

Groen van Prinsterer: Godfather of Bavinck and Kuyper

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The reawakened interest in the theology of Herman Bavinck that was accelerated by the publication in English of his *Reformed Dogmatics*, and the impetus given to the public theology of Abraham Kuyper at Princeton Seminary that came on the heels of commemorating the centennial of his *Lectures on Calvinism*, have caused people to wonder about the historical roots of this neo-Calvinist intellectual and cultural revival. One could of course point back to the original Reformation and the birth of Calvinism, or at least in part to the Further (Second, Puritan) Reformation of the seventeenth or even the Christian Counter-Enlightenment of the eighteenth century. But the onset of modern times and modernity begged for a *neo-Calvinism*, a Calvinism updated especially in its cultural mission and public theology.

This essay proposes to answer the question of historical roots by training the spotlight on a mid-nineteenth century man and a book, both of which were of critical importance in the formation of Bavinck and Kuyper. I am referring to the statesman, historian and publicist Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer (1801–1876)¹ and in particular to his “series of historical lectures” published under the title *Unbelief and Revolution* (1847).² The careers of neither Bavinck nor Kuyper, the range of their intellectual output, their reforming zeal in more than one area of life and culture, cannot be understood apart from Groen. It was from him that they learned to see the problem of the spirit of modernity in its widest scope, calling for nothing less than a culture war across the whole spectrum of modern life.

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It was especially as an historian that Groen had a powerful influence on the twin fathers of neo-Calvinism. Dubbed “the father of modern Dutch historiography” by his contemporaries,³ Groen was not only the editor of fourteen volumes of historical sources,⁴ but also the author of an 1100-page manual of Dutch history for use by schoolteachers,⁵ a well-documented study of Prince Maurice and Grand Pensionary John of Oldenbarneveldt during the crisis of 1618/19 leading to the Synod of Dordt,⁶ as well as a score of shorter historical monographs.⁷

Groen practiced a kind of history-writing that one student has called “witnessing history,”⁸ though this characterization does not quite hold for all his publications. Groen certainly acted the scholarly, scientific historian as the editor of primary sources, taking meticulous care in preparing his fourteen volumes of the *Correspondence of the House of Orange*. Yet even here he prefaced each volume with extensive *Prolégomènes* or preliminary introductions in which he not only accounted for his sources and method of editing but also indicated motives and evaluated contexts in a frank and forthright manner as he called attention to the overriding importance of the battle for freedom of conscience during the Dutch Revolt.⁹ Groen believed, with the French historian Guizot, that the “anatomy of history” (establishing the facts) should send the historian back to the “physiology of history,” because the empirical events are clues to the deeper-lying laws that govern the course of those events.

Without question, however, Groen van Prinsterer’s significance for Bavinck and Kuyper is due especially to the *religious* themes that he wove throughout his histories. One of his constant themes, for example, was that realistic historians harbor no optimism about human nature but instead reckon with the innate corruption of man whose periodic outbursts of unspeakable wickedness do shock students of history yet need not surprise them.¹⁰

A second theme, found particularly in Groen’s writings on the recent and contemporary history of his time, is the theme of “the Revolution,” by which he meant the sea change in religious and philosophical beliefs that marked *the birth of modernity*. Nowhere did he expound on this theme in greater depth than in the fifteen lectures which he read to his friends in the privacy of his home during

the winter of 1845/46 and which he published a year later under the title *Ongehoof en Revolutie* or “Unbelief and Revolution.” This work was to have a profound impact on both Bavinck and Kuyper and their constituency. The present article will (I) outline the contents of this work, (II) illustrate how its message stamped the worldview of the two neo-Calvinist theologians, and (III) touch on a number of highlights in Groen’s life and career as he fought “the Revolution.”

I

The book *Unbelief and Revolution* is one long and sustained argument that ever since the Age of Enlightenment the Western world has been under the spell of secular humanism. The work offers a grim diagnosis of the half century since the French Revolution. Our age, so begins the opening lecture on November 8, 1845, is marked by repeated political crises, chronic economic problems, and shocking indifference about morality and religious truth. Meanwhile, the big capitalists dominate, limited competition rules the market, factory owners are getting rich at the expense of the working classes, and the working classes are reduced to paupers and made ripe for revolt.¹¹

To Groen, the conclusion seemed inescapable: there must be a *general, underlying* cause at work underneath all these social woes occurring at the same time. For ten years he had studied the events of the past half century in search of that underlying cause. He looked for the single basic factor that rendered Western Europeans incapable of finding the peaceful ways of living their private and public lives, and he believed he found it in what he called the *revolution ideas*. They were the intellectual ideas that had been propagated since the Age of Reason and had inspired the political revolution that broke out in France in 1789. And although the French Revolution had ultimately been defeated, its ideas lived on. They were guiding men's thinking throughout Europe and shaping private life and public policy.

Among the key revolutionary ideas that Groen identified were that society can be shaped any way men choose and that authority depends on the consent of those under it. These revolutionary notions had fueled a frenzy bent on overthrowing

the three basic pillars of human society: a creation order, revealed truth, and objective justice. The result had been, according to Groen, a wholesale inversion of the minds that brought about a complete change in thinking, a revolution in men's outlook, in fact an overturning of Western civilization through an overthrow of basic Christian principles, morals and values.¹²

This is how the first lecture of *Unbelief and Revolution* sets the stage. In the next four lectures the speaker goes on to outline the pillars of Western civilization that had been taken down with such reckless abandon and disastrous results.

To begin with, he submits, most civilizations throughout the ages have held that authority is anchored in a given order, not in people's vote of approval. Governments are to administer justice that is not determined by majority vote but is subject to transcendent norms.

Governments are instituted by God and ultimately accountable to Him. At the same time, they are limited in scope and must respect and protect the sacred rights of their subjects in their personal lives and in all their social relationships.

In pre-revolutionary times, governments were mostly limited monarchies. Rulers possessed political sovereignty, to be sure; but they were checked and balanced by a great variety of autonomous power structures in society. Authority and freedom were more or less in harmony. To be sure, the Old Regime harbored abuses that cried out for correction; but this could have been achieved through patient and careful reform, not through rash innovation. The violence of the revolutions of our day, Groen argues, stems from a whole new theory of authority and liberty, one that invariably ends up replacing the old wrongs with new ones that are far worse because imposed by a new, omnipotent state.

The next five lectures address an obvious question: If neither the former principles nor the real abuses explain the revolution such as erupted in France, what does? The modern revolutions, Groen contends, can be explained, first of all, from the contract theory. This theory holds that the people, not the rulers, are sovereign. Collectively, however, the people have delegated their sovereign power to a government, and the social contract guarantees they can take back their

original power any time they please. In another version of the contract theory, the people have surrendered their sovereignty outright to government, with the expectation that their life, liberty and property will be safeguarded. Either way, however, government is not limited in any sense but reigns supreme over every aspect of life.

The contract theory, first put forward in the days of the Renaissance, did not immediately lead to revolution—not until it was impregnated by *ongelooft*.¹³ What intervened historically was the Protestant Reformation. Liberals praise the Reformation for pioneering liberty, and Catholics blame Protestantism for undermining authority. Both are wrong, says Groen. On the contrary, the new obedience to the Word of God, taught by Luther and Calvin, by Fox and Wesley, was an antidote to rebellion and revolt.

In the next two lectures, 8 and 9, Groen comes to the heart of his historical analysis. Protestantism failed to take the lead in Western culture and society. Unbelief set in. From the late seventeenth century onward, the voices of dissent from historic Christianity grew more strident. A spirit of unbelief replaced revelation with reason and exchanged morality for enlightened self-interest. Increasingly, truth became a matter of consensus, its claims were considered valid only if rationally based and widely held by right-thinking people. At the same time, conduct came to be governed by convenience—by whatever is expedient and comfortable. That is our modern situation, claims Groen. Two rival worldviews are today locked in mortal combat, and wherever man's truth prevails, there God's truth is ruled irrelevant and religious faith is consigned to private life.

The impact on public life is immense. If the people are the measure of all things, authority must answer to them, or at least to the majority of them. Meanwhile, the state has total power. It does not *respect* rights and freedoms but *allows* them, on condition that people conform to what the state decrees. Education, for example, is to be run by the state, not by the church or the parents. Worship is free, so long as it does not conflict with the civil religion that prescribes the values of the majority.

In this situation, government is by turns the toy of political factions and the slave of public opinion. Minority rights are not safe. The moderates are powerless against the logic of the new ideology. Because the radicals are more consistent they are more persuasive: they will carry the debate and win the day every time.

Thus far in the lectures, Groen appears to be a cheerless critic of modern statism. But at this point in his argument, he calls a dramatic halt. Lecture 10 asks: Given this ideology, can it be put into practice? The hopeful answer: No! At least, never entirely, and never for long. Reality itself will resist it at every turn. The ideology of the Revolution flies in the face of human needs, the natural order, the world order as created and sustained by God. Thus, as the revolutionaries begin to implement their ideology they repeatedly collide with reality, forcing them to change their strategy. As a result, the revolutionary experiment passes through different phases. Groen confidently lays out five phases in which the revolutionary ideology will beat its head against the divine order for the world.

Phase 1: *Preparation*. The new liberal philosophy, propagated in salons, books and pamphlets, enters the public mind and becomes the accepted view among peoples as well as princes, common folk as well as nobility. Popular sovereignty becomes a self-evident truth. Phase 2: *Development*. As the new view of unrestricted liberty is implemented and unfolds in practice, its logical development begins to frighten and alarm by threatening more and more groups of people, until at last only a Regime of Terror props up the government. Phase 3: *Reaction*. Inevitably, the scales tip the other way. Liberty is abandoned in favor of order. A strong man arises as head of state and is hailed as the preserver of the revolution and the savior of the nation. Phase 4: *Resumption*. Once the strong man turns into an ambitious tyrant, he is unseated, to make way for a reprise of the revolutionary experiment, this time with greater caution. Phase 5: *Disillusionment*. The new regime vacillates between order and freedom. No sooner do the friends of liberty strike out for greater freedom than people once again acquiesce in strong government. They give

up on their ideals for a free and just society and turn instead to the pursuit of material wealth.

Throughout—Groen does not grow tired of repeating—the modern state is absolute and “a-theist” or “laic” (we would say: secular). Any appeal to revealed norms is ruled out of order. Meanwhile, the state bureaucracy spreads an iron network over the people and forces everybody to conform to the central government.

Here ends the analysis of the new public philosophy with all its implications. The four lectures that remain trace what Groen calls the “biography of the revolution.” It narrates the history of “the revolution” as it came to be embraced and then was put into practice. Following Guizot’s recipe in reverse, it presents the empirical evidence that reveals the underlying factors responsible for the facts.

Narrating the course of the secular revolution, 1680–1847

In its *preparatory* phase, so begins Groen’s narrative, the revolution turned out to be of a kind that had never before been seen in Western history. Within forty, fifty years it conquered the leading lights in France, soon all Europe. When it finally broke to the surface in 1789 the theory of popular sovereignty was master of the minds and could not be stopped in its pursuit of unrestricted popular rule and universal equality.

The phase of full *development* (lectures 12 and 13) lasted only five years. As Groen moves from one flashpoint to the next, he argues that the French Revolution necessarily unfolded from bad to worse—from framing an ill-fitting constitution to nationalizing the church, guillotining the king, mobilizing the entire nation for war, crushing all opposition, installing a Reign of Terror marked by judicial murders without number, and legislating a system of spying on all citizens until no one felt safe anymore.

Once everybody felt threatened, a *reaction* became inevitable. The Directory, a new regime of moderation, seized control. Before long, however, it was attacked by extremists on the right and extremists on the left. To end the uncertainty, Napoleon was elevated to power. He suppressed the warring factions, censored the

press, and—what irony!—wielded dictatorial power on behalf of the sovereign people.

The fall of the dictator after Waterloo cleared the path for a moderate *resumption* of the original experiment under a Charter granted by the restored Bourbon kings. However, the restoration regime suffered from internal contradictions and in its turn succumbed to the liberals' insistence on greater freedom.

The fifth and last phase, begun in 1830 under "citizen-king" Louis-Philippe, was haunted by fear of a return to radicalism. To prevent new outbreaks of anarchy, liberty had to be severely restricted again. Recurring failure now caused men to become thoroughly *disillusioned*. They gave up their ideals and turned their energies to making money and getting rich. The former champions of justice and liberty fell silent and turned their backs on public affairs.

Thus ends lecture 14. In a closing lecture Groen briefly canvasses the fate of international relations during these revolutionary times. In his judgment, they were equally revolutionary. Sacred treaties were sacrificed whenever expedient, and foreign policies were arbitrary and guided by barely disguised opportunism.

The signs of the times are ominous, Groen concludes; but instead of turning away we should get engaged. It is April, 1846. The middle classes are in power, privileging wealth; the lower classes are open to radical propaganda, preparing new eruptions. Evangelical Christianity is reviving everywhere, but where are the Christians? They have a phobia about politics and remain unengaged. The lecturer ends with a double prayer: *Lord, help our unbelief!* and *Revive us by your Word!*

II

Dutch historians by and large have taken distance from *Unbelief and Revolution*. His contemporaries called it an inflammatory tract, unworthy of an historian. In the last century Johan Huizinga qualified it as "born of wrath and alarm," while Pieter Geyl called it "one grand mistake." Regardless, Groen's entire public career was guided and governed by his unwavering opposition to "the Revolution"

as he had defined it in his lectures. His analysis of the birth of modernity has sometimes been called “larger than life.”¹⁴ Still, the well-known historian Arie van Deursen recently went on record to affirm that Groen, though lacking sometimes in accuracy, was a thorough historian whose *Unbelief and Revolution* was a happy combination of historical craftsmanship and a comprehensive vision.¹⁵ Despite controversy surrounding the book, Groen’s diagnosis of the profound turnabout in “the mind of the West” enabled him to test the spirit of the age, to pick his battles, and to energize his involvement in public life.¹⁶ His place in nineteenth-century Dutch history prompted the same Pieter Geyl to observe: “Time and again one is struck by Groen’s uncommon astuteness, his ability to test events against principles and so determine their deepest significance.”¹⁷

Bavinck and Groen

In contrast to Groen’s detractors, Herman Bavinck (1854–1921) showed his deep affinity with the message of *Unbelief and Revolution* when he contributed a foreword to the reprint of 1904.¹⁸ After noting that the battle fronts had shifted since the book came out in 1847—from rationalism to irrationalism, from Rousseau to Darwin, from revolution to evolution—Bavinck continued:

And yet Groen’s work is not antiquated in the least, for the enemy he fought may have changed its face but not its spirit. In both cases, it is *man* who originates language and religion, law and morality, state and society; in both cases God, his word and law, are left out of consideration. In fact, from this point of view one must say that the situation has not improved but grown worse. There has been progress, but in the sense of further dissolution. We have seen development, but in a downward direction. . . . It is called unscientific to take God into account. Science believes it has to be “atheistic” or else belie its nature. Family, society and state, religion and morality, language and thought have to be explained historically or, if that proves impossible, psycho-genetically, and in the final analysis mechanistically. . . .

Groen was unable to assess the events of his time from a neutral position. He observed and judged them from the standpoint of the Christian . . . And yet,

in spite of—or rather, precisely because of—his standpoint, Groen was an open-minded and impartial historian. This was apparent in his evaluation of the Reformation as well as the Revolution.

At this point Bavinck took the time to record his generation's indebtedness to Groen for having stimulated renewed study of the Protestant Reformation in the wake of the nineteenth-century upsurge of Roman Catholicism.

Groen cannot be accused of antipapism; he did not cover up the faults and failings of the Reformers and their followers; he was fully alive to the Christian element in Rome, and at one time he called down upon his head a sharp and undeserved reproach for exonerating the misdeeds of Catholics during the Reformation. But he also sounded a warning that Protestants might neglect the treasure entrusted to them. If Protestants neglect *to enter into the true facts of the case* and acknowledge that on their side not everything was perfect either, they might give in to an ill-advised magnanimity that would cause the scales to tip in favor of the adversary and of injustice. Groen wanted impartiality, complete impartiality. . . . He took exception to Protestants who *through unfamiliarity with the facts* underestimated the excellence of the Reformation, both in the character of the Reformers and in the course of the events.

Bavinck's foreword next went on to credit Groen for having provided an incisive and comprehensive account of the rise of secularism in Europe.

In the same way Groen's standpoint enabled him to gauge the essence and import of the French Revolution. By "revolution" he understood, not a violent upheaval or the overthrow of a government, but rather "the inversion of the general spirit and mode of thinking that is now manifest in all Christendom," the unfolding of "a wholesale skepticism in which God's Word and Law are thrust aside" and which first seized control in the France of 1789. . . .

The correctness of this insight has been corroborated by the history of the nations year in, year out. In every domain—in family and society, science and art, religion and morality, law and history—men are drawing the consequences

which Groen had seen as implicitly present in seminal form in the principle of the Revolution. If these consequences are not—or not fully—being applied in life, then we certainly do not owe this to the principle, but only to the forces with which God counteracts it in nature and history; to the return to the gospel which his Spirit has brought forth in a portion of Christendom. . . . Groen did not long for a return of dead orthodoxy or old-fashioned forms, but for earnest faith, personal conversion, submission to God’s word and law, for sincere believers who heartily embraced and practiced the unchangeable truths of the Reformation.

Here Bavinck’s foreword moved on to underscore what gives the book its special significance, also for his own understanding of the times and for its call to Christian action and Christian learning and scholarship.

Yet Groen did not stop at the demand for a personal return to the gospel. However much he emphasized the need for individual, true conversion, he was always on guard against the danger of pietism and world-flight. From the gospel he deduced principles which would bring blessing to family and society, science and art, law and politics. After all, the power of the gospel to effect order, freedom and prosperity had been substantiated by world history. Whatever is useful and beneficial to man is promoted by the fear of God and thwarted by the denial of God.

Reading words like these, one realizes that they go far in explaining why Bavinck, after finishing the definitive edition of his *Reformed Dogmatics*, turned away from the science of theology and began to devote much of his time and energy to outlining Christian principles and foundational issues for philosophy, pedagogy and psychology. For all three areas he wrote a number of what were then pioneering studies, both academic and popular.¹⁹

The foreword concluded with two pages about a major challenge raised in the book: the need for a Christian view of the state and for involvement by Christians in the political process of their country. Bavinck deplored the growing trend to conduct politics on a purely secular basis and thought it important to reiterate Groen’s challenge.

While today men strive to cut the state off from all higher, moral and religious principles and in its place assign to it the promotion of all sorts of material interests, Groen worked in the opposite direction. He defended the divine right of civil government and could not imagine a well-ordered state in Christian countries that would be indifferent or hostile toward the church. Sovereign government, be it of a monarchy or a republic, is called to act; such action must be guided by the precepts of morality; morality, if it is to have a basis and meaning, must have a point of support in a faith, the faithful profession of which the Sovereign protects and supports for the sake of maintaining law and order, justice and morality.

Bavinck's introduction to Groen's book was crystal clear as he highlighted its major themes, including its political implications. The following year, 1905, he had an opportunity to speak even more directly to those who were engaged in politics. It was an unsought opportunity. The Anti-Revolutionary Party needed to be mustered and equipped to fight the upcoming general elections, but party chairman Abraham Kuyper was head of the Government at this time so he could not, as he had done for a quarter century, involve himself in party politics and deliver the keynote address at the national meeting of delegates. In these circumstances, Kuyper pressured Bavinck to serve as interim chairman of the party and deliver the inspirational address.²⁰ Bavinck caved in and entitled his address "Christian and Neutral Politics."

The address began by expressing gratitude for Dr. Kuyper's leadership of the anti-revolutionary movement which he had inherited from Groen and had forged into a fighting force some forty years ago. Yet his absence from the assembly, Bavinck added, does not disturb us overly much. For although "we do not have the promise that after Groen and Kuyper a leader of their talent and energy will again be granted us, our party does not stand or fall with a person, because it lives by principles that have stood the test of time." He next went on to formulate the concrete issues and the election strategy to be followed.

Here the address once again breathed the spirit of Groen van Prinsterer. Thus among the many trains of thought in his lengthy address, a most telling one is Bavinck's repudiation of the liberals' complaint that the Kuyper Ministry had contaminated politics by mixing it with religion and so had violated the sacred principle of the separation of Church and State.

Neither Groen van Prinsterer nor our party has ever understood the separation of Church and State in the sense that the state need not take God into consideration. Our program of principles states that we profess the eternal principles of God's Word also for the political domain and that government as a servant of God is duty-bound in a Christian nation to glorify God's name.

Practice reveals the correctness of this view by showing that neutrality in the sense of indifference is impossible for the state. . . . In marriage law, criminal law, the oath, Sunday observance, and so on, government touches on moral and religious principles in which all law is ultimately grounded. A state that violates these religious-moral foundations undermines society, can maintain itself only by force, and prepares its own demise. . . . Religion is one thing, politics another, and they must not be mixed. But mixing the two is something else than maintaining their interconnection. As much as mixing is to be avoided, separation is to be rejected. For politics is a high and noble art . . . a sublime and sacred affair. The earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof. . . .

In no way do we want government to impose the Christian confession on the nation, but by the same principle we demand that government not compel us, either directly or indirectly, to accept its colorless neutrality. In the matter of liberty we outbid the liberals any day. . . . Both sides must refrain from using compulsion. The government, as Minister Kuyper stated in the upper house, must enable every group to arrive at the free development of its own principles and its own convictions. This was rendered impossible when the liberals were in office. Neutrality has promoted the rule of unbelief, the undermining of the religious and moral foundations of our national life.

Referring to the opposition of the liberals to bills for elementary and higher education which Kuyper had piloted through parliament, Bavinck caught fire. He

derided the liberals for “reviving the dogma of the one, holy, catholic public school, accessible to all because of its neutrality,” and for “flogging back to life the dead horse of presuppositionless science.” To underscore his claim that anti-revolutionaries were forward-looking and going with the times, he said:

Christians accept the new circumstances in which they live without resisting and hanging back. They can and must do so, precisely because they are Christians and therefore confess that God has reigned not only in former times but also in the present age, and that He works until now. In one of this lectures given recently in our country, Professor [Adolf von] Harnack remarked correctly that Christians in the first centuries were not a quiet group of ascetics but a “radical progressive party.” And that is what Christians always are when they stand for their beliefs. They engage the new conditions of state and society, philosophy and science, literature and art, vocation and commerce. They prove all things, and hold fast that which is good.

Bavinck rarely agreed with Harnack, but on this point he did.

Not just party meetings, parliament too was treated to Bavinck’s ideas about politics. From 1911 till his death he was a member of the First Chamber or upper house. He was appreciated there for his knowledgeable contributions to the debates, in particular concerning education and colonial policy. The only un-Groenian thing he uttered there was his defence of the vote for women.²¹

Apart from the foreword and the address, references to Groen in Bavinck’s works are all but non-existent. Groen van Prinsterer was no guide for theological science or philosophy. The three places where he explicitly cites Groen suggest, however, that he followed him in his incisive characterization of the apostate nature of modern times.²² Properly viewed, Groen’s influence on a Reformed leader like Bavinck was more pervasive than is generally realized. Groen had shaped the basic parameters of the public debate and indicated the stance that the Christian community needed to adopt in a rapidly secularizing society. Bavinck gave of his best to frame the issue in the same terms and to work it out in a variety of fields.

Kuyper, the rod on Groen's stem

If Groen van Prinsterer was perhaps more of a lodestar for Bavinck, for Kuyper he was a true godfather. Abraham Kuyper (1837–1920) was seventeen years older than Bavinck. He had been in direct personal contact with Groen, first through letters, later also through private visits, from 1864 till 1876, the year Groen died.²³ At first their letters dealt with questions about church history, which was Kuyper's preoccupation during his first charge.²⁴ Gradually the topic became church reform for the purpose of stemming the tide of modernism, an urgent need that Groen had trumpeted for decades, in vain, but which was now, to his relief, freshly and forcefully put back on the agenda by the young pastor.²⁵ The correspondence intensified after Kuyper began attacking the privileged position of the secular public school.²⁶ It reached a peak during the weeks when Kuyper deliberated over accepting a seat in parliament for which he had not campaigned but to which he was elected anyway.²⁷

That was in the year 1874. For almost two years already Kuyper had been writing a great deal of political commentary in his daily *De Standaard*, a paper that was in part financed by Groen. He had been making the rounds of the university towns, lecturing to student clubs on a motto borrowed from Groen: "Calvinism, Source and Safeguard of Our Constitutional Liberties."²⁸ Yet Kuyper, now that active politics beckoned, felt inadequate. He lost much sleep over the possibility of exchanging his place in Amsterdam's church for a seat in parliament. His worries were compounded by the financial difficulties plaguing *De Standaard* in these very months, and as he contemplated the cessation of the paper he wondered in a letter to Groen whether that might harm the cause of "your party." This last note triggered a response from Groen that reveals the unique relationship of the two men:

One last point. You wrote about the danger to *my* party if *De Standaard* would have to be discontinued. *Our* party: to that I should have no objection. But as soon as we begin to specify it is not *my* but *your* party that would be endangered. You were the leader after me—to my delight, but in your own right, needing neither my permission nor mandate.

Kuyper was stung and immediately wrote back:

You are the head of our party and will remain so. You have entrusted me with a flotilla, and I have made ample use of the freedom granted me . . . But my role is to serve, called only to assist in winning support for *your* cause among the lower middle classes, where I am at home and whose language I speak.

It was you who founded our party. I can drop out, but you remain. You can retire, but abdicate never. I could. The song I sing to the people comes from you. If I sang falsely, it was unavoidable, but that does not change your song. I say this in reaction to your contention that the anti-revolutionary party consists of two fractions: *yours*, and as you wish to call it, *mine*. I do not make that claim. . . . I can live only as a rod on your stem.

Groen appeared content to leave it at that, but he reminded his disciple: “we are like-minded, but independent.”

This particular exchange, indicative of the *political* alliance between the two men, throws an interesting light on the manner in which the leadership of the anti-revolutionary movement would pass from the older to the younger man. But the alliance was active in other areas as well. The chief mandate that Kuyper was prepared to take into parliament was to reform the laws dealing with education and church governance, reforms that Groen had always championed. And the direction these reforms had to take was (a) the free development of private Christian schools and universities without unfair competition from tax-supported public education, and (b) the untrammelled expression of orthodoxy in pulpit and seminary without interference from denominational boards dominated by latitudinarian and even modernist sympathies. The regulations that were in force were identified by Kuyper as results of “the Revolution,” and the direction he would favor to have them reformed was the one advocated in Groen’s publications and parliamentary speeches.²⁹

In 1867, shortly after Kuyper brought out his first pamphlet on the church question, Groen sent him a copy of *Ongeloof en Revolutie*, followed a few days later with a warm thank-you note and a portrait of himself. Kuyper replied, thanking

him for the photograph. About the book he wrote: “With that you have given me a photograph of your mind.”³⁰ When the 1868 edition appeared Kuyper wrote its author: “What a happy phenomenon that a need was felt for a second edition of such thoughts, thoughts which articulate the *fundamental quarrel* that appears only in particular forms and as on the surface in the ecclesiastical, social and political domain.”³¹

From that point on, Kuyper and Groen were in contact with each other every week, sometimes every other day, until Groen passed away. The breadth of Kuyper’s activities, the scope of his interests and the variety of his ventures can be explained in the marching order once given by Groen: “*Combat the Revolution in whatever form it manifests itself.*” Into old age Kuyper would maintain that Groen taught them “to see the worldwide impact of the Revolution doctrine” and that “the struggle between the two political convictions in our country is still the antithesis captured in Groen’s slogan *The Gospel against the Revolution!*”³²

Kuyper would also not neglect to remind his readers from time to time that he, and no one else, was the legitimate heir of Groen van Prinsterer, having regularly consulted with him in the days when the antirevolutionary movement was rallying into an organized national party. This was his customary retort to more conservative rivals in the Reformed camp whenever they disputed or deflated his claim by stating that he had made Groen overly much into a theological Calvinist and a Christian democrat.³³ In any case, his loyalty to Groen never flagged. In an inspirational address at the annual rally of the Reformed Young Men’s Associations in 1897, Kuyper exhorted his audience: “Have your clubs study history, God’s Word, the rights of the church, so that you will not be caught off guard later. Study what Groen van Prinsterer sowed and planted!”³⁴ On similar occasions, in 1908 and 1909, Groen van Prinsterer was again held up to the assembled young people as a trustworthy guide in preparing for life.³⁵

III

A closer look at Groen van Prinsterer’s life and career will further clarify why he may be styled the godfather of Bavinck and Kuyper.

Willem Groen van Prinsterer³⁶ lived from 1801 to 1876. After completing a brilliant course of study in Leyden University, he was appointed secretary to the Dutch king. In that role he was a close observer of the political troubles that exploded into the Belgian Revolt of 1830. That traumatic event made him decide to study the revolutions of his time. The favorite authors of his youth, Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Madame de Stael made way for Edmund Burke and Félicité de Lamennais. The former had, respectively, inspired and lauded the French Revolution; the latter two had anathematized it. That Groen focused on the mother of revolutions was no accident. After all, it had rocked Europe for a quarter century.³⁷

As outlined above, Groen came to the conclusion that the French Revolution embodied an intellectual and spiritual revolution of enormous historical significance. It was not just a political uprising but a *social* revolution, an attempt at altering the very foundations of society. Of course, Groen hastened to add, history has seen necessary and justifiable revolutions. As a Netherlander he defended the Dutch Revolt against Spain in 1568 because it was waged not so much from irritation at colonial taxation as from abhorrence of the Inquisition.³⁸ In 2010 Mexico celebrated a centennial and a bicentennial. Groen may well have approved of the Mexican revolt against Spanish oppression in 1810. Also of the Mexican Revolution of 1910? He would have given guarded approval of the redistribution of land among the peasants, seeing that the large landowners were properly compensated. He certainly admired England's Glorious Revolution of 1688/89, in which the Dutch prince William III of Orange played a key role as leader of a Protestant coalition on the Continent. He also wrote in positive terms about the American Revolution of 1776, precisely because it respected historical continuity and governing authority.

But the European revolutions of our time, he complained, respect neither history nor authority. They are inspired by a perverse anti-Christian ideology. For at the core of this ideology are three simple but fatal substitutions: (1) Truth is not found in Revelation; it is whatever people decide to agree is truth; truth is *consensus*. (2) Life was not structured at Creation; it can be arranged any way people agree upon; the social

order is a matter of *convention*. (3) Justice is not normed from Above; it is determined by people who have the power to enforce their laws; *might makes right*.

Keys of explanation: spirit, mind, heart

The historian who narrates the French Revolution must deal not only with lofty aspirations but also with unspeakable atrocities. As Professor Paul has reminded us, Groen, instead of expecting human perfectibility and social progress, held to a “much more realistic” view of human nature by reckoning with the corruption of the natural man, his “innate sinfulness.”³⁹ To operate with this hermeneutic key when reading history, the Christian historian is accustomed to resort to concepts like spirit, mind and heart. In Groen’s conceptual apparatus, spirit is the “spirit of the age,” the supra-individual power of ideas. Next, the human mind, both individually and collectively, assents to the ideas and embraces them. Finally, the human heart *believes* in the ideas and *commits itself* to them, whereupon the mind devises ways and means to act according to those beliefs. Thus Groen can write about the outbreak of the Revolution that “the theory of the supremacy of the people, *master of the minds owing to the spirit of the age*, could not be stopped in its pursuit of a corresponding state.”⁴⁰ Significantly (but often overlooked by his interpreters), his account then digs one layer deeper as he explains why men proved impotent to arrest the ideology: *their hearts were committed to it*. Speaking of those who held the reins of government during the Reign of Terror, he offers the following explanation of their conduct:

They had dedicated their lives to a worldview which they believed to be not only true, good, useful and salutary, but also the sole and sure means of effecting a speedy and universal end of calamity and misfortune and the beginning of undisturbed happiness. . . . Not until we project ourselves into that frame of mind in which men fancy they have received the apostolate of such a gospel shall we be able to form some idea of how the strength of the confessors was enhanced by the content of their confession, by their infatuation and enthusiasm, by their—let me use the word—fanaticism. Nor need we, or should we, take this fanaticism for mad frenzy. On the contrary, it was free of excitement. It rested,

not on the intoxication of the passions, but on the reasonings of the mind. It was commitment to a theory whose illusory scheme for re-creating the world was accepted without question . . .

[Most historians present] the cruelty of the revolutionary fanatics as being without parallel and contrary to the inclinations of human nature. I shall not venture to glance into the innermost recesses of the corrupted heart, nor investigate how highly the natural man, left to himself, values the life of others when his own life or his interests are threatened or when his every desire or plan is thwarted or opposed; we might discover worse. I confine myself to observing that infatuation with erroneous notions concerning the most important issues of human life and man's heart has always, when driven on by such fanaticism, generated similar pleasure and perseverance in evil. . . .

Not to acknowledge any distinction between good and evil in the selection of means is the peculiar mark, not just of Jesuits or Jacobins, but of all fanatics. They aim to destroy whatever stands in their way. They know no remorse, since every crime is but another jewel in the crown of their good works. History attests to this everywhere. Thus Mahomet and his doctrine, in the name of the one God, spread destruction by fire and sword over half the world. Thus papal Rome murdered Protestants in cold blood amid prayers and hymns of praise. We shudder when a Marat demands the sacrifices of the people's vengeance by the tens and hundreds of thousands. And yet, the men of the Terror acted from comparatively noble motives. They were inhuman for love of Humanity. . . . they triumphed over manifold assaults only by an iron will grounded in incomparable perseverance of faith.⁴¹

A freedom-loving personality

Groen was a fiercely independent man. Raised in a Christian home and a faithful Sunday worshiper, it took the death of his mother and his own near-death sickbed before he was ready, at the age of 33, to surrender all to Christ. But his love of freedom and independence continued to put its stamp on his personality as well as his entire career. He was a declared enemy of *statism* (though without reverting to an anti-social brand of individualism). He deplored the growing practice of taking autonomy away from the free associations in society (Tocqueville's "independent powers"⁴² or *corporations intermédiaires*). Looking ahead, we note that this theme would

be worked out more consistently by Kuyper, who defended the “sovereignty” of independent bodies in civil society not so much because they are the products of historical development (as Groen had argued) but because they are rooted in divine creation ordinances. The doctrine of *sphere-sovereignty* became an enduring plank in the anti-revolution platform propagated by Kuyper and Bavinck.

The much maligned theory of *divine right* was rescued from extinction when Groen reinterpreted it so as to give it a much wider application. What makes for a harmonious union of freedom and authority? Groen agreed with liberalism that no person should wield authority over another person . . . *unless* that person so consents (which is a questionable ground) *or unless* God so orders (which is a firm and sure basis). To bow to authority, Groen proudly insists, goes against human nature. It can be done only on God’s orders; only if He ordains it may one submit. Well, as it happens, God has so ordained it. Under his providential rule, various functional authorities have “crystallized” in the course of history. Embedded in the creation were many potential forms of authority which over time came to be distributed over ever so many relationships in society. In this social order, each relationship has a God-given right to exercise power, but then a defined and limited form of power geared to the nature and purpose of the relationship in question. That is why citizens have to obey the laws of the land. And that is why, similarly, children are subject to their parents, pupils to their teachers, apprentices to their employers, tennis players to their umpires, believers to their spiritual overseers, and so on. The *divine right* of authority is an ordering principle throughout society in all its various relationships. An authority figure or office-holder in such a relationship has real authority, but always within the limits that come with the nature of the relationship in question. No one has absolute power. Now then, concludes Groen, only by observing this order can we be truly free.⁴³

To define the limits to authority each time can be hazardous. Groen honors Romans 13: “All power is ordained of God.” So obedience to lawful authority is mandatory. But then he adds: yet not to unlawful authority! Not to usurpers. He writes: “I am not obliged to obey the villain who holds a dagger under our nose or the crowned robber who yesterday overthrew our legitimate ruler.”⁴⁴ One hundred years later the quotation

circulated clandestinely among Calvinists in Occupied Holland and persuaded the more scrupulous among them to give up their disapproval of active resistance to the Nazi government of the day.⁴⁵

Groen van Prinsterer was not only a historian and a jurist. Under the revised, liberal constitution of 1848, he served as an elected member of the lower house of parliament during three different periods. His defense of the rights of parliament is noteworthy. In 1866, when the prospect of colonial reforms, promised in the Speech from the Throne, was suddenly dashed by the royal appointment of a new and untried governor, parliament passed a motion censuring the government. The government of the day cried: how dare you question His Majesty's prerogative! But Groen defended parliament. It has a right to speak its mind. Collaboration and consultation between cabinet and house, he argued, are the keys to healthy representative government. The authority of government does not derive from the people, to be sure, but in a constitutional state a government should nevertheless be prepared to give an account of all its actions to the people's representatives. Groen's public stand was courageous, also because he lost many friends over it.⁴⁶

Another issue was the so-called "independence" of parliament. Constitutional lawyers underscored the provision that members hold their seat "without instruction or consultation." Groen believed that this provision nevertheless allowed candidates to make election promises—to pledge to take a specified position on a current or long-standing issue—and, if elected, to take such promises into parliament as binding mandates. A prominent liberal like the historian Robert Fruin called any such arrangement "unethical," but Groen stuck to his guns: voters must have clarity at the ballot box, he insisted, especially when burning issues are on the agenda. His view ultimately prevailed.

In 1856 he ran on a platform of Christian public education, and won his seat. However, when in the following year the Elementary Education Act ruled that government schools had to be religiously neutral, he promptly resigned his seat. He motivated this controversial step by explaining—in an Open Letter to his constituents—that since the reason for his election had been thwarted he felt obliged to

make room for another representative from the riding that had sent him to parliament.⁴⁷

In this and other ways, all within the constitutional framework designed by the liberals, Groen made valuable and lasting contributions to the shape of parliamentary democracy in his country. The generation of Bavinck and Kuyper reaped the benefit as they spearheaded the emancipation of the lower middle class people who were of the Reformed persuasion.

Friend of the common man

Groen was an aristocrat who came into considerable wealth through his mother who had inherited a fortune. It enabled him to be a generous philanthropist all his life. His concern for the poor was not perfunctory but ran deep. He would personally visit the homes of the destitute in his neighborhood in The Hague. When riots threatened in the unruly days of March 1848, the order went around among the mob: "Remember, the house of Mr. Groen is to be spared!" For his part, Groen long remembered with fondness the warm welcome he received in Leeuwarden in May of 1867, when he gave the opening address at a meeting of the Association of Christian National School Education. The meeting was attended by 600 people representing 162 locals. At the luncheon that followed, 220 people showed up when only 140 had been planned for; but the meager portions did not matter "because Groen was sitting among them and all the table talk only strengthened the bond of love."⁴⁸

More importantly, Groen openly critiqued the oppression that seemed inherent in a capitalist society. Today's leading revolutionaries, he warned, are only too right: our economic system "ends in the dominance of the rich and the rule of the banking houses, splits society up into two hostile camps, gives rise to a countless host of paupers, and prepares the ground for an attack by the have-nots on the well-to-do and would in many people's eyes render such a deed excusable, if not legitimate."⁴⁹ Not many years later the sentiment received an echo in a proposal by Abraham Kuyper: "Taxes on necessities must be removed [and replaced by] an increased rate on luxury cloth, landed property and paper assets above a fixed minimum. . . . Corporate law is to be revised to keep the accumulation of capital within bounds and to combat fictitious

trade.”⁵⁰

In and out of parliament, Groen pleaded for regulations to curb child labor and prevent working-class slums. Huizinga was not altogether incorrect: Groen was alarmed by the red specter of communism and he assured his contemporaries that “in the resolution of these social questions lies the key to the future.”⁵¹ His prominence as a leading spokesman for social reforms enhanced his reputation abroad. At one time a delegation from Britain came to The Hague with the urgent request that Mr. Groen might be “Holland’s Wilberforce,” while Elizabeth Fry came over to solicit his support for a European-wide campaign for prison reform.⁵² Both Kuyper and Bavinck combined their theological labors with strong support for social issues, making them leading contributors to the First Christian Social Congress of 1891.

Groen van Prinsterer’s international reputation grew as well in another context: that of the Evangelical Alliance. For its 1864 general assembly, held in Geneva, Groen was asked to speak on “The Influence of Calvin in the Low Countries.” For the Amsterdam gathering three years later, the organizers prevailed upon him, despite his frail health, to address the delegates; he obliged them with an impromptu speech of half an hour, in French, about the difference between religious nationality and modern nationalism. The audience was spellbound to the end and when Groen descended the platform broke out in a hymn of benediction.⁵³

Groen was by no means an arch-conservative, longing to turn back the clock. He was not a defender of all the practices of the Old Regime *per se*, but he wanted to remind his contemporaries of the solid principles underpinning it. For Groen, principles are always more telling than practice. Thus the only reason he could speak of the French Revolution as “a destructive but cleansing storm” was that he distinguished between the ideological principles of that Revolution and the many practical outcomes of the revolutionary era that had brought about a new situation with new institutions and new insights.⁵⁴ In 1848, when the new Constitution, almost wholly the creation of the liberal professor Thorbecke of Leyden, passed parliament and received royal assent, Groen was eager to win a seat and work under its provisions. He reassured his few political friends: the new Constitution “in and of itself” need not be revolutionary; everything depends on the spirit in which it will be

applied in new legislation.⁵⁵ We need to raise our voice in parliament, so that “Christian-historical” principles are part of the debate. “*Principle against principle!*” is our watchword and battle-cry. Before the details of legislative bills are debated, Ministers of the Crown and Members of Parliament ought to debate the guiding principles that undergird the proposed laws. That was Groen’s approach to politics. He would have enjoyed the parliamentary tussle in 1904 when a Higher Education Bill was being debated and Prime Minister Kuyper from behind the Government table and a Leyden professor from the benches argued over the question whether science was value-free or value-driven.⁵⁶

Groen’s emphasis on sound political principles did not mean that he underestimated the importance of sound laws. For all his critique of the Enlightenment’s principles, he admired its insistence on practical reforms—on deep and far-reaching reforms. He also agreed wholeheartedly with its lofty ideals of justice, liberty, toleration, humanity and morality. Only, he asserted, these fruits of the Christian religion, these pillars of Christian civilization could never be realized on secular grounds. They had been “cultivated in Christian soil” and could only wither “when transplanted to a dry and thirsty land.”⁵⁷ They are eminently worth pursuing, he argued, but only on a Christian basis and in a Christian spirit. At this juncture he would often quote the apostolic instruction that “godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come” (1 Tim. 4:8).⁵⁸ The text appears frequently in Bavinck’s writings, capturing as it were the meaning he attached to his life’s work.⁵⁹

Groen’s appreciation of progress and his sympathy for a “Christian liberalism”⁶⁰ explain how for many years he tried in vain to get the many Christian conservatives in his country to join him in his “anti-Revolution.” When these conservatives continually hesitated or shrank back, he at last cut his ties with them. He was willing to stand alone if necessary. Only half a dozen friends followed him. Their leader’s defiant motto became “*In our isolation lies our strength*”—meaning: by not compromising but standing apart and sticking to our starting principles we maintain our

integrity and keep our bearings amid party collusion and pragmatic compromise. This standpoint made Groen van Prinsterer a colorful statesman with a colorful identity. Over time, he attracted a growing number of voters who resonated with his witness. In this way he became the founding father of a unified, principled “anti-revolutionary” movement.

Toward the end of his life he was gratified to see a younger generation organize this movement into a modern, disciplined political party. This bundling of strength owed a great deal to the formidable organizational talent of Abraham Kuyper.⁶¹ The Anti-Revolutionary Party (since 1980 absorbed in the party of the Christian Democrats) would play a role in government cabinets for more than a century. It served as a first line of defense, a kind of retaining wall, against the forces of secularism. The Christian parties have insisted on imposing controls and limits to widespread demands for state-sponsored gambling, legalization of drugs, abortion on demand, euthanasia by choice, and other symptoms of a rapidly secularizing society. It opened the public square to distinctive Christian participation and fostered a pluralist society of mutual tolerance and accommodation.⁶²

The order of creation

No theme in neo-Calvinism is more important perhaps than the notion of creation order. In that connection Lecture 10 in *Unbelief and Revolution* is worth another look. It is pivotal. After analyzing the practical import of the Enlightenment in its destructive tendencies, Groen interrupts the flow of his argument, as we noted above, in order to ask: Is the Enlightenment project practicable? The lecture then sets forth how the essential goodness of creation continues to assert itself even in the face of tenacious opposition. Try as it might, the groundswell of revolution cannot undo the divine world order. Secular ideologies are not free to shape the world at will; they will constantly meet resistance—from the very nature of things, from man’s true needs, from God’s order for human life. While Groen often couches the argument in the terminology of natural law, at one point he names the deepest source in plain terms: the principles

which the revolution rejects are simply “the immutable laws which the Maker and Sustainer of all things prescribes for his creatures and subjects . . .”⁶³

On what did Groen base this certainty? While he had defiantly declared “*In our isolation lies our strength*,” he indicated the source of his certainty in the preface to *Unbelief and Revolution*: “*It stands written! It has come to pass!*”⁶⁴ He explained: *It stands written!* That is: Holy Scripture is the guide that helps us read and interpret what has happened in the past and is happening still. *It has come to pass!* That is: History is the confirmation that God rules and that the design for His creation will prevail.

Still another slogan captures the essence of Groen’s lifelong witness in the public domain. He once raised it during an election campaign: “*The Gospel against the Revolution!*” At bottom, the contrast between Christian politics and secular politics comes down to obedience versus rebellion, godliness versus secularism.

From his friend, the poet-theologian Isaac da Costa, Groen had learned to “object to the spirit of the age.” Well, whoever does that will also object to many policies and institutions of his age. But be prepared: a stance like that can only provoke mounting opposition, hostility and derision. It cannot but lead to culture wars across the whole spectrum of human society. The revolution must be resisted, Groen proclaimed, *in whatever form it manifests itself*—in marriage and child-rearing, in business and the university, in the arts, amusements and national commemorations, in agriculture and economic policy. At times the battle can be fierce and the forces of this world may appear overwhelming. But no matter, Christians can wait upon the Lord, in the sure hope that evil will not ultimately triumph in the world. One is reminded of a confession made by former Communist leader Mikhail Gorbachev who, looking back on the fall of the Soviet Union, admitted: “God does not allow his creation to be so mistreated.”⁶⁵

The theme of a beneficent creation order would be worked out in Bavinck’s oration on *Common Grace* and Kuyper’s three volumes on the same subject.⁶⁶

Conclusion

If one had to select what were the most critical issues in Groen's political witness, the issues that were most influential for the generation that came after him, the choice would have to be twofold. Both concern the life-giving roots of any culture: religion and education.

First, he fought for confessional orthodoxy in the national church. He combated the church's governance which was controlled by the state. And he was filled with indignation at the doctrinal freedom that some ministers made the most of from the pulpits. Preachers held sermons on Easter Sunday in which they said that Christ arose from the dead "only symbolically," and pastors administered baptism in the name of the trinity of their choice: "Faith, Hope and Charity." Ministers should keep their ordination vows, Groen insisted, barely containing his fury. The "medicinal" approach to church reform—to have faithful preaching over time heal the church from within—he considered a dereliction of duty. He championed instead a more "juridical" approach: the people in the pew have a *right* to hear sermons that are in agreement with the church's confessional standards.⁶⁷ Kuyper took up this cause and led the *Doleantie* exodus of 1886. Bavinck, a son of the earlier Secession, contributed significantly to the unification of the two groups of orthodox Reformed, and he worked hard to keep the united Doleantie and Secession church in the right path.⁶⁸

Groen's second battle aimed at unrestricted Christian content in elementary education. When that became politically impossible, he did not allow himself to be placated by remnants of earlier Christian forms prescribed for the common school. The public school was mandated by law to teach "Christian and social virtues," yet teachers had to remain silent about historic Christian doctrine. Where in this system, Groen asked, is the Cross of Christ? Teaching an "autonomous morality" deprives children of the gospel—the only power that can enable youth to withstand temptation, practice self-denial, and love even their enemies. In the place of his former ideal, Groen now struck out for a fully parallel system of private Christian schools, while still holding out for the public-legal recognition of this alternative.⁶⁹ In his mind, the schools struggle was an essential battle for the future of his people and his country.

Groen did not live to see the full triumph of his binary system, but today the educational pluralism that was established in his country is studied by scholars from other countries.⁷⁰ Since 1920, parity treatment is the law of the land, enshrined in the Constitution.⁷¹ Throughout, the cause of Christian education benefitted from contributions by Kuiper and Bavinck, the former through political action and legislation, the latter through studies in educational psychology and school curriculum. Alumni of Leyden University, both men spent years of their productive lives teaching at the Free University, an institution on an explicitly Reformed basis. No doubt both had read how back in 1844 Groen had consoled his friend Da Costa that his failure to land a professorate at the City University of Amsterdam “might have the beneficial effect . . . of making us realize that if we cannot take Christian principles to our public institutions we shall need our own institutions.”⁷²

Gradually, largely as a spin-off of the struggle for justice in education, the same treatment was won for faith-based organizations in higher education, in labor relations, agriculture, the media, health care and social services. Though never uncontested, they flourish and participate in the public domain on an equal footing with their secular counterparts in a society-wide system that guarantees a level playing field creating a situation of institutionalized worldview pluralism.⁷³

The good fight fought by Groen van Prinsterer, his undaunted witness in the public arena,⁷⁴ was of enduring significance for Bavinck and Kuiper, whose lives and careers bore the unmistakable stamp of their immediate forerunner in the battle against secularism.

NOTES

i. Cf. Roel Kuiper, *“You will always be an example”*: The Life and Times of Willem Groen van Prinsterer (Grand Rapids: Paideia, 2012).

2. G. Groen van Prinsterer, *Ongeloof en Revolutie; eene reeks van historische voorlezingen* (Leyden, 1847); 2nd

rev. ed. (Amsterdam, 1868). Reprinted in 1903, 1904, 1913, 1922, 1924, 1940, 1952, 1965, 1976 and 2008. Abridged Eng. trans. in Harry Van Dyke, *Groen van Prinsterer's Lectures on Unbelief and Revolution* (Jordan Station, ON: Wedge, 1989), 293–539. Spanish translation: *Incredulidad y Revolución*, translated and edited, with an introduction, by Adolfo García de la Sierra (Xalapa: Fábrica de Ideas, 2010). Select portions of the present article were presented at the launch of this work in the Congress buildings, Mexico City, August 5, 2010.

3. H. Smitskamp, *Groen van Prinsterer als historicus* (Amsterdam: H. J. Paris, 1940), 130, 143.

4. G. Groen van Prinsterer, ed., *Archives ou Correspondance inédite de la Maison d'Orange-Nassau*, first series, 9 vols. (Leyden, 1835–47); second series, 5 vols. (Utrecht, 1857–61).

5. G. Groen van Prinsterer, *Handboek der Geschiedenis van het Vaderland* (Leyden, 1846). Reprinted in 1852, 1872, 1875, 1876, 1895, 1928, and 1978.

6. G. Groen van Prinsterer, *Maurice et Barneveldt; etude historique* (Utrecht, 1875).

7. For a complete, annotated bibliography of Groen's 152 publications, see Johan Zwaan, *Groen van Prinsterer en de klassieke oudheid* (Amsterdam: Hakkert, 1973), 467–83.

8. 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), 70.

9. Cf. a communication by the American historian William H. Prescott to Groen, April 17, 1856: "The work indeed under your hands is possessed of a much higher value than what is derived from the mere reproduction of the text; although we cannot praise too highly the apparently faithful and accurate manner in which this has been accomplished. But your own notes and preliminary dissertations furnish stores of information to the historian and to the student of history for which he might look in vain elsewhere: and although in some points there are some of your readers who may come to a different conclusion from yourself, there is no one who will refuse to you the credit of having conducted your investigations with thoroughness, candor, and a conscientious love of truth." Groen reproduced the letter in extenso in his *Maurice et Barneveldt* (Utrecht, 1875), page CLXXXI (*sic*).

10. See Herman Paul, "Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer: A Critical Reappraisal," *Fides et Historia* 36.2 (Summer/Fall 2004): 67–82.

11. *Ongeloof en Revolutie*, 2; *Unbelief and Revolution*, 2. (Note: the English translation of 1989 carries the same pagination as the Dutch original.)

12. Obviously, in Groen's parlance the term *revolution* does not refer to any particular political upheaval or regime change but stands for the intellectual-spiritual revolution of thought introduced in Europe under the label of "rational thinking" and "enlightenment."

13. The word *ongeloof* means unbelief or incredulity, with overtones in Groen of disbelief in revelation,

apostasy from Christianity, and a declaration of human autonomy that chafes at all forms of authority divine and human (“*Ni Dieu ni maître!*”). From his analysis we see that Groen has in mind a broadly defined worldview orientation and commitment—the equivalent of what we today call secular humanism.

14. Severe criticism of Groen for his neglect of “other factors” is leveled by H. E. S. Woldring, “Groen van Prinsterer en 1789; een half begrepen revolutie,” in J. de Bruijn en G. Harinck, eds., *Groen van Prinsterer in Europese context* (Hilversum: Verloren, 2004), 73–79.

15. A. Th. van Deursen, “Kritiek en waardering voor Groen van Prinsterer als historicus in de 20ste eeuw,” in G. Harinck and R. Kuiper, eds., *Groen van Prinsterer en de geschiedenis* (Kampen: Van den Berg, 1994), 27–36.

16. Gerrit J. Schutte, *Groen van Prinsterer: His Life and Work* (Grand Rapids: Paideia, 2012), chaps. 5 and 6.

17. P. Geyl, *Kernproblemen van onze geschiedenis* (Utrecht: Oosthoek, 1937), 165 f.

18. H. Bavinck, “Voorrede,” in G. Groen van Prinsterer, *Ongeloof en Revolutie; eene reeks van historische voorlezingen* (Kampen: J. H. Bos, 1904), v–xiii. (The publisher J. H. Bos should not be confused with J. H. Kok.)

19. Ron Gleason, *Herman Bavinck: Pastor, Churchman, Statesman, and Theologian* (Phillipsburgh, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 2010), 345.

20. *Ibid.*, 375–84.

21. Bavinck’s speeches in the First Chamber have never (other than in the Dutch Hansard) been published, let alone translated.

22. See his *Hedendaagsche moraal* (Kampen: Kok, 1902), 49; *Christelijke wetenschap* (Kampen: Kok, 1904), 104n; “De Hervorming in ons nationale leven,” in H. Bavinck and H. H. Kuyper, *Ter Herdenking der Hervorming, 1517–1917* (Kampen: Kok, 1917), 7–36, at 19.

23. The five hundred letters exchanged between them were published in the centennial year of Kuyper’s birth under the title *Briefwisseling van Mr. G. Groen van Prinsterer met Dr. A. Kuyper* (Kampen: Kok, 1937). The volume was named a “pre-publication” of the series *Groen van Prinsterer, Schriftelijke nalatenschap; Briefwisseling*, ed. J. L. van Essen et al., 6 vols. (The Hague, 1925–1992). It was a rush job, full of mistakes and misprints. The letters have since been more carefully edited and then seeded chronologically into vols. V and VI of the series (hereafter cited as *Briefwisseling*).

24. See e.g. *Briefwisseling*, 5:607, 614, 643, 676, 706; 6:132, 675, 704, 706–09.

25. See e.g. *Briefwisseling*, 5:726–31, 735, 744, 754; 6:1, 13, 32–34, 61, 77, 115.

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26. See e.g. *Briefwisseling*, 5:749–52, 755, 768, 770–73; 6:38–39, 43, 47–49, 54, 59.
27. *Briefwisseling*, 6:488–508.
28. Eng. trans. in James D. Bratt, ed., *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader* (Grand Rapids:Eerdmans, 1998), 279–322.
29. Cf. G. Groen van Prinsterer, *Adviezen in the Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal*, 3 vols. (Amsterdam, 1850/51); *Adviezen in de Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal*, 2 vols. (Utrecht, 1856/57).
30. Kuyper to Groen, April 11, 1867; *Briefwisseling*, 5:671.
31. Kuyper to Groen, Oct. 12, 1868; *Briefwisseling*, 5:729 (ital. added).
32. A. Kuyper, *Antirevolutionaire Staatskunde*, 2 vols. (Kampen: Kok, 1916), 1:137, 547.
33. See *Geen vergeefs woord* (Kampen: Kok, 1951), 19, 22–26, 35, 143, 178f. This volume is a collection of addresses to the pre-election rallies of Antirevolutionary Party delegates.
34. Quoted in A. Th. van Deursen, *De eeuw in ons hart* (Franeker: Van Wijnen, 1991), 25.
35. Cf. *De Zutphensche Bondsdag* (Utrecht: Gereformeerde Jongelingsbond, 1908), 32; *De Haagsche Bondsdag* (Utrecht: Gereformeerde Jongelingsbond, 1909), 39.
36. The second part of his double surname was added in the eighteenth century. His Christian name, Guillaume, was given to him at his baptism in the local Walloon church in September 1801. Throughout his life, however, people knew him as Willem. Dutch publications invariably refer to him as Mr. G. Groen van Prinsterer, in which Mr. does not stand for Mister but for *Meester*, an advanced degree in law.
37. Paul, “A Critical Reappraisal,” 71, draws an apt analogy: “Just as our culture tries to cope with the Holocaust, Groen’s life and time lay in the shadow of the French Revolution.”
38. See H. Smitskamp, “Groen van Prinsterer’s denkbeelden over het recht van opstand,” *Antirevolutionaire Staatskunde* (quarterly) 8 (1934): 182–94.
39. Paul, “A Critical Reappraisal,” 73.
40. *Unbelief and Revolution*, 292 (ital. added).
41. *Unbelief and Revolution*, 343–44, 345, 356. Themes like heart and worldview became topoi in the thought of Kuyper; the loci classici are in his *Lectures on Calvinism*, 20, 46, and in *Honig uit de rotssteen*, 2 vols. (Amsterdam, 1880–83), 2:35–38.

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42. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, Introduction.
43. *Unbelief and Revolution*, 53.
44. *Unbelief and Revolution*, 51.
45. J. A. de Wilde and C. Smeenk, *Het volk ten baat; de geschiedenis van de A.R.-Partij* (Groningen: Jan Haan, 1949), 699.
46. Compare that to what happened in neighboring Prussia during the 1860s: Bismarck, backed by the king, spent millions on army reform, even though the parliament had not approved such appropriations. When the modernized and enlarged Prussian army then won two wars, parliament caved in and formally forgave the chancellor his illegal acts. The whole constitutional charade made Germany ripe for the authoritarianism under the Kaiser.
47. See his 12-page *Open brief aan de kiezersvereniging 'Nederland en Oranje' te Leiden* (The Hague, 1857).
48. G. A. Wumkes, *It Fryske Réveil yn portretten* (Bolsward: Osinga, 1938), 195–96.
49. G. Groen van Prinsterer, *Vrijheid, Gelijkheid, Broederschap; toelichting van de spreuk der Revolutie* (The Hague, 1848), 83.
50. *Briefwisseling*, 6:737.
51. *Ongeloof en Revolutie*, 2nd ed., 413n., citing Baron von Ketteler, the progressive bishop of Mainz.
52. R. Reinsma, *Een merkwaardige episode uit de geschiedenis van de slavenemancipatie* (The Hague: Van Goor, 1963), 7–14, 28–40. See also *Briefwisseling*, 2:944–46; 5:115–18, 793–95.
53. G. Groen van Prinsterer, *La nationalité religieuse en rapport avec La Hollande et l'Alliance Evangélique* (Amsterdam: Höveker, 1867); repr. in M. Cohen Stuart, *In Memoriam Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer: Notice Biographique* (Utrecht, 1876), 47–51. For Groen's relation to the Evangelical Alliance in general, see W. van Oosterwijk Bruijn, *Uit de dagen van het Réveil* (Rotterdam: Daamen, 1900), 51–165. Groen's address deserves an English translation; here is a sample: "Should nationalism ever triumph, we will see the atrocities of a new barbarism amid the most exquisite refinements of civilization." Cf. Churchill on the eve of the Battle of Britain: "But if we fail, then the whole world, including the United States, including all that we have known and cared for, will sink into the abyss of a new Dark Age made more sinister, and perhaps more protracted, by the lights of perverted science."
54. G. Groen van Prinsterer, *Grondwetherziening en eensgezindheid* (Amsterdam, 1849), 368–69.
55. Cf. R. Kuiper, *The Life and Times of Willem Groen van Prinsterer*, chap. 5. See also D. J. H. van Dijk and H. F. Massink, eds., *Groen en de grondwet; de betekenis van Groen van Prinsterers visie op de grondwet van 1848*

(Heereveen: J. J. Groen en Zoon, 1998).

56. Cf. A. Kuyper, *Parlementaire Redevoeringen*, 4 vols. (Amsterdam: Van Holkema & Warendorf, 1908–10), 3:25–27, 49–53, 61–83, 141–82; 4:132–47, 169–84.

57. *Unbelief and Revolution*, 187–88.

58. Groen read these words with this emphasis: “godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise *as much* for the life that now is as for that which is to come.”

59. E.g., *Christelijke wetenschap* (Kampen: Kok, 1904), 107; *Het Christelijk huisgezin*, 2nd ed. (Kampen: Kok, 1912), 193; *Verzamelde opstellen* (Kampen: Kok, 1921), 147; *Kennis en leven* (Kampen: Kok, 1922), 134; *Reformed Dogmatics*, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003–08), 1:43, 362; 3:469, 479; 4:236.

60. This was a label he at first shied away from but later accepted, under the influence of H. J. Koenen and A. Kuyper; see *Briefwisseling*, 2:640, 966 (Koenen); 6:507 (Kuyper). Cf. *Unbelief and Revolution*, 144–51.

61. McKendree R. Langley, “Emancipation and Apologetics: The Formation of Abraham Kuyper’s Anti-Revolutionary Party in the Netherlands, 1872–1880” (Ph.D. diss., Westminster Seminary, 1995).

62. Cf. *inter alia* Arend Lijphart, *The Politics of Accommodation: Pluralism and Democracy in the Netherlands*, 2nd rev. ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975). The collaborative approach to public policy for socio-economic affairs, the so-called *polder* model, especially strong during the 1990s, still awaits its monograph in English.

63. *Unbelief and Revolution*, 116.

64. *Unbelief and Revolution*, Preface.

65. Said in a CBC-TV (Toronto) interview with Terence McKenna, 7 Jan. 2003.

66. H. Bavinck, *De algemeene genade* (Kampen, 1894); A. Kuyper, *De Gemeene Gratie*, 3 vols. (Leiden: Donner, 1902/04).

67. See G. Groen van Pinsterer, *Aan de Hervormde Gemeente in Nederland* (Leyden, 1843) and *Het Regt der Hervormde Gezindheid* (Amsterdam, 1848). Two prominent ministers who were leaning more and more toward theological modernism agreed with him and resigned their office in the church: Conrad Busken Huet and Allard Pierson.

68. Cf. Gleason, *Herman Bavinck*, chapters 10–12.

69. See “Groen van Pinsterer’s Tactics in His Campaign for Freedom of Education,” in J. L. van Essen and H. D. Morton, *Guillaume Groen van Pinsterer: Selected Studies* (Jordan Station, ON: Wedge, 1990),

79–88.

70. See e.g. the publications by Charles Leslie Glenn, Jr., beginning with his *The Myth of the Common School* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988); idem, *Choice of Schools in Six Nations* (Washington, DC: U. S. Department of Education, 1989).

71. Enjoying this equality are Montessori schools, open-air schools, Dalton schools, and all faith-based schools, subject to accredited inspection. The growing number of Muslim schools, which are harder to inspect, has raised the question whether the parity system should be abandoned. Since that would require amending the Constitution, it is not likely to happen anytime soon.

72. Groen to Da Costa, Nov. 16, 1844; in G. Groen van Prinsterer, ed., *Brieven van Mr. Isaac da Costa*, 3 vols. (Amsterdam, 1872), 1:189; see also 190–95, 197–203.

73. The system has been misnamed “pillarization” by sociologists and, even worse, “religious segregation” by some dictionaries I have seen.

74. See also the insightful and entertaining essay by Herbert Donald Morton, “‘A Christian Heroism’: Elements of the Style of Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer,” in J. L. van Essen and H. D. Morton, *Selected Studies*, 101-09.

END OF NOTES

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