Groen's is not a call for a categorical return to an imaginary golden past, but a defence of all that aligns with truth and justice, including progress and change. Groen's approach is inspirational and practical. It seeks to expand Christian influence on political society, without insisting that political society conforms to an ideal matrix of right order before redemptive work can begin. It is propelled by a glad willingness to do God's will and to witness to the Gospel. It is the Christian's invitation to every area of political society to submit to 'God's right'. The political and social history of the Netherlands shows how Groen's inspirational approach can be powerful, and have significant, long-lasting effect.

CHAPTER FOUR: COMPARATIVE CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF GROEN VAN PRINSTERER'S POLEMICAL ARGUMENT OF 'HISTORY' WITH THAT OF BURKE'S CRITIQUE OF THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

Our critical analysis of *Overview* in chapter two has led us to conclude that Groen uses the argument of 'history' to substantiate his critique of French revolutionary ideology. We have shown that his positive use of 'history' is as a witness to the factual, historical truthfulness of Christianity and Christianity's unique and exclusive power to counter the world-crisis that 'unbelief' has caused. Groen's negative, polemical use of 'history' is as an argument that refutes the falsehood and unreal nature of the revolutionary theory. It seeks to show this by demonstrating that the theory is 'in conflict with the essence of things' because it goes against 'nature and time'.⁴³⁷ As Groen's critique of the French Revolution targets its ideological, even religious nature, his polemical argument naturally reflects this. His conception of 'history' as he uses it polemically thus has a broader meaning than the mere passing of time. He attributes guiding properties to it and invests it with moral norms that he presents as imperative. In effect, 'history' buttresses Groen's moral argument for the dismissal of the revolutionary ideology and experiment.

Such a use of 'history' raises the question what Groen's underlying assumption is for such normative use of 'history'. It questions how *absolute* the motivation can

⁴³⁷ Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer, *Nederlandsche Gedachten*, vol. 3, First Series (The Hague: Vervloet, 1832), 97–8.

'Zij geraakt met het wezen der dingen in strijd, en verzet zich (...) tegen de eischen van de weldadige en steeds wederkeerende natuur en van den zonder ophouden voortwerkende tijd.'

be for moral behaviour and judgement grounded in 'history'. Why would 'history', the experience of the past, provide a prescriptive norm against which the morality of the revolutionary changes must be weighed? In that case, would not every radical break from what has gone before by virtue of this break be found wanting? 'History' could then become the absolute standard for the present and future, also for matters of morality, and thereby justify a rejection of any progress and change as a discontinuity from 'history'. Any weighing of 'history' by either justification or critique would also be invalid. 'History' in that case would become absolutely sacred, demanding that the present and future absolutely adhere to the pattern of the past. Such an absolute use of 'history' as a normative argument is in a sense self-defeating, as it does not recognise that change is itself generative of 'history'; there can be no 'history' without change. More importantly, the use of 'history' as an absolutely normative moral argument is rigid and tyrannical. It fails to see that change itself in the abstract is morally neutral, and idolises the past to the point where the present and future are sacrificed to it.

By those who opposed him, Groen was often accused of having such absolutist views of 'history' and suspected of being profoundly unwilling to change with the times or welcome 'progress'. This is exemplified by the criticism of Groen's thought and party voiced by Johan Thorbecke (1798-1872), the most important Dutch political figure of the nineteenth century and a contemporary of Groen's: 'It looks for life among the dead. It does not grasp that they have lived to make new life possible. (...) It desires to abolish the European development of the last fifty

years, as if it were a bad dream'.⁴³⁸

The accusation that Groen regards 'history' as an absolute norm is one that touches the core of his thought because of the pivotal role 'history' plays in it. Groen freely acknowledges this central and authoritative role for the argument of 'history' in his thought. In the introduction to *Unbelief and Revolution* he states: 'In essence my whole argument will be *historical*'.⁴³⁹ Similarly, towards the end of his life, Groen concedes: 'I have constantly appealed to history in my evaluation of the Revolution'.⁴⁴⁰

A critical assessment of this aspect of his thinking is therefore crucial for the appraisal of the whole of his thought. What is more, the question whether Groen's use of 'history' as normative argument is absolute, as his opponents have assumed, is an important one because it sheds light on the ethical norms in which his thought is anchored. An affirmative answer means that 'history' is Groen's ultimate moral norm, while a negative answer means that Groen acknowledges a moral norm that transcends the mere norm of 'history'. Determining the limits

⁴³⁸ J. R. Thorbecke, 'Kerkelijk Staatsregt. Onderzoek van de brochure: De maatregelen tegen de afgescheidenen aan het Staatsregt getoetst; door Mr. G. Groen van Prinsterer', *Journal de la Haye*, no. 8 (9 September 1837): 1. Quoted by K. H. Boersema, *Johan Rudolf Thorbecke: Een Historisch-Critische Studie* (Leiden: Brill, 1949), 204.

Johan Rudolf Thorbecke led three cabinets, from 1849-1853, from 1862-1866 and from 1871 until his death in 1872. From 1871 Thorbecke was prime minister of the Netherlands. He stands at the foundation of the modern Dutch constitution. He was Groen's political opponent as well as his life-long friend.

⁴³⁹ Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer, *Ongeloof en Revolutie: Eene reeks van historische voorlezingen* (Leiden: Luchtmans, 1847), 16. Van Dyke's translation. Unless otherwise indicated, all English quotations from *Ongeloof en Revolutie*, 1847, in this chapter are Van Dyke's translations. These may be found in Harry Van Dyke, *Groen van Prinsterer's Lectures on Unbelief and Revolution* (Toronto: Wedge Publishing Foundation, 1989).

⁴⁴⁰ Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer, *Christian Political Action in an Age of Revolution*, trans. Colin Wright (Aalten, the Netherlands: Wordbridge Publishing, 2015), 40.

and conditions of Groen's norm of 'history' promises also to illuminate this higher ethical norm, and hence to further lay bare the foundations of his critique.

I. COMPARING GROEN'S ARGUMENT OF 'HISTORY' WITH EDMUND BURKE'S

In order to achieve an original as well as rigorous assessment of Groen's normative argument of 'history' in his critique of the French Revolution, we will analyse it comparatively with that of the Revolution's greatest and most poignant critic: Edmund Burke (1729-1797). Burke's thought is similar enough to Groen's to make a comparison possible, and different enough to highlight unique aspects of the ideas of both. A comparative analysis of Burke's and Groen's critiques, particularly their use of 'history' in it, promises a three-fold achievement. The first is that it will position Groen's more unknown critique of the French Revolution within the broader context of Burke's well-known critique. The second is that it will fill a void in Groenean scholarship that lacks a robust comparison of Groen's ideas about 'history' with that of Burke's. Thirdly, it will fill a void in Burkean scholarship with regard to the importance of 'history', which is 'an aspect of his thought that has been largely neglected by scholars, despite the wide recognition of its importance'.⁴⁴¹

While it is clear that a comparison between Burke's and Groen's argument of 'history' in their opposition to the French Revolution is promising, the question must be raised whether a comparison is possible since their thought, however

⁴⁴¹ Sora Sato, 'Edmund Burke's Ideas on Historical Change', *History of European Ideas* 40, no. 5 (2014): 675.

similar in some respects, is also separated by the great differences in time and place in which Burke and Groen wrote. This is importantly so as regards their experience of the French Revolution: Burke writes his classic *Reflections on the Revolution in France* in 1790 as an older man and seasoned politician, about a Revolution that is confined to France and is just getting started. Groen on the other hand is a young man who has only been immersed in politics for a few years when he formulates *Overview* about a Revolution that has gone through the Reign of Terror and has become not merely a French, but a Europe-wide phenomenon. Because of the vast difference in what the French Revolution meant for both men, we begin our analytical comparison of Groen's and Burke's use of 'history' in their critiques of the French Revolution by asking whether such a comparison is possible despite this difference. But first, a brief introduction to Burke's person and work on the French Revolution is in order.

A. *Introduction to Edmund Burke's Person and Work*

1. Burke's Person

On 12 January 1729 Edmund Burke was born to a mixed Anglican-Catholic family in Dublin, Ireland, which at the time was dependent on Britain.⁴⁴² He died on 9 July 1797 in Beaconsfield, Buckinghamshire, England. Though an Irishman, Burke spent most of his professional life in London. He had a brilliant mind, was a

⁴⁴² There is some doubt about Burke's date of birth. Some argue he was born in 1730, not 1729.

man of phenomenal learning and scholarship, had a great interest in history, was legally schooled, and was very gifted rhetorically.⁴⁴³

Burke pursued a career in politics, after a short stint in law, and wrote prolifically. He was a man of integrity, who was known for his charity and generosity and for his fight to uphold liberty and defeat injustice. He is regarded a statesman in the true sense of the word, a Whig who sought to govern his life and his politics based on sound principles.⁴⁴⁴ He is perhaps best known for his 'two great causes or crusades'. The first is the impeachment of Warren Hastings, former Governor-General of India. The other is his critique of the French Revolution and his 'struggle to maintain an anti-revolutionary spirit in Britain'.⁴⁴⁵ In a real sense the French Revolution 'brought Burke's career and ideas into focus, and offered him an opportunity to begin to articulate a tapestry of principles into which many of the threads from his earlier career were woven'.⁴⁴⁶

⁴⁴³ Henry Thomas Buckle gives an especially flattering overview of Burke's extraordinary learning, whose studies 'not only covered the whole field of political inquiry, but extended to an immense variety of subjects'. Buckle quotes 'Nicholls, who knew him', Burke's eulogy and William Wilberforce. Nicolls said, 'The political knowledge of Mr. Burke might be considered almost as an encyclopaedia; every man who approached him received instruction from his stores.' Burke's eulogy read: 'The excursions of his genius are immense. His imperial fancy has laid all nature under tribute, and has collected riches from every scene of the creation, and every walk of art.' William Wilberforce is quoted to have said: 'He had come late into Parliament, and had had time to lay in vast stores of knowledge. The field from which he drew his illustrations was magnificent. Like the fabled object of the fairy's favours, whenever he opened his mouth pearls and diamonds dropped from him': Henry Thomas Buckle, *History of Civilization in England*, vol. 1 (London: Parker, Son, and Bourn, 1861), 414–5.

⁴⁴⁴ John MacCunn, *The Political Philosophy of Burke* (Kitchener, Ontario: Batoche Books, 2001), 18–26.

⁴⁴⁵ F. P. Lock, *Edmund Burke, 1785-1797*, vol. 2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006), v.

Burke's defence of the American colonists also deserves mention.

⁴⁴⁶ Steven P. Millies, "'A Relation between Us': Religion and the Political Thought of Edmund Burke" (Doctoral Thesis, Catholic University of America, 2002), 12. Leo Strauss articulated it as follows: 'In accordance with the eminently practical bent of his thought, he stated his principles most forcefully and most clearly when such a statement was most urgently needed, i.e., when these principles were attacked both most intransigently and most effectively—after the outbreak of the French Revolution': Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History* (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 1953), 295.

Burke was among the first to voice a critique of the events in France. As early as 1 November 1790 he published his now classic *Reflections on the Revolution in France*.⁴⁴⁷ In the work, contrary to what the French focus of the (abridged) title might suggest, he sought to dissuade his *English* audience from imitating the French constitutional madness. This revolutionary madness, it is illuminating to emphasise, was in the autumn of 1790 limited to primarily constitutional changes: none of the excessive violence that is often associated with the French Revolution had at this point in time happened.

The work, as he states in its opening pages, was undertaken ‘chiefly for the peace of my own country’.⁴⁴⁸ Burke was concerned about the situation in England, and feared that French revolutionary ideas would infect it as well as the rest of Europe.⁴⁴⁹ The work had a remarkable effect. Before *Reflections* was published, the general sentiment in England towards the Revolution in France had been ‘one of mixed astonishment and sympathy’. ‘To this easy state of mind Burke’s book put an immediate end. At once’, nineteenth century historian John Motley informs

⁴⁴⁷ A. Goodwin, *The Political Genesis of Edmund Burke’s Reflections on the Revolution in France* (Manchester: The John Rylands Library, 1968), 340.

The unabridged title of the work reads: *Reflections on the Revolution in France, and on the Proceedings in Certain Societies in London Relative to that Event: in a Letter Intended to have been Sent to a Gentleman in Paris*.

⁴⁴⁸ Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, ed. Frank M. Turner, Rethinking the Western Tradition Series (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2003), 9.

Along the same line Burke expresses himself in personal correspondence. A telling example is his letter of 25 October 1790 (a few days before the publication of *Reflections*) to De Calonne, where he states: ‘In reality, my Object was not France, in the first instance, but this Country’: Alfred Cobban and Robert A. Smith, eds., *The Correspondence of Edmund Burke*, vol. 6 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 141. Quoted by Goodwin, *Political Genesis*, 355.

Reflections meant to check ‘English popular sympathies’ for the Revolution and ‘demonstrate how antagonistic its principles were to Whig traditions’: Ibid., 354.

⁴⁴⁹ As Burke stated in the first pages of *Reflections*: ‘It looks to me as if I were in a great crisis, not of the affairs of France alone, but of all of Europe, perhaps of more than Europe’: Burke, *Reflections*, 9.

Similarly, in a letter to his patron Earl Fitzwilliam of 12 November 1789, exactly one year earlier, Burke had called the Revolution ‘the total political extinction of a great civilised Nation in the heart of this our Western System’, in which he saw ‘many inconveniences, not only to Europe at large, but to this Country in particular’: Cobban and Smith, *Correspondence*, 6:36–7. Quoted by Goodwin, *Political Genesis*, 346.

us, 'it divided the nation into two parties'.⁴⁵⁰ *Reflections* rallied a movement to stop the revolutionary ideology from taking root in England that even extended its anti-revolutionary influence to the Continent. Soon after *Reflections*' initial publication a French translation appeared in France that was rumoured to have come from Louis XVI's own hand.⁴⁵¹ A first German translation was published in 1794, where Burke was said to have been even more popular than he was in England.⁴⁵²

After the publication of *Reflections*, Burke composed other anti-revolutionary writings. Arguably most famous are his *An Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs* (1791) and *Letters on a Regicide Peace* (1796).⁴⁵³ Also important are his *Remarks on the Policies of the Allies* (1793), and his letters *To a Member of the National Assembly* (1791) and *To a Noble Lord* (1796).⁴⁵⁴ 'With his usual energy', F. P. Lock, Burke's biographer notes, Burke 'began a campaign to promote a counter-

⁴⁵⁰ John Motley, ed., *Burke, English Men of Letters* (London: Macmillan, 1897), 152.

⁴⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 154.

⁴⁵² M. C. Brands, *Historisme als ideologie* (Assen, the Netherlands: Van Gorcum, 1965), 68, 70. Quoted by W. G. F. Van Vliet, *Groen van Prinsterers historische benadering van de politiek* (Hilversum: Van Vliet & Uitgeverij Verloren, 2008), 131.

The translation was the first literary work of Prussian statesman Friedrich von Gentz (1764-1832). Von Gentz had been converted from his enthusiasm for the French Revolution by reading it and would throughout his political career oppose revolutionary France.

⁴⁵³ In *An Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs* Burke defends 'his conservative interpretation of the Glorious Revolution of 1688, and his claim to be its true inheritor, exposing the 'new', Foxite Whigs' abandonment of the founding principles of their party'. His *Two Letters on a Regicide Peace* 'urged continuation of an interventionist war and abandonment of the peace overtures begun that summer': Iain Hampsher-Monk, 'Burke's Counter-Revolutionary Writings', in *The Cambridge Companion to Edmund Burke*, ed. David Dwan and Christopher J. Insole (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 209.

⁴⁵⁴ *Letter to a Member of the National Assembly* was a letter to François-Louis-Thibault de Menonville who had written to Burke in praise of *Reflections*. In it Burke first asserts that outside intervention may be required to reverse the Revolution. In *A Letter to a Noble Lord* 'he repudiated charges made by two 'new' Whigs, the Duke of Bedford and the Earl of Lauderdale, that it was he who was the turncoat and had reneged on his reformist past by accepting a pension from the (Tory) government': Hampsher-Monk, 'Burke's Counter-Revolutionary Writings', 209.

revolution, a commitment that ended only with his life. When he died in 1797, no one was more completely identified with the counter-revolutionary cause'.⁴⁵⁵

2. Reading Burke

Burke has been read in widely diverse, and sometimes radically contradictory, even antithetical, ways.⁴⁵⁶ Daniel O'Neill's summary gives an impression of their number and variation:

When it comes to reading Edmund Burke, there are an astonishing number of pre-existing theoretical frameworks in the secondary literature. (...) We have had Burke as a liberal of the nineteenth-century utilitarian ⁴⁵⁷ and anti-imperial ⁴⁵⁸ variety, Burke as a

⁴⁵⁵ Lock, *Edmund Burke, 1785-1797*, 2:v.

Groen regarded him 'the most excellent of all opponents of the Revolution'. A man who 'had no equal in setting forth the nature and action of the revolutionary ideas and the successful means to combat them.' Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer, 'Stahl. Studiën. Ten vervolge of in verband met het geschrift "Ter nagedachtenis van Stahl"', in *Bescheiden, 1842-1876*, ed. Johan Zwaan, vol. 2, *Schriftelijke Nalatenschap* (The Hague: Instituut voor Nederlandse Geschiedenis, 1991), 361; Groen van Prinsterer, *Ongeloof en Revolutie*, 1847, 31.

'Als er van revolutiebestrijders spraak is, (...) is hij, zonder eenige vergelijking, de uitnemendste van allen'.

⁴⁵⁶ Burleigh Taylor Wilkins, *The Problem of Burke's Political Philosophy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), 8; Peter J. Stanlis, *Edmund Burke: The Enlightenment and Revolution* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Publishers, 1991), 107.

Wilkins provides the following illuminating list: 'Burke has been labelled both a utilitarian and a natural law theorist, a Lockian and a foe of both Locke's empiricism and of his political liberalism, a Humian and an enemy of Humian scepticism, a disciple of Montesquieu and one who departed from Montesquieu's most important teachings, and, finally, the most outspoken enemy of Rousseau's doctrines and—by one author at least—a man who shared certain fundamental ideas about morality and the state with Rousseau.'

Wilkins suggests that Burke's rhetorical tactics are partly to blame for 'the peculiarly heated nature of the controversies still surrounding Burke's achievements in politics and political thought': Wilkins, *The Problem of Burke's Political Philosophy*, 1.

⁴⁵⁷ 'This was the dominant view for the first hundred years after his death, one that stressed Burke's formative role within the Whig interpretation of history. For examples, see Henry Buckle, *A History of Civilization in England*, 2 vols. (London: Parker and Son, 1857-61); John Morley, *Edmund Burke: A Historical Study* (1867; New York: Knopf, 1924); Leslie Stephen, *History of English Thought in the Eighteenth Century*, 2 vols. (1876; New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1963); and William Lecky, *A History of England in the Eighteenth Century*, 8 vols. (London: Longmans, Green, 1883-90). In the twentieth century this interpretation waned, but it still persists in Sir Philip Magnus's *Edmund Burke* (London: John Murray, 1939). Its best recent expression is J.R. Dinwiddy, "Utility and Natural Law in Burke's Thought: A Reconsideration," *Studies in Burke and His Time* 16, no. 2 (1974-75): 105-28, which views Burke as a utilitarian in the broadest sense possible, if not exactly as a liberal.' This and the following couple footnotes are O'Neill's.

prophet of modernity's perils,⁴⁵⁹ Burke as a republican,⁴⁶⁰ Burke as a proto-romantic,⁴⁶¹ and Burke as a bourgeois ideologue.⁴⁶² Some scholars have been interested in extracting from Burke's work a general theory of political representation,⁴⁶³ political parties and statesmanship,⁴⁶⁴ or radicalism and revolution,⁴⁶⁵ while others have focused more on Burke's particular relation to standard eighteenth-century Whig politics.⁴⁶⁶ A still more general approach takes Burke as a repository of timeless wisdom capable of saving us from our own "present discontents."⁴⁶⁷ And, finally, there is the dominant school of post-war Burkean interpretation that argues (...) that Burke should be seen as the father of modern conservatism, a

⁴⁵⁸ 'See especially Uday Singh Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire: A Study in Nineteenth-Century British Liberal Thought* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999); and Frederick G. Whelan, *Edmund Burke and India: Political Morality and Empire* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1996), both of which focus on Burke's pursuit of Warren Hastings and the East India Company. For similar sympathetic views of Burke on the British Empire in the Irish and broader context, see Luke Gibbons, *Edmund Burke and Ireland: Aesthetics, Politics, and the Colonial Sublime* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); and Michel Fuchs, *Edmund Burke, Ireland, and the Fashioning of the Self* (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1996).'

⁴⁵⁹ 'For examples, see Stephen K. White, *Edmund Burke: Modernity, Politics, and Aesthetics* (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications, 1994); Conor Cruise O'Brien, *The Great Melody: A Thematic Biography of Edmund Burke* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1992); David Bromwich, *A Choice of Inheritance: Self and Community from Edmund Burke to Robert Frost* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989); and Michael Mosher, "The Skeptic's Burke," *Political Theory* 19, no. 3 (1991): 391-418. For a good discussion of the Left's historical fascination with Burke, see Isaac Kramnick, "The Left and Edmund Burke," *Political Theory* 11, no. 2 (1983): 189-214.'

See for another interpretation toward the political left Tom Furniss, *Edmund Burke's Aesthetic Ideology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), quoted by Koen Vermeir and Michael Funk Deckard, eds., *The Science of Sensibility: Reading Burke's Philosophical Enquiry* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2012), x.

⁴⁶⁰ 'See Bruce James Smith, *Politics and Remembrance: Republican Themes in Machiavelli, Burke, and Tocqueville* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985).'

⁴⁶¹ 'See especially Alfred Cobban, *Edmund Burke and the Revolt Against the Eighteenth Century* (1929; London: Allen & Unwin, 1960).'

⁴⁶² 'For an influential reading of Burke as a thinker torn between defending the Old Regime aristocracy and embracing the rising bourgeoisie, see Isaac Kramnick, *The Rage of Edmund Burke: Portrait of an Ambivalent Conservative* (New York: Basic Books, 1977). For the erasure of all ambivalence, see C. B. Macpherson's unreconstructed *Burke* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980). Macpherson follows the lead of Marx himself, who categorized Burke as "a vulgar bourgeois through and through"; see Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, vol. 1, trans. Ben Fowkes (New York: Vintage Books, 1977), 926n13.'

⁴⁶³ 'See James Conniff, *The Useful Cobbler: Edmund Burke and the Politics of Progress* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994).'

⁴⁶⁴ 'See Harvey C. Mansfield Jr., *Statesmanship and Party Government: A Study of Burke and Bolingbroke* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1965).'

⁴⁶⁵ 'See Michael Freeman, *Edmund Burke and the Critique of Political Radicalism* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1980).'

⁴⁶⁶ 'Most recently, see J. C. D. Clark's introduction to his edition of Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 23-111. See also John Brewer, "Rockingham, Burke, and Whig Political Argument," *Historical Journal* 18, no. 1 (1975): 188-201; Frederick Dreyer, *Burke's Politics: A Study in Whig Orthodoxy* (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1979); and Frank O'Gorman, *Edmund Burke: His Political Philosophy* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1973).'

⁴⁶⁷ 'The argument is that of Jim McCue, *Edmund Burke and our Present Discontents* (London: Claridge Press, 1997). It is also to be found in Gerald W. Chapman, *Edmund Burke: The Practical Imagination* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967), as well as in Ian Crowe, ed., *The Enduring Edmund Burke: Bicentennial Essays* (Wilmington, Del.: Intercollegiate Studies Institute, 1997).'

statesman whose political theory is deeply rooted in Thomism and the Scholastic tradition of natural law.⁴⁶⁸

For the purposes of our study, we may roughly divide the evaluation of Burke's critique of the French Revolution into two streams of thought. The first regards his 'revolt against the eighteenth century' as reactive, but original and novel.⁴⁶⁹ In this view Burke is, in Harold Laski's words, 'a member of no school of thought, and there is no influence to whom his outlook can be directly traced.'⁴⁷⁰

The second interprets Burke's critique as a defence of much older ideas. Of those who argue this position, the most authoritative, but ironically also the least successful, is Burke himself. In *Reflections* he repeatedly posits that he does not aim at originality, as when he states:

I assure you I do not aim at singularity. I give you opinions which have been accepted amongst us, from very early times to this moment, with a continued and general approbation, and which indeed are so worked into my mind, that I am unable to distinguish what I have learned from others from the results of my own meditation.⁴⁷¹

In addition, Burke dedicates a good part of *An Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs* to argue the consistency in his thinking.⁴⁷² After the Second World War the

⁴⁶⁸ Daniel I. O'Neill, *The Burke-Wollstonecraft Debate: Savagery, Civilization, and Democracy* (University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007), 51–2. See also Vermeir and Deckard, *The Science of Sensibility*, viii–xii; Walter D. Love, "Meaning' in the History of Conflicting Interpretations of Burke," in *Edmund Burke: The Enlightenment and the Modern World*, ed. by Peter J. Stanlis (Detroit: University of Detroit Press, 1967), chap. 5.

⁴⁶⁹ To echo Alfred Cobban, *Edmund Burke and the Revolt against the Eighteenth Century: A Study of the Political and Social Thinking of Burke, Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Southey* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1929).

⁴⁷⁰ Harold J. Laski, *Political Thought in England: Locke to Bentham* (London: Oxford University Press, 1955), 173.

⁴⁷¹ Burke, *Reflections*, 84.

⁴⁷² Edmund Burke, 'An Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs', in *The Works of the Right Honorable Edmund Burke*, vol. 4 (Boston: Little, Brown, 1894).

view that Burke's thought is a continuation of sorts of English political thought gained momentum among Burkean scholars.⁴⁷³ These scholars trace the historical 'origin' of Burke's thought to an aspect of law. The most prominent, and for a long time dominant, group emphasises that 'the principles of "the" natural law' uphold Burke's thinking.⁴⁷⁴ A smaller group regards Burke's thought 'a partial continuation of the traditional way of thinking of seventeenth-century common lawyers'.⁴⁷⁵ We read Burke in this second, legally informed, stream of thought. This approach seems most intellectually honest as it honours Burke's own claim of consistency. Cognizance of the legal historical-origin of Burke's thought establishes 'a unity on the plane of interpretation' for the interpretation of Burke's ideas. It circumvents 'recourse to an accusation of Burke's inconsistency over the course of his political career', which, as Burkean scholar Charles Parkin

⁴⁷³ J. C. D. Clark, for example, argues that Burke's interpretation of 1688-9 is to be located 'in the mainstream view of the Whigs', and 'in the mainstream of English political thought': Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, ed. J. C. D. Clark (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2001), 41, 97.

⁴⁷⁴ This view is championed by Peter J. Stanlis, *Edmund Burke and the Natural Law* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: University of Michigan Press, 1958); Stanlis, *Burke: Enlightenment and Revolution*. See also Francis Canavan, *The Political Reason of Edmund Burke* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1960); Francis Canavan, *Edmund Burke: Prescription and Providence* (Durham, N.C.: Carolina Academic Press, 1987); Russell Kirk, 'Burke and Natural Rights', *The Review of Politics* 13, no. 4 (October 1951): 441-56; Russell Kirk, *The Conservative Mind: From Burke to Eliot* (Washington, D.C.: Regnery Publishing, 1986); Charles Parkin, *The Moral Basis of Burke's Political Thought: An Essay* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1956); Wilkins, *The Problem of Burke's Political Philosophy*. More recently: Bruce Frohnen, *Virtue and the Promise of Conservatism: The Legacy of Burke and Tocqueville* (Lawrence, Ka.: University Press of Kansas, 1993); Daniel E. Ritchie, 'Remembrance of Things Past: Edmund Burke, the Enlightenment, and Postmodernity', *Books and Culture*, April 2004, <http://www.booksandculture.com/articles/2004/marapr/17.24.html>; Joseph L. Pappin III, *The Metaphysics of Edmund Burke* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1993); Joseph L. Pappin III, 'Edmund Burke's Progeny: Recent Scholarship on Burke's Political Philosophy', *Political Science Reviewer* 35 (2006): 10-65. See Vermeir and Deckard, *The Science of Sensibility*, viii-ix; O'Neill, *The Burke-Wollstonecraft Debate*, 52-3.

⁴⁷⁵ Paul Lucas, 'On Edmund Burke's Doctrine of Prescription; Or, An Appeal from the New to the Old Lawyers', *The Historical Journal* 11, no. 01 (March 1968): 35. Lucas also briefly refers to two other historical origins, with less straightforward legal aspects that scholars have read into Burke: 'Whiggery and that convenient catch-all 'the' British tradition of empiricist philosophizing.'

Noteworthy scholars who have highlighted the common law aspect of Burke's thought are J. G. A. Pocock, 'Burke and the Ancient Constitution—a Problem in the History of Ideas', *The Historical Journal* 3, no. 2 (1960): 125-43; J. G. A. Pocock, *The Ancient Constitution and the Feudal Law: A Study of English Historical Thought in the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1957); J. G. A. Pocock, 'The Origins of the Study of the Past', *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 4 (1962): 236-37; Gisela Schell, 'Englisches Rechtsdenken im Werk Edmund Burkes' (Doctoral Thesis, Johann Wolfgang Goethe-Universität zu Frankfurt a. M., 1955). See also Cecil Patrick Courtney, *Montesquieu and Burke* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1963), 25, 145, 162, 166, 181-3.

has pointed out 'is a weakness of many political formulas which are offered as clues to Burke's ideas'.⁴⁷⁶

B. Fruitful Comparison Possible

Because Burke and Groen lived in eighteenth-century Britain and nineteenth-century Holland respectively, their experience of the French Revolution was very different. Burke was sixty years old, established in his political career and geographically and ideologically removed, when in 1789 the Revolution broke out across the Channel and started gaining popular traction in Britain. When he published *Reflections* in November 1790 with a view to warning his countrymen of the evils of the Revolution, most of what we think of today when we use the term 'French Revolution' had not yet happened. Admittedly, the Bastille, which had held only a handful of prisoners, had been stormed; there had been mob violence during the transfer of the French court from Versailles to Paris; the estates of the Gallican church had been secularised, and the National Assembly had been declared.⁴⁷⁷ But the execution of Louis XVI and Marie-Antoinette, the rise of Robespierre and the Reign of Terror, and the bellicose overthrow of the *ancien regime* in Europe by the armies of the Republic were still years away. In 1790 some calm seemed to be restored after the 1789 hostilities, the King still

⁴⁷⁶ Parkin, *Moral Basis of Burke's Political Thought*, 4.

⁴⁷⁷ A rough timeline of events is that Louis XVI had lost control over *les Etats Généraux*, after having convened them in May 1789 for the first time since 1614. In June the Third Estate had declared itself the National Assembly, the Parisian mobs had stormed the Bastille in July, and had transferred the King and the Assembly from Versailles to Paris in October. 'The Declaration of Rights of Man and of the Citizen' was adopted in August, and the estates of the Gallican Church had been expropriated in November 1789. See Iain Hampsher-Monk, *The Political Philosophy of Edmund Burke* (London: Longman, 1987), 158. J. G. A. Pocock, 'Introduction', in *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, by Edmund Burke, ed. J. G. A. Pocock (Indianapolis, Ind.: Hackett, 1987), xxv. Goodwin, *Political Genesis*, 345. See also George Macaulay Trevelyan, *British History in the Nineteenth Century, 1782-1901* (London: Longmans, Green, 1922), 75-6.

ruled, and the focus of the revolutionaries was on creating a new constitution.⁴⁷⁸ When Burke refers to 'the revolution in France', he thereby 'meant, primarily, Louis XVI's summoning of the States General, over which he swiftly lost control, and its conversion by the Third Estate into a single National Assembly. This alone', J. G. A. Pocock emphasises, 'was enough to constitute a revolution in English eyes'.⁴⁷⁹ To Burke and his contemporaries, then, the Revolution meant a revolt against the old order and its principles of constitutional law: a revolt against the first principles on which European civilisation was built. This is why he called the Revolution in a letter to Earl Fitzwilliam 'the total political extinction of a great civilised Nation in the heart of this our Western System'.⁴⁸⁰

Groen on the other hand was born in the Netherlands in 1801, at a time when the country was deeply marked by France's annexation of it. Its material wealth had been looted, and its boys conscripted to fight in Napoleon's wars, with many never returning from the Russian front. While Groen was a teenager, Holland had been liberated from the French by British, Prussian and Cossack troops in 1813, at whose sides it had subsequently fought in Waterloo in 1815. As secretary in King William I's Cabinet he had been stationed in Brussels in 1829 and had had a front-row seat at the Belgian Revolt of 1830. Groen's experience of the French Revolution thus included the expansion of its influence beyond French borders: the occupation of the Netherlands by French troops, the Belgian Revolt and the

⁴⁷⁸ Barry M. Shapiro, *Traumatic Politics: The Deputies and the King in the Early French Revolution* (University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2009), 2.

⁴⁷⁹ Pocock, 'Introduction', xxv. For what the Revolution meant in 1790, see also Hampsher-Monk, *Political Philosophy of Burke*, 158.

Since Burke died on 9 July 1797, almost 8 years to the day from the storming of the Bastille on 14 July 1789, he never witnessed the far-reaching influence the Revolution had not just on France but on the whole of Europe.

⁴⁸⁰ Cobban and Smith, *Correspondence*, 6:36–7. Quoted by Goodwin, *Political Genesis*, 346.

revolutions and counter-revolutions that swept through Continental Europe, culminating in the tumultuous year of 1848.⁴⁸¹

While the differences in Burke's and Groen's experience of the Revolution are undeniable, the fact that both define the Revolution *not* by the factual events that propelled it and made it what it was, but by the ideology that drove it, still make a meaningful comparison possible. In their understanding of the ideology that lay at the Revolution's roots, Burke's and Groen's thought is very similar. Both saw the Revolution *primarily* as ideological. That this is so for Burke is implied by the early moment on the greater revolutionary timeline at which he voiced his critique. The Revolution at that point was 'merely' one of a change in principles of constitutional theory. The change was primarily one of philosophical presuppositions: a battle to shape and define society on new ideological grounds, and anti-Christian grounds at that. Burke judged the revolutionary constitutional theory to have religious overtones that meant that he viewed the Revolution in its essence as a religious war. He saw the revolution as a struggle for the supremacy of a new pseudo-religion over the old Christian one, fuelled more by the *philosophes* than by social wrongs and abuses. The fact that Burke, in his own words, wished the publication of *Reflections* 'to be, in the first instance, of service to the [English] publick, in the second, to the [Whig] party, as a valuable part of that publick', implies that not French facts, but novel French dogma and

⁴⁸¹ Modern-day Austria, Hungary, Denmark, Germany, Poland, and Italy were among those countries that experienced revolutions.

It is worth noting that Groen's 1831 *Overview* and his *Unbelief and Revolution* lectures, given in the winter of 1845-46 and published in 1847, predated the events of 1848, but predicted the likelihood of future revolutions. His important works *Le parti anti-révolutionnaire et confessionnel dans l'église réformée des Pays-Bas* (1860), *Ter nagedachtenis van Stahl* (1862) and *La Prusse et les Pays-Bas; L'Empire prussien et l'Apocalypse* (1867) were written after 1848.

principles, which lend themselves to English adoption more readily than facts would have, were his focus.⁴⁸²

Groen, similarly, saw the Revolution in ideological terms, as we have shown in the preceding chapters and as the title of his classic *Unbelief and Revolution* makes clear. Groen, too, viewed the Revolution as a religious war and considered himself a disciple of Burke's in this respect. Because Burke's and Groen's understanding of the ideological nature of the Revolution is so similar, their objections to it can be fruitfully compared, irrespective of the vast difference in actual revolutionary fact they each experienced.

Having established that Burke's and Groen's thought on the Revolution may be profitably compared, we will proceed with a critical comparative analysis of their use of 'history' as a normative argument in their polemic against the Revolution. Our aim is to discover what moral norms lie behind their norm of 'history', and on these findings to ask what the foundational presuppositions of Burke's and Groen's critique of the French Revolution are. To show that both Burke and Groen recognise norms that in turn inform the norm of 'history', we will demonstrate that their use of 'history' as norm is not absolute. We will do so by first defining what Burke's and Groen's *conceptions* of 'history' are, and by comparing their conceptions to each other. Secondly, we will explore their *use* of 'history', and ask to what extent their use of 'history' as an argument for moral judgement, is conditional. We will do so by comparing their willingness to critique history, and

⁴⁸² Letter to Earl Fitzwilliam of 5 June 1791. Cobban and Smith, *Correspondence*, 6:272. Quoted by Goodwin, *Political Genesis*, 336.

asking by what criteria they assess historical development and reform. We will conclude by an evaluation of the wider *purpose* for which Burke and Groen use the argument of 'history' in their critique of the French Revolution.

II. BURKE'S AND GROEN'S CONCEPTIONS OF 'HISTORY'

A. History's Ideological Dimension

1. Groen's Historically Formed System

As we have shown in chapter two, Groen posits that history may be 'divided not merely according to time periods, but also according to the course and development of ideas'.⁴⁸³ He understands history to have both a temporal and an ideological, intangible aspect. This ideological aspect is an aid in reading history in terms of the progression and growth of foundational ideas. When history is thus approached 'a characteristic feature that determines its entire direction' may be detected in every period.⁴⁸⁴ This propelling feature is in fact 'the manifestation and the reflection of dominant ideas (...) under whose reign the march of events and the fate of peoples are prepared and developed'. These dominant ideas are furthermore 'but the facts of an intangible and higher order'.⁴⁸⁵ 'History' to Groen is a practical expression not just of tangible but also of intangible truth.

⁴⁸³ Groen van Prinsterer, *Nederlandsche Gedachten*, 1832, 3:81.

⁴⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 3:81 (n° 21).

'Wanneer men de geschiedenis niet enkel naar tijdruimte, maar volgens den gang en de ontwikkeling der denkbeelden splitst, heeft elke periode een hoofdtrek welke haar gansche rigting bepaalt'.

⁴⁸⁵ Groen van Prinsterer, *Le parti anti-révolutionnaire*, 32.

'(...) la manifestation et le reflet des idées dominantes, qui ne sont que des faits d'un ordre immatériel et supérieur, sous l'empire desquels la marche des événements et le sort des peuples se prépare et se développe'.

If 'history' has an ideological, intangible, aspect, it follows that a standard or philosophy is required by which various ideas are assessed and brought into connection with each other. The philosophical standard for weighing facts in the greater context of ideas will as a consequence determine one's 'historically-formed system'. Given the importance of such philosophical presuppositions, Groen argues that 'nowadays any question quickly sinks into a historical debate; every exposition of principles becomes a history lesson. Each of us is what he is only in terms of his historically-formed system.' 'I, too', Groen continues, 'am what I am only as a product of my historically-formed system, that is, by my acceptance of the testimony of the Scriptures to the living God.'⁴⁸⁶ It is to 'history, in this Christian sense', by which he means history understood through the lens of the truth of Scriptures, that Groen appeals in his evaluation of the Revolution.⁴⁸⁷ He does so 'in order to try to understand and describe, in light of the actual facts, the nature and outworking of [the Revolution's] dominant ideas'.⁴⁸⁸ Regarded from this perspective, the Revolution is in its essence 'the history of the irreligious philosophy of the past century.' It has substituted 'human reason and human will for divine revelation and divine law'.⁴⁸⁹ This substitution is 'the application of the denial of God'. It is unbelief, the denial of 'God's right'. This, as we have shown in chapter two, is what Groen deems to be the dominant or foundational idea of the revolutionary era. It is a negation of reality in the sense that it denies what 'divine revelation and divine law' dictate is true. It rejects the Christian conviction, based on 'the testimony of the Scriptures to the living God' that a benevolent God is

⁴⁸⁶ Groen van Prinsterer, *Christian Political Action*, 40.

⁴⁸⁷ Groen van Prinsterer, *Le parti anti-révolutionnaire*, 32.

⁴⁸⁸ 'Pour caractériser la Révolution, c'est à l'histoire, dans ce sens chrétien que constamment j'ai fait appel'.

⁴⁸⁹ Groen van Prinsterer, *Christian Political Action*, 40.

⁴⁸⁹ Ibid.

sovereign over the created universe, which in its reflection of God's just character and will has an 'intangible and higher order'. This order exists because God exists. It is a moral order that is divinely given and does not depend on man's volition. It is what in chapter three we have referred to as right order. Precisely because 'unbelief', 'the application of the denial of God', denies this right order, it militates against divinely given reality and must by necessity come 'into conflict with the essence of things'.⁴⁹⁰ Such conflict will consequently be manifested in history.

Groen's concept of 'history' mirrors the Scriptural tenet that reality has a spiritual, moral dimension. It manifests conflict or alignment with the divinely given right order. The 'intangible and higher order' that is defined by 'divine revelation and divine law' thus typifies Groen's historically-formed system.

a) Christ Central to History

Groen's conviction that divine revelation provides the framework by which 'history' may be understood extends to the view that 'history' may also be the means by which religious 'truth may be known and established'.⁴⁹¹ To Groen Christ is history's beginning and end, while Christ's atonement is 'the central point of world-history'.⁴⁹² God's plan for fallen humanity as revealed in Scripture is also revealed in 'history'. This divine plan is 'victory by the Kingdom of Christ over what Satan has erected, redemption of those whom the Saviour has grafted

⁴⁹⁰ Groen van Prinsterer, *Nederlandsche Gedachten*, 1832, 3:97.

⁴⁹¹ Refers to the title of Groen's 1834 work *Proeve over de middelen waardoor de waarheid wordt gekend en gestaafd*, which translated reads 'Essay on the Methods by which the Truth may be Known and Established'.

⁴⁹² Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer, *Proeve over de middelen waardoor de waarheid wordt gekend en gestaafd*, *Beschouwingen over Staats- en Volkerenregt*, vol. 1 (Leiden: Luchtmans, 1834), 146.

in through sincere faith. All that happens [historically] is in service and submitted to this intention'.⁴⁹³ More than that, to Groen, 'the only viewpoint that gives an overall view of world history' is found 'in the history of the Gospel's influence'. Without such a viewpoint, he states, 'there can in reality be no general history, no philosophy of history, no history of humanity and of civilisation'. This is so, 'because it would seek to equate false appearances with the essence of things. World history is, in its main features, no mystery for the Christian. The Bible (...) has outlined the end of the ages in the fortunes of the Church'.⁴⁹⁴ Hence 'history' confirms the truths that are revealed in the Scriptures, and the Scriptures likewise illuminate patterns in 'history'.⁴⁹⁵ This facet of Groen's thought exposes the influence of the *Réveil*, as we have shown in chapter one. It explains why Groen speaks of 'Christian' and 'historic philosophy' interchangeably. Christianity, precisely because it is historical 'must be the soul of history'. In contrast stands 'anti-Christian' or 'anti-historic philosophy'. The latter is based on 'falsehoods and illusionary notions' instead of on Christian truths, and is hence a false kind of history.⁴⁹⁶ The Revolution's history is governed by an anti-Christian and anti-historic philosophy as it is dominated by the ideology of 'unbelief'. This false spiritual root has made the Revolution 'the history of the atheistic philosophy of

⁴⁹³ Ibid., 131–2.

'Wie Christus aangenomen heeft, weet, ook zonder de jaarboeken der menschheid te doorloopen, dat Hij er het begin en het einde van is. (...) Overwinning van het rijk van Christus op dat hetwelk de Satan heeft gesticht, verlossing dergenen die den Zaligmaker door een oprecht geloof ingelijfd zijn. Aan dit voornemen is al wat gebeurt, dienstbaar en ondergeschikt.'

⁴⁹⁴ Ibid., 132–5.

'In de geschiedenis der Evangeliewerking is het eenige standpunt om de wereldgeschiedenis te overzien. Zonder haar kan er eigenlijk geene algemeene geschiedenis, geene wijsbegeerte der historie, geene geschiedenis der menschheid en der beschaving, geene waarlijk pragmatische geschiedenis zijn, ten ware men een bedriegelijken schijn met het wezen der zaak gelijk stellen wil. De wereldhistorie is, in de hoofdtrekken, voor den christen geen geheim. De Bijbel (...) heeft den afloop der eeuwen geschetst in de lotgevallen der Kerk.'

⁴⁹⁵ H. Smitskamp, *Groen van Prinsterer als historicus* (Amsterdam: H. J. Paris, 1940), 87. This explains why Groen often illustrates the factual narrative in strictly historical works like his *Manual* and the *Archives* with quotes from the Bible.

⁴⁹⁶ Groen van Prinsterer, *Proeve*, 1834, 131–2.

the [eighteenth] century'.⁴⁹⁷ It has fuelled the revolutionary theories in its revolt against 'history' just as much as its revolt against revelation.⁴⁹⁸

The fact that, for Groen, 'the only viewpoint that gives an overall view of world history' is to be found 'in the history of the Gospel's influence', underlines his view of 'history' as the tangible manifestation of the intangible spiritual order.⁴⁹⁹ 'The Gospel's influence' marks the spiritual change in the life of a person and a community as a consequence of the forgiveness and salvation that faith in the substitutionary death of Christ on the cross brings. It is a reflection of God's sovereign order of things in that it offers His divine solution for the human problem of sin with its consequences. Because the Gospel is true, its intangible, invisible reality interacts with the visible, tangible world. This interaction is manifested in history, also world history. Cognizance of God's revealed truth provides the student of history with a framework to understand this historical manifestation.

b) 'Genuine' and 'False' History

For Groen, the ideological root determines the kind of 'history': the Christian principle of recognition of and submission to God, of faith, produces Christian 'history' —the practical expression of God's 'sovereign order of things'.⁵⁰⁰ The anti-Christian principle of rebellion against God, of anarchistic maxims, of unbelief produces 'atheist history' —the practical expression of falsehood. Groen

⁴⁹⁷ Groen van Prinsterer, *Le parti anti-révolutionnaire*, 32.

'La Révolution, c'est l'histoire de la philosophie irréligieuse du siècle passé'.

⁴⁹⁸ Groen van Prinsterer, *Ongeloof en Revolutie*, 1847, 23.

⁴⁹⁹ Groen van Prinsterer, *Proeve*, 1834, 132.

⁵⁰⁰ Groen van Prinsterer, *Christian Political Action*, 78.

thus seems to differentiate between ‘genuine’ and ‘false history’ —the one the manifestation of faith, the other the manifestation of unbelief. F. J. Fokkema has called this distinction the difference between ‘actual, essential history’ and ‘imaginary, unreal history’.⁵⁰¹ H. Smitskamp points to ‘normal or ideal history’ as opposed to ‘experienced history’.⁵⁰² We read the distinction as the difference between history that is in step or aligned with right order, and history that is not. Whether ‘God’s right’ is upheld or not determines whether history is ‘genuine’, what may also be called ‘ordered history’, or ‘false’, what may also be called ‘disordered history’.

Recognition of the distinction between ‘genuine history’ and ‘false history’ makes Groen’s use of the word ‘history’ less ambiguous. It makes intelligible why Groen sometimes understands ‘history’ to mean ‘all that has happened, whether good or evil’, while at other times only ‘what has happened according to God’s will’—as in when he simultaneously states that the Revolution is a fact of history, and that it is in conflict with history.⁵⁰³ The distinction between ‘genuine’ and ‘false history’ furthermore circles back to our earlier observation that the revelation of Scripture elucidates ‘history’, while patterns in ‘history’ likewise illuminate Scripture. The Scriptures determine where the demarcation line between the

⁵⁰¹ F. J. Fokkema, *De godsdienstig-wijsgeerige beginselen van Mr. G. Groen van Prinsterer: Eene beschrijving en beoordeeling* (Groningen: Riemersma, 1907), 34.
‘wezenlijke en onwezenlijke geschiedenis’

⁵⁰² Smitskamp, *Groen als historicus*, 91. As Smitskamp notes, Groen’s two-pronged conception of history reflects that of the Historical School, even if Savigny’s ‘organic history’ misses Groen’s divine sanction.

The distinction between genuine and false ‘history’ does not imply Platonic influence: Ibid., 68–9. For an in-depth discussion on the alleged Platonic influence on Groen, see Johan Zwaan, *Groen van Prinsterer en de klassieke oudheid* (Amsterdam: Hakkert, 1973), 132–61.

⁵⁰³ Smitskamp, *Groen als historicus*, 90–91.

‘false’ and ‘genuine history’ must be drawn. ‘God’s sovereign order of things’ is primarily knowable through the written revelation of God’s Word.

c) *‘History’ is Tangible Manifestation of Intangible Right
Order*

‘History’ for Groen, then, is the tangible manifestation in events and the fates of people of response to the dominance of the intangible moral order. ‘History’ is the experience over time of the interaction of the perceptible, visible world with the imperceptible, invisible reality of God’s sovereign moral order. Or in Groen’s own words: ‘history is the imprint and reflection of the essence of things’.⁵⁰⁴

Where ‘history’ is the manifestation of the dominion of right order, an era’s dominant ideas ‘are just so many facts of’ this order.⁵⁰⁵ These ideas may be aligned with the moral order, or may wholly or partially reject it, but must, because of the hegemony of God’s right order, responsively interact with this essential, ‘sovereign order of things’. ‘Unbelief’, or the denial of ‘God’s right’, Groen regards to be the revolutionary era’s dominant idea, as we have seen in chapter two. The Christian principle by contrast upholds ‘God’s right’. It is genuinely historical because it is aligned with God’s sovereign order of things, with the ‘essence of things’.

⁵⁰⁴ Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer, *Proeve over de middelen waardoor de waarheid wordt gekend en gestaafd*, Beschouwingen over Staats- en Volkerenregt, vol. 1 (Amsterdam: Höveker, 1858), 64.

⁵⁰⁵ *De wijsbegeerte onderzoekt het wezen der dingen, terwijl de historie afdrukkel en bespiegeling bevat.*

⁵⁰⁵ Groen van Prinsterer, *Christian Political Action*, 40.

Our finding, that to Groen 'history' is the manifestation of right order, requires two important clarifications. The first is that Groen's right-order thinking is Protestant, not Scholastic.⁵⁰⁶ The second is that we read Groen's Protestant right-order stance to denote that 'history' must be understood as the manifestation of 'nature' or right order, which in turn must be interpreted by Scripture. This means that in our reading the concepts of 'history', 'nature' and Scripture are telescoped: what we see is 'history', but this is the tangible expression of the higher reality of 'nature' or right order, which itself is the expression of God's truth as revealed in Scripture. We will elaborate on these clarifications when we discuss Groen's view of the Dutch *historical* state below.

2. Burke's Conception

Burke's conception of 'history' does not have the same emphasis on 'dominant ideas that characterise an era' that Groen's conception has. While this is so, it is important to note that the ideological element is most definitely present in Burke's critique. As we have observed above, the 'revolution in France' was at the time of the 1790 publication of *Reflections* primarily a revolution of ideas about constitutional theory and hence ideological. Burke's famous assessment of the Revolution as 'a religious war' highlights this ideological dimension. He views the persecutions of Christian priests and establishments not as an accidental by-product, but as the primary focus of the revolutionaries. This 1793 statement conveys the force with which Burke holds this view:

⁵⁰⁶ See also our observations in chapter three.

See on Scholastic, traditional natural law A. P. D'Entrèves, *Natural Law: An Introduction to Legal Philosophy* (London: Hutchinson University Library, 1967).

We cannot, if we would, delude ourselves about the true state of this dreadful contest. It is a religious war. It includes in its object undoubtedly every other interest of society as well as this; but this is the principal and leading feature. It is through this destruction of religion that our enemies propose the accomplishment of all their other views.⁵⁰⁷

‘The utter extirpation of religion’ is to Burke the ‘one predominant object’ that the revolutionary philosophers pursued. It is the object to which they subordinated ‘every question of empire’. If, he argues, ‘this fanatical atheism [is] left out, we omit the principal feature in the French revolution, and a principal consideration with regard to the effects to be expected from a peace with it’.⁵⁰⁸ These statements witness to Burke’s awareness of the larger ideological elements that influenced and characterised the revolutionaries’ objectives and actions.

Burke’s observation that the constitutional changes that the French Revolution fuelled had religious undertones does not imply that he attributes any specific role for Christianity within his conception of history. In this respect Burke’s concept of ‘history’ is markedly different from Groen’s. It misses Groen’s emphasis on the centrality of Christ to history. For Burke, ‘history’ is at most ‘the known march of Providence’. This does not mean, however, that God does not figure in Burke’s view of reality or its historical expression over time. He regards the *historical* English state to be willed by God. English constitutional policy must therefore —at least indirectly— reflect God’s will for the state in the English context. While Burke’s concept of ‘history’ misses the demarcation between

⁵⁰⁷ Edmund Burke, ‘Remarks on the Policy of the Allies with Respect to France’, in *The Works of the Right Honorable Edmund Burke*, vol. 4 (Boston: Little, Brown, 1839), 114–5.

⁵⁰⁸ Edmund Burke, ‘Letters on a Regicide Peace: Letter II—On the Genius and Character of the French Revolution as It Regards Other Nations’, in *The Works of the Right Honorable Edmund Burke*, vol. 4 (Boston: Little, Brown, 1839), 434–6.

‘genuine’ and ‘false history’ that Groen’s concept makes, Burke’s consistent reference to the English constitution may imply that his thought does make a distinction between ‘genuine’ and ‘false history’, depending on how closely the English constitution is followed. Whether this intuition about Burke’s concept of ‘history’ is accurate requires an analysis of Burke’s view of the historical English state. The same is true of our intuition that Burke’s reference to the English constitution is an ideological reference that implies acknowledgment of a moral order.

A critical analysis of Burke’s understanding of the historical English state promises to bring into focus whether our intuitive findings on Burke’s concept of ‘history’ are accurate. A critical analysis of Groen’s view of the historical Dutch state also promises to confirm the accuracy of our initial conclusions on Groen’s concept of ‘history’. For this reason we will proceed with a comparative critical analysis of Burke’s and Groen’s descriptions of the *historical* English and Dutch state as they contrast them to the revolutionary French state. We will ask whether their understanding of the historical state confirms our initial findings that both Burke’s and Groen’s conceptions of ‘history’ have an ideological dimension. We will also ask whether this ideological dimension is to be understood as defined by divine moral order and what this means for Burke’s and Groen’s concept of ‘history’.

B. The Historical State

Groen defines the historical state as gradually and organically formed by the power of nature and time working in concert within a specific geographical

context. He presents the revolutionary state by contrast as fabricated instantaneously, after an abstract, ideal model that sprouts from the imagination, in one toss, much like a statue of bronze is cast.⁵⁰⁹ History in this context is an expression of ‘the demands of benevolent and ever-returning *nature*, and of ceaselessly continuing *time*’.⁵¹⁰ The historical state is historical precisely because it manifests time and nature working in concert. The Revolution’s creation of a revolutionary state by contrast does not.

Burke’s critique of the French Revolution also contrasts the French revolutionary state with that of the historical English state. Burke defines the English state similarly as determined by the power of the joint action of time and nature. This observation raises the question what Groen and Burke mean by ‘nature’ since the connection between ‘nature’ and ‘history’ is not an obvious one. Our critical analysis of their appraisal of the historical English and Dutch state as they compare it to the state proposed by the revolutionary French, answers this question, and further elucidates their concepts of ‘history’.

1. Burke’s Appraisal of the English State

Burke famously calls the state a partnership ‘not only between those who are living, but between those who are living, those who are dead, and those who are to be born’.⁵¹¹ This multi-generational partnership stewards and transmits

⁵⁰⁹ Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer, *Ongeloof en Revolutie: Eene reeks van historische voorlezingen* (Amsterdam: Höveker, 1868), 190–1. Groen quotes De Lamennais (1780-1860).

⁵¹⁰ Groen van Prinsterer, *Nederlandsche Gedachten*, 1832, 3:97–8. Emphasis added.

⁵¹¹ Burke, *Reflections*, 82.

institutions and liberties 'as an entailed inheritance'.⁵¹² It is an historical endeavour of faithful transmission of the collected wisdom of experience from one generation to the next that requires the memory of customs and traditions to be stewarded over a long time period and by a trustworthy, proven pattern. Tradition and custom are manifestations of the state's historical element. They are expressions of time and 'nature'.

With respect to *time*, Burke explains that the multi-generational endeavour that the state is, is achieved through 'a method in which time is amongst the assistants', 'one of the excellencies' of which is 'that its operation is slow, and in some cases almost imperceptible'. Such partnership expresses the principle that 'where the great interests of mankind are concerned through a long succession of generations', the 'aid of more minds than one age can furnish' is required.⁵¹³ It conveys a non-rational, non-premeditated element that refutes the French revolutionary claim that society could be fabricated on abstract metaphysical grounds and that swiftly by one generation. Time, in this context, is a method of the formative process of the state, that speaks both to the phenomenon of 'a permanent body composed of transitory parts' and of gradual, 'slow', 'almost imperceptible' change.⁵¹⁴

Nature equally plays a prominent role in the multi-generational partnership that the state is, as is made clear by sentences such as 'by preserving *the method of nature* in the conduct of the state', 'by a constitutional policy, working after *the*

⁵¹² Ibid., 29.

⁵¹³ Ibid., 143–4.

⁵¹⁴ Ibid., 29, 143.

pattern of nature', and 'through the same *plan of a conformity to nature* in our artificial institutions'.⁵¹⁵ The meaning Burke gives to the concept of 'nature' as it relates to his view of the historical English state reveals the moral dimension he attributes to 'nature' and thereby also to the state and to 'history'. His concept of 'nature' assumes that God exists and that God's universal laws, both physical and moral, dictate a divinely ordered world into which man is born, and of which the gift of government and civil society forms a part.⁵¹⁶ Burke's *Speech in the Impeachment of Warren Hastings, Esq.* given on the fourth day of the trial, in 1788, elaborates this conviction. There he asserts:

We are all born in subjection (...) to one great, immutable, pre-existent law, (...) antecedent to our very existence, by which we are knit and connected in the eternal frame of the universe. (...) This great law does not arise from our conventions or compacts (...); it does not arise from our vain institutions. Every good gift is of God; all power is of God. (...) If then all dominion of man over man is the effect of the Divine disposition, it is bound by the eternal laws of Him that gave it, with which no human authority can dispense. (...) [The] great gift of government [is] the greatest, the best, that was ever given by God to mankind.⁵¹⁷

To Burke, God has willed the state and is the 'institutor, and author, and protector of civil society'. It is God who 'gave our [human] nature to be perfected by our virtue', and willed the state as 'the necessary means of its perfection'.⁵¹⁸ Because each state is 'a clause in the great primæval contract of eternal society' between God and mankind, it not only connects 'the lower with the higher natures', and 'the visible and invisible world', but is also importantly 'sanctioned by the

⁵¹⁵ Ibid., 29–30. Emphasis added.

⁵¹⁶ Ibid., 29.

⁵¹⁷ Edmund Burke, *The Works of Edmund Burke, with a Memoir*, vol. 3 (New York, N.Y.: Dearborn, 1836), 327. The speech was given on 16 February 1788.

⁵¹⁸ Burke, *Reflections*, 83.

inviolable oath which holds all physical and all moral natures, each in their appointed place'. Burke thus rejects the notion that the state is formed by mere human effort or volition but by contrast insists that it exhibits not just material traits, but also a spiritual connection to God, who has called the created world into being by his word ('the inviolable oath') and has justly ordered it (with an 'appointed place' for everything) by his law. The state has an intangible aspect that reflects the 'moral and physical disposition of things, to which man must be obedient by consent or force'. It is ordered by God's law, which stands for justice, and is for this reason, 'not subject to the will of those, who by an obligation above them, and infinitely superior, are bound to submit their will to that law'. To Burke, then, 'nature' is an expression of reality, a reflection of the divinely given moral order. When society follows 'the pattern of nature' it obeys the law and 'order of the universe', resulting in a social, civil, and moral society. Precisely because of its alignment to divine order, the 'method of nature' displays inherent wisdom, what Burke calls 'wisdom without reflection'.⁵¹⁹

*a) Conformity to Nature in English Context Safeguarded
by the English Constitution*

Burke judges 'conformity to nature', or conformity to God's divine order, in the context of the English state to be safeguarded by the English constitution. This is evident by the constitution's protection of the unforced, 'natural' way that property and people's lives are received, enjoyed and transmitted. The English constitutional arrangements regarding the function, transmission, and benefit of

⁵¹⁹ Ibid., 29, 83.

the government and privileges of the English people follow the 'pattern of nature'. It is this that constitutes the wisdom of the English constitutional policy. It may seem 'the result of profound reflection' but is 'rather the happy effect of following nature'. The excellence of the English political system is in other words the result of the manner in which it is 'placed in a just correspondence and symmetry with the order of the world'.

It is alignment with this 'order of the world', the consistent alignment with 'the pattern of nature' over time that has resulted in the English constitution's 'uniform policy' 'to claim and assert [English] liberties, as *an entailed inheritance* derived to [the English] from [their] forefathers, and to be transmitted to [their] posterity; as an estate specially belonging to the people of this [English] kingdom'.⁵²⁰

Burke, then, acknowledges a universal moral order expressed by 'the pattern of nature', that emanates from God and that finds a practical expression in the state, which is willed by God. In this respect Burke's thought is in line with traditional natural-law doctrine, by which we mean its Scholastic interpretation. It is traditional in its recognition of right order, of justice sourced in God. Traditional natural-law doctrine stands in contrast to post-Hobbesian and post-Lockean modern natural-law doctrine in the distinction it makes between, for the former,

⁵²⁰ Ibid., 29.

law that is ultimately sourced in God, and hence is in accord with justice, and for the latter, law that is sourced in man.⁵²¹

(i) Scholastic Natural Law

A few words of explanation are in order on Scholastic natural-law doctrine. Reduced to its 'simplest expression', A.P. D'Entrèves explains, Scholastic natural law posits that 'natural law goes back to God. Its precepts derive their authority from the fact that they are confirmed and implemented by Revelation.' Because it regards 'the evidence of reason and that of Revelation [to be] correlative', Scholastic natural law understands Revelation both as Scriptural Revelation (since Scripture embodies the law of nature) and as natural revelation (since nature embodies laws that man's reason may derive from it). The correlative nature of faith and reason, of Scriptural and natural revelation, ground three pivotal precepts of Scholastic natural law. The *first* is that the doctrine is 'the expression of the dignity and power of man', who, as D'Entrèves words it, 'is called to participate intellectually and actively in the rational order of the universe. He is called to do so because of his rational nature. Reason is the essence of man, the divine spark which makes for his greatness.'

⁵²¹ See for the distinction between natural-law doctrines pre- and post-Hobbes and Locke: Peter J. Stanlis, *Edmund Burke and the Natural Law* (Lafayette, La.: Huntington House, 1986). See also D'Entrèves, *Natural Law*, 1967, 59–60. D'Entrèves points out that 'the modern theory of natural law was not, properly speaking, a theory of law at all. It was a theory of rights'. He goes on to explain the difference in meaning of the modern *ius naturale* compared with the Roman lawyer's *ius naturale* and the *lex naturale* of the medieval moralist.

Strauss by contrast does not distinguish between the modern and traditional natural-law writers, and does not recognize the divide that Hobbes' thought established between them: Leo Strauss, *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes: Its Basis and Its Genesis*, trans. Elsa Sinclair (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1936), 156.

The *second* builds on the first. It asserts that ‘Grace does not abolish Nature but perfects it’, and so assumes that ‘the essential principles of nature’ are knowledgeable to rational man, whose capacity to gain knowledge of these dictates of ‘natural reason’ is not impaired by the effect of sin. It posits that sin and its consequences ‘do not impair the existence of a sphere of purely natural — i.e., rational— values. It is in this sphere that the foundation of social and political institutions must be assessed.’ As such, natural law insists that the evidence of nature provides a knowable basis of morality.

Thirdly, natural law functions not only as the ‘foundation of morality and of all social and political institutions. It [is] also the paramount standard by which these institutions must be judged.’ It provides the moral basis for the Christian community, and insists that ‘justice, as disclosed to man in the precepts of natural law, must prevail over any other command or authority.’⁵²²

(ii) English Political System Aligned with Right Order

While a discussion of the merits and credibility of reading Burke as a defender of traditional natural-law doctrine goes beyond the ambition for the burden of this study, it is fair to say that his acknowledgement of a natural universal legal and rational order shows Burke to be sympathetic to the doctrine of traditional

⁵²² A. P. D’Entrèves, *Natural Law: An Introduction to Legal Philosophy* (London: Hutchinson & Co, 1970), 38–46.

natural law.⁵²³ This is all the more highlighted by his insistence that English public institutions are grounded in the moral order. In *Reflections* Burke argues that the English 'political system is placed in a just correspondence and symmetry with the order of the world' and that it 'preserv[es] the method of nature in the conduct of the state'. He also emphasises the 'uniform policy' of the *English* constitution, which he considers to be 'the happy effect of following nature.'⁵²⁴ These convictions express the traditional natural-law angle of Burke's thought.

The acknowledgment that universal generic norms find different specific expressions in different times and places is also tenet of traditional natural law. Thomas Aquinas, the most authoritative voice of Scholastic natural law, articulated this tenet in *Summa Theologica*, 1a 2ae, quae. 94, art. 4. Here Aquinas states:

In speculative matters truth is the same in all men, both as to principles and as to conclusions (...). But in matters of action, truth or practical rectitude is not the same for all, as to matters of detail, but only as to the general principles (...). Consequently we must say that the natural law, as to general principles, is the same for all (...). But as to certain matters of detail, which are conclusions, as it were, of those general principles, it is the same for all in the majority of cases (...); and yet in some few cases it may fail.⁵²⁵

In this respect, the English constitutional policy is the 'matter of action', the practical expression of universal law and general natural-law principles in the

⁵²³ We note here that Burke's use of the natural law tradition is not very self-conscious since he barely makes explicit mention of the tradition. He also does not use all of its resources. His recognition of a moral order has been convincingly argued by Stanlis, *Burke and the Natural Law* (1958). See also Parkin, *Moral Basis of Burke's Political Thought*.

⁵²⁴ Burke, *Reflections*, 29. See also Parkin, *Moral Basis of Burke's Political Thought*.

⁵²⁵ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, *Mobi Classics* (Boston: MobileReference, 2010), 3139–40.

English context. It is the faithful and habitual guarantor of the English people's liberties because it is an expression in local custom and tradition of law sourced in God. It ensures, Burke reminds the English, '*our* liberties, as an entailed inheritance derived to *us* from *our* forefathers, and to be transmitted to *our* posterity; as an estate *specially belonging to the people of this kingdom*'.⁵²⁶

The constitution is furthermore an *ancient* constitution, which means that it functions according to the legal fiction of having been in place since time immemorial. This very long time-span in conjunction with its conformity to God's natural and rational order and law, which has organically and adaptively expressed itself in the particular English context, is what anchors the constitution's legitimacy.

Our initial, intuitive evaluation of Burke's conception of 'history' seems confirmed by our critical analysis of his view of the English state. For Burke, the concept of 'history' as expressed in the historical English state, does not mean the mere memory of events, but includes a value judgement and moral norm. Insofar as 'history' developed organically in accordance with natural law it is a genuine reflection of an order and reality that is above and separate from human will or construct. This observation poses the question whether the absolute nature of traditional natural law might not make it antithetical to (historical) change, and hence be unhistorical by definition. In this sense one might argue that the concept of 'history' could never be an expression of natural law. But it is a misconception to equate the unchangeable nature of universal values with an unchangeable

⁵²⁶ Burke, *Reflections*, 29. Emphasis added.

expression of them, since unchanging values do not preclude changeable expressions of them. As noted above, universal generic norms find different specific expression in different times and places. This means historical progress and development is possible. In fact, D'Entrèves has pointed out that 'a deep feeling for history pervades [Aquinas'] legal philosophy', in which 'the largest possible allowance is made for historical circumstances'.⁵²⁷ The expression of God's law in the local context of Britain over time is an example of such change and development. It is this communal alignment to the given divine moral order that gives 'history' its moral dimension. Communal alignment to the pattern of natural law, that which in the English context is given practical expression in English custom and constitutional policy, makes 'history' morally imperative. The operative imperative element is not 'history' itself, but the practical, local expression it embodies of universal ethical norms that emanate from God. The 'belief in truth and in justice' always has pre-eminence over 'historical circumstance'. As the traditional natural law insists: 'History is not the last resort, nor can it provide man with the ultimate standard. "The Lord has said *I am the Truth*, not *I am Custom or Constitution*"'.⁵²⁸ Right order is a reflection of this divine Truth.

'History' to Burke, then, is an expression of reality sourced in God, a practical expression of truth and of justice. The English ancient constitution is the application of the divine moral order or the natural law to the English context, and

⁵²⁷ D'Entrèves, *Natural Law*, 1967, 44. Wu also acknowledges Aquinas' sense of history: John C. H. Wu, *Fountain of Justice: A Study in the Natural Law* (New York, N.Y.: Sheed and Ward, 1955), 37.

⁵²⁸ D'Entrèves, *Natural Law*, 1967, 44. D'Entrèves quotes Gratian, *Decretum Gratiani*, I, viii, 2. The work is part of the *Corpus Iuris Canonici*, the oldest collection of canon law, dating back to c. AD 1140. It is attributed to Gratian, an early twelfth-century Italian monk based in Bologna, the great medieval centre of legal scholarship.

hence positions the historical English state in a 'just correspondence and symmetry with the order of the world'.

b) *'Genuine' and 'False' History*

The fact that Burke connects the historical English state to a 'just correspondence and symmetry with the order of the world', implies that it is possible for a state to stand in *asymmetry* and *unjust correspondence* with this moral order. This in fact is what is wrong with the revolutionary state: it stands unconnected to God's moral order, is artificially created and is sourced in man's volition and law. Thus Burke's use of the transcendent norm of a universal moral order allows him to make a distinction between a state that stands in correct alignment to the moral order and the state that does not. The former is historical; the latter is not. It implies a distinction between what we have termed 'genuine' and 'false history'. 'Genuine history' gives practical expression to moral truth. It is an expression of reality. It is tied to the presupposition that God is the source of all truth and justice. It reflects right-order thinking and traditional natural-law doctrine.

2. Groen's Appraisal of the Historical State

Groen, similarly to Burke, acknowledges the importance of time and nature for the historical state, which he posits to be the result of following 'the demands of benevolent and ever-returning nature, and of ceaselessly continuing time'. He attributes power to 'the work of nature and time acting in concert' because their combined operation gives practical expression to the 'laws God has

determined'.⁵²⁹ 'History' is a reflection over time of what is natural. As we have discussed, it is the 'manifestation and reflection of dominant ideas, which are but the facts of an intangible and higher order, and the power of which prepares and develops the march of events and the fate of peoples'.⁵³⁰ The historical state is characterised by the acknowledgement of 'a supernatural, certain and sovereign order of things'.⁵³¹ It upholds 'God's right', as chapter three has shown. The revolutionary state by contrast is not historical because it is not aligned with God's divine order. Hence it must as a political enterprise fail and thus reveal indirectly what is natural and historical. Alignment with the divine order, with the 'laws God has determined' is what places a state 'on sure ground, on a *historical* foundation', not 'a merely ideal [abstract]' one. God's law and justice, which is not dependent on man's will, provide this 'sure ground', and form the 'essential, positive, not in the least merely material' basis from which 'nature and time retake their power'.⁵³²

The historical state applies the doctrine of the divine right of government, which in turn gives it its historical foundation. Upholding 'God's right' is the historical state's essential characteristic, as we have shown in chapter three. Its opposite, 'the application of the denial of God' in society produces the opposite of an historical foundation. It creates 'insecurity and uncertainty' and a 'forced situation that obstructs every free and gradual development', precisely because it

⁵²⁹ Groen van Prinsterer, *Nederlandsche Gedachten*, 1832, 3:97–8.

⁵³⁰ Groen van Prinsterer, *Le parti anti-révolutionnaire*, 32.

⁵³¹ Groen van Prinsterer, *Christian Political Action*, 78.

⁵³² Groen van Prinsterer, *Nederlandsche Gedachten*, 1832, 3:97–8.

is not aligned with God's divine order.⁵³³ This frustrating situation, this conflict with right order is consequently manifested in 'history'.

Like Burke, Groen's concept of 'nature' gives expression to the assumption that God exists, and that an over-arching moral order is reflected in history. Groen thereby makes the same distinction that Burke does between law that is sourced in and determined by God, that manifests true justice, and law that emanates simply from man's will.⁵³⁴ In this, Groen's views mirror Burke's pre-Hobbesian and pre-Lockean understanding of natural law. It is an expression of the right-order position. But whereas Burke's is more Scholastic, Groen's right-order stance is Protestant. While both stances recognise the divinely given moral order, they differ in the way they posit that this order is knowable.

a) Protestant, Not Scholastic, Right Order

Groen's right-order stance means that he recognises order in the universe, including moral order, which is a reflection of God's character, will and law. In this sense he subscribes to the premises of Scholastic, traditional natural law. He, too, recognises 'an eternal, unchangeable, and universal ethical norm or standard' that is wholly independent of man's will and is binding on men because it emanates from God's will.⁵³⁵ But in contrast to Scholastic right-order theorists, Groen does not lean on 'the Cosmos' as his starting point for the elucidation of the contours of this moral standard, nor does he use natural-law reasoning for this

⁵³³ Ibid.

⁵³⁴ Groen's approving references to Cicero's views on the primacy of laws and their origin in God's all-powerful rule also emphasise this. See Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer, *Grondwetherziening en Eensgezindheid* (Amsterdam: Müller, 1849), 335. With reference to Cicero, *De Legibus*, II, 7.

⁵³⁵ Stanlis, *Burke and the Natural Law*, 7.

elucidation. Instead, he leans primarily on the written revelation of Scripture. His Calvinist convictions prohibit Groen from sharing the Scholastic positions with regard to natural reason, the human instinct to self-preservation, and man's ability to reach moral perfection independently from God.

In contrast to Scholastic right-order theorists, Groen's focus is furthermore on the divine Lawgiver, not on the *matrix* of divine laws that the Cosmos exhibits. While he recognizes the given of God's unchangeable laws, his accent is on the loving and just *person* of God, who desires these laws to be obeyed, more so than on the laws themselves.⁵³⁶ God has revealed Himself and His law in Scripture: He is a covenant-keeping God who is personally and immediately involved with man and society. In this view, man's obligation to uphold 'God's right' is a response to the person of God, not merely a response to an impersonal 'matrix' of laws.

Groen's Protestant emphasis on Scripture and the person of God, as opposed to the Scholastic emphasis on an impersonal matrix of laws, makes his right-order stance less of a 'divine ideal' or 'cosmic norm' by which justice is measured. The latter is more characteristic of the Scholastic right-order stance, which has been described as 'Christian Platonism'.⁵³⁷ Groen's Protestant stance by contrast is less 'idealistic' in Platonic realism's sense. This observation seems in line with that of Dutch classist Johan Zwaan, who has convincingly defended Groen's thought from

⁵³⁶ Groen van Prinsterer, *Nederlandsche Gedachten*, 1832, 3:103.

⁵³⁷ See Joan Lockwood O'Donovan, 'Natural Law and Perfect Community: Contributions of Christian Platonism to Political Theory', *Modern Theology* 14, no. 1 (1998): 19–42.

the charge of Platonic 'idealism' by demonstrating that such Platonic influence on Groen are exaggerated.⁵³⁸

Groen's acceptance and restrained use of the natural-law tradition may seem at odds with his Calvinist stance, and the commonly held assumption that Calvinism with its tenet of the complete depravity of man does not acknowledge natural law.⁵³⁹ But it is clear that Groen's Calvinist presuppositions do not hamper his recognition of a moral order that finds its source in God. Groen, too, recognises that 'law is founded in God's essence' and 'that the foundation of justice lies in the law and ordinances of God.'⁵⁴⁰ The fact that Groen does not directly reference natural reason or its use as a conduit for reaching perfection furthermore confines his use of natural law within more practical parameters that do not conflict with his staunch Protestantism. His concept of the 'divine right of government' also highlights the importance of the principle of God's sovereignty as the source of the moral order. God's sovereignty importantly distinguishes the

⁵³⁸ See Zwaan, *Groen van Prinsterer en de klassieke oudheid*, 132–61. See also Van Dyke, *Groen van Prinsterer's Lectures*, 230.

⁵³⁹ This assumption has been discredited in the last decade. Scholarship is moving away from the reading, importantly argued by Karl Barth, that natural law only plays a negative role in Calvinism, and toward a broader acceptance of an important place in Reformed thinking for natural law. See Stephen J. Grabill, *Rediscovering the Natural Law in Reformed Theological Ethics* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2006); John Witte, Jr., *The Reformation of Rights: Law, Religion and Human Rights in Early Modern Calvinism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); David VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms: A Study in the Development of Reformed Social Thought* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2010); David VanDrunen, *Divine Covenants and Moral Order: A Biblical Theology of Natural Law* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2014). See also Constance Youngwon Lee, 'Calvinist Natural Law and Constitutionalism', *Australian Journal of Legal Philosophy* 39 (2014): 1–41; Constance Youngwon Lee, 'Calvinist Natural Law and the Ultimate Good', *The Western Australian Jurist* 5 (2014): 153–75. Thomas K. Johnson, *Natural Law Ethics: An Evangelical Proposal* (Bonn: Verlag für Kultur und Wissenschaft, 2005); Craig A. Boyd, *A Shared Morality: A Narrative Defense of Natural Law Ethics* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Brazos, 2007); J. Daryl Charles, *Retrieving the Natural Law: A Return to Moral First Things* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2008).

⁵⁴⁰ Groen van Prinsterer, *Proeve*, 1858, 66–8; Groen van Prinsterer, *Ongeloof en Revolutie*, 1847, 7. 'Het regt is in Gods wezen gegrond'.

Calvinistic interpretation of natural law, what may also be called Protestant right-order theory, from Scholastic right-order theory.⁵⁴¹

Groen's thought is only in line with traditional natural-law doctrine, in as far as it asserts that there is a divine moral order that is knowable through revelation. Groen's right-order stance is Protestant in how it defines this revelation primarily as Scriptural.

b) Primacy of Scripture

We read Groen's concept of 'history' to be the tangible manifestation of intangible right order, understood as Protestant right order with its emphasis on Scripture as the vehicle for knowing the contours of right order. This reading of Groen illuminates an aspect of his thought that has led to confusion among Groenean scholarship. It regards the relationship of the roles of 'nature', 'history' and Scripture in Groen's thought. Are they interchangeable, or is there an internal hierarchy to them? As we have touched upon above, our reading understands Groen to lean primarily on Scripture, the truths of which are manifested in right order, and in history —which itself is a manifestation of right order. This goes against the Groenean interpretation that suggests that his thought leans somewhat equally on the pillars of 'nature' or right order and 'history' in addition

⁵⁴¹ Lee, 'Calvinist Natural Law and Constitutionalism', 17, 22. Lee points out that 'the principle of the sovereignty of God represents the great divide between Thomist and Calvinist interpretations of natural law'. Calvin (as does Augustine) derives a unified moral realm 'from God's supremacy as the source of all transcendent norms', while 'the Thomist tradition divides the normative realm in distinct fields'.

to Scripture.⁵⁴² Such an interpretation reads ‘nature’ or right order and ‘history’ as more separate, yet co-ordinate factors ‘working in concert’. Contrary to this view, we read Groen’s Protestant right-order stance to denote that ‘history’ must be understood as the manifestation of ‘nature’ or right order, which in turn must be interpreted by Scripture. In our reading we telescope the concepts in the sense that we understand ‘history’ to be the tangible expression of the higher reality of ‘nature’ or right order, which itself is the expression of God’s truth as revealed in Scripture.⁵⁴³ It thereby posits that ‘nature’ or right order, ‘history’, and Scripture have different functional weight in Groen’s thought, and are not co-ordinate, separate factors.

While it is true that Groen’s reference to God as ‘the God of revelation, history, and nature’ may suggest that he views the concepts of revelation, history, and nature (or right order) to be to some extent interchangeable with each other, our right-order reading of Groen makes it clear that this is an incorrect reading.⁵⁴⁴

These concepts are complementary in some respects, but should they appear to be in conflict, Scripture always has primacy. ‘No truth can be in contradiction with

⁵⁴² An example is Koorders’ statement that ‘the characteristic feature (...) of the anti-revolutionary constitutional theory [consists] of the divine right of government, or (to be more precise) of God’s sovereignty, as He has revealed Himself in His Word and in History’: Daniël Koorders, *De anti-revolutionaire staatsleer van Mr. Groen van Prinsterer uit de bronnen ontwikkeld* (Utrecht: Kemink et Fils, 1860), 46. Emphasis added.

‘De eigenaardigheid (...) van de antirevolutionaire staatsleer [wordt uitgemaakt door] het goddelijk recht der Overheid, of (om het noch-duidelijker te formuleren) van de Soevereiniteit Gods, gelijk Hij zich openbaart in Zijn Woord en in de Geschiedenis’.

⁵⁴³ This reading is in line with the *Réveil* movement’s interpretation of ‘history’, that understands ‘history’ to confirm both Scripture and right order. E.g. Secrétan posits that ‘since history is an observation [or: testing] of the truth, it is reassuring for the faith of the believer to see that this history confirms the teachings of the word of the Lord’: J. C. J. Secrétan, ‘Les leçons de l’histoire’, in *Sermons sur quelques Textes de l’Ecriture sainte* (Amsterdam: Höveker, 1834), 191.

Merle-d’Aubigné asserts that ‘history confirms to us those truths that are taught to us by the nature of things’: J.-H. Merle-d’Aubigné, *Discours sur l’Étude de l’Histoire du Christianisme et son utilité pour l’époque actuelle* (Paris: Risler, 1832), 30.

‘L’histoire étant (...) le contrôle de la vérité, il est rassurant pour la foi du fidèle de voir que cette histoire confirme les enseignemens [sic] de la parole de Dieu’.

‘Ces (...) vérités, que la nature des choses nous enseigne, l’histoire nous les confirmera.’

⁵⁴⁴ Groen van Prinsterer, *Christian Political Action*, 78.

the Word of Him Who is the Truth, the Way and the Life.’⁵⁴⁵ Only Scripture is direct divine revelation, ‘history’ and ‘nature’ are indirect divine revelation.

History manifests intangible right order tangibly in events and fates of people.. Just as there are physical laws that are a given and do not dependent for their function on man’s volition or approval, there are moral and spiritual laws that are also a given. Breaking these moral laws has consequences, just like breaking physical laws. Because essential reality includes not just the tangible, visible realm, but also an intangible, invisible realm, conflict with the sovereign order of things, which happens when moral laws are broken, must be manifested in the tangible realm. Recorded over time such manifestation is ‘history’. Hence, ‘history’ reveals ‘nature’, or right order, and as such may aid in the interpretation of right order, as it does in the interpretation of Scriptural principles. But ‘history’ only manifests, only reveals; it does not determine, nor does it have the last word or final say. Scripture always has primacy.

c) *True Constitution*

Analogously to Burke, Groen’s concept of ‘history’ does not mean the mere memory of events. It includes a moral norm. History is a reflection of ‘nature’ over time. To the extent that ‘history’ is aligned to ‘the essence of things’, to ‘nature’, it is a genuine reflection of a moral order that is above and distinct from human will or construct. In the context of the state, ‘history’ is a practical expression of

⁵⁴⁵ Groen van Prinsterer, *Proeve*, 1834, 188. Groen references John 14:6.

‘*Waar schijnbare tweestrijd opgemerkt wordt [tussen Openbaring, wijsbegeerte, geschiedenis en algemeene overeenstemming, beslist] de Openbaring onvoorwaardelijk. (...) Geen waarheid kan met het Woord van Hem, die de Waarheid, de Weg en het Leven is, in tegenspraak zijn.*’

universal truth and justice in the context of a specific people and geographical location. With Burke, Groen acknowledges that a true constitution must reflect the essence of the historical state: it must embody ‘what the natural frame of people and state prescribes’. A true constitution must be ‘in agreement with the rights and needs of a people’, and express ‘a composition of relations that have arisen and are confirmed in a natural and organic way, (...) the fruit of the times, under the joint influence of history and law’. Such a constitution reflects the outcome of having upheld ‘God’s right’ over a long time-span. It is an expression of the customs and traditions that define a people and a state.⁵⁴⁶

Groen’s understanding of the constitution as an expression of God’s universal justice and truth in the particular context of a particular people mirrors that of Burke. It articulates the historical and traditional position that had undergirded the Dutch unwritten constitution, but the political landscape in which Groen wrote no longer recognised this position. French occupation and revolutionary ideology had resulted in a first Dutch written constitution coming into force in 1798, followed by various replacements.⁵⁴⁷ These new Dutch written

⁵⁴⁶ Groen van Prinsterer, *Grondwetherziening en Eensgezindheid*, 335–7.

‘(...) in overeenstemming met de regten en behoeften van een volk. (...) Eene geschrevene Constitutie kan met het historische Staatsregt zeer wel bestaan; namelijk voor zoo ver zij de op papierbrenging is van hetgeen door het natuurlijk gestel van Volk en Staat voorgeschreven wordt. (...) ‘Een samenstel van betrekkingen op natuurlijke en regelmatige wijs ontstaan en bevestigd; (...) de vrucht der tijden, onder den vereenigden invloed van Geschiedenis en Regt’.

It must be noted that the term ‘Regt’ here translated ‘law’ (as part of ‘history and law’) can also be translated ‘justice’, and denotes more than a mere legal rule. It could also mean ‘right’, ‘claim’, ‘rightfulness’, or ‘legitimacy’. Its meaning is similar to the Latin ‘*ius*’ as opposed to ‘*lex*’.

For a detailed analysis of the different meanings of law, right and *ius*, see John William Salmond, *Jurisprudence* (London: Sweet and Maxwell, 1920), Appendix I.

The concept of a true constitution as expressed here is the reason that, also in the Netherlands, law was considered to be alive in a people, and judges were commissioned to *find* the law: A. F. De Savornin Lohman, *Onze Constitutie* (Utrecht: Kemink en Zoon, 1926), 29.

⁵⁴⁷ The first written Dutch constitution was the ‘*Staatsregeling van het Bataafsche volk*’ [‘Arrangement of State of the Batavian People’], which came into force during French occupation of the Netherlands: De Savornin Lohman, *Onze Constitutie*, 57. During the course of Groen’s lifetime alone, the initial 1798 written constitution was replaced by seven different (written) constitutions.

constitutions were no longer drafted under the assumption that law and justice is ultimately sourced in God, and they no longer assumed a theocentric approach to government or justice. The written constitutions were created, and several times re-created, and were not organically grown as the customary unwritten constitution had been. Since the Dutch constitution of Groen's day was based on revolutionary ideology and was not the organic and local expression of universal moral law in the Dutch context, Groen does not use the argument of a constitution as Burke does, despite their shared presuppositions about a true constitution. Instead, Groen references the Scriptures and the doctrine of the divine right of government for his defence of the historical state.

d) 'Genuine' and 'False' History

We return here to our earlier comment that Groen makes a distinction between 'genuine' and 'false history'. His distinction is determined by the question of whether God's 'sovereign order of things' is upheld or not.⁵⁴⁸ Is 'God's right' upheld or denied? Alignment with right order as it is knowable from Scripture produces 'genuine history'. Rebellion against God's moral order on the other hand produces a 'false', 'atheist history'. Groen hence regards 'history' as the practical

For more information about the Constitution of the Dutch Republic, in force prior to this written Batavian Constitution, and its significance as one of 'the most interesting legal experiments of the old European era', as well as its importance in world history 'through its influence on the Constitution of the United States of America', see R. C. Van Caenegem, *An Historical Introduction to Western Constitutional Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 142–50.

With regard to the importance for the Continent of unwritten custom and law, contrary to the assumption of England's exceptionalism in this respect, see R. C. Van Caenegem, *European Law in the Past and the Future: Unity and Diversity over Two Millennia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002). Manlio Bellomo, *The Common Legal Past of Europe, 1000-1800*, trans. Lydia G. Cochrane (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1995). Charles Howard McIlwain, *The Growth of Political Thought in the West: From the Greeks to the End of the Middle Ages* (New York: Macmillan, 1932), 192–3. R. W. Carlyle and A. J. Carlyle, *A History of Mediaeval Political Theory*, vol. 3 (London: Blackwood, 1915), 42–57.

⁵⁴⁸ Groen van Prinsterer, *Christian Political Action*, 78.

expression of reality and moral truth, as does Burke. Both equally tie genuine 'history' to the presupposition that God is the source of all truth and justice. Both exhibit right-order and traditional natural-law thinking.

For Burke the measure by which to distinguish between 'genuine' and 'false' history is found in the English constitution. Groen's distinction does not contradict Burke's, in that it, too, makes divine revelation its measure, but whereas Burke is content to identify divine revelation within 'nature', which he understands to be organically expressed in the English constitution, Groen identifies divine revelation primarily within the written Word of God, and only secondarily within the experience of 'nature'. This explains why Burke's distinction is subtler, while Groen's is so pronounced. The difference in nuance also sheds light on an additional, very important, contrast between Burke's and Groen's conceptions of 'history', namely, the role of God in 'history'.

C. *God's Role in 'History'*

1. God's Involvement in 'History'

We have seen above Groen's insistence that Christ is the centre-point of world history. This makes his conception of 'history' different from Burke's. For Groen, 'history' is 'the flaming script of a holy God', that confirms God's covenantal promises and warnings expressed in Scripture, that itself is historical 'because of the inseparability of event and teaching'.⁵⁴⁹ Thus 'history is not just a *confirmation*

⁵⁴⁹ Groen van Prinsterer, *Ongeloof en Revolutie*, 1847, xi.

of [God's] Revelation, but is also *itself [God's] Revelation*'.⁵⁵⁰ This explains why Groen uses the motto 'It is written! It has come to pass!' as justification and support of his thought: God has revealed his character and ways with man in the historically reliable Scriptures, and 'history' demonstrates God's ways with man through the factual fates of peoples, proving the validity and truth of the Scriptures through what has come to pass.⁵⁵¹

There are three consequences of Groen's view of 'history' that bear on its use as an ethical standard, all grounded in the priority that Groen gives to what he regards as infallible, God-inspired Scriptures. Firstly, it assumes a covenant-keeping, personal God, who is invested and directly involved in the affairs of men. God's direct involvement is manifested in the written revelation of the Scriptures and the experienced revelation of 'history'. Secondly, it assumes that God's will may be known from His revelation of it in 'history'. Thirdly, if an apparent conflict

⁵⁵⁰ Smitskamp, *Groen als historicus*, 90. Italics Smitskamp's.

⁵⁵¹ Groen van Prinsterer, *Ongeloof en Revolutie*, 1847, xi.

'Er staat geschreven! Er is geschied!'

Groen points particularly to the history of the Dutch Republic and its role in the Reformation as an example of the validity of Scriptural promises of blessings on a people that chooses to obey God, and the history of the French Revolution as an example of the Scriptural warnings of the consequences for a people that turns away from God.

It is worth noting that Groen's conviction that God's role in history is reflected in the fates of people and of individuals does not imply that he identifies prosperity and adversity with blessing and curse respectively. He begins his 1849 work on the revision of the Dutch constitution with a warning that 'the situation of our beloved Country in the midst of the commotions of the nations [around us]', protected as it has been 'from impending disasters', should not be read as 'a so-called seal of approval from Above': Groen van Prinsterer, *Grondwetherziening en Eensgezindheid*, 1.

Already in 1832, in a letter to H. J. Koenen, Groen writes: 'The Gospel has, as far as I know, never promised that the good cause will always triumph on earth, and we only need to regard history or look around us to discern immediately that oftentimes and for longer periods of time evil is victorious'. Quoted by J. L. Van Essen, review of *Groen van Prinsterer en de klassieke oudheid*, by Johan Zwaan, *Nederlandsch archief voor kerkgeschiedenis/Dutch Review of Church History* 55, no. 1 (1974): 108.

'Het evangelie heeft, zoo ver ik weet, nergens het altijd triumferen van de goede zaak reeds hier beneden beloofd en wij behoeven ook slechts de geschiedenis te zien of onze oogen rondom ons te slaan om terstond te ontwaren, dat het kwaad menigmaal en voor langen tijd de overwinning behaalt'.

arises between written revelation and 'history', then Scripture, the Word of Him Who is the Truth, has the final word.⁵⁵²

Burke does not share these three views, nor does he hold the Scriptures in the same high, infallible esteem. For Burke the Bible contains 'by no means an irrelative system of moral and divine truths', but he considers it 'altogether impossible to arrive at any tolerable knowledge of it without having recourse to much exterior inquiry'.⁵⁵³ Hence the value of Scripture lies less in 'timeless absolutes', and more in it being the 'repositor[y] of the wisdom of the ages'.⁵⁵⁴

While Burke acknowledges God's role in 'history', his approach is fundamentally different from Groen's in that Burke's misses the emphasis on a covenant-keeping, personal God, whose direct intervention into man's affairs is transparent. Burke understands God's involvement with mankind more indirectly, and more mysteriously. It is tied into Burke's understanding of the nature of man, which in its turn illuminates his understanding of the State. His view is that man's nature is given by God, is social, capable of achieving perfection, and meant to be perfected. God has in addition given the means for its perfection in the state with its social institutions: 'He who gave our nature to be perfected by our virtue, willed also the necessary means of its perfection. —He willed therefore the state— He willed its connexion with the source and original

⁵⁵² Groen van Prinsterer, *Proeve*, 1834, 188. Groen references John 14:6.

'*Waar schijnbare tweestrijd opgemerkt wordt [tussen Openbaring, wijsbegeerte, geschiedenis en algemeene overeenstemming, beslist] de Openbaring onvoorwaardelijk. (...) Geen waarheid kan met het Woord van Hem, die de Waarheid, de Weg en het Leven is, in tegenspraak zijn*'.

⁵⁵³ Edmund Burke, 'An Abridgement of English History', in *The Works of the Right Honourable Edmund Burke*, vol. 5 (London: Rivington, 1812), 517. Burke explains that this is so because the Bible 'stands connected with so many histories, and with the laws, opinions, and manners of so many various sorts of people, and in such different times'.

⁵⁵⁴ F. P. Lock, *Edmund Burke, 1730-1784*, vol. 1 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 150.

archetype of all perfection'.⁵⁵⁵ Burke's emphasis, much more than Groen's with his Calvinist understanding of man as fallen and thoroughly sinful, is on man's role and responsibility.⁵⁵⁶ In this Burke stands in the tradition of medieval thinkers,⁵⁵⁷ who 'held that the ultimate basis of society is the nature of man', and who posited that 'the reason for social institutions is that Natural Law may be obeyed'. 'Man's nature' as a concept did not point to man's barbaric, primitive condition, but to all 'he would be if fully developed at his best', reflecting the glory of man's Creator, living virtuously, in harmony with God's eternal laws and justice. Contrary to Hobbes' definition, the 'State of Nature' in this view 'is in essence an ideal state to which man, to fulfil his end, must always strive; and the Law of Nature becomes thus the great body of those principles of good conduct which are ideally common to all mankind and the fundamental basis of all morality'.⁵⁵⁸ The state is the avenue for the Law of Nature to be obeyed. Its prerequisite arises from man's natural imperfection, seeing that he, though created in God's image, has 'not as yet attained to the full final perfection of his nature'.⁵⁵⁹ God provides the state as the means that allows man to become virtuous. God's influence is thus primarily reflected in the religious foundation of the state, and the 'ancient order into which we are born'. God's role is contained in subjecting man 'to act the part which

⁵⁵⁵ Burke, *Reflections*, 83. Prior to this passage Burke quotes Cicero approvingly: '*Quod illi principi et praepotenti Deo qui omnem hunc mundum regit, nihil eorum quae quidem fiant in terris acceptius quam concilia et coetus hominum jure sociati quae civitates appellantur*': 'To that supreme God who rules the universe nothing (or at least nothing that happens on earth) is more welcome than those companies and communities of people linked together by justice that are called states'. See Cicero, *De Republica*, VI, 13, in Cicero, *The Republic and The Laws*, trans. Niall Rudd (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 88.

⁵⁵⁶ For a discussion of Burke's faith in the predominant goodness of man while acknowledging original sin and man's capacity for evil, see Stanlis, *Burke and the Natural Law*, 182ff.

⁵⁵⁷ For more on Burke's admiration of the Middle Ages, see also John C. Weston Jr., 'Edmund Burke's View of History', *The Review of Politics* 23, no. 2 (April 1961): 205–6.

⁵⁵⁸ Moorhouse F.X. Millar, 'The Modern State and Catholic Principles', *Thought: A Journal of Philosophy* 12, no. 1 (March 1937): 44, 52–3.

⁵⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 52–3.

belongs to the place assigned' him, and is hence indirect.⁵⁶⁰ For Burke the Providence of God works chiefly 'through secondary means'.⁵⁶¹

Another aspect of God's indirect role in history is the fact that Burke sees 'the known march of the ordinary providence of God' reflected in 'the rules of prudence', that 'first of all virtues'.⁵⁶² Prudence's rules reveal God's truth and wisdom encapsulated in the Law of Nature; they are formed on what may be known from history. Thus for Burke, as for Groen, lessons may be drawn from history, but contrary to Groen's view, God's ordinary providence can be understood 'without divine revelation, for Burke does not say that the rules of prudence must be learned from (...) biblical revelation'. In this sense, 'Burke's understanding of providence does not seem specifically Christian'.⁵⁶³ In addition, Burke does not display Groen's propensity for explaining God's ways by reference to Scripture. He is content to call God 'the all-wise but mysterious Governor of the

⁵⁶⁰ Edmund Burke, *Further Reflections on the Revolution in France*, ed. Daniel E. Ritchie (Indianapolis, Ind.: Liberty Fund, 1992), 160–1.

It should be noted that Burke seems to concede a few times that God may occasionally intervene directly in history. Three passages in Burke's work in particular may thus be interpreted. The first is Burke's historical treatment of the coming of the Saxons to Britain, written at the beginning of his career. He states: 'When we set before us (...) the condition of (...) the Western empire (...) we are almost driven out of the circle of political enquiry: we are in a manner *compelled to acknowledge the hand of God in those immense revolutions, by which, at certain periods, [H]e so signally asserts [H]is supreme dominion, and brings about that great system of change*, which is, perhaps, as necessary to the moral as it is found to be in the natural world. (...) The introduction of Christianity, which, under whatever form, always confers such inestimable benefits on mankind, soon made a sensible change in these rude and fierce manners. *It is by no means impossible, that, for an end so worthy, Providence on some occasions might directly have interposed*'. Burke, 'An Abridgement of English History', 504, 510–11. Emphasis added.

The second are the final sentences of his *Thoughts on French Affairs* (1791), which state: 'If a great change is to be made in human affairs, the minds of men will be fitted to it; the general opinions and feelings will draw that way. Every fear, every hope, will forward it; and then they who persist in opposing this mighty current in human affairs, will *appear rather to resist the decrees of Providence itself, than the mere designs of men*. They will not be resolute and firm, but perverse and obstinate'. Burke, *Further Reflections*, 254–5. Emphasis added.

The third is a letter to an *émigré* clergyman, in which Burke laments that 'it seems as if it were God's will, that the present order of things is to be destroyed': T. Copeland, ed., *The Correspondence of Edmund Burke*, vol. 8 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 412. Quoted by Lock, *Edmund Burke, 1730-1784*, 1:152.

⁵⁶¹ Lock, *Edmund Burke, 1730-1784*, 1:152.

⁵⁶² Edmund Burke, *Thoughts on the Prospect of a Regicide Peace, in a Series of Letters* (London: Owen, 1796), 93. Burke, *Reflections*, 53.

⁵⁶³ Harvey C. Mansfield, 'Burke and Machiavelli on Principles in Politics', in *Machiavelli's Virtue* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 106.

World', and stresses that God's ways are 'an unknown order of dispensations'. Reliance by anyone on such unknowns, 'in defiance of the rules of prudence', he insists 'would not be a pious error, but a mad and impious presumption'.⁵⁶⁴

One of the distinctions between Burke's and Groen's concepts of 'history', then, is that Burke's includes an idea of general Providence, while Groen recognises special Providence and acknowledges God's direct intervention in the affairs of men. Both Burke and Groen understand all that has been durably established over time to reflect God's will, and each thus regards 'history' as a manifestation of God's will—for Burke, this would be God's general, mysterious will; for Groen, God's specific, revealed will.

2. Groen's Evaluation of Evil 'History'

Because Groen recognises God's specific will and His special Providence in 'history', this raises the question of the place within God's will for historical facts that are evil, in light of the orthodox Christian view that God is good and omnipotent. A corollary of this question is how Groen evaluates 'history', which in turn illuminates the higher, transcendent norms that inform Groen's understanding of 'history' and his imperative use of it.

The distinction Groen makes between 'genuine history' and 'false history' set out above makes clear that Groen does not assume that all history has God's approval. Groen insists that not 'all that has come to pass, for this reason merits the stamp

⁵⁶⁴ Burke, *Thoughts on the Prospect of a Regicide Peace, in a Series of Letters*, 92–3.

of Providence'.⁵⁶⁵ God does not actively will evil, even if He permits it. Just as genuine 'history' is marked by recognition of, and submission to God, His will and law, so Providence may only be counted to be God's will when God's ordinances are reflected in it. 'The Christian knows', Groen forcefully states, 'that Providence only delineates travel along the track of morality and justice. The marker is found, not in the divers views of history, but in the clear commandments of God'.⁵⁶⁶ Elsewhere he mentions that he hardly knows of 'anything more wanton' than the view 'that ignores the clear trail of law and duty that has been marked out from above in favour of one's private conjecture of what has been determined in the higher realms'.⁵⁶⁷ What mirrors God's commandments, their practical expression in law and duty, is what marks God's positive will, and Providence. What falls outside these parameters may be God's permitted will, but unrighteousness may never receive approval through any stamp of special Providence. Consequently, man's responsibility is not nullified, nor is his assigned role in history neutralised. God's direct involvement in 'history' does not relieve man of his duty to right wrongs in society, nor does it allow him to be passive.⁵⁶⁸

⁵⁶⁵ Groen van Prinsterer, *De Nederlander*, n° 1346 (10 November 1854). Quoted by Smitskamp, *Groen als historicus*, 95.

'(...) aan al wat tot stand komt, evenmin daardoor het zegel der Voorzienigheid gehecht werd'.

⁵⁶⁶ Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer, *Parlementaire Studiën en Schetsen*, vol. 2 ('s-Gravenhage: Gebr. van Cleef, 1866), 295. Quoted by Smitskamp, *Groen als historicus*, 96.

'De Christen weet dat de Voorzienigheid geen wegen afbakent dan langs het spoor van zedelijkheid en regt. De wegwijzer ligt, niet in de velerlei opvatting der historie, maar in de duidelijke geboden Gods'.

⁵⁶⁷ Groen-Koenen, 21 October 1861 (Réveilarchief). Quoted by Smitskamp, *Groen als historicus*, 96.

'(...) naauwelijks iets verderfelijker [te kennen dan de beschouwing, waarbij] men, op grond van eigen gissing omtrent hetgeen in hooger sferen bepaald is, het ons van hooger hand afgebakend spoor van regt en plicht niet meer in het oog houdt'.

⁵⁶⁸ *Ibid.*; Groen van Prinsterer, *Nederlandsche Gedachten*, 1832, 3:98.

An example is Groen's application of this principle to Bismarck's successful flouting of international law in the period 1866-1870.

The two emphases of Groen's conception of 'history' discussed above, are in concert with Burke's and Groen's presupposition that 'history' is the practical, local expression of universal truth that emanates from God; that 'history' is a tangible manifestation of a divinely given moral order. Differently from Burke, Groen understands this order in an expressly Christian manner that includes the conviction that Christ is God and saviour, the central point of world history. Since these tenets of the Christian faith are considered to be objectively true, they, too, are part of the divinely given moral order and help to explain world history, as well as confirm the historical veracity of the Scriptures. Burke's conception of 'history' misses these emphases.

Where Burke points to the English constitutional policy as a guiding measure to assess alignment to the pattern of universal moral order in the English context, Groen points to the Scriptures, and the truths they reveal about the spiritual dimension of the world, as well as to the summary insight that 'the history of the Gospel's influence' offers by which to truly understand all of world history.⁵⁶⁹ To Groen, what makes 'history' morally imperative is its alignment to the truths revealed in Scripture. The operative imperative element is not 'history' itself, but the moral order that it manifests locally in events and the fates of peoples.

D. Summary: Burke's and Groen's Conceptions of 'History'

To summarise our comparative analysis of Burke's and Groen's conceptions of 'history', we have seen that both Burke and Groen understand 'history' as a

⁵⁶⁹ Groen van Prinsterer, *Proeve*, 1834, 132.

manifestation of the demands of 'nature' and time. Both define 'nature' in terms of traditional natural law, as the doctrine had traditionally been understood pre-Hobbes and pre-Locke. They affirm a divine ordering of the world that is governed by laws derived from God. Only in as far as 'history' reflects this right order does it have normative, moral value. In the English context, the practical expression of universal law and the natural order is found in the English (unwritten) constitution. Thus, for Burke, alignment to the English constitution is what gives English 'history' its moral imperative. 'History' that does not reflect truth and justice that find their source in God is not 'genuine' and therefore not normative. Groen, in contrast to Burke, points to the Scriptures to know the truth and justice that are sourced in God and expressed in 'nature'. His approach is that of a Calvinist. 'History' in this view is only normative if it is aligned with the principles of Scripture, and only then is it 'genuine history'.

Unlike Burke, Groen does not make any normative reference to the Dutch constitution. The reason for this is that in Groen's post-Revolution context the Dutch written constitution no longer gave expression to divine right order in the same way that the unwritten constitution of the pre-revolutionary era had done. Reference to the revolutionary, written Dutch constitution would not convey the normative, moral standard that reference to the pre-revolutionary, unwritten Dutch constitution would have done, or that Burke's reference to the English unwritten constitution, untainted by the revolutionary philosophy, did. Also, and more importantly, Groen does not refer to the constitution because he values the written revelation of Scripture higher than the revelation that may be deduced

from nature. But Groen's Calvinism does not prohibit him from discerning truth within experience and to do so without the aid of Scriptural revelation.

It may be concluded that both Burke and Groen acknowledge a moral order manifested by history. For both, the morally imperative use of 'history' is limited to its alignment to this right order. Hence only history's 'genuine' form has normative value for both, even if they measure such 'genuineness' differently.

Both also focus on divine revelation, emanating from God, even if Burke is content to extrapolate divine revelation from 'nature', through the rules of prudence and in alignment with English constitutional policy, where Groen deduces divine revelation primarily from the Scriptures, and only secondarily from 'history' and 'nature'.

Groen's acceptance of the Scriptures as infallible and historically accurate gives them an importance for his conception of 'history' that is missing from Burke's. The Scriptures provide Groen with the framework with which to assess the various ideologies that influence 'history', and by which to identify God's active involvement in 'history'. He insists that the covenant-keeping God of the Scriptures continues to be actively involved in 'history'. While both Burke and Groen acknowledge God's existence, and both regard Him as the source of man and society, and hence also of 'history', they understand God's role in 'history' very differently. Burke's view of God's role is one that is indirect, 'mysterious', and along 'unknown dispensations'. Groen on the other hand insists that God's will is specific and revealed: God is directly involved in 'history'. God's ways with

mankind are knowable and made known both in the Scriptures and in 'history' — 'the fiery recording of a holy God'. Christ is 'the centre-point of world-history', and 'history' is validation of God's Scriptural revelation and at the same time is itself God's revelation —even if Scripture trumps 'history', should the two seem to be in conflict. Groen's acknowledgement of God's special Providence does not imply that he accepts all 'history' as a manifestation of God's divine will. What has happened outside the parameters of 'justice and duty' is only a reflection of God's permissive will, and does not bear any stamp of divine approval. To the contrary, it assigns man the responsibility to right wrongs and champion righteousness in society.

Both Burke's and Groen's concept of 'history' display a Christian attitude of modesty and humility that acknowledges that true knowledge and insight is not found in mere man or merely in the present generation. It recognises that there are things to learn from the generations that have preceded this present one.

III. BURKE'S AND GROEN'S NORMATIVE USE OF 'GENUINE HISTORY'

Having established the importance of moral order for Burke's and Groen's conceptions of 'history', particularly reflected in what we have called 'genuine history', we will now explore its normative *use*. We will ask whether their use of 'genuine history' is absolute or restricted, and ask how this elucidates their view of right order.

Polemical responses to both Burke's and Groen's critique of the French Revolution have often accused them of being unwilling to embrace change or progress, and of having petrified and unrealistic views of the past. In this section we will question the veracity of this charge against which Burke and Groen defended themselves consistently. We will do so by comparing Burke's and Groen's willingness to critique history and to welcome progressive change. Our aim is to assess by what criteria they use 'genuine history' normatively, in comparison to each other.

Burke's and Groen's alleged refusal to accept change or welcome progress seems the weightiest and most obvious critique that may be levied against their opposition to the French Revolution, with its paradigm-shifting changes and its clarion call for progress and renewal. Burke's and Groen's writings reject this charge as unfounded, as do their lives and political actions. Neither Burke nor Groen were categorically against change or even against revolution. Burke was a Whig who celebrated the 1688 Glorious Revolution.⁵⁷⁰ He was known for his critique of British government policies in the American colonies and his support

⁵⁷⁰ See Burke, *Reflections*, 4.

See also Edmund Burke, 'Debate in the Commons on the Army Estimates, A.D. 1790', in *The Parliamentary History of England, from the Earliest Period to the Year 1803*, vol. 28 (London: Longman, 1816), 361–2. Here is recorded Burke's statement that 'he felt some concern that this strange thing, called a revolution in France, should be compared with the glorious event, commonly called the revolution in England (...) In truth, the circumstances of our revolution (as it is called) and that of France, are just the reverse of each other in almost every particular, and in the whole spirit of the transaction. (...) With us we got rid of the man, and preserved the constituent parts of the state. There they get rid of the constituent parts of the state, and keep the man. What we did was in truth and substance, and in a constitutional light a revolution, not made, but prevented. We took solid securities; we settled doubtful questions; we corrected anomalies in our law. In the stable fundamental parts of our constitution we made no revolution; no, nor any alteration at all. We did not impair the monarchy; perhaps it might be shown that we strengthened it very considerably. (...) The church was not impaired. Her estates, her majesty, her splendor, her orders and gradations continued the same. She was preserved in her full efficiency, and cleared only of a certain intolerance, which was her weakness and disgrace. The church and the state were the same after the revolution that they were before, but better secured in every part'.

of the American Revolution. His support of the American colonists and their constitutional rights as Englishmen was such that the colonists trusted him enough with their interests to appoint him as their agent at the British Parliament for the New York Colonial Assembly in 1770.⁵⁷¹ Groen, likewise, regarded the Glorious Revolution very highly.⁵⁷² He thought the Reformation, the German Revolution, a great divine blessing, and looked on the Protestant Revolt of the Seven Provinces⁵⁷³ (1568-1648) against the Roman Catholic Spanish as a highpoint in the history of the Low Countries.⁵⁷⁴ In addition, both stood for the emancipation of minority groups in society: Burke consistently pleaded the case of Irish Catholics, Groen that of the Reformed Separatists (*Afgescheidenen*).⁵⁷⁵ Both supported the emancipation of slaves. Burke called for gradual emancipation, offering rules in “Sketch of a Negro Code” (1792) for how slaves should be treated, including how their education should be organised so as to prepare them for freedom.⁵⁷⁶ Groen actively worked to eradicate slavery and

⁵⁷¹ Edmund Burke, *The Speech of Edmund Burke, Esq., on American Taxation*, April 19, 1774 (London: Dodsley, 1775). Edmund Burke, *The Speech of Edmund Burke, Esq., on Moving His Resolution for Conciliation with the Colonies*, March 22, 1775 (London: Dodsley, 1775).

F. S. Eastman, *A History of the State of New York: From the First Discovery of the Country to the Present Time* (New York, N.Y.: White, 1831), 411.

⁵⁷² Groen van Prinsterer, *Proeve*, 1858, 69 (footnote). Groen van Prinsterer, *Christian Political Action*, 53–4.

⁵⁷³ The Dutch Revolt has similarities with the Glorious Revolution in that its aim was reform, not abolition. Importantly, it too, sought to uphold the monarchy and the *office* of king, which the United Provinces continued to uphold even when thirteen years into the revolt they ‘abandoned’ the *person* of the king because he was a tyrant, by the 1581 Act of Abjuration (*Akte van Verlatinge*, literally Act of Abandonment). Creating a republican form of government had never been the purpose of the revolt, and was only reluctantly accepted in 1587 as a practical solution, nearly twenty years after the revolt was started. As Lohman has stated: ‘The desire to get rid of the supreme ruler was the consequence, not the cause of the revolt’: De Savornin Lohman, *Onze Constitutie*, 31. See for a comparison with 1688 also *Ibid.*, 44–5.

⁵⁷⁴ P. A. Diepenhorst, *Groen van Prinsterer* (Kampen: Kok, 1941), 310. Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer, *Archives ou correspondance inédite de la Maison d’Orange-Nassau*, vol. 1, First Series (Leyden: Luchtmans, 1835).

⁵⁷⁵ Large groups of formerly Dutch Reformed believers who in 1834 had separated themselves from the State Church out of concerns over its loss of orthodoxy.

⁵⁷⁶ Ian Crowe, ed., *An Imaginative Whig: Reassessing the Life and Thought of Edmund Burke* (Columbia, Mo.: University of Missouri Press, 2005), 181. Edmund Burke, ‘A Letter to the Right Honourable Henry Dundas: With the Sketch of a Negro Code, 1792’, in *The Works of the Right Honorable Edmund Burke*, vol. 6, 12 vols (Boston: Little, Brown, 1894).

chaired the national Dutch effort to this effect.⁵⁷⁷ The generosity of both to the poor was also well recognised. These tangible examples of Burke's and Groen's social and political action contradict Burke's and Groen's alleged satisfaction with the status quo, and demonstrate a drive for the betterment and progress of society.

More importantly, in their writings on the French Revolution both acknowledge that reforms had been in order, though the different points on the timeline of the development of the Revolution at which they write, Burke in 1790 at its eruption, Groen in its aftermath in the mid 1800's, means that the nature of the reforms they advocate is different. As we will show, Burke acknowledges abuses and defects of the government of France at the time of the Revolution that demand reform, and he is convinced reform would have been possible without complete abolition of the former structures. Groen echoes this view, but additionally grapples with revolutionary changes that have been incorporated for more than fifty years and thus have themselves become part of the historical process that Groen respects. Differently from Burke who seems to reject all revolutionary changes since they are an arbitrary innovation and a complete departure from established custom, Groen accepts certain revolutionary changes while rejecting others. Consequently, Groen has to be specific in his argumentation as to why this is so.

⁵⁷⁷ M. Kuitenbrouwer, 'De Nederlandse afschaffing van de slavernij in vergelijkend perspectief', *Bijdragen en Mededelingen betreffende de geschiedenis der Nederlanden*, no. 93 (1978): 76–81. Quoted by F.R.J. Knetsch, 'Introduction', in *La Prusse et les Pays-Bas; L'Empire prussien et l'Apocalypse*, by Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer (Amsterdam: Éditions de la Bibliothèque Wallonne, 1994), 34.

A. *Burke's Reform Standard*

1. Reform, Not Abolition

We will focus on Burke first. His point of contention with the French revolutionaries is not that they sought to correct abuses, or even that such defects existed. In *Reflections*, Burke states with conviction that the French 'parliaments (...) like the rest of the old government, stood in need of reform'.⁵⁷⁸ He agrees that the 'government in France', was 'full of abuses', as was the French Catholic Church. The 'vices and abuses' of such 'old establishments' as well as their 'errors and defects' were both to be expected, and were plainly 'visible and palpable'.⁵⁷⁹ Burke is not blind to them. He is clear about both their existence and the need to act to make the situation right, when he states: 'I am no stranger to the faults and defects of the subverted government of France. (...) There was no question but that abuses existed, and that they demanded a reform; nor is there now'.⁵⁸⁰ Change or reform is not what Burke categorically opposes, neither is he unwilling to change government and church policy. Even about the English constitution Burke states: 'I would not exclude alteration'.⁵⁸¹ Additionally, Burke is not, by his own admission, so respectful of what has developed historically that he cannot critique it or cannot welcome alteration where such is needed. His point of contention with the revolutionaries is not that there were societal vices and abuses that needed correction and improvement, but the manner in which this was done. He asks whether the French government with all its faults 'was such as to be incapable or undeserving of reform; so that it was of absolute necessity that

⁵⁷⁸ Burke, *Reflections*, 174.

⁵⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 118, 142.

⁵⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 107.

⁵⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 209.

erection of a theoretic, experimental edifice in its place?' 'The true question at present', Burke reiterates, 'is whether those who would have reformed, or those who have destroyed, are in the right?' Burke's answer is that the French government had been open to reformation and had for years even earnestly sought 'to correct the abusive practices and usages that had prevailed in the state'.⁵⁸² In addition to this openness to reform by the government, there were not, Burke thought, 'any incorrigible vices in the noblesse of France, or any abuse which could not be removed by a reform very short of abolition'.⁵⁸³ In other words, Burke judged the pre-revolution situation open to critique, and its abuses both in need of reform and capable of being reformed.

In order for Burke to make these value judgements of historically established situations, he uses a measuring standard. Burke does not state explicitly by what norm he makes these assessments. The fact that what we have called 'genuine history' is for Burke 'history' that is developed in line with moral order suggests that a deviation from this moral order leads to 'unhistorical development' so to speak, to 'false history' that results in abuses and defects. As a consequence, rectification would be achieved by bringing such 'unhistorical' development in line again with the moral order. Since the doctrine of traditional natural law allows the moral order to be knowable, it is fair to say that Burke uses principles of traditional natural law as the norm by which he makes such judgements.

⁵⁸² *Ibid.*, 107, 111.

⁵⁸³ *Ibid.*, 118.

2. Reform to Preserve

While Burke does not state explicitly the norm by which he judges whether historically developed situations have defects and faults in need of reform, he does state *a restriction* for how far such judgements and the impetus for reform may go. This restriction also points to traditional natural law as the greater context within which Burke's judgement of 'history' operates. This restriction is Burke's insistence that a true statesman has not just 'an ability to improve', but also at the same time 'a disposition to preserve'.⁵⁸⁴ Reform must be a melioration of institutions, not their complete destruction or replacement. Alteration must be made *in order* to preserve, a principle that holds true even of the English constitution of which Burke writes: 'I would not exclude alteration, but even when I changed, it should be to preserve'.⁵⁸⁵

To Burke, 'one of the first and most leading principles on which the commonwealth and the laws are consecrated' is the principle that its 'temporary possessors' should not 'act as if they were the entire masters; that they should not think it among their rights to cut off the entail, or commit waste on the inheritance, by destroying at their pleasure the whole original fabric of their society'. Acting contrary to this principle is being 'unmindful of what they have received from their ancestors, or of what is due to their posterity'. Doing so betrays a pride and hubris that assumes that the present generation knows better than the accumulated wisdom of generations past. It does not recognise the value of the wisdom, dearly bought through experience by past generations, which it

⁵⁸⁴ Ibid., 133.

⁵⁸⁵ Ibid., 209.

stewards for future generations, nor does it value the strengthening and civilising effect that consistent stewardship of it has. As a result of 'this unprincipled facility of changing the state as often, and as much, and in as many ways, as there are floating fancies or fashions', Burke asserts, 'the whole chain and continuity of the commonwealth would be broken. No one generation could link with the other'. In order not to jeopardise the partnership that society entails 'between those who are living, those who are dead, and those who are to be born', societal reform must be done with caution, with a view to being constant, so as to avoid 'the evils of inconstancy and versatility'.⁵⁸⁶ This explains Burke's insistence on the English people's aversion to 'the very idea of the fabrication of a new government', and their wish now, as it was at the time of the Glorious Revolution, 'to derive all we possess as an inheritance from our forefathers'.⁵⁸⁷ It is highlighted by the fact that the English 'have consecrated the state', clearly marking by this consecration 'that no man should approach to look into its defects or corruptions but with due caution; that he should never dream of beginning its reformation by its subversion; that he should approach to the faults of the state as to the wounds of a father, with pious awe and trembling solicitude'.⁵⁸⁸

The reasons Burke presents for explaining why the improvement that is accomplished by reform must be limited and may only be attempted in order to preserve, point to three important observations.

⁵⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 81–2.

⁵⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 27.

⁵⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 82.

a) *Moral Unity of Multi-Generational Societal Partnership*

The first is Burke's conviction that the fabric of society is a 'partnership' not merely between individuals living today, but among a community that is made up of 'those who are living, those who are dead, and those who are to be born'. It implies that which he had called a few years before the Revolution, a 'continuity which extends in time as well as in numbers and in space'.⁵⁸⁹ This community represents a collective membership in a shared way of life and shared moral standards that transcend the present in time and in generations. It implies a framework of moral unity based on communal acceptance of the divinely given moral order. This right order is recognised to have permanence and validity beyond this specific period of time and the current generation. It is an application of traditional natural-law thinking, and echoes the context of a community of peoples with shared spiritual and moral values that was expressed by the medieval concept of *populus Christianus*.⁵⁹⁰

b) *Society Stewards Civilisation*

The second observation that can be made about Burke's insistence on preserving when reforming, is that society in his view is the guardian of something of high value that must be preserved and stewarded so as to be able to pass it on to future generations, just as the present generation has inherited it from the previous ones. A clue as to how this value in society is to be understood is found

⁵⁸⁹ Edmund Burke, 'Speech on a Motion For a Committee to Inquire into the State of the Representation of the Commons in Parliament, May 7, 1782', in *The Works of the Right Honorable Edmund Burke*, vol. 7 (Boston: Little, Brown, 1894), 95.

⁵⁹⁰ See on *populus Christianus*: D'Entrèves, *Natural Law*, 1967, 38. Gerald J. Russello, ed., *Christianity and European Culture: Selections from the Work of Christopher Dawson* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1998), 22–3. Harold J. Berman, *Faith and Order: The Reconciliation of Law and Religion* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2000), 46.

in Burke's comment that people with reforming intentions are often too quick to only 'consider things in the state in which we find them, without sufficiently adverting to the causes by which they have been produced, and possibly may be upheld'. Burke's point is that the powerful, invigorating causes that lie at the base of the creation and shaping of society, must by the same token be the causes that will uphold and re-invigorate it where decay has set in. He states that these causes could not be 'more certain': European civilisation, European manners, and every related good thing, have 'depended for ages upon two principles; and were indeed the result of both combined; I mean the spirit of a gentleman, and the spirit of religion'.⁵⁹¹ 'The spirit of a gentleman', and 'the spirit of religion' have in common that they are marked by submission to something higher than the self, to a higher code. The religious spirit is characterised by a reverence for God and the felt duty to live according to His will and law; the gentlemanly spirit by obedience to an honour code and the felt duty of chivalrous service to others. In many ways the gentlemanly spirit is a practical expression of the religious spirit, enacting spiritual realities through concrete, physical manners. A clear example of this is the deference of good manners, which expresses the religious call to 'regard one another as more important than yourselves'.⁵⁹² The invigorating causes that lie at the base of the creation and shaping of society, and that have spawned civilisation and manners, and every blessing that has flowed from both, are predicated, then, on the acknowledgement of, and submission to, a divine law and a gentlemanly honour code. The recognition of a moral order thereby undergirds the inheritance

⁵⁹¹ Burke, *Reflections*, 67.

⁵⁹² Phil. 2:3 (NASB)

of civilisation. It is the priceless trust that needs to be stewarded carefully for future generations.

c) State Sacred

The third observation to make about Burke's conviction, that reform needs to be restricted by the aim to preserve, is one that is connected to the two observations previously made. Burke's view of society as a communal, multi-generational partnership and his regard for the immeasurable value of civilisation which society stewards, is undergirded by his assertion that the state is 'consecrated'. A benevolent God has willed the state, and has guided previous generations as they have given expression to that state. Mere man or a present generation must consequently approach changes to the state with 'pious awe' and 'trembling solicitude', with a tender, respectful approach 'as to the wounds of a father'.⁵⁹³ What the present generation stewards are institutions that collectively make up the state that God has willed, and that in this scheme of thinking hold a treasure consisting of the wisdom of experience of previous generations. The nature of the state therefore calls for humility and modesty from the present generation, recognising that it owes its existence entirely to those generations on whose shoulders it stands, and that it has a responsibility towards those generations who will stand on their shoulders as well. This reverential mind-set is in line with an acknowledgement of a divinely given moral order. It reflects the traditional

⁵⁹³ Burke, *Reflections*, 82.

natural-law tenet that the state is given and willed by God, and that political institutions are a material and local expression of natural morality.⁵⁹⁴

3. Summary

Summarising Burke's view on change and progress, we have shown that Burke does not hesitate to acknowledge that the French government and Church had abuses and vices that required reform. While Burke does not explicitly state by what norm he has made this assessment, it is fair to deduce from his view of 'genuine history' as history that developed in line with right order, that rectification of 'false' historical development may be accomplished by bringing it in line again with this moral order. Burke's view, that reform needs to be limited by the aim to preserve, further points to a natural-law framework according to which he makes his judgement of the value of historical development. Burke's preservation-requirement draws out three additional demonstrations of his traditional natural-law mind-set: firstly, the moral unity and shared values implied by his definition of society as a multi-generational partnership; secondly, society's stewardship for posterity of the trust of European Christian civilisation and its foundation in submission to a higher law and an honour code; and, thirdly, the acknowledgement that the state is sacred and given by God, and consequently requires a reverential, pious attitude when approached with the intent to reform.

⁵⁹⁴ A. P. D'Entrèves, *The Medieval Contribution to Political Thought: Thomas Aquinas, Marsilius of Padua, Richard Hooker* (New York: The Humanities Press, 1959), 24.

B. Groen's Reform Standard

Similarly to Burke, Groen is not opposed to reform, nor naïve about the degenerated pre-revolutionary situation in France, or in the Netherlands. He, too, is willing to criticise defects and abuses in the French, and Dutch, government, and argues that these could have been repaired without destroying the whole structure, that 'no revolution was required, since reform would have been possible'. Groen quotes *Reflections* approvingly, stating:

Burke was right when he reproached the French: "You might ... have profited of our example [of 1688], and have given to your recovered freedom [of 1789] a correspondent dignity. ... You might have repaired those walls; you might have built those old foundations ... but you chose to act as if you had never been moulded into civil society and had everything to begin anew. You began ill, because you began by despising everything that belonged to you."⁵⁹⁵ The Netherlands deserves the same reproof.⁵⁹⁶

Since Groen writes nearly sixty years after the Revolution's initial eruption, his critique of revolutionary changes includes not just the original French ones but also the changes that were as a consequence incorporated over this timespan in the Netherlands. Whereas Burke, because of his abhorrence for the revolutionary destruction of the state and its artificial, theoretical reconstruction, seems only negative about the revolutionary changes, Groen is not as completely critical or categorically dismissive. He acknowledges that the 'Revolution had derived good principles from Christian Europe', that 'good fruits had resulted from the Revolution-era', and that 'in the midst of the follies of revolutionary application,

⁵⁹⁵ Burke, *Reflections*, 30.

⁵⁹⁶ Groen van Prinsterer, *Ongeloof en Revolutie*, 1847, 90–1.

doctrines and institutions of great value had appeared'.⁵⁹⁷ He states for instance that in his 'estimation, political equality irrespective of religious views [which the French Revolution accomplished] is progress'.⁵⁹⁸ He accepts that the Revolution righted 'wrongs that furnished the grounds for bitter and reasonable complaint'. For this reason Groen rejects 'self-interested or hateful disavowal of [the Revolution's] resulting rights', or the 'petty overlooking of improvements that have been brought about by it'.⁵⁹⁹ Groen insists in the strongest terms that he is not seeking 'narrow-minded adherence to the old, because it is old, or rejection of the new, because it is new'. 'No one', he maintains, 'is more averse to disastrous retroactivity than I am'.⁶⁰⁰

Groen does not deny that the Revolution itself was historical, 'or that it had created historical institutions'.⁶⁰¹ He insists that 'human ingenuity cannot recreate what has been generated through the operation of nature and time', and this meant that he also did not approve of any artificial re-creation of the pre-revolutionary situation now that post-revolutionary changes had organically

⁵⁹⁷ Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer, *Verscheidenheden over Staatsregt en Politiek* (Amsterdam: Müller, 1850), 231–2.

'De Revolutie is het bederf geweest ook der goede beginselen die zij aan het Christelijk Europa ontleend had. Dit neemt de waarheid en het gewigt der opmerking niet weg dat, te midden van de dwaasheden der revolutionaire toepassing, leerstellingen en inrigtingen te voorschijn kwamen, van groote waardij, inrigtingen welke niet ten onderste boven gekeerd, maar van het Revolutie-beginsel ontdaan en met historie en regt in overeenstemming moeten worden gebracht.

'Ik viel mij het bewijs geleverd te hebben dat ik voor de goede vruchten, niet van het Revolutie-beginsel, maar van het Revolutie-tijdperk, een geopend oog heb'.

⁵⁹⁸ Groen van Prinsterer, *Christian Political Action*, 9. The context for this comment is a discussion on the separation of church and state, and a privileged church.

⁵⁹⁹ Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer, *Handboek der geschiedenis van het vaderland* (Amsterdam: Wormser, 1895), § 971.

⁶⁰⁰ Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer, *Bijdrage tot herziening der Grondwet in Nederlandsche zin* (1840) republished in: Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer, *Staatsregt en politiek*, vol. 1, *Verspreide Geschriften* (Amsterdam: Höveker, 1859), 199–200.

'Niemand [is] afkeeriger dan ik van rampzalige terugwerking'. ' (...) zonder bekrompen vasthouding aan het oude, omdat het oud, of verwerping van het nieuwe, omdat het nieuw is'.

⁶⁰¹ Groen van Prinsterer, *Verscheidenheden*, 231.

'Wij ontkennen niet dat [de Revolutie] historisch is, of dat zij historische instellingen in het leven geroepen heeft'.

developed. 'Trying to bring back the past' he condemns as 'folly; every such effort will become a hideous caricature'.⁶⁰² He does not wish to 'ignore the revolutionary era', or 'narrow-minded[ly adhere] to that which has become outdated and useless'.⁶⁰³ In all his critique of the Revolution, Groen expressly states that he does not 'deny the Revolution, or its consequences', and that he 'accepts the entire societal situation that has developed to his present day, also where such is a consequence of the Revolution'.⁶⁰⁴ Since he highly regards what has become historically established, his regard also includes those revolutionary changes that have taken on an organic life, and have in their own right become historically established.⁶⁰⁵ He states: 'I do not desire that the Revolution be removed from history, of which it forms one of her most instructive parts, as though it had not happened; nor that rejection of its ideology be paired with disavowing those rights that have been acquired during its dominance'.⁶⁰⁶

⁶⁰² Ibid., 241–2. Groen quotes Joseph Fiévée, *Correspondance et relations de J. Fiévée avec Bonaparte: premier consul et empereur, pendant onze années (1802 à 1813)*, vol. 1 (Paris: Desrez, 1836), 34.

'Het is onzin, schrijft Fiévée, te willen terugroepen wat voorbij is. "On ne refait pas le passé; tout initiative à cet égard ne tarde pas à devenir une hideuse caricature." (...) Het menselijk vernuft eindelijk, kan niet herscheppen wat door de werking van natuur en tijd tot stand gebracht werd'.

⁶⁰³ Groen van Prinsterer, *Handboek*, 1895, § 971.

⁶⁰⁴ Groen van Prinsterer, *Verscheidenheden*, 232–3.

'Niet de Revolutie ontken ik; niet de uitkomsten der Revolutie, maar het revolutionair beginsel verwerp ik. Ik neem den geheelen maatschappelijke toestand, gelijk die, ten gevolge ook der Revolutie, zich heeft ontwikkeld tot op den huidigen dag; maar ik beweer dat Staat en Maatschappij, in hun tegenwoordige gesteldheid en vorm, voortaan, met uitsluiting van verderfelijke begrippen, aan den heilrijken en heiligenden invloed der onveranderlijke en hoogste waarheid moeten worden ondergeschikt'.

⁶⁰⁵ Groen van Prinsterer, *Proeve*, 1834, 170 (footnote).

There is no clear timeframe for when Groen deems development to have become historically established, but from a comment by him stating that one reason for his respect for a newly written constitution is that it has been in use for a period of 'nearly twenty years' suggests that a mere two decades is enough: Groen van Prinsterer, *Proeve*, 1858, 88.

⁶⁰⁶ Groen van Prinsterer, *Grondwetherziening en Eensgezindheid*, 483.

'Ik begeer niet dat de Revolutie uit de Geschiedenis, waarvan zij een der leerrijkste gedeelten uitmaakt, alsof ze niet gebeurd ware, worde geligt; ook niet dat de verwerping van de theorie gepaard ga met miskennen der regten die zich tijdens haar overmagt hebben gevormd'.

1. Groen's Norm for Weighing Reform

Groen's selective acceptance of revolutionary changes requires that he explain by what norm he makes his selection. As we have discussed in chapter three, Groen is 'not one of the categorical friends of all that is old. I, too,' he argues, 'am pleased with what is new, that is *as long as it is not in conflict with truth and justice*'.⁶⁰⁷ What Groen advocates is 'respect for historical development', and for 'all rights, also those acquired in the revolutionary era'. His aim is for 'God's right' to be upheld, which is practically done by the 'preservation and improvement in its anti-revolutionary, its Christian-historic meaning' of the post-revolutionary constitution.⁶⁰⁸ Groen's 'guiding standard for anti-revolutionary practice' is the 'resistance to every false principle', and a resistance that is importantly 'with and by respect for every acquired right'.⁶⁰⁹ These statements highlight three aspects of Groen's reform standard: alignment to 'truth and justice', distinction between false and right 'principle', and respect for 'acquired rights'. All three are aspects of the doctrine of the divine right of government, which aims to see 'God's right' upheld in the arena of the state. They are different angles of the same right-order stance.

⁶⁰⁷ Groen van Prinsterer, *Verscheidenheden*, 242. Emphasis added.

The Dutch word '*regt*' is here translated 'justice'. As pointed out in footnote 34, it could also mean 'law', 'right', 'legitimacy', 'claim', similarly to the Latin '*ius*'.

'Ik behoor (...) niet tot de onvoorwaardelijke vrienden van al wat oud is. Ook mij bevalt wat nieuw is; namelijk wanneer het niet tegen waarheid en regt strijdt.'

⁶⁰⁸ Groen van Prinsterer, *Proeve*, 1858, 76 (footnote).

'Een tijdvak van 40 jaren voorbij te willen zien, is een verlangen dat tegen den eerbied voor historische ontwikkeling strijdt, en, ofschoon het revolutionair beginsel behoort afgezworen te worden, men is verplicht alle regten, ook die in den revolutietijd verkregen, te ontzien. Doch wat is het dan dat de nederlandsche Grondwet behoeft? (...) behoud en verbetering in antirevolutionairen, in christelijk-historischen zin.'

See also Groen van Prinsterer, *Verscheidenheden*, 232.

⁶⁰⁹ Groen van Prinsterer, *Grondwetherziening en Eensgezindheid*, 482. Emphasis added.

'Bestrijding van elk leugenachtig beginsel met en door eerbiediging van ieder verkregen regt, ziedaar wat ik als rigtsnoer aangeprezen heb, telken male, voor de anti-revolutionaire praktijk.'

a) *Alignment to 'Truth and Justice' or 'Nature and Law'*

Groen uses the concept 'truth and justice' extensively, often interchanging the terms 'justice' (or 'law'), 'nature', 'truth', and 'history'.⁶¹⁰ They are terms that alone and in conjunction with each other express what is real, what Groen calls 'the essence of things'. They give expression to the given moral order, of which 'genuine history' is the 'imprint and reflection'.⁶¹¹ The essential reality of the moral order that these terms convey Groen regards as a practical touchstone for the testing of revolutionary theory. It also tests the durability and viability of the reforms that it has brought about. They are the 'insurmountable obstacles' that the revolutionary theory faces —the reality-check that blocks its unhampered progress. This is so because the abstract revolutionary theory that the *philosophes* have thought up is false and divorced from reality and from a theocentric moral order. Its practice must consequently result in an 'unavoidable collision with truth and justice'.⁶¹²

The argument that practical experience shows to what extent a theory lines up with reality is one that Burke also made when he reminded the House of Commons that 'one of the ways of discovering that [a theory] is a false theory is by comparing it with practice. This is the true touchstone of all theories, which regard man and the affairs of men, —Does it suit his nature in general? —does it suit his nature as modified by his habits?'⁶¹³

⁶¹⁰ The Dutch term for 'justice' and 'law' is the same: '*regt*', what in Latin is expressed by '*ius*'. Here the context makes clear that 'justice' is the better translation, but at other times it is 'law'.

The concept is referred to as 'history and law' in *Ibid.*, 337, 369.

⁶¹¹ Groen van Prinsterer, *Proeve*, 1858, 64.

⁶¹² Groen van Prinsterer, *Ongeloof en Revolutie*, 1847, 222–3.

⁶¹³ Burke, 'Speech on the Representation of the Commons in Parliament', 97.

Groen's reference to 'truth and justice' is a reference to right order. He presupposes that because the revolutionary theory is not aligned to it, its application cannot but display the theory's faulty essence. This is so because objective truth remains true despite its denouncement as 'error and prejudice'. Groen argues wryly that the move 'to renounce immutable truth does not convert falsehood into truth', any less than 'the denial of God means the destruction of God', or 'the denial of human depravity achieves human perfection', in the same way that 'the blind person's inability to see the sun does not make it shine less brightly'.⁶¹⁴

Hence Groen's reference to 'truth and justice' marks his insistence that the norm for accepting revolutionary changes is their alignment to 'God's unchanging ordinances', to 'unchangeable principles', and the 'essence of things'. In other words, the norm for accepting revolutionary changes is alignment to right order. Right order is knowable as 'truth and justice', or 'nature and law'. As we have noted above, this focus on natural revelation through experience is an expression of traditional natural law. Groen is happy to learn from the observation of nature or experience, interpreted through an understanding of the world that is Scripturally informed. He does not interpret nature or experience through Scholastic natural-law reasoning. The natural-law aspect of Groen's conditional reform standard, is, as we have noted above, restricted to its Calvinistic expression. It allows Groen to make a value judgement and determine whether a specific revolutionary change is a destructive change or a healthy reform.

⁶¹⁴ Groen van Prinsterer, *Ongeloof en Revolutie*, 1847, 224–5, 229, 256. Our and Van Dyke's translation.

b) *Resistance to Every False Principle*

Groen's right-order stance in the face of reform is also expressed by the way he promotes the 'resistance to every false principle' as his 'guiding standard for anti-revolutionary practice'.⁶¹⁵ In this respect as well, the veracity of ideological principles must be assessed by their deviation from, or alignment to, Scripture. Because of its contradiction to Scriptural teaching Groen maintains that all that has been built on an optimistic view of man is built on a false foundation that cannot stand. This is so because of its disregard for man's fallen nature, and its assumption 'that the state arose from human consent' and is 'an artificial production' instead of 'a product of nature'.⁶¹⁶ Real reform of abuses, and authentic hope for the 'regulation of Society and reconciliation of that which was old with that which was new', Groen insists, can for this reason only be achieved 'through the dismissal of those misconceptions that have been dominant since 1795, also in practical matters, and through the acceptance of those authentic principles which can stand the test of all times and all circumstances'.⁶¹⁷ True principles mirror 'the highest truth', the reality of God's existence and the fact that He has divinely ordered the world. The creaturely duty of man to revere God and obey His laws are part of this order.⁶¹⁸ Acknowledgement of this divinely given moral order and adherence to its truth is the Christian principle. It upholds 'God's right'. A denial of 'God's right', a dismissal of right order, on the other hand,

⁶¹⁵ Groen van Prinsterer, *Grondwetherziening en Eensgezindheid*, 482.

'Bestrijding van elk leugenachtig beginsel met en door eerbiediging van ieder verkregen regt, ziedaar wat ik als rigtsnoer aangeprezen heb, telken male, voor de anti-revolutionaire praktijk'.

⁶¹⁶ Groen van Prinsterer, *Ongeloof en Revolutie*, 1847, 38.

⁶¹⁷ Groen van Prinsterer, *Handboek*, 1895, § 971.

'Behoud en eerbiediging van al wat een regtmatic aanzijn had verkregen; regeling der Maatschappij en verzoening van hetgeen oud met hetgeen nieuw was, door ter zijdelegging der wanbegrippen die sedert 1795 ook in de praktijk den boventoon gevoerd hadden, en naar beginsels wier echtheid in alle tijden en onder alle omstandigheden proef houdt'.

⁶¹⁸ Groen van Prinsterer, *Proeve*, 1858, 95. Groen van Prinsterer, *Verscheidenheden*, 233.

is what feeds ‘every false principle’, since it denies God and the universal moral order that emanates from Him. Instead it positions man as the original propelling force of society, and crowns man’s will as the foundation of the state. In its negation of God as Origin and Creator, and of mankind as created with a corresponding duty towards God and each other, the revolutionary dogma with its false principles is ultimately founded on an attitude that is rebellious and anarchistic towards God and His established order. The standard for reform is thus to be measured by the reform’s alignment to divinely given moral order. ‘God’s right’ must in all reforms be upheld. The Christian principle must be given primacy.

c) *Respect for Every Acquired Right*

The third angle on right order that Groen’s reform standard gives expression to is his insistence that reform should be done ‘with and by respect for every acquired right’.⁶¹⁹ Acquired rights are an expression of government that upholds ‘God’s right’. They have in this context ‘received a rightful existence’.⁶²⁰ They are, as we have shown in chapter three,

the slowly ripening fruits of the principle of justice whose action in time, far from bowing to the events, subjects the unformed mass of facts and circumstances to its regulating and purifying influence. Justice, in a philosophical sense essential and historical *par excellence*, was placed above History. It was this dominion of Right over fact that gave rise to a whole series of acquired rights. Now,

⁶¹⁹ Groen van Prinsterer, *Grondwetherziening en Eensgezindheid*, 482. Groen van Prinsterer, *Ongeloof en Revolutie*, 1868, 6, 41. Our translation.

⁶²⁰ Groen van Prinsterer, *Handboek*, 1895, § 971.
‘regmatig bestaan’

any particular combination of these rights determined the distinctiveness of a state, forming its natural constitution.⁶²¹

As a local expression of the universal principle of justice, acquired rights in their unique combination make up the constitution of the historical state, and shape 'the national life of the people'.⁶²² Acquired rights are 'historic rights' because they too are an expression of moral order, as is 'genuine history'. Man in this view is not morally free to determine society based on his own volition or insight. Political society is instead based on 'justice [that] is grounded in the law and ordering of God'.⁶²³ God's moral order insists that 'the unformed mass of facts and circumstances' be subjected to the 'regulating and purifying influence' of 'the principle of justice'. Respect for acquired, historic rights is an expression of upholding 'God's right'. It is a basic feature of traditional Dutch society and constitutional theory. This aspect of Groen's reform standard thereby echoes Burke's assertion that to improve one needs to pay due attention to the causes that have produced the state, so as to harness the same powerful, invigorating causes that originally lay at the base of its creation. Only thus may political society hope to be upheld and re-invigorated where decay has set in.

⁶²¹ Groen van Prinsterer, *Ongeloof en Revolutie*, 1847, 45–6.

⁶²² Groen van Prinsterer, *Ongeloof en Revolutie*, 1868, 41. Groen van Prinsterer, *Proeve*, 1858, 88.

'Het zamenstel dezer [verkregen] regten, waarin de eigenaardige vorm van het staatsleven te voorschijn treedt, maakt de natuurlijke staatsregeling uit'.

'Ik eerbiedig de Grondwet, die door een bijna twintigharig bestaan en door de heiligheid van den eed aanspraak op gehoorzaamheid heeft, doch ik erken tevens een hooger gezag; het gezag van de waarheid, van het regt, van de wezenlijkheid, gelijk ze in het volksbestaan voortleeft'.

⁶²³ Groen van Prinsterer, *Ongeloof en Revolutie*, 1868, 6. Our translation.

'(...) de grondslag van het regt [ligt] in de wet en ordeninge Gods'.

2. Factually Accurate Portrayal of the Historical State

a) *Respect for Acquired Rights*

‘Respect for acquired rights’ as an expression of the divine right of government formed very much the basis of the historical Dutch custom-based constitution. This is highlighted by the adamant way the northern Dutch Provinces insisted on this principle in the face of Spanish oppression, eventually sparking the Dutch Revolt (1568-1648), and the formation of the Republic of the Seven United Provinces, also called the Dutch Republic. The way the Revolt upheld historic rights mirrors Groen’s insistence that reform must be done by and with respect for acquired rights. In order to bring this aspect of Groen’s reform standard into greater focus, and show that Groen’s reference to this element of the Dutch historical state is factually accurate, we will briefly outline here the historical and constitutional situation at the time of the Revolt.

While the Dutch Republic did not have a written constitution as the term is understood today, the basic principles the Provinces acknowledged with respect to sovereign power and its limitations may be extrapolated from the Treaty of the Union of Utrecht of 1579.⁶²⁴ The Treaty united mostly northern Dutch provinces and towns in a defensive alliance against the armies of King Philip II of Spain, and its principles ‘included the sovereignty of each of the provinces (a principle that was never abandoned), the freedom of conscience, (...) and respect for the medieval charters of liberties and privileges of regions, towns and

⁶²⁴ De Savornin Lohman, *Onze Constitutie*, 45. See also Groen van Prinsterer, *Handboek*, 1895, § 183.

‘Meer dan twee eeuwen bleef de Unie historische grondwet van het Gemeenebest’.

corporations'.⁶²⁵ As an arrangement of public law, the Dutch Republic displayed a 'strange mixture of old and new, of medieval and modern elements', legal historian Professor Raoul C. Van Caenegem⁶²⁶ points out. It married 'elements of striking modernity: the abolition of [the] monarchy,⁶²⁷ the considerable degree of religious tolerance, the disappearance of the clergy as a privileged estate⁶²⁸ and the federal form of government', with conspicuously medieval elements. Of the latter the most important for our study are the medieval origin of the provincial and general states, and 'the ingrained respect for acquired rights and for the privileges of social groups, towns and corporations'.⁶²⁹ As we have discussed in chapter three, the impetus to uphold 'God's right' which is expressed by the divine right of government fosters this 'ingrained respect for acquired rights'. This respect permeated all of the United Provinces' arrangement. The abolition of monarchy that resulted from the union of the Seven Provinces is a clear example. Contrary to what may be assumed, the rebellious provinces and towns did not contest the monarchy and had originally continued to recognise King Philip II as monarch. Even a decade after the revolt had started, when the Treaty of the Union of Utrecht of 23 January 1579 brought together towns and provinces that were resolved to continue the resistance to Spain after a number of French-speaking towns and provinces were reconciled with King Philip in the Treaty of the Union

⁶²⁵ Van Caenegem, *An Historical Introduction to Western Constitutional Law*, 143.

⁶²⁶ Professor Emeritus of Medieval History and of Legal History at the University of Ghent, Belgium, and at one time Corresponding Fellow of both the British Academy and the Medieval Academy of America, President of the Royal Academy of Sciences, Arts and Fine Arts of Belgium (1988), Arthur L. Goodhart Professor of Legal Science at Cambridge (1984-85), Sir Henry Saville Fellow at Merton College, Oxford (1989), and Erasmus Lecturer at Harvard (1991): R. C. Van Caenegem, *Law, History, the Low Countries and Europe* (London: The Hambledon Press, 1994), ix.

⁶²⁷ As has been noted earlier, the abolition of the monarchy was never the aim, but only a practical by-product of the Dutch Revolt. See also Groen van Prinsterer, *Handboek*, 1895, § 183, 188-9.

⁶²⁸ On the 'disappearance of the clergy as a privileged estate' it must be noted that this did not mean that the religious voice had lost influence in society. On the contrary, the Dutch Republic was given existence by the Dutch Reformed Church, making it in effect a 'Church-State', since the Church had been established before the State was.

⁶²⁹ Van Caenegem, *An Historical Introduction to Western Constitutional Law*, 146-7.

of Arras of 6 January 1579, the rights of the king and the monarchy were expressly upheld. When in 1581 the Provinces eventually declared that Philip II had abandoned the throne, because he had acted as a tyrant, not as a prince, they did not seek to shed the monarchy, nor did they seek self-government.⁶³⁰ In fact, the Act of Abjuration of 1581⁶³¹ 'made it clear that Philip was to be replaced by another prince', a search to that effect having begun as early as 1576, which was a full eight years into the revolt, and eventually only abandoned by the States General in 1587 because of the failure to find an acceptable candidate.⁶³² Only then was it decided to 'go ahead without monarch and accept the republican form of government'.⁶³³ But even then, 'the ingrained respect for acquired rights' and privileges manifested itself in the way 'the House of Orange, the descendants of William the Silent, [continued to play] a quasi-monarchical role' in the Dutch Republic, 'as it was from their ranks that the stadholders were normally (in a later phase exclusively) recruited'.⁶³⁴ Hence, Groen is factually accurate in his assessment that respect for acquired rights was the common threat and basic feature of the historic Dutch arrangement of state. Respect for acquired rights undergirded Dutch national experience and custom, and the inherited liberties that went back to medieval times.

⁶³⁰ The words of the Act of Abjuration read: 'A King who, instead of protecting his subjects, seeks to persecute and oppress them, to take away their *ancient liberties*, and command and use them as slaves, must not be regarded a Prince, but rather as a tyrant': Groen van Prinsterer, *Handboek*, 1895, § 188. Emphasis added.

⁶³¹ '*Acte van Verlatinghe*', literally 'Act of Abandonment'. Signed 26 July.

⁶³² Among those considered had been William the Silent, who was assassinated in 1584, and Queen Elizabeth I of England, who refused the offer but sent Robert Dudley, earl of Leicester as governor-general of the Netherlands, a position he held from 1585-87.

⁶³³ Van Caenegem, *An Historical Introduction to Western Constitutional Law*, 148.

⁶³⁴ *Ibid.*, 143.

b) Spheres of Sovereignty

There is an additional element to Groen's insistence that reform be done 'with and by respect for acquired rights', given concrete expression by the Dutch Republic with its medieval 'ingrained respect for acquired rights and the privileges of social groups, towns and corporations'. It is found in the diffused and limited sovereignty which fuelled such respect for historic rights, and in turn characterised the United Provinces. This is the concept of sovereignty of spheres, which we have discussed in chapter three. Its plurality of authority structures, each with their own rights and liberties, which in turn were defined, and limited, by the rights and liberties of others, has historically been a characteristic feature of Dutch political society.⁶³⁵

In its diffused and limited sovereignty the Dutch Republic stands in stark contrast to both the French and Batavian Republic, the written constitution of both of which acknowledged centralised and thus ultimately absolute sovereignty. The Dutch Republic upheld 'the liberties that we have inherited from our forefathers'. It recognised the divine right of government, which meant it was aligned with right order and those theocentric 'truths that are older, holier, and more enduring than [those championed by anthropocentric,] theoretical arrangements of state'. The theoretical arrangement that the revolutionary state is, is not sourced in divine, just order, but in man's will, in 'the arbitrariness of centralising constitutions'.⁶³⁶

⁶³⁵ Groen van Prinsterer, *Handboek*, 1895, § 972.

⁶³⁶ Groen van Prinsterer, *Verspreide Geschriften*, 1:199–200.

'Niemand [is] afkeeriger dan ik van rampzalige terugwerking; maar wenschelijk acht ik, zonder onbillijke reactie tegen personen of instellingen, zonder bekrompen vasthouding aan het oude, omdat het oud, of verwerping van het nieuwe, omdat het nieuw is, op te rigten hetgeen, onregmatig ter

3. Dutch Unwritten Constitution

It is interesting to note that despite the fact that the original Dutch unwritten constitution was deemed to no longer have legal validity after the fall of the Dutch Republic, Groen seems to insist that inherited liberties continue to apply. This is so because the original arrangement is 'older, holier, and more enduring than theoretical arrangements of state', since it gives expression to the essence of things, to right order. It gives expression to law that is *found*, not made, because of its alignment to justice, as opposed to merely positive, man-made law championed by the new written constitutions that were modelled after French revolutionary ideology. Elsewhere, Groen elaborates on this conviction, stating: 'I respect the [new Dutch written] Constitution, (...) but I also recognise a higher authority; the authority of truth, of justice, of essential reality, as it lives on in the national life of the people'.⁶³⁷ This is further illustrated by the remark that follows Groen's approval of Burke's assessment that the abuses in the French system could have been reformed and restored, without the need for complete overthrow and abolition of the government. He compares Burke's observation with his own Dutch situation: 'To be sure', Groen states, 'I do not offer laurels to a [Dutch] constitution that had degenerated into a system of prerogatives for the urban magistracy. But I do claim that by searching out its basic features in their historic origin every desirable improvement would have been attainable'.⁶³⁸ As we have mentioned above, this reference to the constitution's 'basic features in their

neêr geworpen, nog vatbaar is voor hestel; de regten uit de revolutie ontsproten te beschermen; de vrijheden die wij van de voorvaders geërfd hebben, boven de willekeur van centraliserende constitutiën te stellen, en bovenal die waarheden te erkennen, welke ouder, heiliger, en duurzaamer dan theoretische staatsregelingen zijn'.

⁶³⁷ Groen van Prinsterer, *Proeve*, 1858, 88.

'Ik eerbiedig de Grondwet, die door een bijna twintigharig bestaan en door de heiligheid van den eed aanspraak op gehoorzaamheid heeft, doch ik erken tevens een hooger gezag; het gezag van de waarheid, van het regt, van de wezenlijkheid, gelijk ze in het volksbestaan voortleeft'.

⁶³⁸ Groen van Prinsterer, *Ongeloof en Revolutie*, 1847, 91.

historic origin' as a guide for 'desirable improvement', similarly to Groen's respect for every acquired right, echoes Burke's assertion that to improve one needs to pay due attention to the causes that have originally produced the state. Groen identifies these basic features of the historical state as its 'recognition of the source of sovereign authority, which is received from God and dedicated to God; liberty and independence in the spheres of one's own sovereignty, defined and limited by the rights and liberties of others'.⁶³⁹

Hence, Groen's reference to 'respect for every acquired right' comprises an acknowledgment that Dutch society's basic feature in its historical origin was shaped by the recognition that sovereignty ultimately emanates from God, and is limited by His will. It is a reference to Dutch historical acceptance of the divine right of government, which is the Christian constitutional theory that aims to 'safeguard liberty as much as it does sovereign authority, by a law that is higher than mere human law'.⁶⁴⁰

4. Abstract Rights

One additional observation needs to be made before we leave the topic of 'acquired rights' as part of Groen's reform standard. It is the fact that Groen does not contrast historic, acquired rights with revolutionary, abstract rights, which is at first glance surprising because of the prominent role that abstract rights played

⁶³⁹ Groen van Prinsterer, *Handboek*, 1895, § 972.

'Erkentenis van de oorsprong der Oppermagt, aan God ontleend, aan God gewijd; vrij en onafhankelijk in den kring van haar eigen regt, door de regten en vrijheden van anderen omschreven en beperkt'.

⁶⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

'Vrijheid zou, evenzeer als het gezag, onder bescherming eener hoogere dan menselijke wet worden gesteld'.

in French revolutionary thinking. In chapter three we have shown that the reason for this is Groen's right-order stance. His focus does not contrast historic rights with revolutionary, theoretical rights, but instead defends 'the liberties that we have inherited from our forefathers over against the arbitrariness of centralising *constitutions*'. The distinction he makes is between inherited liberties that reflect 'truths that are older, holier, and more enduring' on the one hand, and the revolutionary 'theoretical *arrangements of state*' on the other.⁶⁴¹ Thus Groen's contrast is between different conceptions of the state. It highlights our assertion in chapter three that rights have a political context attached to them. The constitutional theory within which rights are defined and exercised is important. This is why in his contraposition of the revolutionary against the historical state, Groen refers to acquired or historic rights, the combination of which determines the historical state constitutionally, as a synonym for the historical state. His argument is one of theocentric constitutional theory, as we have discussed in chapter three. It upholds the divine right of government, and posits that rights are 'circumscribed and confirmed by the unchangeable laws and ordinances of God'.⁶⁴²

Groen's theocentric constitutional attack on the revolutionary state demolishes both it and its abstract rights-fruits. This approach recognises the dependence of abstract rights on the revolutionary state, as well as the inherent flaw of the

⁶⁴¹ Groen van Prinsterer, *Verspreide Geschriften*, 1:200. Emphasis added.

'(...) de vrijheden die wij van de voorvaders geërfd hebben, boven de willekeur van centraliserende constitutiën te stellen, en bovenal die waarheden te erkennen, welke ouder, heiliger, en duurzaamer dan theoretische staatsregelingen zijn'.

⁶⁴² Groen van Prinsterer, *Ongeloof en Revolutie*, 1847, 249.

anthropocentric constitutional theory that makes rights ‘to depend on the good pleasure of the State, that is to say, on the will of changeable men’.⁶⁴³

5. The Constitutional Nature of the Polemical Argument

In Groen’s limited reference to abstract or natural rights he differs from Burke, who extensively addresses the French revolutionary ‘declaration of the rights of man’ and specifically refutes the assumption made by some in English society, notably Dr Price, that the Glorious Revolution of 1688 had given the English ‘fundamental rights’.⁶⁴⁴ While Burke contrasts French abstract, natural rights with the inherited rights of Englishmen, and in this respect differs from Groen’s approach, Burke’s polemical focus is nonetheless also one of constitutional theory, as is Groen’s. This is clear from the way Burke makes his argument: in what resembles an overview lesson on English constitutional law, Burke demolishes the radical view that the English have ‘natural rights’ by demonstrating that the foundational legal documents for England’s arrangement of state ‘from Magna Carta to the Declaration of Right’, as well as all great men of the law, including Sir Edward Coke (1552-1634) and Sir William Blackstone (1723-1780), have sought to ‘prove the pedigree of our liberties’, and show that ‘it has been the uniform policy of our constitution to claim and assert our liberties, as an *entailed inheritance* derived to us from our forefathers’.⁶⁴⁵ Burke’s argument as to why Englishmen do not have natural, abstract but inherited rights hinges on English constitutional law. For this reason Burke appraises the legal

⁶⁴³ Ibid.

⁶⁴⁴ Burke, *Reflections*, 14. The ‘fundamental rights’ that the English had received at the time of the Glorious Revolution according to Dr Price were the rights ‘1. “To choose our own governors;” 2. “To cashier them for misconduct;” 3. “To frame a government for ourselves.”’

⁶⁴⁵ Ibid., 27–9.

documents that marked English constitutional history, and from these makes a legally accurate assessment that they never advanced any 'new form of government' or a 'new code of law', but restated instead existing law and ancient liberties.⁶⁴⁶ The contrast Burke paints between the inherited rights of Englishmen and the natural, abstract rights of the French is one that is embedded in the different contexts for these rights. In contrast to the French rights of men that have sprouted from the *philosophes'* theories, stand the rights of Englishmen that have reliably been acknowledged and re-affirmed throughout English constitutional history, that have been given expression in England's ancient constitution since time immemorial, and that have been upheld and specified by English judges and great legal minds through the generations. Burke's polemical argument *for* the rights of Englishmen and *against* the French rights of men thus centres on principles of English common law, particularly English constitutional law, for their substantiation. Because the English unwritten constitution is a local application of the universal moral law, Burke's argument is in final analysis grounded in right order. This means that even though Burke's and Groen's attack on the validity of 'abstract rights' seems different, they are identical in their

⁶⁴⁶ As Frederic Ogg, one time Professor of Political Science in the University of Wisconsin, points out, Magna Carta, England's most important political and constitutional document, was 'intended primarily as a statement of *existing* feudal law'. It 'contained *little that was new*. (...) There was no thought of a new form of government, or of a new code of law, but only of a redress of the grievances flowing from the misrule of Richard and John. *Not a new system of law, but good government under an old one, was the object*'. For this reason the charter pledges 'cities, boroughs, and villages (...) their "*ancient liberties*"': Frederic Austin Ogg, *English Government and Politics* (New York: Macmillan, 1947), 14–6. Emphasis added.

Besides the Magna Carta and the Declaration of Right, Burke also mentions the Petition of Right. This 1628 document, though not a statute, and technically more in class with a judicial decision, is 'in spirit, purpose, and method exactly in line with the Great Charter'. As George Adams, one time Professor of History at Yale College, makes clear, it 'asserts that the things to which it demands the king's agreement were already the law of the land, and it is based upon the supposition that the king has shown himself so unwilling to regard these principles that it must obtain his formal pledge, binding upon his successors as in 1215, to respect them in the future': George Burton Adams, *Constitutional History of England* (New York: Holt, 1921), 294–5. Burke quotes Parliament's message to King Charles I as set out in the Petition of Right accurately when he writes: "Your subjects have *inherited* this freedom," claiming their franchises not on abstract principles "as the rights of men," but as the rights of Englishmen, and as a patrimony derived from their forefathers': Burke, *Reflections*, 27–8.

reference to right order as the underlying reason for their views. The difference lies in the fact that Groen's argument of constitutional theory points to Scripture for its grounding, while Burke's argument of constitutional theory is grounded in English constitutional law. Groen's constitutional theory is theocentric and *Christian*. It is the doctrine of the 'divine right of government'. Burke's is *English*, and as such is implicitly Christian because of the Christian foundations of English common law. It too is theocentric in its recognition of right order.

6. Summary

Based on our analysis, we may in summary conclude that Groen's norm for accepting revolutionary changes pivots on the question of whether or not these changes align with right order, with immutable truths and higher law, which are knowable through experience —the revelation of nature— and through the revelation of Scripture. Because acquired rights are an expression of right order, they must be respected, also in reform. They define the historical state and are a synonym for it. This explains why Groen contra-poses historic *rights* against the revolutionary *state*, and his indirect attack on abstract rights (in contrast to Burke's direct attack) through his attack on the revolutionary state. His focus, as also Burke's, is alignment to right order. In the context of the state this is the doctrine of the 'divine right of government', what may also be called the theocentric, Christian constitutional law. The final pages of *Unbelief and Revolution* best summarise Groen's reform standard:

When I set my sights on true restoration, my concern is not a return to obsolete forms, or a sudden inversion of the social order, or a

disregard for the rights of all in the interest of a party. Suggestions of the sort I would condemn as being consistent with the Revolution spirit. But, *instructed and guided by experience and by the everlasting Word of Revelation*, I maintain *the immutability of truths*, the forsaking of which has led to those false ideas whose impotence and perniciousness is becoming clearer every day. *The real need of our time is the application, modified in accordance with circumstance, of Christian constitutional law.*⁶⁴⁷

C. Summary: Burke's and Groen's Use of 'History'

To summarise our comparative analysis of Burke's and Groen's normative *use* of 'history' in their critique of the French Revolution we have seen that both Burke and Groen acknowledge that there were abuses and vices in the pre-revolutionary situation in France that required reform. This assessment Groen also extends to the situation in the Netherlands. Neither Burke or Groen oppose change or progress, but both deny that revolution was the only way to rectify the acknowledged abuses. They insist that reform should have been administered, not abolition. Differently from Burke, who is categorically dismissive of the Revolution, Groen acknowledges that some of the revolutionary changes were good and as part of the historical development of the decades after the Revolution have a claim to respect. Groen makes explicit what his guiding standard is for determining whether changes should be upheld, and what of the pre-revolutionary situation should be restored. This is an element of Groen's thought that is missing from Burke's, which may be explained by their different positions on the revolutionary timeline: Burke at its very beginning, and Groen after its military conquest of the rest of Europe, including his own country. While Burke does not provide any explicit standard by which he measures the situation in

⁶⁴⁷ Groen van Prinsterer, *Ongeloof en Revolutie*, 1847, 422–3. Emphasis added.

France to be abusive, the two factors that suggest how he makes a value-judgement about historical development make clear that traditional natural-law doctrine informs his judgement. The *first* is the fact that 'genuine history' for Burke is 'history' that has developed in line with universal natural law and order. In the English context this moral law is expressed in the English constitution. This suggests that to Burke deviation from natural-law principles will lead to what may be called 'unhistorical development', which may be rectified by bringing such 'unhistorical' development in line again with natural moral law. The *second* factor is Burke's insistence that reform should be done with the aim not to abolish and replace, but to preserve. It points to Burke's natural-law mind-set in his acknowledgement of society as willed by God, a multi-generational partnership that shares moral unity and eternal values, and stewards for posterity Christian civilisation with its communal submission to a higher moral order.

In contrast to Burke, Groen is explicit about his reform standard, which highlights three aspects of the doctrine of the 'divine right of government'.

The *first* is the experience-based test of whether the revolutionary changes are aligned to 'truth and justice', to essential reality. This test of experience is similar to the role that natural law plays in Burke's assessment of historical development.

Secondly, though Groen shares Burke's view that universal norms of justice are given unique constitutional expressions in different national contexts, he does not point to Holland's unwritten constitution, in contrast to Burke who finds a practical expression of right order in Britain's unwritten constitution. This is

explained by the fact that the Dutch constitution from the Batavian Republic onwards was no longer an historical, 'natural', unwritten constitution sourced in right order. The written constitutions that had replaced the historical unwritten constitution were sourced in the anthropocentric constitutional theory of the French Revolution. They no longer gave expression to justice as ultimately determined by God, but had made man's consensus and will the basis of law. Groen points instead to Scripture, to which he gives primary importance as a source for the discovery of truth, including historical truth. Scripture informs us whether reform is done in line with God's revealed will. Whatever goes against this standard is performed according to an anti-Christian or false principle. Hence resistance to 'every false principle' is the *second* aspect of Groen's reform standard.

While Groen does not directly point to Holland's unwritten constitution as a standard of reform, the *third* aspect by which reform must be assessed is an implied reference to this unwritten constitution. It consists of Groen's question whether the reform is done 'with and by respect for every acquired right'. This characteristic of the divine right of government expresses a historically accurate basic feature of Dutch society, and is a key formulation of its Christian constitutional theory. Because a particular combination of historic rights constitutionally determined the historical state, this third aspect implicitly echoes Burke's reference to the unwritten English constitution. It also echoes Burke's insistence that reform must be done in order to preserve and in accordance with the same invigorating, powerful causes that fuelled a society's genesis and creative development. Burke's and Groen's definition of these original causes

overlap in that both point to God and to a divine moral order to the world. Respect for acquired or historic rights is a catalyst for the formation of the historical state, as well as for liberty, by the way it limits and contains sovereignty.⁶⁴⁸

We have noted that Groen's polemical argument against the revolutionary state attacks its anthropocentric constitutional roots. It contrasts the revolutionary *state* with historic *rights*, which because of the way they constitute the historical state may be used interchangeably with it. In Groen's attack on the revolutionary state, he only indirectly attacks the abstract rights it allocates to its citizens. In this he is different from Burke who engages the question of the 'rights of men', though Burke's argument is —similarly to Groen's—also one of constitutional theory. The difference between Groen and Burke in this respect is that Groen points to the divine right of government, which is *Christian* constitutional law, while Burke points to *English* constitutional law.

IV. THE WIDER PURPOSE OF BURKE'S AND GROEN'S ARGUMENTS OF 'HISTORY'

While Burke's and Groen's polemical argument of 'genuine history' have many similarities, particularly in its immediate purpose of critiquing the ideology of the French Revolution, the wider purposes for which they use their polemical argument of 'history' are very different. Groen is explicit about this greater purpose of his argument of 'history', while Burke is more circumspect. The frame of reference of Burke's argument of 'history' is an element of Burke's thought that

⁶⁴⁸ See chapter three for the critical analysis.

has received relatively little scholarly attention. The wider purposes of Burke's and Groen's polemical argument of 'history' draws out their similarities and differences in a way that illuminates their thought. For this reason we will critically assess these next.

A. *Christian Apologia: the Purpose of Groen's Argument of 'History'*

We have shown above that Groen understands 'history' to be the 'imprint and reflection of the essence of things', of essential truth, and hence valuable as a tool for rebuttal and fact-checking, for identifying and refuting falsehood and untruth. Because of its witness to truth, 'history' demonstrates the validity of biblical principles and promises, and exposes the fallacy of revolutionary dogma and practice. Groen uses the argument of 'history' to substantiate the truthfulness of his claims. His argument of 'history' hence functions as a witnessing tool. It supports the veracity of general truth-claims, as well as specific Christian Gospel-claims. Groen's argument of 'history' is thus used with a view to imploring his audience to choose faith and obedience to God. Its function is one of Christian *apologia*. Groen openly acknowledges this, as when in 1870 he famously stated that he is a confessor of the Gospel first, before being a statesman.⁶⁴⁹

Groen's ambition to proclaim the Gospel and to use the argument of 'history' to this end is evident from his historical works, which he interlaces with references to Scripture. An obvious example of this is Groen's highly acclaimed *Manual of the*

⁶⁴⁹ Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer, *Aan de kiezers, I-XX* (The Hague: Van Cleef, 1866), n° 3, 16; Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer, *Nederlandsche Gedachten*, vol. 1, Second Series (Amsterdam: Höveker, 1869), n° 27 (7 April 1870).

'Een Staatsman niet! een evangeliebelijder'.

History of the Country.⁶⁵⁰ The title page of this classic work on Dutch national history prominently includes a quote from Psalm 78 that sets the tone of the book. It reads:

We will not hide them from their children, but tell to the coming generation the glorious deeds of the Lord, and His might, and the wonders that He has done. (...) that the next generation might know them, the children yet unborn, and arise and tell them to their children, so that they should set their hope in God and not forget the works of God, but keep His commandments.⁶⁵¹

Similarly, Groen's *Short Overview of the History of the Country* quotes Deuteronomy on its title page: 'Assemble the (...) little ones, (...) that they may hear and learn to fear the LORD your God, and be careful to do all the words of this law'.⁶⁵² Groen further states in the introduction that his purpose for the *Short Overview* is 'to demonstrate what events have historically happened and what their connection to each other was, in light of the Evangelical confession. History too is a sacred trust that has been handed down to us from our forefathers'.⁶⁵³ The view that history is 'a sacred trust' typifies Groen's view of 'history' as an educator of God's ways with a people, and his conviction that lessons may be drawn from history that show God's faithfulness to His promise to honour those

⁶⁵⁰ Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer, *Handboek der geschiedenis van het vaderland, 2 vols* (Leiden: Luchtmans, 1841). First published in 1846.

The book was for more than half a century used as the standard history textbook in Dutch schools. It was a great favourite with Queen Wilhelmina (1880-1962), who is reported to have kept a copy of it on her nightstand: Cees Fasseur, *Wilhelmina: De jonge koningin* (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Balans, 1998), 136. See also Th. Booy, *Het is stil op het Loo ... Overpeinzingen in memoriam koningin Wilhelmina* (Amsterdam: Ten Have, 1963); Th. Booy, 'Koningin Wilhelmina en de gereformeerden', *VU-Magazine* 1 (November 1972): 39-42. Quoted by Van Dyke, *Groen van Prinsterer's Lectures*, 68.

⁶⁵¹ Ps. 78: 4, 6, 7 (ESV).

⁶⁵² Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer, *Kort overzicht van de geschiedenis des vaderlands* (Leiden: Luchtmans, 1841). Deut. 31:12 (ESV).

⁶⁵³ *Ibid.*, iii.

'(...) de toedragt en den zamenhang der gebeurtenissen in het licht der Evangelische belijdenis te stellen. Ook de Historie is een heilig pand dat ons door de Vaderen overgeleverd is'.

who honour Him, not just on an individual level but also on the level of a nation.⁶⁵⁴

The function of Groen's demonstration of God's ways with the Dutch people from history is to implore them to return to God. His aim is to see a reversal from the 'systematic rejections of the Gospel' which has resulted in the Revolution doctrine, which in turn has resulted in the Revolution.⁶⁵⁵ His purpose is to see the Gospel again accepted by the Dutch people and made the plumb line for life, also for political life. Groen seeks to point

to the only fountainhead from which flows in bountiful measure everything we need in order to be strengthened. The well-spring of our life does not lie in the realm of the speculation of some high sounding philosophy, but at the foot of the tree of Calvary, which, by the mercy of God our Saviour, was made the tree of life.⁶⁵⁶

Groen uses the argument of 'history' polemically to discredit revolutionary ideology, but his aim is not limited to the negation of this false doctrine. His greater purpose is a defence of the Gospel. To this he labours, as he openly acknowledged. His own assessment of his primary role and identity is that of confessor of the Gospel, not statesman. His contemporaries shared this evaluation as is illustrated by the words that Groen's friend, pastor L. J. van Rhijn, spoke at his graveside: 'As long as the Gospel of God's grace in Christ is preached in the Netherlands, the name of Groen van Prinsterer will be remembered'.⁶⁵⁷

⁶⁵⁴ Groen van Prinsterer, *Handboek*, 1895, ix. Groen refers to I Sam. 2:30.

⁶⁵⁵ Groen van Prinsterer, *Ongeloof en Revolutie*, 1847, 425.

⁶⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁵⁷ Quoted in Diepenhorst, *Groen van Prinsterer*, 4.

'Zoolang in Nederland het Evangelie van Gods genade in Christus zal worden gepredikt, zal onvergeten blijven de naam van Mr. Groen van Prinsterer!'

A similar self-declared or otherwise attributed sense of calling as a confessor or preacher of the Gospel is missing from Burke. His polemical argument of 'history' is not used in explicit defence of the Christian faith.

**B. *Re-affirmation of the Common Law: the Purpose of Burke's
Argument of 'History'***

The wider purpose for Burke's polemical argument of 'history' is found in the reason Burke gives for publishing *Reflections*. As we have discussed above, the book is written for the *English* public.⁶⁵⁸ In its attack on the French revolutionary state it is a defence of the English historical state as defined by the English constitution. Burke sought to protect England from radical influences from without as well as from within its borders. *Reflections* champions the English liberties, asserted by the constitution 'as *an entailed inheritance* derived to [the English] from [their] forefathers, and to be transmitted to [their] posterity; as an estate specially belonging to the people of this [English] kingdom'.⁶⁵⁹ Burke does so by an appeal to the ancient English constitution. By doing so he affirms in a sophisticated way not just the constitution's expression of the divine moral order in its specific geographical and communal context over many generations. He also re-affirms the ancient constitution's greater context of common law.

Not only is English common law the wider context of Burke's polemical argument of 'history', it also informs the function Burke attributes to 'history', in that it

⁶⁵⁸ Burke wished *Reflections* 'to be, in the first instance, of service to the [English] publick': Letter to Earl Fitzwilliam of 5 June 1791. Cobban and Smith, *Correspondence*, 6:272. Quoted by Goodwin, *Political Genesis*, 336.

⁶⁵⁹ Burke, *Reflections*, 29.

mirrors the function the common law gives to 'history'. By doing so, Burke intends to re-affirm the value of the common law.

That Burke's argument of 'history' is effectively an argument from common law, and not a novel, specific Burkean invention, is an observation that has been convincingly made by legal historian and former James Bar Ames Professor of Law of Harvard Law School, Harold J. Berman. Berman has argued that Burke, and his contemporary Blackstone, are the late eighteenth century's 'more articulate English exponents' of the legal principle of 'historical jurisprudence'. They therefore stand in the tradition of the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century common-law greats Sir Edward Coke (1552-1634), John Selden (1584-1654) and Sir Matthew Hale (1609-1676). Berman persuasively argues that Burke's political philosophy, generally 'characterised as "conservatism,"' is in essence his '1780's and early 1790's' translation of common-law thinking, particularly Hale's integrative, historical jurisprudence.⁶⁶⁰

This reading of Burke as a common-law thinker fits within what Paul Lucas calls a 'tiny and less well-known' group that has argued from the 1950s onward that Burke's traditionalism is 'a partial continuation of the traditional way of thinking of seventeenth-century common lawyers'.⁶⁶¹ This group's work has pointed out that in scholarship at the time, and still today, 'the historical, political or philosophical standpoint is mostly represented in works on Burke', while 'a

⁶⁶⁰ Harold J. Berman, 'The Origins of Historical Jurisprudence: Coke, Selden, Hale', *The Yale Law Journal* 103, no. 7 (May 1994): 1733.

⁶⁶¹ Lucas, 'On Burke's Doctrine of Prescription', 35.

certain gap which concerns his legal philosophy' remains.⁶⁶² Gisela Schell, in her German thesis on 'English Legal Thinking in Edmund Burke's Works', has suggested 'that on the whole the evidence for the importance of English law for Burke's work has remained sparse and incomplete', because 'generally Burke's impact and following has been studied more than his intellectual origin'.⁶⁶³ This merits a brief excursion into these intellectual origins, and the similarities of Burke's use of the argument of 'history' with that of the common law's use, to illuminate further Burke's use of the argument of 'history'.

1. Seventeenth-Century Common Lawyers

a) *Authority of Historical Legal Precedent*

We will start with Coke, at one time England's Attorney General and Chief Justice, whom Burke calls 'that great oracle of our law'.⁶⁶⁴ Coke's most important influence on English law was the result of a clash with King James I. Coke rejected the king's proposition, defended by Coke's antagonist, Lord Chancellor Ellesmere, that 'all law, including common law, has its origins in the will of the sovereign', and that '*Rex est lex loquens*' ('the King is the law speaking').⁶⁶⁵ Coke acknowledged the king's role as 'supreme lawgiver' with 'the absolute power to

⁶⁶² J. B. Jaworskyowski, 'The Legal Philosophy of Edmund Burke' (Doctoral Thesis, University of Oxford, 1950), 3.

⁶⁶³ Schell, 'Englisches Rechtsdenken im Werk Edmund Burkes', 10.

'Daß im ganzen die Hinweise auf die Bedeutung des englischen Rechts für das Werk Burkes spärlich und unausgeführt geblieben sind, hat freilich seinen Grund (...) in der Tatsache, daß allgemein nach Burkes Wirkung und Nachfolge mehr gefragt worden ist als nach seiner geistigen Herkunft'.

⁶⁶⁴ Burke, *Reflections*, 27.

Coke's fundamental influence on the philosophy of English law is found in his identification of "the fundamental law" of England, its unwritten constitution, with the common law itself, and his development of the core English common law belief 'in the unbroken continuity of the common law, and the survival of the authority of its precedents, from early times': Berman, 'Origins of Historical Jurisprudence', 1680–81.

⁶⁶⁵ Michael McConnell, 'Tradition and Constitutionalism before the Constitution', *University of Illinois Law Review*, no. 1 (1998): 178.

appoint and remove judges', and did not dispute the theory of absolute monarchy. But he insisted that 'the king's laws included the laws not only of the reigning monarch but also of his predecessors'.⁶⁶⁶ Berman asserts that in so doing, 'Coke justified judicial decisions and parliamentary positions that had the effect of limiting royal power, on the ground that they were dictated by the historical precedents of English law—precedents endorsed by previous monarchs'.⁶⁶⁷ In this way Coke championed the rule of law and rejected arbitrary rule unbound by accumulated legal wisdom. His position ensured that 'the unbroken continuity of the common law' limited the power of the crown. This unbroken continuity of the law is what Coke's successors John Selden and Sir Matthew Hale 'called "the ancient common law," and what scholars in recent decades have called "the Ancient Constitution."' ⁶⁶⁸

Coke in other words successfully used the argument of 'history' as a legal instrument that limited James I's royal power. In so doing, he located in history 'an authority higher than the King'. In 'the authority of old statutes and judicial decisions' he found his justification for the rejection of 'abuses of the royal prerogative or derogations of the common law'.⁶⁶⁹

⁶⁶⁶ Berman, 'Origins of Historical Jurisprudence', 1674, 1676. (Please note, this and following references are to page numbers of Berman's article, not to dates.)

⁶⁶⁷ Ibid., 1678. Interestingly, the king 'too justified his own actions partly on the basis of their consistency with English legal precedents endorsed by his royal predecessors'.

⁶⁶⁸ Ibid., 1680, 1686. Coke, following Fortescue, traced this continuity back to literally pre-Roman times. His successors were content to trace it back to the Anglo-Saxon period.

⁶⁶⁹ McConnell, 'Tradition and Constitutionalism', 177. Berman, 'Origins of Historical Jurisprudence', 1681. Berman explains that Coke could get away with his stance towards James that history trumped James legal prerogative, 'because English monarchists themselves, and above all King James, continually insisted that the English precedents—which they interpreted quite differently—should be respected. For they, too, felt the need for an historical basis for the legitimacy of the monarchy'.

b) *Philosophical Dimension*

The principle that 'History, which [Coke] saw largely in terms of Tradition and Precedent' has authority,⁶⁷⁰ and such that it trumps even sovereign power, was progressively developed by Selden and Hale to the point that they and their disciples attributed 'a philosophical dimension to the history of the English common law. They asserted, in effect, the normative character of historical experience, putting custom and precedent on a level with equity and legislation as sources of law'. In so doing they 'laid the foundations of a historical jurisprudence that occupied an equal place with natural law theory and legal positivism'. Thus law under their influence came to be understood as 'the balancing of morality and politics in the light of history; it is the balancing of justice and order in the light of experience'.⁶⁷¹

(i) *Spiritual Significance*

A few additional remarks on the role of history within the English common law are in order, before we return to our focus on Burke. The *first* is that 'history' in seventeenth-century England 'acquired a spiritual significance'.⁶⁷² This was a result of English common law's core tenet of dating itself back to time immemorial and claiming to possess an ancient continuity. While this view was

⁶⁷⁰ Berman, 'Origins of Historical Jurisprudence', 1681.

⁶⁷¹ Harold J. Berman, *Law and Revolution II: The Impact of the Protestant Reformations on the Western Legal Tradition* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003), 269.

Berman further explains that they understood law to have 'a moral character (its purpose is to do legal justice) and a political character (its purpose is to maintain legal order)', as well as 'a historical character (its purpose is to preserve and develop the legal traditions of the people whose law it is)'.

For more on the seventeenth-century 'trinitarian view of law' of politics, morality, and tradition (or history), see also Harold J. Berman, 'Toward an Integrative Jurisprudence: Politics, Morality, History', *California Law Review* 76, no. 4 (July 1988): 797–801. F. Smith Fussner, *The Historical Revolution: English Historical Writing and Thought, 1580-1640* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962), xvii.

⁶⁷² Berman, 'Origins of Historical Jurisprudence', 1687.

acknowledged to be a legal *fiction* and in itself is anti-historical, it was nonetheless treated as real and historical.⁶⁷³ This characteristic highlights that for common lawyers history ‘was not a science but a faith’, sometimes even called ‘Coke’s religion’. This spiritual, faith element of ‘history’ conveys its ideological dimension and hence its fitness for use as a general principle for judging always differing legal problems. In addition, it allowed ‘the confirming power of history [to have] the advantage of not being a “theory” in the philosophical sense of the word’. This meant that English common lawyers could purely ‘define the nature, the sources, and the purposes of law in terms of the historical experience of the English people’, and their actual needs, unhampered by ‘the artificial constraints of philosophic theory’.⁶⁷⁴ Thus it was the common law concept of ‘history’ that allowed the English common law to develop according to the local expression of the communally and generationally accepted understanding of justice, and to thus reflect the ‘wisdom of generations’.⁶⁷⁵

(ii) Metaphor

The *second* remark is that ‘history’ was viewed and used by common lawyers as *symbol* or *metaphor*. Reference to what had happened in the past was not used in a way that idealised the ways of the past, or that precluded change and progress. Coke’s ‘theory of the supremacy of the common law was itself a bold innovation,

⁶⁷³ McConnell, ‘Tradition and Constitutionalism’, 184, 186–7.

Anti-historical, since the continuity of common law under Coke assumed the common law’s changelessness. Hale, on the other hand, understood the idea of ancient common law to mean one that was ‘continually changing and adapting’. This, too, meant that the “immemorial” nature of the law was a legal fiction.

⁶⁷⁴ Berman, ‘Origins of Historical Jurisprudence’, 1687–8.

⁶⁷⁵ McConnell, ‘Tradition and Constitutionalism’, 179. McConnell refers to Coke’s specific comment that ‘we are but of yesterday (and therefore had need of the wisdom of those that were before us) (...) No man ought to take upon him to be wiser than the laws’ in *Calvin’s Case*, 77 Eng. Rep. at 381.

which carried radically new applications'. Coke was in this sense 'a radical conservative, who reached back into the remote past not only to strike down innovations of the preceding century of accumulating royal power but also to justify wholly new legal principles'.⁶⁷⁶

The resemblance between common law and its use of 'history' or tradition as an ideological argument that has normative value, and Burke's normative use of 'history' in his critique of the French Revolution is clear. Burke's insistence that reform needs to be done in order to preserve, as well as his openness to reform, is similar to the common law's approach undergirded by its understanding of 'history' as symbol or metaphor. Burke shares a similar respect for the wisdom of the generations that the common law has, exemplified by his words spoken in the House of Commons: 'the individual is foolish; the multitude, for the moment, is foolish, when they act without deliberation; but the species is wise, and, when time is given to it, as a species, it almost always acts right'.⁶⁷⁷ Burke demonstrates the same disdain for abstract metaphysics and for theory that the common law concept of 'history' implies, and he, too, views 'history' as an expression of reality in the particular context of a people, whose historical experience is dictated by their actual needs and circumstances, and not by 'the artificial constraints of philosophic theory'. Burke's 'history' additionally has an almost spiritual significance that mirrors the common law use of 'history', as 'Coke's religion' — more like a faith than like a science.

⁶⁷⁶ Berman, 'Origins of Historical Jurisprudence', 1687–88.

⁶⁷⁷ Burke, 'Speech on the Representation of the Commons in Parliament', 95.

2. Position Vis-à-Vis Hobbes

Another similarity between Burke's 'history' and that of the common law is the position it takes vis-à-vis Thomas Hobbes' thought. Burke's disagreement with Hobbes' assumption that the source of law and government is voluntaristic mirrors the common law rebuttal of it. Hobbes famously opposed Coke's understanding of the common law with its appeal to custom and tradition, and ridiculed both him and custom in his *Dialogue Between a Philosopher and a Student of the Common Laws of England* (1681). In this work Hobbes' Philosopher denies 'that any Custom of its own Nature, can amount to the Authority of a Law', and argues that 'nothing else but right Reason' should dictate what the law is. Since opinions on what right reason is will always diverge, Hobbes relegates law to the command of the sovereign, thus sourcing law ultimately in will and power: 'It is not Wisdom, but Authority that makes a Law. (...) None can make a Law but he that hath the Legislative Power'.⁶⁷⁸ Hobbes' view stands in direct contradiction to that of the common law, and common law sages have consistently attacked it. A prime example is Hale, Coke's intellectual and actual successor as Chief Justice, who argues in his *History of the Common Law* (1713) that it is in the 'Nature of Laws' 'that they are "accommodated to the Conditions, Exigencies and Conveniencies of the People," as those "Exigencies and Conveniencies do insensibly grow upon the People."' Hale's point is not only that human society is inconceivably complex and unpredictable, making it 'virtually impossible for any one person to be able to anticipate the various consequences —intended and unintended— of legal change'. He also insists that custom gives expression to a

⁶⁷⁸ McConnell, 'Tradition and Constitutionalism', 183–4. McConnell quotes Thomas Hobbes, *A Dialogue between a Philosopher and a Student of the Common Laws of England*, ed. Joseph Cropsey (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), 96, 54–55.

people's sense of justice or right order. Custom acts as a legal guide because it 'is the accumulated reason of the ages, superior to the reason of any one person, even oneself'.⁶⁷⁹

Hobbes' position brings out the contrast between the view that assumes that law is sourced in man's will and power, as opposed to the view that a greater authority than the sovereign determines law. In the common law system, the latter view is expressed by the principle of immemorial custom law, drawing as it does on the accumulated wisdom of the species, and hence expressing a communally acknowledged recognition of right order. Burke's alignment with common law thinking with respect to its understanding of 'history', and with the common law's insistence that justice is more than what will and power declares it to be, is an expression of right-order thinking. It was the commonly held view prior to Hobbes.

The dichotomy with Hobbes' ideas is a facet of Burke's thought that particularly Peter Stanlis' work on the traditional natural-law aspects of Burke's thinking has brought out.⁶⁸⁰ The fact that Burke's views stand in such sharp contrast to Hobbes' brings into focus Burke's alignment with common-law presuppositions. It also

⁶⁷⁹ McConnell, 'Tradition and Constitutionalism', 186–7. Quoting Matthew Hale, *The History of the Common Law of England*, ed. Charles M. Gray (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), xxxii–xxxiii, 39.

⁶⁸⁰ See especially chapter two of Stanlis, *Burke and the Natural Law* (1958). Stanlis has shown that Burke's thought fits the traditional natural law, as opposed to its modern post-Hobbesian and post-Lockean redefinition.

Leo Strauss, on the other hand, misses this dichotomy, and links Hobbes' and Burke's thought: Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, 188. For a critique of Strauss's reading of Burke on this point, see Joseph Baldacchino, 'The Value-Centered Historicism of Edmund Burke', *Modern Age* 27, no. 2 (Spring 1983): 139–45; Robert P. Kraynak, 'Strauss, Voegelin, and Burke: A Tale of Three Conservatives', *Modern Age* 53, no. 4 (Fall 2011): 28–31. See also Grant N. Havers, *Leo Strauss and Anglo-American Democracy: A Conservative Critique* (DeKalb, Ill.: Northern Illinois University Press, 2013), 68, 82–5.

underlines the recognition that Burke's views are not new insights as has often been surmised. They represent instead the older right-order position, which the common law historically expressed.⁶⁸¹ This is highlighted also by the contrasting position Burke and Hobbes take when it comes to their view of the state and their view of man.

For Hobbes the state is brought forth out of the chaos of 'natural' man, which he understands to be a brute and at war with all, while for Burke the state is brought forth out of the 'nature' of man, which he understands to be social, capable of 'art' and having a perfectible virtue. Consequently, Hobbes insists on '*ius naturale*' ('natural right'), 'namely, "the liberty each man hath, to use his own power, as he will himself, for the preservation of his own nature; that is to say, of his own life."' The state is a social contract that this strife and war has given birth to. By contrast, Burke assumes man capable of the 'sustained and sustainable trust a genuine human community presupposes', and regards the multi-generational partnership that the state is, given by God for the perfection of man's virtue and nature.⁶⁸² These positions echo the contemporary debate between right-order theorists and those who source justice (and hence natural rights) in man.

⁶⁸¹See Wu, *Fountain of Justice*; John C. H. Wu, 'The Natural Law and Our Common Law', *Fordham Law Review* 23, no. 1 (1954): 13–48; John C. H. Wu, 'Toward a Christian Philosophy of Law', *Women Lawyers Journal* 37 (1951): 34–37, 40; Richard H. Helmholz, 'Natural Law and Human Rights in English Law: From Bracton to Blackstone', *Ave Maria Law Review* 3, no. 1 (Spring 2005): 1–22; D. J. Ibbetson, 'Natural Law and Common Law', *Edinburgh Law Review* 5, no. 1 (2001): 4–20; Paul McWilliams, 'English Common Law: Embodiment of the Natural Law', *The Western Australian Jurist* 1 (2010): 128–32; Nigel E. Simmonds, 'Reason, History and Privilege: Blackstone's Debt to Natural Law', *Zeitschrift der Savigny-Stiftung für Rechtsgeschichte* 105, no. 1 (1988): 200–214; William Blackstone, *Commentaries on the Laws of England: A Facsimile of the First Edition of 1765–1769*, 4 vols (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979). See also W. S. Holdsworth, *A History of English Law*, vol. 2 (London: Methuen, 1936), app. ii.

⁶⁸²David Novak, 'Law: Religious or Secular?', *Virginia Law Review* 86, no. 3 (April 2000): 588. Novak quotes from Hobbes' *Leviathan* and *The Elements of Law: Natural and Politic*.

3. Burke's Common-Law Use of 'History'

From our observations, and the characterisation of 'historical jurisprudence' as 'the balancing of morality and politics in the light of history', there is a clear resemblance between the common law's use of 'history' or tradition as a philosophical argument that has normative value, and Burke's use of it.⁶⁸³ Burke's normative use of 'history' in his critique against the French Revolution mirrors that of the common law tradition. Burke's use of 'history' as well as the almost spiritual significance he gives to it, betray a thoroughly common-law mind.⁶⁸⁴ 'Burke's thought,' Cecil Courtney reminds us,

reaches back to Coke and Hale; and, indeed he was a great admirer of the latter. In idealizing the Common Law and the traditional institutions Burke was simply continuing this same tradition, and we find a similar idealization of the constitution and the Common Law in [the most respected legal scholar of Burke's time, William] Blackstone.⁶⁸⁵

⁶⁸³ Berman, *Law and Revolution II*, 269. 'Historical jurisprudence' highlights the fact that law has a moral, political and historical character.

⁶⁸⁴ Pocock, 'Burke and the Ancient Constitution', 143.

It should be noted, as Pocock does, that Burke's alignment to the common law 'is confined to one aspect of Burke's thought —his doctrine of the superior wisdom of traditional institutions'. The similarities that we have noted between Burke's use of 'history' and the common law's use of it, are not to be read as to imply that 'Burke's unified view of reality—if he had one—was derived from the common law', but 'it is suggested', in Pocock's words, 'that in order to explain his traditionalism, regarded simply as an isolated factor, there is no need to suppose more than his continued employment and highly developed understanding of certain concepts which came from the common law (as he recognized) and were generally in use as part of the political language he spoke with his contemporaries'. Pocock rightly points out that 'there are many things in [Burke's] social and political philosophy besides his traditionalism, and it is not suggested that his membership of the common-law tradition explains all or any of them'.

⁶⁸⁵ Courtney, *Montesquieu and Burke*, 162.

Courtney argues that the similarity between the thought of Burke and Montesquieu 'is probably best explained by the fact that just as Burke was reaching back to the tradition of English Common Law, Montesquieu represents a continuation of the French tradition of *droit coutumier*.' He disagrees with the suggestion 'that, on the whole, Burke was indebted to Montesquieu for these ideas' (p. 162-3). Contrast Pocock, 'Burke and the Ancient Constitution', 143.

William Blackstone (1723-1780), King's Counsel, is famous for his authoritative *Commentaries on the Laws of England* (1765-1769), which was the first methodical exposition of the common law since the middle ages, and is regarded as the first student textbook of law. The work importantly shaped the American legal system.

Because Burke and Hale ‘were arguing from similar assumptions’, J. C. A. Pocock explains, they ‘reached similar conclusions’. Both shared ‘a belief in immemorial customary law which, as Burke found it necessary to explain and Hale did not, was one of the cardinal beliefs in the society and tradition in which both men lived.’⁶⁸⁶ Burke wrote *Reflections* in response to the existential threat to English constitutional theory he perceived was posed by English enthusiasm for French revolutionary ideology. He confronts this threat by reasserting the value of English common law, using the common-law argument of ‘history’ that itself is time-tested and community-embraced. In this way, ‘Burke’s traditionalism is rooted in a way of thought already traditional’, even if, as Pocock points out, ‘it may be possible to discern, from the way in which he restated it, that it was a tradition beginning to fade.’⁶⁸⁷ It was this waning influence, all the more in peril by the onslaught of French counter-traditional ideas, that Burke sought to reinforce.

Burke’s use of the common-law argument of ‘history’ substantiates our premise that his thought is not novel, but stands in a much older intellectual tradition. It also supports our earlier reading that Burke’s views represent the (Scholastic) right-order position with respect to the historical English state.

4. Historical School of Jurisprudence

Burke’s use of ‘history’ in the common law’s sense is an aspect of his thought that became a foundational presupposition of the so-called Historical School of

⁶⁸⁶ Pocock, ‘Burke and the Ancient Constitution’, 143.

⁶⁸⁷ Ibid.

Jurisprudence.⁶⁸⁸ This school of thought ‘emphasized the element of unconscious growth in political forms’ in true Burkean fashion, and insisted that ‘language, morality, law, the State are all the result not of any single act of men, but of a long and painful process in which many succeeding generations have participated’. For this reason, it saw the State as ‘a product of tradition, of custom, of historical development’, and not as ‘a contract between individuals’. The movement gained much traction on the Continent, especially among German legal philosophers. On the Continent, it was Gustav von Hugo (1744-1844) who originally founded the School, and Friedrich Carl von Savigny (1779-1861) who developed it and made it famous.⁶⁸⁹

⁶⁸⁸ Burke’s thought on history has traditionally been acknowledged as an intellectual source of the Historical School. Continental legal thinkers have generally espoused this traditional view, as have such Anglo-Saxon political philosophers as Merriam and Cobban, and legal historians Berman and Kelly: C. E. Merriam, Jr., *History of the Theory of Sovereignty since Rousseau* (New York, N.Y.: Columbia University Press, 1900); Cobban, *Burke and the Revolt against the Eighteenth Century*; Berman, ‘Origins of Historical Jurisprudence’, 1736–8; J. M. Kelly, *A Short History of Western Legal Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 274.

This view has received pushback, notably from Pocock who seems to equate Burke’s close association with the Cokean tradition, a point we have discussed above, with consequential exclusion from the Historical School: Pocock, *The Ancient Constitution*, 242ff; Pocock, ‘Burke and the Ancient Constitution’, 125–43. See also Anne Pallister, *Magna Carta: The Heritage of Liberty* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), 79 (footnote 3); Seán Patrick Donlan, ‘Burke on Law and Legal Theory’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Edmund Burke*, ed. David Dwan and Christopher J. Insole (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 71.

Pocock fails to recognise that in the nineteenth-century Historical School of Jurisprudence ‘the historical jurisprudence that had originated with Coke and Selden and Hale (among others), became separated from the political and moral theories —positivism and natural law— with which they had originally been integrated’: Berman, ‘Origins of Historical Jurisprudence’, 1736.

Donlan concedes that like Burke, Savigny ‘emphasised the importance of the past to his present’, and was ‘deeply critical of philosophical rationalism’. But Donlan surmises that Burke and Savigny differ too much in their focus, seeing that in Savigny’s view ‘the mystical *Volksgeist*’ ‘replaced reason’; law and the people were in this view linked through the ‘spirit of the nation or people’: Donlan, ‘Burke on Law and Legal Theory’, 71. Though Donlan is correct to detect little resemblance between, on the one hand, the ‘insular nationalism of the nineteenth century and the hope for the creation of a German state’, identified with the concept of *Volksgeist*, and, on the other hand, Burke’s view of the English people’s organic development of political institutions, Donlan fails to adequately value Burke’s emphasis on the constitutional policy as a local expression of universal law and divine ordering, which embodies an expression of a local “flavour” or character of a people.

⁶⁸⁹ C. E. Merriam, Jr., *History of the Theory of Sovereignty since Rousseau* (Kitchener, Ontario: Batoche Books, 2001), 21.

The particularly significant works are Hugo’s *Lehrbuch des Naturrechts* (‘Manual of Natural Right’) (1798) and Savigny’s *Vom Beruf unserer Zeit für Gesetzgebung und Jurisprudenz* (‘On the Vocation of Our Time for Legislation and Jurisprudence’) (1814), and *System des heutigen Römischen Rechts* (‘The System of the Modern Roman Law’) (1839).

One of the School's important followers was the Lutheran jurist Friedrich Julius Stahl, who spearheaded the anti-revolutionary movement in Prussia, and with whose thought Groen closely identified. As we have discussed in chapter one, Groen had been an admirer of Von Savigny since his early student days, and his views stand unapologetically in the tradition of Savigny's Historical School of Jurisprudence. This is not surprising as the Historical School stressed the irrationalistic, supra-rational element of the organic development of 'history', which Savigny said occurred 'in accordance with a hidden Providence'. The movement was for this reason, in the words of Herman Dooyeweerd, 'quite congenial to the Christian belief in God's guidance in history'.⁶⁹⁰ Hence, the Historical School of Jurisprudence is another tangible link between Burke and Groen van Prinsterer.

Burke borrowed his defence of civil society against the French Revolutionary onslaught of it from the insights of English legal philosophy that understands law, and hence indirectly society, 'in terms of an ongoing historical tradition, that both transcends and combines moral and political elements', and this fact highlights a dimension of Burke's thought that we have so far under-represented.⁶⁹¹ Our analysis has shown that Burke's use of 'history' is normative not because he regards 'history' to have normative value of itself, but because 'history' is a local

⁶⁹⁰ Herman Dooyeweerd, *In the Twilight of Western Thought* (Nutley, N.J.: The Craig Press, 1975), 76.

For more on Groen's link to Von Savigny's Historical School of Jurisprudence see importantly Van Vliet, *Groen's historische benadering van de politiek*, 32–9. See also Johannes Louis Petrus Brants, 'Groen's geestelijke groei: Onderzoek naar Groen van Prinsterer's theorieën tot 1834' (Doctoral Thesis, Free University of Amsterdam, 1951), 41–6. Van Dyke, *Groen van Prinsterer's Lectures*, 40, 89, 94, 215, 221. R. Kuiper, 'Wie maakt de geschiedenis? Groen van Prinsterer over Goddelijke ordeningen in de geschiedenis', *Transparant* 3, no. 2 (1992): 18–20. Dooyeweerd recognised Groen's link to the Historical School, but judged it of a moderate influence: R. Kuiper, 'Christelijke geschiedbeschouwing als duiding van traditie', *Philosophia Reformata* 60 (1995): 90 (footnote 20).

⁶⁹¹ Berman, 'Origins of Historical Jurisprudence', 1733.

and communal expression over a longer period of time of right order. Alignment with this divinely given order is what ultimately makes 'history' normative. For this reason we distinguish in Burke between 'genuine history' and 'false history', the demarcation line between which is determined by the manner in which each aligns with natural law. This reading could convey the impression that traditional natural-law doctrine determines *in isolation* the normative value of Burke's argument. Cognizance of the common law context and purpose of Burke's polemical argument of 'history' makes clear that this isolated understanding is incomplete. Burke does not make a direct argument for natural law or engage in natural-law reasoning. His normative argument of 'history' is purely legal, and hence is more sophisticated. It presents a view of society that incorporates not merely historical and moral but also political elements. This multi-faceted character of his critique partly explains why the view that Burke must be read as a traditional natural lawyer, which only gained traction after the Second World War, has taken so long to be recognised. It also explains why this reading continues to generate debate among scholars. It is beyond the ambition of this chapter to engage in this debate and propose a definitive reading of Burke as a traditional natural lawyer. But we have identified that Burke's argument of 'history' as he uses it in the context of the English historical state, acknowledges right order. We do not claim that Burke's thought was in its entirety undergirded by common-law principles, but his use of the argument of tradition or 'history' is that of the common-law, as we have established.⁶⁹² Only in isolation, in his limited

⁶⁹² Pocock, 'Burke and the Ancient Constitution', 143. As noted above, Pocock limits Burke's alignment to the common law to his traditionalism, which in isolation uses concepts which originated from the common law and which were commonly used in the political language of his day.

use in his defence of English constitutional theory of the common-law principle of 'history', do we regard Burke's position to be that of Scholastic right order. Burke's Scholastic right-order stance is hence predicated on its context —the *historical* English state.

The framework of English common law allows Burke's polemical argument of 'history' in his critique of the French Revolution to include presuppositions characteristic of traditional natural law, but at the same time to present a more sophisticated and compelling argument than explicit natural-law reasoning would have done. This is achieved by using not just natural law as it is understood in the Christian tradition, but rather the result of centuries of civilising progress built on its recognition of right order as expressed in English common law.

C. Comparative Remarks

The larger purposes of Burke's and Groen's normative use of their polemical arguments of 'history' reflect not only their different contexts but also the different aims of their critique of the French Revolution. Groen's critique is voiced at a time in Dutch national history that is downstream from the French Revolution and its significant influence on the Dutch state. He views the revolutionary ideology as the application of unbelief, the denial of 'God's right', also in political society. His critique of the French Revolution is a critique of this unbelief and a call to Dutch society to return to the communal recognition and upholding of 'God's right' that characterised its pre-revolutionary state. He makes a plea for the re-application of the divine right of government, which is Christian constitutional law. Groen does so for the purpose of seeing the Dutch nation

submit to the Gospel, and as a people follow the God who has revealed Himself and His ways in Scripture and in Dutch national history. Groen's primary aim is for people to return to Christianity. To this end he uses his polemical argument of 'history' in his critique of the French Revolution.

Burke on the other hand writes at a time in English history when the English state is not yet directly affected by French revolutionary ideology, except for the threat that English enthusiasm for the radical French ideas poses. He writes his critique of the French Revolution to counteract this threat to English constitutional law and does so from the vantage point of a state as yet constitutionally untainted by revolutionary ideology. His aim is to see English common law, including the English ancient constitution, celebrated and re-affirmed so as to ensure its preservation in the face of radical ideas.

Burke's focus is in a way similar to Groen's in that it is a call to return. In his case the call is not to return to Christianity, but to the historical embrace of the original principles of the common law, which go back to Coke, Shelden and Hale. The fact that Burke seems to have to restate their common law assumptions might suggest that they were beginning to lose their traditionally held influence. Counter-acting this internal erosion of the primacy of the common law is the wider purpose for Burke's critique of the French Revolution.

V. CONCLUSION

Our critical analysis has established that both Burke's and Groen's conceptions of 'history' are undergirded by the conviction that there is a divinely given order to the world, the essential reality of which finds its 'imprint and reflection' in the historical English and Dutch state. To Burke, the English ancient constitution reveals the local, English expression of this universal moral order; English constitutional law positions the historical English state in a 'just correspondence and symmetry with the order of the world'. To Groen, on the other hand, the Scriptures reveal the contours of the moral order; which in the context of the Dutch historical state finds expression in the 'divine right of government', what may also be called Christian constitutional law.

In their recognition of divine order, as well the restricted normative function they attribute to 'history', Burke's and Groen's views are consistent with each other and with traditional natural law. It echoes Gratian's assertion that history can never be the ultimate standard since 'the Lord has said *I am the Truth*, not *I am Custom or Constitution*'.⁶⁹³ For both, 'history' only has imperative, normative value in as far as it is aligned with moral order, what we have called 'genuine history'.

We have identified Groen's concept of 'history' to be the tangible manifestation of the intangible moral order in events and the fates of peoples. Our reading of Groen as a Protestant right-order thinker makes it intelligible that he determines the contours of this higher order by Scripture. It has also achieved a clarification

⁶⁹³ D'Entrèves, *Natural Law*, 1967, 44.

of the roles that Scripture, 'history' and 'nature' play in his thought in relation to each other, as Groen's Protestant right-order stance denotes that right order must be identified by Scripture. This reading thereby brings a hierarchy to the interconnected concepts of 'history', 'nature', and Scripture: 'history' is man's tangible, visible experience of the intangible, invisible higher reality of 'nature' or right order, which itself is the expression of God's truth as revealed in Scripture.

Burke's conception of 'history' we have recognised to mirror the common-law argument of 'history'. His use of 'history', as well as the significance he gives to it, are those of the common law. It substantiates our premise that Burke's thought has historical origin; his response to the French Revolution is a creative, but not an intellectually novel, critique. It is a defence, in as far as his polemical argument of 'history' goes, of the much older principles of the common law. Burke's common-law use of 'history' furthermore illuminates his indirect embrace of traditional natural-law doctrine, through his direct embrace of the English common law in the context of the historical English state. Only in this confined English context is it the expression of right order over many generations and that in a time-tested, community-approved, customary way. Using the English common law to define his argument of 'history' gives Burke's argument more complexity than a mere natural-law argument of 'history' would exhibit. This is so since the common-law argument encapsulates not just moral, but also historical and political facets. This multi-faceted character of Burke's common-law argument of 'history' explains why the right-order component in Burke's thought has taken so long to be recognised and why it continues to generate debate. In not merely using right order as it is understood in the Christian tradition, but rather

using the result of centuries of civilising progress built on civilisation's recognition of right order as expressed in English common law, Burke's argument of 'history' has added power and sophistication.

We have seen that because 'history' witnesses to truth, to right order, it may be used as a polemical argument to demonstrate the falsehood of the revolutionary constitutional principles. In this respect our findings reveal Burke's rightful place, together with Groen, among right-order theorists.

Both Burke and Groen assume that French revolutionary ideology, because of its conflict with divinely given order, must produce events that of necessity manifest a conflict with this essential reality. In response to the negation of the right order in the state by the French Revolution, the critique by both Burke and Groen purposes to re-affirm right order's expression. Burke does so by re-affirming English common law, the principles of which are right order's ancient expression in the English context. Groen, on the other hand, does so by making a plea to Dutch society to return to Christianity, by Christian *apologia*.

CONCLUSION

Is there a sovereign order of things? An intangible, divinely given moral order to the universe that is itself an expression of truth revealed in Scripture and a reflection of God? Is there an intangible order that must, because of its essential nature, leave a dominating imprint on the tangible, visible world? A right order that dictates what essential justice and essential authority are, and thereby provides the standard by which law and worldly government are to be determined? Is there a divine right that man, also in political society, is to uphold?

French revolutionary philosophy answered these questions negatively, whereas Groen van Prinsterer –and Burke– answered them positively. The critical analysis of our study has led us to conclude that Groen’s right-order thinking elucidates his critique of the French Revolution and his polemical argument as to the validity of his critique. As to the former, we have shown that his critique of French revolutionary ideology pivots on its propelling force of ‘unbelief’, which our analysis has demonstrated to signify the denial of ‘God’s right’ or right order. Its opposite, the upholding of right order in political society and government, is the old doctrine of the ‘divine right of government’. Our analysis has shown this doctrine in its core to go back to its pre-fourteenth century medieval expression, which continues to be defended by a small group of twenty-first century right-order theorists. Our identification of Groen’s thought as Protestant right-order theory is an original interpretation. The Protestant stance is how the Reformers

interpreted the theory, and it differs from its Scholastic expression, which leans more on the revelation of nature and natural reasoning than on the revelation of Scripture for determining the contours of the moral order.

We have shown that Groen's Protestant right-order theory offers a contribution to the contemporary debate among Christian theologians on whether justice is ontologically grounded in inherent human rights or in right order. In this debate contemporary right-order theorists, prominently represented by Joan Lockwood O'Donovan and Oliver O'Donovan, represent a minority position that argues that justice must ultimately be sourced in right order. To this debate Groen's thought brings the Protestant angle of right-order thought, which broadens the right-order position currently represented, as the O'Donovans' right-order theory is more Scholastic. Groen's theocentric constitutional theory brings a contrasting focus to a political context within which the debate is held, which is largely dominated by anthropocentric constitutional theory. Specifically, his thought contributes to the understanding of the properties of 'rights' and the acknowledgement that a political and social context is inherent to them. It also clarifies the potential for tyranny that is encapsulated in the presumption of social equality, and widens the parameters of the debate by introducing into it the time-tested Dutch concept of sovereignty of spheres. We have argued that Groen's relevance for the current theological discussion is also to be found in the way he models hope-filled, optimistic cultural and political engagement that is propelled by a glad willingness to witness to the Gospel. His response to a political reality that has largely rejected right order is not one of cultural

pessimism, as it is for the O'Donovans, but a Christian apologetic call to uphold 'God's right'. Perhaps the Protestant stance of his thought explains why this is so.

With regard to Groen's polemical argument that aims to substantiate the validity of his critique of the Revolution, we have shown that he argues the folly of going against essential order, the resulting conflict of which he assumes history to manifest. Our critical analysis has demonstrated that to Groen, 'history' is the imprint on tangible reality of an intangible essential reality over time. It is the tangible manifestation of the intangible moral order in events and the fates of people. Our reading of Groen as a Protestant right-order thinker has achieved a clarification of the function that 'nature' (or right order), 'history' and Scripture have in his thought. It makes intelligible that in true Protestant fashion, Scripture has primacy for the determination of the contours of right order. It further elucidates the hierarchy that exists between the interconnected concepts of 'history', 'nature' (or right order), and Scripture in his thought, dispelling common misinterpretations of their roles. Our analysis has demonstrated that 'history' is man's tangible, visible experience of the intangible, invisible higher reality of 'nature' or right order, which itself is the expression of God's truth as revealed in Scripture.

To deepen our analysis of Groen's polemical argument of 'history', we have critically compared it with Edmund Burke's argument of 'history' in his critique of the French Revolution. We have argued that the thought of both statesmen may be fruitfully compared despite the differences in their experience of the

Revolution, Burke at its very beginning and Groen after the Congress of Vienna, because both regard the Revolution to be primarily ideological. Our comparison has shown that 'history' for both has an ideological dimension, and has led us to critically analyse Groen's and Burke's views of the *historical* Dutch and English state, which express their concepts of 'history' in the context of the state. We have argued that both Groen and Burke understand 'history' to be a manifestation of the demands of time and 'nature', and have concluded that both define 'nature' in terms of right order. Whereas Groen defines the contours of the right order by Scripture, our analysis has shown that Burke defines the contours of the right order by the English ancient constitution. We have argued that Burke regards the unwritten English constitution to be the local English expression of the universal moral law. Our analysis of Burke's use of 'history' has recognised it to mirror the common-law argument of 'history'. His use of 'history', as well as the significance he gives to it, are those of the common law. This reading substantiates our premise that Burke's thought has an historical origin, and shows his critique of the French Revolution, as far as its polemical argument of 'history' goes, to be a defence of the much older principles of the common law. In using the common law to define his argument of 'history', Burke gives his argument more complexity and elegance, because of the common law's combination of moral, historical, and political facets. This multi-faceted character of Burke's common-law argument, we have suggested, explains why the right-order component of Burke's thought is somewhat opaque, generating continued debate and taking until after the Second World War to be recognised. Burke's common-law use of 'history' gives his argument depth and sophistication

because it draws not merely on right-order theory, but on the result of centuries of civilising progress built on civilisation's recognition of right order.

Our analysis has brought into focus that the critique by both Groen and Burke of the denial of right order by revolutionary constitutional principles uses the argument of 'history' for its polemic because 'history' witnesses to right order — whether its contours are determined by Scripture or by the English ancient constitution. In line with these findings, our analysis has further illuminated the wider purposes of Groen's and Burke's critiques of the French Revolution, which we have shown to be the re-affirmation of the application of the right order in political society. Burke seeks to re-affirm right order in the English context by re-affirming the English common law. Groen seeks to re-affirm right order in the Dutch context by re-affirming the Christian faith, by a call to return to Christianity.

In Groenian fashion we conclude with a quotation from Scripture: 'Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep His commandments [i.e. uphold 'God's right']: for this is the whole duty of man.'⁶⁹⁴

⁶⁹⁴ Ecc. 12:13 (KJV).

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APPENDIX: ORIGINAL ENGLISH TRANSLATION FROM DUTCH OF GROEN'S

1831 OVERVIEW

Overview was spread over seven 1831 instalments of the *Dutch Thoughts* periodical, none of which have previously been translated in English. What follows is an original translation from Dutch. It is offered here to allow Groen to speak in his own words.⁶⁹⁵

27 September 1831, Nederlandsche Gedachten ('Dutch Thoughts') N° 21⁶⁹⁶

Overview

Perhaps the following lines will help, as has been our wish, to elucidate the overall system of *Dutch Thoughts*.

When history is divided not merely according to time periods, but also according to the course and development of ideas, then every period has a characteristic feature that determines its entire direction. This feature has for more than fifty years been that of *unbelief*. Often unlimited and broad popular sovereignty is seen as the source of all revolutionary misery. This is a correct observation, but one needs to go further: one needs to acknowledge that the fallacy of popular sovereignty is only a consequence of unbelief; it is one of the forms in which unbelief manifests itself. In line with the fact that there have never existed a people that did not consider religion supremely important, also in matters of politics, the Gospel was regarded in European Christendom as the foundation of states and as the legal code of nations. This legal code confirmed

⁶⁹⁵ Italics are in the original. The now outdated use of capitals for some nouns has been modernised.

⁶⁹⁶ Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer, *Nederlandsche Gedachten*, vol. 3, First Series (The Hague: Vervloet, 1832), 81–2 (n° 21).

with regard to worldly authority what even pagan peoples had acknowledged: government is God's servant in every one of its forms, which simple truth had always been the Christian's foundation for a state's constitution. It was acknowledged, as it is today, that not all governments are in line with this requirement; but it was acknowledged at the same time, what is often forgotten nowadays, that the neglect and the rejection of duty does not cancel authority that is grounded in the nature of mutual relationships, and that the fallibility of man cannot change the character and essence of institutions. An ordering of God was perceived in every state, as in every family, which resulted in the sanctification of authority, the ennobling of obedience, and the determination of, and insistence on, the duty of subject and government by God's will and law. Authority was not arbitrary and unlimited, and the right of defence and resistance was not unknown. This is the teaching of the Protestant as much as of the Roman Catholic Church. But in the latter it was not always presented in its original simplicity and force, due to the impertinences of its hierarchy. It is the teaching of the Gospel, to which Protestantism has returned, as though it were the *only*, but at the same time *all-encompassing* requirement. And this teaching cannot be altered as long as the Gospel, which is to Christians the authority of God, retains its supremacy over human consent.

But this is precisely the essence of the false [revolutionary] philosophy that it elevates man above God, making faith in revelation less important than confidence in one's own insights.⁶⁹⁷ Reason has become for everyone the source

⁶⁹⁷ Groen notes here, with reference to another pamphlet of *Dutch Thoughts*, that 'for the foundation of societal union a principle of societal dissolution comes into play:' Groen van Prinsterer, *Nederlandsche Gedachten*, 3:49.

and touchstone of truth and justice.⁶⁹⁸ In this way all ties of faith and authority were ruptured. Faith became regarded as prejudice, and obedience as servitude. Man is, according to this philosophy, free and equal: man is lord over himself, and the entire dogma of popular sovereignty directly flows out of this [tenet]. — The foundation of civil society could from this point onwards only be grounded in human agreements; in a tacit or explicit social contract, in which one submitted oneself to a government as a means of seeing the general will executed. For this reason the ideal government was thought to have *originated* out of the general will and to be *obedient* to it. In this scheme of things it is *usurpation* where the first requirement is missing, and where the second is missing, *tyranny*. The states had to be reformed according to this theory.⁶⁹⁹ They did not pass the test. Not to worry! After all was abolished, there would be no more obstacles for the architect.⁷⁰⁰ Now new states would be created for eternity. But it was forgotten that the so-called *general* will, formed through whatever artificial settlement of state, can never at one point in time, let alone over a long period of time, be the will of *all*. Thus a principle of discord and anarchy was created, which was alternatively developed and halted through violence. The factions stood their ground through arranging the state like a machine (the materialism of the state was another inescapable consequence of the new philosophy), through centralisation, bureaucracy, and entire destruction of all that was left of the old common liberties.

⁶⁹⁸ The Dutch word translated 'justice' is '*regt*', the meaning of which is similar to the Latin '*ius*', as opposed to the Latin '*lex*.'

⁶⁹⁹ Groen articulates what the perspective of the revolutionaries had been. What follows is his observation what historically happened, not his instruction for the approach to politics.

⁷⁰⁰ Here ends Groen van Prinsterer, *Nederlandsche Gedachten*, 3:81.

This dreadful philosophy, that starts and ends in atheism, and that had long been hiding in scholarly writings was consistently developed especially in France and with zeal popularised, from where it was soon distributed over all of Europe. It found fertile ground everywhere, which should not be surprising since the Christian faith had become lukewarm in most countries, and pride and all sinful lusts and tendencies were flattered by this dogma, the true nature of which was veiled in many ways and ignored by most.

The consequences of this new philosophy reach further than governments and states. It could hardly have been expected differently, seeing that unbelief, just like faith, envelops all of man, all his thinking and works! In politics it brought insatiable hunger for change, Jacobinism and liberalism; in religion deism, atheism and neology. This development kept a steady pace. The reasoning that had inverted constitutional theory was similarly used on every right and relationship. In this scheme of things the law of nations, the duties of fellow-citizen and countrymen, the requirements even of love for children and marital faithfulness no longer had any foundation but one's own opinion, one's own will, one's own interest. The history of the ever-continuing revolutionary period revealed the approaching barbarism several times, also under the guise of civilised forms. The history of laws, morals and science similarly exhibit the universality of the theory in the universality of its application.

The source of the revolutionary destructions is often attributed to grievances and abuses; just as one blames the inconsistency of the revolutionary creations not on the dogma's essence, but its faulty application. This is mistakenly done since the emergence as well as the failure of the revolution is

the natural and unavoidable development of its dogma.⁷⁰¹ All experiments failed; yet the trial keeps being repeated. The question continues to be *when*, and *how*, and *to what extent* the revolutionary theory must be implemented; but it is not recognised that [the theory] is *always, in every way, and in all aspects* depraved.⁷⁰²

1 October 1831, Nederlandsche Gedachten ('Dutch Thoughts') N° 22⁷⁰³

Overview (Continued)

The main cause of the multiple revolutions, because of which the civilised world is experiencing innumerable disasters, is found in the false [revolutionary] philosophy, of which *unbelief* is the source, and perpetual discord the unavoidable consequence. This disastrous dogma, of which we have shown the character and essence in our previous instalment, must be struck at its source, in the principle from which it flows. Has this been done? Not on any account. Not in 1789, not in 1815, nor in 1830. The dogma has not been opposed. The conflict has merely been about *the degree of its expansion*, and the *mode and timeliness of its application*.

First French Revolution

Delight with the revolutionary theories was, long before the Revolution, wholesale in France. The administrations of Louis XIV, the Regent, and Louis XV

⁷⁰¹ Groen references articles in the third volume of the First Series (1832) of *Dutch Thoughts* that have discussed this principle with regard to the first French Revolution (n° 10), England (n° 11), Holland (n° 12), and Belgium (n° 14, n° 20).

⁷⁰² Here ends Groen van Prinsterer, *Nederlandsche Gedachten*, 3:82.

⁷⁰³ Groen van Prinsterer, *Nederlandsche Gedachten*, 3:85–7 (n° 22).

were times of superstition, hypocrisy, unbelief and moral decay; so that the philosophy of atheism, brought over from England and cultivated by the care of innumerable literary men and poets, could but flourish on such an excellently prepared breeding ground. The revolutionary positions on the nature of governmental authority and the source of society, consequences of that dogma, were regarded as undeniable truths, often openly so, and almost everyone was convinced that the whole world had to be reformed according to the measure of complete liberty and equality, as per popular sovereignty and social contract. The king, intended for the revolutionary gallows, was, during these years, diligently revolutionary-inclined. The aristocracy and the clergy cooperated in many respects, willing to sacrifice privileges. All classes were infused with equal desire and zeal to realise a edifice of the state in compliance with the new philosophy. But, when all rights of property were ignored, when the government was no longer given any obedience, and society —weakened by attack on its vital elements— became a defenceless prey to the forces of the unmoored masses, opposition arose, partly from self-interest, partly from the necessity of order, partly from a remaining sense of equity and justice, from many who argued not that a wrong turn had been taken, but that advances had been too hastily and too thoughtlessly made. Even the most diligent revolutionaries made a turnabout, frightened at the sight of their own work. So acted the so-called constitutionalists, after the option of including an Upper House in the new constitution was ruled out. So acted Mirabeau, when he was prepared to use his criminal eloquence for the benefit of the throne, on the subversion of which he had collaborated previously. **So** acted the Girondins, when they, after having voted for the death of Louis XVI, fruitlessly contested the so-called mountain

party for their own lives. A series of bloody struggles followed, in which the [radical] development always overcame the opposition until the gruesomeness of the triumph would give fresh strength to the resistance, and foreign diversion or homeland violence would halt the expansion. This system, achieved by the executive and later the imperial regime, has nothing in common with anti-revolutionary tenets, and wholly resulted from revolutionary concepts.

But how did Europe respond? —Europe was taken in with the revolutionary dogma, while the revolutionary foolhardiness left it no option but to resist it. A revolutionary, threatened by the dagger or murder-hatchet of his fellow revolutionaries, defends himself: the powers did likewise, when attacked by France with might and main. Repression of the revolutionary dogma would not have been in line with what was to have been expected. French literature had for too long a time been the vehicle of the false philosophy. In most countries it received too much admiration. Most of the monarchs regarded it their duty, as a kind of peace offering⁷⁰⁴ in compensation for their “illegitimate” authority, to assist in the realisation [of the revolutionary philosophy]. The revolutionary spirit had permeated everything, from the higher classes to the populations. Change, reform, ideals were looked-for, as long as they stopped short of anarchy with French looting bands. It is therefore not surprising that a revolutionary government was only fought reluctantly, that what was actual evil was perceived as desirable privileges, that such mistakes both with regard to its means and its ends were made throughout the whole revolutionary war, and that the degeneration of the revolution principle in France was chiefly lamented because

⁷⁰⁴ Here ends Groen van Prinsterer, *Nederlandsche Gedachten*, 3:85.

of its limiting effect for the present on the philosophical reformation of other states.

The Restoration in 1813 and 1815

Love for the revolutionary dogma remained. In France there was hatred for the tyrant; in Europe additionally for the oppressor and the nation that had assisted him. The cause of the suffering endured was not sought in the principles, nor in the institutions, but in its persons, in the abuse of forms of government, in the enormous suppression of a revolutionary disposition that had gone astray, but that was nonetheless salvific at its source and its core. This *Zeitgeist* mood explains the character and development of the restoration; it could have predicted them. If by the name, '*restoration*', is meant restoration of principles, it is badly chosen and little merited.⁷⁰⁵ Expelled dynasties were restored, but without reconstructing the state as an organic whole and in a manner that rests on moral provisions. The revolutionary state-machine was considered nearly perfect in its kind, and deemed only to be steered by other hands: there was a change in persons, while the form of government and the essence of the administration did not undergo any alterations. The legitimate dynasties were grafted, to use the expression, into the revolutionary trunk. In France the excesses of the convention and Napoleon's lust for power were detested. The former had directed the revolution wrongly; the latter had not led the revolution onto the right track, but had halted it by military despotism. Well then, from henceforth there would be no more bitter resistance, no thoughtless gusto, but a

⁷⁰⁵ Reference is made to Groen's previous explanation of this point in Groen van Prinsterer, *Nederlandsche Gedachten*, 3:53.

unified and temperate application of that which was the creed of all. —Alas! It was not realised that what was disapproved, was retained in what was preserved. The king gave the charter (the *giving* of which rested in some respects on a false and liberal presupposition), and kept a system of representation in existence that had arisen from the bosom of the revolution. He thus became the successor of Napoleon and the creator of the second revolution. His mistake was not that he gave too much liberty, but that it was a false liberty, and that the principle of legitimacy was only applied to the birth-right of kings, instead of applying it to all the liberties and rights that are inseparable from a well-established state. The anti-revolutionary principles were not reinstated; the revolutionary institutions were instead continued, even if there was no appetite for the revolutionary principles in their original force and simplicity. It is evident what had to eventually become of a edifice that had been established on revolutionary ground. The expressions in the *Preamble* and in other documents, by which the king, as he thought, retained his rights as sovereign, were, in the final analysis, equal to an inscription that was against the enterprise, and erased without effort in 1830. The government, constrained by revolutionary institutions, was liberal, while it sought as best as possible, to restrain the ultra-liberals. Concession or exceptional measures, both in the liberal spirit, is what constitutes the history of the restored French dynasty. The Ordinances of July⁷⁰⁶ were just as much derived from the liberal theory as the dissolution of the

⁷⁰⁶ Groen refers here to what the French call the 'Cursed Ordinances' (*Maudites Ordonnances*) of 26 July 1830, when *'le Moniteur'*, a French official government journal, published 5 ordinances by King Charles X, which so riled up public opinion that it launched three days of insurrection, romantically dubbed the 'Three Glorious Ones' (*Trois Glorieuses*), that led to the flight of the Bourbon heir in 1830, and to his cousin, the Duke of Orleans, future Louis-Philip I, taking the throne in August 1830 as 'King of the French People' (*Roi Citoyen*), until he too is chased away by the Revolution of 1848.

favourable parliament by Mr de Gazes, and the unlimited compliance of the Martignac Ministry. Even Mr Villèle, whose accomplishments have not been equalled by any other restoration statesman, never fully shook off his circle of revolutionaries; though he likely approved the system of those who, as averse to court tyranny as to revolutionary violence, wished to unite the existing order of things with the principles of religion and justice —with the authority of kings and the liberties of the people. It was, as we have already noted, to be predicted that the revolutionary theory would be just as little opposed by the other states as it was in France.

But, it will be objected, what about the *Holy Alliance*? —This was (similarly to the Polignac Ministry⁷⁰⁷ that has been called, though inaccurately, *an effect without cause*) indeed *a cause without effect*: it was nothing more than a solemn declaration from the heart of a Christian monarch: an *hors d'oeuvre*, a Christian motto for an unchristian edifice. But what about the Congress of *Vienna*? —This was a great showcase of *liberal* diplomacy, which arrogated in the partition of Europe the same arbitrariness, the same power to constitute⁷⁰⁸ by which liberal constitutional theory structures states. “Europe,” someone recently wrote justly, “was organised, similarly to how France had been organised, in a completely artificial way and entirely against her nature.”⁷⁰⁹ But what about the Congresses of *Laybach*, *Carlsbad*, etc., that restrained the revolutions in Naples and elsewhere? —There attention was solely given to the preservation of governments and too little to the liberties of the peoples. A state policy that is not

⁷⁰⁷ Here ends Groen van Prinsterer, *Nederlandsche Gedachten*, 3:86.

⁷⁰⁸ Groen uses the French ‘*pouvoir constituant*’ and refers to the revolutionaries’ assumption that laws, including constitutions, can be made, instead of having to be discovered.

⁷⁰⁹ ‘*L’Europe fut organisée, de même que l’on avait organisé la France, d’une manière toute artificielle et entièrement contra sa nature.*’

able to unite both and allow both to be mutually strengthened and confirmed by each other, is in our view not a true anti-revolutionary policy. Europe had joined the resistance, halted as it was in its progression towards revolutionary institutions by self-defence; but when this revolutionary party had become dominant, and in this capacity had revealed itself (as it had to do) in conquest, domination and suppression, Europe joined those who now desired further development. Napoleon said justly: "The liberal ideas have toppled me."⁷¹⁰ He fell, and it was natural that the postponed or aborted work was immediately begun or resumed. A liberal constitution seemed everywhere the requirement and guarantor of happiness.⁷¹¹ Rest after weariness, unity resulting from indifference, and material prosperity from the delight of peace were attributed to the influence of the new state-structures, which were regarded with an idolatrous reverence as masterpieces, nearly unalterable also for posterity. Wherever Jacobinism reared its head, abuse and excess, never application, was assumed; it was regarded as the convulsion of a dying monstrosity, never as its awakening and resurrection. And, in as far as the state was not happy, not peaceful, not free, the cause for this was believed to be not the revolutionary doctrine's application, but the fact that its application was attempted with too much timidity, reticence and exception.⁷¹²

⁷¹⁰ *'Les idées libérales m'ont renversé.'*

⁷¹¹ Reference is made to Groen's previous explanation of this point in Groen van Prinsterer, *Nederlandsche Gedachten*, 3:73, and especially 3:47.

⁷¹² Here ends Groen van Prinsterer, *Nederlandsche Gedachten*, 3:87.

Overview (Continued)

The revolution-dogma, derived from unbelief, has not been challenged during the twenty-five years of disasters that have followed the sadly important year of 1789. The doctrine was honoured, also when its consequences were fought: Napoleon himself ruled according to that popular sovereignty, whose development he restrained through a terrible and ultimately futile exertion of power.⁷¹⁴ The European attack against this tyrant and usurper happened mostly in name of the same liberal misconceptions. The liberation of peoples was paired with the relinquishment of the revolution. The accuracy of the saying attributed to Napoleon became apparent: "I am the bookmark on the page where the revolution has stopped; but when I am no longer, she will turn the page and will continue her march."⁷¹⁵ The governments and peoples were liberal; the opposition became universally revolutionary, as was to be expected. Promises of liberty, precisely because of the falsehood of the accepted theory, could not be kept without confusion; even so, their fulfilment was desired with urgency, sometimes violently, even at the price of new revolutions. This went too far, according to many. The enthusiasm for the theory was weaker than the fear of exaggeration and the hunger for quietness. This is why the so-called demagogic disturbances in Germany were suppressed, and, in general, the revolutions or

⁷¹³ Groen van Prinsterer, *Nederlandsche Gedachten*, 3:89–91 (n° 23).

⁷¹⁴ Groen notes: "This is why the famous *Royer-Collard* (...) has recently correctly stated of the monstrous despotism of the Empire: "None of the revolutionary governments that have preceded it have given themselves to such an extent to the emanation of popular sovereignty and have celebrated it as much."

'Aucun des gouvernements révolutionnaires qui l'ont précédé, ne s'est autant appliqué à émaner de la souveraineté du peuple et ne lui a rendu d'hommage.'

⁷¹⁵ *'Je suis le si[g]net qui marque la page où la révolution s'est arrêtée; mais quand je ne serai plus, elle tournera le Feuillet et reprendra sa marche.'*

riots that most countries in Europe experienced at various times were subdued. Yet the revolutionary dogma itself continued to command loyalty: so that it continued to be acknowledged, and while its development was subdued where it seemed too preposterous or violent, its application was either continued, or commenced or pledged. In France especially, the revolution proceeded with perseverance and with policy. From the principles the results were slowly deduced. These included the sovereignty of the will of the people and the destruction of every independent authority. All efforts of a dynasty — unrelentingly subjected to systematic attacks of malevolence—, gentleness, strictness, leniency, were foiled by the workings of that deadly principle that was inserted in the charter. The government had to fall, and it is purely by the vigour of national memory and by favourable circumstances that it was able to stand for fifteen years.

The Revolution of July 1830

The discords in France were, as is also the case elsewhere, assessed there from a liberal point of view, and hence accredited to the opposition against liberalism. The king, it was said, was not yielding enough, even if he had already yielded everything, with the exception of the abasement of the crown and the destruction of the sworn constitution. The revolution seemed the legitimate resistance by a people regaining its liberties, not at all the desperate and failed attempt to protect a state against impending doom by a cunningly besieged king. Possibly a revolution has never happened this easily, and was never met with so much applause in most countries. This is a mystery that is very easily

deciphered, if the mood of the general way of thinking—as described above—is considered.

But have later events possibly fostered a shift? Is the revolutionary dogma now at least challenged by the French government and European diplomacy, by the Congress and the Périer Ministry?⁷¹⁶ On the contrary, and keeping this in mind is important for the true assessment of the present situation. On the contrary, that theory continues to be held on to, but a union between liberty and order is sought, and so there is exhaustion from such futile ploys and calculations. As soon as the government fell, the revolutionaries in France were divided. Some wanted complete reorganisation of the state; others wanted merely a change of dynasty. A commoner-king was appointed, who would later realise the republican, or more correctly, the revolutionary institutions. Thus those who had regarded the generally accepted popular sovereignty merely as an irresistible weapon for the accomplishment of different purposes, conceded obligingly in theory what they assumed they would be able to maintain in practice. Faulty consideration! The feigned agreement did not hold. It resulted in coolness, discord, and hatred. Both parties are taking position in opposition of each other with daily growing hostility regarding the application of doctrines. This is to be expected because only the actors have changed; not, as had been the goal of many and especially of the famous agreement, the essence of the matter and the whole organisation of society. Just as the restoration was the continuation of the revolution, so the new [July] revolution is the continuation of the restoration. Indeed, ever since 1789 the same stage play, with a few

⁷¹⁶ Here ends Groen van Prinsterer, *Nederlandsche Gedachten*, 3:89.

alterations, has been performed. The *first revolution* accepted the revolutionary principles unconditionally, but the consequences only as far as was considered compatible with the interests and insights of every government. What was missing in the accuracy of the reasoning of this inconsistency was fully compensated by the partiality of the revolutionary tribunals and subsequently by military violence.

The *restoration*, while adopting an element here and there of anti-revolutionary constitutional theory in the state, maintained the revolutionary institutions, and gradually also relinquished the [anti-revolutionary] principles, lost all support and collapsed, since it was not able to uphold itself through violence.

The *July Revolution* was to ensure that the [revolutionary] development could finally take place without exaggeration and without exception. But because of the unfeasible nature of the promise, its well-meant pledge was of no avail. Various ministries succeeded one another; but even the fierce revolutionaries (telling proof of the unfeasibility of their theory) had to do what the restoration was charged with, except that not enough time was permitted for a general affray. They made use of the same policies that the Directory, that Napoleon had made use of, with this difference that at the time no concessions were made, while presently great concessions are made even if reluctantly and enforced. Thus it is the same all over again; it is the way things have always played out since the liberal dogma gained ground. The principle is accepted and is put into effect, the impossibility of which then becomes apparent and subsequently results in the evasion of the duty to revolt. This conflicts with the agenda of those who push for further revolutionary development, which eventually leads to

either collapse, or a propping up through the use of physical force or through the help of material self-interest.

The seeming resistance that Europe offers in the face of the revolutionary spirit is of no better sort. Far from fighting it, the verdict is that liberalism has been applied with too little liberality these last sixteen years. While some countries are pretty generally convinced that the French attitude requires once more some delay of the planned liberal reforms, even there the deplorable situation of France is only regarded as an exaggeration, against which everyone, in their mind, will be protected by their own insight. Not only the revolt of Paris was generally approved, but also the hunger for its imitation. The fall of Charles X was, it was said, a lesson that the spirit of the age had to be given more, and more rapid, accommodation. Only then would the reorganisation of society take place without those conflicts and violent changeovers, which had accompanied it in France. Likewise the desirability of that recreation was never regarded as debatable. More than one state, and especially England, provides proof that this revolutionary alert was not without effect. It did not take long for the flame of the commotion to explode in all directions. It became clear that the violent, though from a evolutionary perspective nonetheless legitimate, party aimed to topple, also by force of arms, every institution not yet fully revolutionary. What did European diplomacy do? The same as before, with disastrous effect. Anti-revolutionary ⁷¹⁷ dogmas were set-aside with disdain as prejudices of an uncivilised time. Europe did not fight the revolution, but recognised, respected, defended her; it joined the moderates so as to prevent the victory of the radicals.

⁷¹⁷ Here ends Groen van Prinsterer, *Nederlandsche Gedachten*, 3:90.

Thus, a fixed foothold was taken away, no other guiding principle was left but arbitrariness, perpetual inconsistency became compulsory, and since the guarantee of independence and safety could now only be found in weapons, there was a push for excessive armaments.

The first sign of this deplorable policy was the speedy recognition of the monarch who ruled by the grace of the people. Though intervention on behalf of the charter and at any rate of France's national and ancient constitution was still regarded a right, the extent to which duty demanded the immediate use of this capability was doubtful. Thus the principle of non-intervention seemed paramount. Yet it only appeared to be so, since the recognition of the king of the French was a biased act, it was *intervention to the benefit of the revolution*. This is so because the king's two hundred delegates installed him as a tool and slave of factions, which they did without any legitimacy, contrary to their oath, contrary to the charter, and contrary to French constitutional theory; as though it wasn't enough to be a passive spectator when one could be accomplice, too. As a consequence the Powers had a common interest in the new French government, which was the arrest of the development of the revolutionary principle inside and outside of France. The fall of Louis-Philip seemed to mean widespread war, and widespread war seemed to mean the fall of Louis-Philip. For this reason the French administration and its preservation of peace was given support: this is the objective of the Powers, and, when this is kept in mind, the politics of Europe, however inconsistent from the point of view of essential justice, are really very consistent.

In the meantime it has become clear that the calculation of diplomacy becomes miscalculation and disappointment. In the event of such a peace

France's supremacy as well as the influence of the revolution is increased. And it is to be feared that the avoidance in such a manner of anarchy and war, by delay and provocation must lead to a gruesome explosion. Likely the moment of having to make the difficult decision is near. But, unless the actual attack is made first by France, or, really in defence by some of the powers, the war will again, it seems, be started and conducted in the same way as the first revolutionary war, in that the anarchists will be restrained so as to maintain the situation that produced the anarchy. Is it possible to build high expectations on such a foundation? The result will be more disastrous than the result of the earlier experiment. What Europe will win, is what the French ministry now wins by its muffling of the popular movements: the sigh of relief and the rapid approach of an even more perilous conflict. Europe remains completely true to itself in these liberal politics.⁷¹⁸ The Congress is heavily criticised, yet it was true to the same liberal principles that diplomacy followed in the past, and nearly all consider its application in other areas desirable.

The above hopefully shows that we have not unjustifiably called the struggles of the last half-century those of *a liberal civil war*. The world is subjected to a revolutionary faction that has not encountered opposition when it comes to the *essence* of its dogma, of its fanaticism. Its power is furthermore found in the universality of the revolutionary delusion.⁷¹⁹

⁷¹⁸ Reference is made to Groen's concise explanation of these policies at the beginning of *Overview*, see Groen van Prinsterer, *Nederlandsche Gedachten*, 3:81.

⁷¹⁹ Here ends Groen van Prinsterer, *Nederlandsche Gedachten*, 3:91.

Overview (Continued)

In the previous articles it has been shown that the root of the revolutionary theory is found in *unbelief*, in the denial of a revealed Deity. This necessarily results in the sovereignty of reason and, in matters of the state, the sovereignty of all or so-called popular sovereignty. It has been shown that this dogma, though opposed in many ways in its development, has never been attacked in its coronary artery; that the principle was accepted while its consequences were rejected —despite the fact that the principle was false and its consequences were correct. Now that this catastrophic theory again rears its head as an all-destructive storm, the time has come for its undivided rule over minds, if not broken, then at least to be challenged. How? Where is a force to be found that is powerful enough to conquer such a formidable foe? We have given the answer before:⁷²¹ *Only Christianity can challenge the liberal theory with success.*

Since respect for Christian truth as it relates to all other truths is so little exercised, a repeated plea cannot be deemed unnecessary. A communal faith in a Higher Being has always been the indispensable bond of a well-structured society. Faith in God's infallible revelation is the bond that united the European states, both to each other and in their internal structure since the early Middle Ages. But religiosity had become tepid as early as the beginning of the eighteenth century, especially in the higher classes, which meant that the Christian organisation of society was adhered to more out of habit than out of conviction. Non-belief in Christianity found willing acceptance, while hiding under the title

⁷²⁰ Groen van Prinsterer, *Nederlandsche Gedachten*, 3:93–5 (n° 24).

⁷²¹ Groen refers to Groen van Prinsterer, *Nederlandsche Gedachten*, 3:50.

of 'Religion of Reason' and other well-sounding names, so that it was clear to very few that this exalted philosophy, through a very gradual transition, had to result in outright unbelief, in utter atheism.

Soon the dreadful dogma set to work. Its first concern was the exclusion of revelation, with many expressions of esteem, from all areas of knowledge and practice. The rule of reason was meant to clear the 'mess' that Christianity had made. This great goal seemed nearly achieved by the *isolation* of Christianity. "A derisory veneration," Mrs de Staël writes, "broke religion away from all that regarded life; it was thanks to reverence so to speak that religion was driven from the human mind."⁷²² Because every other bond of faith and submission expired as a consequence of the abandonment of faith in God, no other guiding principle remained but individual intellect and reason in philosophy, individual taste in the fine arts, the individual will in politics. Thus practical atheism took possession of all subjects like the exterior walls of a fortress. Christianity itself was subsequently stormed by atheism, deism, and eventually by neology, which secured the victory after having entered in the guise of a friend. —What vain attempt that limits its proclamation to the power of what is divine while leaving the misery of mankind to its own devices! The promising pledge of unbelief only brought about that disastrous anarchy, of which the confusion in politics is merely one of its —in everything visible— outworkings.

Lack of principle is the prevailing disease of these times. Why is it that there are no more generally acknowledged principles? It is because the source of all moral principle is denied; because a dogma is accepted, the main proposition

⁷²² *'Une vénération dérisoire écartait la religion de toute les affaires de la vie ; c'était pour ainsi dire, à force de révérences, la conduire hors du cercle de l'esprit humain.'*

of which is the rejection of all principles.⁷²³ There is no solution but in the return to what has been left behind!⁷²⁴ Revelation must once again be recognised in all its authority, and there is no other revelation than what is contained in the Holy Scriptures.⁷²⁵ Clearly, then, an inescapable link exists between politics and Christianity;⁷²⁶ and the saying that the revolution-war is a *religious war* is not an exaggerated expression, but a simple truth.⁷²⁷ It is clear that similarly to the past when the conflict between the Gospel and superstition raged, there is and will be conflict between the Gospel and unbelief, between faith and atheism. The *civil war of the liberals* will make room for a *civil war of mankind*, or rage on simultaneously when liberalism itself is eroded. It is clear that no essential recovery may be expected except directly through the reinvigorating influence of the Gospel, or indirectly through intervention from above.

There are many objections to these insights. Some argue that it is not productive to search out what is hidden and uncertain. Rightly so, but seeking to guess the future is another matter altogether from announcing what is already laid up in the present. It is clear that the liberal theory generates a war *of all against all*; it is clear that only a dogma of faith and love can overcome that

⁷²³ Here ends Groen van Prinsterer, *Nederlandsche Gedachten*, 3:93.

⁷²⁴ Groen notes here that 'liberalism removes faith in truth and what is not alterable. Christianity is the foundation for all that is truth and unalterable.' Groen van Prinsterer, *Nederlandsche Gedachten*, 3:51.

⁷²⁵ Groen notes: 'Of this most of our readers are likely convinced: Holland, for all its leniency towards revolution-dogma, remained attached to the truth of the Gospel by a happy inconsistency. But even those who regard Christianity as foolishness have the choice—in as far as they acknowledge that the liberal theories are purely *negative*—either to doom mankind to destruction or to point to a *sure* faith that offers hope for restoration and reconstruction. What are the options? The 'God of Progress' of the St. Simonists, or the 'Sovereignty of Reason' of Mr Royer Collard, of which Mr Berryer so aptly has remarked: "Alas! The ministers, the ambassadors of this sovereign are those whose powers are most contested and invoked by the greatest number; everyone considers himself to be reason's spokesperson, with ever-present disputes as a consequence." Another option is faith in liberty, in perfection. How? By way of one's self? Woe him who has no better hope in life or death.'

⁷²⁶ For Groen's definition of Christianity see: Groen van Prinsterer, *Nederlandsche Gedachten*, 3:33.

⁷²⁷ See Groen van Prinsterer, *Nederlandsche Gedachten*, 3:13.

dogma of selfishness and self-conceit. And there is no doubt that the Gospel will eventually bring the general victory.

Others think that the thought of the renewed implementation of Christianity as the common foundation [for society] is a chimera; that such has never been done, and in any case is not possible in this century. To maintain that [Christianity] never functioned [as society's foundation] shows a misunderstanding either of what we desire or of the witness of history. We know that heaven cannot be brought to earth; that many unchristian deeds were perpetrated in the most Christian eras, and that there have always been wide gaps between the recognition and the doing of duty. But the authority of revelation used to be assumed in all matters; the standard existed even if it was deviated from. In these days the standard is removed, or reversed. Is it assumed that this makes no essential difference? In that case the same reasoning should be used in other matters. Then penal laws should be abolished because crimes are continuously committed. Then it should not be considered dangerous for society to declaim crime as if it were a matter of indifference, or to praise it as though it were a duty. As for the argument that Christianity does not suit this century, this accusation is very bold. Unbelief's long rule makes that the necessity for faith is doubly felt. And, while Christianity is dispelled from almost all societal institutions, it is showing, especially now, both in- and outside of Europe, a power that contradicts unbelief in deed. Much of what is considered not feasible, will be carried out, when the necessity is heartily felt of what is seemingly impossible. Should there be hindrances that can only be removed gradually, this is no reason to slow down: the required diligence must be doubled when the work is harder. The first Christians did not enquire whether

their faith pleased the unbelievers. Luther's time did not seem a very opportune one to defy mighty Rome. The century of Wycliffe and Hus were equally unsuitable, with the stake its reward for confession. But to stand for the truth, to recommend and propagate it, is always duty. This is all the more so when the truth is denied. The outcome is not for man to determine, when his duty is clearly lined out. And at present, now that the scourge⁷²⁸ of unbelief destroys the world, now that—for the time being—very little self-sacrifice is needed for the fight against misconceptions, the fear to displease actually holds present-day people back, while no fear of suffering and of death held back those heroes of the faith, as it did not our Dutch forefathers! Mankind does not know whether in God's plan moments or centuries are demanded. Plain assessment suggests that in the case of such confusion as is before us, it is not to be expected that order will be recovered within a few years. The era that we live in is glorious enough. Should this not be the time of its fulfilment, then it is likely the time of preparation.⁷²⁹ The reproduction of the following very powerful lines may be proof that we, too, do not expect or desire hurried or forced changes that would not avail anything anyway.

For this great restoration of society to work, one needs to be well convinced, firstly that the passage of time needs to be [the work's] prime minister, and that successive generations will pass before the people will be completely ready for it. Secondly, that the intervention by a civilian power, and in general all manner of coercion, far from halting the progress, will have no other effect than to give ground to it indefinitely. [Restoration] will only be real and durable when she is the fruit of a profound conviction. The change that is required is not a physical one, but a change in the state of mind. The blessed torch of the truth must be lifted above

⁷²⁸ Here ends Groen van Prinsterer, *Nederlandsche Gedachten*, 3:94.

⁷²⁹ Groen alludes to the fulfillment of the age with Christ's return.

the ruins of Christian civilisation, so that it will shine before all eyes, and so that its rays will penetrate through the mists of error, enlightening little by little spirits that are misled and voices that are mistaken. The unchanging principles of law must be shown on all your countenances; the eternal laws, unshakeable foundation of power and of liberty, must be developed, to the point that reason, finally weary of its sterile labours, understands that outside of Christianity there is only —and can only be—irremediable error, corruption, calamities and bondage.⁷³⁰

There is one more objection that is often made, that can be refuted without much effort. The admonition to return to Christianity, it is said, is entirely indeterminate. One may just as well make the recommendation to 'be religious, be good', or tell a sick person to 'be well.' The advice [to return to Christianity] will perhaps be considered less vague when attention is given firstly to the character of Christianity, and secondly to what necessarily and immediately follows its application. Christianity is not a cluster of related lessons in morality, nor a product of speculation and reasoning: it is entirely *historical*; so that, as has been justly said, it is actually wrapped up in one single well-proven fact that is also the centre-point of world history. But also in its application it already leads to the realm of essential reality. By its destruction of the liberal theory, it breaks

⁷³⁰ Groen notes: 'These are the words of La Mennais, who may be referenced in as far as he defends Christianity.'

'Pour que cette grande restauration de la société s'opère, qu'on se persuade bien, d'abord que le temps en droit être le premier ministre; et que des générations successive passeront, avant que les peuples y soient complètement préparés: en second lieu, que l'intervention de la puissance civile, et en général tout moyen de contrainte, loin d'en hâter le progrès, n'aurait d'autre effet que de la retarder indéfiniment. Elle ne saurait être réelle et durable, qu'autant qu'elle sera le fruit d'une profonde persuasion. Il s'agit de changer, non l'état matériel des choses, mais l'état des intelligences. Elevez au dessus des ruines de la civilisation Chrétienne le sacré flambeau de la vérité; qu'il brille à tous les yeux, et que ses rayons se prolongeant à travers les nuages de l'erreur, éclairent peu à peu les esprits égarés en des voies trompeuses. Montrez sous toutes leurs faces, les immuables principes du droit; développez les lois éternelles, fondement inébranlable du pouvoir et de la liberté, jusqu'à ce que la raison, lasse enfin de ses stériles labeurs, comprenne qu'il n'y a, et ne peut y avoir, hors du Christianisme, qu'erreur, calamités et servitude sans remède.'

down the weapons that combat all that exists, and removes at the same time the obstacles that halt simple development and completion.⁷³¹

29 October 1831, *Nederlandsche Gedachten* ('Dutch Thoughts') N° 25⁷³²

Overview (Continued)

Without a return to the Christian faith, no end to the anarchy of emotions and of societies is to be expected. That was the topic of our previous plea, which in its final sentences, using only a few words, demonstrated the sure influence of faith. Some development of this last comment will show even more clearly that the suggested change is not limited to reflection, or the lateral effect of mere individual religiosity, but that it is rather completely *practical*; that it furnishes an indispensable guideline also for common relations and societal matters, and that it disperses on all aspects of science and practice a beneficial light and life. Christianity destroys the liberal theory. —Even though many Christians approve of concepts whose character and substance they underestimate, an incompatibility remains between a dogma of love and self-denial, and a theory that is grounded in selfishness and is in a way self-deification. Enmity remains between a faith that derives all from God's will, and a line of thought that submits all to human caprice. Liberalism disappears where Christianity is expanded and applied. As soon as only the essence of this false dogma is taken into account, it becomes clear that in this one act of Christianity's benevolence is bound up the spring of thousand benefits and the source of overall recovery.

⁷³¹ Here ends Groen van Prinsterer, *Nederlandsche Gedachten*, 3:95.

⁷³² Groen van Prinsterer, *Nederlandsche Gedachten*, 3:97–9 (n° 25).

The revolutionary theory knows no *authority*, because the power of governments, where it does not rest on the acknowledgment of God's sovereignty, must stem also legally from the fickle approval of subjects. Nor does the theory know *liberty*, because it is destroyed in either licentiousness or violence, when the sanctity of authority is taken away. It knows no *nationality*, since a dogma of selfishness and self-interest must extinguish every sense of kinship and public interest. Nor *enlightenment*, not merely because the unmistakable light of religion shines indirectly or directly on the whole sphere of human skills, but also because every progress in science and learning presupposes common foundations, and thus a universal, never an individual consent-dependent, premise of faith. With the liberal dogma the sanctity of rights and duties is snuffed out. Led by one's own ideas, passing opinions, and circumstances, one floats endlessly about without anchor in a world of ideals. Liberalism removes all foundations of learning, all principles of action. It results in discord, dissolution and destruction — in science it results in unending doubt, in its application in restless war and revolution. On the debris of civilisation and society eventually barbarism will rise under the name of enlightenment, as will excessive popular anger and irresistible violence under the name of liberty. It is therefore neither an imaginary, nor a small service when Christianity, source of unification, peace and harmony, restrains the all-destroying forces of unbelief. But that isn't the only thing. Not only is destruction stopped, the re-building is also started.

Since liberalism encompasses all human pre-disposition, and is in actuality the application of God-denial, it follows that the operation of every good principle is arrested by the influence of this theory. It ends up in conflict with the

essence of things, and in order to continue its self-conceited creation sets itself against the demands of benevolent and ever returning nature and of continually progressing time. It is the struggle of human pride against the laws issued by God. For this reason⁷³³ there will always be a forced situation where this false theory rules, that halts every free and gradual development. Remove this impediment that gives everything the hallmark of uncertainty and vagueness, and before long one finds oneself on solid ground, on an *historical* foundation, and out of the merely ideal, into the essential, *positive*, not in the least merely *material* world. Then there is inquiry not solely into what someone *can* or *will* do, but what each *ought* to do, and thus there is recovery of the principle of rights and duties. Nature and time resume their power, and when mankind subjects itself —though not passively— to their united action, it is possible to augment and perfect what is conserved and preserved.

It is important to note that at every important crisis of the last half-century, deliverance remained possible, and that only by the repudiation of the Christian principle and the acceptance of the liberal principle did it become impossible. In 1789 the situation in France, though far from being as detrimental as has been suggested in most liberal writings, was nonetheless very susceptible to weighty improvements. The monarchy, moderated in an irregular way, saw its national and original presence for the greater part degenerated by the powerlessness of the old families and the fact that the rights of the people were falling in abeyance. There were abuses, the continuation of which was not comfortable to anyone. Reform was the common wish, but why could it not have

⁷³³ Here ends Groen van Prinsterer, *Nederlandsche Gedachten*, 3:97.

been tried without the inversion of society? Because it immediately became the initial realisation of the revolutionary theory, instead of fuelling reform, conservation of the essence of the matter, and being a preservation-agent against a revolution. Because from the start what should have been more than ever maintained and affirmed as foundation of the edifice was neglected.

In 1813 a distinction should have been made between liberty and liberalism in order to accomplish an essential restoration. A distinction should have been made between reverence for rights that were acquired as a consequence of the revolution, and submission to the revolutionary principles that had resulted in the revolution.⁷³⁴ However, since the principle of religion was not once again accepted as the *source* and *sanction* of constitutional and international law, the dominion of the false dogma, with however many exceptions and amendments, had to be primarily confirmed. Constitutions, the granting of which meant vacillation and thereby also the acceptance of the false principle, promised a liberty that especially now was granted almost only in pretence and not without danger, because it made the revolutionary centralisation and state-machine inevitable. The formidable lesson of the hundred days had no effect, just as the experience of twenty-five years had not. Vigilance was merely given to the well-preservation of Napoleon, when at this point those principles by which a faction had divided a king from the nation and given France over to soldiers and Jacobins, should have been renounced.

⁷³⁴ Groen elaborates by quoting Chateaubriand: 'The *material* interests and the *moral*, or better, *immoral*, interests of the revolution should not be confused. The first should be protected, the second persecuted, destroyed, crushed.'

'Il ne faut pas confondre les intérêts matériels révolutionnaires et les intérêts moraux ou plutôt immoraux de la révolution. Protégez les premiers; poursuivez, détruisez, anéantissez les seconds.'

In 1830, when the edifice that had long been reeling abruptly collapsed, the rights of the heir to the throne should have been acknowledged and no amendments to the charter should have been tolerated, other than those that were in alignment with the recognised principles of historical and anti-revolutionary constitutional theory. What was once again the reason why any prospect for the establishment of a better order was missing? The reason is found in the failure to appreciate justice and authority; in infatuation with the same dogma that had caused the explosion and determined its course. It meant that a nation—which constitutes many possibilities for prosperity, but also for the extermination of itself and others—is yet again given over to the centralising despotism of a liberal faction. It has always been the duty of Christian kings to fight the anti-Christian revolutionary spirit in France and in their own country. That would have been better, and would have given different results for the peace of Europe, than the defence of the constitution of 1791, than bestowing honour on the tyrant who trampled their rights and the rights of their peoples, than leaning on the enthusiasm for a false dogma and supporting the revived revolution by seeking to be impartial between good and evil.

After July 1830 it was clear that proof of approval could not be given to the instituted administration without putting all anti-revolutionary principles aside. Even without intervention on behalf of trampled justice (if in one's own concerns no hesitation and more resilience had been shown, then general politics would not ⁷³⁵ have continually vacillated between justice and injustice) a third restoration might have been possible. This would have required the refusal to

⁷³⁵ Here ends Groen van Prinsterer, *Nederlandsche Gedachten*, 3:98.

receive the revolutionary state into European society, alongside the efforts of the French supporters of the restoration. Such a restoration would have been a blessing to all of Europe, as long as it had been an essential restoration, and merely one militarily enforced by a foreign power.

It is not difficult to give more examples. When one scrutinises more specifically what action crucial moments demanded guided by the unchangeable and religiously based principles of truth and justice, it becomes ever more clear (as could also be demonstrated with respect to other topics of science and application) that the application of the anti-revolutionary dogma, of which unconditional faith and submission to God is its core, exerts an influence that is as beneficial in its scope, as it is incalculable in its size and its power.⁷³⁶

10 November 1831, Nederlandsche Gedachten ('Dutch Thoughts') N° 26⁷³⁷

Overview (Continued)

The Gospel-light was ignored; an era of darkness and misery began. Human wisdom, robbed of divine guidance, overthrew states and nations. Licentiousness and violence acted for liberty and authority; it was as though a tangle of destruction replaced the societal and moral order.⁷³⁸ Make a fresh start, mankind that has lost its way! It is Christian faith that brings back light, life, warmth and growth. All that is good and desirable re-emerges on historical and Christian soil. In the five previous instalments these ideas have been treated more elaborately,

⁷³⁶ Here ends Groen van Prinsterer, *Nederlandsche Gedachten*, 3:99.

⁷³⁷ Groen van Prinsterer, *Nederlandsche Gedachten*, 3:101–3 (n° 26).

⁷³⁸ Groen quotes Chateaubriand: 'In proportion to how much the tie of religion is let go, society is out of joint; and when the revolution came to trample [religion], rickety empires seemed to have entered into the chaos.'

'*A mesure que le lien de la religion s'est relâché, la société s'est disjointe; et quand la révolution est venue le briser, les empires croulants ont semblé rentrer dans le chaos.*'

and now that the nature and essence of the world-crisis, namely *confusion because of unbelief*, has been pointed out, the errors of other proposed solutions become apparent also.

1. Material Well-Being is Not the Primary Issue

While this view will elicit little direct contradiction, deliverance is sometimes expected from the advancement and organisation of this concern. It goes without saying that material well-being is important, but it is not the main issue, and because it is secondary to a higher interest it must stand back and not be the exclusive, nor primary concern. General well-being would not be recuperated in this way. Physical prosperity, even if desirable without moral prosperity, can scarcely be obtained as long as the struggle of principles has not ended. Even if physical prosperity were to miraculously befall a people, it would not for this reason protect against discord, which is destructive also of that renewed prosperity. Consider France: it flourished before 1789, or —should lack of unbiased knowledge of history make this doubtful— consider the United Netherlands: they flourished before 1780; or —should it not be possible to vividly imagine this— consider France as well as Belgium: both had reached a marvellous level of exterior affluence from 1815 to 1830. Such examples teach a very important lesson as to the terrible force of the false dogma and the necessity to emphatically and principally resist it. The wishes and plans under daily discussion are reduction of taxes, great salary cuts, improvement of finance management, and justly so since the weight of public debt and costly administration becomes unbearable also for well-intentioned peoples. But

lightening the load in this matter does not remove the cause of such overuse and that expensive organisation; it does not remove the actual cause of these disasters. Neither do division of territory, and artificial accords of diplomacy. The decision as to who owns this or that room, or this or that field does not extinguish a fire, or stop a flood. The Congress of Vienna has determined much that has proven to be pernicious. Even with a less outlandish accord the work would have been just as futile because it ignored the essential danger of a revival of revolutionary principles. The London Conference, the existence and conduct of which was based on those same principles is an equally odd example of a similar disregard of evil, and consequently of futile work.⁷³⁹ No border agreement, no avoidance of widespread war solves the problems from which the chaotic situation in Europe springs.

There is only one central thought that trumps all lesser interests. Take for example the relative powers of every state: might there be anyone in this context who does not regard the supremacy of France dangerous for the independence of the other Powers? Not surprisingly⁷⁴⁰ guarantees against such a bold and ambitious nation are ever sought in a so-called balance of Powers, in a monitoring by European Powers, or in another way. Yet at present France dreads even itself, and above all the horror of the revolution-spirit. Restraining the *nation*, should this prove necessary, is regarded as entirely a matter of later concern, and if France instead of the revolution is the focus, then the actual evil will not be halted anywhere, and the revolution's strength will only be increased by the union of national Powers. Even if France were to be robbed of part of its

⁷³⁹ The London Conference of 1830 is where the Great Powers gathered to recognise the Belgian Revolution's success and to guarantee Belgium's independence.

⁷⁴⁰ Here ends Groen van Prinsterer, *Nederlandsche Gedachten*, 3:101.

powers, even if it were to be effaced from the map of Europe, this would save nobody. What good does the amputation of one limb do when the gangrene has already overtaken the whole body?

2. National Well-Being is Not an Essential Element of the Conflict

While the revolution has availed itself of the means of national hatred, particularly in Poland and in Belgium, and while it profits abundantly from this deception, in final analysis these national differences are without actual importance in the face of a conflict about universal theories. In these matters the question is not whether one is English, French or Dutch, but whether one is revolutionary or anti-revolutionary. The faction that favours revolution sacrifices all else to its purpose, as the example of the English government shows that has taken up the revolution-harness alongside France and Belgium and in so doing has in most respects trampled the chief principles of *English* constitutional theory. It must become clear also to those who consider the revolution favourably that the outcome of this fearful conflict regards the welfare of all nations equally.

3. Disagreement About Differing Forms of Government is Unnecessary

A misconception that is very common is that the conflict is between monarchist and republican institutions, and that a new-fangled constitution that combines both so to speak, will play a moderating role. Because most countries in which the revolution broke out were autocratic regimes, the revolution naturally had

an anti-monarchical effect, but the revolution has not speared republics, and in its essence it opposes every government. The distinction is not found in title or form. The Dutch Republic was anti-revolutionary, while the monarchies of Napoleon, of Louis-Phillip, and of Leopold are revolutionary.⁷⁴¹ Constitutional theory, as per its pre-revolutionary meaning, does not exclude any kind of government, just like the revolutionary dogma does not limit itself to monarchic or republican forms. The distinction is found in whether or not essential authority is acknowledged. For this reason Christianity, though compatible with all forms of government, is incompatible with a theory that rejects every dutiful submission and with it in fact God's ordering.⁷⁴²

4. Even more Astonishing is that the Conflict between Faith and Unbelief is sometimes taken for a Conflict between Different Confessions of Faith and Christian Convictions

It is true that atheism disguised as Protestant dogma has on many occasions assailed Christianity in its attack on Catholicism. Driven by narrow-mindedness and mutual hatred, both Protestants and Catholics have also, instead of uniting against a common enemy,⁷⁴³ joined its ranks. But these sad disavowals of duty and interest do not alter the essence of the matter. It is the supremacy of reason that does not recognise a higher principle apart from itself, which every

⁷⁴¹ Groen refers here to Louis-Philip I, who had become king of France in August 1830 and Leopold I, who had become first king of Belgium in July 1831.

⁷⁴² Groen notes that there are 'few errors that shed such a false light on the situation in which Europe finds itself, while at the same time being perpetuated so consistently, also where such would not have been expected. Pointing to especially clear examples of this is not difficult. "The kings flee," Count Lainé notes: this is perhaps so, but so does every administration, every authority, every legal relationship between parties. Even the *Gazette de France* (...) sometimes speaks of a conflict between autocracy and popular rule, democratic and aristocratic rule, where only the contrast between revolutionary and anti-revolutionary should be noted.'

⁷⁴³ Here ends Groen van Prinsterer, *Nederlandsche Gedachten*, 3:102.

Christian, every person who believes in revelation, must emphatically resist when they realise the true nature of these atheistic theories. After all, this dogma destroys the essence of both faith and authority.

5. Finally, it is Said that there is Continuous Conflict between Excessive Attachment to the *Old* and a Disproportionate Yearning for *Novelty*

The old and the new are thought to be two extremes between which a safe middle ground and a golden mean is to be found. In previous times changeable institutions were built on unchanging foundations. At the time, it flowed out of the nature of the matter, that one focussed more on conservation, the next on alteration, and the third, justly, on the right mean. No-one anticipated sudden destruction, let alone the undermining of foundations that were considered holy. Things are completely different, now that firm foundations are no longer recognised. All have departed from that ground on which alone safety is found. Now the one seeks to stand immovably on a steep slope, the next blindly races on, while the third keeps hesitating and with the others will shortly reach the precipice. But one asks what kind of contradiction exists between these and the proponents of the Christian and historical theory? The revolutionaries (called Jacobins, or liberals, or moderate liberals and doctrinals⁷⁴⁴) seek the realisation of a dogma that is as outrageous as it is false and pestiferous. While many, equally taken by the dogma, view rickety institutions as a guarantee against so-

⁷⁴⁴ 'Doctrinaires' in French. This was the name given to French royalists who during the Bourbon restoration (1814-1830) sought to reconcile the French monarchy with principles of the Revolution.

called abuse, it is the Christian, while he is not opposed to the progress of human endeavour, despises the meagre glow of a prideful philosophy through the illumination of revelation and history. He by contrast desires unconditional respect and application of those eternal principles that, neither old nor new, have a higher ranking than the influence of location, circumstances and time.

Indeed, all these differences, all that conflicting interest that has been listed in the sections above play a role in the great conflict, but they also dissolve in it. The principal question is the choice between submission to a higher Being, who desires obedience to his unchangeable laws, or the adoption of one's own law, which must result in inherent arbitrariness. Should by transaction the union of the one with the other be sought, the choice is already made against the God who does not tolerate other gods before him. These are bold and sure words spoken against a dogma that is approved by many. —Perhaps this candour requires a few more clarifications so as to be acquitted from any charge of impertinence and to add reasons of weightier consequence.⁷⁴⁵

19 November 1831, *Nederlandsche Gedachten* ('Dutch Thoughts') N° 27⁷⁴⁶

Overview (Conclusion)

It is perhaps sensible to show that we are not being impertinent when we disagree so emphatically with the revolution dogma that by a friendlier name receives so much endorsement and approval. What do we defend? —We defend unchangeable *principles* from an *opinion* that in its core is directed against the essence of all truths. This becomes clear as soon as we further develop the

⁷⁴⁵ Here ends Groen van Prinsterer, *Nederlandsche Gedachten*, 3:103.

⁷⁴⁶ Groen van Prinsterer, *Nederlandsche Gedachten*, 3:105–8 (n° 27).

comment, noted at the beginning of this essay, that the revolutionary-theory is the dogma of *unbelief*. Human science is based on *faith* in its broadest and philosophical sense. In all her facets she assumes truths, the certainty of which is not proven so much as intuited, or acknowledged and accepted based on a higher authority. This matter does not require further explanation or a different approach. This is the foundation, the beginning of all human knowledge; hereon all else is built, herewith all else is begun, which is why they are called axioms and *principles*. The intellect is confined within the circle of these truths. Only when application, comparison and deduction is endeavoured does the intellect's toil and the struggle between *opinions* commence.⁷⁴⁷ The edifice of science is erected on these foundations through reason and experience. The conflict of opinions makes certain what was previously in doubt. This transition importantly defines the progress of science. Thus a second kind of principles takes shape: theorems, which have been so fully examined and have received such protracted consent that they have acquired the stamp of irrefutability, as a consequence of which no further examination is deemed necessary. In this way the legacy of mankind increases daily, using the treasures of the ancestors, while thereby furthering its gains for posterity. This was the accepted mode of thought until the 'wise' philosophy of unbelief came on the scene. It completely reverses (as it is *revolutionary* not just in its consequences, but also in its essence) the

⁷⁴⁷ Groen quotes Pascal: 'Reason has to lean on what the intellect and perception knows, and on these it has to ground every discovery.' They are, as Ancillon remarks, the capital with which the mind is to engage: 'Without that primal fortune made up of ideas, we would not be able to acquire new riches. We would not be able to engage in any business without having some credit, some advance payment or some capital.'

'C'est sur ces connaissances d'intelligence et de sentiment qu'il faut que la raison s'appuie, et qu'elle fonde tout son découvrir.' (Pascal)

'Sans cette fortune primitive en fait d'idées, nous ne pourrions pas acquérir de nouvelles richesses. On ne saurait dans aucun genre faire des affaires, sans avoir du crédit, ou des avances de fond et de capital.' (Ancillon)

structure of things. Its foundation is the deification of the individual;⁷⁴⁸ through whom the truth is determined and shaped, instead of received. No mark or test of truth is found but in everyone's fallible and finite intellect. Universal truths thus disappear, as does the difference between principles and opinions. For everybody truth is whatever he thinks, beauty is whatever pleases him, and justice is whatever he prefers. All knowledge and duty is in this scheme of thought are deduced from man's understanding and will. And because man's nature is not just fallible, but also depraved and in need of a higher power for its regeneration, this principle-denying principle frighteningly reveals the depths of the horridness of a dogma that, spawning arbitrariness and doubt, would deliver mankind utterly to the dominion of evil. This disastrous nature of a false theory certainly already shows that the confidence with which it is sometimes attacked, also in this periodical, is not vain self-confidence. Where it regards actual opinions, prudence and modesty⁷⁴⁹ are called for, and one's own thoughts and imaginations are not to be entertained with too much satisfaction. Where it regards principles, a judgement should be pronounced boldly where such is necessary; especially where the most certain, the most cherished, the holiest truths have to be defended against reckless attacks. But, should the truth itself be removed, God denied, the foundation of justice, morality and duty destroyed, and mankind given over to the influences of hell, then it will be perceived that one's own opinion is not at stake, but the assertion of eternal truth against a spirit of

⁷⁴⁸ Groen notes: 'A Dutch Christian philosopher has rightly remarked: "The ruling practical principle is the self-elevating of people, *the autolatry*. Everyone individually makes himself out to be his own God. Out of this flows the pernicious and all-destroying new principle of equality, of popular authority, etc." — "In conformity with the philosophy of the century," wrote La Mennais, "each individual's reason has become his law, his truth, his justice. Everyone is sovereign over himself in the absolute sense of the word."

'Selon la philosophie du siècle, la raison de chaque individu voilà sa loi, sa vérité, sa justice. Chacun est souverain de soi-même dans le sens absolu du mot.'

⁷⁴⁹ Here ends Groen van Prinsterer, *Nederlandsche Gedachten*, 3:105.

deception and destruction. It would be a discharge of duty that resembles arrogance as little as the bitterness of wounded self-love resembles the glow of a righteous indignation. But it will be said that it was public opinion that put its seal of approval on the liberal theories. If by public opinion is meant the outlook of intelligent and sensible folks, it deserves consideration and respect, within limits. But her unconditional dominion is one of the disastrous consequences of the supremacy and absolute rule of reason, by which certainty is moulded into uncertainty, and principles into opinions. Determined by the same boundaries that give the mind a spacious working environment, it exercises an oft beneficial influence within this environment, and an always pernicious one outside it. In order to be a safe guide it should first be tested by revelation, common perception and experience.

The Christian has the Holy Scriptures. He knows that every act that is contrary to its commandments, is a crime, and every opinion with which its content does not align, is a misconception. And nowadays there is hardly one darling theorem of this new philosophy that does not seize a principal truth of revelation. But what is more, its essence is entirely anti-Christian, since it does not acknowledge any independent, *objective*, truth and hence no Christianity or revelation. The Christian does not need further proof. On the ocean of life faith is to him an undecieving compass, and the simple seafarer's faith in the power of the lodestone will not have any public opinion or crafty argument convince him to look for the true North in a different direction than the magnetic pin points to. But the battle may even be profitably brought to the territory of unbelief and before the so-called lauded court of public opinion. When public opinion in its widest scope is asked for advice, then we are able to invoke the general

conviction of all previous eras against the opinion of the last half-century.⁷⁵⁰ Bar a few exceptions, the dogma that subjects the truth to mankind instead of mankind to the truth cannot be found, not in classical, nor in recent times prior to the eighteenth century that saw the beginning of this dominating philosophy. Never before has it been applied to society. After it was applied some understood the philosophy's scope and consequences, so that there have always been objections against it. In various countries this may nowadays be observed in more outspoken ways than was previously the case. What is liberalism? It is an entirely new dogma that revolts against the eternal principles and the common consensus of centuries. Infatuation with a misconception, together with ignorance and superficiality, meant that the testimonies of philosophers and the course of events were read as though they confirmed the theories that had in actuality until only shortly before been repudiated. The revival of the true study of philosophy and history will soon shatter the vanity of such prejudiced delusion. Experience and all of history perpetually refute and contradict the modern-day composition of the false dogma. The pernicious nature of the revolutionary dogma becomes abundantly clear when the world *as it previously was* is compared to the world *it has created*.

Gripped by the fanatical nature of unbelief, attempts have been made these past sixty or seventy years to realise the liberal theories in various countries and in different ways. Though there were different views on the degree of development, the necessity of its application was generally acknowledged: liberalism triumphed *more or less* everywhere. And what was its consequence?

⁷⁵⁰ Groen quotes Ancillon: 'It's by the spirit of the centuries that the spirit of the century must be judged.'

'C'est avec l'esprit des siècles que l'esprit du siècle doit être jugé.'

An epoch arose that does not have its equal in its array of war and revolution, of misery and crime.⁷⁵¹ Perhaps it is objected that centuries long gone by also saw many terrors and disasters. Why? Who could deny that sin and decay have ruled on earth since the fall of mankind, as they will rule until all will be made new as has been promised? It will however be difficult to find another example of an era similarly marked by such a build-up of vice and misery within a few years. And while the new dogma of liberalism is the cause of these evils, the earlier dogma that taught that authority and knowledge is received from God has always been consolation and medicine. The latter forms the solid foundation of science and state, was the bond of societies, and has repeatedly established peace out of tumult, order out of confusion, and civilisation out of barbarism. And what about the theory of unbelief? It found Europe peaceable, prosperous, in the enjoyment of much liberty and enlightenment, and prepared to make all desired improvements and sound reforms. Well, it has triumphed, and its work has been confusion, despotic authority, war, and want. Things would have been even worse had not its influence been softened and halted in many ways through the remainder of Christian civilisation⁷⁵² and the obstinacy of nature that is never fully defeasible. The nature of the liberal theory is to dissolve [what it touches], and because this is its only outcome, it can never fully be put into practice. Its absolute development would mean the destruction of the human race. For this reason, material violence compensates for the lack of moral unity after it has

⁷⁵¹ Here ends Groen van Prinsterer, *Nederlandsche Gedachten*, 3:106.

⁷⁵² Groen quotes La Mennais: 'Spirit fights matter, eternal reason fights changeable opinion, faith fights disorder, liberty fights bondage, that in all its aspects comes out of the maxims that have been publically established; and all that remains of social life is owed to the influence that Christianity still has.'

L'esprit lutte contre la matière, la raison éternelle contre l'opinion variable, la foi contre le désordre, la liberté contre l'esclavage, qui, de toutes parts, sort des maximes publiquement établies; et ce qui reste de vie sociale n'est dû qu'à l'influence qu'exerce encore le Christianisme.'

been destroyed. On this course of destruction and incongruity, progress is either made or held up and must consequently accomplish the opposite of what is promised and intended. Over and over this is the choice that must be made, not because the dogma has been deviated from, but because it has been faithfully observed. Thus it is not degeneration or excess, but rather the correct application that results in the failure of the repeated experiment. The dogma stands condemned even by reason, despite the fact that reason's supremacy is its first tenet. To challenge such a dogma is not presumption, but duty. It preaches tolerance, but not that kind of tolerance that is severe towards the error, while soft, compliant and forgiving towards the one who makes the error. It preaches tolerance. No wonder, since it is precisely by such *toleration*, which is based on *equalisation* and indifference, that its dominion is recognised and confirmed. It tolerates the truth, under the condition that the lie is placed beside it. This is impossible, since an irreconcilable and ever-*active* enmity exists between these two. Darkness and light are mutually exclusive. It is impossible to equalise in this. *Indifference* is the triumph of evil. Injustice triumphs when the attempt is made to unite justice and injustice. Truth must be either rejected or admitted. Either one joins the ranks of faith and virtue, or one has already joined those of vice or unbelief.⁷⁵³

As we have noted several times, the revolutionary theory still has general hegemony at present, and the future of the world depends on the continuation or

⁷⁵³ Groen quotes Pascal: 'It is necessary that each one takes sides and moves closer either to dogmatism or to pyrrhonic skepticism; because the one who thinks he can be neutral is a Pyrrhonist by definition: this neutrality is the essence of Pyrrhonism, he who is not against them is by definition for them.'

'Il faut que chacun prenne parti et se range nécessairement, ou au dogmatisme ou au pyrrhonisme; car qui penserait demeurer neutre, seroit pyrrhonien par excellence: cette neutralité est l'essence du pyrrhonisme, qui n'est pas contre eux, est excellemment pour eux.'

the destruction of its influence. Without putting forward guesses that have no satisfactory grounds of probability, the following may nonetheless be asserted with certainty since it follows from the nature of the case. *Either* the truth will shortly be reinstated in its rights, something for which one barely dares hope. Then the collapse of the edifice of liberal pride and selfish incongruity would surely follow: liberty and enlightenment would return with the return of authority and faith, protected by the Christian principle. In this case an era of unprecedented prosperity may be expected. *Or* the revolutionary theory expands its victories; in which case we will enter an era of either anarchy, or violence, or listlessness, the sleep of death, and near lifelessness. It is possible that then the states will disintegrate and the bonds of society⁷⁵⁴ will become detached to such an extent that mutual war, anarchy and barbarism will be the consequence. We sometimes look with pride on our civilisation, as though it were a vested legacy. But is one aware what has generated civilisation? Religion always and everywhere has generated civilisation, and the Christian faith did so in Europe. Its outer shells are still present, but its life has left it; and should these shells not be revived, then they will soon disappear completely, or in any case will not provide protection against essential degeneration. Though some countries are doubtless heading towards the savageness of the first French revolution because of the revolutionary influence, yet it may well be that in the absence of a nobler tie the iron chains of physical force and violence will be universally forged as protection against the feared anarchy. The [1830 London] Conference, that in many ways followed the Congress of Vienna's lead, used a system that is very

⁷⁵⁴ Here ends Groen van Prinsterer, *Nederlandsche Gedachten*, 3:107.

well suited for more expansive and powerful application as it assumes the supremacy of the Great Powers' arrogant and irresistible aristocracy. And the nations, threatened by the horrors of widespread war and anarchy, might regard the most horrible arbitrariness and coercion a blessed anchor.⁷⁵⁵ But this last remark uniquely opens another perspective. Might the enormous conflict of principles and theories that is followed by perpetual disappointment eventually lead to an aversion of all that disturbs quiet and does not generate material interest? In that event, constitutional theory and diplomacy would in theory adhere to liberal principles, but in practice would use or misuse it after its whim. Then there would be governing according to the situation at hand, without any other purpose than to maintain what exists, especially without principles. But the tyranny would be soft and bearable because of its submissive position. — This might be possible, and is quite likely in view of the supremacy of selfishness and the weakening of higher motivation, but it should not be imagined desirable. There could be nothing more pernicious than to continue to sink in that same indifference of the last fifteen years, that faintheartedness and deafening quiet, and it must always be regarded a blessing and a salvation to have woken up from these, however horrible the awakening was. Order without principles is a situation that also excludes what is good, and must therefore lead to deterioration, materialism and dullness. Order is glorious when it is the organisation of principles, disastrous when it becomes the prescription and

⁷⁵⁵ Groen notes that this would be the fulfillment of a prediction made in the 1829 work *De nos réformes*, which at the time seemed to most the epitome of exaggeration: 'Transitions, civil and open war, the loss of our good and brave dynasties, —and finally the tyranny of the sword that we will call up, as though it were a blessing from heaven: that will be the consequences of these sad errors.'

'Les bouleversements, la guerre civile et étrangère, la perte de nos bonnes et braves dynasties, — et finalement le despotisme du sabre que nous invoquerons comme un bienfait du ciel, seront les conséquences de ces tristes erreurs.'

confirmation of evil. Even in that case peace and material wealth may potentially be had, though these usually are the fruit of principles and not the wages of the lack of principles. It is not enough that mankind be undisturbed in his enjoyment of earthly goods; the goal of his existence is to glorify God, and woe to the world when its organisation becomes one of systematic disobedience and desecration.

This overview, the wanting and inadequately animated nature of which is keenly felt by the editorial staff of *Dutch Thoughts* will nonetheless hopefully have shed some light on the periodical's mode of thought and aim. We only have one wish in final instance. The Netherlands has been formed and reformed by Christianity. Though the country has wandered, became apostate, and has been dragged into the abyss, it was saved by God's mighty arm when He broke the violence of the oppressor. While the revolutionary storm is again ravishing the world, the Netherlands has been spared, protected and guided in a remarkable way, as though it is being prepared and raised for a significant future, through both evil and evil's tempering. If much has been accomplished with regard to principles by individuals who trusted God, consider how much a nation — however small and insignificant— might accomplish were it, in its defence of justice and interest, also uphold the banner of Christianity before the nations! May this be the Netherlands' destiny! May the Netherlands be used in God's purposes to further that Christian revival of which mankind has need for victory over unbelief and destruction!⁷⁵⁶

⁷⁵⁶ Here ends Groen van Prinsterer, *Nederlandsche Gedachten*, 3:108.