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## Strategic narratives

Schlebusch, Jan

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**Strategic Narratives**  
**Groen van Prinsterer as Nineteenth-Century Statesman-Historian**

**PhD thesis**

to obtain the degree of PhD at the  
University of Groningen  
on the authority of the  
Rector Magnificus Prof. E. Sterken  
and in accordance with the decision by the College of Deans.

This thesis will be defended in public on

25 June 2018 at 14:30 hours

by

**Jan Adriaan Schlebusch**

born on 4 February 1989  
in Bloemfontein, South Africa

## **Supervisors**

Prof. M.P.A. de Baar

Prof. C. Jedan

## **Assessment Committee**

Prof. G. Harinck

Prof. A.L. Molendijk

Prof. T.H. Weir

*Dedicated to my parents*

*My father, Jann, for inspiring this project*

*My mother, Annemarie, for her support and love*



**Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer (1801-1876)**

*(Portrait by Dirk Jurriaan Sluyter, 1872)*





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## PREFACE

I initially became familiar with the name Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer (or simply: Groen) in 2008, during my first year as an undergraduate student at the University of the Free State in South Africa. Perhaps surprisingly, this was rather coincidental, as it wasn't through my studies that I became acquainted with this historical figure, but during a break. I visited my parents on the farm, and my father was reading a book (neither of us can today recall which work it was) in which a passage from Groen's *Unbelief and Revolution* was quoted. My father was quite intrigued by the quote, so much so that he thought it necessary to call me and read it to me out loud. I recall that it made a similar impression on me at the time. Today I still can't recall exactly which section it was from *Unbelief and Revolution* (alas), but it nevertheless incited me to read the English translation of Groen's magnum opus for the first time.<sup>1</sup>

Five years later, in 2013, while I was finishing up my Masters thesis at the University of the Free State in South Africa, a university friend of mine, who had successfully applied for an Erasmus Mundus scholarship the year before, encouraged me to do the same. I came across the Erasmus Mundus EU-Saturn program, which at the time offered the possibility of a PhD program at the University of Groningen's Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies. One application requirement was the submission of a research proposal showing the envisaged socio-political relevance of the proposed study. Groen's *Unbelief and Revolution* immediately

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<sup>1</sup> Harry van Dyke, *Groen van Prinsterer's Lectures in Unbelief and Revolution* (Jordan, Ontario: Wedge, 1989).

sprung to my mind. Through a successful application I was blessed to receive the nearly three-year-long scholarship that allowed me to successfully embark on this endeavour.

Although the focus of the study had already, within the first few months, shifted a significant distance from the original proposal, I believe that I have been successful in achieving its original purpose: contributing something useful to the study of this historical figure by showcasing his historical societal impact in an unprecedented way. Furthermore, it has been my hope and aim throughout that God may be glorified through this project – an objective that has greatly motivated me to work productively throughout the time that I was granted to complete it.

There are many who have helped and guided me along the way, without whom this project would never have become a reality. In this light I would like to acknowledge and express my sincere gratitude to the following people, institutions, and projects:

The Erasmus Mundus EU-Saturn scholarship program provided the necessary funds to make this project possible.

The Graduate School of the Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies at the University of Groningen accepted me for a PhD position and provided me with the necessary funds to complete my training and supervision program which was integral to this project. The Graduate School under the chairmanship of Professor Jacques van Ruiten also not only offered me opportunities to present my research and gain valuable feedback, but also exposed me to other research projects at the school, exposure which has improved me as a scholar.

My supervisors at the Graduate School of Theology and Religious Studies at the University of Groningen, Professors Mirjam de Baar and Christoph Jedan, who sacrificed innumerable hours and provided a vital effort to help this project stay on track and finish on schedule. Your guidance was indispensable. A special thank you, also, for helping to make the project an enjoyable experience with your enthusiastic participation in the process, especially our enjoyable and memorable monthly meetings. Thank you also for your patience during our online meetings towards the end after I returned home to South Africa, when some very bad internet connections from my side often lead to frustrating interruptions.

Professor George Harinck from the Theological University of Kampen and Free University of Amsterdam, as well as Professor Herman Paul from the University of Groningen and University of Leiden, provided vital advice and guidance at crucial stages of my research. Without their input this dissertation would not have its present shape.

The Faculty of Religious Studies at Florida State University and the British Ecclesiastical History Society granted me opportunities to present my research to international audiences at conferences in Tallahassee and Cambridge, respectively. This exposure and the feedback gained from it proved to be very helpful in shaping the project.

My parents Jann and Annemarie continued their loving support of my project and offered plentiful encouragement even when times were tough.

My loving wife Lize's help and support carried me throughout. Without her as the pillar of our home and little family, productively focusing on my research would not have been possible.

Last but certainly not least, I'd like to thank our children. Our delightful little daughter, Hanna, is the first member of our family line to be born in the Netherlands in over two centuries. We especially appreciate you being such a good and calm little girl, allowing our sleep routine to not be markedly interrupted when you entered our lives at such a busy time. Thank you for all your love and consideration. We also appreciate our baby boy, Jadrian, who was patient and content during times when I was working hard to finish up my dissertation.

# INTRODUCTION

The figure of Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer (1801-1876) is not well known outside of the Netherlands. This dissertation is the first on this Christian statesman and historian to be written in English in nearly thirty years, and only the second ever after Harry van Dyke's 1989 dissertation.<sup>2</sup> Whereas van Dyke's work had focused narrowly on Groen's anti-revolutionary (i.e. anti-Enlightenment) magnum opus, *Unbelief and Revolution*, this dissertation is the first to offer a broader analysis of Groen's life and work for an international audience of historians of the nineteenth century.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, given Groen's significance for later Reformed politicians such as Abraham Kuyper and his historical importance as Protestant historian and statesman, church historians and political historians, as well as students of the philosophy of history, would also benefit from the contribution of this dissertation.

Despite continued appreciation by a small circle of Dutch Reformed scholars, who see Groen as a political inspirator or as historiographically viable, historians outside of that circle may only acknowledge that he had some limited historical significance, but they do not appreciate him as historian anymore.<sup>4</sup> Where appreciation of Groen still exists, most scholars emphasize his contribution as exemplary Christian statesman.<sup>5</sup> Some scholars also

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<sup>2</sup> Harry van Dyke, *Groen van Prinsterer's Lectures on Unbelief and Revolution* (Jordan, Ontario: Wedge, 1989).

<sup>3</sup> *Unbelief and Revolution* was a series of private lectures delivered by Groen and was published in 1847, with a second edition appearing in 1868.

<sup>4</sup> In the Netherlands, the last known academic defence of Christian historiography which appealed to Groen was offered by the Dutch Reformed historian Roel Kuiper in his book *Uitzien naar de zin - Inleiding tot een christelijke geschiedsbekouwing* (Leiden: Groen & Zoon, 1996). This incited an almost immediate negative response by the historian Wim Berkelaar in his article "Is christelijke geschiedbeoefening mogelijk?," *Transparant* 8, no. 2 (1997): 24-25.

<sup>5</sup> See: D. van Dijk and H. Massinck (ed.), *Groen en de grondwet - De betekenis van Groen van Prinsterers visie op de Grondwet van 1848* (Heerenveen: J.J. Groen & Zoon, 1998); Roel Kuiper, 'Tot een voorbeeld zult gij blijven' - Mr. G Groen van Prinsterer (1801-1876) (Amsterdam: Buijten & Schipperheijn, 2001); Jan de Bruijn and George Harinck (ed.), *Groen van Prinsterer in Europese context* (Hilversum: Verloren, 2004); W.G.F. van

point to his contribution to Christian history writing.<sup>6</sup> However, the traditional interpretation of Groen as ideological forebear is marked by a *separation* of Groen's contributions as statesman and as historian, where either or both aspects of his legacy are presented as continually relevant for Dutch Christians today in terms of either politics or history writing. In this dissertation, I aim to challenge that separation and offer an integrated view of Groen as both statesman and historian. I do so by employing the tools provided by the recent innovations of narrative approaches in historiography. Through an emphasis on the practical function of narrative in history-writing, the latter is shown to be a political act in itself. In this regard the narrative strategies underlying Groen's socio-political engagement were not uniquely Christian or Anti-Revolutionary. In approaching Groen's political and historiographical work as integrated, I aim to cast a new light upon it – highlighting the historical relevance of his narratively sanctioned career as statesman-historian as of interest for a broad, international audience of scholars today. This study's integrated approach, focusing on the manner of Groen's political engagement as historical narrator, therefore provides a valuable tool with which Groen's historical significance can be highlighted and appreciated in an unprecedented way.

The anti-revolutionary Groen, as statesman-historian, productively engaged in and impacted the socio-political discussions and processes of his time. Groen's place in the national memory culture of the Netherlands is well evidenced. A casual visitor to the Netherlands might come across his name by means of the fact that more than ten Christian

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Vliet, *Groen van Prinsterers historische benadering van de politiek* (Hilversum: Verloren, 2008); Jelle Bijl, *Een Europese Antirevolutionair - Het Europeabeeld van Groen van Prinsterer in tekst en context* (Amsterdam: VU University Press, 2011); Huib Klink, "Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer (1801-1876)," in *Revolutionair verval en conservatieve vooruitgang in de achttiende en negentiende eeuw*, ed. T. Baudet and M. Visser, 272-296 (Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, 2012); Tom-Eric Krijger, "Een veldheer met vele legers: De partijpolitieke erfenis van Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer," *Trajecta: religie, cultuur en samenleving in de Nederlanden* 24 (2015): 85-120.

<sup>6</sup> Kuiper, *Uitzien*, 19.

schools and at least twenty-three streets in various cities and towns throughout the country have been named after him. Even though his broader historical impact has often been overlooked in mainstream historiography, the extensive study on Groen as an ideological forebear has continued for well over a century. However, by their emphasis on Groen either as historian or as statesman and political theorist, existing approaches have unfortunately neglected some of the crucial dynamics of the most significant and historically decisive aspects of his political engagement, such as his strategic defense and solidification of the Dutch constitutional democracy in 1856, when he rejected the reactionary agenda of King Willem III. This episode forms an ideal historical test case for the perspective proposed in this dissertation, aimed at presenting a holistic and integrated view of Groen as simultaneously statesman and historian to a broader audience.

In viewing history writing as a political act with a political agenda, a narrative approach of Groen's life and work is most helpful in achieving this objective. Reading his writings as strategically aimed at the explanation and justification of his political position in his historical context, provides the ideal tool to fill the gap in the historiography on Groen by researching Groen the politician and Groen the historian as closely integrated. Such a perspective is vital for a comprehensive understanding of the historical significance and dynamics of Groen's history writing as sanctioning his socio-political engagement and contribution. This dissertation's main question therefore concerns how narrative strategies function in Groen's historiographical and autobiographical writings as argumentation for and justification of his political self-positioning and public engagement as an anti-revolutionary.

Since the latter half of the twentieth century narrative approaches have been systematically developed in light of the growing dissatisfaction with prior approaches to

historiography aiming at explaining the past in causal terms. Under the influence of philosophers of history such as Hayden White in particular, history writing has come to be seen as representation (through narrative) rather than explanation of historical fact.<sup>7</sup> As founder of the narrative approach, White's work has been recognized as fundamentally and significantly changing the focus of the discipline.<sup>8</sup> In his most influential work, *Metahistory: Historical Imagination in 19th-century Europe*, White proposes historical narrative as tropologically sanctioned, with every worldview of the historian being figuratively represented in his text by one of four possible tropes.<sup>9</sup> These four tropological categories are Metaphor, Metonymy, Synecdoche, and Irony.<sup>10</sup> With his approach based in literary theory, he presents history-writing as ultimately an aesthetic-poetic act.<sup>11</sup>

Recently, however, some historians and philosophers of history have criticized White's approach as too radical. They have pointed to his reduction of history-writing to the fictional based on his understanding of texts as non-referential and metaphorical constructions, i.e. that do not point to a reality beyond the text itself.<sup>12</sup> One of White's most renowned critics is the American philosopher of history, David Carr. In his 2014 work, *Experience and History: Phenomenological Perspectives on the Historical World*, Carr offers an attractive alternative to White's postmodern approach: while embracing White's

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<sup>7</sup> Frank Ankersmit, "Narrative and Interpretation", in *Blackwell Companions to Philosophy: A Companion to the Philosophy and History of Historiography*, ed. A. Tucker, (Chichester: Blackwell Publishing, 2009), 199-201. See also Robert C. Williams, *The Historian's Toolbox: A Student's Guide to the Theory and Craft of History* 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., (New York: Routledge, 2015), 100.

<sup>8</sup> Frank Ankersmit, "Narrative, an Introduction", in *Re-figuring Hayden White*, ed. H. Kellner, E. Domanska and Frank Ankersmit, (Stanford: Stanford University, 2009), 78.

<sup>9</sup> White, *Hayden White, Metahistory: Historical Imagination in 19th-century Europe* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2014), xxx.

Despite White's emphasis on nineteenth-century historical narratives, Groen van Prinsterer is not mentioned in *Metahistory*.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, x.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, xxxi-xxxii.

<sup>12</sup> David Carr, *Experience and History: Phenomenological Perspectives on the Historical World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), xxi-xxii; Chris Lorenz, *De constructie van het verleden – Een inleiding tot de theorie van de geschiedenis*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition (Amsterdam: Boom, 1998), 58-60, 133-136.

emphasis on narrative he rejects the reduction of historical narrative to fiction. Carr's emphasis on narrative is still in line with recent developments in historiography, initiated by White's revolutionary work. However, unlike the latter's insistence on an unbridgable gap between historical reality and historical representation, the phenomenological-narrative approach advocated by Carr offers an alternative. According to Carr history writing is both practical and public, i.e. he looks beyond White's reduction of narrative to literary theory in maintaining that narrative is inherent to all human existence and that all human perception is narrational.<sup>13</sup>

Carr's narrative approach offers an ideal framework for the study of Groen as nineteenth century statesman-historian, because its emphasis on the practicality of narrative allows for the integration of strategies of political self-positioning within historical narratives. Before explaining how exactly I envisage applying Carr's approach to the study of Groen as statesman-historian, I will offer a little more detail on the basic tenets of this approach.

Carr proposes the phenomenological-narrative approach "as a way of overcoming the weaknesses and solving the problems of [a] dual focus on representation and memory" in terms of history-writing.<sup>14</sup> Following the German philosopher Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), he advocates a retentive understanding of history, where a narrative is retained consciously or subconsciously as a framework in which one's actions in the present make coherent sense in light of the given past and envisaged future.<sup>15</sup> One may explain the retentive nature of narrative as lived experience in terms of a rally in tennis. One's position on the court during a rally is determined by all the preceding shots by both oneself

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<sup>13</sup> Ankersmit, *Narrative and Interpretation*, 201-202.

<sup>14</sup> Carr, *Experience and History*, 2, 7.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 67-68.

and one's opponent, and this "history" is retained in one's mind as determinative for shot selection and re-positioning in the present, aimed at giving oneself the best chance of achieving the future goal of winning the point.

Carr proposes that all human experience, to be intelligible, is narrational in nature. Historical narrative as (collective) experience shapes the horizon for a group's social self-establishment, political positioning, and societal engagement by providing the coherent framework in which all of this becomes possible.<sup>16</sup> Carr distinguishes his view of the nature of narrative from those of Hayden White and those structuralists who had previously also emphasized narrative in history.<sup>17</sup> The latter viewed narrative as an alien structure of literary imagination imposed on everyday life, following the rules of storytelling that originate in fiction, rather than as intrinsically characteristic of human experience itself. Carr observes that White and the structuralists viewed historical narrative as a form of creative fiction – an escape from reality to satisfy the historiographical need for narrative coherence – and therefore refused to seriously consider the explanatory significance of narrative itself.<sup>18</sup> Carr counters that the narrative structure actually reflects everyday human reality and all human participation in it.<sup>19</sup> He argues that it is because of the closeness of narrative and human reality, where "narrative explanation does not inhabit a different conceptual universe from the narrated," that the former serves as an adequate means of explaining the latter.<sup>20</sup> Narrative is therefore not merely aesthetic but practical: it is the means of human

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 73-75, 91-92.

<sup>17</sup> White, *Metahistory*, ix; Lorenz, *Constructie*, 102.

<sup>18</sup> Carr, *Experience and History*, 220.

<sup>19</sup> Carr, *Experience and History*, 112-113, 115, 195, 201.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 222-223.

self-understanding which forms “the organizing principle not only for actions and experiences but also for the self who acts.”<sup>21</sup>

As mentioned above, Carr identifies various problems with Hayden White’s approach that he tries to avoid in his narrative approach. He criticizes the Whitean presuppositions (i) that reality and narrative are mutually exclusive, in that narrative properly belongs to the realm of fiction; (ii) that knowledge and imagination are intrinsically opposed; and (iii) that “fiction” and “falsehood” are synonymous.<sup>22</sup> Countering these, he argues (i) that the human world, as reality, manifests itself with an inherent narrative form, which is also the most appropriate form of conveying that reality; (ii) that knowledge is not merely passive reception of information, but human activity; and (iii) that the distinction between history and fiction lies in the author’s intent, not in the quality of the (historical) work.<sup>23</sup>

Carr proposes that the narrative structure of history-writing is not limited to history or even to literature in general. It constitutes the practical mode by which everyday human experience is constructed, much like a melody, in which “parts and relations point backward and forward to each other in time as determined by their place in the whole”: an interplay of retention and anticipation.<sup>24</sup> Humans experience time through participation in events that take time, and, as with a melody, narrative is necessary to grasp their unfolding.<sup>25</sup> Human experience and participation in reality “envisage the future, consult the past, and arrange the present as the passage between the two.”<sup>26</sup> Carr thus views the philosophy of history in experiential and practical terms as opposed to theoretical terms. As he explains:

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 113-114.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 204-205.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 206-209.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 108-110.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 179.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 110.

our performance of ... actions not only spans great periods of time, but it is also interrupted and intermittent, must be set aside and taken up again and again, and maintained on course in spite of unexpected intrusions and unforeseen circumstances. The practical role of narrative here is to remind ourselves not only of 'what we are doing,' in the sense of what action we are involved in, but also of 'where we are' in the action, what has been accomplished so far and what still needs to be done.<sup>27</sup>

The historicity integral to human existence entails seeing "ourselves and our present situation as the dramatic turning point between past and future, and we arrange the past in such a way as to make a certain future meaningful if not inevitable."<sup>28</sup> Narrative also has the practical function of holding together a community, constituted and called to participation by the telling and re-telling of the story, over time.<sup>29</sup>

For Carr, nineteenth-century philosophies of history therefore should be understood "not as metaphysical claims about the reality of the historical process, but as a kind of discourse more appropriately compared with the political-rhetorical kind of story-telling."<sup>30</sup> He argues that the familiarity of the narrative structure and context opens up immediately recognizable strategies for dealing with the present situation.<sup>31</sup> Taking Hegel as an example, he notes that the philosopher's "ultimate purpose in advancing a philosophy of history was not to make theoretical or metaphysical claims about the origin and destiny of world history, but to mount a rhetorical and persuasive account that would help move it toward a certain goal."<sup>32</sup> Carr adds, however, that this does not mean that Hegel's philosophy of history should be understood as prescription rather than description, but rather as a re-

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 111.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 134.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 119.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 121.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 214.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 133.

description through a narrative spanning past, present, and future, with a rhetorical function.<sup>33</sup> Carr explains:

we are situated in the present and face a future that we can affect with our planning and action. Our figuring of the future involves a refiguring of the past and the construction of a practical narrative to make sense of what we do. Our claim here is that this practical-narrative structure not only exists at the individual level, but is found also on the social and communal plane and on the larger-scale and longer-term plane of history.<sup>34</sup>

And:

Thus the phenomenological contribution to the philosophy of history ... is neither a speculative account of the overall course of history, of the sort associated with Hegel's philosophy of history, nor merely an epistemology of historical knowledge, since it traces the conditions of such knowledge to the underlying historicity of experience.<sup>35</sup>

Carr therefore calls for an ontological view of narrative in which historical narrative is viewed as a "mode of existence," which, given the temporal character of human understanding, has a self-constituting function for communities and gives meaning to human action.<sup>36</sup> Communities are constituted by and have a "narrative existence."<sup>37</sup>

How, then, can this phenomenological-narrative approach fruitfully be applied to the current study of Groen van Prinsterer as statesman and historian? As noted, the approach was specifically chosen to answer my main question: to explain the function of the narrative strategies in Groen's works whereby he argued for and justified his political position and engagement.

As Carr notes, this practical narrative as historiographical strategy was particularly embraced by historians following the Enlightenment's conception of societal future as one

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 136.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 172.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 225, 227-229.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 230.

no longer merely to be prophesied or even speculated about, but rather to be shaped by human action, based on the idea that humanity's destiny lay in its own hands.<sup>38</sup> In the nineteenth century this was coupled with the rise of historicism, a conservative and romantic mode of thinking, which, in contradistinction to rationalist epistemology, proposed that all of human society could be understood (and consequently transformed) only in terms of how it had been historically shaped.<sup>39</sup> This development historically coincided with Groen's rise to prominence as public historian and as Christian statesman in the Netherlands.

Focusing specifically on the Dutch context, the Dutch historian Herman Paul, in a 2016 article on Carr's work, shows how this practical-narrational trend in historiography was evident in Dutch religious and cultural life (particularly outside of academia) from around 1860 until the start of the Second World War.<sup>40</sup> He observes that during this period, interest in historiography generally had the function of communal self-positioning in time and called for appropriate socio-political engagement, especially in the midst of the radical and rapid socio-political changes of the nineteenth-century.<sup>41</sup> He re-iterates Carr's observation that nineteenth-century historicism should be viewed not merely as an epistemic reaction to the rationalism of the Enlightenment, but as a means of religious and moral self-establishment in the midst of the experience of a socio-religious and socio-political crisis.<sup>42</sup> He notes that in the Netherlands, church ministers in particular expressed an interest in the philosophy of history towards the latter half of the nineteenth-century, precisely because they had

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 140, 142.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 144-145.

<sup>40</sup> Herman Paul, "Plaatsbepaling in de tijd: geschiedfilosofie in Nederland 1860-1940," *Tijdschrift voor geschiedenis* 129, no. 1 (2016): 11.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 30.

concerns regarding the future of Christianity in Europe.<sup>43</sup> This sentiment would continue to predominate until the crisis of historicism also significantly affected Dutch Calvinism in the late 1930s.<sup>44</sup>

Paul starts his analysis of the effect of this historiographical perspective in 1860, arguing that from then, even more so than in the preceding historiographical work of Groen van Prinsterer, the philosophy of history in the Netherlands came to be seen as the battlefield of conflicting societal visions.<sup>45</sup> Nonetheless, despite the date of this conceptual shift in the Netherlands, I will show, by means of Carr's narrative approach, that Groen's entire career can be appreciated in this light as a practical mode of existence. This is because Carr teaches us that narrative is always present as a means employed by the historian, even if unconsciously done so (as was the case with Groen). I will exemplify this through an emphasis on Groen's practical utilization of his narrative reflections throughout his political career.

In other words, focusing on Groen's Christian-historical narrative as reflected in his writings – that is, his retentional framework of existence as part of a human story encompassing past, present, and future – I will explain how the narrative strategies present in Groen's writings can be interpreted in the same light as others that Carr identifies. Historical narrative strategies underlying Groen's works can then be re-understood as a typical form of narrative-rhetorical political self-positioning indebted to the nineteenth-century historicist tradition. Although Groen became famous for developing and proposing a distinctly Christian historical narrative, his indebtedness to nineteenth-century historicism

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 18, 27.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 15.

has been well-documented.<sup>46</sup> The Dutch historian George Harinck has also observed that Groen's historiography needs to be understood in light of the Dutch Reformed cause in the Netherlands at a time when, in terms of their own worldview, they were under immense existential pressure from nineteenth-century Enlightenment liberalism.<sup>47</sup> This conceptualization was narratively evident throughout Groen's works.

Via the phenomenological-narrative approach, the focus of this dissertation will therefore be to explain how Groen's Christian-historical narrativization can serve as an example of a nineteenth-century historical-narrational strategy of socio-political self-positioning, as well as an example of a strategy shaping and sanctioning socio-political action – in this particular case, as the leading representative of the anti-revolutionary movement in the Netherlands. In other words, the great advantage of approaching Groen in this way is that it provides a most useful tool in helping to cast a new historical light on Groen's political action and societal engagement. One of the main reasons why Groen's biographers to date have missed this important integrated focus is because they have generally sought to present Groen as a spiritual and ideological predecessor in their works. Remaining within that narrative paradigm has prevented them from fully appreciating the function of Groen's narrative in his writings.

Groen's justification for and self-understanding of his socio-political engagement can be best addressed by re-appreciating the close interrelationship between Groen the statesman and Groen the historian. Appreciating his political action as an anti-revolutionary public figure, embedded within the framework of a Christian-historical narrative where the Netherlands is a divinely chosen providential instrument of paramount historical-

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<sup>46</sup> van Vliet, *historische benadering*, 33.

<sup>47</sup> George Harinck, "Een gereformeerd historicus vandaag," in *Groen van Prinsterer en de geschiedenis – Historische opstellen*, ed. George Harinck and Roel Kuiper (Kampen: Van den Berg, 1994), 126-127, 131.

teleological significance, opens up the potential for a new understanding and re-appreciation of the life and work of this interesting figure. Unexplored until now, the main focus of this dissertation is Groen's distinctly Christian narrativization of history as a foundational means for sanctioning and justifying sensible public engagement on a socio-political level in the historical context of the nineteenth-century Netherlands. The value of this approach will particularly become evident when applied to the episode I have chosen as a test case for showing the value of my approach – Groen's surprising course of non-intervention in 1856, when he refused to support the politically influential King Willem III in his reactionary attempt to undermine the newly established parliamentary democracy.<sup>48</sup>

The paradigm of resistance against contemporary socio-political and socio-religious changes that marked Groen's career was decisively interrupted by a remarkable – and historically significant – decision of his in 1856. It took place in the aftermath of the newly established constitutional democratic system that had been initiated with the acceptance of the constitution of 1848. Groen, a dissident member of the Second Chamber, in 1856 surprisingly acted as defender and solidifier of the Dutch political system – at that time still young and vulnerable – the constitutional parliamentary democracy that has endured to this day.<sup>49</sup> The role played by narrative in shaping his political position and sanctioning his political engagement was particularly well-evidenced in this episode, one in which Groen played a historically significant role in contributing to solidify and shape the Dutch constitutional democracy. It therefore provides my dissertation with an interpretation of a historical episode to demonstrate the strength of my phenomenological-narrative approach for studying Groen as statesman-historian.

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<sup>48</sup> Groen's historically decisive role in this episode will be extensively treated in chapter six.

<sup>49</sup> Marnix Betten and Henk te Velde, "Passion and Reason: Modern Parliaments in the Low Countries" in *Parliament and Parliamentarism: A Comparative History of a European Concept*, ed. Pasi Ihalainen, Cornelia Ilie and Kari Palonen, (Berghahn: New York, 2016) 82, 90

Groen opposed many of the socio-political developments that triumphed at the time: the increased prevalence of the idea of the sovereignty of the people, political centralization, de-confessionalization of the Dutch State, the shift of political power away from the House of Orange, educational reform, and the liberal constitutional revisions.<sup>50</sup> This career-long dedication to resistance against the prevailing societal developments makes his choice for non-intervention in 1856 such a surprising and intriguing case, made even more interesting given its historical significance for the Dutch constitutional democracy.

The primary sources used for this research include a wide variety of Groen's political, historical, and philosophical writings from various stages throughout his life and career, from the mid-1820s through the mid-1870s. In general, I use the original publications of Groen's writings, but I have chosen to translate the Dutch titles in my text to English. An appendix at the end of this dissertation provides a full list of the titles of Groen's works and other non-English primary sources used, in both their original language and with English translation. Groen's major writings can be divided into four categories (each listed chronologically):

(i) his journalistic endeavors: the various series of his periodical, *Dutch Thoughts* (both from the early 1830s and from its later revival in the early 1870s);

(ii) Christian-historical political and philosophical works: *On National Spirit and Good Citizenship* (1829), his epistemically contemplative *Essay on the Means by which Truth Is Known and Confirmed* (1834), *Unbelief and Revolution – A Series of Historical Lectures* (first edition: 1847, self-revised and re-published in 1868), *Liberty, Equality, Fraternity:*

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<sup>50</sup> Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer, *Ongeloof en revolutie*, ed. Roel Kuiper and Arie Kuiper (Barneveld: Nederlands Dagblad, 2008 (1847)), 28, 69, 195-196, 207; *Ibid.*, *Nederlandsche Gedachten, 2nd series - V* (Amsterdam: Höveker & Zoon, 1873), 40; *Ibid.*, *Grondwetsherziening en eensgezindheid* (Amsterdam: Johannes Muller 1849), 10-11, 476.

*Elucidation of the revolutionary maxim* (1848), *The Right of the Reformed Church* (1848), *Varieties on Constitutional Law and Politics* (1850), *Epilogue to a Five-year Battle* (1855), *In Remembrance of Stahl* (1862), and *Religious Nationality with Regard to the Netherlands and the Evangelical Alliance* (1867);

(iii) works relating to the constitutional revisions of 1840 and 1848: *Contribution to Constitutional Revision in the Dutch Manner* and *Advice in the Doubled Second Chamber of the Estates-General*, both published in 1840, as well as *Constitutional Revision and Unanimity* (1849), *Primary Education and Article 194 of the Constitution – Parliamentary Advice of 28 September 1864* (1864), and *How the Education Law of 1857 Came to Be: Historical Contribution* (1876);

(iv) historiographical works: his *Handbook on the History of the Fatherland* (1841, self-revised and re-published three times by 1875), his defense of his historiographic method in his *Answer to Mr. M.C. van Hall* from 1844, as well as *1813 Re-thought in Light of Our National History*, published on the fiftieth anniversary of the return of the prince of Orange in 1863.

I extensively draw from Groen's correspondence throughout this dissertation.<sup>51</sup> I also include a few references to brief miscellaneous writings of his, in addition to his PhD dissertation in law, *On the Excellence of the Justinian Code* (1823).

I generally utilize the original Dutch versions of Groen's works, with the exception of his magna opera of *Unbelief and Revolution* and the *Handbook*. Here I use various editions in addition to the originals, which aid with the vital comparison of the first and consequent versions published by Groen during his own lifetime. The importance of this lies not only in appreciating the significance Groen attached to these works as reflected in his felt need to

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<sup>51</sup> Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer, *Schriftelijke nalatenschap: briefwisseling 1808-1876*, ed. C. Gerritson, A. Goslinga, H.J. Smit and Jantje L. van Essen. (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1925/1949/1964).

re-edit them himself, but particularly in studying Groen's own thought development and its effect on his narrative self-(re)positioning, as reflected in his edits of these two works at different stages during his lifetime.

Apart from Groen's writings, a thorough grasp of the historical and ideological context pertaining to his anti-revolutionary stance is essential. In this regard the following sources have proved to be most valuable: the British-Irish conservative Edmund Burke's famous *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1791), the German historian Arnold Ludwig Heeren's *Historical Researches into the Politics, Intercourse, and Trade of the Principal Nations of Antiquity* (1812), the German jurist-historian Friedrich Carl von Savigny's *On the Vocation of Our Age for Legislation and Jurisprudence* (1814), the Swiss jurist Karl Ludwig von Haller's *Restoration of Political Science* (1816), Groen's Réveil friend Isaac Da Costa's *Objections to the Spirit of the Age* (1823), and the German legal theorist Friedrich Julius Stahl's *A Historical View of the Philosophy of Law* (1837).

The first two chapters will consist of a traditional biography. For the sake of the international audience to which my dissertation is geared, these chapters are placed at the start in order to familiarize the audience with the figure of Groen van Prinsterer. The focus of these chapters will be Groen's life and historical context before and after 1848 respectively. The justification for the structural splitting of these two chapters at this particular historical juncture in Groen's life is the great socio-political changes in Europe and the Netherlands that marked that year of revolutions. New challenges emerged from these changes that inevitably impacted the narrative strategies present in Groen's writings. These two chapters will therefore establish the historical framework from which to view Groen's anti-revolutionary grand historical narrative from a phenomenological-narrative approach. Chapter 3 provides a thematic overview of the foci of the existing literature on Groen. This

overview will contrast my approach and its value to that of the existing literature. In chapters 4 and 5, my approach to Groen's anti-revolutionary historical narrative will come to full fruition where I discuss Groen the historian (Chapter 4), as well as Groen the political theorist (Chapter 5). This will establish a comprehensive groundwork for chapter six, where I will focus on my test case regarding Groen's rationale behind his choice for non-intervention in 1856, particularly concerning how his self-understanding and sanctioning of this choice functioned within the framework of his historical narrative. I conclude my dissertation by returning to address the research question concerning the practical political function of Groen's narrative strategies as historian.

## **CHAPTER 1**

# **The Revolution's Anecdote: Groen's Early Life and Early Career as Anti-Revolutionary Thinker and Public Figure (1801-1847)**

### **1. Introduction**

In order to understand Groen's narrative engagement in its historical context, our attention first turns to the significance of Groen's lived experience, as well as his political and historiographical contributions. The biographical overview of the following two chapters will familiarize an international audience with his life and times. The focus of this chapter is his early life and the first half of his career, when he established himself as an anti-revolutionary public figure. This part of his life was historically situated in the Batavian-French (1795–1813) and Restoration (1815–1848) periods in Dutch history. I will focus on (i) Groen's family background and childhood, (ii) his early development as a student, advocate, and referendary in the king's cabinet, (iii) the significance of his lived experience of the Belgian Revolution in shaping his career, (iv) his early career as anti-revolutionary publicist and Réveil front man in the 1830s, and finally (v) his positioning in terms of the constitutional revision of 1840 and engagement in the education debates during the 1840s. The reader will thereby be familiarized with the nature and dynamics of Groen's anti-revolutionary socio-political engagement prior to the establishment of the Dutch constitutional democracy in 1848. The chronological splitting of this biography into two

chapters at this point in time is done because of the significance of Groen's narrative repositioning after this episode in 1848, as will be seen later on in chapter 5.

## **2. Groen's Early Life: The Batavian-French Period and the United Kingdom (1801–1830)**

### *2.1 Groen's Family Background and Childhood*

Through the Batavian Republic established in 1795, the political ideas of the Enlightenment first gained political establishment in the Netherlands.<sup>52</sup> Historically, however, this national political revolution naturally grew out of the successes of the so-called Patriot Movement of the 1780s in the Netherlands.<sup>53</sup> One of the first cities in which the Patriot Movement manifested publicly was Heusden in North Brabant. Here, under Baron Van der Does van Noordwijk (1726–1787) a system had developed in the second half of the eighteenth century whereby favors and positions were exchanged for political support. This was a source of irritation for many tax-paying citizens, who then felt attracted to the Patriot Movement.<sup>54</sup> Tensions escalated at the start of 1784, when, in his New Year's Eve sermon, the local Reformed minister Rev. Sterck argued that Dutch Roman Catholics should be content under a Reformed (Calvinist) regime in the Netherlands, in which the Reformed Church (*Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk* as it was known at the time) enjoyed a privileged position — the status quo at the time. Three (liberal) Patriot church members objected to the sermon. They were publicly supported by another local minister, Rev.

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<sup>52</sup> A. Rasker, *De Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk vanaf 1795* (Kampen: J.H. Kok, 1974), 19; Joost Roosendaal, *Tot nut van Nederland* (Nijmegen: Joost Roosendaal, 2012), 17.

<sup>53</sup> Roosendaal, *Tot nut*, 189.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 17-19.

Cornelius Groen van Prinsterer, Guillaume Groen's grandfather.<sup>55</sup> Groen's grandfather, therefore, although a Dutch Reformed minister, held political sympathies somewhat more aligned with liberal ideas regarding national de-confessionalization promoted by the Enlightenment in the late eighteenth century.

The establishment of the Batavian Republic was marked by socio-political and socio-religious liberalization. A policy of complete separation of church and state was initially accepted by the National Assembly of the Batavian Republic in 1796.<sup>56</sup> While this was a blow to the Reformed Church, it was welcomed by many Roman Catholics, dissident Protestants such as Mennonites, and Jews. Limitations were even imposed on the Reformed Church, as ministers were not allowed to use sermons to criticize government policies.

The first written national constitution in the history of Netherlands, accepted by the Batavian Republic in 1798, reflected the principles of liberty and equality as understood within the framework of the French Enlightenment.<sup>57</sup> Welfare and education, previously understood to be domains of the church, became public (state) affairs. Some church property was confiscated and put in a national fund for education and caring for the poor. In 1806, a new education law was accepted that officially declared all education to be commissioned by government. This law, accepted when Groen was only five years old, would have a major impact on his career, triggering the battle over education in which he would play a very important role later in his life.<sup>58</sup>

When a second Batavian constitution had been accepted in 1801, however, religion was proposed as vital to the fabric of civil society, and issues such as Sunday observance or

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 30-31. The Dutch Reformed Church: this was the official name of the national Reformed Church established in the sixteenth century. From 1816 it would become known as the *Nederlands Hervormde Kerk*.

<sup>56</sup> Freek Schlingmann, *Koning Willem I - vadertje, koopman en verlicht despoot* (Soesterburg: Aspekt, 2012), 55.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 56-57.

<sup>58</sup> Rasker, *Hervormde Kerk*, 20-21; Schlingmann, *Willem I*, 56-57.

rest became civil matters again. Louis Bonaparte, who became king of the puppet Kingdom of Holland in 1806, also maintained a neutral stance concerning the various religious denominations, despite pressure from his brother, Napoleon, to ensure that Dutch Roman Catholics would support their government.<sup>59</sup> He retired in 1810, however, and the Netherlands became a fully integrated part of the French empire. The *Code Pénal* consequently issued by Napoleon for the Netherlands also recognized the rights of Calvinists, Lutherans, Jews, and Roman Catholics, but limited religious rights of all who did not fall under these categories.<sup>60</sup> French rule would eventually be brought to an end in 1813 following Napoleon's defeat in Russia, initiating an era of "restoration" of some pre-revolutionary royal positions of authority in the Netherlands, as in many other parts of Europe.<sup>61</sup>

Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer was born in Voorburg, near the Hague, on 21 August, 1801, the year of the acceptance of the second Batavian constitution. On both his father's and mother's side, he descended from elite patriot families. As noted, his grandfather, Reverend Groen van Prinsterer, was counted among those members of the upper class who had supported the Patriots even prior to the Batavian Revolution. His son and daughter-in-law stayed true to this legacy, preferring to adopt and integrate French culture into their lives, for example opting for a French Reformed Church over the Dutch Reformed Church. Much of the family's wealth was due to the inheritance of Groen's mother, Adriana Henrieka Caan. She came from a particularly wealthy Patriot family and her cousins, Jan and Nicolaas Staphorst, both played major roles in the Batavian Revolution. Socializing in elite circles in The Hague and conversing in French, she was herself very much

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<sup>59</sup> Rasker, *Hervormde Kerk*, 21; Schlingmann, *Willem I*, 59-60.

<sup>60</sup> Schlingmann, *Willem I*, 62-64.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

settled in the liberal upper class of the time.<sup>62</sup> Groen's parents were therefore not at odds with the status quo at the time of Groen's birth. The Reformed historian Roel Kuiper has even suggested that Groen's French name, Guillaume, which also wasn't a traditional family name, was itself a testimony to the pro-French Enlightenment sentiments of his parents.<sup>63</sup> Groen's eventual rise to fame would be a result of dedicating his life to opposing this legacy, however.

Initially, Groen's father, who wanted Groen to become a doctor like himself, had a big hand in the boy's education, which took place at their home at Voorburg near The Hague.<sup>64</sup> During the reign of Louis Bonaparte, in 1808, the young Groen started attending a school in The Hague, where he received instruction in grammar, mathematics, geography, history, and science.<sup>65</sup> From early on in his life, the interests that would shape his later career, particularly as historian, became evident. From the age of thirteen he would also receive private instruction from the rector of The Hague Gymnasium, Kappeyne van de Cappello, where history was his favorite subject.<sup>66</sup> Groen had, even as a nine-year-old boy, expressed in a letter his love for logical syllogisms — which would play a vital role in his career both as historian and as political philosopher.<sup>67</sup>

The return of the Prince of Orange to the Netherlands when Groen was twelve years old, had, at least according to his narrative recounting, left a lasting and decisive impression upon him. Groen fondly wrote that the people's calls of "Oranje boven!" ("Viva Orange!") upon the prince's return in 1813 were a re-awakening of the true historical Dutch spirit, and

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<sup>62</sup> Kuiper, *Tot een voorbeeld*, 13-14.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 16-17.

<sup>65</sup> Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer, *Schriftelijke nalatenschap: briefwisseling 1808-1876*, ed. C. Gerritson, A. Goslinga, H.J. Smit and Jantje L. van Essen, (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1925/1949/1964 (1808)), I, 1-2.

<sup>66</sup> Van Vliet, *Historische benadering*, 19.

<sup>67</sup> Groen, *Briefwisseling I*, 2-3.

even a “revolution” in line with the purposes of divine providence. In his historical narrative, the true Dutch spirit had been smothered by French revolutionary Enlightenment influences during the period of 1795–1813, but was, at least for the moment, revived upon the prince’s return.<sup>68</sup> In his *Handbook on the History of the Fatherland*, he positively described the spirit of 1813 as one of truly religious anti-revolutionary fervor.<sup>69</sup> However, he also in his *Handbook* revealed his reservations to the 1813 political changes as insufficient, not marking a clear enough break with the revolutionary principles he opposed.<sup>70</sup>

## *2.2 Groen’s Early Development as Student, Advocate, and Referendary in King*

### *Willem I’s Cabinet: The United Kingdom (1814–1830)*

After the defeat of Napoleon and the fall of the First French Empire in 1813, the Sovereign Principality of the United Netherlands was instituted, succeeded shortly thereafter by the United Kingdom of the Netherlands in 1815, with Prince Willem IV inaugurated as its first king, King Willem I. The Congress of Vienna that year had re-instituted many old monarchical houses in Europe.<sup>71</sup> In his 2008 PhD dissertation on Groen, W.G.F. Van Vliet placed the decisions of this Congress in the context of a nineteenth-century European Restoration spirit, by which, in the aftermath of the experiments of the French Revolution, there was a growing tendency to return to historical roots and arrangements — a movement known as Romanticism.<sup>72</sup> In the Netherlands, the pre-Batavian office of *stadhouder* (or ‘prince’),

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<sup>68</sup> Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer, *1813 In het licht der volkshistorie herdacht* (The Hague: H.J. Gerritsen, 1869 (1863)), 45-46.

<sup>69</sup> Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer, *Handboek der Geschiedenis van het Vaderland*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed (Amsterdam: Höveker & Zoon, 1872 (1841)), 902.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.* 785, 819.

<sup>71</sup> C.J.M. Breunese, *Losgemaakt uit de verdrukking - Opiniejoernalistiek rond de scheiding van Noord en Zuid 1828-1832* ( Apeldoorn: Het Spinhuis, 2014), 16.

<sup>72</sup> Van Vliet, *Historische benadering*, 18.

previously held by the heads of the family of Orange, was deemed to have become outdated and inappropriate. The Netherlands was no more a decentralized state with provincial and local aristocratic authority. Rather, the state had become national and constitutional.<sup>73</sup>

A third national constitution was accepted in 1814, which provided for a strong monarch, assisted by ministers individually responsible to him. This arrangement remained intact when the constitution was revised in 1815 with the establishment of the United Kingdom of the Netherlands, comprising the Netherlands and Belgium.<sup>74</sup> Willem I was consequently crowned “King of the Netherlands and Archduke of Luxembourg.”<sup>75</sup> The new constitution also, at the newly crowned king’s request, instituted a Second Chamber in the Dutch parliament.<sup>76</sup>

This major political shift occurred just as Groen was entering his teenage years. Groen, when later reflecting on his upbringing and early education, characterized it as a form of moderately liberal Christianity.<sup>77</sup> He would subsequently, after maturing as an anti-revolutionary, distance himself from the spirit of the catechism classes he had received from the family’s pastor, the theologically liberal Reverend Dermhout, during this time. He regarded it as “painful” to have to oppose Dermhout publicly, as he had had great respect for the man since he was a boy.<sup>78</sup>

Nonetheless, Groen always recognized that his early education guided him on a path that would ultimately shape his anti-revolutionary worldview. The seeds of this outlook

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 28. *Stadhouder* was the traditional title for the Prince of Orange.

<sup>74</sup> Jeroen Koch, *Willem I 1772-1843* (Amsterdam: Boom, 2013), 249

<sup>75</sup> Schlingmann, *Willem I*, 93.

<sup>76</sup> Koch, *Willem I*, 309

<sup>77</sup> Groen, *gedachten V.*, 211, 255.

<sup>78</sup> Groen, *Bescheiden deel I en II 1821-1876*, ed. Johan Zwaan, (The Hague: Instituut voor Nederlandse Geschiedenis, 1991), II, 502 “pijnlijk”.

were planted during his time at Leiden University (1817–1823), which he started attending after finishing school in The Hague. Already in February 1818, Groen’s father recommended to him the works of the jurist-poet Hieronymus van Alphen, who, as a renowned Orangist, had political sympathies very different from the Groen van Prinsterer family at the time.<sup>79</sup> Kirpestein noted that this points to the moderate or centrist political-religious stance of Groen’s father at the time.<sup>80</sup>

After Groen had completed his final years of school in The Hague, he enrolled in Leiden to study history and law.<sup>81</sup> While Groen was studying there, his father directed him to another Orangist and anti-patriot, the controversial counterrevolutionary Willem Bilderdijk.<sup>82</sup> Groen consequently attended the lectures of Bilderdijk, who was a leading initiator of the Dutch Réveil.<sup>83</sup> During the early 1820s, the poet-jurist Willem Bilderdijk fought a lonely battle against the liberalizing political and religious tide in the Netherlands. As his biographers Honings and van Zonneveld put it: “He felt like a foreigner in his time and fervently desired death.”<sup>84</sup> Bilderdijk’s ultraconservative cultural criticism against the *communis opinio* of his time proved quite unpopular on a larger societal scale. Nonetheless, he managed to gather a small but loyal and dedicated circle of friends around him.<sup>85</sup> One of Bilderdijk’s close friends was Isaac Da Costa, a converted Jew who created a stir by publishing a very controversial anti-Enlightenment booklet, *Objections to the Spirit of the*

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<sup>79</sup> Groen, *Briefwisseling* I, 11. The Traditionalist Orangist Party stood opposed to the Enlightenment Patriot Party in the late eighteenth century.

<sup>80</sup> Jan W. Kirpestein, *Groen van Prinsterer als belijder van kerk en staat in de negentiende eeuw* (Leiden: Groen & Zoon, 1993), 61.

<sup>81</sup> Kuiper, *Tot een voorbeeld*, 20; Van Vliet, *Historische benadering*, 20.

<sup>82</sup> Groen, *Briefwisseling* I, 19-20.

<sup>83</sup> See sections 2 and 3.1 below for an description of the movement and its role in shaping Groen’s thinking and action.

<sup>84</sup> Rick Honings & Peter van Zonneveld, *De gefnuikte arend: Het leven van Willem Bilderdijk* (Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, 2013), 12: “Hij voelde zich een vreemde in zijn tijd en verlangde vurig naar de dood.”

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*

*Age*, in 1823.<sup>86</sup> Both Bilderdijk and Da Costa, who would become influential figures in the Dutch Réveil, rejected the notion of a written constitution in itself as a product of the Enlightenment.<sup>87</sup> In his *Objections* Da Costa argued that while modern philosophy's claim to have defeated superstition was indeed noble, under this guise it had declared all religion not devoted to the supremacy of reason superstitious, thereby placing fallen man on the throne of God: as superstition was fought, unbelief was promoted.<sup>88</sup>

On multiple occasions throughout his career, Groen would acknowledge Bilderdijk as a significant positive influence on his intellectual development, yet adding that his appreciation for Bilderdijk had always been eclectic, and that he merely made him skeptical of liberal theories rather than convinced of his counterrevolutionary position.<sup>89</sup> Nonetheless, by 1831 he credited Bilderdijk for making him aware of and leading him to guard against the "unchristian" elements in his early education.<sup>90</sup>

In his consequent self-positioning as anti-revolutionary from the late 1820s onwards, Groen would distance himself explicitly, though never completely, from his moderately liberal family upbringing. In this regard there is a lot of value in the Reformed minister Jan Willem Kirpestein's remark, that a moderate stance marked the political position of many of the second-generation patriot families during the early nineteenth century. Whereas Groen's grandfather was an ardent fighter for the Enlightenment-inspired Patriot cause, Groen's father, as evidenced by directing his son to influential thinkers on the right, appeared to lack dedication to the cause of his own father. This in turn enabled Groen to gradually shift away from his parents' position without causing excessive familial strife,

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<sup>86</sup> J.F. van Haselen, *Uit het dagboek en de brieven van Willem de Clercq* (Baarn: Bosch & Keuning, 1937), 4-5.

<sup>87</sup> Honings & Van Zonneveld, *Bilderdijk*, 402.

<sup>88</sup> Isaac Da Costa, *Bezwaren tegen den geest der eeuw* (Leiden: A.W. Sijthoff's, 1923 (1823)), 1.

<sup>89</sup> Groen, *Ongeloof en revolutie* (2008), 54; *Briefwisseling I*, 503.

<sup>90</sup> Groen, *Briefwisseling I*, 503.

although some of his other early social relations within the upper class would suffer from his re-positioning, as the example of Reverend Dermhout shows. Despite maintaining good relations, his father was very displeased with Groen's shift towards the Réveil.<sup>91</sup> In narrating on the role of the liberal upper classes during the Batavian time (i.e. his parents' generation) later in life, Groen argued that they were, to a great degree, essentially blinded to the dangers of the revolutionary theories by their materialistic lifestyle centered around their wealth.<sup>92</sup>

Groen might have had his own parents (and perhaps most of all his father) in mind with this generalization, parents with whom he would nevertheless maintain good relations. It would be more difficult to have argued that his grandfather or uncles were oblivious regarding the revolutionary theories, for they were very much dedicated to the Patriot cause and the Enlightenment ideologies on which the Batavian Republic were founded. In Groen's narrative, his parents were largely victims of the Revolution by virtue of the upper-class culture in which they were raised. Thereby Groen, in retrospect, narrated the background to his early life and education so as not to fully antagonize the class he was born into, a class in which his parents felt comfortably at home, but one with prevailing liberal sentiments from which he would decidedly maneuver away.

At Leiden, Groen would also be influenced by Romantic philosophies, such as the Historical School of von Savigny, as well as ancient Greek and Roman philosophy.<sup>93</sup> By 1830 Groen had admittedly been a great admirer of von Savigny.<sup>94</sup> He would also recognize Plato throughout his career, and when later reflecting on his academic career in Leiden, he would

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<sup>91</sup> Kuiper, *Tot een voorbeeld*, 75-76.

<sup>92</sup> Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer, *Nederlandsche Gedachten*, 2<sup>nd</sup> series - IV (Amsterdam: Höveker & Zoon, 1872), 210-211.

<sup>93</sup> Van Dyke, *Lectures*, 40; Van Vliet, *Historische benadering*, 32.

<sup>94</sup> Groen, *Briefwisseling I*, 267.

even describe this classic philosopher as his “favorite author.”<sup>95</sup> He eventually completed his doctoral examination in the humanities in January 1823 and defended theses for his doctorate in law during April. On 17 December 1823 he graduated with doctorates in both fields.<sup>96</sup>

During the first four years after graduating from Leiden, Groen would primarily work as an advocate.<sup>97</sup> He additionally started to experiment with writing history for the first time. In 1826, at the age of twenty-five, Groen himself would deliver a public lecture in The Hague, entitled “On the Reasons for Making the History of the Fatherland Known.”<sup>98</sup> During this same time he also participated in a national competition for the honorary title of “Historian of the Kingdom.” He was awarded a finalist medal by the king, but no overall winner was ever announced.<sup>99</sup> Some of his other activities during this time included writing two unpublished essays dealing with international affairs: *Concerns Regarding the Call to Support the Greeks* (1825) and a *Historical Essay on the History and Consequences of the Tightening Unity of Civilized Nations* (1826).<sup>100</sup> The first was written concerning the Greek rebellion against Turkey, which he opposed; the second reflected the historical nature and development of European nations in their unity and diversity.<sup>101</sup>

Groen would eventually move to Brussels to work as referendary in the cabinet of King Willem I from 1827, where his experiences would have a lifelong impact on his career.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Groen, *Gedachten V*, 250.

<sup>96</sup> Kuiper, *Tot een voorbeeld*, 25, 27.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>98</sup> “Over de redenen om de geschiedenis der natie bekend te maken”.

<sup>99</sup> Van Vliet, *Historische benadering*, 20.

<sup>100</sup> *Bedenkingen tegen een oproeping tot ondersteuning der Grieken; Historische proeve over de geschiedenis en de gevolgen der steeds nauwer gewordene vereeniging van de beschaafde volken.*

<sup>101</sup> Bijl, *Europese Antirevolutionair*, 38, 46.

<sup>102</sup> R.H. Bremmer, *Er staat geschreven! Er is geschied! - introductie tot het leven en werk van Groen van Prinsterer als getuigend historicus* (Apeldoorn: Willem de Zwijgerstichting, 1981), 7-8.

### 3. Groen and the Belgian Revolution (1828–1830)

In 1821 Groen had married a lady from a patrician family background, Elizabeth (Betsy) van der Hoop, the daughter of the former mayor of Groningen, Abraham Johan van der Hoop.<sup>103</sup> They shared a common religious devotion and felt out of touch with the liberal spirit of the social circles in which they moved.<sup>104</sup> Although Bilderdijk is considered to have been the initiator of the Dutch branch of the Réveil, it was not until 1828 that, while living in Brussels, Groen's pious wife Betsy introduced him to the Réveil movement by means of the royal court's Swiss chaplain, Jean-Henri Merle d'Aubigne.<sup>105</sup> During his time in Brussels, Groen regularly attended services held by the chaplain.<sup>106</sup> Groen himself would later describe the Réveil, which had such a telling influence on his politico-religious formation and career, as a movement of "Christian Revival: Reformational return to the A B C of the gospel."<sup>107</sup>

The Réveil was a Methodist- and Calvinist-inspired pan-European revival movement that appeared at the beginning of the nineteenth century.<sup>108</sup> Within the movement there was great emphasis on personal regeneration and personal experience as a central part of Christian faith. This could be termed a form of "experimental Christianity."<sup>109</sup> Apart from this emphasis on personal religion, the movement also emphasized that religious principles

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<sup>103</sup> Kuiper, *Tot een voorbeeld*, 34.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 35

<sup>105</sup> Kirpestein, *Belijder*, 36-37; D. Kuiper, "Kerngroepvorming, met name binnen het Amsterdamse Réveil - over sociale lagen en familierelaties in de lange negentiende eeuw (1815-1914)," in *Opwekking van de natie: Het Protestantse Réveil in Nederland*, ed. Fred van Lieburg (Hilversum: Verloren, 2012), 13, 35.

<sup>106</sup> Kirpestein, *Belijder*, 36-37.

<sup>107</sup> Groen, *Gedachten V*, 265: "Christelijke wederontwaking. Reformatorische terugkeer tot het Evangelische A b c."

<sup>108</sup> Marie Elizabeth Kluit, *Het Réveil in Nederland: 1817-1854* (Amsterdam: H.J. Paris, 1936), 3-5; Van Dyke, *Lectures*, 21.

<sup>109</sup> U. Gäbler, "Enkele kenmerken van het Europese en Amerikaanse Réveil," *Documentatieblad voor de Nederlandse Kerkgeschiedenis na 1800* 33, (November 1990), 10-11.

by necessity had socio-political consequences.<sup>110</sup> Characteristic of the Réveil movement was, therefore, its commitment to a more integrated view of religion and socio-political action: the Kingdom of Christ had to become concrete in every sphere of life.<sup>111</sup> When the Belgian Revolution broke out in 1830, Groen also sided with other Réveil figures as the most prominent denouncers of the revolutionary spirit.<sup>112</sup>

There were a number of religious, socio-political and socio-economic factors that contributed to the outbreak of the Revolution in Belgium at that particular point in history.<sup>113</sup> After the initiation of the United Kingdom of the Netherlands in 1815, there was some opposition against the 1815 constitution from Belgian Roman Catholics. However, the historian C.J.M. Breunese notes that it initially looked as if the king's authority and policies were untouchable, and that strong opposition, primarily from the liberal press, became visible only in the early 1820s.<sup>114</sup> Apart from the Roman Catholics, liberals in Belgium also generally mistrusted and opposed the king's policies. Liberal French *refugiés*, who had come to settle in Belgium, desired to establish an independent republic.<sup>115</sup> However, even here in the southern part of his kingdom, there was high praise for the king's economic innovation, and the revolution of 1830, according to King Willem I's biographer Jeroen Koch, cannot be ascribed to economic factors.<sup>116</sup>

Willem I is often described as an "enlightened despot." His government was authoritarian, but his thinking was greatly influenced by the Enlightenment. Tension marked

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<sup>110</sup> Willem Aalders, *Revolutie en Réveil 1789-1989* (The Hague: J.N. Voorhove, 1989), 77, 79.

<sup>111</sup> Maartje Janse, "'Vereeniging en verlangen om vereenigd te werken' - Réveil en Civil Society," in *Opwekking van de natie: Het Protestantse Réveil in Nederland*, ed. Fred van Lieburg (Hilversum: Verloren, 2012), 169.

<sup>112</sup> P. Schram. "Inwendige zending zonder grenzen," in *Documentatieblad voor de Nederlandse Kerkgeschiedenis na 1800* no. 33, (November 1990), 138.

<sup>113</sup> Schlingmann, *Willem I*, 124-125.

<sup>114</sup> Breunese, *Losgemaakt*, 15, 19.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>116</sup> Koch, *Willem I*, 411

his relationship with the constitutionalists of his time.<sup>117</sup> A biographer of the king, F. Schlingmann, has noted in this regard: “The king believed . . . that reason could solve all problems. But then reason without gainsaying. The way Willem I governed, he might as well have governed without ministers.”<sup>118</sup> Koch also notes that the king viewed the constitution as merely an official legitimation of his personal power.<sup>119</sup> During his rule, the Estates General also effectively merely sanctioned his decisions. The “Blanket Law” of 1818 did state that the king was punishable if he overstepped limitations placed upon him, but it failed to be specific; with no concrete limitations, it practically left the king at liberty to do as he pleased.<sup>120</sup>

The 1814 constitution had proclaimed the Reformed faith as that of the head of the state and allowed for the Reformed Church to enjoy a publically privileged position.<sup>121</sup> A constitutional revision was needed following unification with predominantly Roman Catholic Belgium in 1815, in which these articles consequently fell away.<sup>122</sup> The 1815 constitution granted “full religious liberty,” but also stated that the king has the responsibility to see to it that all denominations stay true to the laws of the state.<sup>123</sup> Twentieth-century church historian Rasker has commented on this: “Therefore, in accordance with the ideas of the Enlightenment, there is no state-church or privileged church any longer, but in accordance with Enlightened Despotism, an intensive involvement of the ruler in ecclesiastical

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid, 14; Rasker, *Hervormde Kerk*, 25.

<sup>118</sup> Schlingmann, *Willem I*, 93-94: “De koning geloofde ... in de rede die alle problemen kon oplossen. Maar dan wel Rede zonder tegenspraak. Zoals er door Willem I werd geregeerd, had hij ook zonder ministers kunnen regeren.”

<sup>119</sup> Koch, *Willem I*, 309

<sup>120</sup> Schlingmann, *Willem I*, 96.

<sup>121</sup> “Nederlandse grondwet: achtste hoofdstuk. Van den godsdienst, het openbaar onderwijs en het arm-bestuur 1814, art. 133”, accessed 3 June 2016, <https://www.denederlandsegrondwet.nl/9353000/1/j9vvihlf299q0sr/vi6colh4wzyl>.

<sup>122</sup> Rasker, *Hervormde Kerk*, 25.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., 25-26.

matters.”<sup>124</sup> The Common Regulation of 1816 entailed that the king had the right to directly appoint members of the Dutch Reformed Church synod. Decisions by the synod also had to be approved by him.<sup>125</sup> Members appointed to the synod, according to the regulation, had the duty to care for the interests of Christianity in general, the Reformed Church in particular, the preservation of true doctrine, religious education, the advancement of Christian virtues, and the advancement of love for king and fatherland, in addition to overseeing the administration of the church.<sup>126</sup>

Ever since the acceptance of the 1815 constitution, there had been opposition from Belgian Roman Catholics particularly against the constitutional regulation that the king had the duty or privilege to oversee all denominations. Willem I desired the same authority over the Roman Catholic Church that he had over the Reformed Church, which placed him in great conflict with a large section of the Belgian population, as well as with Rome. Many Roman Catholics found it particularly annoying that a Protestant monarch enjoyed so much authority and rights over the Roman Catholic Church. Many of its bishops openly advocated opposition to the new constitution.<sup>127</sup>

Opposition intensified when the king started to take control of the education system in the southern provinces, which had traditionally been under control of the Roman Catholic Church. Schlingmann has explained this move as integrated with the king’s general policy towards religion at the time:

The king simply desired to, similarly as in the north, place civil authority — separated from every faith — above ecclesiastical. For him this could only be

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<sup>124</sup> Ibid., 26: “Er is dus, overeenkomstig de ideeën van de Verlichting, geen staatskerk of bevoorregte kerk meer, maar wel, overeenkomstig de ideeën van het verlicht despotisme, een intensive bemoeienis van de vorst met kerkelijke zaken.”

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., 27-28.

<sup>126</sup> Schlingmann, *Willem I*, 99-100.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., 107; 123.

achieved by means of reforming the education system so as to create an educated, enlightened and tolerant national spirituality.<sup>128</sup>

Though not the primary cause, there was an economic dimension to the revolution, too: the southern part of the United Kingdom regarded it as adding insult to injury when Belgium, with no public debt, was forced via taxation to carry the debt placed upon it by the north. Furthermore, in Belgium, more than any other continental European country during the time leading up to the revolution, mechanization led to increased unemployment. The so-called “monster alliance” was consequently established against the king by both Roman Catholics and pro-Enlightenment liberals in the south.<sup>129</sup> The king’s suppressive socio-economic and religious policies drove these two groups, though originally natural enemies, into each other’s arms.<sup>130</sup> Dutch was declared the official language by the king in 1821 — one of the main measures the king implemented in his attempt to unify the south and the north — but the southern press heavily opposed this. Despite limits imposed on the press, by 1830 the greater part of the Belgian press was still publishing in French, providing the public news from the new revolution that had taken place in France during July of that year.<sup>131</sup>

By 1828–29 a large number of petitions against the government were already publicly circulated, particularly targeting Justice Minister Cornelis van Maanen, who was responsible for implementing the king’s policies directed against the liberal press at the time.<sup>132</sup> Despite the king’s concessions in terms of taxes, language policies, administrative separation, and education in early 1830, on the 25<sup>th</sup> of August that year, a day after the

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<sup>128</sup> Ibid., 109: “De koning wilde, evenals in het noorden – los van ieder geloof – alleen de burgerlijke macht boven de geestelijke stellen. Dit kon volgens hem het beste door een verstandige, verlichte, verdraagzame nationale geestelijkheid te vormen en wel aan de basis, door de schooling te hervormen.”

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., 114, 116; Breunese, *Losgemaakt*, 19. “monsterverbond”.

<sup>130</sup> Breunese, *Losgemaakt*, 15, 21.

<sup>131</sup> Schlingmann, *Willem I*, 117; Breunese, *Losgemaakt*, 27.

<sup>132</sup> Breunese, *Losgemaakt*, 15.

king's birthday, revolution broke out in Brussels.<sup>133</sup> A delegation to the king arriving in The Hague on 28 August demanded Van Maanen's immediate resignation. Van Maanen wanted to suppress the revolution with violence, while the king desired open discussions with all parties involved, even suggesting an administrative reform to grant more autonomy to the south.<sup>134</sup> Nonetheless, after driving the Dutch forces under Prince Frederik's command out of Brussels, Belgium declared its independence on 18 November.<sup>135</sup>

Groen established his place within an anti-revolutionary framework around that time. He identified his introduction to the Réveil's ideas, along with the socio-political tumult that broke out in Belgium during his time, as greatly contributing to shaping him as an anti-revolutionary. This experience developed Groen's self-conceptualization of "anti-revolutionary" as a political position in terms of both a particular religious-philosophical and socio-political perspective.

For Groen, Brussels in the late 1820s represented the narrative thesis and antithesis that would guide his entire anti-revolutionary career, both as historian and as statesman — the poison of the Revolution, and the "antidote" of the Christian gospel.<sup>136</sup> Already in March of 1829 in Brussels, Groen distanced himself from his family's liberal tradition, when, in two letters written to the two men who oversaw his education as a boy, his father and his principal Kappeyne van de Cappello, he lamented that the revolutionary spirit was gaining the upper hand in public and political discussions in Brussels.<sup>137</sup> In this same letter to his father, he stated that by that time his father should have become accustomed to his own "unique point of view," noting that this "independent" point of view should guide his career

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<sup>133</sup> Koch, *Willem I*, 456-457; Schlingmann, *Willem I*, 125; Breunese, *Losgemaakt*, 27.

<sup>134</sup> Schlingmann, *Willem I*, 127; Breunese, *Losgemaakt*, 29.

<sup>135</sup> Breunese, *Losgemaakt*, 130-131.

<sup>136</sup> Groen, *Gedachten V*, 265 "teengif".

<sup>137</sup> Groen, *Briefwisseling I*, 139, 141.

choices, since “status and honor is, for me, inasmuch as it is the result of career position and not of person, of very little value.”<sup>138</sup> While assuring his father that he was aware of the potential social consequences of his positioning, he had already come to regard his principles as of overriding importance.

Though leaning to the right since at least his time as a student at Leiden, his development to consciously embrace an anti-revolutionary position during his experience in Brussels is confirmed by the fact that one of his first truly anti-revolutionary publications also appeared in 1829, entitled *On National Spirit and Good Citizenship*. In the midst of the intensification building up to the Belgian Revolution, he called for the continuation of the United Kingdom of the Netherlands and Belgium, because the Dutch and Flemish shared a tribal ancestry and were therefore one nation. He especially regarded this unity as a necessary line of defense against the threat of a French Revolutionary ideal of international amalgamation, in which peoples were at risk of being absorbed and losing their distinct national characteristics.<sup>139</sup> Groen, though by this time not yet matured ideologically, had already been making sense of and narrating his socio-political outlook in Brussels along the lines of his Christian-historical narrative, with revolutionary “unbelief” as antithesis to the “revealed doctrine” of the gospel.<sup>140</sup> Shortly after experiencing the Belgian Revolution, Groen, in a letter written to A.G.A. van Rappard on 20 November 1831, noted that in the past three to four years he had experienced an important change of perspective: he had embraced Christianity as the core principle for all of life and started to view history as the affirmation of the truths contained in the Bible as God’s special revelation.<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> Ibid., 140 “individueele manier van zien” “onafhankelijk” “aanzien en eer hebben voor mij, namelijk in zoover zij uit den post voortvloeyen en niet uit den persoon, zeer wienige waarde.”

<sup>139</sup> Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer, *Over volksgeest en burgerzin* (Leiden: C.C. van der Hoek, 1829), 9-10

<sup>140</sup> Ibid., 23 “ongeloof” “geopenbaarde Leer”.

<sup>141</sup> Groen, *Briefwisseling I*, 503.

## 4. Groen as Historian and Political Theorist: The (Northern) Kingdom of the Netherlands (1830–1848)

### 4.1 Groen's as Anti-Revolutionary Publicist and His Emergence as *Réveil Front*

#### *Man*

After gaining firsthand experience of the effectiveness of the liberal press in Belgium, Groen took to journalism in the early 1830s after resettling in The Hague, along with continuing to work on his publication of the Royal Archives, the private correspondence and other writings of prominent members of the House of Orange, with permission from the king.<sup>142</sup> His journal became known as *Dutch Ideas*.

Having buried his mother in late 1832, Groen himself fell very ill in early 1833, but upon being healed, he continued his anti-revolutionary publishing career with renewed fervor. During that year he also took a trip to Switzerland to visit a man who greatly impacted his political-historical thinking, the political theorist, Carl Ludwig von Haller.<sup>143</sup> Perhaps it was the significance of his regeneration from that year's terrible illness in combination with the trauma of his mother's death that led Groen to later reflect on his anti-revolutionary career as having truly commenced in 1833.<sup>144</sup>

In addition to continuing with the editing and publication of the Royal Archives, from around the mid-1830s Groen started to write and publish more political, historical, and

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<sup>142</sup> Ibid., 45-46.

<sup>143</sup> Kuiper, *Tot een voorbeeld*, 61, 63.

<sup>144</sup> Groen, *Gedachten V*, 25.

philosophical works.<sup>145</sup> Of these his 1834 *Essay on the Means by which Truth Is Known and Confirmed* was the first major publication. This essay was significant for the philosophical foundations of Groen's anti-revolutionary political and historical theory, as it represented an attempt to publicly expound his core epistemic principles.<sup>146</sup> Groen argued that there are five legitimate epistemological *viae*: foundational principles, divine revelation, philosophy, history, and common agreement through the ages, with the whole chain of human knowledge being bound to God as foundational first principle.<sup>147</sup>

Within the context of the circle of friends formed around this middle party of the Réveil, Groen held his private lectures on *Unbelief and Revolution* at his home during the winter of 1845–1846.<sup>148</sup> Published in 1847, Groen's political-philosophical magnum opus proposed as its main argument that societal unbelief (in God's sovereignty) led to political totalitarianism. In this work (as we will see in more detail in chapters four and five), Groen concisely argued that the state is a divine institution, rather than the product of a social contract.<sup>149</sup> This work proved a timely refutation of the Enlightenment-revolutionary spirit from his antirevolutionary perspective, being published just prior to the revolutions in France, Switzerland, and Germany the following year, the year that also marked the end of the Restoration period in the Netherlands.<sup>150</sup> He would follow this up in 1848 with another work addressing the same issues, but with simplified argumentative strategies written for a broader audience, entitled *Liberty, Equality, Fraternity: Elucidation of the Revolutionary Maxim*.

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<sup>145</sup> Kuiper, *Tot een voorbeeld*, 72.

<sup>146</sup> Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer, *Beschouwingen over staats- en volkerenrecht. Eerste deel: Proeve over de middelen waardoor de waarheid wordt gekend en gestaafd* (Leiden: S. & J. Luchtmans, 1834), vii.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*, 3, 6.

<sup>148</sup> Kluit, *Het Réveil*, 252.

<sup>149</sup> Groen, *Ongeloof en revolutie* (2008), 57.

<sup>150</sup> Kuiper, "Ter Inleiding" in *Ongeloof en Revolutie (1847)*, by G. Groen van Prinsterer, ed. Roel Kuiper and Arie Kuiper (Barneveld: Nederlands Dagblad, 2008), 8-9.

Groen's historiographical magnum opus, his *Handbook on the History of the Fatherland*, which would be revised a number of times throughout his lifetime, also saw its first edition published in 1841. In his *Handbook*, following a biblical (and distinctly Old Testament) covenantal model of societal apostasy as the cause for societal decline, he divided the history of the Dutch nation prior to the Batavian time — which he started at the Reformation in 1517 to emphasize what he narrated as its Protestant character — into four periods. These periods were (i) tribulation (1517–1568), (ii) battle (1568–1648), (iii) flourishing (1648–1713), and (iv) decline (1713–1795), with the last period culminating in the Batavian Revolution.<sup>151</sup>

In addition to actively publishing on political theory and history, Groen would also be preoccupied with publicly fighting, as anti-revolutionary leader, his battle on the ecclesiastical front from the late 1830s through the 1840s.

In 1837 Groen became directly involved in a major ecclesiastical dispute regarding a new split-off Reformed denomination in the country. The Réveil, in which Groen would become a prominent figure, would be one of three prominent distinguishable religious currents within Dutch Protestantism, whose paths diverged in the 1830s.<sup>152</sup> Groen considered his party to be a middle party between the other two, namely the Groningen School of Theology and the *Afgescheidenen*.<sup>153</sup> The former emerged during the 1830s, when liberal theologians at the University of Groningen developed a distinctive academic theology opposed to the Three Forms of Unity, which became known as the Groningen School.<sup>154</sup> In

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<sup>151</sup> Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer, *Handboek der Geschiedenis van het Vaderland* (Leiden: S. & J. Luchtmans, 1841), 108.

<sup>152</sup> Kuiper, *Kerngroepvorming*, 50.

<sup>153</sup> J. Vree. "Het Réveil als partij in de Nederlandsche samenleving: opkomst, groei, doorwerking en geschiedschrijving (1833-1891)," in *Opwekking van de natie: Het protestantse Réveil in Nederland*, ed. Fred van Lieburg (Hilversum: Verloren, 2012), 63. The name "Afgescheidenen" is derived from the "Afscheiding" ("split") in the *Nederlands Hervormde Kerk* in 1834, which marked the beginning of this denomination.

<sup>154</sup> Van Dyke, *Lectures*, 18-19.

reaction to this theological liberalization, the *Afgescheidenen*, who also interpreted the 1816 Common Regulation to be in opposition to the Dordtian Church Order, split from the national Reformed church to start a new denomination in 1834.<sup>155</sup> This ecclesiastical movement posed a new challenge to the political establishment, particularly to the religious interventionism of King Willem I in the north following the Belgian Revolution.<sup>156</sup> The Réveil in general sympathized with the theological orthodoxy of the *Afgescheidenen*, but preferred to stay within the structures of the national church.<sup>157</sup> Why this was Groen's position can also be derived from his historical narrative, in which he cast the Reformed Church as an integral part and treasure of Dutch nationhood, especially as national moral compass.<sup>158</sup> Unlike the other two theological parties, the Réveil was not a denomination. Compared to the *Afgescheidenen*, who mostly came from the lower social class, the Réveil, with its predominantly upper-class makeup, harbored a less anti-aristocratic or pro-emancipation approach in their fight against theological liberalism.<sup>159</sup> Groen, for example, criticized the continued desire of the *Afgescheidenen* to ask for civil authorization as a concession to revolutionary state absolutism.<sup>160</sup> Nonetheless, for the Royal Archivist to defend against the king the rights of a denomination to which he did not even belong, was, at the time, a quite notable act.<sup>161</sup>

The Dutch Church historian R.H. Bremmer has argued that the major difference between the Réveil and the *Afgescheidenen*, while both were confessional groups, lay in their respective interpretations of Article 28 of the Belgic Confession. Groen and the Réveil

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<sup>155</sup> R.H. Bremmer, "Historische aspecten van de Afscheiding," in *Aspecten van de Afscheiding*, ed. A. de Groot and P. Schram (Franeker: Uitgeverij B.V., 1984), 15, 24.

<sup>156</sup> Breunnesse, *Losgemaakt*, 9, 19.

<sup>157</sup> Janse, *Vereeniging*, 181.

<sup>158</sup> Groen, *Handboek* (1841), 88.

<sup>159</sup> Rasker, *Hervormde Kerk*, 70; Bremmer, *Afscheiding*, 25.

<sup>160</sup> Groen, *Gedachten V*, 292-293.

<sup>161</sup> Kuiper, *Tot een voorbeeld*, 84.

considered the national church to be the legitimate church of the Netherlands and called for it to be reformed from within. Hendrik De Cock and the *Afgescheidenen*, however, saw it as their duty to split from what had become a false church.<sup>162</sup> They suffered government persecution in the early years of their existence. Despite remaining in the national church, Groen vocally spoke out against this by defending their rights, as a historically-rooted Reformed Church, against oppression.<sup>163</sup>

Whereas Groen had rushed to the defense of the *Afgescheidenen* outside of his own denomination, he vigorously engaged in a battle with the Groningen School within the Reformed Church to which he belonged. The most prominent leader of this school, Hofstede de Groot, recognized Groen as leader of the opposing Réveil party by 1840.<sup>164</sup> Groen authored an appeal to the 1842 synod of the Reformed Church to condemn the Groningen School, *Het adres der zeven Haagse heeren*, but it did not succeed.<sup>165</sup>

#### *4.2 Groen and the Constitutional Revision of 1840*

Apart from the ecclesiastical disputes, Groen also became a recognizable voice in the political domain with his engagement in discussions surrounding the constitutional revisions of the 1840s.

Between 1830 and 1840 there had been an unconstitutional situation in the Netherlands.<sup>166</sup> This was mostly due to King Willem I's costly unwillingness to accept the consequences of the Belgian Revolution.<sup>167</sup> He refused to arrange a division of the national

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<sup>162</sup> Bremmer, *Afscheiding*, 27-28.

<sup>163</sup> Groen, *Bescheiden II*, 356.

<sup>164</sup> Vree, *Het Réveil*, 106-107.

<sup>165</sup> Kuiper, *Tot een voorbeeld*, 119. *The Address of the Seven Gentlemen from the Hague*.

<sup>166</sup> Van den Berg, *Grondwet*, 59.

<sup>167</sup> Boogman *Rondom 1848*, 9-10.

debt or to recognize the port of Antwerp as belonging to Belgium. He also financed Orangist opposition in Belgium.<sup>168</sup>

On the one hand, Willem I's energetic initiatives in commerce and trade earned him the nickname "merchant-king".<sup>169</sup> However, the Restoration period was for the most part an economically trying time for the Netherlands. When the southern provinces seceded from the Netherlands and the port of Antwerp reopened in 1815, it proved to be noteworthy competition to Amsterdam.<sup>170</sup> Military intervention and other costly expenses relating to the Belgian issue forced the king, under pressure of the Estates General, to finally recognize Belgian independence in 1839.<sup>171</sup> Agriculture and trade also suffered during the 1830s, and the increased use of imported coal, as well as its associated transportation costs, had a negative impact on the economy.<sup>172</sup> The king's financial policy proved ineffective and even counterproductive, with interest on Dutch public loans increasing from 13 to 42 million guilder between 1814 and 1840.<sup>173</sup> Though it was lagging, the Netherlands under Willem I did not have a backward economy, as during this time the Netherlands became increasingly industrialized and established an impressive channel, railway and waterway system, although the costs for all this proved a heavy burden on the people at the time.<sup>174</sup> Overseas trading was, however, stimulated by the king's founding of the *Nederlandsche Handelsmaatschappij* in 1824.<sup>175</sup>

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<sup>168</sup> Koch, *Willem I*, 463, 484

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*, 9; Van Dyke, *Lectures*, 8. The positive economic effects of many of his initiatives and reforms have continued until into the twenty-first century.

<sup>170</sup> Van Dyke, *Lectures*, 8; Schlingmann, *Willem I*, 9.

<sup>171</sup> Schillingmann, *Willem I*, 235.

<sup>172</sup> Van Dyke, *Lectures*, 10; Schillingmann, *Willem I*, 238.

<sup>173</sup> Schlingmann, *Willem I*, 115.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*, 94.

<sup>175</sup> Van Dyke, *Lectures*, 9.

Nonetheless, the king's policy towards Belgium proved to be economically and socially costly. It would not be until 1842 that the highly unpopular minister Van Maanen, who played a major role in this failing political strategy, retired.<sup>176</sup>

One of the main figures who would eventually contribute to changing this untenable, unconstitutional situation was Johann Rudolf Thorbecke (1798–1872), born in Zwolle of German ancestry, three years prior to the birth of Groen. As a young man he had studied philosophy and classics in Germany, where he became acquainted with Romanticism and the Historical School. He thereafter lectured in Leiden and Ghent during the 1820s and 30s, where he also became acquainted with Groen.<sup>177</sup> Thorbecke can be described as a liberal historicist; he held a diachronical view of history, in which every identifiable political era was strictly separated from others, with each having its own distinct political principles.<sup>178</sup> For him, the chief purpose of politics was to correctly identify and apply the principles suitable for the era, in order to achieve the necessary reforms for socio-economic and political revitalization.<sup>179</sup> Political action should be guided primarily by what practical circumstances at any given time necessitated, and not by unchanging principles.<sup>180</sup> Although he was influenced by the Historical School of von Savigny (like Groen), Thorbecke would not adopt the Romantic School's emphasis on tradition, instead favoring constant renewal adapted to each era.<sup>181</sup> In 1830, Thorbecke had, also like Groen, opposed the Belgian Revolution due to sharing the king's (and Groen's) ideal of a Greater Netherlands, but he was at the same time sympathetic to the revolutionary ideals of free speech, free press, and free religious

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<sup>176</sup> Schlingmann, *Willem I*, 249.

<sup>177</sup> Martin Sommer, *Wat een held! Tien vaderlanders op een voetstuk* (Diemen: Veen Media, 2012), 73.

<sup>178</sup> Ernst Kossmann, *Thorbecke en het historisme* (Amsterdam: Noord-Hollandsche Uitgevers Maatschappij, 1982), 31-32.

<sup>179</sup> Erik Swart, *De scheppende kracht van de natie - het liberalisme volgens J.R. Thorbecke* (Amsterdam: Van Gennep, 2007), 13; Sommer, *wat een held*, 74.

<sup>180</sup> Drentje, *Thorbecke*, 337.

<sup>181</sup> Kirpestein, *Belijder*, 94.

expression.<sup>182</sup> Thorbecke's motivation for supporting a unified greater Netherlands was based not on an argument for kinship like that of Groen, but primarily on the envisaged economic advantages and stability (against the French threat) provided by the unified kingdom.<sup>183</sup> Nonetheless, he criticized the religious politics of the king in the south, which he believed to be pushing the Catholic portion of the nation further away.<sup>184</sup>

Thorbecke's biographer Jan Drentje and the Dutch historian Ernst Kossmann rightly observed that Thorbecke, at least early on in his career, seemed to have great appreciation for Groen's sentiments on the dangers of revolutionary (Enlightenment) liberalism.<sup>185</sup> As evidenced in their correspondence, Thorbecke likewise saw liberalism as usurping rightful authority, and potentially leading to greater tyranny, under the banner of the people's sovereignty.<sup>186</sup> A good example of this is a letter from Groen to Thorbecke, dated 17 October 1832, in which he expressed bewilderment at the suppositions that mankind originated from absolute and wild liberty, that a social contract was the foundation of justice, and that mankind is in the historical process of perfecting itself. Thorbecke replied to Groen a couple of days later, noting that he was "in complete agreement with his ideas."<sup>187</sup> During this time there can be little doubt that the two, with their shared historicist mode of thinking, considered each other much more as allies than foes. In autobiographical reflections written in his later life, following Thorbecke's glorious career, Groen would be eager to emphasize this.<sup>188</sup>

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<sup>182</sup> Sommer, *Wat een held!*, 73-74.

<sup>183</sup> Drentje, *Thorbecke*, 254.

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.*, 257.

<sup>185</sup> Kossmann, *Thorbecke*, 31; Drentje, *Thorbecke*, 260.

<sup>186</sup> Groen, *Briefwisseling I*, 61, 283-284, 330, 332, 596.

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*, 620-621: "volkome eens met uwe bedenkingen."

<sup>188</sup> Groen, *Gedachten V*, 35-37; 163.

Kirpestein has also noted that although Thorbecke, particularly early on in his career, had been skeptical concerning the idea of the sovereignty of the people, he had always maintained a positive attitude towards those theories of the eighteenth-century French Enlightenment that Groen so vigorously denounced.<sup>189</sup>

In 1835–36 Thorbecke started giving lectures on the constitution in Leiden, which laid the foundation for his later work as constitutional reformer.<sup>190</sup> Then in 1837, a public split between Groen and Thorbecke became evident. Upon reading Groen’s defense of the *Afgescheidenen*, Thorbecke communicated to Groen his strong disagreement, criticizing Groen’s defense of this new denomination as subordinating the state to the church.<sup>191</sup> Groen, at least for his part, and perhaps in a qualified sense, regarded Thorbecke as more of an ally than enemy until this dispute. Nonetheless, as early as 1832, Groen had already written to his Leiden promoter Van Assen to express suspicion of Thorbecke’s “materialist” politics, for Thorbecke had denounced as “Reformed” (i.e. Calvinist) some of Groen’s journalistic articles against the French newspaper *Gazette nationale de France*.<sup>192</sup> Nonetheless, even though they had shared a high appreciation for history from the beginnings of their careers, ultimately their differences in political self-understanding would lead to irreconcilable differences in their political positioning and engagement, as I will continue to explain in chapter four.

In 1839 Thorbecke published his *Note on the Constitution*, and Van Assen encouraged Groen to write a response.<sup>193</sup> Groen consequently produced his *Contribution to*

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<sup>189</sup> Kirpestein, *Belijder*, 91.

<sup>190</sup> Drentje, *Thorbecke*, 298.

<sup>191</sup> Groen, *Briefwisseling II*, 211; Drentje, *Thorbecke*, 314.

<sup>192</sup> Groen, *Briefwisseling I*, 637.

<sup>193</sup> *Aantekening op de grondwet*.

*the Revision of the Constitution in the Dutch Manner* in Leiden in 1840.<sup>194</sup> In that same year, however, during the last month of King Willem I's reign, a constitutional revision was accepted which, although not effecting extremely radical changes, was in line with Thorbecke's recommendations in limiting monarchical liberty and increasing ministerial responsibility. The Dutch historian J.C. Boogman has observed that this was also in line with public opinion, as the passive attitude of the people towards the king's irresponsible policies started to change.<sup>195</sup>

Indeed, following the acceptance of the 1840 constitutional revision, which limited the powers of the monarch, Willem I found it difficult to adapt and forsook the throne.<sup>196</sup> Willem II was enthroned on 28 November 1840.<sup>197</sup>

The political historian Koos van der Berg describes the core argument of Groen's *Contribution* as follows:

Above all maintenance and Restoration of the Dutch principles are necessary.  
. . . Religion, authority and liberty are in this regard core concepts for Groen. .  
. . The acknowledgement of the Protestant character of the Dutch nation is crucial for Groen.<sup>198</sup>

Every essential revision of the constitution, for Groen, had to start with the recognition of the moral authority of God's law. As long as the revolutionary principles implying the sovereignty of man were accepted, all constitutional revisions would merely lead to further confusion or more compulsion. He feared the consequences of an ahistorical constitution based on Enlightenment principles, but he held the English constitution in very high regard due to its foundation in common law. In this regard he stood in opposition to Bilderdijk,

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<sup>194</sup> Drentje, *Thorbecke*, 324, 326.

<sup>195</sup> Boogman, *Rondom 1848*, 23.

<sup>196</sup> Schlingmann, *Willem I*, 237.

<sup>197</sup> *Ibid.*, 243.

<sup>198</sup> Van den Berg, *Grondwet*, 62: "Voor alles is handhaving en herstel van de Nederlandse beginselen nodig; ... Godsdienst, gezag en vrijheid zijn in dat verband kernbegrippen voor Groen ... De erkenning van het protestantse karakter van de natie is voor Groen cruciaal."

however, who rejected the idea of a constitution in principle.<sup>199</sup> This narrative emphasis of Groen on epistemic principles guiding socio-political trajectories was at the heart of his disagreement with Thorbecke.

#### *4.3 Groen's First Engagement in the School Struggle in the 1840s*

The education law of 1806 presupposed public schools where Christian values were taught. This law remained intact even after the 1840 constitutional revision. It was supplemented by a royal decree in January 1842, which determined that one hour per week could be allowed for doctrinal instruction in schools, provided by local clergymen, but only if acceptable to the majority of the school. In practice, however, one dissenting voice could suffice to ban "offensive" material from the curriculum — a principle supported by the advances of Enlightenment thinking, even in the Reformed Church.<sup>200</sup> Groen criticized both the 1806 law and the 1842 royal decree in an 1848 work, defending his position on the public right of the *Nederlands Hervormde Kerk* as a national church operating with and alongside government as rooted in his narrative of Dutch history.<sup>201</sup> With the 1842 synod of the Reformed Church, Groen also called on the church to protest against the recent national developments concerning education.<sup>202</sup>

In July 1840, in addition to the ordinary members of the Second Chamber, extraordinary members were invited to give their input regarding the constitutional revision during sittings to be held the following month. Groen was one of these invitees. The

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<sup>199</sup> Ibid., 63-64.

<sup>200</sup> Van Dyke, *Lectures*, 36; Van Vliet, *historische benadering*, 214-215.

<sup>201</sup> Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer, *Het regt der Hervormde Gezindheid* (Amsterdam: Johannes Müller, 1848), 148.

<sup>202</sup> Vree, *Het Réveil*, 79.

invitation had followed his publication of *Contribution* in March.<sup>203</sup> During these discussions Groen called the Dutch education system both un-Christian and anti-Christian, arguing that the claim to doctrine-free education was merely a veil under which anti-Christian doctrines were promoted to children.<sup>204</sup> Although the Second Chamber neither made any official decisions nor voted on any bills regarding education then, through Groen's engagement in these discussions Christian education finally became an agenda point. Groen was consequently appointed to a government commission to investigate education in November of that same year. He advised that education should be viewed primarily in terms of parental and ecclesiastical rights and duties, rather than under the civil government. In this regard he sided with the three Roman Catholics on the commission and against the three other Protestants.<sup>205</sup> In his report he advocated the separation of the public school along denominational lines — Roman Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish. The king, however, ignored the recommendations of the commission.<sup>206</sup>

## 5. Conclusion

As a descendent of liberal Patriot families, Groen van Prinsterer had a fairly liberal upbringing for his time. He and his wife Betsy decisively maneuvered themselves away from the liberal sentiments prevalent in the social circles in which they were raised. Throughout his career, he viewed this step in light of his transition to the anti-revolutionary position due to his introduction to the Réveil during the late 1820s and his experiences running up to the

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<sup>203</sup> Kuiper, *Tot een voorbeeld*, 96-97.

<sup>204</sup> Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer, *Adviezen in de Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal in dubbelen getale*. (Leiden: S. & J. Luchtmans 1840), 80-81.

<sup>205</sup> Kuiper, *Tot een voorbeeld*, 99-100.

<sup>206</sup> *Ibid.*, 101.

historic Belgian Revolution in 1830. Groen's narrative self-understanding here would play a major role in his consequent self-positioning as an anti-revolutionary front man in Dutch public life, as well as his career of socio-political engagement flowing from this principled self-positioning.

It was during the 1830s that Groen started publishing actively as an anti-revolutionary political theorist and historian. He rose to prominence as the leading figure of the Dutch Réveil, taking over from Willem Bilderdijk, a mentor of his. Through this autobiographical narrative and his narrative of Dutch history, he positioned himself in the middle of an influential church split in the 1830s. Thereby he managed to maintain the historic rights of the Dutch Reformed Church as national church, while simultaneously defending the religious liberty of, and sympathizing with, the more theologically conservative *Afgescheidenen*.

Groen's historical narrative of Dutch history, as evident in his 1841 *Handbook* among other works, also shaped his engagement in constitutional and education debates during the 1840s. In chapter four I will elaborate on this claim by observing how Groen's historic narrative sanctioned his understanding of the schooling issue, as well as the particular strategies he consequently employed.

In this chapter we have therefore seen how Groen's lived experience throughout his early life and early career as anti-revolutionary and Réveil public figure served as a foundation for his political and religious positioning amidst the socio-political and socio-religious changes of the time. This also lays the groundwork for a better understanding of the practical-political significance of Groen's Christian-historical narrative, which will be discussed in chapters four to six.

I have chosen to conclude this chapter on the first part of Groen's career just before the decisive year of 1848, since the events of that revolutionary year (discussed in the following chapter) would bring about the most radical socio-political change in the Netherlands that Groen had to bear during his lifetime. Coverage of such events requires treatment independent from his self-positioning in the early part of his anti-revolutionary career, treated in this chapter. In the next chapter, by continuing my biographical focus, but also drawing from his political works, I will provide a general historical overview both of the latter part of Groen's career as anti-revolutionary and of his final years (1848–1876).

## CHAPTER 2

# **“Each of his words was an act”: Groen as Anti-Revolutionary in the New Dutch Constitutional Democracy and His Final Years (1848–1876)**

### **1. Introduction**

1848 proved to be another revolutionary year — one that irrevocably changed the course of European history. In February a revolution broke out again in Paris and spread throughout the continent.<sup>207</sup> The Netherlands itself managed to escape the revolutionary tumult that plagued other countries, but 1848 proved historically decisive for it too. This year marked the initiation of the Dutch constitutional-monarchial democracy by virtue of the acceptance and implementation of Johan Rudolf Thorbecke’s constitutional revision. This constitutional revision in the Netherlands was of a liberal spirit and was speedily completed by Thorbecke at the king’s request to tame the revolutionary tide that was spreading across Europe.<sup>208</sup> The inevitable game-changing nature of these events, both at home and throughout the continent, provided a profoundly new challenge for Groen’s anti-revolutionary movement and forced Groen’s hand in terms of narratively readjusting his political positioning, as we will see in Chapter 5. I have selected this date as the starting point of the second half of his public career, for the purpose of highlighting Groen’s response to these profound socio-political changes. This second half of Groen’s career as public anti-revolutionary, as well as

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<sup>207</sup> Kirpestein, *Belijder*, 94-95.

<sup>208</sup> *Ibid.*, 95.

his final years after retiring from parliament, historically corresponded to the first three decades of the Dutch constitutional democracy.

This second half of Groen's career between 1848 and 1865 can in turn be divided into two periods: (i) his first term as member of the Second Chamber of Parliament (1848–1857) and (ii) his continuing socio-political engagement outside, as well as his eventual return to the Second Chamber (1858–1865). Finally, this chapter concludes with an overview of his actions following his retirement from parliament during the final decade of his life (1866–1876).

## **2. Groen as Member of the Second Chamber: The Early Years of the Dutch Constitutional Democracy (1848–1857)**

### *2.1 Thorbecke's Constitutional Revision of 1848 and the Enthronement of Willem III*

King Willem II, who had reigned from 1840 to 1849, delegated more responsibility to his ministers than his father did. However, he still actively participated in state affairs, particularly military matters and foreign policy, and a fully responsible and independent cabinet of ministers would not exist during most of his reign. This would have to wait until after the next constitutional revision in 1848. Nonetheless, according to the king's ministerial appointments, he clearly strove towards a liberalization of government.<sup>209</sup> One of the most significant appointments in this regard was of the liberal Van Hall as Minister of

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<sup>209</sup> Boogman, *Rondom 1848*, 24.

Justice in 1842. Van Hall would later become one of the first prime ministers of the modern Dutch constitutional democracy that would be established in 1848.<sup>210</sup>

Willem II had also continued the important planned project of his father to dry up the Haarlem Lake in North Holland.<sup>211</sup> During his time, however, economic growth was virtually nonexistent, unemployment rose, and the number of people living off public welfare increased from 10% in 1842 to 15% in 1847.<sup>212</sup> Nonetheless, figures from agriculture and shipping indicate a general recovery of the national economy for 1830–1850, which included Willem II's nearly decade-long reign.<sup>213</sup> The acceptance of the Dutch prime minister-to-be Johan Rudolph Thorbecke's proposed constitutional revision, which he eventually singlehandedly drafted in 1848, marked the end of the Restoration period in the Netherlands and initiated a new (democratic) era.<sup>214</sup>

Upon hearing of the outbreak of the March Revolution in Germany, King Willem II claimed to have changed from a conservative to a liberal in one night, arguing that he became convinced of the necessity of a constitutional revision in a more liberal spirit.<sup>215</sup> However, the king's biographer, Jeroen van Zanten, has noted that the king was actually blackmailed into embracing the idea of a new constitution.<sup>216</sup> He consequently appointed Thorbecke, a member of parliament at the time, to the constitutional commission under the chairmanship of Minister Gerrit Schimmelpenninck in March 1848.<sup>217</sup>

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<sup>210</sup> Ibid., 25. The term "democracy" in this historical context needs to be qualified: although the 1848 constitutional revision introduced many modern democratic elements into the Dutch political system, by modern liberal standards the Netherlands would not be considered to have become a democratic country until 1922, when universal adult male franchise was first implemented.

<sup>211</sup> Ibid., 244.

<sup>212</sup> Ibid., 9, 46.

<sup>213</sup> R. Griffiths, *Achterlijk, achter of anders? Aspecten van de economische ontwikkeling van Nederland in de 19e eeuw* (Amsterdam: VU (Phd diss.)), 1980, 28.

<sup>214</sup> Henk te Velde, *De grondwet van Nederland*. (Amsterdam: Athenaeum Polak & Van Genneep, 2006), 26.

<sup>215</sup> Boogman, *Rondom 1848*, 51-52

<sup>216</sup> Jeroen van Zanten, *Koning Willem II 1792-1849* (Amsterdam: Boom, 2013), 545-554

<sup>217</sup> Boogman, *Rondom 1848*, 51-52; Kirpestein, *Belijder*, 95.

Thorbecke, however, had come to regard the time as ripe for a more liberal and democratizing constitutional revision in line with his liberal historicist thinking.<sup>218</sup> Thorbecke, a liberal historicist, regarded increased democratization and increased ministerial responsibility as in accordance with the demands of the *Zeitgeist*.<sup>219</sup> To Thorbecke's disappointment, however, the commission did not act as a unity, and Schimmelpenninck was tardy in making the necessary gathering appointments. Thorbecke then took the initiative to singlehandedly draft a revised constitutional text within one week, which the king allowed him to publish and propose to parliament even without Schimmelpenninck's approval.<sup>220</sup>

Despite some petitions objecting to the new constitution reaching the Second Chamber, Thorbecke's proposed liberal system, based around the principles of direct elections and ministerial responsibility, was eventually accepted.<sup>221</sup>

The Dutch political historian Henk te Velde has observed that although there was no political upheaval, this constitutional revision was certainly revolutionary, changing the Dutch nation from a governed mass to a unity of emancipated citizens.<sup>222</sup> In addition to the establishment of full ministerial responsibility and direct elections of the Second Chamber, the implementation of annual budgets was among the most significant reforms brought about by this revision.<sup>223</sup> The new constitution was not original, however: it was an eclectic nineteenth-century European constitution that deliberately preserved archaic formulations to symbolize continuity with historic Dutch rights — a concession made by Thorbecke, who

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<sup>218</sup> Drentje, *Thorbecke*, 402-403.

<sup>219</sup> Swart, *Scheppende kracht*, 14-16.

<sup>220</sup> *Ibid.*, 392-395.

<sup>221</sup> *Ibid.*, 396.

<sup>222</sup> Te Velde, *De grondwet*, 27.

<sup>223</sup> Van den Berg, *Grondwet*, 60-61.

refused to engage in a battle over words.<sup>224</sup> The new constitution initiated the political system the Netherlands has maintained until the present day: a parliamentary democracy with a hereditary monarchy. In the system's early years, however, despite the introduction of ministerial responsibility, the king still had a major influence. Furthermore, only adult males over the age of 23 who paid a minimum amount of tax were allowed to vote. This initially boiled down to only about 3% of the total population. No political parties existed yet, only electoral colleges. National party elections therefore did not yet take place, and voters only elected individual representatives from their local district.<sup>225</sup> Two months prior to the enthronement of Willem III in May 1849, Groen, having been elected by his local district (Harderwijk), entered the Second Chamber and started his parliamentary career.<sup>226</sup> This first spell of his in the Second Chamber would span four terms and continue until 1857.<sup>227</sup>

As in 1840, Groen again reflected on the new constitution, this time in a work published in 1849, entitled *Constitutional Revision and Unanimity*. Taking a similar position to this revision as he had done nearly a decade earlier, Groen stood principally opposed to what he identified as the revolutionary spirit of the constitutional revision. His perspective on the new concrete revisions was eclectic, however; he even praised some of the new reforms as necessary, e.g., the increased liberty for the provision of particular (religious) education.<sup>228</sup> He even later expressed his conviction that Thorbecke, by means of his

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<sup>224</sup> Drentje, *Thorbecke*, 404.

<sup>225</sup> Van der Meulen, *Willem III*, 230, 241.

<sup>226</sup> Van Dyke, *Lectures*, 79.

<sup>227</sup> Krijger, *Een veldheer*, 88.

<sup>228</sup> Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer, *Grondwetsherziening*, 4.

intellectual superiority, had actually managed to slow the constant societal progress of Revolutionary Jacobinism with this revision.<sup>229</sup>

Groen was, however, primarily concerned not with the content of the constitutional reforms, but with what he saw as the revolutionary spirit that informed the reforms, which is where he believed the decisive battle was raging.<sup>230</sup> In this regard his action was again decidedly shaped by his Christian-historical narrative centered around the ideas of apostasy (“unbelief”) and societal decline (“revolution”). He had, however, regarded the preceding 1815 constitution as much more aligned with the Dutch tradition of royal authority, even claiming that although no one considered the 1848 revision as desirable in itself, it was forced through by means of the fear for revolution.<sup>231</sup> Again, like two decades earlier, Groen and Thorbecke had a shared historicist conviction concerning the nature and severity of the threat of potential revolutionary social instability, but they ultimately advocated differing remedial courses, as sanctioned by their adherence to respective historical traditions.

Nonetheless, at the time Groen conceded that the political situation in the Netherlands at the end of the 1840s was one of peace and stability, particularly compared to Germany.<sup>232</sup> Despite rejecting the theories underlying the concrete constitutional changes, Groen still willingly submitted to the revisions. Within the framework of his paradigm of an ongoing religious-epistemic battle raging beyond political forms as such, and given his desire to fulfill his calling in this decisive battle, Groen now saw room even within the new constitutional framework to participate in socio-political discussions as a principled

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<sup>229</sup> Groen, *Gedachten V.*, 337.

<sup>230</sup> Van der Berg, *Grondwet*, 67; Kirpestein, *Belijder*, 95.

<sup>231</sup> Groen, *Grondwetsherziening*, 29.

<sup>232</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

anti-revolutionary.<sup>233</sup> Thorbecke, however, regarded a staunchly principled-confessional politician like Groen to be too disconnected from the *Zeitgeist*.<sup>234</sup>

As with the preceding constitutional revision, this one was quickly followed by a change of monarch: in 1849, Willem III succeeded his father as king of the Netherlands.<sup>235</sup> Following two very short-lived initiating cabinets under the new system, Thorbecke was appointed prime minister of the Netherlands and formed a new cabinet in 1849.<sup>236</sup>

## *2.2 Groen's Repositioning in Light of the Constitutional Changes*

A number of contradictory interpretations of Groen's thought-development around the time of this major constitutional revision are present in the literature. Some authors have claimed that a change occurred in Groen's theoretical understanding of the nature of legitimate governmental authority around 1848, a claim that merits a new study. The importance of understanding his thought-development here is vital to understanding his continued political engagement in the new constitutional-democratic national system. In the sixth chapter of this dissertation I will propose a new perspective in light of Groen's practical narrative strategies of political positioning as reflected in his writings. I will also bring his theory and narrative into relation with his historically significant and influential practical choice for non-intervention in 1856 in the aftermath of this constitutional change, as mentioned in the introduction to this dissertation.

Shortly after the publication of his *Constitutional Revision*, Groen also served as the editor of a magazine called *The Dutchman* from 1850. Under his editorship this would

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<sup>233</sup> Ibid., 70-71.

<sup>234</sup> Swart, *Scheppende kracht*, 16.

<sup>235</sup> Van der Meulen, *Willem III*, 217.

<sup>236</sup> Ibid., 238.

become the country's foremost anti-revolutionary publication.<sup>237</sup> In 1850 he followed up his publications on political theory and history with his *Varieties on Constitutional Law and Politics*, which in addition to political theory concerned history, education, and ecclesiastical matters.<sup>238</sup> One of the distinct differences between this publication and Groen's 1840s political works was its increased practical emphasis. Writing with constant reference to his Christian-historical principles, Groen devoted most of this work to discussing contemporary political issues and concrete developments.<sup>239</sup> This reflected his strategical repositioning, shifting the core of his activity and engagement from that of an anti-revolutionary theorist to that of an active statesman. A few years later, in 1859–60, he would also publish his *Miscellaneous Works*, with a similar practical emphasis.<sup>240</sup>

Active in the Second Chamber during Thorbecke's first cabinet (1849–1853), Groen, preoccupied with political principles, advocated political party formation in the newly-formed constitutional democracy. The anti-revolutionary electoral college was also erected by three Réveil personalities in 1852: Groen himself, along with Van Hogendorp and Mackay.<sup>241</sup> This step led the historian Maartje Janse to conclude that the Dutch Réveil, in which Groen had become the most important figure, formed the prehistory of the ARP.<sup>242</sup> Thorbecke, however, as a liberal historicist, opposed political parties with his ideal of homogeneity in the cabinet, which he argued was the place not for debate over principles, but for concrete, practical, and unified action. Dik van der Meulen, biographer of King Willem III, called Groen's reproach of the Thorbecke cabinet as attempting to act without

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<sup>237</sup> Kuiper, *Tot een voorbeeld*, 140; *De Nederlander*.

<sup>238</sup> Klink, *Groen*, 293.

<sup>239</sup> Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer, *Verscheidenheden over staatsrecht en politiek* (Amsterdam: Johannes Müller, 1850), 22-23; 123; 133-134; 165-166.

<sup>240</sup> Klink, *Groen*, 293.

<sup>241</sup> Kuiper, *Revolutiejaar*, 49.

<sup>242</sup> Janse, *Vereeniging*, 169-170; Anti-Revolutionary Party: the name of the party officially established by Groen's successor, Abraham Kuyper in 1879.

any program “curious . . . for a time in which such government-programs had little support.”<sup>243</sup> Yet Boogman argued that Thorbecke’s ideal worked negatively concerning the cabinet’s stability and continuity, as ministers with minority positions continually were threatened or forced to resign. He continued to note that the later development of the political party system in the Netherlands from the 1880s onward was a positive development more in line with Groen’s thinking than that of Thorbecke.<sup>244</sup> In fact, in 1879 Groen’s successor Abraham Kuyper would build on Groen’s legacy to officially found the first political party in Dutch history, as well as the first Christian-Democratic party in the world, the Anti-Revolutionary Party.<sup>245</sup>

Groen published his *Varieties* during Thorbecke’s first cabinet, wherein he lamented that the liberal-revolutionary party had effectively monopolized political discourse in the Netherlands, and that the ideal of a homogeneous cabinet was merely a strategy to maintain this monopoly.<sup>246</sup>

With regard to Thorbecke, however, Van der Meulen has noted that his ideal needs to be interpreted in relation to what he viewed as the relationship between the cabinet and the king at the time. Tensions existed between King Willem III and the cabinet throughout Thorbecke’s first term, particularly regarding ministerial appointments, and the prime minister’s homogeneity-ideal was based upon his conviction that a united cabinet could aid in limiting the executive power of the monarch.<sup>247</sup> Van der Meulen himself, however, documented the problematic case of Minister Lucas’s conflict with the king, in which Thorbecke had to plead with the minister not to resign because of the precedent it would

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<sup>243</sup> Van der Meulen, *Willem III*, 240: “curieus ... in een tijd dat zulke regeringsprogramma’s weinig voorstanders hadden”.

<sup>244</sup> Boogman, *Rondom 1848*, 93-94.

<sup>245</sup> Kuiper, *Tot een voorbeeld*, 226.

<sup>246</sup> Groen, *Verscheidenen*, 1, 114-115, 122-125.

<sup>247</sup> Boogman, *Rondom 1848*, 94-95; Van der Meulen, *Willem III*, 239-240, 245.

set for other ministers in his model of a homogeneous cabinet.<sup>248</sup> Although he had little trust in the gubernatorial abilities of King Willem III, Thorbecke was no anti-monarchist, as van der Meulen has pointed out; he merely desired a limited influence of the king on matters of government.<sup>249</sup>

The differences between Groen and Thorbecke's shared historicist mode of thinking and practical engagement in politics lies at the very heart of this dispute, however. For Thorbecke, the practicality of the logic and obvious demands of the time and context took center stage, but for Groen Thorbecke failed to take a necessary step back into epistemic self-consciousness, thereby failing to address the principles at the heart of the issues of the day. The history of political party-formation in the Netherlands shows that Groen's demands concerning political party-formation eventually proved historically decisive over that of Thorbecke.

In addition to advocating for party-formation, in the Second Chamber Groen also became extensively involved in the discussions surrounding the new poverty law introduced by Thorbecke. Thorbecke wanted to place the duty of care for the poor under the authority of the centralized state. Groen, a strong advocate of keeping this within the domain of the *Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk* as national church, opposed this bill as having a destructive effect on the culture of Christian charity.<sup>250</sup> The April Movement of 1853 would bring the Thorbecke cabinet to a premature end, however, and consequently also all discussion concerning the proposed bill.

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<sup>248</sup> Van der Meulen, *Willem III*, 239.

<sup>249</sup> *Ibid.*, 241-242.

<sup>250</sup> Kirpestein, *Belijder*, 97.

### 2.3 *The April Movement of 1853*

One of the characteristic policies of the Thorbecke cabinet, as well as the personal policy of King Willem III, was a neutral stance towards religious denominations. Applying this consistently, the cabinet also had no objection to the re-institution of Roman Catholic episcopal hierarchy in the Netherlands, which gave the pope authority over the Roman Catholic Church in the Netherlands for the first time in nearly three centuries. Here Thorbecke's liberal historicist position again clashed with Groen's Christian-historical position in terms of how these sanctioned their respective stances. For Thorbecke this move was a development in line with his ideal of increased religious liberty, while Groen opposed this as a dangerous development that threatened the religious character of the Dutch people and the continued dominant role of the Reformed Church.<sup>251</sup>

The background of the policy of the king and Thorbecke's cabinet was twofold: (i) the monarch's grandfather, King Willem I, had already in 1827 agreed to a concordat with the pope concerning the re-institution of episcopal hierarchy in the Netherlands, but it was never implemented, partially because of the chaos brought about by the Belgian Revolution; and (ii) the nineteenth-century development of the new European nation-states led to skepticism among many Roman Catholics concerning these new states, as they feared that the authority of these governments states would relativize that of the pope. The consequence was a revival of the doctrine of ultramontanism. In the ultramontanist view the church was considered to constitute a complete society in itself under leadership of the pope. Viewing civil government as, in principle, a servant of the pope, and consequently opposing the growing role of the state in society, the monasteries tried to provide

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<sup>251</sup> Drentje, *Thorbecke*, 420; Van der Meulen, *Willem III*, 267.

comprehensive education and healthcare. This led to conflict as the Roman Catholic Church rejected the principles of the post-1848 Dutch constitutional state. The solution to the strife was sought in upholding tolerance as the great Dutch virtue, intended to bind all the different groups together.<sup>252</sup> Nonetheless, Thorbecke's tolerance towards the Roman Catholic Church was criticized not only by the anti-revolutionaries, but even by liberal Protestants such as Hofstede de Groot.<sup>253</sup>

Although Thorbecke was aware of the dangers of re-introducing Roman Catholic episcopal hierarchy, he nonetheless underestimated the influence and strength of anti-Roman Catholic sentiments within Dutch Protestantism.<sup>254</sup> Many in the Reformed Church still saw the king as the upholder and protector of their national faith as expressed in the 'Algemeen Reglement' of 1816, whose prescriptions were still binding.<sup>255</sup>

After a period of indecision and uncertainty on whether the Roman Catholic Church or the Dutch government should take the initiative in the process, the pope finally broke the ice by publicly announcing the re-institution of episcopal hierarchy in the Kingdom of the Netherlands in early March 1853. The pope's explicit description of Calvinism as heresy in this public proclamation, as well as his choice of the Protestant stronghold of Utrecht as the seat of the archbishop, angered numerous Dutch Protestants.<sup>256</sup>

The public resistance of Protestants against this re-establishment of episcopal hierarchy, which started in Utrecht shortly following this papal announcement, became known as the April Movement.<sup>257</sup> Although it can be said that the April Movement led to the fall of the Thorbecke cabinet on 19 April 1853, the disbandment of this cabinet by the king

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<sup>252</sup> Kirpestein, *Belijder*, 104-105.

<sup>253</sup> Drentje, *Thorbecke*, 423.

<sup>254</sup> Van der Meulen, *Willem III*, 268-269; Drentje, *Thorbecke*, 422.

<sup>255</sup> Van der Meulen, *Willem III*, 267.

<sup>256</sup> *Ibid.*, 270-271.

<sup>257</sup> Drentje, *Thorbecke*, 423; Van der Meulen, *Willem III*, 271.

needs to be viewed in the context of ongoing tension and conflict between the king and the ministers throughout Thorbecke's term. With the outbreak of the April Movement the relationship suffered even further, as some ministers grew increasingly weary of a king they thought might side with the Protestants. When the king effectively excused himself by publicly declaring that his hands were tied by the 1848 constitution concerning the new religious regulations as agreed upon by parliament, the relationship became untenable in Thorbecke's eyes, and he asked the king to disband his cabinet. In 1852 Thorbecke had also asked the king to dismiss him as minister, which the king, despite ongoing tensions between himself and Thorbecke at the time, had refused. This time, however, Willem III acted on the request. He had found a suitable replacement for Thorbecke in the former minister of justice and finance, Floris Adriaan van Hall. The king, having already entered into conversation with van Hall even before the request for disbandment, clearly had the intention of dismissing the cabinet anyway.<sup>258</sup> Because the king had already proven himself to be a principled advocate of religious tolerance, van der Meulen concludes that "Willem with his actions . . . was driven by anti-papist sentiments, is unlikely ... that [he] grabbed the re-instatement of the bishops as opportunity to bring Thorbecke down, bear witness of a pragmatic drive."<sup>259</sup>

Kirpestein has noted that Groen in no way harbored staunch anti-Roman Catholic sentiments, but he did principally oppose Ultramontanism as a threat to the privileged position of the Reformed Church in the Netherlands.<sup>260</sup> Indeed, Groen's narrative of events

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<sup>258</sup> Van der Meulen, *Willem III*, 262, 265, 274-277.

<sup>259</sup> *Ibid.*, 277: "Dat Willem bij zijn optreden ... door antipapisme werd gedreven, is minder waarschijnlijk ... Dat [hij] juist de komst van de bisschoppen aangreep om Thorbecke ten val te brengen, lijkt te wijzen op een wel zeer pragmatische inslag ..."

<sup>260</sup> Kirpestein, *Belijder*, 109.

and involvement reflect the inner conflict he as an anti-revolutionary had in evaluating this Protestant uprising.

Opposing Ultramontanism as a threat to historical Dutch rights, he wrote regarding the concordat in 1841, warning the king that the Netherlands was:

a country whose government, in order to have strength and durability, may not forget that, for the [Reformed] religion's sake, your Majesty's godly ancestors fought for liberty; that one knows the tendency of the Roman Church also through the experience of forebears and that people, thank God, are not in our day indifferent to the faith for which so many, on this Protestant soil, were willing to lay down their lives either at the stake or on the battlefield.<sup>261</sup>

Groen's Christian-historical position also sanctioned his stance on the April Movement. Despite interpreting the movement as evidence for the strength of Dutch Protestantism against Ultramontanism, Groen stood very critical towards what he would cast as its populist nature. In a letter from Groen to his fellow Réveil member Van Assen on 5 May 1853, Groen expressed how pleased he was with regard to the April Movement's contribution to the fall of Thorbecke's cabinet. While admitting that the new cabinet of Van Hal was not in agreement with his anti-revolutionary position, he regarded it as a major improvement.<sup>262</sup> Interestingly, however, already in 1853 Groen stood opposed to the spirit of the April Movement, an opposition he would confirm in another letter in January 1856.<sup>263</sup> Years later he would clarify his opposition to the movement as rooted in what he considered to be its revolutionary nature.<sup>264</sup> He would write: "In 1853 the distinction between the anti-papist excitement, which I condemn, and the Christian-Protestant resilience that I advocate,

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<sup>261</sup> Groen, *Bescheiden I*, 668. "een land welk regering, om kracht en duurzaamheid te hebben, niet behoort te vergeten dat het, om der godsdienst wille, door Uwer Majesteits godvruchtige voorvaders vrijgestreden werd; dat men er de strekking der Roomsche kerk ook door de ondervinding der voorgeslachten kent; en dat men, Gode zij dank! er ook nog in onze dagen niet geheel onverschillig is aan het geloof voor hetwelk zoovelen, op deze protestatschen bodem, het leven, hetzij op den brandstapel, hetzij op de slagvelden veil gehad hebben."

<sup>262</sup> Groen, *Briefwisseling III*, 119.

<sup>263</sup> *Ibid.*, 153, 214.

<sup>264</sup> Groen, *Gedachten V*, 85-87.

became evident.”<sup>265</sup> Nonetheless, Groen opposed what he saw as a dualistic and selective application of principles by the government: showing increased tolerance towards Roman Catholicism, yet simultaneously forcing liberal theories on the Reformed Church.<sup>266</sup> In Groen’s reflections he narrated the April Movement as rooted in the anti-revolutionary parliamentary resistance against the liberal Thorbecke cabinet, even claiming that, had it not been for a lack of self-confidence, an anti-revolutionary cabinet with himself at the helm could potentially have been formed once the Thorbecke cabinet disbanded.<sup>267</sup> Nonetheless, even he seemed to acknowledge the unlikelihood of this claim.<sup>268</sup>

On 19 April 1853, the same day that the ministers of Thorbecke’s cabinet were officially notified of their dismissal, the new cabinet, with a more conservative composition, was formed. One of the first steps of the newly formed cabinet of Van Hall-Donker Curtius was to disband the Second Chamber; consequently new elections took place on 17 May, in which the conservatives, with momentum built up from the April Movement, also did well. The constitution of 1848 was also interpreted by the new government to allow for the king to enter into an arrangement with his ministers that Willem III considered more suitable than before. He would work intensively with the new cabinet, who would acknowledge that the ministerial government proceeded from the monarch, combined with the acknowledgement that they at the same time had a role of co-operation and co-responsibility with the king. With this the constitution was understood and applied slightly differently than had been Thorbecke’s intention.<sup>269</sup>

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<sup>265</sup> Groen, *Gedachten V*, 327: “In 1853 is het onderscheid gebleken tusschen *anti-papistische opgewondenheid*, die ik misprijs, en *christelijk-protestantsche* veerkracht, die ik verlang.”; Kirpestein, *Belijder*, 107.

<sup>266</sup> Kirpestein, *Belijder*, 108.

<sup>267</sup> Groen, *Gedachten V*, 85-87.

<sup>268</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.

<sup>269</sup> Van der Meulen, *Willem III*, 323-324.

## *2.4 Groen's Involvement in the School Struggle and the New School Bill*

In the early days of the Van Hall-Donker Curtius cabinet, the king remained as involved in political matters as he had been previously.<sup>270</sup> His *modus operandi* would prove a blow for his relationship with the cabinet in September 1854. In the city of Schiedam, protests arose because of the dramatic increase in the price of bread. The king, without consulting the ministers, commanded a violent government intervention. The ministers were very uneasy with the king's drastic actions, and under pressure from them, the king withdrew his command.<sup>271</sup> Furthermore, the Crimean War of 1854 had a crippling effect on the Dutch economy, since allied forces blocked eastern harbors of Russia, a very important trading partner of the Netherlands. This was of great concern to Minister Van Hall, who managed to successfully negotiate for Dutch interests at the end of the war. The king, however, though positively crediting Van Hall's actions, was disappointed with his cabinet's overall handling of the issue, particularly regarding their lack of consultation with him.<sup>272</sup> In 1855, when the scientist Mulder and mathematician Simons began a campaign against the cabinet which it believed had betrayed the April Movement, they could count on the king's support.<sup>273</sup> By May 1856 the king clearly had desired a new cabinet, and his final eventual justification for disbanding the cabinet would revolve around an issue in which Groen played a major role by virtue of his involvement in the school struggle.<sup>274</sup>

By this time the education law of 1806 had effectively remained in place for fifty years. The 1848 constitution theoretically allowed for private, particular denominational

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<sup>270</sup> *Ibid.*, 325.

<sup>271</sup> *Ibid.*, 327.

<sup>272</sup> *Ibid.*, 330-331.

<sup>273</sup> *Ibid.*, 334.

<sup>274</sup> *Ibid.*, 336.

schools, but by the time of the cabinet of Van Hall, no regulations for the establishment of such schools had yet been put in place. Since the April Movement, the calls for private education for Protestant children became stronger within their circles. However, in 1854 Interior Minister Van Rhenen, who had an even less positive outlook on private and particular religious education than Thorbecke, proposed a regulation that proclaimed public education to be sufficient, but allowed for exceptional circumstances where separate schools may be instituted for children of different religious backgrounds.<sup>275</sup> This particular allowance, Van der Meulen has noted, “was meant as a concession to the kindred spirits of Groen van Prinsterer and the conservative . . . Protestants.”<sup>276</sup>

The bill, however, proved unacceptable for the majority of the Second Chamber, including Groen. Van Rhenen therefore proposed a revised bill in 1856 that advocated religiously neutral education, which received more support in the Second Chamber, but which also left the anti-revolutionary Groen very dissatisfied. He spearheaded an extra-parliamentary action, composing a people’s petition against the new schooling law.<sup>277</sup> The petition received around ten thousand signatures.<sup>278</sup> The Reformed historian Roel Kuiper has rightly observed that Groen’s role in the fall of the cabinet Van Hall-Donker Curtius in 1856 has often been underestimated.<sup>279</sup> Political historian Bert Wartena agrees and indeed has explicitly ascribed the fall of this cabinet to the success of Groen’s petition:

The king declared . . . that he would refuse to place his signature under a law that a great part of the people had a serious objection to. Van Hall thereupon

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<sup>275</sup> Van Vliet, *Historische benadering*, 220; Van der Meulen, *Willem III*, 336.

<sup>276</sup> Van der Meulen, *Willem III*, 336.: “Dat was bedoeld als tegemoetkoming aan de geestverwanten van Groen van Prinsterer en aan de behoudende ... protestanten.”

<sup>277</sup> *Ibid.*, 336.

<sup>278</sup> Historians differ regarding the exact number of signatures the petition received: Bert Wartena (*Goeman Borgesius (1847-1917): Vader van de verzorgingsstaat - Een halve eeuw liberale en sociale politiek in Nederland* (Amsterdam: Aksant, 2003), 85) has claimed fourteen thousand, Roel Kuiper (*Revolutiejaar*, 104) said around ten thousand, while Dik van der Meulen (*Willem III*, 336) claimed it was less than ten thousand. A figure of around ten thousand seems to be a safe estimate.

<sup>279</sup> Kuiper, *Revolutiejaar*, 104.

resigned. Van der Bruggen, an ally of Groen van Prinsterer, formed a new cabinet. In his very first speech the issue of the education bill stood central.<sup>280</sup>

The king especially had an eye for the desires expressed in the petition initiated by Groen, more so than the Second Chamber. However, the king's support for the petition was not principled, but ultimately rooted in his desire to see the cabinet of Van Hall disbanded. The king's support of Groen's petition therefore needs to be viewed in light of his worsening relationship with his ministers — and for the king it had the desired effect: as soon as he resisted the bill, the cabinet-ministers offered their resignation, which the king granted. Despite the king's support not being principled, Groen nonetheless viewed the actions of the king as a success and praised him for standing on the same historical line as his ancestors.<sup>281</sup> I agree with Roel Kuiper that an argument can be successfully made for Groen as a vital player in the fall of the Van Hall cabinet. Although it might not have been the case that Groen's principles won the ideological battle of the day, with his engagement as politician and public figure he made a noteworthy contribution to the democratic discourse and processes at the time. Groen's engagement, sanctioned by his Christian-historical narrative, achieved some form of success, even if only as a socio-political critic.

This, of course, opened the path to, and was followed by, Groen's significant action of May 1856, to which I shall, as noted, return in chapter six.<sup>282</sup>

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<sup>280</sup> Wartena, *Goeman Borgesius*, 84-85: "De koning verklaarde ... dat hij zou weigeren zijn handtekening te zetten onder een wet waar een groot deel van de bevolking ernstig bezwaar tegen had. Hall trad daarop af. Van der Bruggen, geestverwant van Groen van Prinsterer, vormde een nieuw ministerie. In de eerste toonrede stond de kwestie van de onderwijswet al centraal."

<sup>281</sup> Van Vliet, *Historische benadering*, 221; Van der Meulen, *Willem III*, 336-337.

<sup>282</sup> Also see the Introduction to this dissertation for a brief overview of Groen's action in 1856.

## 2.5 Groen's Resignation from the Second Chamber

Groen resigned from the Second Chamber in 1857 after a new School Bill, with which he was radically at odds, had been passed even under the anti-revolutionary cabinet of Justinus van der Bruggen.<sup>283</sup> In order to understand the dynamics in the conflict leading to Groen's resignation, we need to note an earlier split within the Réveil, of which both Groen and van der Bruggen were members. Although there was never full unity within the Réveil and personal conflicts had always arisen among its members, a real concrete split became manifest during the 1840s and 50s. Groen was the main representative of the so-called "juridical-confessional wing," whereas the central figure of the Utrecht branch of the Réveil, Nicolaas Beets, represented the "ethical-irenic wing."<sup>284</sup>

The ethical-irenic wing of the party, primarily composed of ministers, found the increased political activism and tendency towards political party-formation of the juridical-confessional wing problematic. This wing also regarded the emphasis on the Reformed confessions by Groen's branch of the party as a wrong means unto revival, which they believed would depend more on the change of heart and attitude rather than theological orthodoxy.<sup>285</sup> During the 1840s the juridical-confessional wing became manifest in a group later known as the *Christian Friends*, while the ethical-irenic school countered them with their publication *Severity and Peace*.<sup>286</sup>

Van der Bruggen, being of the ethical-irenic persuasion, regarded the ideal of Groen — a confessional or even a Christian state — as an unrealistic fantasy. He believed it not to

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<sup>283</sup> Van der Meulen, *Willem III*, 343.

<sup>284</sup> Kluit, *Het Réveil*, 281; Kuiper, *Kerngroepvorming*, 51.

<sup>285</sup> Bart-Jan Spruyt, "Tracasserie religieuse - de onvervulde belofte van een 'nader Réveil,'" in *Opwekking van de natie: Het Protestantse Réveil in Nederland*, ed. Fred van Lieburg (Hilversum: Verloren, 2012), 224-225.

<sup>286</sup> Kluit, *Het Réveil*, 290; *Ernst en Vrede*.

be the duty of the Christian statesman to advocate societal Christianization. He disagreed with Groen that the church should play a primary role in establishing schools and favored particular religious schools as established by parents' initiative. He regarded public education to be the exception where the former wasn't sufficiently established, but had a more favorable look upon existing 'secular' public education than Groen, for which Groen reproached him.<sup>287</sup> He emphasized the individual nature of Christianity as a personal faith over its societal impact.<sup>288</sup> Thus we see that even within the anti-revolutionary movement at the time, there were differing narrative strategies of political engagement. Groen's historical narrative emphasis on Dutch nationhood, as shaped and sanctified by Reformed Christianity, was obviously not shared by the ethical-irenic anti-revolutionaries. A thorough comparison of the historical narrative differences between Groen and Van der Bruggen, however, falls beyond the scope of this study, as my current narrative focus is limited to an analysis of Groen's strategic handling of the parliamentary conflict with Van der Bruggen.

Groen had at times sympathized with the Réveil's ethical position concerning societal revitalization (and in later life he would also try to reconcile the ethical party and the confessionalists), but he had no sympathy for the anti-confessionalism of the irenic position.<sup>289</sup> Unlike Groen, Van der Bruggen desired to educate the next generation of Dutch by means of private education, separated from the existing Reformed Church, whose public right he did not acknowledge. He also regarded the emancipation process brought about by the Revolution as in line with God's will.<sup>290</sup> Groen accused Van der Bruggen's

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<sup>287</sup> Boogman, *Rondom 1848*, 161; Van Vliet, *Historische benadering*, 223; Van der Meulen, *Willem III*, 340-341.

<sup>288</sup> Van Vliet, *Historische benadering*, 223.

<sup>289</sup> Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer, *Hoe de onderwijswet van 1857 tot stand kwam: Historische bijdrage* (Amsterdam: Höveker, 1876), 83, 123.

<sup>290</sup> Kirpestein, *Belijder*, 118-119.

wing of the Réveil of being too heavily influenced by the spirit of subjectivism and individualism, and of granting opposition parties too much by remaining silent on issues where public opposition was needed.<sup>291</sup> Indeed, Van der Bruggen wrote to Groen in 1855 that he regarded the individualism resulting from the French Revolution in a much more positive light than Groen did. Furthermore he argued that legislation should not directly serve the coming of the kingdom of God by establishing a Christian state, but should merely maintain order until God's kingdom arrives. He sharply distinguished between law and gospel, order and liberty, state and religion.<sup>292</sup>

Groen distanced himself from Van der Bruggen's conception of law, order, and liberty and his sharp law/gospel and state/religion distinctions, which he viewed as false dichotomies advocating the exercise of rights independent from God's law. For Groen Christian liberty could only exist in a framework of obedience to God's law.<sup>293</sup>

Nonetheless, historians agree that the acceptance of the schooling law is to be counted as one of the very few successes of the Van der Bruggen cabinet.<sup>294</sup> The background to this acceptance was the resignation of the anti-liberal Interior Minister Simons. After his budget was rejected by the cabinet in December 1856, he offered his resignation, which the king initially refused. Upon his return to the cabinet, however, he suggested that the liberal Second Chamber, whence the bulk of opposition against him and other conservatives came, be disbanded. He received no support from colleagues and again offered his resignation, which the king this time granted.<sup>295</sup>

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<sup>291</sup> Groen, *Onderwijswet*, 86, 120.

<sup>292</sup> Groen, *Briefwisseling III*, 203-204.

<sup>293</sup> Groen, *Onderwijswet*, 138-139.

<sup>294</sup> Boogman, *Rondom 1848*, 168; Van der Meulen, *Willem III*, 343.

<sup>295</sup> Van der Meulen, *Willem III*, 344.

Van Rappard, who played a major role in managing education as member of the Department of Internal Affairs during the 1830s, succeeded Simons and took the responsibility of the education bill upon himself. On 21 February 1857, the law was first presented to the Second Chamber.<sup>296</sup>

Groen's narrative of the event revolved around his claim that it was the intention of the newly accepted education law not that Christian education be provided in public schools, but that the schools merely advance "Christian virtues," in a similar spirit to the longstanding law of 1806. Nonetheless, in an attempt to accommodate Roman Catholics and anti-revolutionaries, the original bill stated that where particular religious schools become established by parents' initiative, they also qualified for state subsidies — a provision proposed by van der Bruggen himself. During the discussions in parliament, however, this clause allowing subsidies for particular religious schools would be scrapped. The anti-revolutionary party, especially Groen, also found the idea of teaching Christian virtues without Christian doctrine to be problematic, amounting to a rejection of true Christianity in favor of Enlightenment humanism. In addition to the aforementioned treatment of private and public education, this law also introduced minimum wages and pensions for teachers. The bill eventually passed in the Second Chamber on 20 July with 47 votes against 13. The 13 no-votes included all of the 6 antirevolutionaries, 6 of the 12 Roman Catholics, and 1 conservative.<sup>297</sup>

Groen had, during the build-up to the vote, considered a new petition, but decided against it based on past disappointments.<sup>298</sup> In 1857, after the new education law was

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<sup>296</sup> Groen, *Onderwijswet*, 168.

<sup>297</sup> *Ibid.*, 168-169.

<sup>298</sup> Boogman, *Rondom 1848*, 166-168.

accepted, Groen resigned his position in the Second Chamber.<sup>299</sup> He would return only in 1862.<sup>300</sup> Upon resigning, Groen made another strategical change. He noted that the battle for the issue was not lost, but that the battle lines had shifted from legislation to the practical realization of Christian education by the people themselves. He even argued that although seemingly losing in parliament, the anti-revolutionary position on the education issue had made great inroads in the collective conscience of the Dutch people.<sup>301</sup> His reflections on the outcome, which by all accounts amounted to a defeat, suggested that he identified an ever-present true Dutch spirit or principle that, though suppressed, was always latent. For Groen it was on this spiritual-epistemic level that the true battle raged. Thus, as his narrative engagement allowed him to decenter the constitution in 1848, he now decentered the immediate decisions of parliament in favor of developing the invisible moral spirit of the nation, which he regarded as decisive for all socio-political developments in the long term.

Throughout 1857 the cabinet of Van der Brugghen found it difficult to govern given the opposition it received from the Second Chamber. In February 1858 the climax of the conflict was reached when Minister Vrolijk's proposal to amend the tax law was met with such staunch criticism that he felt compelled to resign. In March the king had even considered disbanding the Second Chamber given the difficulties it created for the cabinet, but advisors warned him against such a step. Nonetheless, during the same month the cabinet itself offered its resignation, which the king happily granted.<sup>302</sup>

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<sup>299</sup> Van der Meulen, *Willem III*, 343.

<sup>300</sup> Boogman, *Rondom 1848*, 167.

<sup>301</sup> Groen, *Onderwijswet*, 193-194, 200.

<sup>302</sup> Boogman, *Rondom 1848*, 168; Van der Meulen, *Willem III*, 344.

### **3 Groen's Continuing Socio-Political Engagement Outside, and Eventual Return to, Parliament (1858–1865)**

A more liberal cabinet, that of J.J. Rochussen, would replace Van der Bruggen's. In spite of enjoying support from the Second Chamber, which his predecessor never attained, Rochussen's cabinet still suffered under pressure of the threat of war as it became involved in the conflict between Austria and France under Napoleon III.<sup>303</sup> The cabinet also had to manage the lagging development of the Dutch railway system and its negative financial consequences. Local interests competing for preference in the budget proposed for the expansion of the national railway system also had a negative impact on discussions during a time when political parties did not yet exist in the Dutch political system. This issue eventually greatly contributed to the fall of Rochussen's cabinet in February 1860.<sup>304</sup>

After the fall of two more short-lived cabinets, Thorbecke convinced the king that the time was right to establish a second liberal cabinet, so the 1<sup>st</sup> of February 1862 marked the start of the second Thorbecke cabinet. In the nine years between his first and second cabinet, there had been five Dutch cabinets whose composition differed ideologically from more conservative to more liberal, but none of them considered revising Thorbecke's 1848 constitution. The only exception to this rule was the king himself.<sup>305</sup>

Following his resignation in 1857, Groen spent most of his time and energy taking up his historiographical endeavors again. He re-initiated his Archives project and did much of the preliminary research that would result in his eventual publication of *Maurice and Oldenbarnevelt* shortly before his death in 1875. This was a defense of Prince Maurice of

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<sup>303</sup> Van der Meulen, *Willem III*, 345-346.

<sup>304</sup> *Ibid.*, 347-348.

<sup>305</sup> *Ibid.*, 360.

Orange (1567–1625) in response to the work of the American historian John Lothrop Motley's *Life of Oldenbarnevelt*.<sup>306</sup>

During the late 1850s and the early 1860s, Groen lost a number of people who were very close to him. In 1858 his sister Keetje died, in 1859 his former Leiden University professor Van Assen, in 1860 his Réveil friend Da Costa, and in 1861 the German jurist who greatly shaped Groen's thinking, Julius Friedrich Stahl.<sup>307</sup> For the first time since the 1840s, Groen could also dedicate his time to writing political-theoretical works again. In addition to his *Miscellaneous Works*, the years following his resignation saw the publication of a French tract summarizing his political position, *The Anti-Revolutionary Party and the Confessional Reformed Church of the Netherlands* (1860), and a political-theoretical work in honor of Stahl, titled *In Remembrance of Stahl* (1862).<sup>308</sup> In this latter publication, appealing to Stahl as the leader of his German political allies, Groen discussed his anti-revolutionary position on political authority and his ideal of the Christian state.<sup>309</sup> All these publications, along with a cheaper and more widely circulated edition of his *Handbook* in 1862, enabled Groen van Prinsterer to become a household name as an historian in broader Dutch public life.<sup>310</sup>

Groen's continued his battle for Christian education outside of parliament: in 1860 he established the Union for Christian National Education to aid the advancement of the growing number of private Christian schools.<sup>311</sup> He returned to parliament to re-engage in the battle on that front in 1862. Groen's return to the Second Chamber was during the early days of the second cabinet of Thorbecke. He would again turn his focus in particular to the issue of education, making it the most central of his parliamentary career.

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<sup>306</sup> Kuiper, *Tot een voorbeeld*, 168; *Maurice et Barnevelt*.

<sup>307</sup> *Ibid.*, 175-176.

<sup>308</sup> *Verspreide geschriften; Le parti anti-révolutionnaire et confessionnel dans l'église réformée des Pays-Bas*.

<sup>309</sup> Guillaume Groen Van Prinsterer, *Ter nagedachtenis van Stahl* (Amsterdam: Höveker, 1862), 29-30, 51.

<sup>310</sup> Kuiper, *Tot een voorbeeld*, 181.

<sup>311</sup> Unie voor Christelijk-Nationaal School Onderwijs (CNSO)

During the middle period of his final term in the Second Chamber, Groen delivered a famous parliamentary address on 28 September 1864 on the issue of education and the constitution. He repeated his 1848 stance on particular and public education: if church and state were to share the public domain, public education was to be preferable. In a de-confessionalized state, however, private education should be the norm and public education the exception.<sup>312</sup> He argued that article 194 of the constitution, which stated that education was “sufficiently provided” by government, had made the secular public school practically imperative and thereby forced an anti-Christian education upon a Christian people. By now he called for the article to be revised.<sup>313</sup>

This, his last term in the Second Chamber, would last about three years and continue until 1865, when he retired due to health concerns.<sup>314</sup>

#### **4. Groen’s Retirement from Public Life and His Final Years (1866–1876)**

After leaving parliament, Groen finally completed his work on the Royal Archives in 1866.<sup>315</sup> He would also continue to be involved with public actions organized around the network he had established through the Réveil. In August 1867 he was invited to be the guest speaker at the fifth general conference of the international *Evangelical Alliance*, which had been established in London in 1841. He delivered a famous address in which the historical narrative at the heart of his political position and entire career again received prominence. His address emphasized the importance of Christianity in historically shaping European

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<sup>312</sup> Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer, *Het lager onderwijs en art. 194 der Grondwet – Parlementair advies van 28 september 1864* (The Hague: Van Cleef, 1864), 6.

<sup>313</sup> *Ibid.*, 9, 12, 14-15, 18-19, 23.

<sup>314</sup> Van Vliet, *Historische benadering*, 213; Van Dyke, *Lectures*, 79.

<sup>315</sup> Kuiper, *Tot een voorbeeld*, 190.

cultures in general and Dutch nationhood in particular, and accused revolutionary modernism of threatening this cherished heritage.<sup>316</sup> The following year he also published the second edition of his magnum opus, *Unbelief and Revolution*.

From around 1870, Groen largely withdrew from public life and handed over the responsibility of leading the anti-revolutionary movement to Abraham Kuyper, whom he had known since 1864.<sup>317</sup> Nonetheless, during the early 1870s he would revive his periodical *Dutch Ideas*, which in this final series not only focused on current events, but additionally assumed a distinctly autobiographical character.<sup>318</sup> Additionally, he would finally complete and publish his historical work on Prince Maurice and John of Oldenbarnevelt in 1875, just one year prior to his death.<sup>319</sup> His final work would also be autobiographical, as he reflected on his final actions during his first term in the Second Chamber of parliament in the 1850s in *How the Education Law of 1857 Came to Be* (1876).<sup>320</sup> Groen died on 18 May 1876, and his funeral took place in the Hague on 23 May.<sup>321</sup> During the funeral, A. Meijer, a Christian school principal from Rotterdam, praised the contribution and practicality of Groen's principled public engagement, which highlights his Christian-historical practice:

'Mr Groen van Prinsterer was not a practical man,' so some have claimed. Wonderful self-deceit! Because he was so practical, he was so [vigorously] resisted; this man, who put the standard of the Gospel against the Revolution. Each of his words was an act . . . and proven to be an act, shall persist through many generations.<sup>322</sup>

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<sup>316</sup> Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer, *De religieuze nationaliteit met betrekking tot Nederland en De Evangelische Alliantie* (Amsterdam: Höveker, 22 augustus 1867), 4.

<sup>317</sup> Kuiper, *Tot een voorbeeld*, 186-187, 209-210; Van Vliet, *Historische benadering*, 234.

<sup>318</sup> *Ibid.*, 202.

<sup>319</sup> *Ibid.*, 213.

<sup>320</sup> *Ibid.*, 216.

<sup>321</sup> *Ibid.*, 218-219.

<sup>322</sup> J.H. Gunning, *Bij het graf van mr. Groen van Prinsterer – 23 mei 1876* (Amsterdam: Höveker & Zoon, 1876), 22. "Mr. Groen van Prinsterer was geen man van de praktijk,' zoo heeft men gezegd. Wonderlijk zelfbedrog! Omdat hij zoo praktisch was werd hij zoo weerstaan, de man, die den Evangelie-standaard tegenover de van der Revolutie stelde. Ieder zijner woorden was eene daad . . . en zal blijken eene daad to zijn, voortwerkende tot in verre geslachten."

Groen's wife Betsy would pass away in March 1879, just one month before the official erection of the Anti-Revolutionary Party on 3 April 1879. In the inaugural lecture, the founder and first party leader, Abraham Kuyper, would acknowledge and praise the contributions of both Groen and his wife.<sup>323</sup>

## 5. Conclusion

The second part of Groen's career was characterized by a shift in emphasis regarding his contributions both as political-historical theorist and as parliamentarian. Engaging in public political debates, Groen constantly clashed both with opponents and even with fellow anti-revolutionaries due to his continued emphasis on the spirit and principle behind every reform and law as the core matter in all disputes. His recognition of historical rights belonging to the Reformed Church and the monarchy, as well as his ideal of re-confessionalizing the Dutch state, continually shaped his action and position for the socio-political challenges of the day. His emphasis on principles as always decisive and his consequent advocacy for political party-formation would eventually end up being historically significant for the Dutch democracy. Furthermore, his political action would also prove historically decisive in bringing down the cabinet of van Hall-Donker Curtius.

Despite sharing a typical historicist mode of thinking with the liberal front man and author of the new constitution, Johan Rudolph Thorbecke, their respective positions regarding the constitution and the school struggle radically differed. Groen's aspiration for a Christian state, with regard to which he was heavily indebted to German conservative jurist and political theorist Julius Friedrich Stahl, eventually led to his resignation from the Second

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<sup>323</sup> Kuyper, *Tot een voorbeeld*, 221.

Chamber following the 1857 education law. This distinct anti-revolutionary emphasis on the decisiveness of epistemic principles central to his political engagement, however, allowed him to not view this resignation as a failure. He could easily strategically shift his attention to battles outside of parliament, aiming to win the hearts and minds of the Christian people of the Netherlands for his cause of Christian education. This strategy enabled him also to return to the Second Chamber in 1862 and again assume the same battle as Reformed Christian statesman. He concluded his public career in the late 1860s after finally retiring from parliament in 1865 to focus on completing his historiographical and autobiographical endeavors.

Groen's continued emphasis on the importance of Christian education was tied to his view that the true battle was to be won or lost in terms of the philosophical battle between revolutionary and Christian-historical principles. Groen regarded raising up a new generation of Dutch citizens adhering to the latter as most vital for his cause. Despite strategic shifts concerning his position in the school struggle, Groen's underlying goal was always to maximize the reach of Christian Reformed education among the nation's youth at the time. I will continue to elaborate further on this particular element in Groen's thinking in chapter five, where I discuss Groen as political theorist.

Having now concluded the historical-biographical section of this dissertation, the following chapter shifts the focus to Groen as historian. The following chapter will emphasize his historiographical narrative of the Dutch nation as reflected in his *Handbook on the History of the Fatherland*, among other historiographical writings. This will reveal how his presentation of a national historical narrative, which he understood to be the framework of his very life and work, shaped his socio-political engagement.

## **CHAPTER 3**

# **Towards an Integrated View of Groen as Statesman-Historian: An Overview and Critique of the Themes and Approaches in the Existing Literature on Groen**

### **1. Introduction**

In emphasizing the novelty of my approach to studying the dynamics of Groen van Prinsterer's socio-political engagement through a focus on his narrative strategies, I regard it as vital to contrast my perspective with what has already been said and done in the existing literature on this nineteenth-century Dutch statesman and historian.

Perhaps as expected, the bulk of existing literature on Groen has been written, funded, and published largely from within the confines of orthodox Reformed circles in the Netherlands. Unsurprisingly, the emphasis of this body of scholarship has been on elements of Groen's thought and action to which an orthodox Dutch Calvinist audience can relate (or could relate at the time of publication). As I will explain in this chapter, Groen's relevance or significance is thereby sought in his unique contributions for the Christian Reformed population historically and for the given author's contemporary context. In attempting to appreciate him as forebear, the literature's emphasis has therefore been either on his relevance for continuing political engagement, especially in terms of the issue of education, or on his contributions in terms of Dutch Reformed history. In other words, the literature on Groen has consequently almost exclusively focused either on Groen as nineteenth-century Christian-historical political theorist, statesman, and anti-revolutionary polemicist on the

one hand, or on his unique contributions as a historian of Dutch history on the other. Contrasting Groen to his peers in terms of his historiography and political theory or practice has thereby received prominence throughout the existing body. In response to these approaches which cast him into a box as either statesman or historian, I propose a more integrated, holistic view of his life and works. By analyzing his Christian-historical narrative existence from outside of the framework of that existence (or for that matter, outside of the narrative framework of any opposing positions), my approach will enable me to illuminate the typicality of his nineteenth-century socio-political narrativized engagement.

My overview of the existing body of literature in this chapter provides a thorough analysis of all noteworthy contributions, identifying those dominant themes and priorities prevalent in the existing body from the early twentieth century to the present day. I will also briefly mention various weaknesses of, and contentious issues surrounding, differing interpretations within this body on Groen, for the purpose of engaging in these historiographic discussions via my novel approach in consequent chapters.

## **2. Overview of the Existing Body of Literature on Groen van Prinsterer**

The body of existing literature dating from the beginning of the twentieth century until today has naturally seen its own evolution in foci and emphasis. My overview starts at the beginning of the twentieth century, as this not only was when the postmortem scholarship on Groen commenced, but it also marks the beginning of a new generation of scholars who researched Groen as historical figure without living with or knowing him personally.

In the early part of the twentieth century, the literature tended to be biographical, focusing either on Groen's Christian-historical theory as exemplified in his political magnum

opus, *Unbelief and Revolution*, or on his strategies in parliament regarding the School Struggle.<sup>324</sup>

A shift in emphasis occurred around 1940, with scholarship on the historiographical aspects of Groen's work starting to gain momentum, although some scholars were still equally preoccupied with exploring Groen's political theories in *Unbelief and Revolution*.<sup>325</sup>

During the mid- to late 1970s the emphasis shifted again towards Groen's political action. This was partially due to the near concurrence of the centenary of his death and the significant identity shift in Christian politics with the unification of three Christian parties into the Christian Democratic Appeal (CDA) in 1977.<sup>326</sup>

From the early 1980s until the start of this decade, however, the main focus of the literature again returned to theoretical and biographical inquiries into Groen's historiography and political philosophy within its historical context, albeit with a broader

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<sup>324</sup> Fokke Fokkema, *De godsdienstig-wijsgerige beginselen van Mr. G. Groen van Prinsterer. Eene beschrijving en beoordeling* (Grijskerk: E. Riemersma, 1907); J. Lens, "Groen van Prinsterer en de ministeriele crisis van 1856," *Ons Tijdschrift*. 2, ed. L. Bückman, G. Gerritson, J. Lens, G. Schrijver and P. van der Valk (D.A. Daamen, 1913): 757-775; Herman Bavinck, "Voorrede tot de derde en vierde uitgave," in *Ongeloof en Revolutie - Eene reeks van historische voorlezingen*, by G. Groen van Prinsterer, ed. H. van Malsen, xiii-xxi (Utrecht: Kemink & Zoon, 1924 (1904)); A.F. de Savornin Lohman, "Waarom is Groen's Ongeloof en Revolutie de eerste maal verschenen en van blijvende waarde?," in *Ongeloof en Revolutie - Eene reeks van historische voorlezingen*, by G. Groen van Prinsterer, ed. H. van Malsen, vii-xii (Utrecht: Kemink & Zoon, 1924); P.A. Diepenhorst, *Groen van Prinsterer* (Kampen: Kok, 1932).

<sup>325</sup> Hendrik Smitskamp, *Groen van Prinsterer als historicus* (Amsterdam: H.J. Paris, 1940); L.C. Suttorp, Z.W. Sneller and J. Veldkamp (ed.), *Groen's "Ongeloof en Revolutie" - Een bundel studiën* (Wageningen: Zomer & Keuning, 1949); J.P.L Brants, *Groen's geestelijke groei - onderzoek naar Groen van Prinsterer's theorien tot 1834* (Amsterdam: Wed. G. van Soest, 1951); Pieter Geyl, *Reacties* (Utrecht: Oosthoek's Uitgevers, 1952); Herman Dooyeweerd, *Vernieuwing en Bezinning: om het Reformatorisch grondmotief* (Zutphen: J.B. van den Brink, 1959); Jaap Kamphuis, *De hedendaagse kritiek op de causaliteit bij Groen van Prinsterer als historicus* (Goes: Oosterbaan & Le Cointre, 1962); Johan Zwaan, *Groen van Prinsterer en de klassieke oudheid* (Amsterdam: Adolf M. Hakkert, 1973); Harry van Dyke, *Lectures Eight and Nine in Unbelief and Revolution* (Amsterdam: Groen van Prinsterer Fund, 1975).

<sup>326</sup> Hendrik Mulder, *Groen van Prinsterer: Staatsman en profeet* (Franeker: 't Wever, 1973); J. Kruidenier, "De controverse tussen Groen van Prinsterer en van der Bruggen inzake de schoolkwestie," *De reformatorische school*, (part 1) 1 November 1975: 5-12, *ibid.*, (part 2) 1 February 1976, 11-16, *ibid.*, (part 3) 1 March 1976, 9-18; C Bremmer (ed.), *Een staatsman ter navolging - Groen van Prinsterer herdacht (1876-1976)* (The Hague: Stichtingen Kader- en Vormingswerk van A.R.P., C.H.U. en K.V.P., 1976).

The *Christen-Democratisch Appèl* (CDA) is a Christian Democratic political party in the Netherlands. The three parties that merged to form the CDA were the *Anti-Revolutionary Party*, the *Christian-Historical Union* (both of which claimed to stand in the tradition of Groen) and the *Katholieke Volkspartij* (Catholic Peoples' Party).

focus in terms of the sources. It became less centered around *Unbelief and Revolution* than had been the case with preceding literature.<sup>327</sup> Finally, most recently, there has been a slight revival of interest in the philosophical-political legacy and influence of Groen on his influential spiritual successors in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries.<sup>328</sup>

### 3. Thematic Focus of Groen Historiography to Date

A set of main themes uniformly characterize this extensive and diverse body of literature on Groen over the past century. With a focus on Groen's life, his Christian-historical philosophical and historiographical theories, and his political activities, the following themes can be broadly identified throughout the literature: (I) Groen as political theorist: *i.* Groen's concept of the Christian state and the relationship between the church and the state, *ii.* Groen's understanding of the nature of political authority and political liberty, and *iii.* Groen's notion of "revolution"; (II) Groen as historian: *i.* the polemic character of his historiography, *ii.* his indebtedness to Romantic historicism, *iii.* his conception of historic causality and the role of ideas in history, and *iv.* his teleological historiographic conception; and (III) Groen the politician: *i.* a historical overview of his relationship to Thorbecke, in light

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<sup>327</sup> Bremmer, *er staat geschreven* (1981); Harry van Dyke, *Lectures* (1989); Jantje van Essen, & Donald Morton, *Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer - Selected Studies* (Jordan Station, Ontario: Wedge, 1990); Kirpestein, *Belijder* (1993); George Harinck and Roel Kuiper (ed.), *Groen van Prinsterer en de geschiedenis - Historische opstellen* (Kampen: Van den Berg, 1994); D. van Dijk and H. Massinck (ed.), *Groen en de grondwet - De betekenis van Groen van Prinsterers visie op de Grondwet van 1848* (Heerenveen: J.J. Groen & Zoon, 1998); Kuiper, *Tot een voorbeeld* (2001); Herman Paul, "Groen van Prinsterer: a critical reappraisal," *Fides et Historia* 36, no. 2 (2004): 67-82; Jan de Bruijn and George Harinck (ed.), *Groen van Prinsterer in Europese context* (Hilversum: Verloren, 2004); Van Vliet, *historische benadering* (2008); J.G. Barnhoorn, *Amicitia Christiana: Da Costa en Groen van Prinsterer in hun briefwisseling (1830-1860)* (Apeldoorn: De Banier, 2011); Bijl, *Europese antirevolutionair* (2011); Huib Klink, *Groen* (2012).

<sup>328</sup> Harry van Dyke, "Groen van Prinsterer: Godfather of Bavinck and Kuyper," *Calvin Theological Journal*, no. 1 (2012): 72-97; Krijger, *Een veldheer* (2015).

of debates surrounding the constitutional revision and debates within parliament itself, and  
*ii.* his work concerning the School Struggle.

### *3.1 Groen as Political Theorist*

#### *3.1.1 The Christian State*

Groen's position on the Christian state relates to his involvement with the Réveil, a nineteenth-century pan-European Christian revival and socio-political movement. His position accordingly presupposed that the Christian religion not only impacted and shaped the individual life of the believer, but necessarily had significant socio-political implications. In the public domain neutrality is practically impossible, and a religious or epistemic battle, i.e. between faith and unbelief — which also characterizes all of history — is inescapably present.<sup>329</sup> The Christian faith, for Groen, is the cement of a healthy and moral society, since divine law alone can adequately address the challenges posed by the divinely created reality.<sup>330</sup> History evidenced that the Christian faith had been the vitality of European civilization and Dutch culture; the revelation of Scripture in combination with the lessons of history formed the solid foundation for political practice.<sup>331</sup> Government, as a providentially

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<sup>329</sup> Mulder, *Staatsman en profeet*, 76; Johan Zwaan, "Theorie en praktijk van Groen van Prinsterers geschiedschrijving," in *Groen van Prinsterer en die geschiedenis - Historische opstellen*, ed. George Harinck and Roel Kuiper (Kampen: Van den Berg, 1994), 85, 89; Van Vliet, *Historische benadering*, 211; Van Dyke, *Godfather*, 76.

<sup>330</sup> Brants, *Geestelijke groei*, 145-146; Mulder, *Staatsman en profeet*, 73; Van Vliet, *Historische benadering*, 196; Krijger, *Een veldheer*, 87.

<sup>331</sup> Diepenhorst, *Groen*, 308; Bijl, *Europese antirevolutionair*, 127.

created institution of God, was to be primarily responsible to Him and His laws, as opposed to being merely the formation of the people by means of a social contract.<sup>332</sup>

Groen's ideal of the Christian state was therefore shaped by a recognition both of transcendent divine morality on the one hand, and on the other hand of the historically-developed rights and relationships that have, through historical endurance, proven to reflect the true soul of the people.<sup>333</sup> Groen, as anti-revolutionary, rejected egalitarianism as a political principle and argued that state-sanctioned equality would merely replace natural inequalities with artificial inequalities.<sup>334</sup> Groen opposed the idea of a separation of church and state, arguing for a national church with public right. For him, the liberal ideal of the separation of church and state amounted to institutionalizing unbelief.<sup>335</sup> While he acknowledged that all religions that historically helped to shape the nation should be tolerated, he believed that, in the Dutch context, the Reformed Church should enjoy a privileged position in Dutch public life.<sup>336</sup> He advocated for the public welfare system to remain the domain of the Reformed Church as opposed to being taken over by the state.<sup>337</sup> His preoccupation with Christian education was also rooted in his ideal of the Christian state and the national church, since the revival of national Christian identity and culture was inseparably tied to it.<sup>338</sup>

The secondary literature on Groen has offered two mutually exclusive positions on how Groen theoretically reconciled the historical reality of the increasingly liberal

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<sup>332</sup> Brants, *Geestelijke groei*, 143; Zwaan, *Klassieke oudheid*, 249; Klink, *Groen*, 276-277; Krijger, *Een veldheer*, 87.

<sup>333</sup> Kirpestein, *Belijder*, 43-44; Klink, *Groen*, 280.

<sup>334</sup> Zwaan, *Klassieke oudheid*, 303-304.

<sup>335</sup> Kirpestein, *Belijder*, 137-138; Van Vliet, *Historische benadering*, 201.

<sup>336</sup> G.J. Laman, *Groen van Prinsterer als volksvertegenwoordiger* (Franeker: T. Wever, 1949), 26-27; Kirpestein *Belijder*, 110-113; Van Vliet, *Historische benadering*, 190-192, 199, 201-204.

<sup>337</sup> Kirpestein, *Belijder*, 97.

<sup>338</sup> Laman, *Volksvertegenwoordiger*, 14.

democracy in which he lived with his ideal of the Christian state. This is related to different views of Groen's understanding of the nature of political authority, discussed below.

### *3.1.2 Political Authority and Liberty*

Groen's opposition to the social contract as a Rousseauist and 'revolutionary' heresy was central to understanding his conceptualization of political authority and political liberty.<sup>339</sup> When first publishing the translation of lectures 8 and 9 of *Unbelief and Revolution* back in 1975, Harry van Dyke appropriately claimed in his short introduction, "Certainly the cornerstone of Groen's political philosophy is his insistence ... that power and authority in state, society and family derive from divine institution and cannot in the final analysis be grounded in human approval or social convention."<sup>340</sup> For Groen, societal secularization (or unbelief) led to political totalitarianism, since the transcendent moral principles found in religion were necessary to uphold a healthy balance between liberty and authority.<sup>341</sup> His conceptualization of liberty countered what he saw as the licentiousness of revolutionary liberty with an Augustinian concept of *servire Deo vera libertas est* ("serving God is true liberty").<sup>342</sup>

As mentioned above, in terms of how Groen countered the idea of the social contract throughout his career, there are essentially two streams of thought present in the literature. Historians from the 1930s up to the late 1980s generally tended to identify a significant change in Groen's thinking around 1848 or 1849, when he encountered and

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<sup>339</sup> Brants, *Geestelijke groei*, 143; Zwaan, *Klassieke oudheid*, 243; Van Dyke, *Godfather*, 75.

<sup>340</sup> Van Dyke, *Lectures Eight and Nine*, vi.

<sup>341</sup> Zwaan, *Klassieke oudheid*, 219; Van Vliet, *Historische benadering*, 296.

<sup>342</sup> Johan Zwaan, "Groens staatsbeschouwing," in *Een staatsman ter navelgong - Groen van Prinsterer herdacht (1876-1976)*, ed. C. Bremmer (Den Haag: Stichtingen Kader- en Vormingswerk van A.R.P., C.H.U. en K.V.P., 1976), 87.

embraced the conservative German jurist, Julius Friedrich Stahl (1802-1861). This led to Groen's forsaking of Karl Ludwig von Haller's (1768-1854) private-legal (or *res privata*) concept of civil authority in favor of Stahl's republican (or *res publica*) theory.<sup>343</sup> Von Haller's feudal theory was that the historical private ownership of large amounts of property gradually became the foundation for "owning" and exercising government authority in a given area, while Stahl in turn favored a republican idea that government authority is a public matter of interest to the entire community as a whole; government was to represent the interest of the entire populace, and was not merely the historical duty of a landlord towards his subjects. The general argument found in the literature is that Groen forsook a more exclusivist monarchial-historical conception of the state and developed a greater appreciation for the newly established constitutional democracy.

Unanimity on the issue was first challenged by Dutch Reformed minister Jan Willem Kirpestein's PhD dissertation in 1993, arguing that Groen's thought development was not so simplistically linear.<sup>344</sup> However, since then, with the exception of W.G.F. van Vliet's dissertation on Groen in 2008, most recent scholarship have continued to affirm the traditional and majority position.<sup>345</sup> Thus recent scholarship has still mostly adhered to this paradigm of a decisive interruption of Groen's thinking in 1848-1849, although a couple of dissenting opinions have emerged. Additionally, most recently, the Dutch Church historian, Tom-Eric Krijger has, like Sap, argued that Groen embraced increased democratization as

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<sup>343</sup> Diepenhorst, *Groen*, 319-322; Brants, *Geestelijke groei*, 140; Dooyeweerd, *Vernieuwing en bezinning*, 50; Zwaan, *Klassieke oudheid*, 291-292; Kruidenier, *De controverse (1)*, 13.

<sup>344</sup> Kirpestein, *Belijder*, 85-86.

<sup>345</sup> see e.g. the church historian Roel Kuiper's 2001 biography on Groen (*Tot een voorbeeld*, 178), historian Jan Drentje's 2004 biography on Thorbecke (Jan Drentje, *Thorbecke: Een filosoof in de politiek* (Amsterdam: Boom, 2004), 429), the Free University historian Jan Willem Sap's 2004 article on Groen's view of democratization (Willem Sap, "De angst voor revolutie bij de democratisering van de rechtsstaat: Groen van Prinsterer en De Tocqueville," in *Groen van Prinsterer in Europese context*, ed. Jan de Bruijn and George Harinck (Hilversum: Verloren, 2004), 29), and Jelle Bijl's 2011 PhD dissertation on Groen's vision of Europe (Bijl, *Europese antirevolutionair*, 364).

the natural development of the Dutch national character after 1848, adapting his political policies accordingly.<sup>346</sup>

In applying a new approach, I will not only engage and position myself in this dispute, but also propose an alternative third way of understanding Groen's theoretical development in chapter five. This will also have implications for understanding the dynamics and significance of Groen's political action, as I will explain with the 1856 test case in chapter six.

### 3.1.3 *Groen's Notion of "Revolution"*

Surprisingly, different views of Groen's understanding of the concept of "revolution", as it relates to his anti-revolutionary theory, have also surfaced throughout the body of literature, despite the near homogeneity of the authors' ideology and religious background. This is surprising for two reasons: (i) Most importantly, although Groen was often weak in systematically developing his own political theory and agenda, he tended to be much stronger and clearer when polemicizing — and in this sense he was quite clear about what he understood by the concept of revolution; secondly, (ii) a correct grasp of Groen's conceptualization of the revolution is so central to making any claims regarding his political theory, that it seems rather baffling to me that some would endeavor to write seriously on Groen's political theory (or even historiography) while arguing that this is a confusing or obscure concept in his thought.

Nonetheless, this has been claimed by the twentieth-century Dutch Christian parliamentarian I.A. Diepenhorst: namely that even Groen's *Unbelief and Revolution*

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<sup>346</sup> Krijger, *Een veldman*, 91-92.

remains vague in terms of the meaning of the term “revolution.”<sup>347</sup> Another deviating minority opinion is that of the twentieth-century Dutch historian Arie van Deursen, who in a 1994 article argued that Groen’s “revolutionary” forsook the claim to divinely instituted authority, regardless of whether the authority exercised is sinful (i.e. opposed to God’s will) or not.<sup>348</sup> Nonetheless, almost all authors have accurately understood Groen’s conceptualization of revolution as an epistemic shift in the societal conscience away from the recognition of the transcendent authority of God, the Creator and Ruler of the universe, whose will is revealed in Scripture and nature. This epistemic shift has inevitable socio-political implications. Accordingly, societally disruptive events like the French Revolution are merely the consequence and manifestation of the real revolution, which already took place in the hearts and minds of the people.<sup>349</sup>

Groen fought the “Revolution” as opposed not only to the teachings of history and God’s Word, but by extension also to the nature of reality. To him the Revolution gradually and systematically overthrew the basic pillars of justice, order, and truth needed for a healthy human society. The essence of his battle as political philosopher was the ever-present epistemic, historical, and political antithesis of belief or obedience to God versus unbelief or disobedience to God.<sup>350</sup>

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<sup>347</sup> I.A. Diepenhorst, “Groen van Prinsterer en de ‘revolutie’,” in *Een staatsman ter navolging - Groen van Prinsterer herdacht (1876-1976)*, ed. C. Bremmer (The Hague: Stichtingen Kader- en Vormingswerk van A.R.P., C.H.U. en K.V.P., 1976: 173-180), 177-178.

<sup>348</sup> A.T. van Deursen, “Kritiek en waardering voor Groen Van Prinsterer als historicus in de twintigste eeuw,” in *Groen van Prinsterer en de geschiedenis - Historische opstellen*, ed. George Harinck and Roel Kuiper (Kampen: Van den Berg, 1994), 32, 34.

<sup>349</sup> Herman Bavinck, *Voorrede*, xv-xvi, xviii, xx; Arie van Dijk, “Groen’s ‘Ongeloof en Revolutie’,” in *Een staatsman ter navolging - Groen van Prinsterer herdacht (1876-1976)*, ed. C. Bremmer (The Hague: Stichtingen Kader- en Vormingswerk van A.R.P., C.H.U. en K.V.P., 1976), 188-189; Kirpestein, *Belijder*, 44, 123-124; Van Vliet, *Historische benadering*, 104-105; Klink, *Groen*, 280; Van Dyke, *Godfather*, 74-75.

<sup>350</sup> Klink, *Groen*, 288-289; Van Dyke, *Godfather*, 75, 94-95.

### 3.2 Groen as Historian

Groen's contributions to Dutch historiography are widely appreciated by his spiritual heirs, who emphasize not only the distinctly Christian nature of his historiography, but specifically the scholarly advances he made in the field during the nineteenth-century in terms of primary source research, editing, and publication.<sup>351</sup> Four themes dominate the literature on Groen's historiography:

#### 3.2.1 The Polemic Character of His Historiography

As polemicist, history for Groen served to call the reader to faith and obedience to God's laws — those creational ordinances implanted in reality as called into existence by God, in addition to the laws set out in the Bible as special or divine revelation.<sup>352</sup> According to Groen, without God, all reality becomes chaotic, and history purposeless.<sup>353</sup> In addition to Scripture, God reveals Himself in His covenantal relationship to creation through the flow of history itself.<sup>354</sup> In the nineteenth-century, with the Reformed religion in the Netherlands under ideological pressure from Enlightenment liberalism, Groen, as statesman and as historian, stood up for their cause and pointed out Protestantism's role as a constitutive factor of Dutch nationhood.<sup>355</sup> The Christian civilization, of which Groen regarded himself a defender,

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<sup>351</sup> George Harinck, *Gereformeerd historicus*, 125; Roel Kuiper, *Uitzien*, 29; Van Dyke, *Godfather*, 73.

<sup>352</sup> Martin Te Velde, "Het schriftgebruik in Groens handboek der Geschiedenis van het Vaderland. Een inventarisatie met enkele kanttekeningen," in *Groen van Prinsterer en de geschiedenis - Historische opstellen*, ed. George Harinck and Roel Kuiper (Kampen: Van den Berg, 1994), 43; Van Dyke, *Godfather*, 94.

<sup>353</sup> Van Vliet, *Historische benadering*, 359.

<sup>354</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>355</sup> Harinck, *Gereformeerd historicus*, 126-127, 131.

was, to him, inseparably connected to European and Dutch historical development and progress.<sup>356</sup>

### *3.2.2 The Influence of Romantic Historicism and the Réveil*

Although historians have long recognized the influence of the German Historical School on Groen's political theory and historiography, van Vliet (2008) was the first to systematically elaborate on this claim.<sup>357</sup> This nineteenth-century historicist school was characterized by a belief in the authority of a historically developed cultural law, a romantic reaction to the Enlightenment's alleged disregard for history's pedagogic value.<sup>358</sup> Van Vliet has pointed to a number of elements in Groen's Christian-historical thinking derived from this school: (i) a rejection of striving towards a perfect society; (ii) the emphasis on the particular and unique character of a people; (iii) the organic symphony of the character of the nation, law, and political forms; (iv) the necessity of sensitivity and tentativeness with reforms; (v) the value of political interest; (vi) the idea that new reforms must be rooted in the old; and (vii) opposition to the codification of laws based on the rational insight of one generation of politicians.

Groen saw in this school an ally against rationalistic conceptions of natural law, and appreciated its respect for the wisdom of ages as reflected in historically developed political rights and arrangements, sealed by the test of time. Although von Savigny's ideas were only to a very limited degree influenced by religious notions, Groen gave the Historical School a

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<sup>356</sup> Bijl, *Eurpoese antirevolutionair*, 13.

<sup>357</sup> Brants, *Geestelijke groei*, 45-46; Dooyeweerd, *Vernieuwing en bezinning*, 120; Van Dyke, *Lectures*, 40; Van Vliet, *Historische benadering*, 32.

<sup>358</sup> Van Vliet, *Historische benadering*, 32.

Christian flavor.<sup>359</sup> In this regard he felt particularly attracted to the German Lutheran jurist Julius Friedrich Stahl's modification or reformation of this school.<sup>360</sup>

Through the combination of historicism with historiographic traditions from within the Réveil, Groen was able to synthesize a unique Christian historiographical perspective. The Réveil shared Romanticism's rejection of Enlightenment rationalism.<sup>361</sup> Groen's conception of history as ecclesiocentric or Christocentric, with the essence of history being God's work in building and growing the Church of Christ, was directly indebted to this tradition.<sup>362</sup> In this regard the names of the Swiss church historian Merle d'Aubigne and fellow Dutch Réveil figure Isaac Da Costa have been rightly mentioned as influences in the literature.<sup>363</sup> However, a clear weakness of the scholarship has been the grossly overestimated insistence of the influence of the father of the Dutch Réveil, Willem Bilderdijk, on Groen's historiography.<sup>364</sup> In the fourth chapter of this dissertation I will engage with this question regarding the exact nature of the historiographical impact of the Réveil on Groen, critiquing existing literature and outlining some implications of the alternative view that I propose.

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<sup>359</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>360</sup> Ibid., 36-38.

<sup>361</sup> Kuiper, *Uitzien*, 19; W. van der Zwaag, *Réveil en afscheiding: negentiende-eeuwse kerkhistorie met bijzondere actualiteit*. (Kampen: De Groot Goudriaan, 2006), 5, 7; Van Vliet, *Historische benadering*, 29, 82.

<sup>362</sup> Fokkema, *Godstienstig-wijsgerige beginselen*, 31-32; Kamphuis, *Causaliteit*, 44-45; Van Essen, *Selected Studies*, 25; Van Vliet, *Historische benadering*, 88; Barnhoorn, *Amicitia Christiana*, 250-251, Bijl, *Europese antirevolutionair*, 195.

<sup>363</sup> Aart van Schelven, "Groen's denkbeelden over de reformatie," in *Groen's "Ongeloof en Revolutie" - Een bundel studiën*, ed. L.C. Suttorp, Z.W. Sneller and J. Veldkamp (Wageningen: Zomer & Keuning, 1949), 80-81; Kuiper, *Uitzien*, 34; Van Vliet, *Historische benadering*, 84-85.

<sup>364</sup> Bremmer, *Er staat geschreven*, 52-53; Kuiper, *Uitzien*, 34; Van Vliet, *Historische benadering*, 29, 85.

### 3.2.3 Groen's Conception of Historic Causality and the Role of Ideas in History

In light of Groen's proposal that systematic apostasy from the Christian faith, i.e. the epistemic shift from belief to unbelief in God's sovereignty, manifested in socio-political decline, his emphasis on the role of ideas in history has been widely recognized.<sup>365</sup> The overwhelming majority of authors have argued that Groen, with an emphasis on ideas as historically decisive, adhered to a mechanical-logical paradigm in which each dominant epistemic framework inevitably led to certain societal consequences.<sup>366</sup> He has been criticized for neglecting socio-political, personal, and cultural elements in historical causality, interpreting the flow of history within an oversimplified dialectic of the ideological struggle between faith and unbelief.<sup>367</sup>

This accusation has generally held that while Groen claimed to want to let the facts speak, he simply used history to affirm this preconceived paradigm. The Dutch historian Pieter Geyl was the most outstanding twentieth-century critic of Groen's method as unhistorical, arguing that it was based on the false presupposition that ideas alone determine the flow of history and that Groen's apriorisms hindered him from practicing scientific history.<sup>368</sup> Various responses to this criticism followed: in the early 60s the minister and Dutch Church historian Jaap Kamphuis would attempt to counter Geyl, strongly arguing

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<sup>365</sup> Fokkema, *Godsdienstig-wijsgerige beginselen*, 37-38; J.H. De Pater "Groen's beschouwingen over de verloop van de revolutie," in *Groen's "Ongeloof en Revolutie" - Een bundel studiën*, ed. L.C. Suttorp, Z.W. Sneller & J. Veldkamp (Wageningen: Zomer & Keuning, 1949), 100-101, 103; Z.W. Sneller, „De aanval van Fruin in 1853 op den auteur van 'Ongeloof en Revolutie'” in *Ibid.* (9-26), 10-12; Geyl, *Reacties*, 7; Van Essen, *Selected Studies*, 30; Van Deursen, *Kritiek en waardering*, 32, 34; Zwaan, *Theorie en praktijk*, 73-74; J. Schaeffer, “Er is meer tussen oorzaak en gevolg,” in *Groen van Prinsterer en de geschiedenis - Historische opstellen*, ed. Goerg Harinck and Roel Kuiper, (Kampen: Van den Berg, 1994), 114-115; Kuiper, *Uitzien*, 35; Van Vliet, *Historische benadering*, 90; Barnhoorn, *Amicitia Christiana*, 247.

<sup>366</sup> Fokkema, *Godsdienstig-wijsgerige beginselen*, 35, 37-38; De Pater, *Beschouwingen*, 100-101, 103; Sneller, *De aanval*, 174-177; Geyl, *Reacties*, 7; Zwaan, *Theorie en praktijk*, 73-74; Schaeffer, *Er is meer*, 114-115; Van Vliet, *Historische benadering*, 90; Barnhoorn, *Amicitia Christiana*, 247.

<sup>367</sup> De Pater, *Beschouwingen*, 114-116; Geyl, *Reacties*, 7, 58, 60-61, 79.

<sup>368</sup> Geyl, *Reacties*, 11, 46-47.

for Groen's adherence to a biblical-covenantal paradigm of the tree and its fruits, which he contrasted with any form of logicism in which ideas are a central driving force in history.<sup>369</sup> The Groen historian and archivist, Jantje Lubbegiena van Essen, also attacked Geyl in 1982 on this count as misunderstanding Groen because of his inability to fathom him as "a confessor of the gospel even as a historian."<sup>370</sup> During the mid-1990s, Arie van Deursen proposed an alternative view based on his unique understanding of Groen's theorizing on revolution, countering the notion that Groen neglected socio-political factors in history. Explaining his understanding that Groen saw revolution as the *claim* to divinely instituted authority, regardless of whether the authority exercised is sinful or not, Van Deursen argued that Groen saw ideas as a primary historical mover, but one with which socio-politics are always interrelated.<sup>371</sup> Most recently, Jilles Pieter Bijl has argued that Groen's historiography was essentially shaped by the synchronistic-ethnographic method of the German *Göttinger Schule*.<sup>372</sup> The method of this school of historiography as well as Bijl's argument, will be explained in the following chapter.

All in all, five different positions on Groen's conception of historic causality and the role of ideas in history can be identified in the literature: I call them (i) the majority conception of a Groenian logicism (a view represented by both orthodox Reformed supporters and historiographic critics of Groen through the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries): Fokkema (1907), De Pater (1949), Sneller (1949), Geyl (1952), Zwaan (1994), Schaeffer (1994), Van Vliet (2008), and Barnhoorn (2009); (ii) Kamphuis's (1962) conception of Groenian covenantalism; (iii) Van Essen's (1990) emphasis on Groen's ideocentric

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<sup>369</sup> Kamphuis, *Causaliteit*, 15-16, 40-41.

<sup>370</sup> Van Essen, *Selected Studies*, 33. The Dutch article was translated and published in English as part of the *Selected Studies* in 1990.

<sup>371</sup> Van Deursen, *Kritiek en waardering*, 32, 34-35.

<sup>372</sup> Bijl, *Europese antirevolutionair*, 71-75, 81.

historiography as representing a polemic reaction to the Enlightenment's secularization of historical causality, in which all historic phenomena were seen to be explainable via socio-political structures; (iv) Van Deursen's (1994) alternative conception of Groen's causality based on his unorthodox understanding of the Groenian concept of "revolutionary"; and most recently, (v) Groen as synchronic-ethnographic historian in the tradition of the *Göttinger Schule*, as proposed by Bijl (2011). My position, informed by my approach's emphasis on Groen as historical narrator, complements (yet differs from) all existing positions, and will also be explained in chapter four.

### *3.2.4 Groen's Historical Teleology*

Groen saw the providential development and protection of the Christian Church and the gospel it proclaims as central to the divine purpose behind history. With reference to the church invisible (as opposed to a particular denomination), Groen's historiography was therefore ecclesiocentric, although his scope was certainly broader than mere church history.<sup>373</sup> World history as called into existence by God, was, for Groen, teleologically rooted in the paradisiacal promise of Genesis 3:15, the promise of victory for the seed of the woman (Christ) over the seed of the snake (evil). For this reason, Christ's redemptive work in "the fullness of time" was central to and decisive for history.<sup>374</sup> In this regard, Groen as historian stood in the tradition of St. Augustine and Bishop Otto von Freising (1114-1158), both of whom emphasized history as the battleground between Christ and Satan, sin, evil,

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<sup>373</sup> Fokkema, *Godsdienstig-wijsgerige beginselen*, 31-32; Kamphuis, *Causaliteit*, 28; Van Essen, *Selected Studies*, 25; Van Vliet, *Historische benadering*, 87; Baarnhoorn, *Amicitia Christiana*, 251; Bijl, *Europese antirevolutionair*, 195.

<sup>374</sup> Fokkema, *Godsdienstig-wijsgerige beginselen*, 32; Kamphuis, *Causaliteit*, 44-45; Mulder, *Staatsman en profeet*, 76; Van Essen, *Selected Studies*, 23-25; Te Velde, *Schriftgebruik*, 45; Van Vliet, *Historische benadering*, 85; Klink, *Groen*, 278-279.

and death, on the path to the eventual victory and glorification of Christ.<sup>375</sup> The paradigm of fall and redemption, as well as its implications, such as human depravity as the core of his anthropology and his creational-providential teleology, was central to Groen's understanding of history.<sup>376</sup>

Groen opposed empiricism, which he believed reduced history to immanent processes.<sup>377</sup> He held steadfastly to the conviction that the secularization of the field of history blinded one to the true metaphysical reality behind history.<sup>378</sup> In the 1970s, the lawyer-historian Hendrik Mulder argued that Groen saw an inevitable future defeat for Christendom in history, but that he nonetheless thought it the Christian calling to fight for Christian societal regeneration in the meantime.<sup>379</sup> More recently, however, Van Vliet noted that Groen's rejection of empiricist historiography was related to a positive eschatological expectation, even arguing that Groen's convictions regarding Christ's eschatological victory enabled him to make coherent sense of history.<sup>380</sup> Van Dyke has also, with his 2012 article on the influence of Groen on his spiritual heirs Bavinck and Kuyper, directly contradicted the view of Mulder, arguing that Groen foresaw a triumph of good over evil in the world and in history.<sup>381</sup>

This eschatological-teleological aspect of Groen's historiography, widely yet only briefly addressed in the literature, is one of the more underappreciated elements of Groen's historical narrative. In this regard I provide a new and more extensive perspective in chapter four of this dissertation.

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<sup>375</sup> Van Essen, *Selected Studies*, 23; Paul, *Reappraisal*, 72.

<sup>376</sup> Paul, *Reappraisal*, 23; Van Dyke, *Godfather*, 74.

<sup>377</sup> Kuiper, *Uitzien*, 34.

<sup>378</sup> Geyl, *reacties*, 91.

<sup>379</sup> Mulder, *Staatsman en profeet*, 76-77.

<sup>380</sup> Van Vliet, *Historische benadering*, 67.

<sup>381</sup> Van Dyke, *Godfather*, 95.

### 3.3 Groen the Politician

#### 3.3.1 Groen's Relationship to Thorbecke and the Constitutional Revisions

Groen's career in politics would kick off in the 1840s. In 1839 the liberal Dutch prime minister-to-be, Johan Rudolph Thorbecke, made a name for himself in the contemporary constitutional discussions with his *Notes on the Constitution*. Groen's former PhD promotor at Leiden University, Cornelis Jacobus van Assen, informed him of this, encouraging him to reply. Groen consequently produced his *Contribution to Constitutional Revision in the Dutch Manner* (in Leiden) in 1840.<sup>382</sup> In that same year, during the last month of King Willem I's reign, a constitutional revision was accepted that, although not bringing about radical changes, was in line with Thorbecke's thinking and recommendations in that it limited the liberty of the monarch and introduced increased ministerial responsibility.<sup>383</sup> Although Groen appreciated many of the concrete reforms of the constitutional revision, his attitude towards the new constitution was that it essentially amounted to no substantial change or reform, since it was preoccupied with external forms and not essentials.<sup>384</sup> He believed that, because of humankind's depravity, fundamental reform on a moral and spiritual level was a necessary prerequisite for true political reform.<sup>385</sup> Dutch political historian Koos van den Berg summarized the core argument of Groen's *Contribution* written during the 1840

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<sup>382</sup> Drentje, *Thorbecke*, 324, 326. *Aanteekening op de grondwet*.

<sup>383</sup> Boogman, *Rondom 1848*, 23.

<sup>384</sup> Mulder, *Staatsman en profeet*, 72; Klink, *Groen*, 281.

<sup>385</sup> Mulder, *Staatsman en profeet*, 73.

constitutional revision as a plea for the maintenance of historical principles or notions of authority and liberty, as informed by Protestant Christianity.<sup>386</sup>

Nearly a decade later, Thorbecke also singlehandedly composed the 1848 constitutional revision, which introduced a liberal system based around direct elections and increased ministerial responsibility.<sup>387</sup> As was the case during the Belgian Revolution of 1830, in 1848 Groen and Thorbecke identified a similar societal threat in the revolutionary spirit of the time, but saw different solutions. Thorbecke regarded structural democratizing reforms via a constitution as the anecdote to potential societal instability, while Groen maintained that a return to traditional moral-epistemic Christian Dutch principles was the true remedy for the basic moral-epistemic problems, of which societal problems were merely a result.<sup>388</sup> Nonetheless, he was willing to live with the new constitutional form and participate in the new system, albeit in the hope that the societal mindset would change.<sup>389</sup> Though Groen was not unconcerned with good legislation, he was convinced that the true battle raged beyond the debates regarding a particular form of government, instead concerning the underlying spirit and principles, with the former only being of service to the latter.<sup>390</sup> As I point out in chapter five, despite a shared historicist approach, their differing political strategies correlated with their respective historical narrative strategies for political self-positioning.

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<sup>386</sup> Koos van den Berg, "Groen van Prinsterer en de grondwet," in *Groen en de grondwet - De betekenis van Groen van Prinsterers visie op de Grondwet van 1848*, ed. D. van Dijk and H. Massinck, (Heerenveen: J.J. Groen en Zoon, 1998), 62.

<sup>387</sup> Drentje, *Thorbecke*, 402-403.

<sup>388</sup> Kirpestein, *Belijder*, 95; Van den Berg, *Grondwet*, 65-67; Drentje, *Thorbecke*, 331-332, 337; Klink, *Groen*, 283.

<sup>389</sup> Van den Berg, *Grondwet*, 70-71; Kuiper, *Tot een voorbeeld*, 127; Van Vliet, *Historische benadering*, 218.

<sup>390</sup> Van Dyke, *Godfather*, 92-93.

### 3.3.2 Groen in Parliament and the School Struggle

The divide between Groen and Thorbecke is vital to understanding the prelude to Groen's parliamentary action, and in particular the school struggle in which Groen would extensively engage in the 1850s and 60s — his main source of fame as a politician.

As noted, early on in his career as a member of the Second Chamber, Groen opposed Thorbecke's poverty bill aimed at giving the state more control of the welfare system in the Netherlands, advocating instead that welfare should remain the church's domain.<sup>391</sup> As part of his defense of the public right of the *Nederlands Hervormde Kerk*, he additionally opposed the re-institution of Roman Catholic episcopal hierarchy in the Netherlands, which restored the pope's right to appoint bishops in the Dutch Church province, a right he had lost during the Dutch Revolt.<sup>392</sup> King Willem III's biographer Dik van der Meulen has argued that Thorbecke was very much aware of the social unrest that such an episcopal hierarchy would cause, but nonetheless, Thorbecke's biographer Drentje has observed that Thorbecke probably underestimated the influence and strength of the anti-Roman Catholic sentiments of Dutch Protestantism at the time.<sup>393</sup> Regardless, in early March 1853, when the pope publicly announced the re-institution of episcopal hierarchy in the Netherlands, public resistance broke out. Many Protestants were particularly angered by the pope's explicit reference to Calvinism as a heresy in this announcement, as well as his indication of the Protestant stronghold of Utrecht as the seat of the archbishop. The resistance, which became known as the April Movement, also started in that city.<sup>394</sup> Although the April Movement ultimately brought down the first Thorbecke cabinet, its disbandment should be

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<sup>391</sup> Kirpestein, *Belijder*, 97.

<sup>392</sup> *Ibid.*, 109; Drentje, *Thorbecke*, 420; Van der Meulen, *Willem III*, 267; *Dutch Reformed Church*.

<sup>393</sup> Drentje, *Thorbecke*, 422; Van der Meulen, *Willem III*, 268-269.

<sup>394</sup> Drentje, *Thorbecke*, 423; Van der Meulen, *Willem III*, 270-271.

viewed in light of the continuing tension between king and cabinet concerning their understanding of their respective governmental roles and the extent of their authority. When the king disbanded the cabinet, in other words, it was not due to anti-papist or pro-Protestant sentiments on his own part, but was a strategic move in light of this strained relationship.<sup>395</sup>

This formed the historic background to Groen's parliamentary engagement in the school struggle as parliamentarian, which started around 1854. In that year, the Minister of Interior Affairs G.C.J. van Rhenen proposed a bill that proclaimed public government education to be sufficient, but allowed for exceptional circumstances where private schools might be instituted separately for children of different religious backgrounds.<sup>396</sup> Groen, who had long been a proponent of Church-led education, but also formally proposed "splitting" public schools according to religious affiliation, was among those unhappy with the bill.<sup>397</sup> One of his main practical arguments for making his case of school-splitting was that if Christian education were to be privatized, many poorer Christian families would not be able to afford it and would be forced to send their children to a secular public school.<sup>398</sup> A majority of the Second Chamber (with varying motivations) rejected the bill, forcing Van Rhenen to introduce a revised bill in 1856 that advocated for religiously neutral state education. This second bill received more support. In response, however, Groen countered with an extra-parliamentary people's petition against the bill, which gained around ten thousand signatures.<sup>399</sup> This act would prove instrumental in the fall of the cabinet at the time — that of ministers F.A. van Hall and D. Donker Curtius — as the king declared that he

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<sup>395</sup> Van der Meulen, *Willem III*, 274-277.

<sup>396</sup> Van Vliet, *Historische benadering*, 220; Van der Meulen, *Willem III*, 336.

<sup>397</sup> Van Dyke, *Lectures*, 36; Kuiper, *Tot een voorbeeld*, 100; Van Vliet, *Historische benadering*, 214-215.

<sup>398</sup> Diepenhorst, *Groen*, 424-425.

<sup>399</sup> Roel Kuiper, "Groen van Prinsterer en de revolutiejaar 1848," in *Groen van Prinsterer in Europese context*, ed. Jan de Bruijn and George Harinck, (Hilversum: Verloren, 2004), 104; Van der Meulen, *Willem III*, 336.

would refuse to sign into law a bill to which such a large part of the nation objected.<sup>400</sup> As with the April Movement, here again the king's use of Groen's petition for disbanding the cabinet was not so much because of his sympathy with the cause of the petition, but because he sought a justification for disbanding a cabinet with which he, like the preceding one, had endured a very strained relationship.<sup>401</sup>

The next cabinet, led by minister Justinus van der Bruggen, was also the most conservative of any since the constitutional revision, and would eventually effectively deal with the schooling issue.<sup>402</sup> Nonetheless, despite his anti-revolutionary credentials, Van der Bruggen fundamentally differed from Groen regarding the schooling issue in the parliamentary debates, favoring private religious schools to be erected by parents' initiative alongside the public education system.<sup>403</sup>

An edited version of Van Rhenen's bill was eventually accepted on the 20<sup>th</sup> of July, with Groen eventually resigning from the Second Chamber in 1857 following its acceptance into law, thereafter continuing his work as historian.<sup>404</sup> He would return to the Second Chamber in 1862, under a second Thorbecke cabinet, to continue fighting the same battle, albeit this time with a different strategy.<sup>405</sup> By then he had already founded the Union for Christian-National School Education in 1860, an organization dedicated to advancing the position and recognition of a growing number of private Christian schools. Groen took this same battle to parliament in the 1860s.<sup>406</sup> He now advocated for making private rather than public education the norm, with public neutral education only provided as the exception to

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<sup>400</sup> Mulder, *Staatsman en profeet*, 86; Kuiper, *revolutiejaar*, 104.

<sup>401</sup> Van der Meulen, *Willem III*, 336-337; Van Vliet, *Historische benadering*, 221.

<sup>402</sup> Boogman, *Rondom 1848*, 168; Van der Meulen, *Willem III*, 338-340, 343.

<sup>403</sup> Boogman, *Rondom 1848*, 161; Kirpestein, *Belijder*, 118-119; Van Vliet, *Historische benadering*, 223; Van der Meulen, *Willem III*, 340-341.

<sup>404</sup> Kuiper, *Tot een voorbeeld*, 168; Van der Meulen, *Willem III*, 343.

<sup>405</sup> Van Dyke, *Lectures*, 79; Van Vliet, *Historische benadering*, 213.

<sup>406</sup> Kuiper, *Tot een voorbeeld*, 177; Van Vliet, *Historische benadering*, 232.

the former as rule.<sup>407</sup> He finally retired from parliament in 1865.<sup>408</sup> However, towards the very end of his life, he again returned to advocating the policy of facultative splitting of public schools along religious lines.<sup>409</sup>

Differences exist in the literature on how to view Groen's exact theoretical position (and its evolution) in terms of the principle of Christian education. Early twentieth-century scholars emphasized Groen's advocacy for the facultative splitting of schools according to religious conviction as the essence of his conviction, namely an appreciation for the historic rights of religious denominations and the Christian character of the Dutch nation. He believed that a recognition of the historic religious ingredients of Dutch nationhood could counter secular public education that would eventually destroy the Christian spirit of the nation.<sup>410</sup> The early twentieth-century anti-revolutionary leader Pieter Diepenhorst added that the differences between Groen's strategies in the 1850s and 60s, as well as his surprising return to his 1850s-position at his life's end, point not to a change in principle, but merely to a different means of advocating for his ideal of a national Christian education in public debates.<sup>411</sup> In this regard Diepenhorst's interpretation precluded what would become the majority position in the literature on Groen's view of Christian education.

Towards the end of the 1940s, advocates for Christian education G.J. Laman and D. Langedijk would agree with Diepenhorst. They argued that Groen adhered to the ideal of a Christian state with public education in consultation with the church, but should this

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<sup>407</sup> Diepenhorst, *Groen*, 433.

<sup>408</sup> Kuiper, *Tot een voorbeeld*, 183.

<sup>409</sup> Diepenhorst, *Groen*, 433-434; Krijger, *Een veldman*, 101.

<sup>410</sup> Lens, *Ministeriele crisis*, 758; A. Goslinga, "Het Conflict Groen-Van der Bruggen," in *Christendom en Historie, lustrumbundel vanwege Het gezelschap van Christelijke historici in Nederland* (Amsterdam: Holland, 1925), 278-279; Diepenhorst, *Groen*, 429, 431.

<sup>411</sup> Diepenhorst, *Groen*, 430.

become practically unrealizable, government should at least recognize the historic Christian identity of the people they govern and arrange public education accordingly.<sup>412</sup>

Later, in 1973, Hendrik Mulder would take a similar approach to analyzing Groen's position: the essence for him was a Dutch Christian education system, the means of which were (alternately) his advocacy of split public schools and the right to private Christian education.<sup>413</sup> He noted that Groen, after the disappointment of 1857, initiated a program for a neutral, pillarized state in which private education would be the rule, even advocating for no theology faculties at public universities. Mulder called Groen the father of the Dutch concept of *Pillarization*.<sup>414</sup> His advocacy for the absolute neutrality of public institutions was based in his mistrust of an education system ostensibly promoting general Christian virtues within that historic context as secular humanism under a false name.<sup>415</sup>

In a 1975 article, prominent Christian higher education lecturer, J. Kruidenier, argued that for Groen the core principle was liberty of education rather than Christian public education, with the idea being that parents take prime responsibility for it over the state, although the latter was to play a supportive role.<sup>416</sup> He identified a shift in Groen's principles. For him, Groen's ideal before 1848 was private Christian education, with a split along denominational lines. Then, through the influence of Stahl from 1848 onwards, Groen

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<sup>412</sup> D. Langedijk, *Groen van Prinsterer en de schoolkwestie*. (The Hague: J.N. Voorhoeve, 1947), 15, 25, 31; Laman, *Volksvertegenwoordiger*, 26, 28.

<sup>413</sup> Mulder, *Staatsman en profeet*, 84-85, 90.

<sup>414</sup> Mulder, *Staatsman en profeet*, 90-91

*Verzuiling* or *Pillarization* in English, was a twentieth-century socio-political system in the Netherlands, whereby each politico-denominational group within society created and cultivated their own social institutions, such as schools, trade unions, media, sports clubs etc. The political theorist Arend Lijphardt distinguishes four pillars in Dutch society: Calvinist, Roman Catholic, Socialist and Liberal. (*Verzuiling, pacificatie en kentering in de Nederlandse politiek*, 9th reprint (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2007)), 29, 34.

<sup>415</sup> *Ibid.*, 91.

<sup>416</sup> Kruidenier, *De controverse (1)*, 12.

changed to prefer a national public education system with a threefold facultative splitting along religious lines – Protestant, Roman Catholic, and Jewish.<sup>417</sup>

The Reformed Party councilman and history teacher Gert Slootweg, writing at the end of the twentieth century, agreed that there was a principled change or development with Groen, but unlike Kruidenier, he did not connect this to the influence of Stahl. He argued that Groen actually held that the principle of divine right necessitates public (Protestant-)Christian education provided by the mutual co-operation of government and church as both under the authority of God. Then after the disappointment of 1857, he changed his position to favor religiously neutral public education, but while advancing the rights of private Christian schools with government support. He returned to his original principle at the end of his career.<sup>418</sup>

Two authorities from around the same period (i.e. the 1990s and early 2000s), Reformed minister Jan Willem Kirpestein and Reformed historian George Harinck, as well as Reformed minister Huib Klink in a 2012 article, have all argued that Groen's differing strategical approaches to the school struggle in parliament (and outside of parliament as well) should be seen as pragmatic, with Groen always, as a starting principle, holding on to the ideal of a Christian Protestant national public education system. In other words, Groen's arguments for denominational schools, advocacy of facultative splitting, and acceptance of religiously neutral education after 1857 should be interpreted in light of his strategy at any given time to maximize the potential and reach of Christian-Protestant education.<sup>419</sup>

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<sup>417</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>418</sup> Gert Slootweg, "Groens 'theocratische' visie en de doorwerking daarvan bij de kleine christelijke partijen," in *Groen en de grondwet - De betekenis van Groen van Prinsterers visie op de Grondwet van 1848*, ed. D. van Dijk & H. Massinck, (Heerenveen: J.J. Groen & Zoon, 1998), 47.

*SGP: Staatkundig Gereformeerde Partij – The Reformed (i.e. Calvinist) Political Party in the Netherlands.*

<sup>419</sup> Kirpestein, *Belijder*, 121; George Harinck, "Groen van Prinsterer en Thomas Chalmers: 'Precious ties of a common faith'," in *Groen van Prinsterer in Europese context*, ed. Jan de Bruijn and George Harinck, (Hilversum: Verloren, 2004), 47, 50; Klink, *Groen*, 286-288.

Although the interpretations of Kirpestein, Harinck, and Klink reveal similarities to those of the early twentieth century, and in particular that of Diepenhorst, there is a marked difference: whereas Lens, Diepenhorst, and the co-publisher of Groen's correspondence, the Reformed historian Adriaan Goslinga, had focused on Groen's historic principle of rights-recognition of traditional religious practice as theoretically underpinning his stance on education, more recent authors argued for his ideal of building a specifically Protestant nation through education as decisive. In this regard Kirpestein (1993) and Harinck (2004) are in agreement with the earlier interpretations of Langedijk (1947), Laman (1949), and Mulder (1973). Together they represent the majority position on the issue within the literature.

Another recent author to weigh in on the issue, W.G.F. van Vliet, with his 2008 doctoral dissertation, however, returned to a position popular nearly a century before. He argued that Groen saw the state and church as mutually responsible for providing Christian education to a traditionally Christian people in accordance with the historical principle, which is why he felt obliged to recognize the rights, for example, of Dutch Roman Catholics in this regard. He notes that the "desire" and "right" of the people to Christian education are continually recurring themes in Groen's argumentation.<sup>420</sup>

Most recently, Tom-Eric Krijger has also written on the issue, and, in building an argument for Abraham Kuyper as Groen's legitimate and authentic anti-revolutionary successor, he has brought renewed attention to Kuyper's insistence that Groen indeed had a principled change of mind in the 1860s. That is, Kuyper saw Groen change from calling for Christian public education to advocating neutral public education with Christian private schools, reflecting a genuine ideological shift away from his prior position.<sup>421</sup>

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<sup>420</sup> Van Vliet, *Historische benadering*, 215-217, 219-220.

<sup>421</sup> Krijger, *Een veldheer*, 91-92.

In chapter six, when arguing for the significance and decisiveness of Groen's *modus operandi* in 1856, I will also return to the theoretical underpinning of his participation in discussions on education in parliament, his central concern at the time. There I will both critique existing interpretations of Groen's action and introduce a new perspective.

#### **4. Conclusion**

In summarizing the foci of existing literature on Groen, it would be fair to say that the emphasis has been on those aspects of his political-historical theory and public action that were polemical against his opponents, and on those ideas and concepts he used to counter the prevalent liberal Enlightenment ideas of his time. In terms of approach, all existing literature has therefore focused on Groen's political theory and practice within his nineteenth-century context, with some trying to draw parallels to apply his insights to their contemporary challenges. For this reason the literature to date has not managed to analyze the narrative strategies constitutive of Groen's political engagement, since the authors generally (consciously and unconsciously) occupy a place within the same Christian-historical tradition, thereby being too involved to view it from the outside.

In terms of content, there has been a clear divide in the literature concerning Groen's notion of the nature of political authority. This has proven to be quite decisive in interpreting Groen's Christian-historical position and its development as a whole, as well as his political action in general — but particularly with regard to his stance on the constitution and the schooling issue, which has been the central focus of the literature on his public political action.

Additionally, with regard to his historiography, the focus has likewise been on its polemic nature, and relatedly on the anti-Enlightenment tradition by which it was shaped, his conceptualizing of historic causality and the role of ideas as necessary to understand his method, as well as the (though in my view heavily underappreciated) role of teleological-eschatological thinking in his historical narrative. As noted previously, a comprehensive overview and analysis of the tradition in which Groen's political theory and historiography were shaped is peculiarly absent, something I address in chapters four and five.

Considering the thematic foci of the existing literature, the novel contribution of this dissertation will lie in stressing the importance of a correct understanding of Groen's Christian-historical position on an interconnected political and historiographic level, with the purpose of appreciating his political action and its significance in a new and interesting way. As explained in the introduction, this will be done via highlighting the socio-political self-constituting and sanctioning function of Groen's anti-revolutionary historical narrative. In other words, the distinct focus of this dissertation is to show how the development of his political thinking and consequent public political engagement can be illuminated through an emphasis on the distinct historical narrativization present in his texts.

With this approach, this dissertation will cast new light upon the Christian-historical narrative in Groen's writings, appreciating it as Groen strategically utilized it in his nineteenth-century Dutch context to make sense of the world and to shape his identity as a Christian political actor within history. That is, we will see how Groen's narrativization placed himself within the continuing historical development of the Dutch people and the Church among that people as a continuing prequel, which both precedes and succeeds his own lifetime, finally leading up to the denouement of his narrative. This will enable me to present a more integrated view of Groen's historiography, political theory, and public action

than can be found in the existing literature, allowing me not only to engage in the existing disputes in the corpus on Groen itself, but to also present and argue for a broader appreciation of Groen's life and contributions in a novel way.

The value of this new approach to studying Groen will be evidenced most clearly in the following chapters (4 to 6), in which the three aforementioned theoretical and practical aspects of Groen's life and political contributions will be highlighted as integrally shaped by his Christian-historical narrative.

## CHAPTER 4

# The Christian-Historical Narrative: Its Political Objectives, Rhetorical Strategies and Central Themes

### 1. Introduction

For the purpose of achieving his political goals, Groen employed various politically sanctioning rhetorical strategies and thematic emphases in his historical narrative. He lived and acted within the paradigm of a distinct narrational existence, establishing what Carr would describe as an anti-revolutionary “consciousness of the present . . . [through] its horizon — or background-consciousness of [historical] retention.”<sup>422</sup> In other words, the narrative strategies in his texts were employed to establish the anti-revolutionary political position by intertwining it with history, i.e. as an inherited pursuit of truth in an ongoing societal activity that both preceded and succeeded his own existence in history.<sup>423</sup> In this chapter I analyze how Groen accomplished this in his history-writing by means of his historical narrative meta-structure, his commitment to modern source-based historic research, and his strategic employment of the central themes in the Christian-historical narrative. The central focus is Groen’s strategic narrational re-description of history as a rhetorical means for establishing and justifying his political position and actions. The value of this new perspective lies in its allowing for a more integrated view of Groen as historian and as political figure.

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<sup>422</sup> Carr, *Experience and History*, 35.

<sup>423</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.

## 2. Groen's Historical Narrative Meta-Structure

Groen's narrative structuring of history was decisive not only for his anti-revolutionary political theory and his Christian-historical worldview, but equally so for his public socio-political engagement. The polemic purposes behind Groen's historical approach should be viewed in light of the Calvinist demand for principled action in all spheres of life.<sup>424</sup> In the nineteenth century, when Enlightenment liberals — those who in Groen's narrative adhered to "revolutionary" principles — regarded the days of the Reformed religion in the Netherlands as numbered, Groen, as statesman-historian, stood up for their cause and identified Protestantism as a constitutive factor of Dutch nationhood.<sup>425</sup> Correspondingly, traditional Dutch Calvinists suffered a crisis of identity amid the radical socio-political and socio-religious changes they had to learn to bear. In this regard Groen's historical narrative served a vital self-constituting function for them as a socio-political group within Dutch society.<sup>426</sup> How the narrative managed to do this, we will see in this and the remaining chapters of this dissertation.

The Christian civilization of which Groen regarded himself a defender was, to him, inseparably connected to European and Dutch historical developments, in which Groen saw the ever-present guiding hand of divine providence.<sup>427</sup> As was common in the nineteenth century among historicist thinkers, Groen's political theory and action were inseparably sanctioned and shaped through his historiographic perspective and narrative. As we will see, Groen's philosophy of history was, like that of Marx, Hegel, and other famous figures from the nineteenth century, in the words of the historian Carr

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<sup>424</sup> Harinck, *Gereformeerd historicus*, 126.

<sup>425</sup> *Ibid.*, 126-127, 131.

<sup>426</sup> Paul, *Plaatsbepaling*, 13.

<sup>427</sup> Bijl, *Europese antirevolutionair*, 13.

a kind of discourse more appropriately compared with the political-rhetorical kind of story-telling . . . to [be] read . . . as [a] narrative whose role is neither cognitive not aesthetic, but practical . . . not [merely] describing the history of mankind, but urging that it move in a certain direction.<sup>428</sup>

Groen's historical narrative provided a political orientation by "locating present-day experience on a large-scale historical canvas."<sup>429</sup> The value of this narrative strategy was particularly evident in his nineteenth-century Dutch context, where, as mentioned, orthodox Christians had a difficult time coming to terms with the rapid socio-political changes that marked their own time; Groen, as a public representative of this group, strove to provide political direction.<sup>430</sup> *Unbelief and Revolution*, Groen's Christian-historical manifesto, for example, was subtitled *A Series of Historical Lectures*. The subtitle emphasized the historical element sanctioning Groen's political theory — which was itself largely shaped by his study of history given his polemic opposition to the "anti-historical" element in Enlightenment philosophy.<sup>431</sup> Groen's historical narrative adamantly argued that this "anti-historical" element was a denial of the divine ordinances that were manifested in history.<sup>432</sup> Importantly, since Groen's purpose with this and other historical-political works was polemic, it should be viewed as interrelated with his battle as a political theorist and statesman against the epistemology and social theories of the Enlightenment.<sup>433</sup> As polemicist, the historical narrative for Groen served to call the reader to faith and obedience

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<sup>428</sup> Carr, *Experience and History*, 121, 123, 129-130.

<sup>429</sup> Paul, *Plaatsbepaling*, 11.

<sup>430</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>431</sup> Hendrik Smitskamp, "Het boek 'Ongeloof en Revolutie'," in *Groen's "Ongeloof en Revolutie" - Een bundel studiën*, ed. L.C. Suttorp, Z.W. Sneller and J. Veldkamp, (Wageningen: Zomer & Keuning, 1949), 16, 18.

<sup>432</sup> C. Verheij, "Groens visie op de presentie van God in schepping en geschiedenis," in *Groen van Prinsterer en de geschiedenis – Historische opstellen*, ed. George Harinck and Roel Kuiper, (Kampen: Van den Berg, 1994), 98.

<sup>433</sup> *Ibid.*, 24-25; van Schelven, *Denkbeelden*, 75-76; J.H. De Pater, "Groen's beschouwingen over de verloop van de Revolutie," in *Groen's "Ongeloof en Revolutie" - Een bundel studiën*, ed. L.C. Suttorp, Z.W. Sneller and J. Veldkamp, (Wageningen: Zomer & Keuning, 1949), 101; Kamphuis, *Causaliteit* 14; Verheij, *Groens visie*, 94; Harinck, *Gereformeerd historicus*, 126-127.

to God's laws.<sup>434</sup> For Groen, without God all reality would become chaotic and history purposeless and useless, since it was God who called history into existence and his decrees which provided it with coherent meaning and purpose.<sup>435</sup> In addition to Scripture, God revealed himself in his covenantal relationship to creation throughout history.<sup>436</sup>

Groen as historian selected a number of themes which informed his narrative focus. An overview of these themes would provide us with an understanding of the practical value of narrative for his anti-revolutionary agenda. Groen's nineteenth-century historiography also needs to be seen as typical for his time, not only because of its practical objectives, but due to his focus on primary source research, which to him formed an inescapable foundation for a convincing narrative.

### **3. Groen's Commitment to Modern Source-Based Historic Research**

While Groen rejected Rankean positivism as such, he admired the man widely considered to be the father of modern historiography, Leopold von Ranke (1795–1886), and was committed to the principle of primary source-based research. He recognized knowledge of the language, culture, and historical context of the sources as vital. He was also committed to studying sources in their completeness. This influence was reflected in his focus on producing a complete, non-selective publication of the *Royal Archives of the House of Orange*.<sup>437</sup> In the Netherlands, Groen, with his publication of the *Archives*, was also a pioneer in primary source historical research.<sup>438</sup> He was also recognized as such among his

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<sup>434</sup> Te Velde, *Het schriftgebruik*, 43.

<sup>435</sup> Van Vliet, *Historische benadering*, 359. See Lecture X of *Unbelief and Revolution*.

<sup>436</sup> Ibid.

<sup>437</sup> Zwaan, *Theorie en praktijk*, 65.

<sup>438</sup> Harinck, *Gereformeerd historicus*, 125; Kuiper, *Uitzien*, 29.

foremost peers, even when they rejected his narrative as unscientific.<sup>439</sup> Groen was of the conviction that

the foundation [of historical] studies [is] expressed in one word: *complete truth*. . . . This became clearer to me time and time again with the publication of the Archives; and, although I had, from the start, never disguised my insights regarding it, I continually grasped the opportunity to explicitly stress the duty of a love of truth and my firm determination to remain faithful to it.<sup>440</sup>

Groen therefore reconciled what he considered to be a foundational principle, namely complete and thorough primary source research, with the liberty or duty of the historian to interpret these sources on the basis of his own presuppositional standards, as he himself did in practicing historiography. Like many historians in the nineteenth century, he also utilized this Rankean method strategically throughout his historical narrative, which itself sanctioned specific socio-political ends.

## **4. The Thematic Emphasis of Groen’s Christian-Historical Narrative as Rhetorical Strategy**

### *4.1 The “Unbelief and Revolution” Dichotomy*

Groen’s historical narrative always revolved around a dichotomy he articulated as present and decisive throughout the whole of history, although his own writings focused on the history of the Netherlands as part of Europe from the late Middle Ages to his own era.

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<sup>439</sup> Robert Fruin, *Verspreide geschriften –IX*, ed.P.J. Blok, P.L. Muller and S. Muller, (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1904 (1886)), 453.

<sup>440</sup> Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer, *Antwoord aan mr. M.C. van Hal* (Leiden: S. & J. Luchtmans, 1844)., 65 “de Grondwet [van Historische] studiën ... [wordt] in het eene word *volledige waarheid* uitgedrukt ... Dit is mij, bij de bewerking der *Archives*, telkens duidelijker geworden; en, gelijk ik mijne inzichten daaromtrent, van den beginne af, niet verbloemd had, zoo heb ik telkens de gelegenheid aangegrepen om de plicht der waarheidsliefde en mijn vast besluit om getrouw daaraan te zijn, met nadruk op den voorgrond te stellen.”

Groen narrated Dutch national history in particular as a vital and decisive battleground for a dichotomy he regarded as the overarching theme of world history. In this regard, Groen borrowed from the synchronic-ethnographic method of the German *Göttinger Schule*, marked by a Eurocentric historiographic approach to global history, which it viewed as a cohesive unity.

The earliest noteworthy influence on Groen's historiographical development was from his teachers at Leiden University, E.A. Borger (1784–1820) and J. Bake (1787–1864).<sup>441</sup> They had replaced their teacher Daniel Albert Wyttenbach (1746–1820) at Leiden in 1817. The latter's historiography had been shaped, through his studies in Göttingen, Germany, by Arnold Hermann Ludwig Heeren (1760–1842), the main proponent of the *Göttinger Schule*.<sup>442</sup> Jelle Bijl, in a 2011 dissertation on Groen's vision of Europe, has argued in light of these facts that Groen's view of history, particularly in his earlier life, had been shaped through a "Göttingen learning environment."<sup>443</sup> Heeren proposed an interdisciplinary, synchronistic, and simultaneously ethnographic treatment of history. It aimed to do justice to both the cohesion of universal history and particular historic-cultural development of different peoples, with a selective focus on those nations the historian considered as truly contributing to and perpetuating human civilization.<sup>444</sup> Heeren wrote, for example: "With whatever justice and impartiality other lands and nations may be estimated, one cannot deny the truth that the noblest and best of everything, which man has produced, sprung up, or at least ripened, on European soil."<sup>445</sup>

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<sup>441</sup> Groen, *Bescheiden II*, 502.

<sup>442</sup> Bijl, *Europese antirevolutionair*, 71, 75.

<sup>443</sup> *Ibid.*, 81 "Göttinger leeromgeving".

<sup>444</sup> *Ibid.*, 72-72.

<sup>445</sup> Arnold H.L. Heeren, *Ideen über die Politik, den Verkehr und den Handel der vornehmsten Völker der alten Welt, Dritter theil, erste Abtheilung* (Göttingen: Vanderhoek und Ruprecht), 1 "Wie gerecht und unparteiisch man auch in der Würdigung anderer Länder und Völker sein mag, so bleibt es doch eine nicht zu bezweifelnde

Bijl has convincingly shown this school to offer a tradition – previously neglected in the secondary literature - in which Groen practiced his historiography, especially by identifying Groen’s Eurocentric historic perspective. However, his argument concerning the structural-methodical resemblances between Groen’s *Handboek* and Heeren’s *Handbuch* as reflected in their similar historic periodizations is less convincing.<sup>446</sup> In terms of their synchronization of history, Bijl has tabled the following similarities:

Groen’s <i>Handboek</i> (1841)	Heeren’s <i>Handbuch</i> (1809)
History of the Netherlands prior to the Reformation (prior to 1517)	End of the fifteenth century to the reign of Ludwig XIV (1492–1661)
The Dutch Republic (1517–1795)	Ludwig XIV to the death of Frederick the Great and the revolutionary era (1661–1786)
The Revolution (1795–1840)	Death of Frederick the Great to the fall of the French Empire (1786–1804)

Although the parallels drawn by Bijl are not entirely convincing, what is clear from Groen’s periodization is his view that Dutch history saw a golden age (1648–1713) through the strength of a fully Christianized culture born from the battles of the Reformation (1517–1648), but was marked by socio-political decline once Enlightenment ideas gained a foothold on Dutch soil (from 1713 onwards).<sup>447</sup> Without simplistically idealizing the past, however, Groen would argue that the “Revolution,” not only as an historical-political phenomenon (e.g. the French and Batavian Revolutions), but as an historical-philosophical development, amounted to an anti-Christian infringement upon the natural rights, established relationships, and justice system rooted in the divinely ordained historical order. Therefore the anti-revolutionary position had to oppose this Revolution as a path doomed

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Wahrheit: das Edelste, das herrlichste jeder Art, was die Menschheit aufzuzeigen hat, keimte, oder reifte wenigstens, auf Europäischem Boden.”

<sup>446</sup> Bijl, *Europese antirevolutionair*, 115, 245-249. The full title of Heeren’s work, which reflects his Eurocentric approach, is *Handbuch Der Geschichte Des Europäischen Staatensystems und Seiner Colonien*.

<sup>447</sup> Groen, *Handboek* (1841), 108.

to practical disaster and tyranny.<sup>448</sup> Groen built this narrative argument around the conceptualization of revolutionary liberty as existing only in unconditional submission to the general will, embodied by government. In other words, revolutionary liberty was but veiled submission to the will of other, more powerful people, and was therefore slavery. Only a recognition of God's transcendent authority, he argued, could liberate man from the arbitrary authority of others.<sup>449</sup>

The practical political value of this narrative structure was evidenced when Groen concluded the outline of this historical narrative thesis in the first lecture of *Unbelief and Revolution*. Here he utilized it as a call for societal repentance accompanied by an emphasis on the duty of the Christian, with trust that God would turn the tide, to work in the present for societal reform advancing the kingdom of God on earth.<sup>450</sup>

Furthermore, the conclusion of *Unbelief and Revolution* consisted of calling the Christian to actively engage in politics within the framework his narrative provided. This rhetorical appeal for political engagement was narratively sanctioned by this historical narrative of Dutch history, evidenced in his own claim that he produced these lectures to show forth the duties of those who are both Christian and Dutch.<sup>451</sup> In the final lecture he argued that the Christian must take note of numerous historical realities derived from his narrative. Firstly, the reality of the need for improvement: the Netherlands at the time, he narrated, was in reality not a monarchy nor a republic, but a revolutionary centralized and all-powerful state — one to which the Christian should strongly object.<sup>452</sup> Secondly, the fact that the liberals, those who denied divine authority in the public domain, could only be

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<sup>448</sup> Groen, *Ongeloof en revolutie* (2008), 28, 36, 118.

<sup>449</sup> *Ibid.*, 199.

<sup>450</sup> *Ibid.*, 37-38.

<sup>451</sup> Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer, *Ongeloof en Revolutie - Eene reeks van historische voorlezingen*. (Leiden: S. & J. Luchtmans, 1847), 8.

<sup>452</sup> *Ibid.*, 378-379.

resisted by a return to solid anti-revolutionary principles.<sup>453</sup> Finally, the great strength of Christian principle in this particular historical position and context as sanctioned by his narrative: a re-contextualized application of timeless Christian-historical principles was the true need of the time. The lessons of reality and historic practice emphasized in his narrative would aid in calling for this. These principles, through which the historical gains of the revolutionary theories could practically be resisted and overturned, needed to be learned and practiced, since these truths would encourage repentance and lead to true flourishing.<sup>454</sup> He also concluded, by re-emphasizing his Christocentric historical narrative, with admonition and assurance to his readers:

much of what the world sees as great, is small. Much of what it sees as small, is great. . . . Faith conquers the world. To conquer the world it is necessary to . . . destroy all arrogance that rebels against the wisdom of God and to make every thought captive to obedience to Christ.<sup>455</sup>

His narrative therefore explicitly drew attention to what he saw as the decisive battle in history on an epistemic and religious level. He strategically reduced his opponents' victories to the superficial while arguing that the strength of his position, as evidenced through history, represented the true metaphysical reality, and consequently the only path to genuine socio-political success.

#### *4.2 The Role of Ideas in Historical Causality*

As noted in the previous chapter (see section 3.2.3), Groen valued and emphasized a substantial role for ideas in historical causality. In both his *Handbook* and *Unbelief and*

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<sup>453</sup> Ibid., 379-380.

<sup>454</sup> Ibid., 385-388.

<sup>455</sup> Ibid., 389 "Veel van wat de wereld groot acht, is klein. Veel van wat ze klein acht, is groot. Het geloof overwint de wereld. Om de wereld te overwinnen is het nodig ... elke hoogte die zich verheft tegen de kennis van God neer te halen en alle gedachten als gevangen te leiden tot de gehoorzaamheid aan Christus." He quotes from II Corinthians 10:5.

*Revolution*, Groen's central proposition was that the ideological-epistemic shift away from Christianity, and the consequent embrace of the ideas behind the Revolution, historically manifested in socio-political decline.<sup>456</sup>

As also noted in chapter one, however, there have been five different positions regarding Groen's understanding of the role of ideas in history presented in the existing body of literature. Briefly identifying the weaknesses of each of these positions will aid in emphasizing the novelty and value of my own narrative-based perspective.

A phenomenological emphasis on Groen's historical narrative strategies can open up a new, unventured perspective on the historical role of ideas in his Christian-historical narrative, as I will now propose.

Firstly, when analyzing not only the periodization, but also the structure of Groen's historical narrative, we see an emphasis on contrasting religious and philosophical ideas, particularly as these ideas manifest on a socio-political level. This shaped Groen's emphasis on highlighting certain historic events in Dutch history. Whether he was writing on the causes of the outbreak of the Dutch Revolt in the mid-sixteenth century or the history of Prince Maurice and Johan van Oldenbarnevelt in the early seventeenth century, he always elucidated the battle with a dichotomous praising of the Christian or 'Gospel' side of historical conflicts on the one hand, ever eager to point out its victorious achievements against the antagonistic anti-Christian or 'Revolutionary' side (in its various forms) on the other. In these narratives the ideas or principles he saw represented on each side, and the socio-political effects thereof, were prominently cast as historically decisive.<sup>457</sup> The accusation that he neglected socio-economic factors in favor of a hard logicism, by which

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<sup>456</sup> Groen, *Handboek* (1841), 105-108; *Ibid.*, *Ongeloof en revolutie* (2008), 171-172.

<sup>457</sup> Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer, *Handboek der Geschiedenis van het Vaderland* (Veenendaal: Kool, 1978 (1872)), 78-79, 83-84; 212-215.

only ideas are regarded as having historical significance, in his narrative — the majority position reflected in the literature — does not hold up, however, especially not as he matured as an historian in later life. Nonetheless, it must be admitted that Groen could not have applied the biblical tree-and-fruits principle without resorting to some kind of inescapable logical consequences. Groen was therefore not an anti-logicist, as Kamphuis has claimed, either. The paradigm of ideas inevitably influencing history was also central to the polemic nature of Groen's historiography, by which he desired to draw readers' attention to an ideological battle between faith and unbelief. When combined with a biblical-covenantal paradigm which Groen saw as imprinted in historical reality, a logicist — albeit not an exclusive hard logicist — concept of historical causality with Groen becomes inescapable.

Groen's own admittance disproves a hard logicistic conceptualization of historic causality. He specifically regarded the outbreak of the Dutch Revolt as centrally due to a dislike of the foreign occupation — a cause he also sided with. He additionally noted that the interests of the local authorities to maintain their position and power against the ambitions of the Spanish king were a major factor.<sup>458</sup> Furthermore, he also admitted that some of the motivations for resisting the Spanish authority were less noble than the religious motivations, including the desire for more glory by the family of Orange and trade interests aimed at increased profit. These factors brought many, including some Roman Catholics, to embrace the Dutch cause. Nonetheless, he incorporated these factors into his narrative focus by arguing that through the instrumental value of these motivations the Reformation and its ideas found protection in a "general resistance to the deeds and bills of an anti-national regime."<sup>459</sup> The fact that this particular clause was absent from Groen's first editions of the *Handbook*, only inserted into the fourth edition in 1875, indicates that Groen

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<sup>458</sup> Ibid., 88-89.

<sup>459</sup> Ibid., 80 "algemeen weerstand tegen de daden of ontwerpen van een antinationaal bewind."

increasingly sought to emphasize socio-political historical factors as he matured as a historian in later life.<sup>460</sup> Nonetheless, even then a claim like this still served as a supporting strategy for his focus on the battle of ideas as the central narrative plot. In his anti-revolutionary narrative, the Dutch Revolt was not considered to be “revolutionary,” as it represented a historic development in line with the grand divine purpose of history, namely the victory of the seed of the woman (Christ) over the seed of the snake (Satan) prophesied in Genesis 3:15.<sup>461</sup>

The central role of ‘victory’ in his historical narrative also renders erroneous Van Essen’s attempt to explain Groen’s narrative casting of the covenantal curse-and-blessing paradigm as one in which misfortune was not necessarily always equivalent to curse and prosperity not equivalent to blessing.<sup>462</sup> This view lacks appreciation for the dynamics of Groen’s rhetorical strategies. Furthermore, it is an inaccurate description of Groen’s historical method and strategy to argue that he simply implanted a religious element into the synchronic-ethnographic method of the Göttingen School, as claimed by Bijl.<sup>463</sup> Groen’s historical narrative, in which the gospel and Christ’s redemptive lordship over creation were the key to unlocking the mysteries to, and providing coherent understanding of, global and European history, was quite distantly removed from Heeren’s notion of European superiority based on material aspects such as the European climate and topography.<sup>464</sup>

This brings us to the next central theme in Groen’s historical narrative, namely, his notions concerning historical teleology.

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<sup>460</sup> Groen, *Handboek*, (1841), 125; *Handboek* (1978(1872)), 80.

<sup>461</sup> Groen, *Handboek* (1978 (1872)), 1, 85-86, 90.

<sup>462</sup> Van Essen, *Selected Studies*, 36.

<sup>463</sup> Bijl, *Europese antirevolutionair*, 553-554.

<sup>464</sup> *Ibid.*; Heeren, *Ideen*, 6-10.

### 4.3 Historical Teleology

As noted in the previous chapter (see 3.2.4), the existing literature has widely recognized the centrality of the providential development and protection of the Christian church and the gospel it proclaims as central to Groen's understanding of the divine purpose behind history. This principle appears on two levels in his historical narrative: firstly, in his emphasis on the historic-providential principle, and secondly, in the eschatological dimension of his narrative.

#### 4.3.1 Groen's Historic-Providential Principle

With regard to the historic-providential principle, Groen stood in an historicist tradition in which his thinking was greatly shaped by his early contact with the German Historical School of Friedrich Carl von Savigny (1779–1861). Already in Groen's doctoral dissertation in law at Leiden University (1823), in which he treated the historical development of Justinian law, Groen expressly credited Von Savigny.<sup>465</sup> Van Vliet has enumerated several elements in Groen's Christian-historic thinking derived from this school.<sup>466</sup>

Groen saw an ally in this school, characterized by its nineteenth-century historicist mode of thinking, against rationalistic conceptions of natural law. He appreciated its respect for the wisdom of ages, as reflected in historically-developed political rights and arrangements sealed by the test of time.<sup>467</sup> This historicist tradition partially shaped Groen's

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<sup>465</sup> Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer, *Disputatio juridica inauguralis de juris Justiniani praestantia ex rationibus eius manifesta* (Leiden: H. W. Hazenberg Jr., 1823 (Phd diss)), 89.

<sup>466</sup> See Chapter 3, section 3.2.2.

<sup>467</sup> Van Vliet, *Historische benadering*, 53.

central Christian-historical thesis, that the true essence and structure of healthy socio-politics was imprinted in nature and history.<sup>468</sup>

Although Von Savigny's ideas were to a small degree influenced by religious notions, Groen re-interpreted the principles of the Historical School to give them a distinctly Christian flavor.<sup>469</sup> In this regard he was, particularly after 1849, influenced by the German Lutheran jurist Julius Friedrich Stahl's reformation or modification of the school.<sup>470</sup> Von Savigny had emphasized the organic historic development of a particular people, where historic laws, customs, rights, and privileges are the particular expression of that people's soul, not to be interrupted by an abstract or universal theory of rights. Stahl added that while morals were mediated through history and historic rights therefore were to be maintained, all legal-ethical content also needed to be measured against unchanging transcendent principles.<sup>471</sup> Stahl thus pointed out that the school ran the risk of absolutizing the spirit of the people as the origin of rights and laws, at the expense of neglecting divine moral principles, thereby descending into relativism.<sup>472</sup> Stahl further embraced tentativeness towards radical, rapid socio-political change, characteristic of the Historical School's respect for providential divine guidance in the flow of history. For Stahl, respect for the historically-developed amounted to respect for the God who guides history.<sup>473</sup>

Although Groen also appreciated divine providence as guiding the flow of history, his strategic narrative appeal for the socio-political value of the historically-developed differed from that of Stahl. In this regard it is vital to note the role of teleology in Groen's historical

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<sup>468</sup> Groen, *Proeve*, 147.

<sup>469</sup> Van Vliet, *Historische benadering*, 33.

<sup>470</sup> *Ibid.*, 36-38.

<sup>471</sup> Friedrich Carl von Savigny, *Vom Beruf unserer Zeit für Gesetzgebung und Rechtswissenschaft*, ed. H. Hattenhauer, (Munich: Vahlen, 1973 (1828)), 102; Friedrich Julius Stahl, *Die Philosophie des Rechts nach geschichtlicher Ansicht, dritte Auflage*. (Heidelberg: J C B Mohr, 1854 (1837)), 587-588.

<sup>472</sup> Van Vliet, *Historische benadering*, 63.

<sup>473</sup> *Ibid.*, 62, 64.

narrative. With Groen, historic rights were to be respected not simply because they were manifested by the hand of providence, but particularly because their durability served as a seal of their accordance with the *purpose* of history as revealed through Scripture, i.e. the victory of Christ over evil.<sup>474</sup> Groen, because of his conviction that “no page or almost no line of history isn't polluted by sin,” explicitly distanced himself from all notions that all of providence or history was to be cherished as legitimate or necessarily in line with God’s moral will.<sup>475</sup> In Groen’s historical narrative, history’s authority was always tied to what he saw as its proximate relationship to God’s creative-redemptive order and plan for the cosmos: that is, as connected to its *cosmological genesis* in its sovereign divine design, and its *cosmological telos* in the glorification of Christ’s lordship.<sup>476</sup>

Importantly, with Groen, the “historic principle” was understood to be epistemic, rather than ethical.<sup>477</sup> He employed history as pedagogic by emphasizing that, in the long term, history reflected the divinely imprinted essence of reality. Durability thereby served for him as a seal of authority, because developments or initiatives at odds with the created order were doomed to failure.

Thus, while for Stahl, historically developed arrangements are to be respected as manifestations of divine *ordinations*, for Groen they are to be respected as manifestations of divine *ordinances*. The former refers to those eternal decrees whereby God predetermined whatever would come to pass in the world, while the second refers to eternal laws established by God for purposefully ordering creation.

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<sup>474</sup> Ibid., 64.

<sup>475</sup> Groen, *Ongeloof en revolutie* 2008, 59-60 “geen bladzijde en bijna geen regel van de geschiedenis welke niet door zonde werd bezoedeld.”

<sup>476</sup> Groen, *Ongeloof en revolutie*, 57, 76-77, 243.

<sup>477</sup> Van Vliet, *Historische benadering*, 88-89.

In attempting to explain this element in Groen's historical thinking, Van Vliet has identified a twofold use of the word 'history' in Groen's writings: firstly, in a general sense, meaning all that has been historically realized on the basis of ideas; and secondly, in a narrower sense of the Christian-historic principle, meaning those historic developments in accordance with the created-order and providential purposes of God.<sup>478</sup> Van Vliet, referring to the work of Albertus Cornelis Leendertz, has explained this difference as rooted in the historical-theological differences between Stahl's Lutheranism and Groen's Calvinism.<sup>479</sup> Leendertz argued in his 1911 PhD dissertation that Lutheranism is characterized by a historic and doctrinal trust in the organic nature of the providentially ordained, whereas Calvinism's emphasis on the doctrine of election more naturally tends towards an emphasis on the divine calling of the Christian to obey God's moral law in the midst of difficult circumstances, albeit circumstances that are providentially ordained.<sup>480</sup> This may have been a factor in their differing historical narratives, yet Van Vliet and Leendertz did not focus on the much more important role of their respective rhetorical strategies. If one were to approach Groen's and Stahl's positioning in Carr's terms of their historical narrative as a (collective) experience shaping the horizon for a group's social self-establishment, political positioning, and societal engagement, then Groen's different strategy in relation to his shared historicist thinking with Stahl can be appreciated in a new light, as I will now explain.<sup>481</sup>

Stahl, it must be remembered, lived in a Germany where the revolutions of 1848, which he had vigorously opposed, had very limited success; the aristocrats in many regards

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<sup>478</sup> Ibid., 90, 92.

<sup>479</sup> Ibid., 60.

<sup>480</sup> Albertus Cornelis Leenderts, *De grond van het overheidsgezag in de antirevolutionaire staatsleer* (Amsterdam: J.H. de Bussy, 1911 (Phd diss.)), 124-125.

<sup>481</sup> Carr, *Experience and History*, 67-68, 73-75, 91-92.

eventually came out on top.<sup>482</sup> Although Stahl's opposition in this regard could be called 'anti-revolutionary', the historical context of Germany at that time demanded a different form of narrative self-positioning than was demanded of like-minded Christian traditionalists in the Netherlands since the time of the Batavian Revolution, and especially since the introduction of the constitutional democracy of 1848. Pertaining to narrative strategies, a lot can be gleaned from the fact that Groen, ever keen on distinguishing himself from the conservative party in the Netherlands, explicitly considered the German conservative party to be their true Christian-historical allies across the border.<sup>483</sup> From this we can see what vital role narrative played in terms of self-constituting political positioning at the time. Whereas Groen lived in a context that he viewed as dominated by the socio-political legacy of a successful liberal revolution, Stahl lived in the context or aftermath of what he considered a successful counter-revolution, where he was largely in agreement with the status quo. This was clearly reflected in their respective narrative strategies of self-positioning. Stahl's narrative tended to emphasize the importance of conservation, while Groen's narrative tended to emphasize the importance of opposition.

The best support for Van Vliet's interpretation of a twofold use of the concept of 'historic' with Groen would be a quote from his *Constitutional Revision and Unanimity* (1849):

I desire not that the Revolution be removed from history, of which it compromises one of the most instructive parts, as if it never happened; neither that a rejection of its theory be accompanied by a denial of the rights which formed through its power. But, although the Revolution certainly belongs to history, we must not forget that a doctrine, derived from false speculation, is opposed to the essence of things and therefore opposed to

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<sup>482</sup> Shearer Davis Bowman, *Masters & Lords: Mid-19th century U.S. Planters and Prussian Junkers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 202.

<sup>483</sup> Groen, *Gedachten IV*, 32.

history, to the historic development of humanity, against all societal rights and relationships, as a fatal seed of confusion and dissolution.<sup>484</sup>

Nonetheless, Van Vliet failed to see that even here, for Groen, it was essentially the opposition of the revolutionary principles to “nature and right” that implied their “impracticality” that made the Revolution anti-historic.<sup>485</sup> His anti-revolutionary/pro-history dichotomy can therefore best be understood in terms of the socio-political purposes of his Christian-historical narrative, rather than in terms of a twofold semantic conceptualization. Groen’s pedagogic appeals to history were, as a rhetorical strategy, aimed at inciting Christian socio-political engagement, in which opposition to the divine order was purposefully presented as an historical-political failure, while the antithesis of his narrative — the Christian faith and its promoted moral values — was presented as the inescapable foundation for true historic progress and success.

Groen’s indebtedness to the Historical School was not limited to a general historicist mode of thinking, but also partook of its prominent romantic anti-rationalist sentiments. He utilized these in a unique way for his particular socio-political purposes as a historian in his own context.

Groen’s appreciation of time-tested historical rights and relationships was also, in addition to the Historical School, largely rooted in his Burkeanism. In *Unbelief and Revolution*, Groen explicitly attested to Edmund Burke’s defense of the historic rights of the monarchy and medieval estates in England and in France, when he argued that the

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<sup>484</sup> Groen, *Grondwetsherziening*, 483 “Ik begeer niet dat de Revolutie uit de Geschiedenis, waarvan zij eender leerrijkste gedeelten uitmaakt, als of ze niet gebeurd ware, worde geligt; ook niet dat de verwerping van de theorie gepaard ga met miskening der regten die zich tijdens haar overmagt hebben gevormd. Maar, ofschoon de Revolutie voorzeker tot de Geschiedenis behoort, dit mag ons niet doen vergeten dat een leer, aan valsche bespiegeling ontleend, tegen het wezen der dingen en dus tegen de Geschiedenis, tegen de historische ontwikkeling der Menschheid, tegen elken gegeven toestand der maatschappelijke regten en betrekkingen, als een noodlottige kiem van verwarring en ontbinding, gekant is.”

<sup>485</sup> Guillaume Groen Van Prinsterer, *Ongeloof en Revolutie – Een reeks van historische voorlezingen*, ed. Hendrik Smitskamp, (Franeker: Wever, 1952 (1868)), 12 “natuur en recht” “onuitvoelbaarheid”.

disbandment of the estates and separate class representation in favor of a united General Assembly discontinued historic mutual collaboration and effectuated majority tyranny.<sup>486</sup> He referenced Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* when he shunned the revolutionary neglect of tradition.<sup>487</sup>

The tight interrelation between Groen's historical narrative and his socio-political engagement was evident early in his career. In this regard, Burke's historicist thinking was almost as important in shaping the young Groen as the Historical School. In his *Thoughts against the Call to Support the Greeks* in 1825, Groen noted,

Europe has already been turned upside down by deceptive theses. To [this] philosophy . . . one should largely ascribe the French Revolution. Without the false theory this outburst would neither have been so rapid nor so horrible. And because the acceptance of rules which are not in accordance with [true] right sooner or later result in the downfall of a realm, how studious must one then be, when new principles are incorporated, to test these with the utmost diligence.<sup>488</sup>

This dichotomy, so prominent in his narrative, was therefore used for political self-positioning, clearly echoing the sentiments Burke expressed in his *Reflections*. For instance:

by preserving the method of nature in the conduct of the state, in what we improve, we are never wholly new; in what we retain, we are never wholly obsolete. By adhering to this manner and on those principles to our forefathers, we are guided not by the superstition of antiquarians, but by the spirit of philosophic analogy.<sup>489</sup>

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<sup>486</sup> Groen, *Ongeloof en revolutie* (2008), 95-96, 290.

<sup>487</sup> *Ibid.*, 137.

<sup>488</sup> Groen, *Bescheiden*, 71. "Europa is door bedriegelijke stellingen reeds eenmaal ten ondersteboven gekeerd. 't Is de beschouwing ... waaraan men de Fransche Revolutie grootendeels toeschrijven moet. Zonder de valsche theorie zou de uitbarsting noch zoo spoedig plaats hebben gehad, noch zoo verschrikkelijk zijn geweest. En zoo het aannemen van beginsels, die niet overeenkomen met het regt, aan een rijk vroeg of laat zijn ondergang berokkent, hoe zorgvuldig behoort men dan te zijn om nieuwe beginsels, bij derzelve invoering, met de meeste naauwkeurigheid te toetsen." *Objections against a call to support the Greeks*.

<sup>489</sup> Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, ed. Frank M. Turner, contr. Darrin M. McMahon, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003 (1791)), 29.

Bijl has rightly observed that Groen came to know of Burke through the Göttingen historian Arnold Hermann Ludwig Heeren, rather than the Réveil's Merle d'Aubigne. This is important, for Groen's 1825 *Thoughts* was written before his move to Brussels, where he would meet Jean-Henri Merle d'Aubigne.<sup>490</sup>

#### 4.3.2 *The Eschatological Dimension of Groen's Historical Narrative*

As noted in chapter one, an aspect of Groen's history-writing that has been grossly neglected in the literature is his eschatological outlook. Only a couple of authors have briefly mentioned it, and among them there have been contradicting interpretations (see Chapter 3, section 3.2.4). One obvious reason for this is that Groen never systematically set out his eschatological position. Nonetheless, clear eschatological sentiments play an important rhetorical role throughout his historical narrative. I propose to show that through my approach, an emphasis on the practical and political motives underlying Groen's historical narrative can enlighten the narrative role of this aspect of his historiography, which has not yet received sufficient treatment.

Groen cannot be regarded as having been a pure adherent of the Historical School, and despite the school's evident influences on him, he merits treatment as a (Reformed)

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<sup>490</sup> Bijl, *Europese antirevolutionair*, 197. The fact that Groen in a letter written in 1831 to Thorbecke asked him to lend him a "work quoted by Heeren in his Handbook" in the same paragraph that he referenced Burke, is quite significant. [Guillaume Groen Van Prinsterer, *De briefwisseling van J.R. Thorbecke - I: 1830-1833*, ed. G.J. Hooykaas & J.C. Boogman, (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1975 (1831)), 264 "... door Heeren in zijn Handboek (p. 585 ed. 1819) aangehaalde werkje"]. Groen could therefore not have been oblivious to the connection between Burke and Heeren during the early 1820s when the latter's influence on him was greatest. In this regard I side with Bijl against not only fairly recent literature where the claim has been made that it was through Merle d'Aubigne that Groen had come to know Burke, but also Gerritson, the publisher of Groen's correspondence in the 1920s. [Bart-Jan Spruyt, *Tot lof van het Conservatisme* (Amsterdam: Balans, 2003), 19-20; Van Vliet, *Historische benadering*, 132; Groen, *Briefwisseling I*, 279]. Incidentally, the relevant post scriptum in Groen's letter to Thorbecke was omitted in Gerritson's edition of Groen's correspondence. [Groen, *Briefwisseling I*, 515].

Christian historian.<sup>491</sup> In addition to Groen's following of the Historical School, Van Vliet has also observed that he proposed a "religious interpretation of history," which, in combination with the former, shaped Groenian historiography.<sup>492</sup> This "religious interpretation" is seen manifested in both the teleological and eschatological aspects of his historical narrative.

Groen's Christian-historical view entailed that he saw divine revelation not primarily as a once-off supernatural intervention, but as a force continually establishing and mediating itself through history.<sup>493</sup> Groen opposed empiricism as an approach which reduced history to its immanent processes.<sup>494</sup> Groen held steadfastly that the secularization of the field of history would blind one to its true metaphysical reality.<sup>495</sup> Groen understood a text like Genesis 3:15 to anticipate the establishment of the kingdom and lordship of Christ over all that is evil, which played a guiding role in his historical narrative. For Groen

in the path of history, God's Word is [also] a lamp unto our feet. Without the Holy Scripture history remains a mystery; through faith we know its content and purpose; the fulfillment of the Paradise-promise, the victory of the Messiah over the deceiver. . . . To the forming, maintenance and glorification of his Church, the fate of persons and nations, through all generations and ages, are subordinate.<sup>496</sup>

He also argued that

the Christian not only recognizes in history the guidance of providence (as the deist does), but decidedly remains true to the confession of the gospel. In

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<sup>491</sup> Kuiper, *Uitzien*, 19; Van Vliet, *Historische benadering*, 29.

<sup>492</sup> Van Vliet, *Historische benadering*, 82 "religieuze interpretatie van de geschiedenis".

<sup>493</sup> *Ibid.*, 84.

<sup>494</sup> Kuiper, *Uitzien*, 34.

<sup>495</sup> Geyl, *Reacties*, 91.

<sup>496</sup> Groen, *Handboek* (1978 (1872)), 1 "... op het pad der Historie, zij Gods Woord [ook] een lamp voor onzen voet. Zonder de H. Schrijft blijft de wereldgeschiedenis raadsel; door het geloof, weten wij haar inhoud en doel; de vervulling van der Paradijs-belofte, de zegepraal van den Messias over den verleider ... Aan de vorming, handhaving en verheerlijking zijner Gemeente, zijn de lotgevallen van personen en Natiën, door alle geslachten en eeuwen, ondergeschikt."

the coming and victorious return of the Messiah [the Christian] recognizes and expects the solution to mysteries of the history of humanity.<sup>497</sup>

This linear and theocentric or Christocentric historical interpretation distinguished his narrative from von Savigny and the Historical School, which was characterized by an adherence to a more indefinite or impersonal providential force guiding history.<sup>498</sup>

In this regard his historiography was (among others) shaped by his interaction with a number of Réveil figures. The view of the establishment and progress of Christianity as the central plot of history was brought to Groen's attention by his Réveil friend Willem de Clercq, who in a letter from 7 April 1830 noted, "We must now learn to see, that Christ is the focal point of the whole of world history, that apostasy of man and reconciliation with God is the theme of history."<sup>499</sup> Groen echoed De Clercq when he wrote in his *Dutch Ideas* on 22 October 1831: "Christianity . . . is thoroughly historic, so that actually, as has been rightly noted, as a well-proven fact, [in it] also the central point of world history is located."<sup>500</sup>

Although some have suggested that the counterrevolutionary Willem Bilderdijk may have been the original figure who brought Groen to this perspective, and although Groen in 1831 admitted to have enjoyed listening to Bilderdijk's lectures on history, this counterrevolutionary's influence on Groen as historian must not be overestimated.<sup>501</sup> Despite respecting the man, Groen was highly critical of Bilderdijk's history-writing. In 1832 Groen

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<sup>497</sup> Groen, *Ongeloof en revolutie* (2008), 243 "Dit is de christen die ook in de geschiedenis niet alleen de leiding van een Voorzienigheid opspoort en opmerkt (zoals de deïst doet), maar beslist trouw blijft aan de belijdenis van het evangelie. Die in de komst en zegevierende terugkomst van de Heiland de oplossing erkent en verwacht van de raadsels van de geschiedenis van de mensheid."

<sup>498</sup> *Ibid.*, 84-85.

<sup>499</sup> Groen, *Briefwisseling I*, 285.

<sup>500</sup> Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer, *Nederlandsche Gedachten – III* (The Hague, G. Vervloet, 1832 (1831)), 95 "het Christendom ... is geheel historisch; zoodat het eigenlijk, gelijk men te recht opgemerkt heeft, in een enkel welbewezen feit, tevens het middelpunt der wereldgeschiedenis opgesloten ligt." *Nederlandsche Gedachten*.

<sup>501</sup> Groen, *Briefwisseling I*, 267; see also Chapter 3, 3.2.2.

wrote to his former promotor Van Assen that Bilderdijk “had not studied history as thoroughly, as I had thought up until now”; in another letter the following year, he stated, “I am underwhelmed by the history of Bilderdijk. Many assertions, but little proof.”<sup>502</sup> He also accused Bilderdijk of being rather shallow in his description of history and of neglecting thorough source-based research.<sup>503</sup> Although he has rightly placed Groen as an historian within the context and tradition of the Réveil, I would take issue with Roel Kuiper’s claim that “Groen’s historiography may be seen as the scientific testing of the historical perspectives of Bilderdijk.”<sup>504</sup> The same can be said regarding Rolf Bremmer’s (Sr.) suggestion that Bilderdijk provided the example and framework for Groen’s approach to Fatherland (Dutch) history.<sup>505</sup> To find historians who impacted and shaped Groen’s conception of history and his consequent narrativization, we would have to look to other Réveil figures.

Kuiper also, in addition to Bilderdijk, has mentioned another figure associated with the Réveil — Isaac da Costa — and in this case he has made a fair point.<sup>506</sup> A central theme in Groen’s historic narrative was his view of the Netherlands as a providentially elected nation with a divine purpose related to this cosmic-historic telos of evangelistic progress, and he narrated Dutch national culture and development as historically rooted in the Reformation.<sup>507</sup> Da Costa, however, of whom Groen was not uncritical either, but whom he thought of more highly as historian than Bilderdijk, certainly influenced Groen in

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<sup>502</sup> Ibid., 646 “der geschiedenis niet zoo grondig had bestudeerd, als ik tot nu toe had gedacht.”; *ibid.* II, 18 “De geschiedenis van Bilderdijk valt mij zeer uit de hand. Vele assertiën, maar weinig bewijs.”

<sup>503</sup> Ibid. V, 53.

<sup>504</sup> Kuiper, *Uitzien*, 34 “Groens historiografie mag worden gezien als een wetenschappelijke toets van de geschiedvoorstellingen van Bilderdijk ...”

<sup>505</sup> Bremmer, *Er staat geschreven*, 52-53.

<sup>506</sup> Ibid.

<sup>507</sup> Van Schelven, *Denkbeelden*, 80, 84, 86-87, 89, 91; Verheij, *Groens visie*, 100.

understanding and casting Fatherland history as having a particularly religious character.<sup>508</sup> This central narrative theme in Groen's historiography was therefore inseparably connected to and shaped by his (anti-revolutionary) nineteenth-century Réveil socio-political agenda of opposing the de-confessionalization and promoting the Christianization of Dutch culture and the Dutch state.

Nonetheless, Groen did not share Da Costa's well-known chiliastic eschatological views, in which it is believed that Christ's Second Coming will initiate a literal millennium (Rev. 20), a Golden Age in world history which Christendom prospers.<sup>509</sup> In his *Short Overview* of 1842, Groen explicitly promoted an orthodox preterist interpretation of the great tribulation prophesied in Matthew 23 and 24, i.e. an exegetical perspective that holds that most eschatological prophecies in the New Testament, such as the rise of the Antichrist, the Great Tribulation, and the advent of the Day of the Lord as Jesus Christ's 'judgment-coming', have already been fulfilled and were fulfilled no later than the first century AD.<sup>510</sup> He added that although Israel as a nation had not been irrevocably rejected by God, its redemption was postponed until after the gospel would conquer the nations.<sup>511</sup> This was very different from da Costa's vision and hope of an imminent national restoration of Israel, by which he admonished Groen to turn his heart to Jerusalem for hope.<sup>512</sup>

Via the Réveil preacher-historian Merle d' Aubigne, Groen's historiography was influenced by the German Lutheran historian August Neander, who would play an important role in shaping the eschatological-teleological dimension of Groen's narrative. Groen's central narrative theme connecting historic European blessedness with Christianity can

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<sup>508</sup> Groen, *Briefwisseling I* 566; *ibid.* II, 18; Groen, *Ongeloof en revolutie* (2008), 165.

<sup>509</sup> Barnhoorn, *Amicitia Christiana*, 289.

<sup>510</sup> Groen, *Bescheiden II*, 49.

<sup>511</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>512</sup> Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer, *Brieven van mr. Isaac da Costa – I (1830-1849)*. (Amsterdam: Höveker & Zoon, 1872), 25; Isaac da Costa, *Bijbellezingen II: Job – Maleachi*. (Amsterdam: H. Höveker, 1866), 523.

largely be traced back to the influence of Merle d'Aubigne.<sup>513</sup> Merle also particularly impressed Groen in his interpretation of the historic (non-)relationship between the ideas of the Reformation and the ideas of the Enlightenment.<sup>514</sup> Traditionalist Roman Catholics whom Groen considered as anti-revolutionary allies often made this accusation against the Reformation, namely, that it had socially and philosophically paved the way for the Enlightenment as a precursor to the French Revolution. In response to this accusation Groen referred to Merle (in addition to von Ranke) in support of his own interpretation.<sup>515</sup> Merle's history-writing, was, like Groen's, characterized by anti-Enlightenment polemics that could be traced back to Neander, who had made a deliberate attempt to reclaim the science of history from the Enlightenment for Christianity.<sup>516</sup> Neander introduced his monumental work, *General History of the Christian Religion and Church*, as follows:

It shall be our purpose to trace, from the small mustard grain, through the course of the past centuries, lying open for our inspection, the growth of that mighty tree [i.e. Christianity], which is destined to overshadow the earth, and under the branches of which all its peoples are to find a safe habitation.<sup>517</sup>

This eschatological-teleological sentiment of Neander was a form of postmillennialism, an imminent eschatological expectation in which Christ's second coming occurs after a figurative millennium (Rev. 20), a golden age in world history where Christendom prospers. This eschatological perspective was also propounded by Merle d'Aubigne, and echoed by Groen's covenantal and ecclesiocentric or Christocentric narrative in his own

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<sup>513</sup> Bijl, *Europese antirevolutionair*, 195; see also Groen, *Briefwisseling* I 485.

<sup>514</sup> Van Schelven, *Denkbeelden*, 75-76.

<sup>515</sup> Groen, *Ongeloof en revolutie* (2008), 153-154.

<sup>516</sup> Van Schelven, *Denkbeelden*, 78-79

<sup>517</sup> Auguste Neander, *Allgemeine Geschichte der Christliche Religion und Kirche* (Vol. I), 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., (Gotha: F.A. Perthes, 1856 (1826)), 1 "Es soll unsere Aufgabe sein, zu betrachten, wie aus dem kleinen Senfkorne im laufe der geschlossen vor unsere Augen liegenden Jahrhunderte jener grosse Baum wurde, der die Erde zu überschatten bestimmt ist und unter dessen Zweigen aller Völker derselben eine sichere Wohnung finden sollen."

historiography.<sup>518</sup> In a letter to Van Assen dated 23 March 1834, Groen expressed reservations about the view on history espoused by Bilderdijk (a chiliast), but he had the highest appreciation for Neander's work.<sup>519</sup>

For Groen, as he explained in his *Essay* of 1834, the history of the world was the "wrapping of the development of the gospel. . . . [I]t is, from a higher than earthly point of view, in reality, the straw in which the seed [of the gospel] is stewed to ripeness."<sup>520</sup> This resembled Neander's historical narrativization. Groen thereby rhetorically structured his historical narrative to emphasize the metaphysical centrality of the true battle of good and evil, calling for active immanent participation in this battle through political activism. Since this political activism's strength was rooted in a confidence in the power of an omnipotent God as sovereign over the course of history, and whose victory was presented as assured in his narrative, Groen could call the anti-revolutionary to take courage to always continue on despite any and all grave temporal setbacks. The practical political value of his strategic narrative was exemplified in Groen's conclusion of *Unbelief and Revolution*:

The Christian-historic principle also . . . directly leads to political triumph. The truth of a principle is also evidenced in application . . . taught and guided by experience and the eternally constant Word of Revelation, I proclaim the inalterability of truth, the forsaking of which leads to distortive ideas. In this regard the inability and depravity [of it] become clearer every day. . . . Submission to truth is the only true practicality. . . . Even now there lies in the free confession of your conviction an ability of which the outworking is known to Him alone who works the growth. . . . Let us, in the midst of very small sacrifices to which we are called with dutifulness and self-denial, keep an eye on the progress made by the dominion of truth through witness. . . . Faith conquers the world. To conquer the world it is necessary that we in our own conscience dethrone the concerns and take down every height which

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<sup>518</sup> Bijl, *Europese antirevolutionair*, 194-195; Van Vliet, *Historische benadering*, 67.

<sup>519</sup> Groen, *Briefwisseling II*, 42.

<sup>520</sup> Groen, *Proeve*, 144 "de omhulsel der evangelische ontwikkeling ...: zij is, uit een hooger dan het aardsche standpunt beschouwd, als 't ware de halm waarin het zaad tot rijpheid is gestoofd ..."

elevates itself against the knowledge of God and take every thought captive to obedience to Christ.<sup>521</sup>

This rhetorical declaration of victory was rooted in the eschatological-teleological element intertwined in Groen's historical narrative. He strategically shifted the emphasis from the immanent to the transcendent, as if to say that despite a loss in present battles, the anti-revolutionary position was always winning the war. His expectation for victory was not only eschatological and transcendent, however, as his central call was for immanent participation in socio-political and ecclesiastical battles. Through active socio-political engagement in their own context, anti-revolutionaries saw themselves as participating in an ongoing battle — and victory — that spanned the whole of history, so they could live out their divine calling in honorably serving the timeless causes of truth and justice.

Central to Groen's historical narrative was the idea that the reality of divine ordinances, by which God establishes his inescapable sovereignty, is manifested and taught through experience (or history). This entailed the inevitable failure of "revolutionary" human projects aimed at usurping the inescapable sovereignty of God. This formed the foundation for his optimism in his famous appeal at the end of *Unbelief and Revolution*, and narratively clarifies his optimism regarding a future victory of the Christian-historical worldview through political engagement. He asserted that the gospel was due to conquer the world; in Groen's narrative the Christian-historical teleological ideal of Christ's victory

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<sup>521</sup> Groen, *Ongeloof en revolutie* 2008 (1847), 385-387, 389 "het christelijk-historische beginsel leidt ook ... rechtstreeks naar politieke winst. De waarheid van een beginsel blijkt ook in een brede toepassing ... door de ervaring en het eeuwig blijvende woord van de openbaring geleerd en geleid, beweer ik de onveranderlijkheid van waarheden. De verzaking daarvan leidt tot dwaalbegrippen. Hiervan valt het onvermogen en de verderfelijke dagelijks meer in het oog ... Onderwerping aan de waarheid is de enige ware praktijk ... Er ligt ook nu in de vrijmoedige belijdenis van uw overtuiging een vermogen waarvan de werking alleen bekend is aan Hem die de groei geeft ... Laat ons bij de zeer geringe opofferingen waartoe wij vooralsnog geroepen worden tot plichtsbetrachting en zelfverloochening in het oog houden dat de heerschappij van de waarheid veld wint door getuigen ... Het geloof overwint de wereld. Om de wereld te overwinnen is het nodig vooraf in ons eigen geweten de overwegingen te ontronen en elke hoogte die zich verheft tegen de kennis van God neer te halen en alle gedachten als gevangenen te leiden tot de gehoorzaamheid aan Christus."

over evil not only had a supra-historical dimension concerning Christ's second coming as the end of history, but was to be manifested in and through history. Significant in this regard was his conclusion of *Unbelief and Revolution* with a quotation from II Corinthians 10:5, a passage he rhetorically employed to encourage Christians to confidently engage in social and political action for the purpose of achieving socio-political goals according with their faith.

#### *4.4 Summary of Groen's Main Strategic Narrative Themes*

In summary, I recognize the following eight narrative themes that Groen strategically utilized for his anti-revolutionary ends in his Christian-historical narrative:

(i) An emphasis on divine revelation as mediated through the Bible (special revelation), and through the created order (general revelation) as pedagogically manifested in history. This pedagogic value was attached to his historiography, manifested in Groen's typical historicist narrative political positioning in the nineteenth century.

(ii) A Christocentric historical narrative, wherein the paradigm of fall-redemption-glorification played a central role. To Groen, world history as called into existence by God was teleologically rooted in the messianic promise of Genesis 3:15. Through a narrative emphasis on the certainty of messianic victory, he rhetorically invited and encouraged anti-revolutionaries to engage in this victorious battle via socio-political engagement in their own context.

(iii) The establishment and progress of the gospel proclaimed by Christianity as central to the progression of history. Groen presented his narrative so as to emphasize

the inevitability of the victory of the truth of his own position over the false revolutionary ideologies doomed to inevitable failure.

(iv) Through an historicist mode of thinking indebted to the Historical School and Burke, an appreciation of the importance of historically developed rights, which Groen utilized in his narrative to sanction his political engagement. This particularly manifested in his narrative presentation of his Christian-historical position as aligned with the true Dutch spirit; he defended it against enemies he regarded as usurpers of legitimate authority and destroyers of true liberty.

(v) A distinct modification of the historic principle in a uniquely Christian fashion, presenting historical durability in his narrative as a seal of accordance with the providential purpose of history, namely the victory of Christ over evil.

(vi) A covenantal-logical historic dichotomy, wherein the battle between faith, representing the true and good, and unbelief, representing deceit and evil, was central. This dichotomy was narratively utilized as a rhetorical device to invite confident anti-revolutionary socio-political engagement in the midst of strong opposition. Groen the historian and Groen the political theorist were therefore inseparably connected.

(vii) An intrinsic connection between a covenantal curse-and-blessing paradigm and the manifestation of created ordinances in history — something the extant literature has, for the most part, failed to appreciate. To Groen, reality necessitated the practical inescapability of this covenantal paradigm evidenced through his historical narrative, since rebellion against the inescapable divinely-created order would necessarily have negative consequences, while positive societal results would generally be achieved through obedience to God's creation ordinances.

(viii) An appeal for Christian societal and political engagement rooted in confidence in victory — the belief in his cause’s strength to “conquer the world.” In terms of his eschatology, Groen broke with the chiliasm of his fellow Réveil brothers in favor of Neander’s postmillennialism. Groen’s eschatology and its role in his historiographic narrative have received virtually no treatment in the literature on Groen as historian, yet it is central not only to understanding him as an anti-revolutionary historian and statesman, but also to seeing their intrinsic interrelation.

## **5. Conclusion**

Groen, as a nineteenth-century historian, employed the research methods of Rankean modern historiography in addition to standing in the nineteenth-century historicist tradition by virtue of his strategic narrative construction. His Christian-historical narrative had evident practical political objectives, rhetorically calling for action and engagement in the socio-political issues of his day.

Through his historical narrative, he promoted a Christianized state and culture as the political ideal that, because of its accordance with divinely ordained reality, was alone able to stand the test of time, whereas anti-Christian “revolutionary” projects were doomed to fail. This narrative strategy served the rhetorical purpose of encouraging his marginalized anti-revolutionary movement unto confident political engagement. Through narrative he self-established his political position as historically rooted and as representing an ever-present wisdom of the ages, i.e. as one that would remain amid ephemeral revolutionary endeavors. His narrative strategy par excellence was to show that although accusations of his movement’s irrelevance might at first glance have appeared true, there was yet another,

deeper stage on which the battle raged beyond what met the eye in the immediate context. Despite shifting the stage, his narrative repeatedly identified what from his perspective were regarded as concrete (immanent) historic victories, such as that of the Eighty Years' War.

This strategic double emphasis in his narrative served a distinct political purpose. As he lived in a society where traditional Christians had difficulty coming to terms with and self-positioning themselves within the context of rapid socio-political de-confessionalization, a narrative emphasis on the inevitable self-destructing nature of the antagonized revolutionary position would help the anti-revolutionaries find firm footing within the political spectrum of the time. It would help them to continue witnessing in the public domain, even when their voices were not acknowledged and they ended up on the losing end of many a vote. In this regard it should be noted that Groen, despite the distinctiveness of his historical narrative, was a typical nineteenth-century historian in the historicist tradition, primarily preoccupied not with a systematic-epistemic theoretical treatment of history, but with a practical objective of self-positioning in his own historic context.<sup>522</sup>

The next chapter will focus specifically on the content of Groen's political positioning itself and the nature of his political engagement, as made possible via his narrative strategies. It will emphasize how he drew from this narrative self-positioning as an anti-revolutionary statesman within an anti-revolutionary movement in his historical context, in order to constructively position and engage on a political level.

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<sup>522</sup> Paul, *Plaatsbepaling*, 30.

## CHAPTER 5

# Groen's Christian-Historical Political Theory as Narratively Sanctioned

### 1. Introduction

Along with the historical dimension, Groen's narrative had a simultaneously political dimension. His rhetorical appeals to history were constitutive of his political position throughout his anti-revolutionary career. This narrative appeal is nowhere more evident than in his political magnum opus, *Unbelief and Revolution*, which, as has been noted, was appropriately subtitled "*A Series of Historical Lectures.*" Through an analysis of this work's context and purpose, its audience and initial reception, its structure and narrative argument, and a comparison of the 1847 and 1868 editions, the practical narrative strategies and their political implications, as reflected in its text, can be highlighted. This narrative emphasis in turn paves the way for a novel understanding of Groen's political positioning on the issue of true political authority, on which there has been much debate in the literature. Through providing a new narrative-based perspective on Groen's political theory — the focus of this current chapter — and consequently Groen's political engagement post-1848, the framework is also set for appreciating his historically significant choice for non-intervention in 1856, which will be the focus of the next chapter.

## **2. *Unbelief and Revolution* as Groen's Christian-Historical Manifesto**

Groen himself, as well as the literature, regarded *Unbelief and Revolution* as his fundamental Christian-historical manifesto, from which the core principles of his political theory as the basis of his socio-political engagement can consequently be gleaned.<sup>523</sup> From a phenomenological-narrative perspective, I intend to provide an overview and analysis of, firstly, the work's original historical context and political purpose. Additionally, the focus will be on the first audience for whom it was intended, the initial reception it received from public figures, Groen's central argument in the work, the narrative structure and content of the book, and, finally, a comparison of the two editions of 1847 and 1868. This comparison sets the stage for my engagement in the interesting and historically important discussion on the development of Groen's political theory pertaining to his conceptualization of legitimate authority — the lens through which much of Groen's political action after 1848 has been interpreted by twentieth-century and early twenty-first-century historians. As “a series of historical lectures,” which he delivered, wrote and published as a Christian Dutchman for the Christian Dutch, *Unbelief and Revolution* was an important narrative means by which Groen constituted and directed the anti-revolutionary position within his historical context.

Throughout my analysis, I primarily make use of the two most recently published (Dutch) editions of the work, although they saw the light more than half a century apart: the 1952 edition, edited by Hendrik Smitskamp, and the 2008 edition, edited by Roel and Arie Kuiper. In the section analyzing the differences between the two editions published during Groen's lifetime (in 1847 and 1868), I also utilize the original edition as published in 1847.

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<sup>523</sup> Groen, *Ongeloof en revolutie* (1952), 8-9; see also: Smitskamp, *Het boek*, 11; Kuiper, *Ter inleiding*, 7, 16.

## 2.1 Context and Purpose

The winds of change blowing in the Netherlands during the 1840s, such as marked the discussions on constitutional revision in a liberal spirit, provided the incentive for Groen to systematically articulate his Christian-historical worldview. This culminated in his fifteen lectures on *Unbelief and Revolution*, delivered from his home between November 1845 and April 1846. He tried to provide his audience with a Christian-historical philosophical alternative to both contemporary liberalism and conservatism. The lectures followed and philosophically built upon the historical narrative set out in his *Handbook on the History of the Fatherland*, the first edition of which was already published in 1841.<sup>524</sup> His work in the final section of his *Handbook* provided him with the incentive for the lectures. In this final section, he treated the period of Dutch history after the Batavian Revolution in 1795, which he narrated to be ideologically dominated by the theories of “unbelief” produced by the Enlightenment.<sup>525</sup> Founding itself on this narrative framework, these lectures became what the twentieth-century historian Hendrik Smitskamp called the “unmissable key to understanding [Groen’s] thought and action.”<sup>526</sup> Producing *Unbelief and Revolution* was therefore a politically constitutive act on Groen’s part within the parameters sanctioned by his Christian-historical narrative.

Other Réveil figures like Isaac Da Costa essentially made a living of delivering lectures on various subjects and charging people attendance fees. Though on a much more modest

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<sup>524</sup> Van Dijk, *Groen’s ongeloof en revolutie*, 181-182.

<sup>525</sup> Smitskamp, *Het Boek*, 11.

<sup>526</sup> *Ibid.*, 9 “een onmisbaar sleutel tot het verstaan van zijn denken en doen”.

and private scale and without necessarily charging money, his friends, like Groen, followed suit.<sup>527</sup>

The Dutch-Canadian author Harry van Dyke has identified three purposes behind the lectures: to be a confession of political principles, to witness to the saving power of the gospel, and to be an exercise in Christian apologetics.<sup>528</sup> For Van Dyke, Groen was concerned with the future of Christian civilization, the eternal destiny of souls, and the glory of God.<sup>529</sup> With his historical survey he desired to teach his audience lessons for their own time.<sup>530</sup> This observation implicitly points to the historicist mode of thinking underlying this work.

After Groen had delivered these private lectures, he, desiring to deliver the message to the public as soon as possible, published the lectures without revision in 1847.<sup>531</sup> This was a time when the Enlightenment spirit of modernity was featuring prominently in the Dutch public discourse.<sup>532</sup> Groen timed this work so as to provide a complete and comprehensive alternative narrative framework from which to understand the society of his time and eventually engage politically with the purpose of transforming this society.

As Groen wrote in his preface to the first edition of 1847, with the publication of *Unbelief and Revolution* he for the first time comprehensively set out his political theory.<sup>533</sup>

He self-described his lectures as embodying an

historically based argument that there exists a natural and necessary connection between unbelief and revolution; that the movement which aims

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<sup>527</sup> Van Dyke, *Lectures*, 139.

<sup>528</sup> *Ibid.*, 85.

<sup>529</sup> *Ibid.*, 86.

<sup>530</sup> *Ibid.*, 88.

<sup>531</sup> *Ibid.*, 171.

<sup>532</sup> Kuiper, *Ter inleiding*, 7, 16.

<sup>533</sup> Groen, *Ongeloof en revolutie* (1952 (1847)), 8-9.

at the self-elevation of mankind . . . at sovereignty in both politics and science, has been born out of a rejection of the gospel.<sup>534</sup>

This central narrative proposition would shape his political engagement throughout his career: since unbelief had no other outcome than revolutionary chaos, Groen believed that in his time and context, civilization stood before an inevitable choice: either submit to the authority of God and his revelation and remain Christian, or reject it and decline into radical Jacobinism.<sup>535</sup> Groen thereby set the tone for this narrative argument in the preface, noting that within a year of having delivered the lectures, many political developments, particularly within Switzerland and Prussia, reaffirmed his historical narrative-based interpretations of reality. This encouraged him to publish the lectures in 1847.<sup>536</sup> Other publications that saw the light very shortly after his delivery of these lectures, espousing what he saw as similar narrative paradigms, also encouraged him to publish: he mentioned the German conservative Joseph van Radowitz's *Present Conversations Regarding State and Church* (1846), the French socialist politician-historian Louis Blanc's *History of the Revolution* (1847), and the French poet-politician Alphonse de Lamartine's *History of the Girondins* (1847).<sup>537</sup> Nonetheless, although he mentioned Radowitz and Blanc in the 1847 edition's introduction, Groen never mentioned them again in his revised 1868 edition, and only a single-sentence quote from Lamartine against the social contract is added by footnote.<sup>538</sup>

While there was an element of concern for the salvation of souls in *Unbelief and Revolution*, and while I would grant Van Dyke's assertion that the issue played an underlying role throughout the narrative of the lectures — e.g. his continual reference to the gospel

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<sup>534</sup> Ibid., 8 “historisch betoog, dat er natuurlijk en noodwendig verband is tussen *ongeloof* en *revolutie*; dat de richting welke, ten gevolge der zelfverheffing van den mens, in staatsrecht en wetenschap ... heerschappij voert, uit verwerping van het Evangelie is ontstaan.”

<sup>535</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>536</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>537</sup> Ibid., 10; *Gespräche aus der Gegenwart über Staat und Kirche; Histoire de la Revolution; Histoire des Girondins*.

<sup>538</sup> Ibid. (1868), 261.

and calls for repentance — I would not consider it a major concern or purpose in the work.<sup>539</sup> Its character was political, and its strategic purpose was to establish a solid theoretical foundation for a political position that sought to practically and publicly engage and transform society at the time. In achieving this purpose, a strategic narrative played the central role. As a confession of his Christian-historical principles and an exercise in Christian apologetics, it was contextually inseparable from Groen's narrational identification of the inroads made by the liberal (or "revolutionary") elements in the *Zeitgeist*, which he already identified at the start of the 1840s in his historiographical *Handbook*. This provided the incentive for producing the political-philosophical and Christian-apologetic work that was *Unbelief and Revolution*.<sup>540</sup> Groen himself also affirmed that political engagement was a main motivator behind the lectures.<sup>541</sup>

## *2.2 First Audience and Initial Reception*

Groen delivered the fifteen lectures that make up *Unbelief and Revolution* at his home in The Hague between 8 November 1845 and 4 April 1846 on Saturday evenings. Twenty-one people in total were among the invitees for these evenings, all of whom were from a rather elite background: two bore the title of count, two had the title of *jonkheer*, and a total of fourteen held university degrees.<sup>542</sup> Van Dyke has provided the most thorough overview of the audience, dividing them into six categories:

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<sup>539</sup> Groen, *Ongeloof en revolutie* (2008 (1847)), 37-38, 385-388.

<sup>540</sup> Groen, *Handboek* (1978 (1841)), 673; see also Chapter 1, Section 4 for an overview of the political and religious climate in the Netherlands during the time leading up to the publication of *Unbelief and Revolution*.

<sup>541</sup> Groen, *Ongeloof en revolutie* (2008 (1847)), 10-12.

<sup>542</sup> Van Dyke, *Lectures*, 148.

(i) Groen's friends from his university days in Leiden: Boreel van Hogelanden, former disciple of Bilderdijk turned liberal; De Greve, adherent of the irenic wing of the Dutch Réveil; Delprat, deacon of the Walloon Church in The Hague and fellow Réveil member; Philipse, Groen's brother-in-law and a conservative; and Hoffman, a Rotterdam merchant sympathetic to the Réveil;

(ii) Men with anti-revolutionary leanings: Gefken, solicitor-general of the court in The Hague and a sympathizer with Groen's ideological leanings, though not anti-revolutionary himself; Singendonck, who from 1850 would become secretary of the First Chamber and an adherent of the irenic wing of the Réveil;

(iii) Groen's Réveil comrades: Gevaerts, a lawyer from The Hague; Gevers, who would become auditor-general in 1851; Voûte, a retired professor in philosophy, physics, and astronomy in Amsterdam, and member of the Walloon Reformed Church; Ernst van Bylandt, Groen's doctor and member of the Walloon Church; Elout van Soeterwoude, justice in the provincial court in The Hague; and Mackay, referendary with the Council of State;

(iv) Invitees who were distinctly not of Groen's school of thought: Eugène van Bylandt, Ernst's brother and referendary of the king's cabinet (a position Groen had held earlier), a liberal churchgoer and follower of Thorbecke; Gockinga, the more liberal-leaning justice of the supreme court in The Hague; Noordziek, librarian of the Royal Library in The Hague and a freemason; Vollenhoven, a Remonstrant who would eventually help draw up the education bill accepted in 1857 that Groen would strongly oppose;

(v) Counterrevolutionary Bilderdijkians: Capadose, a retired doctor, who criticized Groen for over-emphasizing the differences between himself and Bilderdijk in his lectures; Quertenmont, who worked for the registry office in The Hague;

(vi) Two figures whom Van Dijk argues are too difficult to categorize: one Van der Heim, secretary of the Second Chamber at the time; and Van der Kemp, a deputy district judge who was somewhat critical of many of Groen's ideas.<sup>543</sup>

The list of attendees itself points to the socio-political function of the narrative Groen proposed throughout the lectures. In exposing it to influential figures inside and even outside the movement in which he positioned himself, he strove to move the public discourse in his intended direction; thereby his narrative served the practical purpose of effectuating socio-political engagement and, eventually, change.

Mixed reactions to Groen's lectures followed as can be derived from his correspondence. Although they appreciated Groen's efforts, many of the first audience were extremely critical of his thoughts. Boreel defended the social contract against Groen.<sup>544</sup> Van der Kemp criticized Groen's idea of the state as one rooted in the private-legal authority of the sovereign, and proposed that the state existed because of the people, rather than the sovereign. Secondly, he further criticized Groen for not identifying clearly enough the false presuppositions of the Enlightenment ideas of liberty and equality. Thirdly, he criticized Groen's idea of the unification of church and state as not only an infringement upon both institutions, but also a reduction of faith to forced hypocrisy, rather than a matter of the heart.<sup>545</sup> However, Van der Kemp also in a separate letter to Groen noted that he did "not greatly differ from your sentiments" and that "you, through your work, have greatly attributed to furthering my knowledge."<sup>546</sup> Quertenmont, on the other hand, praised Groen for formulating the historical-philosophical idea (or narrative) that unbelief furthered

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<sup>543</sup> Ibid., 141-148.

<sup>544</sup> Groen, *Briefwisseling II*, 808-809.

<sup>545</sup> Ibid., 967.

<sup>546</sup> Ibid., 821 "ik [verschil] niet grootelijks van uw gevoelens" "gij hebt mij door uw werk ter vermeerdering mijner kennis ontzaggelijk veel dienst gedaan".

revolution and that epistemic apostasy led to political decline, affirming to him what he had long been convinced of. Nonetheless, he still counted himself to be more of a Bilderdijkian than Groen, in terms of holding exclusivist monarchial, anti-constitutional convictions.<sup>547</sup>

Among the first readers of the publication who were not present at Groen's private lectures, the reactions were equally mixed. Fellow Réveil member Hendrik Koenen responded with criticism. He argued that Groen's ideal of a Christian state with the Reformed Church's public privileges was untenable and at odds with recent historic developments of institutionalized religious plurality.<sup>548</sup> J. Bake, Groen's former professor from Leiden, accused him of romanticizing the past and attaching dates and periods to the development of unbelief that were disconnected from historical reality.<sup>549</sup> Also, the son of Groen's fellow Réveil member Willem de Clercq, Gerrit, directly opposed Groen in explaining that he regarded both the Enlightenment and French Revolution as positive developments. His attack focused on Groen's presupposition of the depravity of man.<sup>550</sup> Isaac da Costa, however, a fellow traditionalist (and at times even counterrevolutionary) thinker, wrote to Groen in 1847 calling it an "outstanding work."<sup>551</sup> It is also known that two Reformed ministers responded particularly positively: Reverend J.J. van Oosterzee, another anti-modernist Réveil figure, held that the "work [was] an imposing, historical-political apology for the necessity of Special Revelation . . . [and that] the inseparable connection between revolution and unbelief has become more abundantly clear to me."<sup>552</sup> Additionally Reverend Nicolas Beets, the central figure of the Utrecht Réveil, reacted positively upon

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<sup>547</sup> Ibid., 821.

<sup>548</sup> Ibid., 810.

<sup>549</sup> Ibid., 813.

<sup>550</sup> Ibid., 823.

<sup>551</sup> Groen, *Brieven van Da Costa*, 284 "voortreffelijk werk".

<sup>552</sup> Groen, *Briefwisseling II*, 813 "[begroet het] werk als eene imposante, historisch-politische apologie voor de noodzakelijkheid eener buitengewone openbaring ... [en dat] het onafscheidelijk verband tusschen revolutie en ongelooft mij helderder dan voorheen is geworden".

reading it, writing Groen to thank him for the “precious gift [and] . . . the value and pleasure, that reading it has brought me.”<sup>553</sup>

The narrative proposed in *Unbelief and Revolution* was clearly met with suspicion by many at the time, both friends and foes. However, the political potential of this narrative in the long run would be aided by the tumultuous European revolutions of 1848. Its successes would be further evidenced, not only by Groen’s own political engagement throughout the two decades following publication, but also by the status assigned to it by later Anti-Revolutionary Party leaders such as Abraham Kuyper and A.F. de Savorin Lohman. These men both saw the work as an important political-philosophical foundational document for the Anti-Revolutionary Party.<sup>554</sup>

### *2.3 Structure and Main Narrative Argument*

The fifteen lectures comprising the work can be divided into four main sections:

- (i) Introduction and Lectures I and II: introductory section;
- (ii) Lectures III–V: a defense of divine right and historical political structures;
- (iii) Lectures VI–X: Christian-historical apologetics against the theories of the Enlightenment or Revolution;
- (iv) Lectures XI–XV: a historical outline of the development of the Revolution, utilized as an appeal to fellow Christians to take action.

Through its narrative, *Unbelief and Revolution* structured the battle-lines in the spiritual conflict and stimulated the development of a distinctly Christian approach and response.<sup>555</sup>

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<sup>553</sup> Ibid., 812 “kostelijk geschenk, [en] ... het nut en genot, dat mij de lezing verschaft heeft”.

<sup>554</sup> Kuyper, *Ter inleiding*, 13.

<sup>555</sup> Groen, *Ongeloof en revolutie* (1952 (1847)), 10-12; Groen, *Ongeloof en revolutie* (2008 (1847)), 37-38.

Groen held to an Augustinian concept of history, with the central guiding factor in history being the battle between faith and unbelief, i.e. the kingdom of God versus the kingdom of the darkness. He identified “revolutionary” modernism as an enemy lamentably separating Western civilization from its Christian roots. This would lead to a spoliation and decline of the culture.<sup>556</sup> “Revolution” for Groen was ultimately the denial of the sovereignty of God in favor of the sovereignty of mankind, not simply a political upheaval (although he considered that an integral part of the greater process). The theories and concepts that this Revolution advocated were identical with the Enlightenment’s political ideals of the sovereignty of the people, liberty, equality, and the social contract.<sup>557</sup> Groen identified the French Revolution as the most prominent historical manifestation of the rationalist religion idolizing mankind and opposing God, as the fruit of the tree of unbelief.<sup>558</sup> Narrating these “revolutionary” ideas as false and contrary to true historical progress, he cast it as a threat to all true authority and liberty.<sup>559</sup> For Groen, the Christian theory of the state rooted it in both a universal and a particular order: God’s transcendent will and the manifestation of respective historical developments.<sup>560</sup>

Van Dijk rightly summarized *Unbelief and Revolution* as follows: “The forsaking of the gospel in politics and society leads, via a secular idea of liberty, to anarchy, from which dictatorship alone offers liberation. In short: secularization leads to totalitarianism.”<sup>561</sup> He further described Groen’s “logicism” underlying this reasoning as follows: “Tell me your

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<sup>556</sup> Groen, *Ongeloof en revolutie* (2008 (1847)) , 28.

<sup>557</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>558</sup> *Ibid.*, 36, 118.

<sup>559</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>560</sup> *Ibid.*, 39, 41, 43-44, 50-51.

<sup>561</sup> Van Dijk, *Groen’s ongelooft en revolutie*, 183 “het verlaten van het evangelie in staat en samenleving loopt via een werelds vrijheidsideaal uit op de anarchie, waaruit alleen de dictatuur nog redding biedt. Korter uitgedrukt: secularisatie loopt uit op totalitarisme.”

principles, and I'll tell you your destiny."<sup>562</sup> In this regard, his narrative followed a distinctly biblical and Old Testamental prophetic paradigm.

Groen distinguished his defense of the *droit divin* from, and presented it as a principle against, state absolutism. His narrative attempted to legitimize government authority and demand obedience to it when, and only when, it was exercised in accordance with the laws and providential purposes of God.<sup>563</sup>

The core message of the work can best be described as such: forsaking the supremacy of the divine, transcendent moral order as the authoritative standard for societal and political arrangements in favor of the supremacy of man, manifesting epistemically in rationalism and empiricism, conflicts with divine creation ordinances and leads to anarchy from which government tyranny alone offers liberation. In Groen's narrative, therefore, the concepts of "unbelief" and "revolution" were intrinsically linked.

Groen narrated this main message with an argument for his Christian-historical principle, which consists of two elements: (i) the divine right (*droit divin*) of historical authorities as providentially instituted, legitimate governments primarily responsible to God and His law for exercising justice; and (ii) historical rights and privileges as providential manifestations of God's will and purpose, affirmed by the seal of historic durability.

The first element of his principle being *Christian*, it affirmed the sovereignty of God and his will; the second being *historical*, it affirmed God's providential governance of creation as a means by which his will is manifested in history. This Christian-historical principle was also *anti-revolutionary*, in that it countered the ideas of the Enlightenment, which Groen saw as manifested socio-politically with the French Revolution and other nineteenth-century revolutions, and identified as the social contract and the novel

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<sup>562</sup> Ibid.

<sup>563</sup> Groen, *Ongeloof en revolutie* (2008 (1847)), 58, 63-65.

rationalistic notions of liberty, fraternity, and equality. These Groen regarded as distorted due to their conceptual separation from what the essence of reality and ultimate standard throughout his narrative: the supreme authority of the Creator and Lawgiver over creation.<sup>564</sup>

The practical and political function of this narrative argument particularly comes to light in the final section of this work: lectures XI-XV.

In Lecture X, Groen divided up the political manifestation of “the Revolution” into five historical phases through which the revolutionary absolute state persisted: preparation, development, reaction, renewed experimentation, and resignation.<sup>565</sup> In Lectures XI-XIV he further systematically set out this historical narrative with an overview of the socio-political developments rooted in this revolution. He begins this concise historical narrative by summarizing his own anti-revolutionary stance: that he, as a Christian, believed that in terms of religion, morality, right, family, and the state, no wisdom existed outside of what has its foundation in God’s revelation. For Groen, a true Christian would in history not only see providence, which even deists see, but also acknowledge and identify “in the coming and triumphant second coming of the Saviour the solution . . . to the riddles of the history of humanity.”<sup>566</sup> He therefore made explicit his overriding Christocentric presupposition, from which he constructed his entire Christian-historical narrative.

In his narrative of the revolution Groen identified seven characteristics historically present in all five periods of the revolutionary development: (i) a theoretical origin in anti-Christian philosophy; (ii) a striving towards universal application and influence; (iii) an attempt at the destruction of the foundation of true rights — the divine order; (iv) an

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<sup>564</sup> Ibid., 68, 77, 80, 213.

<sup>565</sup> Ibid., 227.

<sup>566</sup> Ibid., 243 “in de komst en zegevierende terugkomst van de Heiland de oplossing ... van de raadsels van de geschiedenis van de mensheid.”

inevitable failure in consistent application due to impracticality; (v) experiments with different forms, while maintaining the same fundamental character; (vi) internal fights regarding the fruits of the principle, but not the principle itself; (vii) true resistance to the Revolution, which can be found only in upholding faith in God over unbelief.<sup>567</sup>

Returning, then, to the five periods identified in lecture X, Groen narrated a historical chronology for the revolution's unfolding in France and elsewhere in Europe in the period stretching from the eighteenth-century French Enlightenment to 1845 (his historical present), with preparation being the philosophical build-up to 1789, followed by development (1789–1794), reaction (1794–1815), renewed experimentation (1815–1830), and finally resignation (1830–1845).<sup>568</sup> He referred to various developments in France in the years prior to the Revolution as support for his narrative assertion that not socio-economic realities, but false philosophies, were primarily to blame for its outburst.<sup>569</sup> With regard to the period of development (1789–1794), he emphasized that the loosening of all moral and legal ties by naturally depraved humans' consistent application of the revolutionary theories led to the bloodshed and tyranny characteristic of the first French revolutionary government. He argued that it could not be ascribed merely to the friction between revolutionaries and counter-revolutionaries, or to the acquisition of power by fanatics.<sup>570</sup> This bloodshed and tyranny shattered dreams of a consistent application of the revolutionary theories, but not the love for the theories themselves, which continued into the period of reaction (1794–1815).<sup>571</sup> The desire for order and rest, without a desire to turn back the revolutionary tide, eventually led to the rise of the violent Napoleonic despotism as

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<sup>567</sup> *Ibid.*, 244-252.

<sup>568</sup> *Ibid.*, 252.

<sup>569</sup> *Ibid.*, 270.

<sup>570</sup> *Ibid.*, 273, 288-289, 303-304, 307, 315, 327-332.

<sup>571</sup> *Ibid.*, 336-337.

a reaction to the licentiousness and confusion of the early revolutionary period.<sup>572</sup> This period was in turn followed by one of renewed experimentation (1815–1830), where men tried to re-apply the theories under new forms of government again.<sup>573</sup> This resulted in the revolutionary all-powerful centralized state remaining intact, but now with a monarchical stamp.<sup>574</sup> In Groen's narrative, the nineteenth-century liberalism of the Restoration period was cast as a merely toned-down Jacobinism.<sup>575</sup> This again culminated in the revolutions of 1830.<sup>576</sup> Groen then saw the reaction to this revolution as one of resignation (1830–1845), where in the name of maintaining order, the revolutionary governments incorporated tyrannical measures for the sake of self-preservation.<sup>577</sup>

The narrative retention of this historical narrative structure as one spanning and connecting past, present and future provided Groen with the politically constitutive foundation that sanctioned his conclusion of the final lecture with an appeal for Christian-historical political engagement aimed at societal transformation. By appealing to what he narrated as the signs of the times and the position of the Netherlands within this historical process of revolutionary development, he rhetorically encouraged Christians to societal engagement as a fulfillment of their calling at that given time in history.<sup>578</sup>

Regarding the signs of the times, Groen enumerated four characteristics of his historical present: (i) conservatism seemed strong, but it would be ineffective to stand the tide of the revolution due to the absence of a solid, stable principle; (ii) the masses remained vulnerable to radical revolutionary ideas because of a lack of good leadership; (iii)

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<sup>572</sup> *Ibid.*, 344, 347, 349.

<sup>573</sup> *Ibid.*, 350-351.

<sup>574</sup> *Ibid.*, 352.

<sup>575</sup> *Ibid.*, 353.

<sup>576</sup> *Ibid.*, 355-356.

<sup>577</sup> *Ibid.*, 357-358, 360-361.

<sup>578</sup> *Ibid.*, 363.

the general desire for religion, if not cultivated by orthodox Protestantism, might potentially have aided the rise of Roman Catholic Ultramontanism, combined with a flavor of Jacobinism as a dangerous new civic religion; (iv) there was, however, also a revival of the Christian religion and despite the fact that revolutionary heresies had conquered many churches, anti-revolutionaries could hope for a true reformation of faith and morals.<sup>579</sup>

He thereafter narrated the negative impact of the revolutionary principles on his own fatherland.<sup>580</sup> Groen retained the historical narrative in the shift from past to present, anticipating the rhetorical space to call for political action. The narrative could now easily flow into the final section of his last lecture, where he, still employing continuing narrative retention, set out the political calling of the Christian anti-revolutionary in his historical context.

For practical action in fulfilling this calling, Groen argued for the following: (i) Firstly, that the Christian must take note of the dire need for improvement. In his narrative the Netherlands was in reality not a monarchy nor a republic, but a revolutionary centralized and all-powerful state, to which all Christians must object.<sup>581</sup> (ii) Secondly, that the liberals, who denied the authority of God, could be resisted only by returning to solid anti-revolutionary principles in the public domain.<sup>582</sup> (iii) Finally, that a re-contextualized application of Christian-historical principles was the true need of the time. Through implementation of his narrative strategies, Groen argued that the lessons of reality and practice justify and demand these calls to action. These principles needed to be learned and taught, and only thereby could the gains of the revolutionary theories be resisted and

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<sup>579</sup> Ibid., 369-372.

<sup>580</sup> Ibid., 373.

<sup>581</sup> Ibid., 378-379.

<sup>582</sup> Ibid., 379-380.

overturned, since these truths would encourage repentance in all who accept them.<sup>583</sup> He concluded by admonishing and assuring his readers:

Much of what the world sees as great, is small. Much of what it sees as small, is great. . . . Faith conquers the world. To conquer the world it is necessary to . . . destroy all arrogance that rebels against the wisdom of God and to make every thought captive to obedience to Christ.<sup>584</sup>

This teleological-eschatological proclamation with which he concluded the final lecture serves a very important rhetorical function in his entire narrative. It emphasizes the need for political engagement along the lines just described, proclaiming a hope of contributing to and participating in the eventual inevitable victory in the battle in which the Anti-Revolutionary Party was engaged. This was rhetorically intended to encourage perseverance in the midst of all setbacks that would in all likelihood accompany this strategic political engagement, given the political atmosphere in that particular historical context.

*Unbelief and Revolution* was therefore indeed a Christian-historical manifesto that proposed a distinct historical narrative as a rhetorical (re)description of reality, aimed at inciting socio-political engagement with competing paradigms of political thought at the time.

#### *2.4 The First and Second Editions Compared*

Groen's edits to the second edition published in 1868 consisted of some deletions and substitutions, but mostly of additions in the footnotes. The only really significant deletion in the second edition was an entire page towards the end of Lecture V, in which Groen had defended three of his views against opposition and objections. The first of these views was

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<sup>583</sup> Ibid., 385-388.

<sup>584</sup> Ibid., 389 "Veel van wat de wereld groot acht, is klein. Veel van wat ze klein acht, is groot. Het geloof overwint de wereld. Om de wereld te overwinnen is het nodig ... elke hoogte die zich verheft tegen de kennis van God neer te halen en alle gedachten als gevangen te leiden tot de gehoorzaamheid aan Christus." He quoted from II Corinthians 10:5.

his position regarding the unity of church and state, which he explained to be nothing different from maintaining a Christian state through a rejection of “political atheism.”<sup>585</sup> The second related to his advocacy of tempered monarchy as a form of government, citing its track record against tyranny, specifically the examples of both the Dutch revolt against Philip II and the Brabant resistance against the enlightened Habsburg monarch, Joseph II, leading to the creation of the United States of the Southern Netherlands (also known as the United States of Belgium) in 1790.<sup>586</sup> Groen clearly approved of both these movements of resistance, which led to political revolutions. Finally, he defended *res privata*, the theory that political authority differed only in degree, not in kind, from private property rights, arguing that political authority, like private property, was a gift from above — from God — rather than merely delegated from beneath by the people, with consequent duties accompanying a divinely ordained stewardship. He also noted, however, that despite his defense of the idea, he still recognized both legitimate monarchies and republics as long as they were not “revolutionary,” i.e. separated from the idea of divine right.<sup>587</sup>

A series of substitutions reflected a change in Groen’s thinking, shifting towards a milder stance regarding Roman Catholicism and a slight change in emphasis regarding historic Calvinism. In Lecture VII (on the Reformation), Groen changed what he at first simply described as the “corrupt clergy” of the pre-Revolution French Roman Catholic Church to “a part of the clergy” in the second edition.<sup>588</sup> In the final lecture he, in the first edition, had accused Roman Catholicism of advocating the “most blasphemous

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<sup>585</sup> Groen, *Ongeloof en revolutie* (1847), 117-118 “politiek atheïsme”.

<sup>586</sup> *Ibid.*, 118.

<sup>587</sup> *Ibid.*, 118 “revolutionair”.

<sup>588</sup> *Ibid.*, 165 “bedorven geestelijkheid”; Groen, *Ongeloof en revolutie* (1952 (1868)), 121 “een deel der geestelijkheid”.

superstitions,” but he changed this in the second edition to “pitiful superstitions.”<sup>589</sup> Concerning the Calvinist reactions in the sixteenth century against the persecutions they suffered, however, Groen had noted in the first edition that they “looked upon questionable resistance as a legitimate means of defending national rights.” But in the second edition he rephrased this to read less antagonistically: “looked upon powerful resistance as a legitimate means to the dutiful defense of national rights.”<sup>590</sup>

In terms of additions, Groen cited in footnotes a series of new authors who were completely absent from the first edition. Most references to a single new author were to the German constitutional lawyer and political philosopher Friedrich Julius Stahl, while numerous references and quotes to the conservative French political philosophers Alexis de Tocqueville and Francois Guizot were also added.<sup>591</sup> Importantly, under the influence of Stahl, Groen made explicit the distinction between bad constitutionalism and constitutionalism properly understood, a distinction vital to his entire argument.<sup>592</sup> After publishing the first edition, he was accused of advocating the reinstatement of the old, pre-revolution order, or at the very least, of being vague about his ideals in this regard.<sup>593</sup> With the second edition Groen now clarified his narrative with added footnotes that he believed the old order to be irrevocably past and that it should stay that way.<sup>594</sup> In Lecture VII at least six footnotes were also added in defense of his understanding of the Reformation as a fundamentally Christian-historical (anti-revolutionary) movement that opposed unbelief and

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<sup>589</sup> Groen, *Ongeloof en revolutie* (1847), 406 “meest lasterlijke bijgeloovigheden”; Groen, *Ongeloof en revolutie* (1952 (1868)), 308 “jammerlijke bijgelovigheden”.

<sup>590</sup> Groen, *Ongeloof en revolutie* (1847), 147 “in twijfelachtigen wederstand een regtmatig handhaven van Volksregten te zien”; Groen, *ongeloof en Revolutie* (1952 (1868)), 108 “om ... in krachtigen weerstand plichtmatige handhaving van volksrechten te zien.”

<sup>591</sup> Van Dyke, *Lectures*, 195.

<sup>592</sup> Groen, *Ongeloof en revolutie* (1952 (1868)), 195.

<sup>593</sup> Robert Fruin, *Het antirevolutionaire staatsregt van Mr. Groen van Prinsterer ontvouwd en beoordeeld*, (Amsterdam: Gebhard & Co.), 93-94.

<sup>594</sup> Groen, *Ongeloof en revolutie* (1952 (1868)), 173, 283.

brought Christendom back to its core epistemic basis of authority, rather than an emancipatory precursor of the Enlightenment, as many liberals and Roman Catholic counterrevolutionaries narrated it to be.<sup>595</sup>

The second edition should not necessarily be considered more authoritative than the first. The changes that occurred can be clarified in terms of Groen's narrative strategies. These changes to the narrative were regarded as necessary due to contextual circumstances, which dictated a shift in rhetorical emphasis. Nonetheless, on the other hand it is undeniable that his political position somewhat matured between the first and second edition, especially evident in Stahl's influence. Again, however, references to Stahl can be partially understood in light of Groen's desire to further concretize and clarify his position from the criticisms of Robert Fruin and others following the publication of the first edition.<sup>596</sup> More importantly, he would have considered the re-application of the Christian-historical principles enabling political engagement in the newly established context of a constitutional parliamentary democracy in the Netherlands as demanding a political re-positioning, which in turn required certain narrative modifications. In this regard my position is at odds with the bulk of existing literature on Groen's political theory, as I will now introduce a fresh perspective on the matter through an emphasis on his narrative strategies.

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<sup>595</sup> Ibid., 113, 115, 118, 123, 124.

<sup>596</sup> For a detailed analysis of the development of Groen's thinking and in particular the influence of Stahl upon him, see 3.2 below.

### 3. Groen's Notions of Political Authority: *Res Privata* vs. *Res Publica*

#### 3.1 *The Existing Literature*

In the literature, one can find contradictory interpretations of Groen's thought development concerning his view of the nature of political authority, which on its own merits a new study. As noted in the first chapter, most authors, including Diepenhorst (1932), Brants (1951), Dooyeweerd (1959), Zwaan (1973), Kruidenier (1975), Kuiper (2001/2004), Sap (2004), and Bijl (2011) all identify a significant change in Groen's thinking occurring around 1848-9, which all of them ascribe to an increased influence from and appreciation of the German philosopher Friedrich Julius Stahl (1802–1861) and Groen's consequent forsaking of Karl Ludwig von Haller's (1768-1854) notions of political authority.<sup>597</sup> This opinion is held by all of the scholarship addressing the issue prior to Jan Kirpestein's 1993 dissertation and includes almost all of it thereafter, with the only other known dissident opinion expressed by W.G.F van Vliet in his 2008 dissertation.<sup>598</sup>

After having delivered and published his first edition of *Unbelief and Revolution*, Groen received a lot of criticism for his reliance upon von Haller from both friend and foe. Upon receiving the first published edition in 1847, his Réveil friend Koenen wrote to Groen expressing concern regarding his appreciation for the Hallerian system.<sup>599</sup>

The liberal Leiden history professor Robert Fruin, writing in the aftermath of Thorbecke's loss to the conservatives in 1853, also took aim at Groen's so-called

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<sup>597</sup> Diepenhorst, *Groen*, 319-322; Brants, *Geestelijke groei*, 140; Dooyeweerd, *Vernieuwing en bezinning*, 50; Zwaan, *Klassieke oudheid*, 291-292; Kruidenier, *De controverse (2)*, 13; Kuiper, *Tot een voorbeeld*, 178; Sap, *Angst*, 29; Drentje, *Thorbecke*, 429; Bijl, *Europese antirevolutionair*, 364.

<sup>598</sup> Kirpestein, *Belijder*, 85-86; Van Vliet, *Historische benadering*, 27, 129-130.

<sup>599</sup> Groen, *Briefwisseling II*, 811.

Hallerianism in *Unbelief and Revolution* when he criticized him for desiring a return to outdated and impractical principles.<sup>600</sup> However, by that time Groen had already written the following in his 1850 *Varieties*:

[Professor Star Numan] reminds [us] . . . that the king of the Netherlands is sovereign. Without questioning the sovereignty of the king, the professor agrees fully with what Stahl has emphasized time and again, the public character of the state; that the state is not anymore, as it had been in Europe previously, *res privata*, but has increasingly and more eminently, become *publica res*. He observes that such an institution of the state, as republic, is far from, in the common usage of the word, being opposed to the monarchy, and that particularly therein it receives its strongest foundation and most certain guarantee.<sup>601</sup>

Groen became familiar with Stahl's work in 1848, a year after publishing his first edition of *Unbelief and Revolution*, via his extensive correspondence with the likeminded Groningen jurist Cornelis Star Numan (1807–1857), a former fellow student, as well as with Phillip Willem van Heusde (1778–1839), a fellow Dutch and Genevan Réveil figure.<sup>602</sup>

In that same year in July, he wrote to his former Leiden promotor Van Assen that he had just come into contact with Stahl through reading his work for the first time, adding that it was a pity that the German was so little-known in the Netherlands at the time.<sup>603</sup>

Von Haller was a prominent ultraconservative Swiss political theorist active during the Restoration period in Europe, and he desired to go beyond the debates regarding the structuring of the modern post-revolutionary European nation-states by rejecting the idea altogether. Appealing to history to counter all notions of the social contract, he essentially

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<sup>600</sup> Robert Fruin, *Antirevolutionaire staatsregt*, 6.

<sup>601</sup> Groen, *Verscheidenen*, 256, 258-259 "[De Hoogleraar Star Numan] herinnert ... dat de Koning der Nederlande *Souverein* is. Deze Souvereiniteit des Konings buiten bedenking gesteld zijde, beaëmd de Hoogleraar ten volle, wat door Stahl telkens op den voorgrond is gesteld, het *openbaar* karakter van den Staat; dat de staat niet meer is, gelijk in Europa voorheen, eene *res privata*, maar, bij toeneming en in hoogerem zin, *publica res* wordt. Hij doet opmerken dat dergelijke inrigting van den Staat, als *gemeenebest*, wel verre van, naar de gebruikelijk geworden beteekenis van het woord, in tegenstelling met het Koningschap te zijn, juist daarin den stevigsten grondslag en den zekersten waarborg ontvangt."

<sup>602</sup> Groen, *Briefwisseling* II, 902.

<sup>603</sup> *Ibid.*, 911.

defended the feudal *res privata* theory of the great landlord as ruler, with no right to tax his subjects and with the entire social order based upon unequal relationships of duties and responsibilities. He regarded the natural state of men as characterized by fundamental inequality and dependence, with natural law demanding the maintenance of these relationships in society. The landlord as prince was to have an independent existence from his land, and he held the responsibility to exercise governmental functions due to his historical socio-economic position and relationship to his subjects, not because he represented the people as the state.<sup>604</sup>

Stahl, who rose to prominence as a leading figure of the German conservative movement around the same time as Groen did in the anti-revolutionary movement, rejected von Haller's *res privata* concept of governmental authority, favoring a *res publica* notion. Like von Haller, he rejected the Rousseauist social contract theory. However, his counterargument was entirely different. He argued that the legitimate authority of monarchs and governors was rooted not in their historical property ownership rights, but rather in their positions in the state as a divinely ordained institution. As an officeholder under God's authority, the king had the duty to uphold the laws of God in his realm.<sup>605</sup>

Some authors in the existing literature have, in arguing for a change in Groen's political theory due to Stahl, also seen it as enabling and structuring his political action after 1849.

Diepenhorst has cast Groen as a complete adherent of von Haller's ideas regarding *res privata* prior to 1849, thereafter embracing Stahl's criticism and position. He has argued

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<sup>604</sup> Karl Ludwig von Haller, *Restauration der Staats-Wissenschaft: oder Theorie des natürlich-geselligen Zustands, der Chimäre des künstlich-bürgerlichen entgegengesetzt. Darstellung, Geschichte und kritik der bisherigen falschen Systeme. Allgemeine Grundsätze der entgegengesetzten Ordnung Gottes und der Natur*, (Wintherthur: Steinerischen, 1816), xii, xxiii-xxiv.

<sup>605</sup> Friedrich Julius Stahl, *Die Philosophie des Rechts nach geschichtlicher Ansicht, dritte Auflage*. (Heidelberg: J C B Mohr, 1854 (1837)), 568.

that this shift towards republican thinking further enabled Stahl to play a substantial role in shaping Groen's thought and action during the second phase of his career, following the transformation of the Dutch state to a constitutional parliamentary monarchy.<sup>606</sup>

Brants built his argument by proposing a marked difference between the two editions of *Unbelief and Revolution* as published on opposite ends of the claimed change in 1848/9. To him, only the first edition, not the second, can be considered a supplement to Groen's 1834 *Essay*, in which he had relied so heavily on von Haller.<sup>607</sup> Brants, however, added that Groen failed to correctly understand von Haller, wrongly identifying him with the Historical School of von Savigny; by contrast, von Haller's view of the state was rather static and not historically dynamic.<sup>608</sup> This claim is remarkable, because as Brants himself noted, the *Essay* failed to mention von Savigny even once.<sup>609</sup> Brants referenced a letter from Groen to Koenen in February 1835, wherein Groen explained that although he disagreed with von Haller over his ideas of the Reformation as predecessor to the French Revolution, "it takes nothing away from his great contribution, inasmuch as he has shown that the state isn't artificial and voluntary, but historic and inseparable from our nature."<sup>610</sup> Brants commented, "This sentiment would have been affirmed by von Savigny but not von Haller."<sup>611</sup> He argued that Thorbecke in fact had a superior understanding of von Haller, evidenced when Thorbecke, in reference to Spinoza's natural law theory that right and power were synonymous, noted that von Haller developed this understanding of the relationship between right and power further along rationalistic lines by arguing that the

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<sup>606</sup> Diepenhorst, *Groen*, 319-322.

<sup>607</sup> Brants, *Geestelijke groei*, 140-141.

<sup>608</sup> *Ibid.*, 45-46.

<sup>609</sup> *Ibid.* 142.

<sup>610</sup> Groen, *Briefwisseling II*, 106 "beneemt [dit] niets aan zijne groote verdiensten, in zoo ver hij getoond heeft dat het Staatsleven niet kunstmatig en willekeurig, maar historisch en van onze natuur onafscheidelijk is."

<sup>611</sup> Brants, *Geestelijke groei*, 45 "[D]at zal von Savigny beamen en von Haller in deze vorm niet".

essence of power (and by implication the foundation of right) lay in the free use of reason.<sup>612</sup> Brants did grant, however, that in a certain sense Groen adhered to elements of both von Savigny and von Haller, since whereas von Haller exclusively emphasized the role of the static natural law, and von Savigny exclusively emphasized the role of history, Groen adhered to a historicism colored with a static element, although in his case this was not natural law, but divine revelation. Groen considered history a mirror-image of this revelation, thereby identifying a close relation between “the essence of rights and historical rights.”<sup>613</sup>

Dooyeweerd regarded Groen as being greatly influenced by a reactionary form of secular humanism throughout his entire career, which he considered to be rooted in the Historical School’s emphasis on the historical shaping of socio-political reality.<sup>614</sup> For him, this even applied to Stahl as well, for whom Dooyeweerd had a higher regard than von Savigny, but whom he also regarded as having reformed the movement only to a very limited degree, rather than having fully corrected it.<sup>615</sup> Dooyeweerd accused the Historical School of ontologically absolutizing history.<sup>616</sup> He argued that although Groen from early on rejected the Rousseauist conventional state based on natural law in favor of a historicist view of the foundation of political arrangements, his Platonism allowed him to utilize the distinction between idea and manifestation in his view of history, as expressed in his belief that history is the normative expression of transcendent principles. Per Dooyeweerd, this in turn allowed Groen to ignore the very real differences between von Haller and von Savigny’s Historical School, by interpreting the former (as exponent of the idea) in light of the latter

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<sup>612</sup> Ibid., 46; see: J R Thorbecke, *Bedenkingen, aangaande het Regt en den Staat*. (Amsterdam: P Meijer Warnars, 1825), 107-108.

<sup>613</sup> Brants, *Geestelijke groei*, 142 “het wezen van het recht en het historische recht”.

<sup>614</sup> Dooyeweerd, *Vernieuwing*, 63, 177.

<sup>615</sup> Ibid., 50-51.

<sup>616</sup> Ibid., 120.

(as exponent of the idea's manifestation), thereby viewing them as allies. Dooyeweerd agreed with Brants's interpretation that von Haller's idea of right and authority is more static than historically dynamic, and consequently at odds with the historicist theory that states were the natural products of historical development — a view in reality more aligned with the great opponent of Savigny's historicism, Thibaut.<sup>617</sup> Dooyeweerd argued that von Haller never fully broke with the social contract doctrine and that his theories of a universal natural law and authority were in agreement with Hobbes and Spinoza.<sup>618</sup> For Dooyeweerd, Groen's 1848/9 break with von Haller's *res privata* theory merely led to Groen's adaptation of von Haller's understanding of feudal arrangements. Guilds and estates were understood as possessing authority as independent ingredients of the *res publica*, but this still denied the true republican vision of the state as fundamentally differentiated from other spheres that were inherently dependent on the state.<sup>619</sup> Dooyeweerd regarded Kuyper as the figure who eventually liberated the anti-revolutionary movement from the private-legal doctrine of authority and led it towards republicanism.<sup>620</sup> Dooyeweerd's critique of Groen stands in direct relation to the crisis of the historicist tradition in which Groen and Kuyper had previously operated, which hit Dutch Protestantism in the 1930s.<sup>621</sup>

Zwaan noted that under the influence of von Haller, the pre-1849 Groen had a greater preference for the monarchical forms than the later Groen, who exhibited a greater preference for democracy due to a greater appreciation of the republican nature of the state.<sup>622</sup> He agreed with Dooyeweerd that Groen developed these republican sentiments

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<sup>617</sup> Ibid., 124-129.

<sup>618</sup> Ibid., 127, 129.

<sup>619</sup> Ibid., 134-135.

<sup>620</sup> Ibid., 239.

<sup>621</sup> Herman Paul, "Who Suffered From the Crisis of Historicism? A Dutch Example," *History and Theory* 49 (May 2010), 185-186.

<sup>622</sup> Zwaan, *Klassieke oudheid*, 291-292, 298.

and forsook absolutist tendencies only long after 1849, when he finally admitted the republican nature of Calvinism under Kuyper's influence.<sup>623</sup> Zwaan identified a gradual ideological development in the anti-revolutionary movement from Hallerian *res privata* (under Groen pre-1849) to Stahl's *res publica* (under Groen post-1849) to Kuyperian Christian democracy (at the end of Groen's life and beyond).<sup>624</sup>

Kruidenier, focusing on Groen's ideals and actions regarding the schooling issue, argued that Groen, having come into contact with Stahl's ideal of the Christian state, saw a national public Christian school as his great concern, as opposed to merely advocating freedom of education as he had done previously. This made him forsake denominational private schools in favor of a plurality of public schools established along religious lines — Protestant, Roman Catholic, and Jewish. Kruidenier argued that many of Groen's contemporaries missed this important change in his thinking, leading to various misunderstandings during parliamentary discussions on the matter.<sup>625</sup>

Kuiper argues that since Groen came into contact with Stahl around 1848, he forsook the private-legal notion of governmental authority in favor of republicanism. However, for polemic purposes Groen didn't publicly recognize this radical change in his thinking.<sup>626</sup> Per Kuiper, Groen's position changed through Stahl from a desire to overturn the new order established in 1848 to a principled acceptance of it.<sup>627</sup>

Sap argues that Groen's theoretical change, enabled by Stahl around this time, was so profound that he forsook a private-legal conception of the state in favor of seeing

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<sup>623</sup> Ibid., 215, 240, 280.

<sup>624</sup> Ibid., 240.

<sup>625</sup> Kruidenier, *De controverse (2)*, 13-14.

<sup>626</sup> Kuiper, *Tot een voorbeeld*, 179-180.

<sup>627</sup> Ibid.

increased societal and political democratization as the key to the development of true liberty.<sup>628</sup>

Drentje, biographer of Thorbecke, also argues that Groen had, through contact with Stahl, changed from a principled opponent of the Dutch constitutional democracy to its supporter.<sup>629</sup>

Most recently, Bijl has simply stated that Groen's change from an adherent of Hallerian *res privata* to Stahlian *res publica* has been so well-documented that new research in this regard would be redundant. He connects this to the historic changes that occurred around 1848 and to Groen's desire for a new, relevant theory for the post-1848 European context. Nonetheless, Groen was forced to forfeit one of the fundamental aspects that characterized his political theory regarding authority prior to 1849.<sup>630</sup>

Kirpestein's interpretation of Groen's development has, as noted, followed a different line. Kirpestein responded to Zwaan's interpretation and preferred to call Groen's shift a *redirection* of Groen's thinking under Stahl's increased influence, noting that even before 1849 his appreciation for von Haller had been eclectic:

It remains questionable whether we can conclude from the first edition of *Unbelief and Revolution* that Groen was initially a Hallerian. . . . Groen's love for von Haller's work was limited to the polemic of von Haller against the idea of the sovereignty of the people as basis for politics. . . . Groen, to my mind, did not follow von Haller slavishly but made independent use of his work.<sup>631</sup>

Kirpestein continues to argue that Groen, primarily valuing von Haller's contribution concerning the historical nature of the state and his opposition to the social contract, never

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<sup>628</sup> Sap, *Angst*, 29.

<sup>629</sup> Drentje, *Thorbecke*, 429.

<sup>630</sup> Bijl, *Europese antirevolutionair*, 364-365, 367.

<sup>631</sup> Kirpestein, *Belijder*, 85-86 ``Het blijft echter een vraag of we uit de eerste druk van Ongeloof en Revolutie mogen concluderen dat Groen aanvankelijk een Halleriaan was ... Groens ingenomenheid met von Hallers werk was beperkt tot de polemiek die von Haller voerde tegen de leer van de volkssoevereiniteit als uitgangspunt voor het staatsregt ... Groen is mijns inziens von Haller niet slaafs gevolgd maar heeft een zelfstandig gebruik van zijn werk gemaakt ... ``.

desired a restoration of the medieval status quo in Hallerian fashion.<sup>632</sup> Dooyeweerd had also admitted Groen's approach to be eclectic, but called him a moderate follower of the Hallerian school of thought, while Kirpestein goes much further to claim that Groen, as an independent thinker, had been politically in line with Stahl even before he came into contact with his works. Kirpestein argues that von Haller only directed Groen to the right foundations for his political theory, foundations he would eventually discover and appreciate in Stahl.<sup>633</sup> For Kirpestein, we should interpret Groen's contact with Stahl as reaffirming his convictions, rather than constituting a turning point in his political development.<sup>634</sup> As evidence, Kirpestein references Groen's narrative self-reflection in 1850:

[Stahl's] follower? Yes, I'm proud of the title; although, not to lose my right to independence, I recollect that I, in 1847, had scarcely been familiar with my contemporary, and that I have not, consequent to the acquaintance, until now changed course, but, I mean that I (and this I acknowledge) have continued on the same path, with increased firmness of conviction, with increased insight into the applicability of my principles.<sup>635</sup>

Van Vliet's interpretation is a combination of elements from Kirpestein on the one hand, and from the group of majority positions on the other. He bases his argument around the fact that Groen forsook Hallerian thinking on such a vital point in 1849 without hardly even mentioning it, observing that he had, at most, been an eclectic Hallerian in the first place. Per Van Vliet, Groen had always used von Haller in a preliminary way, appreciating him only for the themes he discussed as vital to the antirevolutionary struggle, without considering

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<sup>632</sup> Ibid., 87.

<sup>633</sup> Dooyeweerd, *Vernieuwing en bezinning*, 247; Kirpestein, *Belijder*, 87.

<sup>634</sup> Kirpestein, *Belijder*, 87.

<sup>635</sup> Groen, *Verscheidenheden*, 221 ``[Stahls] volgeling? Nu ja, ik ben trotsch op dezen titel; hoewel ik, om mijn regt op zelfstandigheid niet te verliezen, herinner dat ik in 1847 naauwelijks bij name met den uitnemenden tijdgenoot bekend was, en dat ik, ten gevolge der kennismaking, tot dus ver niet op een ander spoor geraakt, maar, zoo ik meen (en daarvoor zal ik steeds erkentelijk zijn) op denzelfen weg, met meer vastheid van overtuiging, met meer inzigt in de toepasselijkheid mijner beginsels, vooruitgegaan ben.``

him a founder of a system.<sup>636</sup> He calls for an appreciation of Groen's eclecticism as central to understanding his treatment of all his sources.<sup>637</sup> Although the earlier Groen had been indebted to von Haller for his private-legal monarchism (as evident from his treatment of the medieval monarchies in Lecture IV of *Unbelief and Revolution*), von Haller's static universalism, at odds with von Savigny's historicist emphasis on the unique and particularistic historically developed character of peoples — such a vital part of Groen's thinking — led to a natural decline in Groen's appreciation of von Haller.<sup>638</sup>

Van Vliet, like Kirpestein, has argued for the development from eclectic Hallerian to eclectic Stahlian as natural, but Van Vliet has cast the break with von Haller as more significant and evident than Kirpestein. That is, Van Vliet has argued that Groen's contact with Stahl brought him to new insights that, although not changing the fundamentals of his worldview, helped it greatly to mature; this is stronger than Kirpestein's view of Stahl merely reinforcing what Groen had already known and believed beforehand.<sup>639</sup> As evidence for his standpoint, Van Vliet refers to Groen's *In Remembrance of Stahl* (1862), where Groen argues that Stahl had rightly identified von Haller's idea of *res privata* as an "apparent wisdom amounting to a dangerous anachronism."<sup>640</sup> Groen also continues:

[Von Haller's desire is] [t]o return to a highly deficient condition, to exchange the public right of the unified state for the collection (*Aggregat*) of a multitude of particular rights without essential regulation and relation. This striving towards the revival of the old estates under patrimonial authority betrays a blindness for the eminence of the national state. The medieval system was rooted in the independence and separation of the estates; the modern in the unity of the nation. . . . Then men harbored firstly self-interest and only thereafter national interests; now the standard has to be the common good. . . . Stahl, it is so, already prior to 1848 made his attitude known to the publishers of the *Wochenblatt*; but Star Numan could, when

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<sup>636</sup> Van Vliet, *Historische benadering*, 129-130.

<sup>637</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>638</sup> *Ibid.*, 129.

<sup>639</sup> *Ibid.*, 127-128.

<sup>640</sup> Groen, *Ter nagedachtenis*, 122 "schijnbare wijsheid [die] op een gevaarlijk anachronisme neerkomt."

writing to me, not have been familiar with the many later writings and speeches by Stahl in which the eminence of his constitutional position over against the (much more medieval-derived) ideal of the excellent and well-intended king, is revealed.<sup>641</sup>

Whether or not authors in the existing literature have argued for a radical or less significant change in Groen's conceptualization of political authority during the late 1840s, nearly all have attempted to connect Groen's re-positioning and public action in the post-1848 Dutch context to his views on political authority and republicanism, for which he was indebted to Stahl. While positioning myself in this dispute, my purpose is to eventually go beyond this search for Groen's political justification in his theoretical development and focus rather on his continual retention and re-description of his historical narrative as foundational for his political existence and practice.

### *3.2 Groen's Narrative Re-Positioning Concerning Political Authority: A Novel Perspective*

An emphasis on Groen's strategic narrative positioning, both before and after 1848, is the key to unlocking a new perspective on his theory of political authority. With this approach to the sources, Groen's strategic, narrativized theoretical position will enlighten his personal

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<sup>641</sup> Ibid., 122-123 ``Op een wederkeeren naar een hoogstgebrekkige toestand, op het wederinruilen van de publiekregtelijke staatseenheid tegen een zamenvoeging (*Aggregat*) van eene menigte bijzondere regten zonder wezenlijke ordening of verband. Dat dit ijveren voor de herleving van aloude Stenden onder patrimonieel gezag een blind-zijn voor de voortreffelijkheid van den nationalen Staat verraadt. Het middeneeuwsche (*sic*) stelsel was gegrond op zelfstandigheid en afzondering der Stenden; het moderne is gegrond op eenheid der Natie ... Toen had men eerst eigen- en daarna het Staatsbelang in het oog; nu moet men tot rigtsnoer hebben de welvaart van het algemeen ... Stahl, het is zoo, had reeds vóór 1848 zijne verhouding tot de Publicisten van het *Wochenblatt* kenbaar gemaakt; maar Star Numan kon, aan mij schrijvende, nog niet bekend zijn met zoo menig later geschrift of rede van Stahl, waarin de uitnemendheid zijner constitutionele rigting tegenover het (veel meer aan middeneeuwschen (*sic*) toestand ontleende ...) ideaal van den voortreffelijken en ook in dit opzigt welmeenenden Koning, openbaar is.``

motivations behind his 1856 political choice for non-intervention following the constitutional revision of 1848 in a new, unexplored fashion.

In the second lecture of *Unbelief and Revolution*, Groen called upon the support of ancestors and predecessors for the narrative purpose of showing his “science against the Revolution” to be nothing new, but the true historical or traditional position.<sup>642</sup> Groen praised the counter-revolutionary authors who made valuable contributions to fighting the revolutionary theories, for by his own definition, “all that leads to the true knowledge of revelation, is antirevolutionary.”<sup>643</sup> He started by listing figures like Plato (narrated as proto-antirevolutionary), Guizot, Van Alphen, Pitt, Burke, von Gentz, Fiévée, the authors of the *Berliner Politisches Wochenblatt*, De Bonald, De Maistre, and De Lammenais.<sup>644</sup> However, before crediting von Haller and Bilderdijk, Groen noted with regard to the Roman Catholic De Lammenais’ anti-Protestant sentiments:

I would not need to provide an exculpation, no assurance that I do not lean back towards the Roman Church. We do not belong to those who appreciate the truth only in associates and forget that not only friends, but sometimes also enemies can become learned. We ought to be eclectic, in the good sense of the word. With a thorough standard, we ought to acknowledge the purity of the jewel, wherever it may be found.<sup>645</sup>

Then, although crediting von Haller, Groen also added (and remember that this note already appeared in his first edition): “I’m no unconditional panegyrist, not of anybody, and especially not of von Haller.”<sup>646</sup> Lecture II, where Groen established the foundations of his political movement with a rhetorical plea for the continuing relevance and vitality of the

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<sup>642</sup> Groen, *Ongeloof en revolutie* (2008), 39 “wetenschap tegen de Revolutie”.

<sup>643</sup> Ibid., 43. “[a]lles wat tot de echte kennis van openbaring en geschiedenis leidt, is antirevolutionair ...”.

<sup>644</sup> Ibid., 42, 44, 47, 49, 51.

<sup>645</sup> Ibid., 51-52. “Ik zou geen verontschuldiging hoeven te geven, geen verzekering dat ik niet overhel tot de Roomse kerk. U behoort niet tot hen die waarheid enkel in medestanders waarderen en die vergeten dat niet enkel van vrienden, maar soms evenzeer en meer nog van vijanden geleerd kan worden. Wij behoren eclectici te zijn, in de goede zin van het woord. Met een deugdelijke toetssteen de echtheid van het metaal, overal waar het aanwezig is, te erkennen.”

<sup>646</sup> Ibid., 52. “Ik ben geen onvoorwaardelijk lofredenaar, van niemand, en van von Haller vooral niet.”

Christian-historical position, therefore provides sufficient evidence that Groen's reliance upon others, at least in his own mind, had always been eclectic. Selectively drawing from others as it served his narrative strategies and purposes, this eclecticism was particularly applicable with regard to his so-called Hallerianism prior to 1849.

In fact, as early as in his 1830 *Dutch Ideas*, Groen had already explicitly drawn a sharp distinction between republican and revolutionary principles, arguing that it would be an error to equate the two.<sup>647</sup> In Lecture VI of the first edition of *Unbelief and Revolution* he reiterated this same sentiment.<sup>648</sup>

Both of these statements were made prior to his introduction to Stahl's works. Nonetheless, they have been difficult to reconcile with the Hallerian text in Lecture VI of both editions, where Groen explicitly opposed

the wrong ideas . . . by which . . . every state, under every name and form . . . literally become *res publica*. Thereby the essence of the monarchy (*res Regis*, *res propria*, not *res populi*, not *res publica*) is destroyed.<sup>649</sup>

With this same lecture, Groen seemed to identify an inseparable connection between the social contract and republicanism, and later (in Lecture XII) between republicanism and the rise of constitutionalism.<sup>650</sup>

Historians and biographical theorists, such as Hans Renders and Binne de Haan, have observed that autobiographical material, though an important source for historical biographers, should not be considered decisive but rather be critically analyzed.<sup>651</sup> A

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<sup>647</sup> Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer, *Nederlandsche Gedachten – I*. (The Hague: G. Vervloet, 1830), 61.

<sup>648</sup> Groen, *Ongeloof en revolutie* (2008), 137.

<sup>649</sup> Ibid., 119 “de verkeerde ideeën ... [waar]volgens ... iedere staat, onder elke naam en gedaante ... letterlijk *res publica* [werd]. Hierdoor ging het wezen van de monarchie (*res Regis*, *res propria*, niet *res populi*, niet *res publica*) teniet.”

<sup>650</sup> Ibid., 130-134, 293-294.

<sup>651</sup> Hans Renders. & Binne De Haan, “Introduction: The Challenges of Biography Studies,” in *Theoretical Discussions of Biography - Approaches from History, Microhistory, and Life Writing*, edited by Hans Renders and Binne De Haan, (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 2.

biographer should take charge of his analysis and not merely be led by autobiographical witness.<sup>652</sup> In this spirit, many authors arguing for a radical change in Groen's views from around 1848 have chosen to downplay the significance of Groen's autobiographical narrative in which he indicated the opposite, such as this self-reflection in his 1873 *Dutch Ideas*:

My repeatedly expressed appreciation for von Haller's *Restauration der Staatswissenschaft* [must] be explained and qualified. Also in his political theory I found the building of systems on hypotheses lacking factual foundation, and the anti-historical element of delusionary scientific hopes vexatious. My praise applied to no more . . . than . . . the sharp fierceness by which, with the simplicity of history, the dangerous doctrine of the social contract and the sovereignty of the people were maligned and vilified.<sup>653</sup>

Instead, these authors have chosen to emphasize the significance of several editorial changes Groen made in his second edition, published long after Groen's contact with Stahl.

Groen wrote in his preface to the second edition that since the publication of the first, his worldview had not changed, but only been reinforced.<sup>654</sup> Nonetheless, Stahl, not mentioned in the first edition, was referenced sixty-six times in the second edition via footnotes.<sup>655</sup> Also, with the publication of the first edition, in Lecture VI Groen went to great lengths to defend Calvinism against objections from counterrevolutionaries, e.g. that it contributed to the development of republicanism and possessed democratizing tendencies at odds with monarchical authority.<sup>656</sup> Among other arguments, Groen cited the Belgic Confession's mention of 'kings' in article 36 as proof that Calvinism in no way gave

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<sup>652</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>653</sup> Groen, *Gedachten V*, 250 "mijne meermalen duidelijk uitgesproken ingenomenheid met von Haller's *Restauration der Staatswissenschaft* [moet] worden verklaard en beperkt. Ook in het Staatsregt was mij telkens het bouwen van stelsels op *hypothesen*, het gemis van feitelijke grondslag, het *antihistorische* der wetenschappelijke luchtkasteelen, ergerlijk geweest. Mijne lofbedeeling strekt zich niet verder ... uit [dan] ... de scherpzinnige felheid waardoor, met den eenvoud der Historie ... de gevaarlijke leer van *Contrat Social* en Volkssouvereiniteit ter neêrgebliskemd en verguisd werd."

<sup>654</sup> Groen, *Ongeloof en revolutie* 1952 (1868), 15.

<sup>655</sup> Van Dyke, *Lectures*, 195.

<sup>656</sup> Groen, *Ongeloof en revolutie* 2008 (1847), 138-143.

preference to a republic.<sup>657</sup> Groen attempted to justify this extensive treatment of the issue with implicit reference to criticisms that he had been ignoring the true nature of Calvinism under the influence of von Haller; Groen explicitly distanced himself from von Haller's position, since the latter regarded the Reformation and the French Revolution as manifestations of the same spirit.<sup>658</sup> This was, however, a Hallerian position with which Groen had disagreed since the start of his career. He had countered it by writing to von Haller himself in 1835 that in the principles of the Reformation he would find the best refutation of Jacobinism.<sup>659</sup>

With the second edition Groen made various references to the work of Stahl in this vein, but essentially reiterated this same argument. Groen noted that Stahl's assessment of Calvinism differed from von Haller, identifying a merely practical and historical connection between Calvinism and the Revolution while admitting a fundamental philosophical difference between the two. Whereas the Roman Catholic von Haller interpreted them as having the same spirit and blamed the Reformation in general for the rise of the Revolution, Stahl simply saw a connection between Calvinism and republicanism.<sup>660</sup> Stahl argued that Calvinism contributed to the development of true political liberties as opposed to the false revolutionary liberties, while at the same time also contributing to the decline of the European monarchies. These true liberties in turn formed the foundation of the English constitutional monarchy and the American democracy.<sup>661</sup> Groen also applied Stahl's distinction between bad constitutionalism and constitutionalism properly understood in his rejection of the 1791 French constitution as usurping monarchical authority (Lecture XII).

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<sup>657</sup> Ibid., 140.

<sup>658</sup> Ibid., 106-107.

<sup>659</sup> Groen, *Briefwisseling I*, 118-119, 140.

<sup>660</sup> Groen, *Ongeloof en revolutie 1952 (1868)*, 111.

<sup>661</sup> Friedrich Julius Stahl, *Die Luthersche Kirche und die Union: eine Wissenschaftliche Erörterung der Zeitfrage*. (Berlin: Wilhelm Hertz, 1859), 62-63.

Groen quoted Stahl as arguing that the main problem with this revolutionary constitution was its failure to check the will of the masses.<sup>662</sup> Having called Jacobinism, Bonapartism, and constitutionalism “branches of the same tree” in the first edition of Lecture XI, Groen added a footnote to this observation in the second edition, sympathizing with Stahl’s sentiment that the constitutional monarchy is itself a means of moral progress, with Groen observing that the idea of a constitutional monarchy is different from constitutionalism, where the office of the king is dissolved into the executive branch.<sup>663</sup> In Lecture XV, where Groen in the first edition distanced himself from the view that constitutions can themselves effect societal revitalization, he added to a footnote a reference to Stahl’s idea that the most natural form of (constitutional) government was one where the king has the authority, with parliament exercising a guiding societal influence on the monarch.<sup>664</sup>

Groen also added a footnote in the second edition to his discussion on Bilderdijk’s exclusivist monarchial sentiments in Lecture II (from which he already distanced himself in the first edition), reiterating that he had never been opposed to constitutional government as Bilderdijk had been.<sup>665</sup>

On the other hand, despite these edits, Groen surprisingly chose to leave unchanged his observation a couple of paragraphs later that “the Calvinist doctrine never led to republicanism.”<sup>666</sup>

Taking all of this into consideration, with regard to this claimed change of political ideology, I propose a narrative perspective wherein Groen’s theoretical position should be

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<sup>662</sup> Groen, *Ongeloof en revolutie* 1952 (1868), 232.

<sup>663</sup> *Ibid.*, 195.

<sup>664</sup> *Ibid.*, 316.

<sup>665</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>666</sup> Groen, *Ongeloof en revolutie* (1952 (1868)), 141 “De calvinistische leer heeft stellig nooit naar republicanisme geleid”.

understood in light of his political and rhetorical agenda. This will offer an alternative explanation in terms of his positioning in its historical context.

Groen's narrative re-positioning as a practical political strategy can perhaps best be derived from the work he wrote in honor of Stahl's contribution to Christian-historical politics shortly following the German's death. In 1862, six years prior to publishing the second edition of *Unbelief and Revolution*, in his *In Remembrance of Stahl*, Groen explicitly distanced himself from the Hallerian view in favor of Stahl:

Stahl [avoids] . . . von Haller's error. He does acknowledge that no one had so carefully observed and explained the patrimonial nature of European realms; but he does not seek in that private-legal [concept] the long-lost fulcrum for contemporary structures. Rejecting the revolutionary state, rejecting the former absolutism of rulers, which seemed to have triumphed over all liberties and rights, he desired no inappropriate imitation of medieval conditions, which have passed and is in our time not enviable. On the contrary: in the gradual alteration of this original characteristic lay, according to Stahl, the progress of European politics; the encroachment, in doctrine and practice, the conviction, that every state is a common affair, *res publica*. Precisely in this public and republican character of the State (in no way similar to the pernicious absurdity of the common sovereignty of the people, and very much reconcilable to an independent and powerful monarchy) lies the condition, the life principle, and the vitality of a national-constitutional monarchy.<sup>667</sup>

However, he also added:

I know that between the Prussian and Dutch conditions there are differences; maybe I [would consider] him [Stahl] too much of an anglophile and too parliamentary. . . . But in terms of the core principle, in the foundations of

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<sup>667</sup> Groen, *Ter nagedachtenis*, 7-8 "Stahl [vermijdt] ... de dwaling waarin von Haller vervalt. Wel erkent hij [Stahl], dat niemand den oorspronkelijken patrimonieelen aard der Europesche Rijken zoo scherpzinnig ingezien en zoo duidelijk opengelegd heeft; maar hij zoekt niet in dit privaatrechtelijke het sedert lang vermolmd steunpunt voor hedendaagschen opbouw. Afkeerig van den revolutionairen Staat, afkeerig van het vroeger absolutisme der Vorsten, zoo als het schier over alle vrijheden en regten gezegevierd had, wil hij die klippen niet ontgaan door ongerijmde nabootsing van middeleeuwsche toestanden, die èn voorbij, èn ook in onzen tijd niet benijdenswaard zijn. Integendeel. Juist in het van lieverlede gewijzigd zijn van dien oorspronkelijken karaktertrek ligt, volgens Stahl, de vooruitgang van het Europesche Staatsregt; het veldwinnen, in leer en praktijk, de overtuiging, dat elke Staat de zaak van het Algemeen, *res publica*, is. Juist in dit openbaar en republikeinsche karakter van den Staat (aan de verderfelijke onzinnigheden eener algemeene Volkssouvereiniteit niet soortgelijk, en met een zelfstandig en krachtig koningschap zeer wel vereenigbaar) ligt de voorwaarde, het levensbeginsel en de levenskracht eener nationaal-constitutionele Monarchie."

political and religious considerations, we who are here [in the Netherlands] called antirevolutionary, are in conformity with Stahl. Throughout all local and national differences the common truth and global historical position remains. We also desired a setting aside of the liberal theories and an application of Christian, historical, Dutch principles. We also, after 1848, desired no reaction or conservatism, smothering the love of liberty and extinction of the spirit of the people, accompanied by a restoration of that which had been outdated; no, rather, taking given conditions into consideration, we desired compliance to, partial revision, and development of the constitution.<sup>668</sup>

This quote reveals the practicality behind Groen's re-positioning. At the heart of his embrace of Stahl was the rhetorical need for a solid re-establishment of his Christian-historical position in coming to terms with the political changes of 1848. Significantly, he also edited his historical narrative appeal in lecture IV in light of the rhetorical demands of the time. Groen already in the first edition quoted Burke as saying that one can better engraft republican elements on a monarchy than vice versa, a quote he left unchanged, merely adding the following footnote in the second edition: "The whole of Dutch history, in terms of the dynasty of Orange, proves that the Dutch monarchy, in its historic origins, is nourished with republican tenor and spirit."<sup>669</sup> Thus, appealing to the same historical narrative as sanctioning his political position and strategies, he incorporated various modifications to make it more applicable to the constitutional parliamentary context in which the Dutch political system had inevitably developed since the publication of the first edition. This new edition, however, maintained in the final lecture that same climactic

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<sup>668</sup> Ibid., 19-20 "ik weet dat er tusschen de Pruisische en Nederlandsche toestanden verschil is; misschien zou ik hem te anglomaan en parlementair [vindt] ... Maar, in hoofdbeginsel, in grondtrekken van staatkundige en godsdienstige beschouwing, zijn ook zij die men hier antirevolutionair noemt, met Stahl homogeen. Onder alle locale en nationale verscheidenheden geldt het algemeene waarheid en wereldhistorische rigting. Ook wij hebben gewild terzijdestelling van liberale theorieën, toepassing van Christelijke, historische, Nederlandsche beginsels. Ook wij hebben, na 1848, geen reactie of conservatisme, met versmoording van vrijheidszin en uitdooving van volksgeest, en met behendig wederinpalmen van hetgeen verleend was, gewild; neen, veeleer inachtneming van den gegeven toestand; naleeving, partieele herziening, ontwikkeling der Grondwet."

<sup>669</sup> Groen, *Ongeloof en revolutie* (1952 (1868)), 73 "De geheele geschiedenis van Nederland, in verband met de historie van het Stamhuis van Oranje, bewijst dat de Nederlandsche monarchie, in historischen oorsprong, met republikeinschen zin en geest doorvoed is."

appeal for political engagement aimed at societal transformation. However, the edits Groen made served to restructure the narrative build-up to this rhetorical call to action so as to maximize its efficiency and relevance to the audience. In this regard Harry van Dyke has offered a valuable comment. He notes Groen's stubbornness regarding his exposition of the *res privata* even in the second edition of Lecture IV can be attributed to his desire to

demolish the historical credentials of ancient 'royal democracy' which liberal writers believed existed in the Early Middle Ages and which they equated, anachronistically, with participatory government under a representative electoral system.<sup>670</sup>

With this, Van Dyke has recognized an element of the rhetorical purposes behind this lecture, regarding which Groen himself noted earlier:

Only when we are familiar with the meaning and legitimate extent of authority in the forms [of government], we learn to see how far the desire of the learned to reduce everything to systems deviates from history. We see how wrongly the revolutionaries proclaimed their goal to be the constitutional restoration of ancient political systems.<sup>671</sup>

The primary sources, since they display explicitly pro-republican sentiments from Groen prior to 1848-9, provide unconvincing evidence that Groen's political theory underwent a radical change at that time. His strategic re-positioning after 1848 thus also had a theoretical foundation in his writings prior to 1848. Groen had repeatedly reiterated that the form of government or form of the political system had never itself been decisive, but, rather, the spirit behind it — as seen in his ongoing defense of the divine right of rulers. In reflecting upon the constitutional revision of 1848 a year thereafter, Groen even noted that his main objection was with those theorists who argued for the republican and, by

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<sup>670</sup> Van Dyke, *Lectures*, 217-218.

<sup>671</sup> Groen, *Ongeloof en revolutie* 2008, 77 "Alleen wanneer wij met de betekenis en de wettige omvang van het gezag in de vormen nauwkeurig bekend zijn, leren wij inzien, hoe ver de drang van de geleerden om alles in systemen onder te brengen reeds vroeg van de waarheid van de geschiedenis afweek. We zien dan hoe verkeerd het was dat de revolutionairen hun doel uitbazuinden als grondwettig herstel van het aloude staatswezen."

extension, democratic forms of government as the only legitimate forms based on their adherence to the sovereignty of the people — thereby seeking political salvation in those forms.<sup>672</sup> In this regard Groen's narrative was always characterized by a shift of emphasis away from political forms and processes, to the epistemic principles by which each system is informed.<sup>673</sup> This central narrative focus, by which Groen decentered constitutional and political forms, allowed him to easily adapt his narrative and political transition when the establishment of a new constitutional parliamentary system in the Netherlands required a strategical re-positioning for political engagement.

Seeing this rhetorical purpose and function behind the modifications also partially clarifies why Groen had chosen to publish its second edition at that point in time (1868). Groen had, after all, risen to increased public prominence in the 1850s and 60s through his political action, particularly with the education battle, but also through the wide circulation of his *Handbook*. Coming then towards the end of his career, he realized the need to restructure his political magnum opus, reshaping it to continue to be a useful rhetorical-political tool for his established movement - one that could continue to incite political engagement even after his retirement from public life. Groen's practical-political narratively sanctioned re-positioning was also reflected in another letter Groen had written to the publisher Kemink on 5 October 1865, a few years prior to the publication of his second edition. Herein he narrated his own career as one in which he

from 1834 to 1848 was particularly preoccupied with historical studies. . . . That I thereafter, from 1849 to 1865, particularly as member of the Second Chamber, came up for the Christian-Historic or Anti-Revolutionary Party,

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<sup>672</sup> Groen, *Grondwetsherziening*, 15.

<sup>673</sup> Groen, *Grondwetsherziening*, 12, 528; *ibid.*, *Ongeloof en revolutie* (2008), 190, 195-196, 207.

whose often unacknowledged sentiments find most agreement with those of Burke, Guizot, and Stahl.<sup>674</sup>

This all brings me to the following conclusions regarding Groen's political theory:

(i) Groen's eclectic referencing of and borrowing from authors whom he considered allies cannot be interpreted only as a development of his ideas, but must be seen within the context of his narrative political strategies rhetorically sanctioning the establishment of his practical political position within its historical context.

(ii) Groen made both positive and negative references to republican and constitutional systems prior to 1848. In Groen's works after 1848, positive references predominate, although he left some negative references unchanged in the second edition of *Unbelief and Revolution*.

(iii) Groen's constant focus on the epistemic principles behind a political system, rather than the political form itself, highlights the fact that looking to a change in Groen's understanding of political authority or forms of government — as most of the literature has done — misinterprets his entire argument. Appealing to Groen's later criticism of von Haller is self-defeating, since his criticism rests on the very conviction that von Haller was wrong to seek deliverance in certain political forms. In reality, Groen merely adapted his rhetorical narrative focus to the challenges posed by a new political system and landscape in his historic context, not the foundations of his political theory itself.

(iv) After 1848, in light of radical socio-political changes, Groen adapted his narrative focus and strategies, which were always aimed at describing history and reality in such a

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<sup>674</sup> Groen, *Briefwisseling V*, 634-635 "van 1834 tot 1848 mij vooral met historische studiën bezig heb gehouden ... Dat ik daarna, van 1849-1865, vooral ook als lid der Tweede Kamer, opkwam voor de Christelijk-historische of anti-revolutionaire partij, wier veelzins miskende gevoelens de meeste overeenkomst hebben met die van Burke, van Guizot, van Stahl."

way as to incite his audience to action according to his ideals of Christian political engagement in their historical context.

(v) Groen's restructuring of his narrative also shaped his own political position within the framework of the historical context in which he sought to promote societal Christianization as a statesman. His (historical) narrative was therefore very much practical and political.

(vi) Groen's political engagement following the 1848 constitutional changes in the Netherlands cannot be sufficiently explained (as most of the literature has sought to do) in terms of a change or development in his political theory. Rather, we must look to Groen's narrative strategies at the time as the key to unlocking the full dynamics of his political engagement.

#### **4. Conclusion**

Groen's political positioning was, both before and after 1848, in typical nineteenth-century historicist fashion, rhetorically sanctioned and established. In this regard his strategical narrative engagement in contemporary political discourse and process followed a similar paradigm to those of his staunchest opponents, such as Thorbecke. The historical narrative was at the heart of his political positioning, as was the development and modification thereof as demanded by his changing historical context. Through appeals to an historical narrative of Dutch and European history, Groen, with his magnum opus, *Unbelief and Revolution*, presented a narrative in which his position represented not only the true Dutch

spirit, but the most solid foundation for true political progress. He concluded this narrative, which spanned the entire work, with an appeal for political engagement aimed at achieving and participating in this political progress. Groen's own political action as statesman, parliamentarian, and activist after 1848 was also shaped and sanctioned in a particular way via this rhetorical narrative. Its recognition, which scholarship on Groen has missed until now, opens up a new and intriguing way of understanding his political action, and, in particular, his surprising choice for non-intervention in 1856. The next chapter is dedicated to unlocking the full dynamics of this episode as a test case for my narrative approach. This will show, with a concrete and practical historical example, how this approach can highlight the significance of Groen's actions as a statesman in his historical context and engender a re-appreciation thereof.

## **CHAPTER 6**

# **The Historical Significance of Groen's Narrativized Choice for Non-Intervention in 1856**

### **1. Introduction**

This dissertation's introduction mentions Groen's historically significant choice for non-intervention in 1856, and particularly his distinct emphasis on his Christian-historical narrative as the sanctioning political foundation for this action. Having discussed Groen's historical narrative strategies for political engagement in the preceding two chapters, in this final chapter I return the focus to his strategic narrativized engagement in the momentous episode of 1856. Groen's actions during May and June of that year will act as a test case for my narrative approach; I will assess these actions to highlight the strategic form of political engagement that the Christian-historical narrative sanctioned in order for Groen to achieve his socio-political aims. This test case will exhibit how my perspective allows for a re-appreciation of the complexity and historical significance of Groen's choice in 1856, showing how this episode was not a defeat for Groen, but markedly fruitful. It proved momentous for the young constitutional monarchy of the Netherlands, although historians have largely underappreciated this fact until now. Via the focus on Groen's narrative strategies as statesman-historian, the historical significance of his choice, not only for the Dutch democracy at the time, but also for Christian democratic political practice in general, will be highlighted in a novel way.

## 2. The Historical Background to 1856

Several authors in the past have attempted to argue for Groen's historical relevance by claiming that the Dutch constitutional monarchy, as established in 1848, was a synthesis of the combined efforts of the liberal Thorbecke and the anti-revolutionary Groen.<sup>675</sup> Such an argument is unconvincing, primarily because it denies the distinctly Thorbeckean nature of the 1848 constitutional revision and the direction in which it historically propelled Dutch politics; and secondarily because it erroneously relativizes Groen's very real opposition to the spirit of the new constitutional system. The denial of this opposition has rested on preconceived notions that Groen underwent a radical development in his political theory around 1848 — an interpretation debunked in the previous chapter. Groen therefore cannot be historically defended as some kind of neglected 'founding father' of the modern Netherlands, as some have argued. However, I believe his historically significant choice for non-intervention in 1856 made him an important early role-player in solidifying the, at the time, new and still vulnerable parliamentary monarchial democracy, a system that he himself neither would have invented nor advocated for.

The historical background to Groen's choice for non-intervention was largely shaped by the impact of the 1853 April Movement. In its aftermath King Willem III saw an opportunity to improve the strained relationship he had with his cabinet. Nonetheless, as noted in chapter three, this did not change much, and the king's relationship with the new

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<sup>675</sup> J.A. Eijman, *Colijn, de verbinding tussen Thorbecke en Groen – De historische nationale herstelgedachte* (Rotterdam: Nijgh & Van Ditmar, 1977), xiii; S.W. Couwenberg, *Westers staatsrecht als emancipatieproces – Ontwikkeling van de constitutionele emancipatiefunctie in de democratische rechtsstaat* (Alphen aan de Rijn: Samson, 1977), 74; Jan W. Sap, *The Netherlands Constitution 1848-1998 – Historical Reflections*. (Utrecht: Lemma, 2000), 4-5.

cabinet of Van Hall remained as strained as ever. He consequently utilized Groen's petition against the new schooling law to disband that cabinet in 1856.

Already on 25 May 1856, it had become clear to Frits de Kock, the king's secretary, that the king had made up his mind regarding the disbandment of the Van Hall cabinet.<sup>676</sup> Willem III, having experienced repeated conflict with different cabinets, wasn't pleased with how Thorbecke's new constitutional system was working itself out, and he considered the reactionary idea of restructuring it all yet again.<sup>677</sup> Assuming he was unaware of the blackmailing of his father with regard to the constitutional revision, one could say that the revolutionary threats his father claimed to fear were by now but a distant memory to Willem III. In light of his use of the anti-revolutionary Groen's petition to bring down the cabinet of Van Hall, his conservative Minister of War Forstner suggested that Groen should be chosen to lead a new anti-revolutionary cabinet.<sup>678</sup>

The king's secretary De Kock had already on 2 May, however, written a letter to another leading anti-revolutionary figure, Justinus van der Bruggen, informing him that the king was seriously considering a more conservative cabinet in which he would play a role with the purpose of "perhaps saving the Fatherland from the evils to which a straying spirit of the people seems to be leading."<sup>679</sup> This letter itself points to the political inroads Groen's narrative had made in the contemporary political discourse. He was, after all, already the chief proponent of a Christian-historical covenantal narrative paradigm that the king's secretary here echoed when writing to a potential (and would-be) prime minister at the

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<sup>676</sup> Van der Meulen, *Willem III*, 338.

<sup>677</sup> *Ibid.*, 336-337.

<sup>678</sup> Tiemen De Vries, *Mr. G. Groen van Prinsterer: Een bibliografie* (Utrecht: F Wentzel, 1908), 119; J. Lens, *Crisis*, 759.

<sup>679</sup> This letter is quoted in A.M. van der Giezen, *Een halve eeuw Nederlandse onderwijspolitiek (1806-1857)* (Middelburg: Rijksarchief van Zeeland, 1969), 226 "het Vaderland misschien vrijtewaren voor de onheilen, waartoe een verdwaalde volksgeest het schijnt te willen leiden."

height of King Willem III's reactionary political engagement. This was significant, as it signified that the king, still one of the most politically influential figures in the Netherlands at the time, had embraced Groen's narrative as at least a practical means by which he not only engaged with, but himself directed, the political discourse and process — and in the midst of a cabinet crisis.

Following Forstner's suggestion, the king entertained the idea of Groen as a potential minister or even former of a new cabinet. His secretary De Kock, himself sympathetic to the king's sentiments, consequently visited Groen. They met twice during mid-May 1856 to discuss his potential role in the formation of a new cabinet, or even a completely new political direction for the Dutch state.<sup>680</sup> This consideration should be understood in light of the monarch's reactionary tendencies, as Groen had become renowned as the most prominent principled public opponent of Thorbeckean liberalism and defender of the historic rights of the House of Orange.<sup>681</sup> As did the letter from the king to the anti-revolutionary Van der Bruggen earlier that month, these discussions with Groen also signified that the king was, at that time, at least partially embracing Groen's narrative as a sanctioning means for the reactionary steps he had in mind.

### **3. Groen's Response to the King's Reactionary Agenda**

The king's utilization of Groen's narrative culminated on 19 May 1856, when he, via De Kock, sent the same letter to both Groen and the former Minister of Colonies and conservative member of parliament, J.C. Baud.<sup>682</sup> In an attempt to find allies and political justification for

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<sup>680</sup> Groen, *Bescheidenen* II, 548.

<sup>681</sup> Boogman, *Rondom 1848*, 152; Van der Meulen, *Willem III*, 340.

<sup>682</sup> Van der Meulen, *Willem III*, 337-338.

his reactionary agenda, the king's letter inquired of both of them, in light of the crisis surrounding the imminent fall of Van Hall's cabinet, for their thoughts on the following:

- Was the moral development of the nation on a corresponding level with its material prosperity?
- Was the increased influence on government granted to the people by the 1848 constitutional revision used positively, or was it abused?
- Was the new electoral system living up to expectations and producing results in accordance with the true spirit of the Dutch nation? And if not, how would one go about changing the current system?
- Since 1848 the people had expressed unparalleled interest in co-governance, which seemed to have a paralyzing effect on government — how could this desire be counterbalanced?
- Considering the tension that had developed in light of the education bill, would a re-editing of the constitution be productive?
- Should the cabinet of the day be completely or partially be rearranged, and if so, when?
- Should the upcoming elections be left to take its natural course for the next government to produce the most productive results?<sup>683</sup>

On 23 May Groen wrote his reply, described by the twentieth-century Dutch lawyer-historian Hendrik Mulder as one of "the most remarkable documents of our nineteenth-century parliamentary history after 1848."<sup>684</sup> As expected, he agreed with the king that the state of the nation at the time was worrisome and affirmed that the moral development of

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<sup>683</sup> Groen, *Briefwisseling* III, 229-230.

<sup>684</sup> Mulder, *Staatsman en profeet*, 87 "de merkwaardigste documenten uit onze negentiende eeuwse parlementaire geschiedenis na 1848."

the nation was lagging behind its material prosperity.<sup>685</sup> He noted, however, in contradistinction to the king's reactionary agenda, that he didn't believe that the problem could be attributed to the people abusing their increased influence in the political sphere. The problem with the people was rather that they were too indifferent and uninterested, that their spirit was extinguished. That being said, he explicitly added that he had never been "a proponent of direct elections on a national, provincial, or municipal level . . . not in general and in particular not given the character of our country."<sup>686</sup> He argued that he had opposed the new system in 1848 because it was founded on "damnable ideas regarding the sovereignty of the people."<sup>687</sup>

Groen thereby continued the same narrative emphasis that had characterized his practical writings regarding both the 1840 and 1848 revisions of the constitution. He was not without critique of the system itself, and he did not shy away from informing the king that he still (as before) didn't see progress as equivalent to increased democratization and liberalization, which was a sentiment of Thorbecke's, who saw the French Revolution and its societal impact as all-important positive historical phenomena.<sup>688</sup> Groen narrated the decisive battle as occurring on the level of principles. To him the foundational principles that formed the interpretative guide for the new constitution were the heart of the problem with the new system and should be the main point of consideration. That Groen, in his narrativized engagement, saw no structural modification of the system as a suitable remedy for what he considered to be a spiritual-epistemic "revolutionary" problem, was echoed by the surprising, striking, and historically significant words that followed in his response to the

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<sup>685</sup> Groen, *Onderwijswet*, 18.

<sup>686</sup> *Ibid.*, 18-19 "voorzitter van regtstreeksche verkiezingen in Land, Provincie of Gemeente ...; niet in het algemeen en vooral niet met het oog op onzen landaard."

<sup>687</sup> *Ibid.* "verderfelijke begrippen omtrent Volkssouvereiniteit".

<sup>688</sup> Jan Drentje, "Thorbecke Revisited: De rol van het doctrinaire liberalisme in de Nederlandse politiek," (*BMGN – Low Countries Historical Review* 126, no. 4 (2011)), 9.

king: “But this system is the one we now have.”<sup>689</sup> This reply, signifying a recognition of and contentment with the reality of the new system, was probably not the answer that the king had expected or desired to hear from Groen.

The king had, after all, chosen Groen, along with J.C. Baud, as addressees of this letter for distinctly reactionary purposes. In these men he saw the most likely public figures to support his reactionary agenda. For his part Baud, as Minister of Colonies and very close friend of King Willem II, had, during the 1840s prior to the 1848 revision, strongly defended the independence and thorough involvement of the king in political affairs as co-governing with his ministers. He had even repeatedly defended Willem II’s pre-1848 reactionary stance to increased ministerial responsibility and opposed any constitutional revisions in that direction.<sup>690</sup> Not only was Groen a renowned critic of the new system, but the king had also just brought down the cabinet by virtue of Groen’s successful petition.<sup>691</sup> In these two men Willem III saw potential kindred spirits.<sup>692</sup> Yet now Groen, like Baud, who personally visited with De Kock following his reception of the letter, rejected the reactionary invitation of the king.<sup>693</sup> The literature has acknowledged these responses as finally quenching all reactionary sentiments that persisted within the newly established parliamentary democracy. Thus, the historical significance of Groen’s reply at the time should not be underestimated, as unfortunately has been done throughout the body of literature.

As noted in the previous chapter, many authors have also downplayed the significance of Groen’s reply by projecting a simplistic evolution of his ideas on political

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<sup>689</sup> Groen, *Onderwijswet*, 19 “Maar dit stelsel is er nu eenmaal.”

<sup>690</sup> Wouter Hugenholtz, *Het geheim van paleis Kneuterdijk: De wekelijkse gesprekken van koning Willem II met zijn minister J.C. Baud over het koloniale beleid en de herziening van de grondwet, 1841-1848* (Amsterdam: KITLV, 2008), 9-10, 18, 22, 28.

<sup>691</sup> Boogman, *Rondom 1848*, 152.

<sup>692</sup> Van der Meulen, *Willem III*, 338.

<sup>693</sup> Boogman, *Rondom 1848*, 156-159; Van der Meulen, *Willem III*, 338-340.

authority. Even in this response to the king, through the narrative build-up of his argument affirming the contemporary system, Groen still noted that he in no way advocated democratization. Rather, his rhetorical narrative strategies as means for political self-constitution and self-positioning provide the key to unlocking the dynamics of this choice for non-intervention on Groen's part.

In continuing his letter of response, Groen noted that every attempt at changing the system itself was doomed to amount to nothing more than yet another tumultuous revolution.<sup>694</sup> For Groen, whether the people “participated directly or indirectly in the organization of the public affairs” was not the core issue. In his narrative the government had to aid in working towards what had become the true political demand of the time: the advancement of higher moral standards.<sup>695</sup> Of course, given his Christian-historical narrative, these morals could be none other than those historical anti-revolutionary principles he had advocated throughout his historiographical and political works, such as his *Handbook on the History of the Fatherland* and *Unbelief and Revolution*. Thus, here his letter also reflected the narrative shift of emphasis that had enabled his political engagement throughout his career — a strategic position that strove to escape petty arguments regarding administrative and structural side issues, decentering the constitution and focusing instead on the underlying ideas and principles. This narrative shift away from the conventional public political discourse was an historicist means of political self-constitution par excellence. Since Groen viewed the politics of his day through the lens of this narrative, he saw the need for the establishment of an anti-revolutionary political party, which in itself was going to prove decisive not only for shaping Christian democratic political engagement for future generations, but also for laying the foundations of the Dutch political party system itself.

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<sup>694</sup> Groen, *Onderwijswet*, 19.

<sup>695</sup> *Ibid.*, 19-20 “rechtstreeksche of zijdelingse deelgenootschap aan de regeling der publieke zaak”.

Nonetheless, despite the clear narrative shift in emphasis towards theoretical or epistemic principles, Groen's letter did not shy away from making practical, immediate suggestions for reforms at that point in time, although, even then, it clearly carried the stamp of narrative sanction. He noted that withdrawal of the bill on primary education should be one of the first practical steps of a new government.<sup>696</sup> However, even this suggestion was made not for the sake of immediate structural objectives regarding the education system. Groen rather stressed the importance of rejecting the bill as vital to the intergenerational preservation of the "Christian character of the people," which was an educational objective "unmissable in terms of the national [Protestant] education."<sup>697</sup> Thus, his narrational emphasis on the vitality of the Christian character of the Dutch nation as providentially blessed with the privilege of preserving true religion, and the political engagement that this historical narrative sanctioned, was determinative for even his most practical suggestions in response to the king's reactionary tendencies.<sup>698</sup> This sentiment reflected the hope of reviving the dormant Christian spirit that he narrated to be ever-present among the Dutch people, from which he envisaged acquiring the necessary strength for successfully achieving all the anti-revolutionary political objectives. Thus Groen's contentment with the status quo has been wrongly interpreted as acceding to a more liberal position.<sup>699</sup> Following the historical narrative of *Unbelief and Revolution*, and in foreseeing and even hoping for the eventual (albeit non-revolutionary) downfall of liberal politics, Groen desired the Christian Dutch to be prepared to participate in the process of national Christian reconstruction and re-confessionalization when the time came.<sup>700</sup>

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<sup>696</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>697</sup> Ibid., "Christelijk karakter der Natie" "onmisbaar in de [Protestantsche] volksopvoeding".

<sup>698</sup> Groen, *Handboek* (1841), 3-4.

<sup>699</sup> See the discussion of the existing literature in chapter 5 section 3.1.

<sup>700</sup> See chapter 5 section 2.3.

With this objective Groen rejected any radical constitutional revision “in the sense of . . . 1840 and 1848”.<sup>701</sup> He rejected such a revision not because he had in principle accepted the status quo and adapted his political theory accordingly, but because in the narrative paradigm that sanctioned and structured his entire political existence, a revision just like the recent ones would make little difference in achieving his socio-political objectives. Groen’s narrative emphasis on the supremacy of epistemic principles was vital in structuring and sanctioning this choice for non-intervention at that particular time. Hence he argued in the letter that it would be better to clarify the spirit of the constitution as an authoritative interpretative guideline, for a change in form without a change in principles would merely pave the way for another (perhaps different) form of revolution.<sup>702</sup> This sentiment cannot be rightly grasped if isolated from the historical narrative plot that Groen set out in Lectures X-XIV of his *Unbelief and Revolution*. Here Groen narrated the post-revolutionary history of the Netherlands and of Europe so as to emphasize the repeated and inevitable failure of revolutionary politics under various political forms. Having the lived experience of many political changes and forms of government even during his own lifetime, he narratively structured what he considered to be a revolutionary cycle, in which under various and ever-changing forms of government, the revolutionary state remained intact.<sup>703</sup> This, he believed, allowed the revolutionary government to effectively maintain its monopoly while deceptively disguising itself under the veil of true change. In reality, the revolutionary state remained intact, argued Groen, but constantly re-manifested itself,

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<sup>701</sup> Groen, *Onderwijswet*, 21 “in den zin ... van 1840 en 1848”.

<sup>702</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>703</sup> Groen, *Ongeloof en revolutie* (2008), 227, 252.

albeit disguised under different forms.<sup>704</sup> This narrative paradigm guided Groen to decline the king's attempt at a constitutional revision or any recasting of the post-1848 system.

While Groen acknowledged that his stance on the schooling issue was a minority position in the Second Chamber at the time, he narrated the brief history of the constitutional parliamentary system (between 1848 and 1856) as one where marked changes in political direction had already occurred. Following this narrative perspective, he then expressed hope that the government, under the current system and through the legal democratic process, could come to the correct conclusions on a matter he regarded as vital to the preservation and furthering of the Dutch people's Christian character.<sup>705</sup> After assuring the king that the unaltered continuation of the democratic process would be to his benefit, he made a fascinating claim that exhibited the core rhetorical focus of his narrative re-description of reality: "Every defeat in the defense of a virtuous matter is a harbinger of victory. The opposition, after having repeatedly achieved success, ultimately surrenders to the supremacy of truth."<sup>706</sup> In Groen's historical narrative, the divinely established order of reality itself would, if need be, suffice to ensure the inevitable failure and collapse of every revolutionary system with which it was at odds. This narrative decentering of the constitutional parliamentary system was strategically effective in setting a completely different narrative stage with its own hope of success. Groen's narrative was here, as throughout his career, characterized by a re-plotting of the socio-political developments of his day in terms of an all-encompassing and inescapable epistemic-religious framework. In Groen's narrative existence, this was the decisive domain in which the battle between good and evil

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<sup>704</sup> G. Groen van Prinsterer, *Vrijheid, Gelijkheid, Broederschap: Toelichting van de spreuk der Revolutie*. (The Hague: J. Roering, 1848), 102.

<sup>705</sup> Groen, *Onderwijswet*, 23.

<sup>706</sup> Ibid. "elke nederlaag bij het verdedigen eener deugdelijke zaak, is eene voorbode der overwinning. De oppositie na de zege meermalen te hebben behaald, geeft zich eindelijk voor de overmagt gewonnen."

raged. He deliberately attempted to draw the king's attention to this stage and away from futile attempts at restoration, attempts that merely re-applied the revolutionary theories.

Continuing to narrate recent Dutch history after 1848, Groen noted that in 1853, after the April Movement, his party was indeed in a very favorable position. Nonetheless, this position was wasted due to a lack of principled politics. He therefore argued that the only advice he could in good conscience offer the king was that there was a need for a return to those political principles (and not necessarily political forms) under which the king's ancestors had flourished. With this, Groen, in light of the Christian-historical narrative, of course had anti-revolutionary political principles in mind, albeit with an "application amended according to the [demands of] the [new] circumstances."<sup>707</sup> At the heart of Groen's response, therefore, was a rhetorical plea for a principled political position that he narrated as rooted in and sanctioned by Dutch national history, but within the framework of the newly established constitutional democratic system. This rhetorical appeal was, in terms of its method and strategy, common for the time; in terms of its narrative and rhetorical content, however, it was very distinct. Not only the narrative repositioning, but the political strength and confidence Groen drew from the (historical) narrative, was distinctly shaped by his Christian faith in a God who is sovereign over history and will certainly accomplish his purposes for human society through history, regardless of the political system or framework used as a means. Groen's appeal was for the king and his party to be constructive and productive instruments in the achievement of these divine purposes and accomplishments.

Groen concluded his response to the king by noting that the king ought not to interfere in normal elections and parliamentary discussions regarding the education law (even while he acknowledged the king's right to do so), but should allow them to take their

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<sup>707</sup> *ibid.*, 24 "naar de omstandigheden gewijzigde toepassing".

normal course.<sup>708</sup> The hope in the revival of the true Dutch spirit, which, in Groen's narrative, had time and again proven to stand the test of time, formed the narrative theme by which Groen finally rounded off his letter.<sup>709</sup>

In a note accompanying the letter, Groen reacted to the prompts implying a potential role for him in the next cabinet. He wrote that he preferred his current independent position and that he regarded the time as ill-suited for occupying a cabinet position.<sup>710</sup>

Secretary De Kock replied on 26 May, thanking Groen for his response and noting that the king would take his advice into serious consideration.<sup>711</sup> Indeed, as twentieth-century historian J.C. Boogman has noted, after Groen's reply "there was no support for reactionary politics to be expected from either the antirevolutionary parliamentary representation or from the Reformed part of the nation." He added that the king took Groen's reply as a reprimand and that his attitude towards the anti-revolutionary consequently changed for the worse.<sup>712</sup>

Here, in the midst of a cabinet crisis and at a decisive point in time, the king gave Groen a platform to finally exercise some significant political influence and call for some of those reforms he had been publicly advocating for years. Yet Groen emphatically chose to decline to intervene. Given his background and his long-held convictions, this certainly came across as surprising. After all, he, perhaps more so than anyone else, voiced principled opposition to what the new constitutional system represented. For years he had been advocating, among other things, the restoration of some of the historical-political

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<sup>708</sup> Ibid., 24-25.

<sup>709</sup> Ibid.

<sup>710</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>711</sup> Groen, *Briefwisseling III*, 227.

<sup>712</sup> Boogman, *Rondom 1848*, 155 "was er voor reactionaire politieke plannen geen steun meer te verwachten noch van het antirevolutionaire 'pays légal' noch van het gereformeerde volk achter de kiezers."

relationships that previously characterized the Dutch political system. These included the public position of the Reformed Church through a constitutional mandate that the monarch must be Protestant, opposition to Thorbecke's 1854 poverty law that shifted public welfare from the domain of the church to the state, and the promotion of a constitutional Christian Sabbath (Sunday) law.<sup>713</sup> He also advocated the constitutional clarification and revision of education laws (including article 194 of the 1848 constitution itself), and called for counterbalancing the drive towards increased democratization and centralization.<sup>714</sup> Most importantly, however, he vocally opposed the general spirit of the constitution, and saw as non-negotiable the explicit constitutional or at least governmental recognition of a divinely ordained moral order and of divine authority as the guideline for all future legislation and parliamentary action.<sup>715</sup> In 1849, he had even noted that his submission to the new constitution was conditional upon the lack of a viable alternative.<sup>716</sup>

Nonetheless, following these discussions, Colonel Singendonck, whom Van der Brugghen had told that Groen did not desire a cabinet position, visited with Groen on 1 June to confirm this. Groen informed him that his backtracking on this matter was never intended to be unconditional.<sup>717</sup>

Groen later reflected that Singendonck had left him under the impression that the king desired to rearrange the education law and education system according to Groen's own agenda. Singendonck also clarified Groen's stance on a potential cabinet position with de Cock, who met with Groen again on 3 and 11 June. De Cock, however, now informed him

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<sup>713</sup> Groen, *Bijdrage tot herziening der Grondwet in Nederlandsche zin* (Leiden: S. & J. Luchtmans, 1840), 71-73, 99-100; *Narede van een vijfjarige strijd* (Utrecht: Kemink & Zoon 1855), 88.

<sup>714</sup> Groen, *Bijdrage 1840*, 110-111; Groen, *Adviezen*, 144; *Grondwetsherziening*, 393.

<sup>715</sup> Groen, *Grondwetsherziening*, 467.

<sup>716</sup> *Ibid.*, 476.

<sup>717</sup> Groen, *Briefwisseling III*, 229; Groen, *Bescheiden II*, 547.

that opposition towards Groen was too great at that stage.<sup>718</sup> In a letter to Van der Brugghen, however, De Kock noted that while he as an anti-revolutionary was welcome to be part of the king's plans for a new cabinet, there was too much objection to opening up a position for Groen, the leading anti-revolutionary at the time. This marked the end of any possibility of a cabinet position for the anti-revolutionary front man.<sup>719</sup>

In the meantime Colonel Singendonck had also written a letter to Van der Brugghen on 29 May to inform him that the king desired him for a cabinet position. In explaining the background to the king's decision, he noted that during a meeting on 8 May, De Kock had informed him that the king had opposed the new education law and that Groen, given his decisive role in opposing the bill and the cabinet of Van Hall-Donker Curtius, would be an ideal candidate for a cabinet position, combining the portfolios of Education and Reformed Services. In this position he could also take responsibility for a new education law. He noted that although Groen desired to treat the issue of education conventionally, through discussions in the Second Chamber, the king would still like to see Groen as part of a new cabinet, with the king planning to dissolve the existing cabinet by 10 June.<sup>720</sup> He was obviously unaware both of Groen's response to the king about a week earlier and of De Kock and the king's interpretation of it.

As noted, understanding Groen's reply as a political engagement sanctioned by his Christian-historical narrative, as opposed to an ideological change coinciding with the radical socio-political changes of 1848, highlights the historical significance of these events. Authors who have opted to ascribe Groen's actions here to an ideological change have interpreted this episode as reflecting the king's ignorance of Groen's change in position and consequent

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<sup>718</sup> Groen, *Briefwisseling* III, 229; Groen, *Bescheiden* II, 549.

<sup>719</sup> Groen, *Briefwisseling* III, 941.

<sup>720</sup> *Ibid.*, 940-941.

disappointment upon the realization thereof. However, understanding Groen's response in light of his narrative strategies for political engagement offers an unexplored and superior explanation for the motivations behind Groen's response. When acknowledging the rhetorical and practical dimension of the narrative underlying Groen's reply to the king via De Kock, Groen's choice for non-intervention can be highlighted as a historically important act solidifying the newly established constitutional-democratic parliamentary Dutch monarchy, a political system and framework that has remained intact in the Netherlands to this day. The historical significance of Groen's action can thereby be seen as threefold:

(i) At a time when the king was still an influential political figure and bent on changing the system inaugurated in 1848 once again, Groen helped solidify the Dutch constitutional democracy. He quenched the spirit of reactionary politics at a time when tumultuous political revolutions in Europe were by no means uncommon and the continual conflicts between king and cabinet evidenced that the new system was still vulnerable. With his response Groen fell out of favor with the king, but he maintained his position nonetheless, pointing to his principled steadfastness.

(ii) Secondly, he aided in shaping the framework of the Dutch democracy as one of constructive engagement by various contradicting positions and principles. His narrative sanctioned a principled engagement within this framework that he believed to be to the benefit of the country as a whole. His faith in the future success of his agenda, as rooted in his historical narrative, sanctioned active participation in, and a call for, the unaltered continuation of the democratic process.

(iii) Thirdly, Groen pioneered a new pathway for the fruitful and constructive engagement of orthodox Christian politics within the framework of a modern constitutional democracy — a framework that he himself would not have invented or desired. Particularly

in the face of many others in his Réveil party who preferred a return to some *status quo ante*, Groen managed to lead the formerly counter-revolutionary Bilderdijkian movement to an eclectic anti-revolutionary position, which enabled this pathway. He thereby laid the foundations of Christian democratic political engagement in the Netherlands, and also beyond its borders. This is evidenced by his legacy in the official founding in 1879 of the Anti-Revolutionary Party, the first Christian democratic party, and the successes its founder and Groen's successor Abraham Kuyper would later achieve within this paradigm.

#### **4. The Aftermath of Groen and Baud's Responses: A New Cabinet and the School Struggle**

After the disbandment of the cabinet on 10 June, Groen had also written a supplementary response to De Kock on 12 June in which he again noted that even the dismissal of Prime Minister Van Hall should in itself not have necessitated the disbandment of the entire cabinet. Finding a new minister to take up his position should not have been a difficult task, and would have contributed to increased ministerial stability.<sup>721</sup> It is clear that Groen, living and retaining an anti-revolutionary narrative, prioritized political stability as the immediate need at the time. For him stability was a necessary precondition for the moral re-awakening of the people in line with the traditional Dutch spirit and away from the destructive revolutionary fire.

On 14 June 1856, the anti-revolutionary Van der Bruggen was asked to form a new cabinet.<sup>722</sup> Van der Bruggen consequently met with Groen the next day, informing him of the plan and asking for his support, which he regarded as indispensable. According to

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<sup>721</sup> Groen, *Onderwijswet*, 31-33.

<sup>722</sup> Boogman, *Rondom 1848*, 160.

Groen's notes on the meeting, he had pleaded that as long as the education issue received the necessary attention and prominence and he could remain true to his conscience, Van der Bruggen could count on his support. However, in reflecting upon the meeting, Groen complained that Van der Bruggen had described his own agenda only vaguely.<sup>723</sup>

Many within Réveil circles (such as Chantepie de la Saussaye) welcomed the appointment of Van der Bruggen over Groen, whose potential cabinet they regarded as "untenable."<sup>724</sup>

In the midst of the process of forming a new cabinet, on 17 July Groen wrote a letter to Van Asch van Wijk, the likeminded judge of the District Court of Utrecht, from which we can gain supplementary insight into Groen's narrative framework. Groen lamented that liberalism was making strong inroads into Dutch society at the time. However, he concluded the letter as follows:

There is no reason for us to be discouraged; we trust in the virtue of our principles and the all-powerfulness of our supreme Leader; we may not deny that many gradually come to see the deceptions and dangers of the doctrines we fight against, and, with our eyes directed to Heaven, we can under all circumstances say: all will be all right.<sup>725</sup>

Groen's narrative was therefore characterized by a continual repositioning based on the socio-political reality of the time, but with a consistent appeal to unchanging, transcendent principles as the foundation from which a flexible political engagement became possible. This narrative always continued to express its hope in the re-awakening of what he considered to be the largely dormant Christian Dutch spirit, and there is no doubt Groen hoped that someone like Van der Bruggen would be instrumental in leading such a process.

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<sup>723</sup> Groen, *Onderwijswet*, 35.

<sup>724</sup> Groen, *Briefwisseling III*, 943-944 "onhoudbaar".

<sup>725</sup> *Ibid.*, 159 "Er is geen reden voor ons om ontmoedigd te zijn; wij vertrouwen op de deugdelijkheid onzer beginsels en het alvermogen van onzen oversten Leidsman; we mogen niet miskennen dat velen van lieverlede de bedriegelijkheid en gevaarlijkheid der leerstellingen die wij bestrijden, inzien, en, met het oog naar Boven, kunnen we onder alle omstandighede zeggen: het zal wel zijn."

The rhetoric and strategy of this narrative, as expressed at this particular point in time, was especially significant in light of two facts: (i) Groen wrote this letter after experiencing a couple of personal political setbacks: apart from losing all hope of a future cabinet position, he had suffered an unsuccessful re-election campaign for the Second Chamber in the district Zwolle, which he mentioned in the letter; (ii) secondly, as with his formal reply to the king in May, these sentiments were expressed at a time when a number of right-leaning Réveil figures, such as the more counter-revolutionary Van Assen and Da Costa, encouraged Groen to work for a recasting of the political system itself. Just two weeks before receiving the king's letter, for example, Van Assen had written to Groen that the form of government initiated in 1848, with its direct elections, itself formed a hindrance to the advancement of anti-revolutionary politics.<sup>726</sup> Da Costa had also, in 1853, expressed his concern to Groen that the eclectic anti-revolutionary path of Groen deviated too much from that of Bilderdijk.<sup>727</sup> As noted in previous chapters, however, Groen had already, long prior to 1848, explicitly distanced himself from the radical restorationist or reactionary tendencies of Bilderdijk's position.

After a cabinet formation-process that spanned two weeks, the new cabinet under the leadership of Van der Bruggen was officially inaugurated on the 1 July 1856.<sup>728</sup>

The schooling issue was at the top of Groen's priorities at the time, and would receive thorough parliamentary treatment under this cabinet. Nonetheless, history shows that Groen, perhaps unduly assuming that other anti-revolutionaries supported his particular positions unconditionally, wrongly believed Van der Bruggen (and the king) to

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<sup>726</sup> Groen, *Onderwijswet*, 15-16.

<sup>727</sup> Groen, *Brieven van Da Costa*, 150.

<sup>728</sup> Van der Meulen, *Willem III*, 340.

completely agree with him on the issue.<sup>729</sup> From their meeting on 15 June, Groen understood that Van der Bruggen would follow and advocate for his schooling position.<sup>730</sup> He had understood from past discussions in the Second Chamber, in December 1853, that Van der Bruggen was on the same page as him in opposing the (religiously) mixed public school.<sup>731</sup> During this sitting of the Second Chamber in late 1853, Van der Bruggen had noted:

I desire only to encourage the interior minister to attend to the wise words of the honorable speaker in front of me [Groen], when he points to the possibility and necessity, also in preparation of the next education law, in terms of the principle of keeping the mixed school facultatively split. I believe this principle can equally well be expressed by saying that the mixed school should not be compulsory anymore. . . . When one . . . would come to the conviction that compulsory mixed schools are foreign to us, yet are not only not indigenous, but detrimental for the education of our people . . . then the way will be paved for a peaceful resolution of this important issue.<sup>732</sup>

Statements like these led Groen to assume too much regarding Van der Bruggen's agreement with him on the schooling issue. For his part, Van der Bruggen seemingly believed that the facultative splitting of public schools could not receive broad support once it became clear that there would be no chance of a thoroughly anti-revolutionary cabinet.<sup>733</sup>

Although Groen's assumption of their agreement was not totally unfounded, he clearly misinterpreted Van der Bruggen's position. In a letter dated 3 May 1853, the latter

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<sup>729</sup> Boogman, *Rondom 1848*, 161.

<sup>730</sup> Groen, *Adviezen*, 101-102.

<sup>731</sup> *Ibid.*, 165-166, 191.

<sup>732</sup> *Handelingen der staaten-generaal over onderwijs, kunsten en wetenschappen 1853-1854* (Leiden: De Mortier & Zoon, 1854), 50 "Ik wensch den Minister van Binnenlandsche Zaken alleen op het hart te drukken het wijze word dat door den geachten spreker voor mij gezeten is uitgesproken, wanneer hij wees op de mogelijkheid en op de noodzakelijkheid, ook also eene voorbereiding tot de volgende wet op onderwijs, om het beginsel aan te kleven dat de gemengdheid der scholen facultatief moet worden gehouden. Ik meen dat dit beginsel even goed kan worden uitgemaakt, door te zeggen, dat de gemengdheid niet meer verplichtend moet zijn ... Wanneer men ... tot de overtuiging zal komen dat het beginsel verpligte gemengdheid der scholen bij ons vreemd, aan de wet opgedrongen en in dezelve niet inheemsch is en nadeelig voor onze volksopvoeding en onderwijs ... dan zal de weg gebaad worden voor eene vreedzame oplossing der gewichtige quaestie."

<sup>733</sup> Diepenhorst, *Groen*, 413.

indeed argued against the mixed school, but in favor of separation through the establishment of private-religious schools by parents' initiative. As a member of the ethical-irenic wing of the Réveil, he thought splitting schools by state sanction would violate the fundamentally voluntary nature of religion. Additionally, he argued that the costs of splitting all public schools would be too high and that teachers' salaries would suffer as a consequence.<sup>734</sup> Perhaps Groen's misunderstanding of Van der Bruggen could itself be attributed to the narrative framework within which he operated: believing his anti-revolutionary position to represent the true need and desire of the Dutch people, he took it for granted that men like Van der Bruggen, who truly had the best interest of the Christian Dutch people at heart, would naturally be inclined to follow his core recommendations.

Regardless, Groen's ensuing disappointment resulted from this misunderstanding. On 5 July, in the closing speech of the first week of the parliament's session, Groen would hear that the king's desire was to continue on the path of the mixed school. With that, Groen's fate in this parliamentary battle was sealed, eventually culminating in his 1857 resignation from the Second Chamber.<sup>735</sup> He would, however, continue his fight for Christian education, first outside of parliament and again inside parliament when he returned in 1862.<sup>736</sup>

Authors positing an ideological change in Groen's political theory to explain his actions in 1856 have viewed the whole episode as one big defeat: Groen now had come to embrace the new system as a means unto his goal of societal re-Christianization, but he ultimately failed. However, while the disappointment of 5 July was undoubtedly a shattering disappointment, a look at the objectives behind Groen's narrative strategic engagement

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<sup>734</sup> Groen, *Briefwisseling* III, 935-938.

<sup>735</sup> Groen, *Adviezen*, 187.

<sup>736</sup> Van Vliet, *Historische benadering*, 227-228, 232.

opens up some previously unconsidered dynamics of this historic episode. In the events prior to the disappointment, Groen enjoyed significant unheralded success. With his reply to the king via De Kock, Groen successfully applied his narrative to the political discourse when given the opportunity to do so. He achieved certain political goals, especially in re-applying his anti-revolutionary principles in a new context and getting his highest political priority on the national agenda. Even though the education law that was eventually accepted proved a huge disappointment to him, others were forced to take note of Groen's narrative, and Van der Bruggen's cabinet finally made the schooling issue a priority. Due in part to the practical success of Groen's narrativized engagement, the young and vulnerable Dutch constitutional democracy was solidified against reactionary tendencies and also shaped to make room for principled discussions from contrary perspectives. Groen, through his narrativized engagement, was an unneglectable figure in the nineteenth-century victory over restorationist or reactionary sentiments within the Dutch constitutional democracy. His Christian-historical narrative sanctioned these successful political engagements. Thus, like the famous author of the constitution and first prime minister, Thorbecke, as well as many other nineteenth-century figures, Groen helped shape and steer the national political discourse and consequently, given his 1856 choice for non-intervention, influenced the future.

## **5. Conclusion**

Groen's actions in 1856 in no way amounted to a defeat, as it has often been represented in the literature. Central to understanding this is recognizing that narrativized engagement, rather than a change of principles, was at the heart of Groen's strategic choice for non-intervention in 1856. By virtue of this strategic choice, Groen achieved significant success as a statesman. The historical significance of Groen's reply on 23 May 1856 is threefold: (i) it quenched reactionary politics in the Netherlands when European nation-states were just emerging from a tumultuous period marked by revolutionary instability, thereby solidifying the still vulnerable Dutch constitutional democracy; (ii) it shaped this democracy and its process as a stable system marked by the constructive political engagement of opposing worldviews; and (iii) it opened up a new, untried pathway for orthodox Christians to participate in the democratic political process. In this regard Groen's narrative strategies' success in finding solid ground for the Christian-historical worldview as a participant within the new constitutional democratic framework proved historically decisive.

## CONCLUSION

The phenomenological-narrative approach proposed by historian David Carr and applied to the study of Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer's career as statesman-historian has allowed me to investigate the function of Groen's narrative history in coherently sanctioning and establishing a foundation for his political position and movement, as well as his anti-revolutionary engagement in the nineteenth century. Through narrative Groen practically established and continually re-positioned himself and his movement according to the socio-political challenges of his day. By analyzing Groen's narrative, I have managed to venture where previous scholarship has stopped short of: revealing the narrative rhetorical strategies of Groen's historiographical, political, and autobiographical writings concerning the justification of his political positioning and actions. This has allowed me to transcend the dichotomy of Groen as statesman or Groen as historian, which is implicitly present throughout the existing literature. Groen serves as a good example of the practical historicist mode of political engagement typical for the nineteenth century. This study demonstrates that the historical relation of Groen as historian and Groen as statesman was more integrated and mutually interdependent than it has been presented in previous scholarship.

To briefly look back: The first two chapters of this dissertation mainly served as a biography of Groen's life and his historical context, for the main purpose of introducing him to an international audience who might be unfamiliar with him.

Chapter 3 provided an overview of this body of existing scholarship, for the purpose of showing the absence of this much-needed integrated perspective that my dissertation

offers. I also briefly mentioned various shortcomings in the literature that I later engage and improve upon.

In Chapter 4 I turned to Groen's rhetorical re-description of the Dutch historical narrative along biblical covenantal lines, as it formed the framework from which he viewed society and engaged politically within that societal context. His work as historian also served a very practical function in establishing his own political position within his narrative of the unfolding of history — that is, his present context understood in light of the past and an envisaged future. Through his presentation of the historical narrative he also provided his fellow Dutch Reformed Christians, who collectively saw the time as rather tumultuous, with a firm foothold in their societal historical context. His narrative helped to establish this section of the population in the public mind as an integral part of Dutch national identity and national life, even during a time of increasing societal de-confessionalization and democratization. Additionally, Groen used and re-used his (re)description of historical reality to not only legitimize his political positions but also win others over for his political agenda. Through the Groenian narrative the anti-revolutionary movement and later political party was born and shaped. The Anti-Revolutionary Party, established in 1879, was the first ever Christian democratic party.

In chapter 5 I discussed how Groen as a statesman employed narrative strategies similar to those of his opponents, like Thorbecke, to politically position himself and constructively engage with other positions during his active public life, especially as parliamentarian. Like his opponents, Groen appealed to a distinct historical narrative to sanction his political self-constitution and (re)positioning. As sanctioned by his narrative, Groen's political agenda centered around the issue of education, which he saw as the necessary means to revive the true Dutch spirit informed by the Reformed faith. In

contradistinction to claims made in the existing literature, I showed how Groen's continuing engagement as a statesman within the constitutional democracy cannot be understood in terms of a political-theoretical development in his mind, but must rather be seen in terms of his practical political repositioning as narratively sanctioned. In contradistinction to authors such as Diepenhorst (1932), Brants (1951), Dooyeweerd (1959), Zwaan (1973), Kruidenier (1975), Kuiper (2001/2004), Sap (2004), Bijl (2011), and Krijger (2015), I argued that Groen did not undergo a significant change of mind regarding the nature of political authority, nor did he ever embrace the liberal constitution or increased democratization in themselves.

In chapter 6, I turned to Groen's choice for non-intervention in 1856 as a test case – an episode reconstructed to elucidate the effectiveness and value of my narrative approach for producing an original, integrated and holistic picture of Groen as historically significant statesman-historian.

The background to this episode involved Groen's objective of establishing a Christian-national system of education to counteract the societal inroads made by Enlightenment liberalism. This was indeed a central aim of his entire career as anti-revolutionary parliamentarian. Through his relentless narrative emphasis on ideological principles throughout history – and consequently in the public domain – he managed to do more than merely publicize Christian education as a prominent and national issue. While a member of the Dutch Second Chamber, he actually played an important role in the disbanding of one of the first cabinets of the Dutch constitutional democracy under the reign of King Willem III, a cabinet with which the monarch had a strained relationship. His petition against the 1856 education bill proved instrumental in the king's justification for the disbandment of the Van Hall-Donker Curtius cabinet.

In May 1856, when opting to disband this cabinet, the king therefore looked to Groen for advice in the midst of the political instability of the time, hinting at a rearrangement of the political system itself. Groen's lifelong opposition to liberalism helped him gain a reputation which seemed to make him a natural ally for the king's reactionary attempt. Groen's reply to the inquiries of the king — in which he declined the latter's suggestions — proved a disappointment to the monarch, given his restorationist leanings. The bulk of the existing literature has wrongly explained Groen's actions from the 1850s onward, and especially those during this episode in 1856, according to an ideological change Groen allegedly underwent during the late 1840s. This myth has been dispelled, and consequently we can re-appreciate the historical significance of Groen's role in this episode from 1856.

Groen's career-long narrative emphasis on epistemic foundations and principles sanctioned his decline of the king's hints towards another constitutional revision and a possible change of the electoral system and form of government. Groen's 1856 reply to the king proved historically vital for the young and vulnerable Dutch constitutional democracy. His Christian-historical narrative tended to decenter the constitution in favor of the spirit and principles that drove Dutch politics and society at the time, which was Groen's major concern. If the public political mindset and generally accepted principles were not changed, Groen believed, then all systemic or constitutional changes would prove to be merely artificial and even counterproductive in the long run.

Although in the short term Groen's response to the king proved to be a disappointment, for in 1857 another education bill that Groen vigorously opposed was accepted, Groen's narratively sanctioned choice for non-intervention in 1856 nevertheless proved historically decisive on three levels:

(i) It helped solidify the Dutch constitutional democracy by aiding in quenching the spirit of reactionary politics at a time when tumultuous political revolutions in Europe were by no means uncommon, and when the continual conflicts between king and cabinet evidenced that the new system was still vulnerable.

(ii) It helped to shape the framework of the Dutch democracy as a system of constructive engagement involving various contradicting political positions, parties, and principles.

(iii) It pioneered a new, unventured pathway for the fruitful and constructive engagement of orthodox Christian politics within the framework of a modern constitutional democracy — a framework that he himself would not have invented or desired.

Whether or not one views the development of European nation-states into constitutional democracies as an inevitable process that universally characterized the time period, one is forced to acknowledge the vital historical role played by the anti-revolutionary Groen in the development and shaping of the early Dutch constitutional democracy. His Christian-historical narrative emphasis on divine providence as guiding and directing all of history, and in particular Dutch history, played a decisive role. His narrative commitment to the divinely established order of creation as historically ensuring the failures of all “revolutionary” endeavors gave him the confidence to believe in the (long-term) strength and inevitable success of his anti-revolutionary position, even when he represented only a small minority position in his own historical context. This commitment was central to his strategy in 1856. This narrative served the rhetorical function of calling others to politically engage with confidence, while also swaying others to join what he considered to be his ultimately winning side. The underappreciated eschatological elements underpinning his narrative rhetorically structured his story as one spanning past, present, and future, and

they were aimed at achieving practical political objectives and inciting others to participate in the process.

To cast Groen as adapting his principles and theories for relevance's sake after 1848 is to misinterpret his motives his historical contribution to the Dutch constitutional democracy. Groen must rather be viewed as treating the radical socio-political changes that historically coincided with his career in a typical nineteenth-century historicist fashion, although as sanctioned by his distinct Christian-historical narrative. With regard to his narrative re-description of reality as a rhetorical mode of political engagement, Groen was methodologically a child of his time, more so than has been acknowledged in the literature until now. At the same time, he also stands out for his distinct anti-revolutionary narrative and the political positions he accordingly took. The strategies, purposes, and methodology behind Groen's history writing should therefore be considered modern in the post-Enlightenment nineteenth century context, all the while sanctioning a distinctly ideologically anti-modernist (i.e. anti-"revolutionary") political position and practice. Groen embraced the strategies of the post-Enlightenment Rankean historiography of his age, perhaps more than he himself would have acknowledged, and more than those after him who have continued to take up his narrative may have realized. In terms of his rhetorical re-description of history itself and his socio-political positioning, however, his reputation as an anti-Enlightenment thinker and political and historiographical dissident must be maintained. In fact, I have shown that most of the scholarship has wrongly presented Groen post-1848 as more of a modernist than he actually was. Groen maintained his traditionalist stance in the midst of change more than he has received credit for, but likewise scholarship until now has underappreciated the significance of his carefully calculated strategic narrative (re-)positioning in light of the socio-political challenges of his historical context.

The implications of this study for nineteenth-century historiography relates directly to the manner in which we view post-Enlightenment political discourse. Going beyond the theoretical content of political positions, which tend to emphasize traditionalists of the time as simply enemies of the Enlightenment, the analysis of the narrative strategies that sanctioned those positions provides a new way of seeing the strategic similarities between liberals and anti-liberals of the nineteenth century as children of their time. Strikingly, Groen, though an ideological dissident in the nineteenth century, did much the same thing as a “mainstream” figure like Hegel in strategizing his narrative within the broader scope of history and human reality. This opens up the potential for other studies of nineteenth-century political figures and engagements from the standpoint of narrative, which could potentially draw attention to various underappreciated and unexplored elements of the rhetorical strategies underlying political positions and engagements of their time.

Furthermore, the present study challenges historians to re-evaluate currently prevailing narratives concerning the nineteenth-century post-Enlightenment de-confessionalization (often problematically termed ‘secularization’) of European nation-states. For the study of Groen has shown how one anti-revolutionary Christian statesman actively engaged, participated in, and aided in shaping the process of democratization characterizing the period, even without expressing his principled support — a contribution for which he has not been credited until now. Viewing a figure like Groen as one of the historically significant solidifiers and shapers of the Dutch constitutional democracy, as this study has shown him to be, opens up intriguing questions concerning the role of religious traditionalists and other dissidents at that time in Europe. Exploring whether this may have been underestimated in existing historiography is a potentially intriguing challenge for historians of the nineteenth century.

What my emphasis on narrative in this dissertation has shown is that, without a compromise of his core religious and political positions, and even as an anti-revolutionary, Groen was even more politically and historically influential and successful in his practical public engagement than the existing scholarship has acknowledged. His contribution demands appreciation beyond the traditional confines of Dutch Reformed scholarship. By virtue of his Christian-historical narrative political engagement in the early democratic processes of the Dutch constitutional state, Groen has left an important mark on Dutch history — of which historians of the nineteenth century would do well to take note.

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## APPENDIX

### Translated titles of sources and their original language titles

#### Works by Groen

1813 Re-thought in Light of our National History	1813 In het licht der volkshistorie herdacht
Advice in the Doubled Second Chamber of the Estates-General	Adviezen in de Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal in dubbelen getale
Answer to Mr. M.C. van Hall	Antwoord aan mr. M.C. van Hall
Constitutional Revision and Unanimity	Grondwetsherziening en eensgezindheid
Contribution to Constitutional Revision in the Dutch Manner	Bijdrage tot herziening der Grondwet in Nederlandsche zin
Dutch Thoughts	Nederlandsche Gedachten
Epilogue to a Five-year Battle	Narede van een vijfjarige strijd
Essay on the Means by which Truth is Known and Confirmed	Proeve over de middelen waardoor de waarheid wordt gekent en gestaafd
Handbook on the History of the Fatherland	Handboek der Geschiedenis van het Vaderland
How the Education Law of 1857 Came to Be: Historical Contribution	Hoe de onderwijswet van 1857 tot stand kwam: Historische bijdrage
In Remembrance of Stahl	Ter nagedachtenis van Stahl
On the excellence of the Justinian Code, Manifest from its Principles	Disputatio juridica inauguralis de juris Justiniani praestantia ex rationibus eius manifesta
Liberty, Equality, Fraternity: Elucidation of the Revolutionary Maxim	Vrijheid, Gelijkheid, Broederschap: Toelichting van de spreuk der revolutie
On National Spirit and Good Citizenship	Over Volksgeest en burgerzin
Primary Education and article 194 of the Constitution – Paliamentary Advice of 28 September 1864	Het lager onderwijs en art. 194 der Grondwet – Parlementair advies van 28 september 1864

Religious Nationality with regard to the Netherlands and the Evangelical Alliance	Religieuze nationaliteit met betrekking tot Nederland en de Evangelische Alliantie
The Right of the Reformed Church	Het regt der Hervormde Gezindheid
Unbelief and Revolution – A Series of Historical Lectures	Ongeloof en revolutie – Eene reeks van historische voorlezingen
Varieties on Constitutional Law and Politics	Verscheidenheden over staatsrecht en politiek

### **Other Sources**

(Da Costa) Objections to the Spirit of the Age	Bezwaren tegen den geest der eeuw
(Heeren) Historical Researches into the Politics, Intercourse, and Trade of the Principal Nations of Antiquity	Ideen über die Politik, den Verkehr und den Handel der vornehmsten Völker der alten Welt
(Stahl) A Historical View of the Philosophy of Law	Die Philosophie des Rechts nach geschichtlicher Ansicht
(Von Haller) Restoration of Political Science	Restauration der Staats-Wissenschaft
(Von Savigny) On the Vocation of our Age for Legislation and Jurisprudence	Vom Beruf unserer Zeit für Gesetzgebung und Rechtswissenschaft

# ACADEMIC SUMMARIES

## English

Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer (1801-1876) was a Dutch statesman and historian whose legacy includes a great oeuvre. He was the founder of an Anti-Revolutionary political movement in the Netherlands, which was characterized by its opposition towards the Enlightenment-inspired liberalism of the time. In the Netherlands he is generally best remembered for his significant role as an advocate for Christian-Protestant education. A casual visitor to the Netherlands should come across the name Groen van Prinsterer in the great number of schools and streets named after him, even though the general public is still greatly ignorant concerning him.

Studies of the life and work of Groen van Prinsterer have come almost exclusively from within Dutch Reformed circles and have consequently emphasized Groen's role as historical forebear, either as statesman or as historian. An integrated and contextual view of Groen as statesman-historian is surprisingly absent. David Carr's phenomenological-narrative approach, which emphasizes the practical function of narrative for the sanctioning of a particular socio-political positioning in one's historic context, allows this dissertation to fill that very gap. This approach allows for an investigation into Groen's historical and autobiographical narrative strategies as sanctioning his political action. Groen rhetorically utilized his covenantal-eschatological narrative of Dutch national history and his historical position within this narrative spanning past, present and future, as justification for taking a particular political position in his historical context – one aimed at future societal

transformation. His antirevolutionary position was characterized by opposition to the prevailing liberalism of his time. He advocated the re-Christianization of the Dutch people and a restoration of Christian principles as foundations of state and society.

Groen narratively represented Dutch national history from the sixteenth-century Revolt against Spanish until the mid-nineteenth century as a distinct manifestation of the Biblical-Covenantal “curse-blessing” and “tree-fruit” paradigms. Thereby Groen’s anti-revolutionary narrative rhetorically presented as successful all human endeavors in accordance with God’s will, while godless human projects must inevitably end in failure. In Groen’s narrative, socio-economic crises were explained in religious terms. Thereby he attempted to win over non-Christians and liberals. Groen’s narrative was characterized by a dichotomy between the “Revolution” and Christianity, which decisively shaped his history of the Netherlands. His narrative exhibited an idealization of the societal structures and beliefs prevalent prior to the French- and Batavian Revolutions, both of which he presented as the fruits of apostasy from Christianity.

Groen’s political positioning and engagement were narratively sanctioned by his presentation of history, which provided the plot as narrative framework in which he could strive towards his ideals of societal re-Christianization and a restoration of Christian principles. Groen could thereby present his anti-revolutionary position as representative of the true historical Dutch spirit of the past and one destined for success in the future.

Groen was born into a moderately liberal Dutch family at the start of the nineteenth century during the heyday of the Batavian Republic. He purposefully maneuvered himself away from the spirit of his upbringing, however, from his time at Leiden University (1817–1823). At Leiden Groen had come into contact with a number of influential conservative thinkers at the time, most notably Willem Bilderdijk and Isaac Da Costa. After graduating in

Leiden, Groen worked as an advocate and continued doing historical research. In 1827, when Groen moved to Brussels to work as refendary of the king, he came into contact with one of the most prominent Réveil figures at the time, Reverend J.H. Merle d'Aubigne, who left a lasting impression upon him. The combination of the Réveil's Christianity-inspired socio-political concerns and the socio-political tumult preceding the 1830 Belgian Revolution greatly shaped Groen's self-positioning as anti-revolutionary.

After 1830 he embraced the role and identity of anti-revolutionary and Réveil front man in the Netherlands. As leading figure within the Réveil, Groen strategically positioned himself at the front of the middle party in terms of the Dutch Reformed theological landscape at the time: he remained a member of the Dutch Reformed Church but sympathized with the theological conservatism of the *Afgescheidenen*. This religious self-positioning was sanctioned by his covenantal-theological narrative of Dutch history: he emphasized a historic role of the Calvinist faith and the Reformed Church in shaping Dutch nationhood. In this manner he strategically justified remaining within the Reformed Church, which he regarded as enjoying public rights based on its historic position in national life. At the same time, however, he sided with theological conservatives outside of his denomination against the liberal Groningen School within the Reformed Church.

During the 1840s Groen became increasingly involved in public political discussions, in particular on the constitutional revisions at the time. He opposed the 1848 constitutional revision produced by the liberal statesman, Johan Rudolph Thorbecke. Groen's main concern regarding the 1848 constitutional revision was therefore primarily focused on its underlying liberal principles, rather than with most of the content itself.

Groen was elected to the Second Chamber of the Dutch Parliament in 1849 where he remained until 1857. During this time he focused primarily on the issue of education.

Groen's Christian view of history, which presented a true Dutch Protestant Christian spirit as the heart and soul of Dutch nationhood, justified his emphasis on Christian education as the necessary means of rekindling this national spirit. He believed this, at the time, to be the first necessary step in the ongoing battle of Christianity against the "Revolution", a covenantal-eschatologic dichotomy around which he based his narrative of history. In 1856 Groen initiated a petition against the proposed education law of Minister van Rhenen, which gained around ten thousand signatures. The king, suffering a strained relationship with the cabinet at the time, used the success of Groen's petition to argue that the Dutch people opposed the cabinet, which he also consequently disbanded.

During this episode the king inquired in a letter to Groen for his thoughts on the political system at the time, suggesting the possibility of restorationist steps aimed at recasting the system yet again. His letter also implicitly suggested a leading political role for Groen. To the king's surprise, however, Groen reacted negatively to his suggestions, arguing that the system should be allowed to continue its democratic course without interference. Groen's fight for Christian principles as fundamental for the socio-political domain justified his choice for non-intervention at the time, as he regarded changes in the political form as too shallow and artificial to produce the sustainable change he narratively envisioned. The king's attitude towards Groen consequently changed: whereas he had previously considered him for a cabinet position, this possibility was thereafter excluded. Groen's narrative self-positioning enables us to understand why he reacted dismissively to the king's requests.

My analysis shows how Groen's reply to the king was historically decisive on three levels: i) it quenched the spirit of restorationism when revolutionary changes and restorations were not uncommon in Europe and the young Dutch constitutional democracy was evidently still vulnerable; ii) it opened up a pathway of constructive engagement for

Christian politics in a modern democracy, and consequently for the first Christian democratic party in the world, the Anti-Revolutionary Party, founded by his successor Abraham Kuyper in 1879; and iii) it contributed to shaping the Dutch democracy, a system that has endured to this day, as one allowing for constructive engagement and discussion between conflicting political positions. In this regard Groen's historic role as a solidifier of the Dutch constitutional democracy, a system he would not have invented himself, has been underappreciated in the existent literature. One of the greatest contributions of this dissertation lies in showing how the significance of Groen's choice for non-intervention has been wrongly downplayed by looking for a supposed ideological change to explain it. Rather, Groen's narrative emphasis on the decisiveness of core, eternal principles, in decentering the constitution, lay at the heart of this political action in 1856.

After retiring from parliament in 1857, Groen returned to his work as historian before returning to the Second Chamber in 1862 to continue his fight for Christian education, albeit with a different strategy. It was through Groen's actions, both inside and outside of parliament, advocating Christian education that the issue of education became a prominent national issue.

Groen finally retired from parliament in 1865 due to health reasons. He would continue to be active in social engagements within the context of the Réveil for several more years, but he eventually retired from public life in 1870, handing over the reins of the anti-revolutionary movement to Abraham Kuyper. Groen would thereafter continue to write important autobiographical reflections towards the end of his life in which he narrated his own career so as not only to justify his own position, but also to enable the fruitful continuation of the anti-revolutionary political movement in the Netherlands. In 1879, three

years after his death, the movement he started evolved into the first Christian democratic political party in the history of the world, the Anti-Revolutionary Party.

Through the application of Carr's narrative approach to the study of Groen as simultaneously statesman and historian, for the first time a holistic picture of Groen as Anti-Revolutionary public figure emerges, casting new light on the political strategies behind his public engagement. This enables a fresh appreciation of Groen's historical significance for constitutional democracy in the Netherlands.

## Nederlands

### *Strategische narratieven: Groen van Prinsterer als negentiende-eeuwse staatsman-historicus*

Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer (1801-1876) was een Nederlandse staatsman en historicus die een groot oeuvre heeft nagelaten. Hij was de grondlegger van de antirevolutionaire politieke beweging in Nederland, die zich afzette tegen het door de Verlichting geïnspireerde liberalisme. Hij leeft in Nederland vooral in de herinnering voort vanwege zijn pleidooi voor onderwijs op protestants-christelijke grondslag.

Groen van Prinsterers leven en werk is tot op heden vooral bestudeerd door Nederlandse historici uit gereformeerde kring. Zij richten zich op de rol van Groen als ideologische voorganger, en ze belichten bijna uitsluitend Groen als staatsman of Groen als historicus. Een integrale en contextuele beschouwing van Groen als staatsman-historicus ontbreekt verrassend genoeg nog. David Carrs fenomenologisch-narratieve benadering, met zijn nadruk op de praktische functie van narratief voor de sanctionering van een bepaalde sociaal-politieke positie in een gegeven historische context, maakt het mogelijk om met dit proefschrift die leemte te vullen. Carrs benadering biedt de mogelijkheid om de door Groen ten behoeve van zijn politiek handelen ingezette historische en autobiografische narratieve strategieën te onderzoeken. Groen gebruikte zijn verbondstheologische-eschatologische narratief van de Nederlandse nationale geschiedenis en zijn historische positie in dit narratief van verleden, heden en toekomst, als rechtvaardiging voor zijn antirevolutionaire politieke positie die gericht was op een toekomstige maatschappelijke transformatie. Zijn antirevolutionaire positie werd gekenmerkt door oppositie tegen het in die tijd dominante

liberalisme. Groen bepleitte een herkerstening van het Nederlandse volk en een herstel van de christelijke beginselen als de grondslag van staat en maatschappij.

Groen stelde de Nederlandse nationale geschiedenis vanaf de Opstand tot aan het midden van de negentiende eeuw voor als een duidelijke manifestatie van de Bijbels-verbondstheologische “straf-zegen” en “boom-vrucht” paradigma’s. Daardoor presenteerde Groens antirevolutionaire narratief alle menselijke pogingen die met Gods wil overeenkwamen als succesvol, terwijl goddeloze menselijke projecten gedoemd waren om te mislukken. In Groens historisch narratief werden sociaal-economische crises in religieuze termen geduid. Daarmee poogde hij ook niet-christenen en liberalen te overtuigen van zijn antirevolutionaire positie. Zijn narratief van de geschiedenis van Nederland werd gekarakteriseerd door de dichotomie tussen de “Revolutie” en het Christendom en door een idealisering van de maatschappelijke structuren en de heersende overtuigingen van vóór de Franse en Bataafse Revoluties. Deze Revoluties presenteerde hij als het resultaat van de afvalligheid van het christendom.

Zo werd Groens politieke positionering en politieke betrokkenheid narratief bekrachtigd door zijn interpretatie van de geschiedenis, die de verhaallijn leverde op basis waarvan hij herkerstening van de samenleving en herstel van de christelijke beginselen bepleitte. Groen kon daarmee zijn antirevolutionaire positie presenteren als de ware historische Nederlandse geest die was voorbestemd voor succes in de toekomst.

Groen werd aan het begin van de negentiende eeuw, tijdens de hoogtijdagen van de Bataafse Republiek, geboren in een gematigd liberaal en Waals-hervormd gezin. Gedurende zijn studietijd aan de Universiteit Leiden (1817-1823) maakte hij zich doelbewust los van de geest van zijn opvoeding. In Leiden kwam Groen in contact met een aantal invloedrijke conservatieve denkers van die tijd, met name Willem Bilderdijk en Isaäk da Costa. Na zijn

promotie in de rechten werkte Groen als advocaat en bleef hij historisch onderzoek doen.

Toen Groen in 1827 naar Brussel verhuisde om te werken als referendaris van de koning, kwam hij in contact met een van de meest prominente Réveil-figuren van dat moment, de predikant J.H. Merle d'Aubigné, die een blijvende indruk op hem maakte. De christelijk geïnspireerde sociaal-politieke betrokkenheid van het Réveil in combinatie met en de sociaal-politieke onrust in de aanloop naar de Belgische opstand van 1830 was een doorslaggevende ervaring die Groens zelfpositionering als antirevolutionair beïnvloedde.

Na 1830 nam Groen de rol van voorman van de antirevolutionaire beweging en het Réveil op zich. Als leidersfiguur in het Réveil kon Groen zich strategisch positioneren binnen de voorhoede van deze middenpartij in het Nederlandse protestants theologische landschap van die tijd: hij bleef lid van de Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk, maar sympathiseerde met het theologisch conservatisme van de Afscheidenen.

Deze religieuze zelfpositionering werd bekrachtigd door zijn verbonds-theologische narratief van de Nederlandse geschiedenis: Groen beklemtoonde de historische rol van het calvinistische geloof en de Nederduits Gereformeerde Kerk in de vorming van het Nederlandse volkskarakter. Daarmee rechtvaardigde hij zijn lidmaatschap van de Hervormde Kerk, die volgens hem voorrechten diende te genieten vanwege haar historische positie in het maatschappelijk leven. Tegelijkertijd koos hij echter de zijde van de theologische conservatieven (Afscheidenen) buiten zijn eigen kerkverband tegen de vrijzinnige Groninger Richting binnen de Hervormde Kerk.

Gedurende de jaren 40 van de negentiende eeuw raakte Groen steeds meer betrokken bij de actuele politieke discussies, in het bijzonder inzake de grondwetsherzieningen. Hij verzette zich tegen de grondwetsherziening van 1848 van de liberale voorman Johan Rudolph Thorbecke. Groens voornaamste bezwaar tegen de

grondwetsherziening van 1848 richtte zich meer op de liberale grondbeginselen daarachter dan op de inhoud zelf.

Groen werd in 1849 gekozen in de Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal. Tot 1857 bleef hij kamerlid. Gedurende deze jaren richtte hij zich vooral op de Schoolstrijd. Groens christelijke geschiedbeschouwing, die de ware protestants-christelijke geest als hart en ziel van de Nederlandse natie presenteerde, rechtvaardigde zijn nadruk op het belang van christelijk onderwijs als het noodzakelijke middel om deze nationale geest opnieuw aan te wakkeren. Hij geloofde dat dit de eerste noodzakelijke stap was in de voortdurende strijd tussen het christendom en de geest van de revolutie, een tweedeling waarop hij zijn historisch narratief baseerde. In 1856 was Groen de initiatiefnemer van een petitie tegen de voorgestelde Onderwijswet van minister Van Rhenen die door circa tienduizend mensen werd ondertekend. De koning, die op gespannen voet stond met het kabinet, gebruikte het succes van Groens petitie als argument dat het Nederlandse volk niet achter het kabinet stond, waarna hij het kabinet ontbond.

Tijdens deze episode vroeg de koning per brief Groen naar zijn gedachten over de toestand van het politieke stelsel. Willem III vestigde zijn hoop op Groen in de verwachting dat deze bereid zou zijn hem te steunen in zijn streven naar restauratieve maatregelen, wat in wezen een poging was om het politieke systeem te herstructureren. Het verzoek van de koning bood impliciet ook de mogelijkheid van een leidende politieke rol voor Groen. Tot verrassing van de koning reageerde Groen afwijzend op diens voorstellen, omdat volgens hem het stelsel de ruimte moest krijgen om de ingezette democratische koers voort te zetten.

Groens strijd op de strijd voor christelijke beginselen als fundament voor het sociaal-politieke domein diende als rechtvaardiging van zijn besluit om niet te interveniëren.

Veranderingen in de politieke structuur beschouwde Groen als te oppervlakkig en kunstmatig om de duurzame veranderingen tot stand te brengen die hij voor ogen had. Bijgevolg veranderde de houding van de koning jegens Groen. Niet langer overwoog hij hem nog voor een kabinetspost. Groens narratieve zelfpositionering stelt ons in staat om te begrijpen waarom hij afwijzend reageerde op de verzoek van de koning.

Mijn analyse laat zien hoe Groens antwoord aan de koning op ten minste drie vlakken van historisch belang was: (i) het temperen van de restorationistische geest in een tijd waarin revolutionaire veranderingen en restauraties in Europa niet ongewoon waren en het jonge Nederlandse parlementaire stelsel duidelijk nog kwetsbaar was; (ii) het openen van een weg van constructieve betrokkenheid voor de christelijke politiek in het kader van een moderne democratie en bijgevolg de oprichting van de eerste christendemocratische partij ter wereld, de Anti-Revolutionaire Partij, in 1879 door Groens opvolger Abraham Kuyper; en (iii) het helpen om vorm te geven aan de Nederlandse parlementaire democratie als een stelsel dat constructieve betrokkenheid en dialoog tussen principiële tegenstrijdige politieke posities mogelijk maakte – een stelsel dat tot op de dag van vandaag bestaat.

Concluderend kunnen we stellen dat Groens historische rol als een bestendiger van de Nederlandse democratie, een systeem dat hij zelf niet zou hebben willen ontwerpen, ondergewaardeerd is in de historiografie. Een van de belangrijkste bijdragen van dit proefschrift ligt derhalve in het aantonen hoe Groens keuze voor non-interventie ten onrechte is geïnterpreteerd als een veronderstelde verandering in zijn politieke theorie. Integendeel, het was Groens continue narratieve nadruk op het fundamentele belang van religieuze beginselen die, door de aandacht van de grondwet af te wenden, doorslaggevend was voor zijn politieke non-interventie in 1856.

Na het beëindigen van zijn eerste fase als parlementariër in 1857 zette Groen zijn werk als historicus voort, alvorens in 1862 terug te keren naar de Tweede Kamer om daar zijn strijd voor christelijk onderwijs voort te zetten, zij het met een andere strategie. Dankzij Groens acties zowel binnen als buiten het parlement ten behoeve van de strijd voor christelijk onderwijs, werd onderwijs een prominente nationale kwestie.

Groen nam uiteindelijk in 1865 om gezondheidsredenen afscheid van het parlement. Hij zou nog enkele jaren actief blijven op sociaal gebied in het kader van het Réveil, maar trok zich in 1870 terug uit het openbare leven en droeg het leiderschap van de antirevolutionaire beweging over aan Abraham Kuyper. Groen zou nog tot aan het einde van zijn leven belangrijke autobiografische overdenkingen blijven schrijven, waarin hij zijn eigen loopbaan op zo'n wijze narratief voorstelde dat niet alleen zijn eigen positie werd gerechtvaardigd, maar ook de toon werd gezet voor de vruchtbare voortzetting van de antirevolutionaire politieke beweging in Nederland. In 1879, drie jaar na Groens dood, groeide de door hem opgerichte beweging uit tot de eerste christendemocratische politieke partij ter wereld: de Anti-Revolutionaire Partij.

De toepassing van Carrs narratieve benadering op het leven en werk van Groen als staatsman én historicus, maakt het mogelijk om voor het eerst een holistisch beeld van hem als antirevolutionaire publieke figuur te schetsen. Op basis hiervan kunnen we tevens tot een herwaardering komen van Groens historische betekenis voor de constitutionele democratie in Nederland.

## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Jan Adriaan Schlebusch was born in Bloemfontein, South Africa on 4 February, 1989. He grew up on a cattle farm near the city and has enjoyed many pleasant returns to the farm, where he helps out his father, who runs the ranch full-time.

In 2013 he received a three-year Erasmus Mundus scholarship to do his PhD at the University of Groningen. During his studies he and his wife became the parents of a girl Hanna (born February 2016) and a boy, Jadrian (born September 2017). Prior to enrolling for a PhD, he had already completed a B.A. (Theology), a B.A. Honors (Latin) and a M.A. (Philosophy) from the University of the Free State in Bloemfontein. He and his wife also previously spent a year in South Korea, working as English teachers.