

## University of Groningen

### Bridge between Tradition and Situation

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*Published in:*  
Secular Schooling in the Long Twentieth Century?

*DOI:*  
[10.1515/9783111152578-011](https://doi.org/10.1515/9783111152578-011)

**IMPORTANT NOTE: You are advised to consult the publisher's version (publisher's PDF) if you wish to cite from it. Please check the document version below.**

*Document Version*  
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

*Publication date:*  
2024

[Link to publication in University of Groningen/UMCG research database](#)

*Citation for published version (APA):*

Exalto, J. (2024). Bridge between Tradition and Situation: Titus M. Gilhuis and the Changes in Confessional Schooling in the Netherlands, 1945-1985. In M. Roos, J. Westberg, & H. Edgren (Eds.), *Secular Schooling in the Long Twentieth Century?: Christianity and Education in Norway, Sweden, and the Netherlands* (pp. 201-221). (Studies in the History of Education and Culture; Vol. 5). De Gruyter Oldenbourg. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783111152578-011>

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John Exalto

# Bridge between Tradition and Situation: Titus M. Gilhuis and the Changes in Confessional Education in the Netherlands, 1945 – 1985

## Introduction

In this chapter, I discuss the changes in confessional education in the Netherlands during the period from roughly 1945 to 1985. I describe these changes through an outline of the developmental trajectory of one of the key figures in Protestant denominational schooling. The changes in his thinking about Christian education reflect the transformations that we can observe in the entire confessional schooling during this period.

I have chosen this case because it provides a meaningful addition to the existing historiographic narrative of confessional education, which predominantly focuses on increasing government involvement, internal and external secularization, and a flattening of Christian identity. Threat and defense play a significant role in this narrative. By closely examining how the participants themselves constructed their own narrative in response to these new developments, we add depth to the historiography and align with recent studies on Dutch education in this period. In a broader sense, this chapter tests the influential proposition by the Dutch-American historian James Kennedy that the Dutch elites in the 1960s accommodated the rapid modern developments to the extent that they partly facilitated and even stimulated them. They believed that modernization was inevitable and that it was better to move in sync with the modern youth than to be left behind by them.<sup>1</sup>

This chapter follows a chronological, thematic structure. The focus is on the evolution of Titus Menno Gilhuis (1914–1990), which I will portray based on his publications. The main question is how he situated confessional education ideologically, pedagogically, and didactically within a changing context. I limit myself to his most significant works, published as standalone writings with a popular character, as they were intended to directly engage with the field of education. Gilhuis's work did not go unnoticed: several publications went through multiple reprints

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<sup>1</sup> James Kennedy, *Nieuw Babylon in aanbouw: Nederland in de jaren zestig* (Amsterdam: Boom, 1995).

and often sparked further discussions. The choice of Gilhuis is not based on his originality or groundbreaking ideas. However, in his time, Gilhuis was a prominent figure in confessional, more specifically, Protestant denominational education, evident in his commentaries on education featured on the front page of the newspaper *Trouw* between 1953 and 1963.

The period 1945–1985 was a time of rapid changes for the Netherlands, as well as for the entire Western world. This also applied to denominational education, which before the war was in self-imposed isolation to a much greater extent than it was afterwards. Societal and cultural developments such as individualization, secularization, and multiculturalism were also evident in denominational circles. From the 1960s onwards, private education underwent some significant transformations. The implicitness of pillarization gradually disappeared, ecclesiastical boundaries lost their plausibility, ecumenism, the Third World, and peace education came into focus, and heaven was no longer located at the horizon of earthly life but in the nearby, intra-worldly future. In this context, leaders had to reconsider and redefine their positions. This was also true for Titus Gilhuis.

## A Neo-Calvinist Environment

Titus Menno Gilhuis was born in Hardenberg in the province of Overijssel, located in the northeast of the Netherlands. His father, Pieter Gilhuis (1877–1954), had been the head of the Christian school there since 1907. After having worked at the Christian school in Bennekom and the Christian *mulo* (a type of secondary school) in Sneek, Gilhuis spent sixteen years in Hardenberg. In 1923, he became a teacher and assistant director of the newly established Rehoboth Reformed teacher training college in Utrecht. The school's identity and administrative dominance were shaped by the *Gereformeerde Kerken*, the Reformed Churches established in the nineteenth century as a result of the Secession, an orthodox split of the more liberal *Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk* (the Dutch Reformed Church).

On the occasion of its twenty-fifth anniversary in 1949, L.W.G. Scholten, the then director and former colleague of Gilhuis characterized education at Rehoboth. According to him, the education was founded on the principles of the “Calvinistic Reformation,” focusing on nurturing national awareness, emphasizing the distinctive characteristics of the Dutch nation, and fostering a love for the royal family. This educational approach thus had a clear identity and a pronounced religious foundation. Another element was the emphasis on authority: “Authority

as a nation-forming element was traced back to its divine foundation.”<sup>2</sup> In commemoration of its fiftieth anniversary, another former teacher wrote about the Rehoboth: “Imparting factual knowledge used to be highly important. The teacher training college resembled a ‘diluted’ secondary school with a sprinkling of pedagogy. Looking back, I believe that we did not adequately convey how knowledge should be presented in primary schools.”<sup>3</sup> Although the specifics of the curriculum are unknown, there would likely have been significant focus on subjects such as biblical history, church history, and Dutch history. The treatment of pedagogy is also unclear. Gilhuis taught pedagogy, as well as Dutch and French. In 1929, he obtained his degree in pedagogy under Jan Waterink (1890–1966) at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, who had recently been appointed as the (first) professor of pedagogy at this neo-Calvinist institution of higher education.<sup>4</sup>

The Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam was founded by Abraham Kuyper (1837–1920), leader of the *kleine luyden* (the “small folk,” a term referring to the ordinary Reformed people) among the Reformed community, who, through an emancipation process, rose socially, politically, and economically. Kuyper worked to promote Christian education and establish independent, denominational schools. Thanks in part to his efforts, the long-standing *Schoolstrijd* (“School Struggle”) ended when financial equality between public and private education was enshrined in law in 1920. Private confessional education soon surpassed public education.<sup>5</sup> Kuyper was an advocate of a pluralistic society, as he believed that various segments of society had the right to their own existence and expression. This, in his view, applied to the organization of their own education as well. Waterink and Gilhuis followed in his footsteps; like Kuyper, they were convinced that Re-

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2 Lubbertus W. G. Scholten, “De nationale betekenis van ‘Rehoboth,’” in *25 jaar Rehoboth*, ed. B. van Ginkel (Utrecht: Rehoboth, 1949), 2–3.

3 T. van Veen, *Rehoboth 1923–1973: Extra uitgave ter gelegenheid van het vijftigjarig bestaan der school* (Utrecht: Rehoboth, 1973), 17.

4 For Waterink and the Neocalvinist pedagogy, see Johan C. Sturm, *Een goede gereformeerde opvoeding: Over neo-calvinistische moraalpedagogiek (1880–1950), met speciale aandacht voor de nieuw-gereformeerde jeugdorganisaties* (Kampen: Kok, 1988); Johan C. Sturm (ed.), *Leven en werk van prof. Dr. Jan Waterink, een Nederlandse pedagoog, psycholoog en theoloog (1890–1966)* (Kampen: Kok, 1991); Marjoke Rietveld-van Wingerden, Doret J. de Ruyter, and Leendert F. Groenendijk, “Jan Waterink (1890–1966): A Dynamic Dutch Pioneer of Special Education,” *International Journal of Special Education* 24, no. 3 (2009): 21–28.

5 John Exalto, *Van wie is het kind? Twee eeuwen onderwijsvrijheid in Nederland* (Amsterdam: Balans, 2017).

formed principles were beneficial for society as a whole and should be promoted with conviction.<sup>6</sup>

Beyond the school environment, Pieter Gilhuis served as an elder in the Reformed Churches and was a board member of the Reformed Association for Alcohol Control. He was also active in the Reformed Workmen's Union Patrimonium.<sup>7</sup> He embodied a typical representative of the Reformed pillar, hailing from the *kleine luyden* and participating in an emancipation process through denominational institutions. Gilhuis came from a family of simple artisans and small livestock farmers in Sneek. He was the only one in his family to pursue further education. Through his marriage to Geurdina de Gooijer, he became part of a family that had received slightly more education. His father-in-law was a Reformed minister, and two brothers-in-law – married to his wife's sisters – were also heads of Christian schools. His own children ascended the social ladder further. Two sons studied theology, became ministers, and earned doctorates in theology at the Vrije Universiteit. One of his sons-in-law was the principal of a Christian secondary school in Leeuwarden, while another son-in-law, a doctoral minister, played a pivotal role as chairman of the Netherlands Christian Broadcasting Corporation in the developments of the Reformed pillar in the second half of the twentieth century.<sup>8</sup>

Titus followed in his father's footsteps, studying at the Rehoboth teacher training college and pursuing a long teaching career. Shaped within the Reformed Churches, the neo-Calvinist teacher training college, and the Reformed pillar, his views on education were undoubtedly influenced by these environments. Gilhuis attended the Rehoboth from 1930 to 1933 and only much later, in 1960, did he earn his history degree through evening studies at the Vrije Universiteit. He worked as a teacher in Pijnacker and The Hague. In 1942, he married Wilhelmina Gesina Nijenhuis (1912–1999), with whom he had four children. In 1944, he became the head of the Christian school in Heinenoord; he held the same position from 1949 in Weesp and from 1955 in Katwijk aan Zee. In 1959, he became a history teacher at the Christian Lyceum in Dordrecht. In 1965, he became the principal of the Christian Lyceum on Moreelsestraat in Amsterdam-Zuid, and in 1972, he started his last paid role as the academic senior lecturer in history didactics at the Vrije Universiteit. Here, he trained students who, after completing their history studies, obtained a teaching qualification. This was not always an easy task as

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6 Johan Sturm and Siebren Miedema, "Kuyper's Educational Legacy: Schooling for a Pluralist Society," in *Kuyper Reconsidered: Aspects of his Life and Work*, ed. Cornelis van der Kooi and Jan de Bruijn (Amsterdam: VU University Press, 1999), 238–47.

7 *Trouw*, October 19, 1954.

8 "Kwartierstaat Pieter Cornelis Gilhuis (1946–2005)," H. J. Michiel Wijers, accessed January 30, 2024, <http://www.hjmwijers.nl/KTiUH/Gilhuis-PC-kwst.htm#kw02>.

many students in this era tended to lean towards a Marxist societal and philosophical viewpoint.<sup>9</sup>

Gilhuis was not regarded as progressive at the Vrije Universiteit or in Christian teacher training colleges during the 1970s. Instead, his greatest influence was on the more conservative school boards and primary school teachers.<sup>10</sup> Gilhuis gained particular renown as the chairman of the Unie School en Evangelie (a Protestant NGO which was founded in 1879 as part of the school struggle, originally called Unie Een School met de Bijbel), a role he held from 1970 to 1982. It was primarily in this capacity that he developed his vision on Christian education in a changing societal context.<sup>11</sup> Gilhuis retired in 1982.

## In the Footsteps of the Forefathers

Shortly after the Second World War, Gilhuis began to make his presence felt in the public arena. He clearly followed in the path of the neo-Calvinist forefathers. In 1947, he authored a brochure by the Unie Een School met de Bijbel – of which he would become president years later – entitled *De christelijke school een noodwoning?* In that same year, he delivered a lecture at the Christian Teachers' Association's Pentecost Conference in Leeuwarden, which was later published in 1948 as *Isolement en apostolaat*.<sup>12</sup> Both publications emphasized the importance of the independent Christian school and rejected the alternative of the Christian state school. Gilhuis aimed to continue the trajectory of denominational segregation.

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9 D. G. Bijl, H. G. Leih, and H. J. van Maanen, eds., *In dienst: De Unie en Gilhuis – Gilhuis en de Unie* (Kampen: Uitgeversmaatschappij J. H. Kok, 1982), 18.

10 Cf. Maurits Groen and Arie Wilschut, “Dat gaat langzaam, dat gaat veel langzamer”: Gesprek met drs. T. M. Gilhuis over polarisatie,” *VU Magazine* 5, no. 7 (1976): 29–33.

11 Klaas de Jong Ozn., “Gilhuis, Titus Menno,” in *Biografisch lexicon voor de geschiedenis van het Nederlandse protestantisme*, vol. 6, ed. Cornelis Houtman (Kampen: Kok, 2006), 91–93; Bijl, Leih, and Van Maanen, *In dienst*. For the process of emancipation of the Reformed circle, especially via education, see Dick Th. Kuiper, *Tussen observatie en participatie: Twee eeuwen gereformeerde en antirevolutionaire wereld in ontwikkelingsperspectief* (Hilversum: Verloren, 2002), 87–100; examples can also be found in John Exalto and Gert van Klinken, eds., *De protestantse onderwijzer: Geschiedenis van een dienstbaar beroep, 1800–1920* (Zoetermeer: Meinema, 2015).

12 Titus M. Gilhuis, *De christelijke school een noodwoning?* ('s-Gravenhage: Unie Een School met de Bijbel, [1947]), 12–13. Cf. Klaas de Jong Ozn., *Een verhaal dat verdergaat: Geschiedenis van de Unie voor Christelijk Onderwijs 1879–1979* (Amersfoort: Unie voor Christelijk Onderwijs, 1999), 115. Titus M. Gilhuis, *Isolement en apostolaat: Bijdrage tot de beantwoording van de vraag: De christelijke staatsschool of de vrije christelijke school?* (Wageningen: H. Veenman & Sons, [1948]).

This stance put him in opposition to the postwar movement known as the *Doorbraak* (Breakthrough), which aimed to dismantle the prewar system of denominational segregation that had divided society into compartments, the so-called pillarization. According to the proponents of the *Doorbraak*, it was time for a new society in which Christian party politics and separate Christian schools were no longer desired. This vision took shape in a new political party, the Labor Party, in which Christians and non-Christians collaborated towards a social-democratic ideal. The *Doorbraak* also sought to abolish Christian denominational schools by offering Bible education in public schools, thereby working towards the apostolic and missionary task inherent in Christianity. The *Doorbraak* was inspired by the influential German theologian Karl Barth. Although the *Doorbraak* did not realize its ideals, it did spark an intense discussion in the 1940s in the field of education regarding the survival of denominational schools. The fact that this discussion engaged people's minds is evident from the approximately three hundred Christian teachers who transitioned from denominational to public education during that period.<sup>13</sup>

According to Gilhuis, it was not a new phenomenon to question the legitimacy of the denominational confessional school, which he framed as the “free Christian school.” This questioning had already occurred during the time of Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer (1801–1876), the father of the Protestant *volksdeel*, the Protestant segment of society in the nineteenth century. The concept of the independent Christian school is now, just as it was then, viewed by some Christians as a makeshift solution, a temporary dwelling. These Christians are critical and negative towards the Christian school as a separate entity alongside public schools: they see it as nurturing sectarianism, promoting a “sterile isolation,” and sometimes even threatening to become a “counter-church” if it tries to proclaim the Gospel alongside the church. Above all, the independent Christian school lacks compassion for the needs of the Dutch child because it retreats into a shelter and closes its windows to the world. Therefore, say the critics, the Christian school should be no more than a shelter; a temporary dwelling that we should abandon once there is a new school for the entire nation, a school where Christianity serves as a guiding and spiritual force.

In response to this new challenge for Christian denominational education, Gilhuis initially sought answers that had been formulated in the past by proponents of the Christian community and education, such as Groen van Prinsterer and Abra-

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<sup>13</sup> De Jong, *Een verhaal dat verdgaat*, 115; Peter Kromdijk, *Eenheid in verscheidenheid: Doorbraak in de Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk en de samenleving tijdens het interbellum* (Hilversum: Verloren, 2017).

ham Kuyper. According to Gilhuis, these are questions that were already asked in their time, and they developed convincing answers that remain valid today. However, by the mid-nineteenth century, Groen van Prinsterer had concluded that, due to political developments, the Netherlands was no longer a Christian state. Consequently, he abandoned the ideal of a Christian public school in favor of the independent, the “free” Christian school. Kuyper consistently followed in Groen’s footsteps by working towards the formation of a Christian community. Yet the ultimate goal of both Groen and Kuyper remained the re-Christianization of society, bringing the child into contact with the Bible. They aimed to achieve this by fully teaching the message of the cross on the independent Christian school – something that was no longer feasible in public schools due to the diversity of opinions. According to Gilhuis, their views and solutions also contained the answers for his own time:

Whoever wishes to do something against the ongoing de-Christianization today – as we live amidst the demons that will increasingly grip the masses and the child of the people – in a country that will predominantly change in character due to technological advancements and ongoing industrialization, further de-Christianizing and dehumanizing man and his child – can only do so in the barbarism of our Western European society with the *full* Gospel.<sup>14</sup>

Interestingly, Gilhuis’s concern about the de-Christianization of society was shared by proponents of the *Doorbraak* – even as early as 1945, immediately after the war; this was an important theme in education. According to Gilhuis, this de-Christianization could not be combated with the superficial religion taught in public schools, but only with the “totalitarian Gospel” of the independent Christian school – through the Christian *volksdeel*, that is, the Protestant pillarized part of society, the nation could be re-Christianized.

Ideas about the identity of the Protestant homeland occupied him during the same period when, in the spring of 1948, he published a report on the teaching of national history in Roman Catholic primary schools.<sup>15</sup> This report was released by the Willem de Zwijgerstichting, which aimed to strengthen the Protestant character of the Dutch nation and thereby advocated a form of Protestant nationalism. Gilhuis compared thirteen Roman Catholic textbooks and concluded that they focused more on church history than on national history. In line with the Amsterdam socialist pedagogue Gerrit van Veen (1880–1964), he considered the perspec-

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<sup>14</sup> Gilhuis, *De christelijke school een noodwoning?*, 12–13.

<sup>15</sup> Titus M. Gilhuis, *Rapport in opdracht van de Willem de Zwijgerstichting uitgebracht over het vaderlandse geschiedenisonderwijs op de rooms-katholieke lagere scholen in Nederland* (’s-Gravenhage: Willem de Zwijgerstichting, 1948; repr. 1949).



tive presented in these textbooks to be “nationally subpar.”<sup>16</sup> The church was central to the narrative of national history in these textbooks. The process of Christianization and the Middle Ages garnered much more attention than the time of the Reformation. Figures like Luther and Calvin were portrayed as false teachers. The Protestant founders of the Netherlands were labeled opportunists. Gilhuis referred to “Roman Catholic religion” as a danger to democracy, highlighting that twentieth-century dictatorship first emerged in Catholic Italy – a significant accusation so shortly after the end of the Second World War. According to Gilhuis, only an active Protestantism could prevent us from falling under the sway of power-hungry Romanism once again.

Gilhuis’s report received widespread distribution and was sent to eight hundred municipal governments. It was reprinted in 1949 and garnered considerable attention in the media. In the same year, one of the textbook authors discussed by Gilhuis, clergyman Thomas Doodkorte (1885–1954), a member of the Congregation of the Brothers of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart in Utrecht, responded with a brochure.<sup>17</sup> Doodkorte’s arguments can be summarized as three main points. Firstly, he stated that the Netherlands has never been solely a Protestant nation; Catholics, among others, have always lived in this country and made their contributions. Doodkorte considered Gilhuis’s assumption of a national Protestant past to be based on a fallacious premise. Secondly, Doodkorte argued that Catholics also have the right to their own perspective on the past. In this context, the Christianization process and the medieval period play a crucial role, showcasing the historical significance of Catholicism. Lastly, under the motto of freedom as a national virtue, Doodkorte pointed out that freedom of belief existed in the Netherlands, allowing for the coexistence of different viewpoints. He asserted that the Willem de Zwijgerstichting should not dictate how Catholics perceive history. Implying that imposing a historical perspective mirrored Nazi practices and would revive old anti-papal sentiments, Doodkorte was essentially saying that Catholics were as much full-fledged inhabitants of the country as anyone else, and had their place and history that they wanted to freely share.<sup>18</sup>

In 1950, a brochure by the Protestant history teacher Dr. J. C. H. de Pater (1887–1971) followed, and in November of that year, a brief commentary by the Catholic professor in history L. J. Rogier (1894–1974) was published in the newspaper *De*

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<sup>16</sup> Gerrit van Veen, “Beschouwingen over het geschiedenisonderwijs,” *Paedagogische Studiën* 18 (1937): 10–21.

<sup>17</sup> Thomas J. Doodkorte, *Nationaal beneden de maat?* (Tilburg: Drukkerij van het R.K. Jongensweeshuis, 1948).

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Karen Ghonem-Woets, *Boeken voor de katholieke jeugd: Verzuiling en ontzuiling in de geschiedenis van Zwijzen en Malmberg* (Zutphen: Walburg Pers, 2011), 186, 193, 198.

*Tijd*.<sup>19</sup> Rogier mentioned that the quotes presented in Gilhuis's report surprised, irritated, and amused readers, but he pointed out that a selection from Protestant textbooks would elicit a similar reaction. The polemical exchange between Gilhuis, Doodkorte, and De Pater demonstrated, according to Rogier, that confessional textbooks were still influenced by nineteenth-century historical paradigms and were not aligned with contemporary historical scholarship.<sup>20</sup> Simultaneously – though Rogier skirted the issue somewhat – the polemic revealed that there existed a fundamental difference in the perspective on the nature of the Dutch nation. In 1953, the Catholic clergyman Carolus Pauwels rightfully highlighted this aspect when discussing several brochures from the Willem de Zwijgerstichting, referring to the Protestant segment of the population “that would like to represent the entire nation.”<sup>21</sup> The polemical debate between Gilhuis, Doodkorte, and De Pater revealed that the sixteenth century was the battleground for their differing views, particularly concerning the role of William of Orange, the significance of Protestantism, and the interpretation of freedom of faith and conscience.

Gilhuis demonstrated himself as an advocate of history education that propagated Protestant nationalism and sought to imprint his views on education. He followed the same path of the forefathers in his brochures on the denominational Christian school, invoking figures like Groen van Prinsterer and Abraham Kuyper, and viewing the Protestant *volksdeel* as the core of the nation from which societal re-Christianization could stem. Thus, Gilhuis positioned himself as a fervent defender of the pillarization model that came under criticism shortly after the Second World War and was increasingly challenged from within the Christian community itself.

## Didactic Profiling

In the 1950s, Gilhuis reiterated this viewpoint through a series of didactic publications. In 1952, he published a brochure about the daily Bible story in Christian schools. He believed that the Bible story often turned into a mere moral tale, conveying a few lessons and a pleasant narrative. However, according to him, the Bible story should center around Jesus Christ and possess a proclaiming nature: a proclamation of salvation and grace. Gilhuis asserted that the failure of Protestant

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<sup>19</sup> J. C. H. de Pater, *Nationaal beneden de maat* ('s-Gravenhage: Willem de Zwijgerstichting, 1950).

<sup>20</sup> Louis J. Rogier, “Nationaal geschiedenisonderwijs, een onverkwikkelijke oorlog,” *De Tijd*, November 30, 1950.

<sup>21</sup> C. F. Pauwels O.P., “De kern van het debat: Gaat het gesprek tussen katholieken en protestanten wel diep genoeg?,” *De Volkskrant*, September 19, 1953.

teachers in this regard had contributed to the process of secularization. Such a Bible story requires educators with strong convictions and a biblical way of life. By presenting this argument, Gilhuis seemed to assign the school a role almost akin to that of a church – specifically, the role of conveying the message that is unique to the Christian faith.<sup>22</sup>

Gilhuis was firmly convinced of the historical significance of the school struggle and emphasized, in a lesson plan on the occasion of the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Unie Een School met de Bijbel in 1954, that this had been a fight for freedom – the freedom of parents against the guardianship of the state. This theme remained a continuous topic in circles of denominational Christian education until the mid-1960s. Through historical narratives from the time of the school struggle, the foundation of the Unie, and stories of past fighters, Gilhuis aimed to approach the subject of the school struggle in a didactic manner, using storytelling.<sup>23</sup> In the 1950s and 1960s, he was especially engaged – in addition to his regular job – in developing didactic materials for national and church history, two fields for which he had a special affinity.

In the early 1950s, national history was his primary focus, aligning him with the prevalent didactic practices of his time. During this period, history education in the Netherlands, as well as in other European countries, was characterized by a focus on (religious) identity. Gilhuis's perspective on Protestantism as the core of the nation was not uncommon.<sup>24</sup> He published a wall chart with a corresponding booklet of historical years for primary schools, which highlighted the Golden Age, the House of Orange, and Protestant history.<sup>25</sup> The same approach was taken in the three-volume series *Hun naam leeft voort: Historisch leesboek voor de christelijke school*, which he co-authored with teacher Joh. van Hulzen. This series was published in 1951 and was in its fourth edition by 1956, making its way into numerous Protestant classrooms. The series aimed, according to its preface, to present engaging historical biographies that would linger in memory. The authors restricted

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22 Titus M. Gilhuis, *Venster op Jezus: De school met de Bijbel en de verkondiging* (Delft and Bandung: Uitgeverij Van Keulen, 1952).

23 Titus M. Gilhuis, *Wachters bij de wissel: Schets van een les voor leerlingen van 12–14 jaar over de geboorte van het Volkspetitionnement en van De Unie "Een School met den Bijbel"* ('s-Gravenhage: Unie Een School met de Bijbel, 1954).

24 See Arie Wilschut, *Beelden van tijd: De rol van historisch tijdsbewustzijn bij het leren van geschiedenis* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 2011), 10–18; cf. also Tina van der Vlies, *Echoing Events: The Perpetuation of National Narratives in English and Dutch History Textbooks, 1920–2010* (Göttingen: V&R unipress, 2022).

25 L. A. de Gans and Titus M. Gilhuis, *Vlug gekend met tekst en prent: Geïllustreerde jaartallen voor de lagere school* (Groningen: Jacob Dijkstra, [1951]). On the wall map, see Hans Piena, "Van spel tot ernst: 300 jaar Canon van Nederland," *Volkskunde* 124, no. 1 (2023): 27–46.

themselves to forty-five lives of individuals “for whom God had prepared a place and task in the Netherlands, whether of a religious, political, military, or cultural nature.” They justified the relatively high number of female individuals as an attempt to rectify the frequent disregard of women’s significance in history education.<sup>26</sup> However, this emancipatory motive only manifested in seven of the forty-five biographies, and even then, they concerned political figures whose positions were attained through birth or marriage.

The series presented a familiar canon of figures who shaped Protestant history. The connection to the existing power structure is evident in the chapter dedicated to prewar Antirevolutionary Prime Minister Hendrikus Colijn (1869–1944), the political successor of Abraham Kuyper. Colijn is portrayed as a revered leader and depicted as a devout man, even though modern biographies assess him quite differently as a colonial administrator and a type of masculine leadership.<sup>27</sup> The series by Gilhuis and Van Hulzen still echoes the sentiments of the Protestant *interbellum*:

He was a Christian statesman, the beloved leader of the anti-revolutionary people. When he addressed that people at large meetings, speaking simply and in terms everyone could understand, it felt a strong connection to him – that was the bond of faith. That people were loyal to him and loved him, regardless of how much his opponents maligned and slandered him. Slander and libel did not affect him; the people’s loyalty refreshed his heart.<sup>28</sup>

In 1963, a new and more elaborate booklet with historical years was released, with the same focus as the earlier booklet. This meant that the seventeenth century took center stage, the nineteenth century received limited attention, and Protestant history formed the core of the narrative.<sup>29</sup> In the same year, Gilhuis co-authored two church history textbooks with a colleague, using the same method as in *Hun naam leeft voort*: biographical narratives in chronological order, selected to highlight Protestant profiling. Starting from Polycarpus and Augustine and progressing through Boniface in the Netherlands, Jan Hus, Geert Grote, and then treating Luther and Calvin, the series introduces Protestant faith heroes such as John Bunyan and Abraham Kuyper, before ending with Dr. W. A. Visser ’t Hooft (1900–1985), the

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<sup>26</sup> Titus M. Gilhuis and Joh. van Hulzen, *Hun naam leeft voort: Historisch leesboek voor de christelijke school*, 3 vols. (Baarn: Bosch & Keuning, 1951), vol. 1, preface, 3–4.

<sup>27</sup> Herman Langeveld, “De canonisering van het Colijn-beeld, 1930–1990,” *Oorlogsdocumentatie ’40–’45* 10 (1999): 200–17; cf. Langeveld’s biography *Hendrikus Colijn 1869–1944*, 2 vols. (Amsterdam: Balans, 1998 and 2004).

<sup>28</sup> Gilhuis and Van Hulzen, *Hun naam leeft voort*, vol. 3, 73.

<sup>29</sup> Titus M. Gilhuis, *Kort en goed: Repetitieboekje vaderlandse geschiedenis voor de christelijke school voor het vierde en vijfde leerjaar* (Baarn: Bosch & Keuning, 1963).

Dutch Secretary-General of the World Council of Churches, who was still alive at that time. This conclusion is meaningful because, although the series emanates a Protestant spirit and consequently exudes a degree of anti-papal sentiment, particularly when discussing the sixteenth century, it concludes with a positive account of the ecumenical movement under the title “That they all may be one.” Gilhuis demonstrated here that he was somewhat less strictly Reformed than he was in the 1940s and was open to new developments, at least within Protestant circles.<sup>30</sup>

This was also evident in a presentation he gave in 1962 about the didactics of church history, in which he considered the ecumenical movement the most significant event of the twentieth century and negatively judged past church schisms. According to Gilhuis, church history was often treated with neglect, despite its crucial role in instilling love for the church. He once again highlighted the biographical method through storytelling as the primary didactic approach and pointed to similar exemplary figures as in *Getuigen van het Licht*. This time, he included a caution that this method should not lead to glorification of individuals: “Always be cautious about creating a black-and-white schema. For instance, when discussing Calvin, talk about Servetus and do not omit the fact that the reformer advocated for a much broader and more rigorous suppression during the gruesome witch trials of 1545, where thirty-four unfortunate individuals were tortured to death, an effort that went beyond the intentions of the Geneva Council.”<sup>31</sup>

## Renewed Zeal

In the 1950s, the debate over isolation and *apostolaat*, the missionary openness to the world, would intensify and persist until the mid-1960s. The *Gereformeerde Kerken*, in which Gilhuis was deeply rooted, adhered to the idea of isolation, particularly in relation to the *Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk* and the *Raad voor de Zaken van Kerk en School*, the Council for Church and School within it, which saw a missionary role for Christians in public education. Gilhuis often disagreed with the

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<sup>30</sup> Gerrit van Heerde and Titus M. Gilhuis, *Getuigen van het Licht: Momenten uit de geschiedenis der kerk*, 2 vols. (Baarn: Bosch & Keuning, 1963; second print without date), 2:90–99.

<sup>31</sup> Titus M. Gilhuis, “De jonge kerk volgt het Lam: Hoe behandelen we de Kerkgeschiedenis op de lagere school?” in *Kerkgeschiedenis en zendingsonderwijs: Verslag conferentie voor personen [sic] van l.o.- en u.l.o.-scholen gehouden op 2 en 3 januari 1962 in het conferentieoord “Woudschoten” te Zeist*, ed. J. Wedzinga (’s-Gravenhage: Christelijk Paedagogisch Studiecentrum, [1962]), 5–36, quotation at 33.

policies of this Council.<sup>32</sup> The debate within denominational Christian education centered on preserving tradition on the one hand, and the necessity of educational innovation on the other. In addition to knowledge acquisition, the importance of character formation was acknowledged. Until that time, there had been little consideration for didactics in denominational schools – most of the attention had been focused on the political struggle for equal rights between religious and public education.

As this discussion began to unfold within denominational education, the process of secularization and the diversification of worldviews led to the gradual unraveling of pillarization, particularly visible from the second half of the 1960s. Christian education faced new challenges due to these changes, and actively sought answers. The focus shifted from socialization in a religious tradition to a more general religious education and attention to rituals. The entities that sustained denominational Christian education – associations, boards, administrations, staff, parents – quietly adapted to the new discourse of individualization. In society as a whole, the rights of the individual and their freedom of choice took center stage. The same process occurred in denominational Christian education, where collective militancy gave way to personal conviction, which only mattered if it was sincere, authentic, and individual. Affiliation with the pillars was no longer taken for granted. As Bram Mellink argued, an individualized religion thus transformed into a new form of group discipline.<sup>33</sup>

The process of individualization also sparked discussions about whether the dual, pillar-based structure should be abolished. Opinion leaders from within the denominational education community openly questioned the role of segmented education and wondered whether its inward focus and conserving effect remained desirable. Paradoxically, this discussion unfolded at a time when the final touches were being applied to the segmented system. School boards had long cooperated within pillar-based associations, which were now uniting under umbrella organizations for the sake of having a say in government policy, thereby gaining more influence over schools and their policies.<sup>34</sup> The process of individualization aligned with the self-development regime of the 1960s and manifested in education by emphasizing the personal faith and individual religious experience of Christian educators, rather than safeguarding tradition.

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32 L. Kalsbeek, *Theologische en wijsgerige achtergronden van de verhouding van kerk, staat en school in Nederland* (Kampen: Uitgeversmaatschappij J. H. Kok, 1976).

33 Bram Mellink, *Worden zoals wij: Onderwijs en de opkomst van de geïndividualiseerde samenleving sinds 1945* (Amsterdam: Wereldbibliotheek, 2014).

34 Jan M. G. Thurlings, *Van wie is de school? Het bijzonder onderwijs in een veranderende wereld* (Nijmegen: Valkhof Pers, 1998), 81.

With the decrease in attention to tradition, the old concept of antithesis was increasingly set aside in favor of the ideal of making a contribution to this world. This manifested in a focus on the Third World, development of cooperation, and world peace. However, societal depillarization and the decline in church attendance did not lead to the abolition of denominational Christian education. By adapting to societal trends, faith-based education actually maintained a strong position. Even though parents were not necessarily all still religious, they appreciated Christian education because it not only emphasized academic achievements but also instilled values such as compassion.<sup>35</sup>

It was during this time of transformation that Titus Gilhuis assumed the role of chairman of the Unie School en Evangelie. He initiated the series *Cahiers voor het christelijk onderwijs*, which sparked an intensive process of reflection on the contemporary issues facing faith-based education. Gilhuis demonstrated in the 1970s that he was moving with the times, where the antithesis had been replaced by a focus on development cooperation, and where the mandate to make a meaningful impact in the world had become more important than Christian dogma per se. However, he continued to advocate strongly for the unique Christian school, as it was a place where the gospel could be proclaimed fully. He realized that secularization could not be stopped by the school, but he believed “that the Christian school could serve as a space to preserve and transmit biblical values in society, flawed as it might be.”<sup>36</sup> The Christian school is a place where faith, doubt, and celebration occur, a place where there is not only counting but also telling. The Christian school was, to quote the title of one of his publications, “the playground of salvation,” where justice on earth was promoted by opening the Holy Scriptures.<sup>37</sup>

Gilhuis made traditional school boards realize that in order to be a modern school, they did not have to abandon their identity; instead, they could infuse it with new energy by working from a place of personal engagement. Identity was receiving more attention than it had before. In his publications, Gilhuis played with a range of quotes from contemporary thinkers and theologians to support

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35 Mellink, *Worden zoals wij*; Mellink, “Having Faith: Religious Optimism in Dutch Parochial Schools during the 1960s as a Case for Secularisation,” *Paedagogica Historica* 49, no. 1 (2013): 139–48; Wim de Jong, *Heer en meester: Vrijheid van onderwijs 1917–2017* (Woerden: Verus, 2017); Exalto, *Van wie is het kind?*

36 Titus M. Gilhuis, *Pleidooi voor een school met de Bijbel* (Kampen: Uitgeversmaatschappij J. H. Kok, 1979), 49.

37 Titus M. Gilhuis, *Op de speelplaats van het heil: De school met de Bijbel en de gerechtigheid op aarde* (Kampen: Uitgeversmaatschappij J. H. Kok, 1973).

his case for Christian education.<sup>38</sup> His use of metaphors sometimes blurred distinctions. For instance, he consciously bypassed the horizontal–vertical dichotomy by speaking of a journey, which involved being filled by the Holy Spirit (a concept he borrowed from the German liberation theologian Dorothee Sölle) through a celebration centered around salvation in Jesus, through biblical storytelling, prayer, song – a turn towards the Bible and God’s heart, which then necessitated a return journey, from God’s heart to the world, to the neighbor nearby and far away.<sup>39</sup> This vagueness drew criticism from the conservative factions within denominational Christian education, claiming he did not give enough attention to the Reformed foundation of the school and that the substitutionary suffering and death of Christ didn’t receive sufficient emphasis.<sup>40</sup> This was partly because Gilhuis’s description was closely related to that of the leftist cultural philosopher Feitse Boerwinkel (1906–1987) – a socialist, pacifist, and ecumenist – who placed the cultural mandate of humanity at the center of his influential notion of “messianic education.”<sup>41</sup>

On two points, Gilhuis was certainly clear. In 1980, together with Reformed theologian and missiologist Johannes Verkuyll (1908–2001) of the Vrije Universiteit, he publicly spoke out against membership of the Dutch Communist Party, deeming it incompatible with a position in a Christian school. Since communism is essentially atheism, parents cannot entrust their children to such teachers for religious education.<sup>42</sup> This stance brought Gilhuis criticism from the left wing of his support base. He had previously expressed his opposition to the so-called *samenwerkings-school*, the “cooperation school” or pluralistic school, a new type of school that could be established in shrinking areas, where public and denominational education merged into one. Gilhuis noted three reasons for his opposition: firstly, on principled grounds, because the gospel has a universal and unique character, thus being paramount in Christian education; secondly, for pedagogical reasons, as children at the primary school age are not ready to be confronted with various worldviews; and thirdly, based on the constitutional freedom of education that is undermined in the case of the pluralistic school. Although Gilhuis encountered

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38 Cf. also Titus M. Gilhuis, *En tóch is het anders: Over de herkenbaarheid van het christelijk onderwijs* (Kampen: Uitgeversmaatschappij J. H. Kok, 1978).

39 Bijl, Leih, and Van Maanen, *In dienst*, 23–27.

40 See the critique of W. H. Velema in Bijl, Leih, and Van Maanen, *In dienst*, 110; cf. Piet Kuijt, *Om welke waarden gaat het in de christelijke school: Weerwoord op de cahiers Unie “School en Evangelie”* (Utrecht: De Banier, 1974); for the rise and growth of orthodox Reformed schools in the 1970s, see John Exalto and Gerdien Bertram-Troost, “Strong Religion in a Secular Society: The Case of Orthodox Reformed Schools in The Netherlands,” *Education Sciences* 9, no. 1 (2019): 1–12.

41 Titus M. Gilhuis and Jaap Hordijk, *Gaat het al beginnen? De erfenis van Feitse Boerwinkel voor opvoeding en onderricht* (Kampen: Uitgeversmaatschappij J. H. Kok, 1989).

42 Bijl, Leih, and Van Maanen, *In dienst*, 26.



some opposition within his own circle, his resistance against the pluralistic school garnered significant support and made him a meaningful political voice.<sup>43</sup>

Gilhuis's formulations in the 1970s were more horizontally focused, less anti-theological, and dogmatic. While he moved with the times, he continued to emphasize the importance of the denominational Christian school as an initiation into the religious tradition. This was also reflected in his didactic work, particularly in the biblical stories he published after his retirement.<sup>44</sup> For the purpose of teaching faith in the family, church, and school, Gilhuis compiled collections of biblical stories, using the Westhill method. This approach centered on the child and included other stories, which Gilhuis referred to as "mirror stories," drawn from children's literature.<sup>45</sup>

His sensitivity to stories was also evident in a 1983 contribution on religious education. Gilhuis argued that the Bible is keen on passing down the story to the next generation; it is the tradition we must convey. We go to church and school to hear God's stories repeatedly and for an extended period until they become our own stories. It is therefore the task of educators and teachers to bridge the gap between the (past) religious tradition and our current situation. There is a divide between young people's world and the older generation's religious experience. Elders

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43 Titus M. Gilhuis, *De gezamenlijke school: vóór of tégen?* (Kampen: Uitgeversmaatschappij J. H. Kok, 1972); in several later *Cahiers*, Gilhuis repeated his opinion against the pluralistic school until the end of the 1970s. Cf. De Jong, *Een verhaal dat verdergaat*, 161–62, and Antonius H. W. M. Pelkmans, *Samenwerkingsscholen in ontwikkeling: De geschiedenis van de samenwerkingschoolgedachte 1945–1983 en een onderzoek naar de ontwikkeling van de samenwerkingscholen voor voortgezet onderwijs* (Nijmegen: Instituut voor Toegepaste Sociologie, 1984).

44 As a didactic of history education he developed a "thematic exemplary method" for secondary education, based on the *Lehrkunst* of the German physicist and pedagogue Martin Wagenschein (1896–1988). The method appeared as *De wereld in een druppel: Modellen, vragen en opdrachten bij het onderwijs in de geschiedenis volgens de thematisch-exemplarische methode* ([www.h.a.vo/m.a.vo/](http://www.h.a.vo/m.a.vo/)) (Kampen: Uitgeversmaatschappij J. H. Kok, 1974). We recognize Gilhuis's preference for storytelling and the (biographical) example, however, the defense of confessional identity is missing. On the other hand, he pays a lot of attention to the religious factor in history.

The history of the school struggle was one of Gilhuis's favourite topics, as is clear from his popular studies *Memorietafel van het christelijk onderwijs: De geschiedenis van de schoolstrijd* (Kampen: Uitgeversmaatschappij J. H. Kok, 1974; rev. ed. 1975) and *De tien jaren 1879–1889: De Savornin Lohman als voorzitter van de Unie "Een School met den Bijbel"* (Kampen: Uitgeversmaatschappij J. H. Kok, 1987).

45 Titus M. Gilhuis, *Vertel mij toch...: Bijbelse verhalen – nieuw gehoord* (Kampen: Uitgeversmaatschappij J. H. Kok, 1988); Gilhuis, *Nu dan, luister: Bijbelse verhalen – nieuw gehoord: Een werk- en vertelboek* (Kampen: Uitgeversmaatschappij J. H. Kok, 1990); Gilhuis, *Lees maar mee: De Bijbel erbij* (Haarlem: Nederlands Bijbelgenootschap; Brussels: Belgisch Bijbelgenootschap, 1990). Cf. Willem van der Meiden, *Zoo heerlijk eenvoudig: Geschiedenis van de kinderbijbel in Nederland* (Hilversum: Verloren, 2009).

must begin by listening to the youth, recognizing that the questions of young people are more important than the answers of the past. For educators, it is crucial to connect with the child's situation and place the Bible story within the child's experiential world. As belief is not a set of truths offered independently of people, but an experiential reality, attention should be given not only to the story but also to celebration. The Christian education system needs to harness both aspects now that secularization poses a significant threat. The question of how the Christian school can bridge tradition and situation needs to be rethought in this new context.<sup>46</sup>

With this testament, Gilhuis demonstrated that, over half a century, he had remained consistent in some respects while undergoing radical changes in others. In 1947, the emphasis was on proclaiming the gospel in schools, but by 1983, the biblical story needed to be integrated into children's lives. In 1948, he provided strong answers from a firm Reformed tradition, while in 1983, he had to rethink the bridge function of the Christian school. What remained unchanged was Gilhuis's Christian inspiration and his dedication to initiating young people into the Christian faith tradition.

## Conclusions

In this chapter, through the lens of works by a key figure in denominational Christian education in the Netherlands, I have shown the transformation that the ideological justifications of confessional schools have undergone. Until the early 1960s, Gilhuis defended the pillarized model from a well-defined Reformed identity perspective. In the 1970s, he underwent a shift towards a more horizontal, engaged justification that focused on earthly reality, with responsibilities for the world and the pursuit of justice on earth as core notions. Due to the universal nature of the gospel, Gilhuis was not willing to distance himself from the institution of the Christian school, but rather aimed to revitalize it. Gilhuis's shift aligns with the recent historiography of Dutch religious history. The postwar period up to 1965 is characterized by the continuation of subcultural organization with a strong ecclesiastical orientation. The period from 1965 to 1985 is considered a time of religious-ethical engagement during which old ecclesiastical and theological distinc-

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<sup>46</sup> Titus M. Gilhuis, "Tussen traditie en situatie: Over geloofsopvoeding anno 1983," in *Wijkende horizon: Facetten van Nederland in de periode 1958–1983*, ed. H. G. Leih. (Kampen: Uitgeversmaatschappij J. H. Kok, 1983), 117–36. Gilhuis's viewpoint is reminiscent of progressive pedagogy from the 1970s, partly inspired by John Dewey; he, however, does not refer to this.

tions lost their significance.<sup>47</sup> Gilhuis's work further demonstrates that religious elites moved with the times. In his case, this was not seen as an inevitability but rather as an attempt to generate new enthusiasm. This attempt succeeded, as he managed to inspire many school boards to contemporarily reconsider their Christian identity. Despite being in an era dominated by leftist, progressive, and Marxist ideas at the Vrije Universiteit and Christian teacher training institutions, he was known as a conservative thinker and his body of work was not highly regarded.

From a didactic perspective, this development is reflected in his initial strong interest in national history from an explicitly Protestant and anti-papist motivation. Gilhuis also paid significant attention to church history. His interest in Dutch history diminished over time, and a significant didactic shift can be observed in his focus on biblical stories: from teaching that emphasizes grace and the cross to an attempt to integrate biblical stories into the lives of children and youth. In this, there is a certain uneasiness in dealing with the religious tradition on the one hand, but on the other hand, a conviction that the tradition is significant enough to explore new forms. The ideal of re-Christianizing the nation, adhered to by Gilhuis and others in the 1940s, was formulated as a response to the already perceived threat of secularization at that time. Over time, secularization came to be seen less as a threat and more as a reality that required a renewed approach.

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<sup>47</sup> James C. Kennedy, "Recent Dutch Religious History and the Limits of Secularization," in *The Dutch and Their Gods: Secularization and Transformation of Religion in the Netherlands since 1950*, ed. Eric Sengers (Hilversum: Verloren, 2005), 27–42; cf. Peter van Dam, James Kennedy, and Friso Wielenga, eds., *Achter de zuilen: Op zoek naar religie in naoorlogs Nederland* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2014).

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