Neo-Calvinism and the French Revolution

Neo-Calvinism and the French Revolution

Edited by
James Eglinton and George Harinck

B L O O M S B U R Y

LONDON • NEW DELHI • NEW YORK • SYDNEY

AQ: Please confirm whether we have change the word "Authors" to "Editors".

CONTENTS

LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS

Hugo den Boer is a PhD student in church history at Kampen Theological University, specializing in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Dutch church history. His work has been published in *Trajecta*, *Tijdschrift voor Nederlandse Kerkgeschiedenis* and *Skript-Historisch Tijdschrift*.

James Bratt is professor of history at Calvin College (Grand Rapids, Michigan). Recipient of a PhD from Yale University (1978), he has published extensively on early American history, Abraham Kuyper and the neo-Calvinist tradition, and Dutch-American history. His articles have appeared in such journals as *Church History*, *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History* and *The Journal of the Early Republic*. His most recent essay is 'English, Dutch, & Swedish Protestantism in the Era of Exploration and Early Colonization' in *The Cambridge History of Religions in America*, vol. 1 (2012). He is the author of *Abraham Kuyper: Modern Calvinist, Christian Democrat* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013).

J. M. (Hans) Burger studied theology in Kampen, the Netherlands. He is currently postdoctoral research fellow in systematic theology at Kampen Theological University. He is the author of *Being in Christ* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2008). He has published articles in *Nederlands Theologisch Tijdschrift*, *Kontekstueel*, *Theologia Reformata* and *Radix*.

Robert S. Covolo is a doctoral candidate in theology and culture at Fuller Theological Seminary researching the relationship between theology and the emerging discipline of fashion theory. He has contributed chapters, articles and reviews to a number of scholarly publications including *Cultural Encounters, European Journal of Theology, Journal of Reformed Theology, The International Journal of Public Theology* and *The Kuyper Center Review.*

James Eglinton is Meldrum Lecturer in Reformed Theology at New College, the University of Edinburgh. Prior to this he spent 3 years on the faculty of Kampen Theological University, initially as postdoctoral research fellow and then as senior researcher in systematic and historical theology. His PhD, written at the University of Edinburgh, focused on the Trinitarian theology of Herman Bavinck and was published as *Trinity and Organism* (London: T&T Clark, 2012). His writings have appeared in *The Kuyper Center Review*, *Journal of Reformed Theology*, *Calvin Theological Journal*, *La Revue Réformée*, *Dutch Crossing*, *Theology in Scotland* and *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology*.

Mark W. Elliott is reader in church history at St Mary's College, the University of St Andrews. His recent publications include *The Heart of Biblical Theology* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012) and *Engaging Leviticus: Reading Leviticus Theologically with its past interpreters* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2012).

George Harinck is professor of history at VU University Amsterdam and Kampen Theological University. He studied History at Leiden University and has published widely on the (international) history of neo-Calvinism and Dutch Protestantism since 1800; see www.hdc.vu.nl.

Wolter Huttinga is a PhD student in systematic theology at Kampen Theological University. His doctoral research concerns Herman Bavinck and Radical Orthodoxy. His articles have been included in *Tijdschrift voor Theologie*, *The Bavinck Review*, *Waar komen we vandaan? Anderhalve eeuw evolutiedebat in protestants-christelijk Nederland* and *Heilig, heilig, heilig: over sacraliteit in kerk en cultuur*.

Matthew Kaemingk is the executive director of the Institute for Theology and Northwest Culture at Fuller Theological Seminary in Seattle. He recently completed doctoral degrees in theology at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam and Christian ethics at Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena. His doctoral dissertation is entitled 'Mecca and Amsterdam: Christian Discipleship and the Challenge of Pluralism Between Islam and the West'. His research has most recently been published in the *Journal for Evangelical Interfaith Dialogue, Missiology, Comment Magazine* and *Fieldnotes Magazine*.

Ewout Klei is a specialist in political and religious history. His doctoral thesis on the Reformed Political Alliance, a small conservative Christian party in the Netherlands, was written at Kampen Theological University and published as *Klein Maar Krachtig: Dat Maakt Ons Uniek* (Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, 2011). Klei is currently writing books on the end of Christian politics in the Netherlands and the history of the Dutch Pacifist Socialist Party. He works as an editor at Studiemeesters Amsterdam.

Paul Wells taught systematic theology at the Faculté Jean Calvin in Aix-en-Provence, France, from 1974 to 2012. His doctorate was awarded by the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. Together with Marie de Védrines, he is responsible for the new translation of Calvin's *Institutes* in modern French.

Alissa M. Wilkinson is an assistant professor at The King's College in New York City, where she teaches cultural criticism, postmodern theory, cultural anthropology, and English. She is the chief film critic at *Christianity Today* and her writing has appeared in *Books & Culture*, *Christianity Today*, *Paste*, *The Gospel Coalition*, *WORLD*, *Relevant* and others. She was formerly editor of *The Curator*, published

by International Arts Movement; *Comment*, published by the Ontario-based think tank Cardus, and *Fieldnotes*, published by the Max De Pree Center for Leadership at Fuller Theological Seminary. She holds a BS in Information Technology from Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, an MA in Humanities and Social Thought from New York University, and an MFA in Creative Nonfiction from Seattle Pacific University. She lives in Brooklyn.

FOREWORD

Paul Wells

The French Revolution was bad for France, but Napoleon was worse. Say something along those lines in French academia or in French polite society, however, and you will be met with a torrent of abuse. Such is the influence of Marxist historiography in the French-speaking world down to the present.

Those who might agree in some measure are the Catholic historians of the right, who have sought to bring grist to their thesis that the Protestant Reformation was the forerunner of Enlightenment freethinking, or those like Pierre Chaunu, whose thought is independent enough to note the consequences of the Revolution: somewhat inevitably, it bled France dry and paved the way for the three Franco-German conflicts of the following centuries.

This book presents the neo-Calvinist notion that the Revolution replaced one religion with another – namely, exchanging Christian theism for a man-centred secularism that is, ironically, profoundly religious. Such an idea is scandalous to the French political and cultural elite for two reasons. First, the idea that any form of religion could be connected with freedom, rather than with intolerance and the oppression of others, lies outwith the bounds of possibility for French secular humanism. In that context, the notion that religion might correspond to human flourishing is incomprehensible. Second, it is utterly impossible for the French secular mentality to see itself as having religious roots or motivations. Its adherents see it simply as a form of pure naturalism, described as being 'neutral', aided and abetted by Darwin, Marx and Freud. These ideas persist even in postmodern France, where 'neutrality' is synonymous with objectivity and the lack of bias.

Turning to the plausibility of Groen van Prinsterer's proposition, however, one cannot but notice the irrefutable historical role of Napoleon, under whom France toiled and strained. Despite taking some measures to curry the Church's favour – for example, the restoration of the traditional calendar and reintroduction of religious festivals – these were simply smoke and mirrors to hide his basic program. Napoleon versed himself in the literature of Athens and vituperated Jerusalem. He reintroduced slavery in the colonies and left the program of liberty, equality and fraternity in tatters. All that remained was the military fraternity of brothers-in-arms under an autocratic supremo.

Napoleon was a Jacobin at heart. His words and actions bear out the neo-Calvinist hypothesis. Liberty was destroyed as he brought France and Europe to their knees in both military and economic terms. As for equality, he put the Church in its place (imprisoning the Pope in Fontainebleau in so doing) by attempting to banish it from public life. The Emperor created a new French priesthood by

founding the elitist system of the *grandes écoles*, which remains in place today and makes France a highly conservative country hidden behind libertarian rhetoric. Concerning his *Code civil* with its Roman antecedents it has been said that, 'what is most striking for the modern observer, is, first, its profound social injustice, and second, the extent to which this injustice was the work of Napoleon himself. What we see is not a universal charter of justice but rather a device designed to propitiate the elites though whom France was now to be ruled . . . in particular the position of women deteriorated dramatically.'[1]

Napoleon revealed his true colours in the Bayonne affair (1808), which was called by one of Joachim Murat's *aides-de-camp*, 'the most iniquitous spoliation that modern history records'.[2] Napoleon was, however, the *vox Dei*, and his comment on the affair was of another ilk: 'However it may have been, I disdained ways that were tortuous and banal: I felt myself to be that powerful! I struck from too great a height. I wanted to act both in the fashion of that Providence which remedies the ills of mortals by means that are their equal, however violent, and in a manner unfettered by judgement.'[3]

The danger of abolishing God, of course, is that man himself ends up playing god and, in turn, making good Dostoyevsky's remark that unlimited liberties then give birth to unlimited despotisms. All this bears out the neo-Calvinist hypothesis about the Revolution and revolutions presented in this book.

1. Charles Esdaile, *Napoleon's Wars: An International History*, 1803–1815 (London: Penguin 2008), p. 33.

2. M. de Marbot, *The Memoirs of Baron de Marbot*, I (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1892), p. 251.

3. E. Las Cases, *Mémorial de Sainte Hélène*, I (ed. G. Walter; Paris: Gallimard, 1956), pp. 784–5.

PREFACE

Since the late 1990s, neo-Calvinism has enjoyed a resurgence of international scholarly interest. This has largely been centred on the ever-increasing availability of its foremost thinkers, Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavinck, in English. That having been said, this movement should not be typecast as an exclusively Anglophone occurrence. Bavinck and Kuyper are now being read in Mandarin, Portuguese, Spanish, Hungarian, Russian, Vietnamese, Korean and Japanese. In the global undertaking that is Christian theology, they are finding their place in often surprising contexts.

The growth of engagement with neo-Calvinism is, however, particularly strong in North America. There, numerous conferences, periodicals, websites and books encourage research on neo-Calvinism. It is home to both the Kuyper Center for Public Theology (Princeton Theological Seminary) and the Bavinck Institute (Calvin Theological Seminary). At present, North America is the scene of a great exchange of ideas between neo-Calvinism and other theological traditions. By contrast, little comparable scholarly infrastructure has been developed in neo-Calvinism's native Europe.

That is why we, as European scholars, have taken the initiative to organize European conferences on neo-Calvinism. In short, our goal was to redress this balance by encouraging academic interaction with neo-Calvinism in European contexts. These efforts began in earnest in early September 2010, when a conference was held at New College, University of Edinburgh, focusing on Herman Bavinck's dogmatic and ethical legacy. In August 2012, this was followed by a conference held in the American Church in Paris, on the theme of neo-Calvinism and the French Revolution.

The proceedings of the Edinburgh conference were published in 2011 in the Spring issue of the *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology*. We are happy that the proceedings from the second conference have now been published in book form by T&T Clark. We hope this to be the start of a biennial series on themes related to the neo-Calvinist tradition. The majority of the contributions in this volume took their earliest form as papers presented in Paris. To this, Paul Wells, the foremost Calvinist theologian to have worked in France in recent decades, has added a foreword to introduce the book.

We would like to thank the authors for their contributions and the publisher for its cooperation. We also wish to extend our appreciation to Stichting Afbouw Kampen, which kindly provided financial assistance towards the completion of this project.

<div align="right">

Dr James Eglinton, University of Edinburgh
Prof. George Harinck, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam

</div>

Chapter 1

ABRAHAM KUYPER AND THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

James Bratt

I Introduction

Abraham Kuyper and the French Revolution: the title suggests one of the shortest scholarly articles in history. Mark Noll puts the case tersely in his Foreword to my new biography of Kuyper: 'Kuyper was first a convinced Protestant who held the image of Reformation guided by the word of God as the highest ideal. Almost as intensely he believed that the French Revolution had unleashed the most destructive forms of rationalism, individualism, and atheism imaginable.'[1] Kuyper expressed the same point in words taken from Groen van Prinsterer and instilled in his followers as the motto of their politics: 'Against the Revolution, the gospel.'[2] And so they repeated it down a century of thought and action. Point made, case closed.

Indeed, the case would be closed, had Kuyper not faced a complicated agenda and, while repeating this slogan, worked complications beneath it. After all, he wanted to promote democracy, the separation of church and state, popular political organization, and sundry other modern innovations, all of which, by the code of the various counter-revolutionary and Restorationist streams that had flowed into his own thought and that still pulsed in his audience, were anathema. How, then, to warrant proposals that bore such thick revolutionary associations? By claiming them for Calvinism. Kuyper did this most famously in the middle of his 1873 oration on 'Calvinism: Source and Stronghold of Our Constitutional Liberties:' 'We are Antirevolutionaries not because we reject the fruits of the revolutionary era but because, history book in hand, we dare contest the paternity of these good things. With much evil the revolution also brought Europe much good, but this

---

1. In James D. Bratt, *Abraham Kuyper: Modern Calvinist, Christian Democrat* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), pp. ix–x.
2. See, among others, Abraham Kuyper, *Niet de Vrijheidsboom maar het Kruis* (Amsterdam: J. H. Wormser, 1889), p. 7.

was stolen fruit, ripened on the stem of Calvinism under the nurturing warmth of our martyrs' faith. . . .'[3]

In making this case and deploying different pieces of it at different times and places across his long career, Kuyper had to effect three bits of intellectual work. First, and most obviously, he had to remind his audience of what had gone wrong with the French Revolution and why, and further to apply that lesson to ideas, movements or policy proposals on the current scene that he wanted to mobilize his followers to oppose. But second, he criticized the Old Regime to explain why the offerings of the Revolution had seemed so appealing, how it had indeed accomplished some necessary work and why his followers accordingly should set themselves against any sort of reflex conservatism. Third, far from denouncing revolution as such, as had progenitors in his tradition like William Bilderdijk, Isaac da Costa, Abraham Capadose and Groen himself, Kuyper celebrated it in certain instances – namely the Puritan and American – when it was by his lights certifiably Christian.

One consequence of this three-part labour was the oscillation we see in him between tones of bold progressivism and legitimist conservatism, between a Calvinism that claimed true title to the foundations of Dutch society and a Calvinism that would measure – and willingly discard – any arrangement of contemporary society by the righteous demands of a just and sovereign God.

II What went wrong in 1789?

For Kuyper's explanation of what had gone wrong with the French Revolution, we could turn to many sites. It will suffice here to look at the keynote address he gave at the Anti-Revolutionary Party convention in 1889, *Not the Liberty Tree but the Cross*. It being the centennial of the Revolution, the moment was ripe for invidious comparisons between the gospel's best promises in the way of politics and the Revolution's worst realities. Kuyper delivered. His talk invoked the unholy trinity of Voltaire, Danton and Robespierre; it charted how revolutionary action in the name of liberty, equality and fraternity had eventuated in their opposites – namely, suppression, pronounced class segmentation and strife; it explained how each phase of the Revolution, its core clientele being partial in both senses of the word, left its goals unfulfilled, these goals being 'unfulfillable' as not satisfying the needs of the whole. 'And so what else could the Revolution wreak also in its more moderate form,' Kuyper asked, 'but the exchange of one tyranny for another?'[4]

3. Abraham Kuyper, 'Calvinism: Source and Stronghold of Our Constitutional Liberties', in James D. Bratt (ed.), *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), p. 298. Originally, the lecture was delivered in 1873 and published in Amsterdam (B. van der Land, 1874).

4. Kuyper, *Vrijheidsboom*, pp. 4–6, 10–12; quotation, p. 12.

Beneath this secular dialectical analysis, however, Kuyper identified a religious dynamic. Before any political, social or economic revolution must come a *moral* revolution, he insisted, a break from the slavery of sin that affects all humankind, in every regime, of every class, in the leader and in the crowd of any cause whatsoever. That moral prerequisite can be obtained only by surrender to the cross of Christ, where the cosmic overturning of the reign of sin had been accomplished once for all; not,[5] thus the title of Kuyper's 1889 address: *Not the Liberty Tree but the Cross*. Put more broadly in terms of political theory: the doorway to true liberty, social harmony and lasting justice consists of obedience to God and the ordinances he had established for human life. In owning that authority, the anti-revolutionary tradition marked the way forward; in deeming such obedience to be the source of all slavery, the French Revolution had gone wrong.[6] All its shifting phases, all its oscillation from one faction to another, its whole series of political arrangements and economic programmes were caught by this original bad principle and therefore could not but come to ruin.

It is instructive to pull back from this sketch of political theory to the more systematic picture developed by Kuyper's mentor, Groen van Prinsterer, around that other revolutionary year, 1848. Like other signal works from that moment – *The Communist Manifesto* and Thoreau's *Essay on Civil Disobedience*, to cite the most famous – Groen's *Lectures on Unbelief and Revolution* attempted to set out a fundamental critique of the hegemonic bourgeois liberal order and a précis of its proper antidote.[7] Groen's argument boils down to this: all political rule derives from divine right, which is delegated via revelation and history. The modern age sought to displace that authority with Reason, manifest politically in republicanism, social-contract theory and notions of popular sovereignty. As the cult of Reason gathered momentum across the eighteenth century, its radical logic became evident: mild English deism gave way to Voltaire's radical sort, then to Diderot's atheism; Montesquieu's analysis of national character bred Rousseau's espousal of civil religion – all of which culminated in Helvetius and La Mettrie's bald philosophical materialism.

This corrosion in French philosophy inevitably destabilized French politics, Groen continued, and the ensuing revolution followed *its* radical logic from the calling of the Estates General to the Reign of Terror until a despairing reaction brought in the law and order regime of the Directory. But the latter were simply Revolutionaries of the Right, lacking any basis in divine authority and thus giving way to further Revolution from the Left. The cycle culminated finally in the tyranny of Napoleon Bonaparte, whose power, rooted in violence and conquest, was forced to pursue endless warfare to sustain its lustre. Those wars simultaneously

---

5. Ibid., pp. 8–9.

6. Ibid., p. 10.

7. The text of Groen's first edition is provided with a very learned and detailed presentation of background and commentary in Harry Van Dyke, *Groen van Prinsterer's Lectures on Unbelief and Revolution* (Jordan Station, ON: Wedge Publishing Foundation, 1989). Note that the commentary and Groen's original lectures have separable pagination.

spread the taint of revolution across Europe and galvanized the opposition that overcame it. Yet the Restoration that proceeded from the Congress of Vienna had not settled the matter, Groen concluded, for its monarchies proved to be variations of human devising. Only the firm foundations of God and history could dispel what threatened to become a chronic cycle of upheaval and repression.[8]

III *The Old Regime and counter-revolution*

To put it mildly, there did not seem much potential for democracy or any other modern notion here. Yet Groen's treatise also hid fissures that someone as skilled as Kuyper could pry open to sever the chord between orthodox Christianity and political reaction. For one, the roots of Groen's 'Revolution' extended back in time well before the outbursts of 1789. That is to say, the 'principles' of 'Revolution' went back behind the usually suspected Enlightenment through the Renaissance and into the late Middle Ages.[9] Thus, in Groen's theory, seventeenth- and eighteenth-century absolute monarchs qualified as 'revolutionaries,' and the papacy and Counter-Reformation did their part in propounding the 'unbelief' that finally exploded in France after 1789. Furthermore, the French Catholic theorist Félicité Lamennais, who first taught Groen the link between unbelief and revolution, exemplified how a counter-revolutionary could eventually turn into a democrat.[10] Theocratic norms, seemingly so prone towards reaction, could actually loosen the spell of the status quo by appeal to a transcendental authority beyond the conventional options of the moment. Mere assertions of earthly authority from the traditionalist side, be they from the august monarchs of the Old Regime or the uneasy ones of the Restoration, did not necessarily bear the mandate of heaven – and might just defy God's sanctity by exaggerating their own.

These lines of critique Kuyper wove into the second, contrapuntal theme of his 1889 address. Having bewailed and explained the failures of 1789, Kuyper also scotched the pretensions of the rulers who had come before it and of those who hoped to pick up the thread after it was over. The latter he gave shortest shrift. 'The hatred of the Restorationists flowed not against the *principle* but against the *consequences* of the Revolution,' he declared. 'While they sought to regain their lost power and privilege . . . they were quite prepared to let the new life of the state arise *out of the root of the Revolution*. In our country too the power of the old regents was almost entirely swallowed up in the stream which flowed

---

8. The development of Groen's argument is summarized in Van Dyke's outline and synopsis, *Groen's Lectures*, pp. 159–70. On the radicalizing dynamics of French theory, see Groen's pp. 192, 198, 216–17; on the oscillation of French Revolutionary regimes, pp. 295–395; the Restoration as implicated in this pattern, pp. 380–94. The religious antidote Groen prescribes is well summarized on Van Dyke's p. 255.

9. Van Dyke, *Groen's Lectures*, Groen's pp. 166–8, 176.

10. Van Dyke, *Groen's Lectures*, pp. 134–6.

out of France.'[11] No surprise then that this 'paper dam' was washed away by that stream when it once again, in 1830 and 1848, attained flood tide. The denizens of Restoration, in sum, fell under Kuyper's judgement of superficiality. The pillars of the Old Regime were mightier and deserved a mightier critique, one scoring their self-adulation. This indeed might be the mightiest indictment possible from a Calvinist, for whom idolatry stands among the worst of sins. The divine right of kings, Kuyper averred, bespoke the king's operational sense of himself as divine, a pretension befitting the pagan rulers of antiquity but all the more offensive when invoked by the 'most-Christian' monarchs like 'the Stuarts in London' and 'the Bourbons in Paris'. 'Our Regents in Holland's cities', Kuyper pointedly added, shared the same syndrome, inflating themselves above their station, above their duly derived authority, to claim a monopoly on state power.[12] With that, as under the absolute monarchs, came the practice of shortening, undermining and eventually eclipsing the liberties of the people. Thus, it was the 'unbelief' of self-deifying power along with its tyrannies and decadence that fell to the Revolution, and properly so: '. . . the Divine Judgment of 1789 put an end to all that, in Paris as in this country, and from that viewpoint, with regard to the events of the French revolution . . . we bow our heads with anxious respect.' As had Nebuchadnezzar of old, so the line-up of French villains from Voltaire to Napoleon carried out '*the righteous judgment of God*' upon the sins and oppressions of the old regime.[13] Its roots and fruits, Kuyper admonished, deserved not the slightest word of defence from anti-revolutionary lips.

Thus, Kuyper *indicted* the enemies of his enemy, rather than reflexively befriending them as ordinary politics might predict. In part this was the effort of political – theological integrity: to exercise the standards of critical principle, as he often demanded, instead of surrendering to convenience. This was also part of Kuyper's life-long agenda of reconciling the cause of faith with the best promise of modernity. But some particular circumstances in 1889 help explain why Kuyper was so emphatic about the point on this occasion. The year marked not only the centennial of the French Revolution but also a crucial midway point in the first Christian coalition Cabinet in modern Dutch history. The department budget proposed by Kuyper's friend, Colonial Minister L. W. C. Keuchenius, had been rejected in parliament, forcing the Mackay Cabinet to decide whether to stand by their imperilled member or to sacrifice him for the sake of staying in power. Kuyper's preference was not in doubt – to uphold Keuchenius not only against opponents without but also against elements within a party that he deemed to be timorous, inconsistent in principle and a self-perpetuating establishment.[14]

11. Kuyper, *Vrijheidsboom*, p. 7. 'Paper dam' in next sentence quoted from p. 5. All italics in quotations in this paper appear in the original.

12. Ibid., p. 9.

13. Ibid., pp. 9, 10.

14. On the Mackay Cabinet, see E. H. Kossmann, *The Low Countries, 1780–1940* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), pp. 352–7. On Kuyper and Keuchenius in this context, Jeroen Koch, *Abraham Kuyper: een biografie* (Amsterdam: Boom, 2006), pp. 348–50, 353–7.

Keuchenius was unapologetically radical, and Kuyper was in a radical mood – we might say, *still* in the radical mode that he had struck with the Doleantie in 1886, that he saw befitting the Netherlands' current economic crisis, and that welcomed the possibilities spelt by the constitutional revision of 1887, with its broader franchise and promise of further democratization.[15] In these circumstances it was useful as well as true, Kuyper might have said like an American pragmatist, to sever faith from reaction and to salvage some of the fervour that had gone into the French Revolution.

IV Confronting economic crisis

Indeed, in the years around 1889 Kuyper was attacking the Revolution from the left, moved by the continuing hardships in the Dutch economy, which were threatening to divide his movement from within, and by his own development of a more constructive and consistent neo-Calvinist perspective.[16] More radical voices in Patrimonium, the Protestant labour union, decried its model of employer paternalism as insufficiently anti-revolutionary. Since when, challenged Patrimonium President Klaas Kater at the union's 1890 convention, did Calvinists think that 'plutocrats and aristocrats know the needs of our back alleys' or 'have any desire to alleviate them?'[17] Economics had never been the strong suit of the anti-revolutionary cause, whose leaders came mostly from theology and law and tended to submerge economic questions beneath political–philosophical generalizations. So just as he had learned political theory on the hop earlier in his career, Kuyper now had to – and did – lay out a systematic analysis that assimilated anti-revolutionary political philosophy to a social-democratic agenda and brought his followers to forthrightly confront the emerging industrial future. His efforts climaxed at a Christian Social Congress in November 1891, where his keynote

15. The radical climate of the times, set by the economic crisis, is well explained in Theo van Tijn, 'De Doleantie kwam niet alleen', *Documentatieblad voor de Nederlandse kerkgeschiedenis van de negentiende eeuw* 10 (January 1986), pp. 41–6, and 'De sociale bewegingen van 1876 tot 1887', in Dirk Pieter Blok, et al. (eds.), *Algemene geschiedenis der Nederlanden* (Vol. 13; Haarlem: Fibula-Van Dishoeck, 1978), pp. 90–100. Kossmann, *The Low Countries,* pp. 310–1, 314–6, gives a more concise summary.

16. The context is well detailed and analysed in G. J. Schutte, 'Arbeid, die geen brood geeft', in Schutte (ed.), *Een Arbeider is zijn loon waardig* ('s Gravenhage: Meinema, 1991), pp. 10–32. For a winsome account in English, see Harry Van Dyke, 'How Abraham Kuyper Became a Christian Democrat', *Calvin Theological Journal* 33 (1998), pp. 420–35.

17. H. J. Langeveld, 'Protestantsche Christenen van Nederland, verenigt u', in Schutte, *Arbeider is loon waardig*, pp. 103–41, offers the most complete treatment of the role of Patrimonium in this context. Quotation from Van Dyke, 'How Abraham Kuyper Became a Christian Democrat', p. 425.

address, *Christianity and the Social Question*, brought his audience of a thousand to their feet in tumultuous applause.[18]

For economic conservatives (that is, neoliberals) and American evangelicals, who assume an automatic affinity between their respective positions, Kuyper's deliverances will be bewildering at best, outrageous at worst. With intense and often heated rhetoric *Christianity and the Social Question* denounced laissez-faire capitalism as inimical to human well-being, material or spiritual; as out of tune with Scripture and contrary to the will of God; and as the very spawn of 'Revolution'. The 'Revolution' Kuyper named here was the French, but he could just as well have used 'Industrial,' for the principles behind and the attitudes stemming from both constituted the deeper revolution in consciousness that anti-revolutionary thinking had always faulted most. Wherein did this revolution lie for economics? In replacing the spirit of 'Christian compassion' with 'the egoism of a passionate struggle for possessions,' Kuyper said. In the abrogation of the claims of community for the sake of the sovereign individual; in the commodification of labour, which denied the image of God and the rightful claims of a brother; in the idolization of the supposedly free market, which deprived the weak of their necessary protections, licensed the strong in their manipulations and proclaimed the consequences to be the inevitable workings of natural law. In the advertising that inculcated a covetous consumerism as the norm of human happiness. The French Revolution, but as Kuyper repeated throughout his work, also the 'utilitarian,' the 'laissez-faire' and the 'Manchester' schools that were the philosophical apologists for industrial capitalism,

> made the possession of money the highest good, and then, in the struggle for money, it set every man against every other. . . . As soon as that evil demon was unchained at the turn of the [nineteenth] century, no consideration was shrewd enough, no strategy crafty enough, no deception outrageous enough among those who, through superiority of knowledge, position, and capital, took money – and ever more money – from the socially weaker.[19]

And since 'it cannot be said often enough,' as Kuyper had intoned in 'Sphere Sovereignty,' that 'money creates power,' the new bourgeoisie soon took command of the state, overriding its divine mandate to protect the weak and turning it into an engine of their own interests.[20]

---

18. Schutte (ed.), *Arbeider is zijn loon waardig*, has the Christian Social Congress as its focal point, having been published on the centennial of that meeting. The text of Kuyper's address (originally *Het Sociale Vraagstuk en de Christelijke Religie* [Amsterdam: J. A. Wormser, 1891]) is available in English translation, with commentary, as *The Problem of Poverty* (ed. James W. Skillen; Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1991).

19. All quotations from Kuyper, *Problem of Poverty*, pp. 44–7.

20. Kuyper, 'Sphere Sovereignty', in Bratt (ed.), *Kuyper Centennial Reader*, p. 478.

That natural law, however, made Kuyper doubt many progressive proposals to correct economic abuses by legislation or regulatory reforms. With an eye towards the 'laissez faire' Liberals' massive public investments to promote commercial enterprise at mid-century or the crony capitalism of the contemporary Dutch Indies, not to mention – for example – the regulatory capture that marks the current American scene, Kuyper declared: 'The stronger, almost without exception, have always known how to bend every custom and magisterial ordinance so that the profit is theirs and the loss belongs to the weaker.'[21] Of course, specific reforms might be legitimate but besides being prone to elite co-optation, such gestures amounted, Kuyper jibed, to calling upon a physician when an architect was really needed. 'We must courageously and openly acknowledge that the Social Democrats are right' to insist that the evils and inequities of the current Dutch situation stemmed from 'the *entire structure* of our social system'. Socialists were wrong in the blueprint they drew up, he hastened to add, but even there, not so much for the design of the interior as for neglecting to lay the foundations of the house in God's eternal ordinances.[22] Kuyper repeated that these broad principles were laid out along 'clearly visible lines' in Scripture and creation, and repeated it again, as if sheer insistence would obscure the conflict within his own movement over how those ordinances applied to current conditions.[23]

Those divisions would increasingly agitate the ARP through the Dutch political battles of the 1890s over franchise extension until the party split apart.[24] It is striking that in the midst of those contentions, Kuyper invoked his movement's old curse upon *all* the Revolution's houses – in the interest of universal manhood suffrage! He executed this turn most memorably in his keynote address at the 1891 party convention, entitled 'Maranatha' – invoking Christ's final judgement upon the works of man to warrant voting rights for all men.[25] Early in the speech he endorsed, once for all, the full pluralization of the body politic that opponents of revolution had always proscribed: 'Without any craftiness or secret intentions' on our part, said Kuyper, 'we accept the position of equality before the law along with those who disagree with us. . . .' We generally 'appreciate our Conservatives' *historical bent* . . . our Liberals' *love of liberty* . . . the Radicals' *sense of justice* and . . . the nobler Socialists' *compassion* with so much indescribable misery.'[26] But at the same time Kuyper recalled the party's old wisdom that all these

21. Kuyper, *Problem of Poverty*, p. 33.

22. Kuyper laid out his vision in further detail in 'Manual Labour' (*Handenarbeid*, 1889), originally a series of newspaper articles run in his *De Standaard*; available in English translation in Bratt (ed.), *Kuyper Centennial Reader*, pp. 231–54; (quotation, p. 234–5).

23. Kuyper, *Problem of Poverty*, p. 68.

24. Dutch political history in this era is surveyed in Kossmann, *Low Countries*, pp. 350–61.

25. Abraham Kuyper, 'Maranatha. Rede ter inleiding van de Deputatenvergadering op 12 Mei 1891' (Amsterdam: J. A. Wormser, 1891); E. T. 'Maranatha', in Bratt, *Kuyper Centennial Reader*, pp. 205–28.

26. Kuyper, 'Maranatha', pp. 221, 213.

rivals – including the Conservatives whom many in the audience took to be the natural ally, indeed the mother lode, of anti-revolutionary allegiance – were branches on the Revolutionary tree. While we honour all our opponents as persons, he began,

> we take exception to and resist . . . their disastrous *principle*, which is detached from Christ and which is the same in all these groups. Together they form a single spiritual family, bred from a single stock. The father of the *Liberal* is called *Conservative*, the offspring of the *Liberal* presents himself as a *Radical*, and the *Socialist* is the legitimate child in the third generation.[27]

Conservatives were no better placed than Liberals to resist Socialist claims. 'The oppressed are asking the Liberals why, if "the people are sovereign," that sovereign people should any longer be trampled en masse by the oligarchs. . . . They are simply applying the principles of the French revolution . . . with merciless consistency and without any nobler chords'.[28]

To political philosophy Kuyper added an urgent reading of history. 'The politics of Europe is undisputedly in search of a new configuration. The oligarchy of financially and intellectually advantaged classes is finished.' It was the historic mission of the anti-revolutionary cause to guard this impulse from mob rule and give it a '*Christian-democratic shape*' instead. 'This can still be done *now*,' he told the throng. 'But if you squander this God-given moment and let it pass unused, you will be to blame for having thrown away the future of your country and you will soon bend under the iron fist which will strike you in your Christian liberty and, unsparingly, also in your wallets and property.' Yet Kuyper could not let democracy's potential dangers have the last word. 'Even if the *zeitgeist* were *anti-*democratic, *you* should still seek the broadening of popular influence,' for 'all the Scriptures preach' and all 'history and experience teach that the moral power of faith tends to reside much more among the "little people" who run short every year than among the affluent who annually increase their net worth'.[29]

V What was good about revolution?

These citations of Kuyper from his 'red decade' (1887–97) are startling to those raised on the picture of the later Kuyper: the prime minister who crushed the 1903 railroad strike, the aging party agitator who so regularly condemned socialism (now competitive in Dutch politics) and underscored its self-professed lineage out of the French Revolution. One way to dissolve the paradox is to dismiss his red decade as an aberration and to cite a consistent abhorrence of revolution as

27. Ibid., p. 213.
28. Ibid., p. 221.
29. Ibid., pp. 221–3.

defining the 'real' Kuyper, early and late. The problem with this explanation is that Kuyper endorsed certain revolutions in the foundational political address of his career, the aforementioned speech on Calvinism and constitutional liberties. If we are going to find a consistent Kuyper, we have to locate the commonalities between that endorsement and his critique of revolution elsewhere.

Kuyper delivered 'Calvinism and Constitutional Liberties' on the Dutch university lecture circuit in 1873, hoping to recruit leaders for the political party he was trying to organize. That required some fireworks. It being the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Dutch Constitution of 1848; however, he had to make something out of a moment his party did not relish. His solution was to virtually ignore the Dutch Constitution in pursuit of the source of constitutionalism, which he found in Reformed theology, and to bypass the Netherlands for the annals of international Calvinism. The result was an argument for stability and order from a narrative of resistance, rebellion and revolution – good, Christian revolution.

As Kuyper made historical narrative do most of the work in his speech, the case studies he chose were telling. One derived directly from Geneva: the Huguenot justification of armed resistance set forth by Calvin's successor, Théodore Béza, and amplified by François Hotman and Philippe du Plessis-Mornay.[30] Theirs was a *constitutional* resistance to *tyrants*, Kuyper emphasized, which required authorization by proper officials, the 'lesser magistrates'. Yet as deployed during the French wars of religion, this resistance entailed a violent defiance that Groen could never endorse. Central though their work was to the development of modern political theory, Groen responded to Kuyper's request to say that he did not have these authors in his library to lend him.[31] Huguenot resistance amounted to a rebellion persistent, systematic, bloody, and radicalizing enough to count as a revolution, save for its lack of success. The seventeenth-century English Puritan uprising that Kuyper treated next was not so limited. It drew Kuyper's unmitigated praise, even though on the record it involved violent insurrection, regicide, destruction of church properties, terror in the (Irish) countryside, instability eventuating in military dictatorship and any number of other features resembling all too closely the pattern of the French Revolution. Yet the Roundheads' was a permissible, even commendable, revolution, Kuyper said, because it was a godly one, as manifested by its formal declarations of purpose and the ethical discipline of Cromwell's New Model army.[32]

---

30. Kuyper, 'Calvinism and Constitutional Liberties', pp. 299–306. Huguenot resistance theory is well laid out in Julian H. Franklin (ed.), *Constitutionalism and Resistance in the Sixteenth Century* (New York: Pegasus, 1969). John W. Sap, *Paving the Way for Revolution: Calvinism and the Struggle for a Democratic Constitutional State* (Amsterdam: VU Uitgeverij, 2001), affirms it as part of a consistent neo-Calvinist tradition and notes Groen's aversion to it, pp. 294–5.

31. Groen's letter to Kuyper of 2 September 1872 is reproduced in *Briefwisseling van Mr. G. Groen van Prinsterer met Dr. A. Kuyper* (ed. A. Goslinga; Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1937), pp. 194–5.

32. Kuyper, 'Calvinism and Constitutional Liberties', pp. 292–7.

Interestingly, in both the French and English cases, Kuyper gave more attention to church than to civil politics, reflecting the priority of religious freedom among the 'constitutional liberties' in his title and also his then-current polemics on the consistory of Amsterdam. Kuyper traced the bane of synodical hierarchy back to a Huguenot adaptation to military necessity, not ecclesiastical principle. At this point another potential explanation of the French Revolution emerges, for the Huguenots of the French Reformation appear in this speech as unitary, hierarchical, centralizing and given to passion – much like the Jacobins of the French Revolution.[33] Not 'principle,' then, but national character seems to have been at fault; the two parties in question a quarter of a millennium apart were less 'religious vs. revolutionary' and more quintessentially French. To return to the seventeenth-century English case, the Presbyterians' fault there had been to betray *their* national character by importing French ecclesiastical ways on the assumption that 'Calvinism was a petrifaction, bound to the form it had assumed, take it or leave it.' Kuyper lauded the English Independents instead, who had properly adapted 'the Calvinist principle' to their own time and place, bequeathing it also to the Puritan founders of New England.[34]

The bridge across the Atlantic allowed Kuyper to take up civil politics and make the rosiest case for his thesis. No one could deny that 'modern liberties flourish in America without restriction,' he began, or that 'the people of the Union bear a clear-cut Christian stamp more than any other nation on earth'.[35] This was not a coincidental but a causal relationship, rooted in the nation's Puritan origins. Kuyper had plenty of sources for this casual conflation of 'New England' and 'America,' since the standard histories of the time exercised the same assumption. His organic sociology was at work too. Whatever the cultural complexity and numbers on the ground in 1873, New England represented 'the core of the nation,' and whatever the developments over the two and a half centuries since Plymouth Rock, the original Puritan stamp still held on America's contemporary character. By this point Kuyper's definition of 'Calvinism' had left behind any confessional particulars to become broadly cultural, connoting moral earnestness, healthy enterprise, middle-class discipline and public respect for religion.[36] So taken, he could hammer home his point: the best of modern liberties were not the fruit of the French Revolution but of Calvinism.

As history, Kuyper's lecture is open to critique at many points.[37] To maintain the United States' 'Calvinist' political foundation, he jumped on a Federalist

33. Ibid., pp. 299–302.

34. Quotations from ibid., pp. 293, 300.

35. Ibid. Kuyper treats the United States in 'Calvinism and Constitutional Liberties' on pp. 286–92. Quotations, pp. 286, 289.

36. Ibid., pp. 289–92; quotation, p. 287.

37. For a more detailed treatment of the point, see James D. Bratt, 'Abraham Kuyper, American History, and the Tensions of Neo-Calvinism', in George Harinck and Hans Krabbendam (eds.), *Sharing the Reformed Tradition: The Dutch-North American Exchange, 1846–1996* (Amsterdam: VU Uitgeverij, 1996), pp. 97–114.

high-water mark in the mid-1790s, venturing neither backward to 1776 nor ahead to the 'revolutionary' Jefferson's triumph in 1800, nor noting the vital role played by the ultra-evangelical Baptists in that victory. For evidence he shuttled blithely back and forth between official political statements and more general national ethos. His segue from the Puritan to the Glorious Revolution in seventeenth-century England ignored the latter's fear of precisely the religious zeal that Kuyper had praised in the former. Most seriously, some of the hardest questions of political theory – as to forms of government or the criteria and means of legitimate resistance – were passed over quickly by appeal to first principles. 'The question is not whether the people rule or a king but whether both, when they rule, do so in recognition of Him.'[38] By extension, theoretically, violence or non-violence, rebellion or obedience could be justified or reproved depending on whether the actor called on the name of the Lord.

We have become much more suspicious since Kuyper's time about the way professed principles can hide less happy interests – indeed, can excuse reprehensible conduct. We are more attuned – as Kuyper should have been, given the dramatic technological transformations already at work in the Dutch 1870s – to the power of material forces vis-à-vis ideas. Yet his early allusions to national character and later attention to class dynamics mitigated that fault somewhat and offer a suggestive opening for integrating ideas, culture and social structure in explanatory – and normative – statements. But Kuyper's strong suit, the systematic tracing of the power of first commitments and their measurement by the transcendent standards of the Lord, is still relevant, not only to judge those in the Revolutionary tradition who deny those standards but equally to weigh those who too confidently claim the warrant of God to defend a dying and unjust regime.

38. Kuyper, 'Calvinism and Constitutional Liberties', p. 307.

Chapter 2

HERMAN BAVINCK AND THE NEO-CALVINIST
CONCEPT OF THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

George Harinck

I Introduction

Reflecting on the role and function of the French Revolution in the tradition of neo-Calvinism, one thing is clear from the start: in this context the significance of this topic can hardly be overestimated. To neo-Calvinism, the French Revolution is like the Fall of Adam and Eve. It was not just an accident; it was the turning point in modern history, disturbing all essential relations – with God, with man and with this world. And it was as effective as the first sin in paradise. The evil brought into this world was not restricted to 1789, or to France, but it was universal, and it permeated all just as the original sin had done.

The Dutch lawyer and historian Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer, whom we may call a forerunner of the neo-Calvinist movement, did not separate religion from civilization and the social order, but related them closely. His definition of revolution was a reversal of a way of thinking and of persuasion, the development of a skepticism that rejected God's Word and law. To Groen, revolution was the inevitable outcome and result of unbelief. The deeper meaning of the French Revolution was, in his estimation, an attempt to overturn the 'unchangeable laws that the Creator and Sustainer of all things has set as a rule for all his creatures and subjects'.[1] In his day, revolution found its expression in freedom and equality, in people's sovereignty, in the social contract and in the authority of the Convention.[2] These cultural and political expressions were to him symptoms of a spiritual crisis. All the different opinions which have been developed and, accordingly, have stood the test of logical and historical exposition were reduced by him to the simple contrast between the truth of God and the opinion of man.[3] This is what Abraham Kuyper later would call the antithesis.

---

1. G. Groen van Prinsterer, *Ongeloof en revolutie. Eene reeks van historische voorlezingen* (Leiden: S. en J. Luchtmans, 1847), p. 116.
2. Groen, *Ongeloof en revolutie*, p. 5.
3. *Idem*, XI.

Whereas nowadays one would refer to the broad movement of the Enlightenment when one is discussing the position of Christianity in Europe in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Groen van Prinsterer and Kuyper focused on this specific historical event. The French Revolution was framed by the neo-Calvinists as the image of the enemy. It was a clear image, with a date, 1789, a location, Paris, and a clear act of terror. In his 1845/46 lectures, published as *Ongeloof en revolutie* ('Unbelief and Revolution'),[4] Groen dealt with revolution in a general way, but time and again he returned to the French Revolution as the specific historical expression of the general idea of revolution. Paris and 1789 are mentioned dozens of times in his lectures, and the last four lectures – about a third of the pages – deal specifically with the history of the French Revolution. In the last lecture, this history culminated in a description of the years of Terror, the reign of Danton and Robespierre. Here Groen tried to convince his audience that this extreme result was not accidental or collateral, but the logical effect of dethroning the Christian religion, the logical effect of Rousseau's rejection of any kind of *mezzo termine*.[5]

Groen's qualification that ideas were pivotal and, as such, that the *philosophes* caused the French Revolution, is supported by Jonathan Israel's thesis that it was a revolution of the mind.[6] Israel traced the roots of this revolution back to the seventeenth century: the embarrassing stalemate of Catholics and Protestants after 1648, the rise of the *libertinage érudit*, the philosophical or scientific revolution of the late seventeenth century. In discussing these new concepts, Israel maintains that Spinoza is the key figure, but Israel stressed that new philosophical ideas and the rise of a democratic politics were inextricably linked, and aimed at eradicating Christianity in philosophical thought and political practice: 'The only effective way to break the *ancien régime* system conceptually – and deliver comprehensive freedom of thought and expression and a democratic politics – was to destroy the notion that the existing order was divinely authorized, directed by divine providence and presided over by the clergy and monarchy together.'[7] By the middle of the eighteenth century it was

---

4. I have used the first edition, for the English edition see: Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer, *Unbelief and Revolution: A Series of Lectures in History*, edit. and trans. by Harry Van Dyke in collaboration with Donald Morton, 2nd Vol. (Amsterdam: Groen van Prinsterer Fund, 1973–75); and Arie Johannes van Dijk, *Groen van Prinsterer's Lectures on 'Unbelief and revolution'* (Jordan Station, Ontario: Wedge Publishing Foundation, 1989).

5. Groen, *Ongeloof en revolutie*, p. 357.

6. See his *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity, 1650–1750* (2001), *Enlightenment Contested: Philosophy, Modernity, and the Emancipation of Man 1670–1752* (2006), *A Revolution of the Mind: Radical Enlightenment and the Intellectual Origins of Modern Democracy* (2009), and *Democratic Enlightenment: Philosophy, Revolution, and Human Rights 1750–1790* (2011).

7. Jonathan Israel, 'What Samuel Moyn got wrong in his "Nation" article', posted 27 June 2010 at History News Network. http://hnn.us/articles/128361.html (accessed 8 March 2013).

plain to see that a synthesis of theology, philosophy, politics and science would fail, and this paved the way for principles of the Radical Enlightenment that according to Israel possess 'an absolute quality in terms of reason which places them above any possible alternative'.[8]

Half a century later Kuyper reasoned in the same way as Groen. What he and his Anti-Revolutionary Party opposed was 'the principle of the revolution': 'Praise to the order of God, and not to the will of man! . . . Against the revolution the gospel! Or, if you want the same opposition in plain Dutch, then say: not the liberty tree, but the cross.'[9] When he dealt in general with the 'storm of Modernism' that had 'arisen with violent intensity' against Christianity, he offered a general picture in his 1898 Stone Lectures:

> Two life systems are wrestling one with another, in mortal combat. Modernism is bound to build a world of its own from the data of the natural man, and to construct man himself from the data of nature; while, on the other hand, all those who reverently bend the knee to Christ and worship Him as the Son of the Living God, and God himself, are bent upon saving the 'Christian Heritage'.[10]

Turning to the French Revolution, Kuyper said:

> In 1789 the turning point was reached. Voltaire's mad cry, 'Down with the scoundrel' was aimed at Christ himself, but this cry was merely the expression of the most hidden thought from which the French Revolution sprang. The fanatic outcry of another philosopher, 'We no more need a God', and the odious shibboleth 'No God, no Master', of the Convention, – these were the sacrilegious watchwords which at that time heralded the liberation of man as an emancipation from all Divine Authority.[11]

The French Revolution was the opposite of everything these Anti-Revolutionaries propagated or defended. It was the ultimate evil.

II Reframing Calvinism

Whereas Groen concentrated on revolution in the state and in political theory, Kuyper had a tendency to broaden this vision to social and domestic relations, and to theology. He coined 'revolution' as a cultural term: it was an 'upheaval not only

---

8. Quoted in Samuel Moyn, 'Mind the Enlightenment', *The Nation*, 31 May 2010.

9. A. Kuyper, *Niet de vrijheidsboom maar het kruis. Toespraak ter opening van de tiende Deputatenvergadering in het eeuwjaar der Fransche revolutie* (Amsterdam: Wormser, 1889), p. 7.

10. A. Kuyper, *Calvinism. Six Lectures Delivered in the Theological Seminary at Princeton* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1899), pp. 3–4.

11. Kuyper, *Calvinism*, p. 3.

of political conditions, but even more of convictions, ideas, and usages of life'.[12] In this way he introduced a new element to Groen's concept, that of the French Revolution as a world- and life-view, and consequently of reframing Calvinism as a world- and life-view. Groen had mentioned Calvinism favourably in his lectures, referring to it as a faith in accordance with Scripture.[13] It was not political theory that had guided the Dutch Republic, he wrote, but the piety of the Calvinists, their fear of God and his Word that had made them unafraid of earthly powers. They defied the dangers, for they believed in the biblical promise: 'if you are faithful until you die, I will reward you with a glorious life'.[14] When Groen referred to Calvinism, he meant faith and piety.

To Kuyper, however, Calvinism had to be something different as well. He qualified the Revolution, or Modernism as he called it, as 'the vast energy of an all-embracing life-system'[15] that assailed Christianity. Groen had never said this. He had explained how revolutionary ideas would lead to revolutionary deeds, and that revolution 'in all its forms and eras was the development of a *systematic* unbelief'.[16] He had shown the consequences of this unbelief, but had also stressed the historical context that could not erase this effect, but could certainly mitigate, divert or halt this outcome.

But these were different times, Kuyper argued. It was no longer enough to oppose Modernism by expressing your Christian faith and living a Christian life. According to him, the nineteenth century was a philosophical age that required reflection on 'our existence as a unity in the mirror of our consciousness' far more strongly than ever before.[17] The nineteenth century asked for life-systems: 'There is no unity in your thinking save by a well-ordered philosophical system.'[18] Such a system consisted of 'principles [that] are interconnected and have their common root in a fundamental principle; and from the latter is developed logically and systematically the whole complex of ruling ideas and conceptions that go to make up our life and world-view',[19] and is 'self-consistent in its splendid structure'.[20] The Revolution presented such a world- and life-view: 'The leading thoughts that had their rise in the French Revolution . . . form together a life-system'.[21]

This is a rather thin argument for the need of a life-system, but Kuyper did not say much more on this idea. That said, his conclusions from this argument were far reaching. First, Christianity was threatened systematically by the modernist world- and life-view, 'which is diametrically opposed to that of our fathers.

---

12. *Idem*, p. 238.
13. Groen, *Ongeloof en revolutie*, p. 148.
14. Rev. 2.10.
15. Kuyper, *Calvinism*, p. 4.
16. Groen, *Ongeloof en revolutie*, p. 144. Emphasis added.
17. Kuyper, *Calvinism*, p. 14.
18. Ibid., p. 202.
19. Ibid., p. 260.
20. Ibid., pp. 260–1.
21. Ibid., p. 15.

Their struggles were for the sake of the glory of God and a purified Christianity; the present movement wages war for the sake of the glory of man'.[22] The Revolution wanted

> to place the whole of life on a new basis, turn upside down the existing order of affairs, and arrange a new world on the assumption that human nature continues in its incorrupted state. This conception was a heroic one and awakened response; it struck some of the noblest chords of the human heart.[23]

And second, in the face of this enemy, Christianity had to reorganize itself, for this struggle of life and death cannot be avoided: '. . . it must be understood that we have to take our stand in a life-system of equally comprehensive and far-reaching power'.[24] The history of the nineteenth century served to illustrate his point: '. . . why did we, Christians, stand so weak, in the face of this Modernism? Why did we constantly lose ground? Simply because we were devoid of an equal unity of life-conception, such as alone could enable us with irresistible energy to repel the enemy at the frontier'.[25] Kuyper thus drew his conclusion: Christians of our day, he said, you can only 'successfully defend your Sanctuary . . . by placing, in opposition to all this . . . a life and world-view of your own, founded as firmly on the base of your own principle, wrought out with the same clearness and glittering in an equally logical consistency'.[26] 'Without this unity of starting point and life-system we must lose the power to maintain our independent position, and our strength for resistance must ebb away'.[27]

A 'unity of life-conception', Kuyper went on, 'is never to be found in a vague conception of Protestantism winding itself up as it does in all kind of tortuosities, but you do find it in that mighty historic process, which as Calvinism dug a channel of its own for the powerful stream of its life. By this unity of conception alone as given in Calvinism, you . . . might be enabled once more to take our stand . . . in opposition to'[28] Modernism.

It is clear from this exposition that Groen and Kuyper had a different take on the essence of Calvinism, and that Kuyper proposed an entirely new approach to this branch of Christianity. Kuyper himself admitted readily that a reconstruction was needed. '[S]ince Calvinism arose, not from an abstract system, but from life itself, [and] it never was in the century of its prime presented as a systematic whole.'[29]

---

22. Ibid.
23. Ibid., p. 238.
24. Ibid., p. 4.
25. Ibid., p. 15.
26. Ibid., p. 261.
27. Ibid., p. 16.
28. Ibid., p. 15; cf. p. 7: 'In the philosophical sense, we understand by it that system of conceptions which, under the influence of the mastermind of Calvin raised itself to dominance in the several spheres of life'.
29. Ibid., p. 266.

The difference between Calvinism as understood in a religious way by Groen and Kuyper's philosophical concept of Calvinism becomes very clear when the latter gives an impression of his understanding of Calvinism as a life-system:

> Calvinism did not stop at a church-order, but expanded in a life-system, and did not exhaust its energy in a dogmatical construction, but created a life- and world-view, and such a one as was, and still is, able to fit itself to the needs of every stage of human development, in every department of life. It raised our Christian religion to its highest spiritual splendour; it created a church order, which became the preformation of state confederation; it proved to be the guardian angel of science; it emancipated art; it propagated a political scheme, which gave birth to constitutional government, both in Europe and America; it fostered agriculture and industry, commerce and navigation; it put a thorough Christian stamp upon home-life and family-ties; it promoted through its high moral standard purity in our social circles; and to this manifold effect it placed beneath Church and State, beneath society and home-circle a fundamental philosophic conception, strictly derived from its dominating principle, and therefore all its own.[30]

What Kuyper envisioned was a life- and world-view as encompassing and as compelling as the Modernist life-system. He found it in Calvinism, rooted in the belief in a sovereign God who elected His people:

> By election, the Calvinist has never meant an exaltation of self on the part of any one, but merely to emphasize that all honor belongs to God, even the honor of moral greatness and heroism of faith. It needs no repetition that from this, Calvin derived all his strength. . . . He who believes in election knows himself chosen for some end, to attain which is his moral calling. A calling for the sake of which, since it is divine, life's most precious thing, if need be, must be sacrificed; but a calling also, in which success is certain, since God, who is sovereign, called him unto it. And therefore he argues not, nor does he hesitate, but puts the hand to the plough and labors on.[31]

In an 1873 letter, Groen distanced himself from Kuyper's election-based view of Calvinism: 'I belong to the Reveil movement and my "*Nous sommes issus de Calvin*" has nothing in common with your premise of predestination.'[32]

---

30. Ibid., p. 231.

31. A. Kuyper, 'Calvinism: The Origin and Safeguard of Our Constitutional Liberties', *The Bibliotheca Sacra*, 52, Nr. 208, October (1895), pp. 664–5.

32. Groen to Kuyper, 23 November 1873, in J. L. van Essen (ed.), *Groen van Prinsterer, Schriftelijke nalatenschap, 7, briefwisseling 1869–1876* ('s-Gravenhage: Instituut voor Nederlandse Geschiedenis, 1992), p. 473. Cf. L. J. van Rhijn to Groen, 17 September 1874, *Groen, briefwisseling, 1869–1876*, p. 570: 'I stick to the unio mystica as the soul of true Christianity . . . election is a sacred secrecy and should not be in the forefront in the system of God's revelation. That place is exclusively reserved for the crucified and glorified Christ'.

Kuyper replied that he appreciated the Reveil movement but that the Netherlands had to move on from this revival to daily labour, and from a religion to a systematic world- and life-view, and that therefore this cohesive Calvinism was needed.[33]

Groen was acquainted with these tensions. In 1850, when some of his friends proposed the founding of an anti-revolutionary political party, Groen supported this plan, but quite a few of his *Reveil* friends stood in opposition: organization and coercion were incompatible with the gospel.[34] However, Kuyper's development towards a systematic worldview was a bridge too far for Groen.

From a systematic point of view the two opposing and competing worldviews in question, Kuyper's neo-Calvinism on the one side and Modernism on the other, did not differ much.[35] Groen had never described the conflict between Christianity and Revolution in these terms. It was Kuyper himself who constructed the two systematic viewpoints.[36] He presented Modernism systematically as a life-system 'bound to build a world of its own from the data of the natural man, and to construct man himself from the data of nature'.[37] And, as he said in 1892,

> so powerful a *life* movement can be successfully countered only by the movement of an antithetic life. Over against the elevation of the word of the world, the absolute authority of Scripture. Only thus can you regain your own base of operation . . . those who still have faith and discern the danger of blurring the boundaries must start by drawing a line around *their own circle*, must develop *a life of their own* within that circle, must *render account* for the life thus constituted.[38]

In 1898 he was even more explicit:

> As truly as every plant has a root, so truly does a principle hide under every manifestation of life. These principles are interconnected and have their common root in a fundamental principle; and from the latter is developed logically and systematically the whole complex of ruling ideas and conceptions that go to make

33. Kuyper to Groen, 25 November 1873, Ibid., p. 474.

34. Roel Kuiper, *'Tot een voorbeeld zult gij blijven.' Mr. G. Groen van Prinsterer (1801–1976)* (Amsterdam: Buijten & Schipperheijn, 2001), pp. 138–9.

35. Cf. George Harinck, 'Twin sisters with a changing character. How Neo-Calvinists dealt with the modern discrepancy between Bible and natural sciences', in Jitse M. van der Meer and Scott Mandelbrote (eds.), *Nature and Scripture in the Abrahamic Religions: 1700–Present* (Vol 2; Brill: Leiden/Boston, 2008), pp. 317–70.

36. For the development of this construction, see J. Vree, 'Hoe de citadel ontstond. De consolidatie der Vereniging 1892–1905', in L. J. Wolthuis and J. Vree (eds.), *De Vereniging van 1892 en haar geschiedenis* (Kampen: Kok, 1992), pp. 113–60; J. Vree, '"Het Réveil" en "het (neo-) Calvinisme" in hun onderlinge samenhang (1856-1896)', *Documentatieblad voor de Nederlandse Kerkgeschiedenis na 1800*, 38 (June 1993), pp. 24–54.

37. Kuyper, *Calvinism,* p. 4.

38. A. Kuyper, 'The blurring of the boundaries', in James D. Bratt (ed.), *Abraham Kuyper. A Centennial Reader* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1998), pp. 396–7.

up our life and world-view. With such a coherent world and life-view, firmly resting on its principle and self-consistent in its splendid structure, modernism now confronts Christianity; and against this deadly danger, ye, Christians, cannot successfully defend your Sanctuary, but by placing, in opposition to all this, *a life and world-view of your own, founded as firmly on the base of your own principle, wrought out with the same clearness and glittering in an equally logical consistency.* Now this is not obtained by either Christian works or mysticism, but only by going back, our hearts full of mystical warmth and our personal faith manifesting itself in abundant fruit, to that turning-point in history and in the development of humanity which was reached in the Reformation. *And this is equivalent to a return to Calvinism.*[39]

Historically Kuyper regarded Modernism as the *Zerrbild*, the imitation of Calvinism and also as its probable successor. Groen also described how the Revolution imitated Christianity by becoming the religion of unbelief,[40] and he quoted Voltaire: '*Si Dieu n'existait pas, il faudrait l'inventer.*' ('If God would not exist, he should be invented.')[41] But he never elaborated on this systematic aspect, while Kuyper expanded this similarity in his philosophical system and called Modernism either a 'caricature' of Calvinism or its 'tyrannical twin sister'.[42]

Returning to the opening sentences of this chapter, it was noted that when discussing the French Revolution in the context of neo-Calvinism, one thing is clear from the start: in this context, the significance of the topic at hand cannot be overestimated. To neo-Calvinism the French Revolution is like the Fall of Adam and Eve. The case has been made that Groen introduced this idea to Kuyper, but that Kuyper was the main architect of the typical neo-Calvinistic construction of the ideas of the French Revolution as a world- and life-view.

III Herman Bavinck and anti-revolutionary ideas

Turning now to Herman Bavinck: in the historiography concerning the anti-revolutionary movement in the Netherlands, the names of Groen and Kuyper are always mentioned, whereas Bavinck's is less frequently heard. This may have to do with the fact the anti-revolutionary movement concentrated on politics, while Bavinck was mainly a theologian, or that Kuyper's thought-provoking *Encyclopedia* (1894) and his spectacular concept of common grace (first published as a newspaper series between 1895 and 1901) drew more attention than Bavinck's

---

39. Kuyper, *Calvinism*, pp. 260–1.
40. Groen, *Ongeloof en revolutie*, p. 192.
41. Ibid., pp. 227–8.
42. Kuyper, *Calvinism*, pp. 183, 239; cf. p. 238: . . .' in this mighty revolution [of 1789], in this upheaval not only of political conditions, but even more of convictions, ideas, and usages of life, two elements should be sharply distinguished. In one respect it was an imitation of Calvinism, whilst in another respect it was in direct opposition to its principles'.

more academic and reflective publications. Nonetheless, he is regarded as one of the intellectual architects of neo-Calvinism, and as such we are obliged to ask what he thought of the revolution concepts of Groen and Kuyper, and what his view on the French Revolution was.

Two things must be realized from the outset. The first concerns birthdates: Groen was born in 1801, Kuyper in 1837 and Bavinck in 1854. When Bavinck was a student at Leiden University, Groen died, and when he started his career the French Revolution had taken place about a century beforehand and was, by that time, history. The Revolutions of 1830–32, the Revolution of 1848, the French–German War of 1870 and the unification of Germany had pushed back the memory of 1789. The other chronological issue is as follows: Kuyper developed his view of neo-Calvinism as a life-system relatively late in his career, in the 1890s, culminating in the full presentation of his view in the Stone Lectures. The word neo-Calvinism was coined after Kuyper's publication of the first volume of his *Encyclopaedie* in 1894.[43] As such, Bavinck grew up with the words 'anti-revolutionary' and 'Reformed' instead of 'neo-Calvinist'. He was not from the generation that had known Groen personally, neither was he raised a neo-Calvinist.

In Bavinck's youth there was not much of an anti-revolutionary movement. In 1871 Groen's preferred anti-revolutionary politicians were not elected in Parliament, and when Kuyper was elected in 1874 he was overworked and had to leave Parliament 2 years later. Ideologically, for more than two decades the Dutch Anti-Revolution amounted to little more than Groen and his famous lectures on *Unbelief and Revolution*. Groen was active in Parliament (1840, 1849–54, 1855–57, 1862–65) as an anti-revolutionary member, but to his contemporaries it was not quite clear what anti-revolutionary meant; it was considered a technical term restricted to Parliament and politics. In Groen's day, politics in the Netherlands was still the business of the elite.[44] It was not, therefore, a word in common usage. Professor of State Law J. T. Buys claimed that the word had something mysterious about it: Groen's supporters trusted him when he defended his political view as coherent, but hardly anyone could explain it.[45] It was only after 1879 that the descriptor 'anti-revolutionary' became a common word in the Dutch vocabulary, when Kuyper had founded a party with that name: the Anti-Revolutionary Party.

43. The oldest use of the word is in a review of W. Geesink, *Calvinisten in Nederland* by a Modernist theologian: J. Reitsma, 'Passio Dordracena', *Geloof en Vrijheid. Tweemaandelijksch tijdschrift* 21 (September or October 1887), pp. 555–90. He used the word 'nieuwerwetsche calvinisten' (pp. 559, 562), 'herborene calvinisten' (p. 569), 'moderne calvinisten' (p. 575) or 'neocalvinist' (p. 577). The Royal Library in The Hague holds the only copy of the book and gives the title as *Calvinisten in Holland* (Rotterdam: J. H. Dunk, 1887) 291 pages. The oldest use of the word in circles congenial with Kuyper I have found thus far is by W. H. Gispen in *De Bazuin*, 26 June 1896.

44. Maartje Janse, *De afschaffers. Publieke opinie, organisatie en politiek in Nederland 1840–1880* (Amsterdam: Wereldbibliotheek, 2007), p. 289.

45. J. T. Buys, 'Een casus positie', *De Gids* 38 (1874), p. 75.

To Bavinck the French Revolution was something that had happened in the past and had influenced the lives and cultures of a previous generation. He was familiar with Groen's framing of the Revolution as the contra image of Christianity and copied that use in his language, but unlike Groen and Kuyper, the French Revolution played no further important role in his publications. None of his titles contains the word 'Revolution'.

In his inaugural address in Kampen in 1883 he referred to the Revolution in the past tense. He pointed to the separation of state and church; the state had taken over the responsibility for education from the church and this had necessitated the organization of Christian education by citizens. Christian primary schools, Kampen Seminary and the VU University would not have been founded without this separation. He welcomed this effect of the separation as the acknowledgement of the fact that 'who believes in Jesus Christ does not just have some opinions that differ from the worldly people, but is a wholly new creation indeed, and that the church of Christ has a life and conscience of its own, its own language and science.'[46]

The particular wording of 'and science' reveals Kuyper's influence, whose picture Bavinck bought in his student days in Leiden.[47] Instead of depicting the Revolution as a threat to Christianity, he welcomed it as a stimulus to be more explicitly Christian. For the same reason mediating positions in Dutch theology could not satisfy him. The mediators did reject the anti-Christian elements in the Revolution, but at the same time they honoured its noble aims and welcomed it as the fulfilment of the Reformation. They opposed Christian political parties, arguing that this implied a judgement of liberals as non-Christian and was contrary to what the Gospel asked. On this point, Bavinck followed Groen and opposed the opinion that the religious point of view should be isolated from life. It should have its effect on cooperation in politics, society and civil life.[48] This implied the

46. H. Bavinck, *De wetenschap der h. godgeleerdheid. Rede ter aanvaarding van het leeraarsambt aan de Theologische School te Kampen, uitgesproken den 10 jan. 1883* (Kampen: G.Ph. Zalsman, 1883), p. 7. Cf. H. Bavinck, *Godsdienst en godgeleerdheid. Rede gehouden bij de aanvaarding van het hoogleeraarsambt in de theologie aan de Vrije Universiteit te Amsterdam op woensdag 17 december 1902* (Wageningen: Vada, 1902), p. 34: 'Ofschoon al wat voornaam en machtig was, met minachting op heel deze beweging neerzag, is de negentiende eeuw toch niet alleen getuige geweest van de doorwerking der revolutionaire beginselen, maar ook van een krachtige ontwaking van het algemeen, ongetwijfeld, christelijk geloof'.

47. Kasboekje 27 September 1875 – December 1875. *H. Bavinck Papers*. Historical Documentation Center for Dutch Protestantism, VU University Amsterdam (HDC).

48. Bavinck, *De wetenschap der h. godgeleerdheid*, 7; H. Bavinck, *De theologie van prof. dr. Daniel Chantepie de la Saussaye. Bijdrage tot de kennis der ethische theologie* (Leiden: D. Donner, 1884), pp. 17–19, 68, 87. Cf. H. Bavinck, *Het vierde eener eeuw. Rede bij gelegenheid van het vijf en twintig-jarig bestaan van de 'Standaard'* (Kampen: J. H. Bos, 1897), p. 7: 'Zoo weinig is Groen de verstoorder der eenheid geweest, dat hij veeleer haar vader en schepper verdient te heeten. Hij was de man, die door wijsgeerige en theologische, door juridische en historische studie uit het vage en onbewuste tot het bewuste, klare denken zich verhief, die indrong in de diepte der beginselen en daar zijne principiëele positie nam tegenover de richtingen en partijen van zijn tijd'.

possibility of conflict. In 1888 Bavinck concluded: 'When no conversion comes and the principles [of Christianity and Modernism] develop alongside each other, the time will come soon that we will stand over against each other, just like Protestants and Catholics have done for three centuries. Between them social contacts, marriages and blood relations have almost ceased.'[49] In the 'Foreword' to his *Reformed Dogmatics* of 1895 Bavinck referred to Groen's remark on isolation and forsakenness in *Unbelief and Revolution*[50] to underline the importance of the communion and fellowship with generations past, including the Roman-Catholic tradition.[51] It was typical for Bavinck to express a feeling of loneliness as a negative effect of a more profiled Christianity.[52]

This is where the Groen-influenced era in Bavinck's work ends. The French Revolution was not a living reality for Bavinck; it was something of the past that had stimulated an independent Christian tradition. Bavinck objected to the Revolution and supported Groen's anti-revolutionary opposition, but at the same time he deplored the separation it had produced. Though these do not seem to be the right ingredients to make him enthusiastic for Kuyper's Calvinism as life-system, Bavinck never openly distanced himself from Kuyper's view and, in his conflict with Alexander F. de Savornin Lohman in the mid-1890s, he defended Kuyper's neo-Calvinism. Lohman was from Kuyper's generation and a follower of Groen. According to Lohman, Groen had recommended the gospel, rather than Calvinism, as an antidote to the Revolution.[53]

As a politician and a professor of law at the VU University Amsterdam, Lohman stuck to the name anti-revolutionary, because that term included orthodox Protestants of different traditions, including those who did not favour Calvinism in the Kuyperian sense, and he rejected the need for, and the idea of, a neo-Calvinist political theory.[54] This was an outright rejection of Kuyper's neo-Calvinism and a protest against the denunciation of other Protestants, as Kuyper frequently did in these years with the word '*halven*' – they were only half-Protestant in his eyes. Bavinck provided Kuyper with the ammunition to get Lohman fired as professor.

49. H. Bavinck, 'Moderne Theologie', *De Vrije Kerk* 14 (June 1888), p. 254.

50. Groen, *Ongeloof en revolutie*, p. 20: 'Het valt niet te ontkennen dat de beginselen die wij voorstaan, geenszins door de meerderheid onzer tijd- en landgenooten worden beaamd: van daar dikwerf, al is het dat men aan het gevoelen der meerderheid geen onvoorwaardelijke hulde gelieft te brengen, een gevoel, zoo niet van twijfeling en ongewisheid, althans van isolement'.

51. Herman Bavinck, 'Foreword to the First Edition (Volume 1) of the *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek*', trans. John Bolt, *Calvin Theological Journal* 45, Nr. 1 (2010), p. 9.

52. H. Bavinck, 'Voorbericht', *Gereformeerde dogmatiek, eerste deel. Inleiding – Principia* (Kampen: J. H. Bos, 1895).

53. A. F. De Savornin Lohman in *De Nederlander*, 29 April 1895, quoted in *Rapport van de Commissie van Enquête, benoemd ingevolge besluit der Jaarvergadering van de Vereeniging voor Hooger Onderwijs op Gereformeerden grondslag, dato 27 Juni 1895. Met bijlagen* (Amsterdam: Fernhout, 1896), p. 46.

54. *Rapport van de Commissie van Enquête*, p. 48.

In the next year, however, when Bavinck spoke at the jubilee meeting on the twenty-fifth anniversary of Kuyper's editorship of his daily *De Standaard*, he did not use Kuyper's neo-interpretation of Calvinism but rather mentioned it in a Groenian sense, in its sixteenth-century context:

> No reaction, no restoration or conservatism will be Revolution-proof, but only a principle that as such in all its implications confronts the revolution, that is the gospel, especially like it has been brought to light by the Reformation and in its Calvinistic expression has been the source and safeguard of our liberties.[55]

He equated anti-revolutionary and Calvinistic, but the only thing he said about present-day Calvinism was that, after Groen, more stress had to be laid on Calvinism than before. As to why and how, however, he gave no details.

When Kuyper sent him the unpublished edition of his Stone Lectures delivered at Princeton Theological Seminary in October 1898 – the ultimate exposition of neo-Calvinism as a system – Bavinck wrote to him a somewhat critical note of thanks:

> I doubt, however, if the listeners in Princeton, who are alien to this world of thought, were able to grasp your high and broad proportions at once. You give so much in such a condensed form that only those who themselves are somewhat abreast of these developments can appreciate what is in it.[56]

In reaction to the development of Kuyper's concept of neo-Calvinism, Bavinck noticed a renewed interest in Groen in the 1890s among Dutch Protestants who did not appreciate the 'ultras', that is, the neo-Calvinists. These Protestants, often belonging to the now crumbling Réveil movement, honoured the neo-Calvinists as excellent, courageous and principled Christians, but judged them as too self-confident concerning their own opinions, too critical of those who did not agree with them in everything, and these Christians looked down upon the Réveil. The 'ultras' had caused damage to the Réveil movement, which considered itself as the true heir of Groen.

What did Bavinck have to say to this criticism from the Réveil movement? Bavinck admitted that Groen was 'not a son of Dordt but of the Réveil',[57] but he distanced himself from this bashing of neo-Calvinists. The disintegration of the Réveil movement was not caused by the neo-Calvinists, but by the internal tensions and differences that had accompanied the movement from its beginning. And these were no minor differences, but concerned Scripture, Confession, church and state, nature and grace – indeed, dogmatics as a whole: 'It is a totally wrong presentation, that the men of the Réveil movement fully agreed on the central

55. Bavinck, *Het vierde eener eeuw*, p. 9.

56. H. Bavinck to A. Kuyper, 17 April 1899: 'Ik betwijfel wel, of de toehoorders in Princeton, wien deze gedachtenwereld gansch vreemd is, in eens U hebben kunnen voegen in Uwe hooge en breede vlucht. Gij geeft zooveel in een kort bestek, dat alleen wie eenigermate zelf op de hoogte is kan waardeeren wat erin zit'. *A. Kuyper Papers.* HDC.

57. H. Bavinck, 'Naar Groen terug (I)', *De Bazuin*, 23 November 1900.

articles of the Christian faith and differed on minor issues only.'[58] Today, Bavinck continued, was not the time for a broad Protestant movement like in Groen's days. The Réveil men had avoided the issue of the church, but after the Secession of 1834 and the *Doleantie* of 1886 this was no longer possible. They wanted unity above all else, but they ended up on the wrong side of history.

So far this was a defence of Kuyper. However, Bavinck judged the Réveil's criticism of the neo-Calvinist movement to be understandable. To him, the negative impression made by neo-Calvinism at around 1890 called for introspection regarding its presumed pedantry, heartlessness and self-righteousness. Bavinck did not agree with the Protestant position, but he wanted to stay on speaking terms and not become isolated from the majority of Protestants who did not follow Kuyper. That is why he took this comment on neo-Calvinism seriously and planned a series of articles in *De Bazuin* on the theme 'Back to Groen', but never published more than one instalment.[59] He remained sensitive, however, towards the arrogance of neo-Calvinists, and the weaknesses and fallacies of neo-Calvinism.

IV Bavinck's reconsideration of Groen

At the turn of the century, Bavinck moved away from Kuyper's dichotomy of Calvinism and Modernism. In his publications from that time, he regularly stressed that the ideas of the French Revolution had disappointed Western culture and made room for a less optimistic outlook. The logical consequences and rational outcome of the revolutionary ideals seemed to have been thwarted by historical and psychological barriers. Owing to disappointment in these revolutionary ideals, more sympathy developed for ideas that paid tribute to the mystical aspects of life and to religion in general.[60] Kuyper analysed this development in 1892 in his rectoral address: 'The blurring of the boundaries'.[61] There he depicted the former age as a century of cold Deism and spirit-deadening Rationalism: 'In its place has come a century of full of enthusiasm and resilience. All elements of society are seething and in ferment, and its spirit tackles everything with a dynamism that boggles the mind.'[62] His preference was clearly with the latter development, but he

---

58. Ibid.

59. Ibid.

60. See, for example, H. Bavinck, *De wereldverwinnende kracht des geloofs. Leerrede over 1 Joh. 5: 4b, uitgesproken in de Burgwalkerk te Kampen den 30sten juni 1901* (Kampen: Ph. Zalsman, 1901), p. 7.

61. Kuyper, 'The blurring of the boundaries', pp. 363–402.

62. Ibid., p. 369. Kuyper exemplified this development with reference to Nietzsche. Vree, 'Hoe de citadel ontstond', p. 114, mentions him as the first in the Netherlands to point to the importance of Nietzsche in public. Kuyper was among the first to introduce Nietzsche, but he was not *the* first. That was Lodewijk van Deyssel (K. J. L. Alberdingk Thijm) who paid attention to Nietzsche in his book review column in *De Nieuwe Gids* 4 (1889), pp. 98–102.

labelled it negatively as a pantheistic turn and as an antidote advocated an even more systematically developed Calvinism and a more rigid social organization of the Calvinists: in short, 'an antithetical life'.[63] Bavinck, however, welcomed this cultural change more positively and had high expectations of a renewed relationship of Christianity and culture.

In this context Bavinck reconsidered Groen's ideas. In 1904 he published a preface to the third edition of his lectures *Unbelief and Revolution*. In this nine-page introduction, Bavinck stressed that Groen's view on the revolution had not lost its relevance, and that the new edition was welcome. In the light of our discussion of the French Revolution, this obvious opinion is less important than what else he said in the introduction. Two things stand out. In the first place, he stressed that the cultural climate had changed since the second edition of Groen's book had been issued in 1868:

> The enemies Groen opposed have nearly all disappeared. The opinions he combatted have lost almost all of its defenders. Who still enthusiastically defends the declaration of human rights? Who still boasts in the heroic deeds and blessings of the French Revolution? Who still raves about the slogan of freedom, equality and brotherhood? And who still dares to explain state and society, language and religion, rights and morals from the conscious act of the will of man?[64]

Bavinck went on, saying that Charles Darwin had replaced Rousseau, Hegel now stood in Kant's place, pantheism had taken over the position of deism, and optimism had made room for pessimism. Man, once merited as an angel, was compared to an animal now that the cultural winds had changed. The Revolution has failed, Bavinck stated, and we have arrived in the era of evolution.[65] The definite character of his opinion as such does not have to surprise. As has already been noted, the French Revolution to Bavinck was an event in the past. This is what he stressed in the introduction to Groen's book. But there was a new aspect in his qualification as well. He not only declared the French Revolution obsolete as a defining historical moment, but also explicitly stated that its ideas had failed and that Calvinism had to deal with new and different ideas and opponents. What the French Revolution had been to Groen was the spiritual or pantheistic turn in European culture to Bavinck. His position is not a critique of Groen, but an acknowledgment of the fact that Groen's times were over and belonged to the past. It was a manifestation of the dynamism of neo-Calvinism, as expressed in Kuyper's maxim that Christianity had to be brought into rapport with the times,[66] or in Bavinck's remark: 'It would

63. Kuyper, 'The blurring of the boundaries', p. 397.

64. H. Bavinck, 'Voorrede', in G. Groen van Prinsterer (ed.), *Ongeloof en revolutie. Een reeks van historische voorlezingen* (Kampen: J. H. Bos, 1904), v. Bavinck's preface was published again in the fourth edition of *Ongeloof en revolutie* (1913).

65. Ibid., vi.

66. A. Kuyper, 'Voorwoord', *Encyclopædie der heilige godgeleerdheid. Deel een: Inleidend deel* (Amsterdam: J. A. Wormser, 1894), vi.

be an unending task to loosen one's ties to the present; it would also not be pleasing to God who speaks to us as seriously and loudly as to previous generations.'[67]

The second interesting aspect of Bavinck's introduction to Groen's *Unbelief and Revolution* is found when he when he asked himself: What would Groen say of my opinion? Would he have said that I went astray and misjudged the French Revolution as the defining moment in the history of Western civilization? Do I still have to take the French Revolution as the Archimedean point of reflection? And is this pessimistic and spiritual era that succeeded the age of rationalism not the result that had already been predicted by Groen as the logical outcome of the detested ideas of the French Revolution?

Bavinck's answer to these questions was negative. He stressed that Groen, in the line of Plato, believed in the reality of ideas (be it that according to Groen the entrance to this *mundus intelligibilus* was not reason but faith).[68] The wrong ideas of the Revolution would lead to the decay of religion and the disruption of society. Bavinck, however, drew attention to the fact that ideas do not have the power to realize themselves, and that facts are nothing else but embodied thoughts. The Revolution was not a system imposed on history and defining its course ever since. Neither has Christianity been the force that had determined the course of history:

> The effects of the teachings of the Revolution are never a logical march of events. They always meet objections that are insurmountable, because these objections originate in the gifts and needs of men, and they are related to nature and to God's ordinations. That is why these objections, together with the teachings of the Revolution, are the two agents of past times. Nature and history conflict with the conceptions of the Revolution.[69]

When we compare this opinion with Kuyper's archetypical view of the history of his times as a conflict between revolution or Modernism as a life-system and Calvinism as a life-system, it is striking that Bavinck stresses how nature and history soften and absorb the logical effects of the revolutionary system. There is a logical outcome of ideas that can be predicted. That said, this world is not an empty space, void of obstacles these ideas might meet. There is humankind with its gifts and deeds, and there are the ordinations of God that stand in the way. As such, the course of history will always be whimsical. More than Kuyper the idealist is Bavinck a realist. He believed in the antithesis and in the relation between ideas and acts, but he did not take refuge in a system or equate a plea for the independent social organization of neo-Calvinism with Jesus' warning that 'whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me' (Mt. 10.37). In his reflection on these issues Bavinck acknowledged that there is a person who

67. Bavinck, 'Voorbericht'; Bavinck, 'Foreword', p. 10.

68. A. Kinneging, 'Groen van Prinsterer en Plato', in J. de Bruijn and G. Harinck (eds.), *Groen van Prinsterer in Europese context* (Hilversum: Verloren, 2004), p. 16.

69. Bavinck, 'Voorrede', VII–VIII.

is the lord of history: Jesus Christ. The Christian acknowledges and looks forward to 'the solution of the riddles of the history of mankind in the coming and the victorious second coming of the Savior'.[70]

It is interesting that Bavinck did not mention Calvinism at all in the introduction to Groen's lectures. While Kuyper saw neo-Calvinism as the fruit and outcome of Groen's ideas on the Revolution, Bavinck's preface did not elaborate on this viewpoint. He supported Kuyper and described the transition from the Réveil movement to neo-Calvinism, from Groen to Kuyper, especially in the domain of politics, as a positive historical development,[71] but he himself did not integrate Kuyper's ideas on Calvinism as a life-system in his line of reasoning. Neither did he distance himself completely from the Dutch Protestant traditions that were excluded by Kuyper's positioning of his neo-Calvinist system, formulated more strictly and exclusively over the years. Bavinck performed a difficult balancing act between Kuyper and other Protestants. He stayed loyal to Kuyper, but after the 1890s was one of the few leading neo-Calvinists who kept in touch with broader Dutch Protestantism.

V Conclusion

If he did not follow Kuyper's specific interpretation of Groen's heritage, what then was this heritage to Bavinck? He had a more historical approach than Kuyper, focusing not so much on the French Revolution as an expression of Modernism as a life-system, but rather on the history of philosophy. In many publications he described the historical development from the eighteenth century to the present via the names and ideas of Voltaire, Rousseau, Kant, Hegel, Nietzsche and others. Bavinck's general description of this development (which shows interesting parallels with his personal development, as described in his letters to his friend Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje)[72] is as follows:

> The subject became conscious of itself and of its true or fancied rights, and by and by has broken the chains that linked it to the past. It has emancipated itself in a limitless sense of liberty of everything that in former days was considered to be high or holy, and now addresses to every authority requiring recognition and submission, the primordial question: tell me, where does your authority originate? . . . The critique awakened, and investigates all foundations

70. Ibid., IX.

71. For example, in Bavinck, *Het vierde eener eeuw.*

72. See, for example, his reflection on the disappearance of his childish faith due to the scholarly criticism at Leiden University, J. de Bruijn and G. Harinck (eds.), *Een Leidse vriendschap. De briefwisseling tussen Herman Bavinck en Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje, 1875–1921* (Baarn: Ten Have, 1999), p. 81.

of authority. The naive, childish, simple faith has disappeared almost totally. Doubt is the mental illness of our age and brings about a lot of moral misery and distress.[73]

Bavinck was especially interested in moral philosophy and described the intellectual history of Europe along these lines. He did not depart from Groen's dichotomy of revolution and Christian faith, but neither did he systemize this dichotomy, as did Kuyper.

Groen's stress on the importance of ideas was to Bavinck the antidote against autonomy and anarchy, the new face of the Revolution in his days. Reflecting on this development, Christianity had to reposition itself in modern culture. Bavinck did not focus on the French Revolution or on its philosophers. He confronted himself with present-day thinkers. This also meant that he felt uneasy with Kuyper's system of Calvinism. When Kuyper repositioned Christianity over against the Revolution, he stressed the need of a life-system and searched for its principles. But over time the principles he had found had to be abandoned, because they no longer connected with reality, or were too rigid.[74]

Here, the first cracks of the concept or reality as a divine order (a concept that was never disputed by Groen or Kuyper) become visible. In the decade following 1910, Bavinck realized that European culture had changed rapidly and a fixed set of principles would outdate Christianity. A more flexible response was needed, a response that would not give up on the dichotomy Groen had taught, but at the same time would address the present issues. These issues did not have much to do with the French Revolution anymore, and were less systematized than Kuyper had envisioned. In 1917, during the First World War, Bavinck wrote:

> Like the French Revolution introduced a new era that was different from the former in all aspects, so and even more radically will this war open a new period, one that will bear another character in every aspect of life. State and society will

73. H. Bavinck, *De zekerheid des geloofs* (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1901), p. 10: 'Het subject is zichzelf, is zich van zijne ware of vermeende rechten bewust geworden en heeft langzamerhand alle banden verbroken, waarmede het aan het verledene vastlag; in grenzeloozen vrijheidszin heeft het zich geëmancipeerd van al wat vroeger hoog en heilig gehouden werd, en richt thans tot alle gezag, dat erkenning en onderwerping eischt, allereerst de vraag: zeg mij, waarop gij rust? . . . De critiek is ontwaakt en stelt een onderzoek in naar de gronden van alle gezag. Het naïeve, kinderlijke, eenvoudige geloof is daarmede schier ten eenenmale verdwenen. Twijfelzucht is de zielsziekte onzer eeuw geworden en sleept een reeks van zedelijke jammeren en ellenden mede'.

74. G. Harinck, C. van der Kooi and J. Vree (eds.), *'Als Bavinck maar eens kleur bekende', aantekeningen van H. Bavinck over de zaak-Netelenbos, het Schriftgezag en de situatie van de Gereformeerde Kerken (november 1919)* (Amsterdam: VU Uitgeverij, 1994), p. 50.

show a new face and be confronted with different issues. Politically and socially we will live under a different regime.[75]

The French Revolution disappeared beyond the horizon.

In reflecting on the way the French Revolution functioned in anti-revolutionary thought, it turns out that Kuyper's elaboration on this theme was dominant, but it did not expel other interpretations. The influence of Groen's interpretation stayed strong, especially outside neo-Calvinist circles, and in the long run turned out to survive the vicissitudes of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Bavinck interpreted Groen's focus on the French Revolution as outdated, but he praised an aspect that had not been paid much attention to thus far: his view of the dynamic character of history. It helped him to stay independent over against Kuyper's Calvinism as life-system. As a result, the French Revolution in the neo-Calvinist tradition was either systematized into a life-system, as in Kuyper's case, or historicized, as in Bavinck's case. In both cases, over the years the French Revolution as an *historical* event became less and less important for neo-Calvinism, compared to the *ideas* expressed in this Revolution.

75. H. Bavinck, *De nieuwe opvoeding* (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1917), p. 5: 'Zooals de Fransche Revolutie eene nieuwe periode inleidde, die op alle gebied kenmerkend van de vorige onderscheiden was; zoo en in nog sterker mate zal de wereldoorlog, die in 1914 losbrak, een tijdperk openen, dat in allerlei opzicht een gansch ander karakter draagt dan dat, waarin wij vóór dien tijd verkeerden. Staat en maatschappij zullen eene andere gedaante vertoonen en voor geheel nieuwe vraagstukken komen te staan. Politiek en sociaal komen we te leven onder een ander regime'.

Chapter 3

FROM BABEL TO PENTECOST VIA PARIS AND AMSTERDAM:
MULTILINGUALISM IN NEO-CALVINIST AND
REVOLUTIONARY THOUGHT

James Eglinton

I Introduction

An area of discomfort often shared by Protestant Christian and French Revolu-
tionary alike is that of multilingualism. Protestant Christians have often struggled
to be reconciled to multilingualism as something inherently good. The French
Revolution was a movement that attacked linguistic diversity, and instead imposed
one language upon the French population. This chapter will explore the negative
views on multilingualism found in revolutionary and (much) Protestant thought,
and will contrast them with the positive defence of multilingualism offered by
the Dutch neo-Calvinist theologians Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavinck, a
defence offered in response to the Revolution's policy of monolingualism.

II Protestant linguistic consciousness

Genesis 11, the Old Testament story of the Tower of Babel, has historically exerted
much influence on the ways many Protestants approach the issues of mono- and
multilingualism.[1] In Genesis 11, God judged the apparently monolingual Babelites

---

1. At the outset, it should be acknowledged that on the relationship of theology and
multilingualism, the Roman Catholic and Protestant traditions differ significantly. By virtue
of the privileged place historically given to Latin in the Roman Catholic Church's liturgical rites
and the particular relationship between Latin and vernacular languages within Catholicism,
a Roman Catholic account of multilingualism must consider issues quite different to
those faced by the Protestant tradition. The Roman Catholic account of multilingualism
is a separate area of study (see, for example, Pascal Majérus, 'What Language Does God
Speak? Exiled English Nuns and the Question of Languages', *Trajecta* (21 February 2012),
pp. 137–52). As this chapter focuses on the understanding of multilingualism found in the
works of two neo-Calvinist theologians, its focus will remain largely limited to Protestantism.

by confusing their common tongue, thus scattering them across the earth. The factor of divine judgement, here associated with a movement from mono- to multilingualism, seems to have become fixed in much Protestant consciousness in associating multilingualism with sin and confusion, and monolingualism with pre-judgement ideals. Within this common consciousness, all post-Babel multilingualism is viewed as a continuation of this curse.

Empirical description of this 'cultural consciousness' is, of course, particularly difficult: Protestantism is not a univocal movement with a central organizational structure and a fully unified set of beliefs. Charting the beliefs held by individual Protestants is inherently problematic in that regard. In talking of commonly held Protestant beliefs on multilingualism, there is little choice but to make some recourse to anecdotal evidence. As scientific studies of beliefs regarding linguistics held by Protestant Christians are far from abundant, it is perhaps more fruitful to focus on the various factors responsible for the creation of the cultural consciousness in question. These can be charted somewhat more accurately, and go some way to demonstrating why many Protestants regard all linguistic diversity as sinful.

Such a negative view of multilingualism, of course, finds a place in Christian thought long before the advent of Protestantism. Isidore of Seville (c. 540–636) is generally credited with the standard account of linguistic development supported throughout Christendom until the early modern era.[2] In this account, Hebrew was the original language given by God to Adam; only Hebrew was spoken until Babel, where God created new languages as a judgement upon the Babelites. In the myriad of languages descended from the new languages made at Babel, Isidore claimed that three retained a special connection to God – Hebrew, Greek and Latin – and that both sacred and vulgar versions of each of these could be found.

The obvious basis for the belief that God's original design for human culture was monolingual, of course, is found in the seemingly clear statement of global monolingualism found in Gen. 11.1 ('The whole world spoke but one language'). Although the Hebrew word here rendered 'earth' ('èrèts) has a broad semantic range (perhaps better translated in Gen. 1-11 as 'the land', rather than 'the planet'),[3] and the full phrase found in Gen. 11.1a, kol haèrèts, might be more accurately (idiomatically) translated as 'everybody' (thus referring to the totality of a people group, rather than a geographical space),[4] the practice of translating kol haèrèts

---

2. Isidore of Seville, *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville* (trans. Stephen A. Barney, W. J. Lewis, J. A. Beach and Oliver Berghof; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 191.

3. Kwakkel, for example, has argued that *haèrèts* in Gen. 1-11 should be translated 'the land', rather than 'the planet'. 'En wat het element "de aarde" betreft, daarbij kun je beter denken aan het droge land dan aan een planeet.' Gert Kwakkel, 'In het begin: Welke boodschap beluisterde Israël in Genesis 1?', in Gert Kwakkel and Rob van Houwelingen (eds.), *In den beginne en verder: Een bijbels-theologische reflectie op de schepping* (Barneveld: De Vuurbaak, 2012), p. 12.

4. William D. Reyburn and Euan McG. Fry, *A Handbook on Genesis* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1997), p. 250.

as 'the whole earth' is almost universal in English Bible translation.[5] The noted English-language exception is the Wycliffe Bible, which renders Gen. 11.1 as, 'Forsooth (all) the land was of one language, and of the same speech.'[6] It should be acknowledged that the same translation issue is found in Gen. 11.9 ('Therefore its name was called Babel, because there the Lord confused the language of kol haằèrèts. And from there the Lord dispersed them over the face of kol haằèrèts.')

The translation of kol haằèrèts in Gen. 11.1 as 'the whole earth' in the Bibles read by the vast majority of Orthodox Protestants is a significant factor in the creation of a common linguistic consciousness among said Christians. The popular beliefs that monolingualism was God's original linguistic ideal for humanity, that human language remained static from Adam to Nimrod, and that Babel is the sole reason for all subsequent multilingualism in human culture, join this translation of kol haằèrèts to form a common Orthodox Protestant set of values regarding language. Monolingualism is seen as somehow good or godly, whereas multilingualism is perceived as somehow chaotic, confusing and ungodly.[7]

The explanation of Babel, and the explicit connections made between God's judgement there and the presence of multiple languages in the present day, offered in popular Protestant children's Bibles, serves as a useful example of this. In *The Jesus Storybook Bible*, the linguistic confusion introduced at Babel is explained as the reason multiple languages now exist in the world. Its explanation of Babel begins with, 'Now, back then, everyone spoke exactly the same language so you didn't need to learn Swahili or Japanese or anything because you could say "Hello!" to anyone and they knew what you meant.'[8] And in drawing this story to a conclusion, it states, 'After that, people scattered all over the world (which is how we ended up with so many different languages to this day).' The Dutch children's

5. The Hebrew term in question, *kol haằèrèts*, is translated as global (rather than local) and primarily geographical (rather than anthropocentric) in meaning in, among others, the English Standard Version, New International Version, King James Version, Revised Standard Version, American Standard Version, The Amplified Bible, Common English Bible, Darby Translation, Knox Bible, The Message, New American Standard Bible, New Century Version, New English Translation and the New Living Translation.

6. The Orthodox Jewish Bible also refrains from translating 'èrèts as a global term, albeit by transliterating, rather than translating, the words *kol Haằèrèts*, thus rendering Gen. 11.1 as, 'And the kol Ha'aretz was of one language and of devarim achadim (common words).'

7. The Jewish commentator Nahum Sarna also provides an example of a similarly negative appraisal of multilingualism. See Nahum M. Sarna, *The JPS Torah Commentary: Genesis* (New York: The Jewish Publication Society, 1989), pp. 80–1. 'But the biblical Narrator is disturbed by the vast diversity of languages that characterizes the human race. Given the Bible's presupposition that all mankind constitutes one great family traceable to a common ancestry, it becomes necessary to account for the rise of a polyglot humanity. The present narrative deals with this development.'

8. Sally Lloyd-Jones, *The Jesus Storybook Bible: Every Story Whispers His Name* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Kids, 2007), p. 54.

Bible, *Mijn Eerste Bijbel*, offers the same explanation of Babel's significance for the development of multiple modern-day languages.[9] In both, the linguistic confusion brought by God at Babel is offered as the Biblical explanation of the phenomenon of multilingualism. As such, it is inextricably linked to a negative set of connotations: sin, a culture-wide rebellion against God, confusion and judgement.

Although this chapter characterizes a generally negative view of multilingualism as typical of much Protestant cultural consciousness, it is nonetheless noteworthy that commentators dealing with Gen. 11 do not univocally present the text as Scripture's account of all subsequent multilingualism. Indeed, although some present the text as asserting a pre-Babel global monolingualism,[10] commentators are far from united in asserting that kol ha'ĕrèts should be translated as the whole earth,[11] or that the text actually conveys that the common tongue spoken referred in Gen. 11.1 was the only language spoken in the world at that time.[12] Van Wolde has argued that Gen. 11 does present an 'origin of languages' account, but also interprets Gen. 1-11 as a single textual movement outlining God's act of creation, which closes with the divine creation of linguistic diversity and the divine act of compelling humanity to fill the earth.[13] (As such, van Wolde represents a

9. John Dillow, *Mijn eerste Bijbel* (Alphen aan de Rijn: Parragon, 2001), pp. 38–41.

10. For example, see John D. Currid, *Genesis: Volume 1* (New York: Evangelical Press USA, 2003), p. 239; Bruce Waltke, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), p. 178. Waltke recognizes that the term *kol* (whole) may be a relative, rather than absolute, term, but nonetheless maintains that 'nothing in the context suggests a restricted use'.

11. See, for example, John Walton, *Genesis: The NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), pp. 371–2. 'The mention of "all the earth" five times in nine verses gives the modern reader a universal feel to the passage, but that sense may be somewhat mitigated when we recall that the Hebrew word translated "earth" also often means "land" and is more narrowly defined. We cannot afford to jump to unwarranted conclusions about the universality of the references; decisions have to be made on a case-by-case basis'.

12. John E. Hartley, *New International Bible Commentary: Genesis* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 2001), p. 126; Victor P. Hamilton, *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament: The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), p. 350; C. H. Gordon, *Before Columbus: Links Bewteen the Old World and Ancient America* (New York: Crown, 1971), pp. 107, 165–6. Hartley, in being aware of the general consensus held by current-day linguists that human languages cannot be descended from one common linguistic ancestor, draws on Hamilton's work to argue that the one language referred to in Gen. 11.1 was a *lingua franca*. His argument is that although linguistic diversity was already present in the world (as recorded in Gen. 10.5, 20, 31; a factor understood by other commentators as dischronisation) all people could communicate through a common (second) language. Hamilton's hypothesis draws on the distinction between *lesonot* (Gen. 10) as local languages, and *sapa ehat* (Gen. 11) as a *lingua franca* (see Hamilton, *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament: The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, p. 350).

13. Ellen van Wolde, *Words become Worlds: Semantic Studies of Genesis 1–11* (Leiden: Brill, 1994), pp. 100–9.

postmodern interpretation of Babel whereby the introduction of linguistic pluriformity is read as a blessing, rather than a curse.)

Against that backdrop, it is perhaps important that the general Protestant consciousness referred to in this chapter (based on the common translation of kol haȅrèts in Gen. 11, and the use of Babel as an explanation of the origins of multilingualism disseminated in Protestant popular culture) be distinguished from the handling of Gen. 11 by exegetes.

In addition to this popular association with sin and judgement, multilingualism has also presented many Orthodox Protestants with problems in relation to evolutionary theories of linguistic development. From August Schleicher (1821–68) onwards,[14] mainstream linguists have generally argued that living languages are constantly changing. When one group of people speaking a single language is divided in two (or multiple) groups, and when contact between those groups is broken or severely limited, the process of linguistic change will invariably set in: first, the language spoken in the isolated contexts will become a range of distinct (but nonetheless mutually intelligible) dialects of the original language; then, in time, those dialects will diverge to the extent that they will become separate languages. According to linguistic evolutionary theory, this will happen whenever the frequency of linguistic contact between scattered groups of humans is lessened.[15]

However, if one believes Gen. 1-11 to teach that from Eden to Babel, only one language was spoken, that language is inherently static, and that no linguistic development occurred (or was ever intended to occur) until God brought linguistic confusion as a judgement upon Babel, evolutionary linguistics (as a scientific explanation of multilingualism) will be an area within which one will feel distinctly uncomfortable. This is particularly so for many Orthodox Protestants, given Schleicher's own overt adherence to Darwinian thought.[16]

Against this fluid, evolutionary model of language, much Protestant theology has posited an essentialist linguistic ideal, whereby monolingualism prevailed as a

14. August Schleier was the father of nineteenth-century evolutionary linguistics. On the grounds that language can be seen as an organism demonstrating development, maturity and decline, Schleicher believed in the application of Darwinian evolutionary principles to the study of language development. See E. F. K. Koerner, *Practicing Linguistic Historiography* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1989), pp. 325–75.

15. For an appropriation of this model by linguists writing on the evolution of languages in the Ancient Near East and in Antiquity, see Pierre Swiggers and Alfons Wouters, 'Langues, Situations Linguistiques et Réflexions sur le Language dans l'Antiquité', in Pierre Swiggers and Alfons Wouters (eds.), *Le Langage dans l'Antiquité* (Leiden: Leiden University Press, 1990), p. 10.

16. See August Schleicher, 'The Darwinian Theory and the Science of Language (1863)', trans. Alexander V. W. Blikkers, in Konrad Koerner (ed.), *Amsterdam Studies in the Theory and History of Linguistic Science I, Amsterdam Classics in Linguistics Vol. 6: Linguistics and Evolutionary Theory, Three Essays by August Schleicher, Ernst Haeckel, and Wilhelm Bleek* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1983), pp. 1–72.

godly reality until God, acting in judgement, inflicted the world with the curse of non-static language.[17] Reformed Christians who relate to Babel and multilingualism in that context perhaps also feel distanced from the warm reception of linguistic diversity found in Pentecostal Christianity's generally more positive account of multilingualism. This Pentecostal openness to multilingualism is linked to a strong focus on the practice of speaking in tongues and exegetical engagement with the relationship of Babel and Pentecost.[18]

The website of the 2012 DRONGO conference – an academic linguistics conference held in Utrecht exploring the richness of multilingualism – provides a useful example of what appears to be this typically Protestant popular antipathy towards multilingualism grounded on a set of exegetical assumptions regarding the Tower of Babel. Under the main information page, the following comment was left by what one can likely suppose to have been a Protestant Christian.

> I thought that the Biblical story . . . of the Tower of Babel had already given the definitive answer to the question whether multilingualism enriches or creates problems. . . . Monolingualism unites, multilingualism divides. Such division can be good, but there is absolutely no reason to be so euphoric about multilingualism.[19]

Although this is an anecdotal example, it nonetheless serves to represent the unease felt by many non-Pentecostal Protestants towards multilingualism, which one suspects is closely related to the general lack of a positive account of multilingualism in most Protestant theology.

In reality, of course, the understanding of multilingualism held by the bulk of Protestants most likely comprises a set of passively acquired, and not actively proclaimed, beliefs. These will present a positive affirmation of Babel as the origin

17. See, for example, Henry Morris, *The Biblical Basis for Modern Science* (Green Forest: Master Books, 2002), pp. 385–406.

18. See, for example, Waldo César, 'From Babel to Pentecost: A Social-Historical-Theological Study of the Growth of Pentecostalism', in André Corten and Ruth Marshall Fratani (eds.), *Between Babel and Pentecost: Transnational Pentecostalism in Africa and Latin America* (London: Hurst, 2001), p. 30; Michael Welker, *God the Spirit* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994), p. 235; Tan-Chow May Ling, *Pentecostal Theology for the Twenty First Century: Engaging with Multi-Faith Singapore* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), p. 32; Timothy Johnston, *The Writings of the New Testament* (London: SCM, 1999), p. 235.

19. Dutch original: 'Ik dacht dat het Bijbelse verhaal over de bouw van de Toren van Babel het definitieve antwoord had gegeven over de Rijkdom of problematiek van meertaligheid. Eéntaligheidheid verbindt, meertaligheid scheidt. Zo'n scheiding kan goed zijn, maar er is geen enkele reden om in het algemeen euforisch – hier tot op het carnavaleske af – over meertaligheid te doen. Alsof er uit alle macht een groot (taal)probleem moet worden onderdrukt. Vergeten wij niet wat eens Guido Gezelle schreef: "De taal is gans een volk"'. 'accessed on http://www.nieuwwij.nl on 18 August 2012'?

of multilingualism, coupled with a general ignorance of linguistic theory. Stated differently, for most Christians Babel is presented as the genesis of multilingualism simply because it is the only account of linguistic origins with which they are familiar. Examples of Christians who actively deny any element of evolution in linguistics are far less common. It appears that such critiques are limited to the Young Earth Creationist movement.[20] The distance between the Young Earth Creationist denial of linguistic evolution and the modern science of linguistics is best seen in Pennock's *Tower of Babel: The Evidence against the New Creationism*.[21]

III Theology, language and languages

It should be noted that much work on theology and language exists in Protestant theology, though it largely seems confined to two fields: (i) missiological engagement with multilingualism (in relation to cross-cultural communication and incarnational theory) and (ii) work on the relationship of theology to the phenomenon of language.

In terms of missiology, it is relatively easy to find work by missiologists affirming that missionaries should learn the languages of those among whom they work.[22] However, the multilingualism approved of in missiological works runs the danger of becoming pragmatic in emphasis: in order to reach people, one must learn their language (ideally, to a high level of fluency, in order to understand them deeply, rather than simply to impart information).[23] However, such an assertion is not (on its own) an affirmation that multilingualism is intrinsically good. It is quite possible to believe that monolingualism is the divine ideal for humanity, but for purely pragmatic reasons also to maintain that a missionary must learn new languages. Such an approach is to tolerate multilingualism (out of necessity), while not condoning or approving of it in principle. It is quite different to assert that Christians should support multilingualism because the presence of multiple languages in God's world is somehow good or godly. It should be noted, however,

20. Henry Morris, *Scientific Creationism* (Green Forest: Master Books, 1985), p. 185. 'There really seems no way to explain the different languages except in terms of the special creative purpose of the Creator. Evolution has no explanation either for language in general or the languages in particular. Exactly how or when the Creator transformed the primeval language of the original human population into distinctive languages of different tribes and nations . . . can perhaps be determined by a close study of the records of prehistory. But this is not a problem susceptible to scientific evolution.'

21. Robert T. Pennock, *Tower of Babel: The Evidence against the New Creationists* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1999), pp. 117–80.

22. See, for example, Alan Richard Tippett, *Introduction to Missiology* (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1987), pp. 129–30.

23. For example, Johan Herman Bavinck, *An Introduction to the Science of Missions* (trans. David Freeman; Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1960), p. 121.

that missiological works (engaging with Gen. 11 and affirming multilingualism as inherently good) do exist.[24]

The missiologist Lamin Sanneh has argued that the interaction of linguistics and missiology has produced a counter-cultural valuation of linguistic diversity:

> The study of languages and cultures in this Enlightenment scheme [where cultural ideas were influenced by the theory of universal paradigms] was essentially the study of a universal theory and grammar, with the consequence of linguistic and cultural variety being held hostage to an idealized conceit. . . . The modern linguistic work of missions, by contrast, promoted extraordinary variety, with languages being treated as internally coherent systems whose essential spark would be preserved in the process and outcome of translating the Scriptures.[25]

The intersection of multilingualism (and particularly the act of translation) and Christianity forms a major theme in Sanneh's work: as such, his work represents a challenge to be followed in other branches of the theological enterprise. Sanneh's emphasis on the element of translation in the transmission of all Christianity, and Christianity's lack of a 'revealed' language, leads to the categorization of Christianity as an inherently multilingual religion, one where linguistic variety is both practically essential and intrinsically good.[26]

24. See, for example, Graham R. Scott and Eleonora L. Scott, 'Heart-Langauge Worship in Multilingual Contexts', *Crucible* 4, 1 (April 2012): p. 11. '[T]he story of Babel (Gen. 11:1-9), demonstrates that the source of all languages is God Himself. Studying this passage shows that language is God's gracious gift to us, and it equalizes all languages as originating from God. In the movement from Babel to Pentecost (Acts 2), it must be stressed that God did not reverse Babel. Rather, God spoke different languages through the apostles so that all could understand His Word. He could have given everyone the understanding of the one language being spoken. But instead, God spoke in multiple languages, showing that God wants people to understand, and He values all languages. This is further reinforced by the throne room scene in Rev. 7:9-10, in which people from every tribe and language worship the Lamb. This suggests that God so loves the diversity of languages that they will be preserved in heaven for eternity.' See also Lamin Sanneh, *Translating the Message: the Missionary Impact on Culture* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2008), p. 52.

25. Lamin Sanneh, 'Religion and the Mother Tongue: A Postlude', in Lamin Sanneh (ed.), *Religion and the Variety of Culture: A Study in Origin and Practice* (Valley Forge: Trinity Press International, 1996), p. 70.

26. 'Being the original Scripture of the Christian movement, the New Testament Gospels are a translated version of the message of Jesus, and that means Christianity is a translated religion without a revealed language. The issue is not whether Christians translated their Scripture well or willingly, but that without translation there would be no Christianity or Christians. Translation is the church's birthmark as well as its missionary benchmark. Consequently, the more Christians press for a return to the origins of their religion, the

In terms of work on theology and language (as opposed to theology and multilingualism), the bulk of work written in that context focuses on the phenomenon of language and apophatism in theology. Can we speak of God with language? Why does language (as a singular human phenomenon) exist, and what can be said (theologically) of its limits?[27] However, these studies tend to focus on human language as a generic phenomenon, rather than on languages in their pluriformity, and although they pose valuable questions, they are of limited direct use to theological questions on multilingualism.

The earlier debates on the phenomenon of language are closely related to theological questions of mono- or multilingualism. Nineteenth-century secular theories of language – that of Bertrand Russell being a prime example – tended towards the idea that language inherently lacked meaning, and as such, that God-talk is meaningless. The most important recent Christian response to this anti-language, anti-theology drive is James Smith's *Speech and Theology*.[28] In this work, Smith uses the early Heidegger's turn to Augustine to defend speaking of God in finite language. His argument centres on the Incarnation: there, the eternal Word was enfleshed. This infinite God entered a finite world of time, space and speech. God's own insistence on speaking leads Smith to argue that God-talk is necessary. However, if, as Smith argues, the Incarnation means that language is necessary, the question then further develops: which language is necessary? Is there only one language for God-talk? Does God-talk require more languages or simply more words in one language?

The direction of this chapter is to argue that God-talk requires multilingualism, albeit not for every individual language user. Rather, God-talk requires multilingualism as a global phenomenon occurring in God's providence. The task of appropriating the self-disclosure of an infinite God requires more, rather than fewer, languages. Such a claim should hardly surprise Christians, given that the Christian Bible itself is no monolingual work. As such, an attempt to provide a constructive, positive theological account of multilingualism (and as such, of language development and the coexistence of languages) is something of a rarity. Reformed, rather than Pentecostal, attempts to appraise multilingualism as good developments in God's providence are similarly rare. It should be noted, though, that this is not entirely virgin territory for theological exploration. Moisés Silva's

---

more they stumble unreassuringly in the gap between the infinitely varied languages adopted for Scripture and worship and the language in which Jesus preached. Since Jesus did not write or dictate the Gospels, his followers had little choice but to adopt a translated form of his message.' Lamin Sanneh, *Whose Religion is Christianity? The Gospel Beyond the West* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), p. 97.

27. See, for example, K. Heeroma, *Nader tot een taaltheologie* (Den Haag: Bert Bakker, 1967); Gordon Clark, *Language and Theology* (Jefferson: The Trinity Foundation, 1980).

28. James K. A. Smith, *Speech and Theology: Language and the Logic of Incarnation* (London: Routledge, 2002).

God, Language and Scripture is a notable Protestant theological work dealing with the Biblical account of languages, the scientific study of languages and linguistic evolution, and challenging the notion that multilingualism is inherently bad.[29] His handling of Gen. 11 argues the following:

> But what is the point of the story [of Babel]? Is this one among the similar myths in a variety of ancient cultures intended to explain the origin of linguistic diversity? When we consider how much the Book of Genesis does not tell us about the origin and development of civilization, it seems doubtful that this passage was written for the purpose of satisfying historical curiosity. In any case, we can demonstrate that over time languages will naturally diversify (perhaps the clearest example is the development of the Romance languages, such as French and Spanish, from Latin), so this passage cannot explain every instance of language variation. It may well be that such an event as is described here could account for the origin of language families (such as the difference between the Indo-European family and the Afro-Asiatic family) and that a memory of the event is reflected in similar stories around the world. But the truth is that we do not have enough information to establish a clear correspondence between the event described in this passage and what we know of prehistoric language development. Moreover, we should not assume that language diversity as such is necessarily a bad thing or a reflection of God's curse.[30]

In identifying Silva's work as exceptional in its interaction between these intellectual fields, and in noting its conclusion (as a Protestant theologian's assessment of the relationship between theology and multilingualism) that multilingualism is good, it is particularly interesting that his work begins with a reference to the influence of Abraham Kuyper and the later American neo-Calvinist Cornelius van Til on his thought.[31]

The context within which this chapter will attempt to provide a positive theological account of multilingualism will be in its examination of attitudes towards mono- and multilingualism in the French Revolution and in the early Dutch neo-Calvinist movement. In this clash of worldviews, we find considerably different views on the relative merits of linguistic diversity: in the French Revolution, the ideal of linguistic uniformity was aggressively imposed on all citizens, whereas neo-Calvinism responded by defending linguistic pluriformity. This chapter will explore the historical and theological aspects of the neo-Calvinist assertion of multilingualism as inherently good.

29. Moisés Silva, *God, Language and Scripture: Reading the Bible in the Light of General Linguistics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990).

30. Ibid., pp. 28–9.

31. Ibid., p. 19.

IV Language and the French Revolution

In writing on the historic situation regarding mono- and multilingualism in Revolutionary France, it is helpful to begin with France at the outset of the twenty-first century. Few countries have as strained a relationship with multilingualism as la République française. The sociolinguists Norby and Hajek have observed that from the 1990s onwards, Europe has been marked by a shift in attitudes towards language whereby minority languages previously lacking in prestige and power have come to receive far greater legal and social recognition.

> In various Western societies around the world, the past decades have witnessed a shift from language policies in which a single, national language has been promoted to policies in which other, usually minority (Indigenous and migrant), languages have been increasingly taken into account.[32]

In that context, France stands out as a country particularly ill at ease with positive affirmations of multilingualism – its awkward reception of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages in 1992 being perhaps the prime example. This Charter, a piece of Europe-wide legislation, was designed to affirm and recognize positively the multilingual nature of modern Europe. France stands out as the notable absentee in the signatories.

Such a background informs Ager's claim that France – concerning its principled defence and practice of monolingualism, at least – is unusual in a world where a vast number of people are born into bi- or multilingual situations, and where much recent political impetus affirms the coexistence of multiple languages.[33]

Analyses of contemporary France and its relationship to multilingualism demonstrate a considerable degree of tension between the monolingual French-speaking majority and those who also speak indigenous minority languages. Despite the fact that the minority languages in question – Breton, Basque, Occitan, Corsican, etc. – evolved in France and as such are historic indigenous French languages, they have nonetheless been subject to a state-led, constitutionally enshrined marginalization over a period of centuries. Ager's sociolinguistic

---

32. Catrin Norby and John Hajek (eds.), *Uniformity and Diversity in Language Policy: Global Perspectives* (Bristol: Multilingual Matters, 2011), xiii. It should be acknowledged, however, that more recent trends in European politics have seen a popular level hardening of attitudes towards multilingualism (via its association with immigration and multiculturalism). See Melanie Cook and James Simpson, 'Discourses about linguistic diversity', in Marilyn Martin-Jones, Adrian Blackledge and Angela Creese (eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Multilingualism* (New York: Routledge, 2012), pp. 123–4.

33. Dennis Ernest Ager, *Sociolinguistics and Contemporary French* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 9. 'While bilingualism or multilingualism is the normal state for most of the world's inhabitants, France is unusual in having a mainly monolingual population'.

analysis highlights 'prestige, acceptability and value' as the central issues in the historic promotion of standard French and the marginalization of France's other indigenous languages. He highlights the reaction to this in 'Corsica and Brittany, but also elsewhere, where people reject the negative label of inferiority and wish to promote a positive image of the local language'.[34] The roots of this negative view of multilingualism, of course, owe much to the intellectual heritage of the French Revolution.

Although the French Revolution attempted to impose the ideal of monolingualism on France (and as such, it gave one particular language a position of power over all others), this tense posture towards diversity of language, and the coupling of monolingualism to power, predates the Revolution by some centuries. In pre-Medieval France, we already find the francien dialect spoken in and around Paris acquiring prestige and power. In the thirteenth century state administration began operating in this language rather than Latin. Between the fourteenth and seventeenth centuries, the political power of French-speaking kings saw the prestigious position of French, as opposed to its southern rival Provençal, become further strengthened. In 1635, the Académie royale (which would go on to be renamed the Académie française after the Revolution in 1789) was founded, its task being to codify the language and its grammar, thus setting the gold standard by which one's language was to be measured.

What is particularly interesting in the history of this move towards a French monolingual ideal is that theologians also made notable contributions within this movement. In the sixteenth century, and thus in pre-Revolutionary France, the Protestant Reformer John Calvin played an important role in the development of a standardized (and highly esteemed) form of French through his choice to publish his *Institutes* in both Latin and French.[35] Although D'Aubigné's account of Calvin's influence on the development of the French language is somewhat overstated, he nonetheless makes the important claim that the Reformation 'created, or at least everywhere emancipated modern languages'.[36] (The impact of the Protestant Reformer Martin Luther on the evolution of the German language has been extensively chronicled elsewhere.[37]

In writing a seminal work in clear, lucid, sixteenth-century French, and disseminating that work among France's literate classes, Calvin impacted the standardization of French. Pannier has argued that a common reception of Calvin's

34. Ager, *Sociolinguistics and Contemporary French*, p. 9.

35. Ferdinand Brunot, *Histoire de la langue française* (Paris: Librairie Armand Colin, 3rd edn, 1947), pp. 14–21.

36. J. H. Merle D'Aubigné, *The History of the Reformation in the Sixteenth Century* (trans. Henry Beveridge; Glasgow: William Collins, 1845), p. 371. See also, Anthonia Feitsma, 'The Reformation and the Vernacular', in Durk Gorter, Jarich F. Hoekstra, Lammert G. Jansma and Jehannes Ytsma (eds.), *Fourth International Conference on Minority Languges, Vol. II: Western and Eastern European Papers* (Avon: Multilingual Matters, 1989), pp. 1–10.

37. See, for example, Ruth H. Sanders, *German: Biography of a Language* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 147.

French writings among his critics was the simultaneous rejection of his contents and admiration of his linguistic style.[38]

> Almost every critic . . . emphasizes Calvin's clarity of thought, the precision of his vocabulary, and his brevity, or rather the concentration of meaning in his prose. Most of them comment on the logical cohesion of his argument and of his syntax, emphasizing Calvin's achievement in having 'taught the French language to reason'.[39]

Calvin's French writing style affected a considerable change in how the French perceived their own language: he demonstrated the use of complex ideas in clear French prose and as such, played a part in the increasingly high place given to French in seventeenth-century France.

In the seventeenth-century context of the Académie royale, the Jansenist theologians Claude Lancelot (c. 1615–95) and Antoine Arnauld (1612–94) rose to prominence as French grammarians. Their most famous work, *Grammaire générale et raisonnée: contenant les fondemens de l'art de parler, expliqués d'une manière claire et naturelle*,[40] a work in Cartesian linguistics known in English as the *Port-Royal Grammar*,[41] asserts that grammar is universal to all humans. (In that sense, Arnauld and Lancelot are ideological forerunners to the contemporary linguist Noam Chomsky, who also argues for a theory of universal grammar).[42] Interestingly, Antoine Arnauld's grandfather, of the same name, converted to Roman Catholicism in 1572, having been raised in a Huguenot family historically influenced by the quality of Calvin's French writings. D'Aubigné makes a direct connection between the impact of Calvin's French and the grammatical understanding espoused at Port-Royal.[43] The general association between

---

38. Jacques Pannier, *Calvin écrivain: Sa place et son rôle dans l'histoire de la langue et de la littérature française* (Paris: Librairie Fischbacher, 1930), pp. 14–31. For a pro-Calvin account of his linguistic style, see Abel Lefranc, *Calvin et l'éloquence française* (Paris: Librairie Fischbacher, 1934).

39. Francis M. Higman, *The Style of John Calvin in his French Polemical Treatises* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 2.

40. Claude Lancelot and Antoine Arnauld, *Grammaire générale et raisonnée contenant les fondemens de l'art de parler, expliqués d'une manière claire et naturelle* (Paris: chez Durand, 1780).

41. Claude Lancelot and Antoine Arnauld, *General and Rational Grammar: The Port-Royal Grammar* (trans. Jacques Rieux and Bernard E. Rollin; The Hague: Mouton, 1975).

42. Vivian J. Cook and Mark Newson, *Chomsky's Universal Grammar: An Introduction* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2007).

43. 'Protestant France was formed, at a later period, on the French of Calvin, and Protestant France was the best informed part of the nation. From it came forth those families of literati and high magistracy which had so powerful an influence on the culture of the people: from it came forth Port Royal, one of the greatest instruments which contributed to form French prose.' D'Aubigné, *The History of the Reformation in the Sixteenth Century*, p. 371.

Port-Royal, then purportedly a bastion of Catholic Jansenism, and a form of 'reheated Calvinism' (*calvinisme reboulli*) seen in the theological wars of the 1660, for example, bears witness to this.[44]

Alongside this French grammarian-devised notion that grammar was universal and logical, the seventeenth century saw many in France arguing that French was the most grammatically clear and logical language, and as such, it was inherently better than other languages. These theologian–grammarians laid the linguistic foundations upon which Rivarol, one century later, would quip that, '*ce qui n'est pas clair n'est pas français, ce qui n'est pas clair est encore anglais, italien, grec ou latin*' ['that which is not clear is not French, that which is not clear is English, Italian, Greek or Latin'].[45] The apparent clarity of French grammar, seemingly supported by Cartesian linguistic theory and the social context of power being gathered (both nationally and internationally) by French speakers, combined to encourage the assertion of monolingual ideals in eighteenth-century France. Ager writes,

> For Rivarol, the universality of French derived from its clarity, itself derived from the direct order of its syntax – verb, subject, object; from its simplicity; and from the abstract nature of its expression. He made the point also that the prestige and hence universality of French depended on the evident superiority of French arms and culture, an approach which required him to denigrate other languages as crude, barbarous or otherwise inferior.[46]

That Rivarol characterized languages other than French as inherently 'barbaric' is worth noting for later and somewhat surprising in comparison with Abraham Kuyper.

Within this context, Revolutionary France was a setting in which France's regional languages were treated with contempt and suspicion. In 1794, the Rapport Barrère famously argued that 'Federalism and superstition speak Breton, the counter-Revolution speaks Italian, fanaticism speaks Basque . . . the crowd of corrupt dialects, the last remnants of feudalism, must disappear: the course of events dictates it. Among a free people, language must be one and the same for all.'[47] This report also described French as 'the instrument of public thought, the most certain agent of the Revolution,' whereas Breton, Basque and German were referred to as, 'those instruments of shame and error . . . that barbaric

---

44. John J. Conley, S.J. *Adoration and Annihilation: The Convent Philosophy of Port-Royal* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2009), pp. 20–1.

45. Antoine de Rivarol, *De l'universalité européenne de la langue française* (Paris: chez Cocherie, 1784), p. 32. Rivarol was awarded the Berlin Academy Prize for this essay.

46. Ager, *Sociolinguistics and Contemporary French*, p. 15.

47. Cited in Dennis Ernest Ager, *Language Policy in Britain and France* (London: Cassell, 1996), p. 42.

gibberish, those crude idioms, which can only serve fanatics and counter-Revolutionaries.'[48]

Bearing in mind the huge influence of the French Revolution on a wide range of topics throughout Europe, it is also unsurprising that this push for monolingualism – alongside the assertion that French, as the superior language, should be that one language – prompted various reactions across Europe. The remainder of this chapter thus moves to deal with the Dutch neo-Calvinist's response to the Revolution's assertion of monolingualism.

V Abraham Kuyper and multilingualism

A key interaction between Abraham Kuyper and the linguistic values of the French Revolution is found in his speech 'Uniformity: The Curse of Modern Life',[49] which was given to a young men's Christian association in 1869 at the Odeon Theatre in Amsterdam. Although this is not the only place in which Kuyper writes of the intersection of theology and multilingualism, it is important as an early example of Kuyper's attempts to contextualize that enterprise in relation to the French Revolution. Accordingly, the bulk of this chapter's interaction with Kuyper will focus on this speech, following which some reference will be made to comments on linguistics made in Kuyper's letters and in his De Gemeene Gratie.

'Uniformity: The Curse of Modern Life' typifies the place given to the Revolution in the bombastic young Kuyper's public polemics. It is not taken as the last word on Kuyper's beliefs regarding multilingualism, but it does provide much useful information in that regard. In fact, comparison of Kuyper's statements on language made in relation to the French Revolution (as found in 'Uniformity: The Curse of Modern Life') and made without reference to the Revolution (as found in De Gemeene Gratie) suggest two very different accounts of multilingualism. This, in turn, is useful in understanding the role played by the Revolution in Kuyper's public rhetoric and polemics.

Beginning with 'Uniformity: The Curse of Modern Life', the driving conviction in this speech is that unity and uniformity are mutually exclusive concepts. Kuyper's argument is that unity requires diversity, a concept he understood to be necessarily

---

48. Original French cited in Hilary Wise, *The Vocabulary of Modern French: Origins, Structure and Function* (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 233. 'Just as French was, 'l'instrument de la pensée publique, l'agent le plus sûr de la Révolution', other languages like Breton, Basque or German were referred to as, 'ces instruments de dommage et d'erreur . . . ces jargons barbares et ces idioms grossiers qui ne peuvent plus servir que les fanatiques et les contres-révolutionnaires'.

49. Abraham Kuyper, 'Uniformity: The Curse of Modern Life', trans. John Vriend, in James Bratt (ed.), *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), pp. 20–44.

denied by the notion of uniformity. Unity presupposes diverse elements that are somehow held together, whereas uniformity asserts that there is only one form, one acceptable manner of being. Hence, to be united – according to Kuyper – we need not all become the same. Rather, we must work out the basis by which we can coexist. In order to become unified, he maintains, all of our preexisting differences must disappear as we are homogenised. Three particular insights are foundational to this distinction between unity and uniformity: regarding God (theological), our experience of reality (existential) and the doctrine of sin (hamartiological).

First, Kuyper's theological starting point is found in the doctrine of God. He maintains that 'unity is the ultimate goal of all the ways of God'.[50] God's purpose in creation is to reflect the unity, rather than uniformity, found within the Triune Godhead. Second, Kuyper's existential insight concerns the nature of reality and our experience of it.

> Life often presents itself to us as an enormous muddle, a vast multicoloured miscellany of things in which we look in vain for unity. But the deep meaning of the whole of divine revelation is that the ways of God lead from all this diversity toward unity, out of this chaos toward order. It tells us that one day by his will all dissonances will dissolve into harmony.[51]

Experienced reality, in its diversity and breadth, prompts us to look for the sense in which this complicated reality is somehow one. Kuyper understood the history of human civilization as the search for that sense of unity.

Third, on the doctrine of sin, Kuyper characterized world history as a 'history of sin', in which the true unity sought by God is often supplanted by a false uniformity. The hamartiological observation at the centre of this thought is that sin has no creative power. Rather, it parodies God's creation. 'Sin always acts so: it puts the stamp of God's image on its counterfeit currency and misuses its God-given powers to imitate God's activity. Itself powerless, without creative ideas of its own, sin lives solely by plagiarising the ideas of God.'[52] In this history of sin, then, uniformity is sin's parody of the unity sought after by the Triune God. Kuyper saw uniform social models – and in this context he identifies the social models found at Babel and in Revolutionary France – as marked by false uniformity, rather than true unity. Most interesting is that Kuyper, in tracing out this 'history of sin' (as a history of these uniform civilizations), begins with Babel and ends with Revolutionary France.

> Was not that striving for unity, that hankering to be one people and to have one language, majestically put down in the collapse and rubble of the tower

---

50. Kuyper, 'Uniformity: The Curse of Modern Life', 21.
51. Ibid., p. 21.
52. Ibid., p. 22.

of Babel? What is the history of Eastern antiquity but a series of restless, bloody attempts to rebuild by the power of the sword the unity shattered on the plain of Shinar? . . . And when history's centre of gravity shifted from Asia to Europe, the same political agenda moved to our continent. . . . Possessed by the same maniacal dream Napoleon, too, sought to complete his world empire.[53]

Indeed, throughout this speech, Kuyper attempts to portray Revolutionary France as a new Babel. His direct invocation of God's judgement on Babel given in Gen. 11.6 ('And the Lord said, "Behold, they are one people, and they have all one language, and this is only the beginning of what they will do. And nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them."') against Revolutionary France, making explicit reference to its attitudes towards monolingualism, is telling in this regard.

> Ladies and gentlemen, do I need to argue the point that all such striving for a false uniformity, the levelling principle of modern life, the demand for one people and one language, run counter to the ordinances of God? You well know the divine word, full of holy energy, that Scripture opposes to that striving: 'Else nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them.'[54]

Language is by no means the sole focus of Kuyper's challenge to Revolutionary France's model of uniformity. Dealing with uniformity in modern architecture, although Kuyper focuses on modern trends in America, in Germany (in Berlin and Wiesbaden) and in Belgium (in Brussels), he traces these directly to Georges Haussmann (1809–91), the civic planner charged by Napoleon III with the redesign of much of Paris. 'It is the modern spirit of Haussmann which violates even the consecrated soil of Montmartre to run a straight line through the circular pattern of its boulevards. Whatever Paris invents, Brussels imitates, and via Brussels, comes to haunt Holland's cities as well.'[55]

Kuyper is also critical of the homogenisation of age-related behaviour and dress,[56] gender differences,[57] and styles of clothing related to social class.[58] The last major area of critique is language. 'The pulse of a nation beats in its language. No wonder, then, that the same demon rages here as well. Certainly, there is much resistance, for a language is deeply rooted in the heart of a people. Yet here too the mindless drive towards uniformity has tried its stunts.'[59]

53. Ibid., p. 23.
54. Ibid., p. 34.
55. Ibid., p. 27.
56. Ibid., pp. 27–8.
57. Ibid., pp. 28–9.
58. Ibid., pp. 29–30.
59. Ibid., p. 30.

VI Kuyper's De Gemeene Gratie *on linguistics*

In his later work *De Gemeene Gratie*, Kuyper revisits the topic of 'the confusion of tongues' (De spraakverwarring).[60] Here, Kuyper handles linguistic pluriformity without reference to the French Revolution. As such, this is an interaction with multilingualism lacking in polemical intent. Accordingly, his statements on linguistics appear to be more measured and – as will be seen – quite considerably different to those made in 'Uniformity: The Curse of Modern Life'.

In *De Gemeene Gratie*, Kuyper writes of Babel as the origin of all subsequent multilingualism and asserts that, in order to understand Gen. 11, one must have some understanding of linguistics. 'This confusion of tongues itself is not comprehensible unless one makes the effort to spend a moment considering the nature of language'.[61] However, he seems to combine this with a thoroughly non-static view of language. Although he describes the inception of multilingualism as miraculous,[62] he nonetheless appears to maintain a more or less evolutionary account of its subsequent development. As a Dutchman, he is particularly aware of the *Sprachbund* running through Germany and the Netherlands, noting the close similarity (and often, the lack of mutual intelligibility) of the languages and dialects spoken therein.[63] He accepts the conventional nineteenth-century association of languages into family groups and, interestingly, attempts to use Gen. 11 to account for the creation of these family groups.

> The confusion that took place had by consequence that the one could no longer simply understand the other. They spoke very differently. They had become foreign to each other, and whatever effort they invested to create linguistic connections with each other seemed unrealistic. This is obviously not to say that if there were, say, 300,000 people there, that 300,000 each now spoke a unique language, so that 300,000 languages were created and nobody could find another person who spoke as he did. To think this is pointless. Evidently, the point of the story is that on the Plain of Sinar, the group broke up into certain groups, perhaps not more than ten or twelve in number, who among themselves spoke a common language, and who immediately became very foreign to the other groups.[64]

60. Abraham Kuyper, *De Gemeene Gratie*, Eerste Deel, Het Geschiedkundig Gedeelte (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1901), pp. 309–16.

61. Kuyper, *De Gemeene Gratie*, p. 311. Dutch original: 'Die spraakverwarring zelve is nu niet te verstaan, tenzij men zich de moeite gunne, een oogenblik over het wezen van *de taal* na te denken'.

62. Ibid., p. 309.

63. Ibid., p. 313.

64. Ibid., pp. 313–14. Dutch original: 'De verwarring, die plaats greep, had tengevolge, dat de één den ander eenvoudig niet meer verstond; ze spraken heel anders; ze waren elkander vreemd geworden; en wat moeite ze zich ook gaven, om weêr taalverbinding met elkander aan te knoopen, het bleek ondoenlijk. Dit wil natuurlijk zeggen, dat, stel er

What seems fairly evident in the handling of linguistics found in *De Gemeene Gratie* is Kuyper's sympathy for nineteenth-century linguistics. As has been noted, he does not maintain a static concept of language (in keeping with linguistic developments of the nineteenth century), and in addition to this, he demonstrates an understanding of language in relation to ethnic-cultural development firmly anchored in the nineteenth century.

In this context, Kuyper argues that Dutch people cannot pronounce the guttural sounds found in Arabic, and that the French cannot pronounce a Dutch 'sch' because, 'the whole formation of the head differs from race to race, also regarding the speech organs, this occurs'.[65] Such a theory is now thoroughly discredited: an ethnically Chinese person raised in a monolingual English-speaking environment will likely find the pronunciation of Mandarin no easier than a non-Chinese monolingual Anglophone, just as an ethnically non-Chinese child raised in a Mandarin-speaking environment will pronounce Mandarin as a native.

On this point Kuyper was wrong, but not uniquely so. The association of one's racial makeup with the ability to speak a particular language was common in the nineteenth century, although it was not universally accepted by linguists. In this regard, the key debate was between Arthur Comte de Gobineau (1816–82), a French linguist, and the German August Friedrich Pott (1802–87). De Gobineau's work *The Inequality of the Human Races* (1853–55), which was later used extensively by Nazi ideologues, argued for a strict correspondence between one's race and one's language. Pott's response, *Inequality of the Human Races from the Perspective of Linguistics* (1856) refuted de Gobineau's claims, and demonstrated that racial profile has no bearing on whether one can speak a certain language.

Kuyper's acceptance of the correspondence between race and language cites 'precise language study' (nauwkeurige taalstudie), but offers no citations. Given that he was writing half a century after the de Gobineau–Pott debate, it would be most interesting to know which language studies Kuyper had read. On this point, though, it is important to note that Kuyper's account of linguistics has taken on many insights typical of nineteenth-century mainstream linguistics, and has attempted to wed them to a Biblical explanation of multilingualism, using Gen. 11 to explain the creation of language families. As such, he represents the creativity of the neo-Calvinist tradition in relation to linguistics.

waren 300,000 mensen bijeen, die 300,000 elk een eigen taal gingen spreken, zoodat er 300,000 talen ontstonden en niemand een tweede vond, die sprak gelijk hij. Dit te denken ware onzinnig. Kennelijk is de bedoeling van het verhaal, dat het in Sinears vlakte bijeen zijnde geslacht in *zekere groepen* uiteenviel, misschien niet meer dan tien of twaalf in aantal, die wel onder elkander eenzelfde taal spraken, maar als groepen, elk met een eigen taal, plotseling geheel vreemd tegenover andere groepen met een andere stonden.'

65. Ibid., p. 315.

VII Critique of Kuyper on multilingualism

Although this chapter highlights 'Uniformity: The Curse of Modern Life' as an interesting example of a neo-Calvinist reaction to Revolutionary France's values on language, there is nonetheless much in this speech – regarding language at least – that is perhaps less different from his revolutionary foes than the young Kuyper might have thought (or at least, wished to communicate), and in addition, that is very different to the presentation of linguistic diversity found in *De Gemeene Gratie.*

The most basic critique is that Kuyper, despite his principled opposition to false uniformity, nonetheless seems to maintain a uniform, fixed 'one nation, one language' model. This model, of course, imposes linguistic uniformity within a national border in a way wholly unnatural to the development of linguistic diversity in the vast majority of human history.

Was Kuyper fair in criticizing the linguistic uniformity of revolutionary France (in its imposition of French upon Breton, Basque and Occitan speakers) while himself making no clear defence of indigenous Dutch languages like Frisian or Limburgs? (Indeed, as will be seen, he spoke elsewhere in unflattering terms about non-standard Dutch dialects.)

His 'one language, one nation' model, despite its opposition to Revolutionary linguistic ideals, is nonetheless typical of its nineteenth-century European context, just as the Revolution's ideal of the French language being imposed on all French citizens was. It reads as a dated understanding of language related to nation, certainly now in a Europe which is far more aware of its rich intra-national multilingual heritage (as is seen in the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages).

Closely related to this artificial pairing of 'one language' to 'one nation' is – what reads as – the young Kuyper's inadequate understanding of linguistic development. In this speech, he seems to have a fairly static view of language, as though Indo-European languages (in this case) have no genetic relationship or long history of influencing each other. From 'Uniformity: The Curse of Modern Life,' it does not appear that Kuyper had a nuanced understanding of the constantly changing nature of a living language, which is always influencing and being influenced by the languages with which it comes into contact.

As has already been seen, his (more measured) later writings on linguistics evince a far less static view of language, which suggests that in the case of 'Uniformity: The Curse of Modern Life' at least, while speaking against the Revolution, the young Kuyper was willing to play to (rather than challenge) popular level misconceptions about foreign languages.

> I must say, that vandalism has already gone a long way toward ruining the beauty of our language. Just read once the advertisements at the lower levels of our business world – that hodgepodge of private lingo laced with a supply of double-crossed mongrel words they alone are privy to. Not to fall behind their competitors for lack of advertising, the owners of small newspapers then swallow

their regrets by following this newfangled mutilation in their 'lead articles.' Next come the translators of rarely sought-after novels. In many devotional pieces the authors send samples of that demented Dutch into our back streets. And many a learned work, frequently even government documents, offers all too vivid proof of how this language corruption is spreading ever wider and higher. Spoken language is admittedly more durable because it is alive, but anyone who has ever listened to the fractured lingo of our 'gentlemen travellers', the hopeless gobbledygook of our store clerks, the droll babblings of our globetrotters, need not be told by anyone how far the indulgence in barbarisms has gone in corrupting our language.[66]

In describing the influence of one living linguistic community upon another as bringing 'barbarisms' into that language, Kuyper sounds more like Rivarol than he would perhaps like us to believe. In this instance, both the young Kuyper and the French Revolutionary linguists seem fairly typical of their nineteenth century (with its novel, dominating idea of nationhood and arbitrary borders) in their approach to language. Indeed, both should be viewed within what Charles Taylor describes as 'the rise of the disciplinary society' affecting Europe from the fifteenth century onwards.[67]

In 'Uniformity: The Curse of Modern Life,' Kuyper's 'one nation, one language' model (which sought to limit 'foreign influences' in language development) was also applied to other European languages.

The same thing is happening outside our borders. Year after year France's vocabulary is overloaded with foreign words made up of forced combinations of Greek roots. Our German friends, with their endless '-iren,' increasingly 'extinguiren' the German glow of their muscular mother tongue. In England,

---

66. Kuyper, 'Uniformity: The Curse of Modern Life', p. 31.

67. Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), pp. 90–145. Bavinck's book on eloquence, *De Welsprekendheid* (Kampen: G. H. Zalsman, 1901), should also be viewed against this backdrop, as should, for example, the exhortations to eloquence in Charles Spurgeon's *Lectures to my Students* (Fearn: Christian Focus Publications, 1998), p. 128. '*If you have any idiosyncracies of speech, which are disagreeable to the ear, correct them if possible.* It is admitted that this is much more easy for the teacher to inculcate than for you to practise. Yet to young men in the morning of their ministry, the difficulty is not insuperable. Brethren from the country have a flavour of their rustic diet in their mouths, reminding us irresistibly of the calves of Essex, the swine of Berkshire, or the runts of Suffolk. Who can mistake the Yorkshire or Somerset dialects, which are not merely provincial pronunciations, but tones also? It would be difficult to discover the cause, but the fact is clear enough, that in some counties of England men's throats seem to be furred up, like long-used teakettles, and in others, they ring like brass music, with a vicious metallic sound. Beautiful these variations may be in their season and place, but my taste has never been able to appreciate them'.

> French influence increasingly pushes back the Anglo-Saxon component of its
> language. Thus slowly but noticeably, especially in the circles of our travelling
> public, the languages of nations run together.[68]

Further to this, his 'one nation, one language' model probably influenced the advice
he gave to Dutch-speaking immigrants in North America. Sinke writes,

> The fact that Abraham Kuyper encouraged Dutch Americans to train their
> children to become 'solid, truly American Calvinists' rather than stress the
> Dutch language . . . in schools helped move the language in this direction [of
> Dutch parents raising monolingual English-speaking children].[69]

So, in the case of Dutch parents raising children in North America, a situation
where bilingualism was quite achievable (with the children learning one language
at home, and another in the community), Kuyper nonetheless seems to have
encouraged monolingualism. In this context Kuyper wrote of the Dutch sociolects
spoken by these early immigrants in less than glowing terms. 'Do not forget that
most colonists only spoke dialect, not high Dutch. Men or women who could
converse in pure Dutch were almost nowhere to be found. They spoke Gelders
or Zeeuws or Brabants . . . not the finely developed language of the refined life in
Holland.'[70] In comparison to the unglamorous dialects learned by the children in
the home environment, Kuyper notes, these Dutch-American immigrant children
were educated in monolingual English schools, where English functioned as the
language of literature, government and law. Kuyper's assessment, in terms of the
viability of these dialects in the face of the English language, was bleak: 'Die strijd
was nu ongelijk.' ['The fight was now uneven.'][71] Kuyper compared the Dutch-
speaking immigrant community with its Irish, German and Swedish counterparts,
noting that those who maintained their heritage languages became isolated and
lacked cultural influence. As such, it seemed logical to him that the children of
Dutch Calvinist immigrants could achieve far more cultural influence in America
if they invested in English.

It is noteworthy that Kuyper does not appear to give much consideration to
the maintenance of bilingual identities. Rather, his is a kind of pragmatic national
monolingualism typical of much of nineteenth-century Europe. This was, of
course, a period where a close degree of correspondence was posited between
national identity and a single, dominant national language.[72] (Interestingly, Kuyper

---

68. Kuyper, 'Uniformity: The Curse of Modern Life', p. 31.

69. Suzanne Sinke, *Dutch Immigrant Women in the United States: 1880-1920*
(Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2002), p. 177.

70. George Harinck, *Mijn reis was geboden: Abraham Kuypers Amerikaanse tournee*
(Hilversum: Uitgeverij Verloren, 2009), p. 136.

71. Ibid., p. 136. Kuyper regarded high Dutch as capable of matching English in this regard.

72. See, for example, Tuska Benes, *In Babel's Shadow: Language, Philology and the Nation
in Nineteenth-Century German* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2008), pp. 197–239.

advised Dutch immigrants in South Africa to continue speaking Dutch to their children, rather than to adopt English, which serves as a further example of this pragmatism).[73]

In comparing Kuyper's statements on language in 'Uniformity: The Curse of Modern Life' and in *De Gemeene Gratie*, the interesting factor is just how different their respective accounts of linguistics are. In the former, the reader is presented with an understanding of the ways in which languages develop that seemed far more influenced by nineteenth-century notions of nationhood than the science of evolutionary linguistics developing in Europe at that time. (And in that light, one is left to speculate whether the then recent experience of studying both linguistics and *vaderlandse geschiedenis* ('the history of the fatherland') under one man, Prof. Matthias de Vries (1853–91) at Leiden,[74] had a stronger influence on the young Kuyper.) In the latter, however, the influence of nineteenth-century linguistic thought on Kuyper is obvious and extensive.[75]

In a debate on standardized Dutch spelling held in the Dutch Parliament in 1909, some 40 years after 'Uniformity: The Curse of Modern Life', it is interesting to note that the mature Kuyper's linguistic argument is based explicitly on French thought. Indeed, Kuyper's contribution to this debate begins with a French expression drawn from a French dictionary:

> *La langue c'est la forme apparente et évidente de l'esprit du peuple* [language is the obvious and evident form of the spirit of the people]. This is a most accurate statement . . . language is stuck to the life of the people and emerges from the life of the people. And speaking of spelling, if we were to compare language to a living body, then spelling would be nothing but the skin, and skin is not pasted

---

73. Harinck, *Mijn reis was geboden: Abraham Kuypers Amerikaanse tournee*, p. 126. In addition to the guidance given by Kuyper to Dutch-American immigrants to assimilate within American culture, it is interesting that on a visit to a high school in Grand Rapids, Michigan, in 1898, he expressed sadness at the lack of attention given to teaching Dutch. It seems, however, that this concerned a pragmatic interest in the role played by national consciousness in the promotion of Calvinism in America. 'When the present writer discovered to his amazement, at the high school in Grand Rapids where more than 30,000 Hollanders live, that even the girls were taught Latin, French, and German, but that Dutch was conspicuous by its absence, he let slip: *That is a shame*, by which he was not referring to the principal of the school but to the Dutch settlers who had simply neglected to use their influence at municipal elections to assert the rights of their nationality.' Abraham Kuyper, *Varia Americana* (Amsterdam: Höveker & Wormser 1899), p. 114.

74. For evidence of de Vries' ongoing influence on Kuyper, see Tjitze de Vries, *Abraham Kuyper: An Annotated Bibliography 1857-2010* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), p. 111.

75. In addition to this, it should be noted that in his *Lectures on Calvinism*, delivered 40 years after 'Uniformity: The Curse of Modern Life', Kuyper refers to the works of the linguists Wilhelm von Humboldt, Jacob Grimm and Max Müller. See Abraham Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism* (Hendrickson: Peabody, 2008), p. 116.

to the body, nor is it moulded after a model and then put on it, but spelling springs from life itself, from the blood and muscles.[76]

Four decades after delivering 'Uniformity: The Curse of the Modern Life,' the fact that his essentially uniform linguistic ideals now overtly drew on French sources is perhaps quite significant. It is also interesting that the Kuyper family employed French gouvernantes to ensure that their children were fluent French speakers.

In this context, Kuyper's low view of non-prestige dialects is also evident. In a letter written from Paris in 1898, Kuyper tells his wife of his search for a suitable gouvernante, but laments that the particular woman he has found, who is otherwise ideal (in that she is a Protestant accustomed to a refined lifestyle), is beset by one particular flaw. 'There is just one objection. She is a Lorraine, and one hears it in her accent, which lacks the soft, flowing French of the Parisian.'[77] Clearly, Kuyper's preference for prestige dialects over seemingly low-class sociolects had consequences for the kind of French his children would learn, and must be read with an eye to his social context: how inappropriate for the children of the Dutch Premier to speak non-Parisian French.

As was stated earlier, the speech in question was given by a young Dutch Christian man for an audience of young Dutch Christian men. It is undoubtedly bombastic in character and typifies the French Revolution as an easy, and somewhat exaggerated, target drawn by Kuyper. Examination of the extent to which Kuyper actually opposed the Revolution's values on language suggests that there was less distance between the orator and his opponent than 'Uniformity' would have the

76. Abraham Kuyper, cited in Jan Noordegraaf, 'The *Volksgeist* Concept in Dutch Linguistics', in Kurt R. Jankowski (ed.), *History of Linguistics 1993* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Co., 1995), p. 251.

77. The full text of the letter is: '22. Grand Hotel, Boulevard des Capucines 12, Parijs, 28 december 1898. Mijn lieve Jo, Het is me hier niet meegevallen. Zoo ruim als de keuze te Londen voor Engelsche ladycompany was, zoo beperkt is de keuze hier. Ik heb agence na agence afgereden, maar het is en blijft pover. Meest meisjes uit zeer kleine burgerfamilies, of weduwen op leeftijd van gelijk allooi, die niets hebben, dan dat ze Fransch spreeken. Alleen ben ik door M. Taunay in aanraking gekomen met mlle. Vienot, die hier een groot pensionnat heeft, en die deed me een gouvernante aan de hand, zekere mej. Bach, een vrouw van ±45 jaar. Zij moet zeer knap zijn, en placht "terminer l'education," gelijk het hier heet onder voorname families. Zij is protestant, en gewend aan een beschaafd leven. Slechts één bezwaar is er. Zij is een Lorraine, en men hoort dat aan haar accent, dat zoo niets van dat zachte, vloeiende Fransch der Parisienne heeft. Ook maakte ze de indruk nogal autoritair te zijn, een tamelijk gezette, imperatieve dame. Durf je dat niet aan, dan blijft alleen een zacht, bleu meisje over van ±34 jaar, die mooi Fransch babbelt, maar niet zoo onderlegd is. Ik zal hier maar niet beslissen, en wachten tot we het eerst eens besproken hebben. Ze vragen allen 100 Francs per maand. Dat is hier het gewone.' See Harinck, *Mijn reis was geboden: Abraham Kuypers Amerikaanse tournee*, pp. 74–5.

reader believe. In addition to this, comparison of this early speech with the later text of *De Gemeene Gratie* suggests that 'Uniformity: The Curse of Modern Life' is probably not an accurate summary of Kuyper's views on linguistics.

That having been said, the important point in critiquing Kuyper's interaction with the Revolution on language (as seen in 'Uniformity: The Curse of Modern Life,' but not in *De Gemeene Gratie*) is that the reader should understand the sense in which he believed that he was fighting for true unity against false uniformity. Although Kuyper's speech does not have an account of intra-national multilingualism, and while his understanding of the affective international relationship between languages now appears flawed, he does nonetheless have an interesting point to make on multi- and monolingualism.

His great fear was the imposition of one language on all the peoples of the world. His concern was for linguistic unity-in-diversity at a global level. (This fear was no doubt the cause of his criticism of the nineteenth-century fad for constructed auxiliary languages. Kuyper does not name the artificial language that upsets him, but at least three such languages were well known in his time: Esperanto, Volapük and Universaglot).[78] Although his understanding of local linguistic diversity could have been richer, he appreciated and defended multilingualism at a global level. The practical consequence of this is obvious. His thoughts on language close with the following: 'Uphold Holland's fame in learning foreign languages but let there be no language you would rather speak, and especially write, than that splendid, rich mother tongue in which alone Dutch people can express what a Dutch heart feels.'[79] For all the flaws in his handling of multilingualism in this speech – in this quote, his romantic conflation of 'Holland' (a regional linguistic identity) with 'Dutch' (a national identity) suggests that those whose mother tongues are Frisian or Gronings are somehow excluded from 'expressing what a Dutch heart feels' – Kuyper nonetheless positions himself against the Revolution by encouraging his audience both to love their own language and to master the languages of others.

It is also interesting to note that a century and a half later, Kuyper's basic position on multilingualism in 'Uniformity: The Curse of Modern Life' (in effect, that of monolingual nations in a multilingual world) is now the position advocated by some contemporary French thinkers in an effort to defend the place of French in a Europe now dominated by English. Oustinhoff's *Traduction et Mondialisation*[80] is a prime example of this. In trying to combat the linguistic

---

78. 'That's what is happening in the attempt to replace Europe's vernacular tongues with an international brewed out of all of them together.' Kuyper, 'Uniformity: The Curse of Modern Life', p. 30. Kuyper's handling of Esperanto in *Pro Rege* suggests that this was likely his target. Abraham Kuyper, *Pro Rege, of Het Koningschap van Christus* (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1911), p. 325. See also Umberto Eco, *The Search for the Perfect Language* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1995), pp. 317–66.

79. Kuyper, 'Uniformity: The Curse of Modern Life', p. 42.

80. Michael Oustinhoff (ed.), *Traduction et Mondialisation* (Paris: CRNS Editions, 2011).

phenomenon of *tout-à-anglais* (whereby English functions as an international lingua franca, and thus eliminates the need for translation into various languages), francophone intellectuals like Oustinhoff, Barbara Cassin and Leonard Orban currently argue for a multilingual Europe wherein no single language is imposed upon all countries. This sounds rather like Kuyper who, albeit not on this point, sounded rather like Rivarol. In that instance, it is interesting that an early neo-Calvinist and a group of contemporary secular French intellectuals, descendants of the Revolution, can produce substantially similar visions of multilingualism in Europe.

VIII Herman Bavinck

In trying to understand Kuyper's colleague Herman Bavinck on multilingualism, this chapter has chosen to focus on his use of Gen. 11 in his seminal *Reformed Dogmatics*.[81] The material in *Reformed Dogmatics* is quite different to that of Kuyper in 'Uniformity: The Curse of Modern Life'. Kuyper's speech is just that: a speech. It deals in generalities and is designed to impact a young, male, Dutch, Christian audience. As a work prepared for an academic readership, *Reformed Dogmatics* is perhaps more careful and measured.

In defending the practice of 'God-talk', Bavinck's *Prolegomena* offers substantially the same argument as that of Smith.[82] 'The bearer of the ideal goods of humankind,' he writes, 'is language, and the *sarks* of language is the written word. In making himself known, God also adapts himself to this reality.'[83] We are justified in speaking of an infinite God with finite language precisely because that God, in Christ, has entered this finite world.

In searching *Reformed Dogmatics* for a section on languages and theology, rather than language and theology, the closest one is found in a movement dealing with the unity of the human race in Volume Two (*God and Creation*), Part V, 'The Image of God.' There, it becomes plain that Bavinck combined a belief in Gen. 11 as recording the creation of multilingualism with a fairly standard nineteenth-century linguist's understanding of the evolution of new languages.[84]

> In Genesis 11, Scripture accordingly traces the origination of languages and of peoples to a single act of God, by which he intervened in the development of humanity. . . . The more savage and rough humanity becomes, the more

81. Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics* (4 vols.; ed. John Bolt; trans. John Vriend; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003–08).

82. Smith, *Speech and Theology: Language and the Logic of Incarnation*.

83. Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics: Prolegomena* (ed. John Bolt; trans. John Vriend; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), p. 380.

84. Bavinck, like Kuyper, was aware of Max Müller's work in linguistics. See Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics: Sin and Salvation in Christ* (ed. John Bolt; trans. John Vriend; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), p. 491.

languages, ideas, and so forth, will take different tracks. The more people live in isolation, the more language differences increase. The confusion of languages is the result of confusion in ideas, in the mind, and in life. Still, in all that division and brokenness unity [of the human race] has been preserved. The science of linguistics has discovered kinship and unity of origin even where in the past it was not even remotely suspected.[85]

Evidently, Bavinck cannot be cast as a glib or naïve modern supporter of multi-lingualism. He believed that it could be traced to Babel, and that its appearance in this world was occasioned by human sin. Interesting, in addition to this, is his attempt to combine this classical Christian understanding of the origins of multilingualism with a non-static view of language existence (which is, as it will be seen, a noteworthy break from much earlier Christian thought on language). He was clearly willing to draw on the science of linguistics. More significant still, as will be seen, is Bavinck's assertion that although multilingualism came into the world through sin, it was not inherently bad and will be preserved in eternity.

As there is no extended handling of multilingualism in *Reformed Dogmatics*, it is useful that one pay close attention to the contexts in which Bavinck uses Gen. 11. As will be seen, Babel is formative for Bavinck's support of multilingualism, though in a way perhaps surprising to many Protestants (perhaps with the exception of van Wolde): in short, he argues that God introduced something good in breaking up the linguistic monopoly found at Babel. As such, an attempt to understand Bavinck on the development, present status and future of multilingualism should centre on the relationship he draws between Babel, Pentecost and the Revelation of John.

In beginning with Babel, it is important to note that Bavinck's use of Gen. 11 in *Reformed Dogmatics* highlights three factors: (i) God's descent to Babel, which Bavinck uses to support the idea of divine accommodation to finite human forms including that of language,[86] (ii) the Godhead's own diversity of persons and attributes[87] and (iii) the decisive action of God in making monolingual Babelites multilingual.[88]

As has been noted, Bavinck's use of this passage is found alongside a foundational defence of language highly similar to that of James Smith. God-talk is justified by this God's own willingness to talk. This God descends to humanity. In addition to this, Bavinck's willingness to use Gen. 11 when discussing the diversity of divine attributes and persons (perhaps consistently with the chapter's own detail on God speaking in the third person, as an echo of Gen. 1.26) functions as a bridge

---

85. Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics: God and Creation* (ed. John Bolt; trans. John Vriend; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), p. 525.

86. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics: Prolegomena*, pp. 328, 448; *Reformed Dogmatics: God and Creation*, pp. 30, 101, 164, 192.

87. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics: God and Creation*, p. 139.

88. Ibid., p. 525.

for the tension between this diverse God's enmity with the culturally monistic, homogenizing, monolingual Babelites.

What is arguably Bavinck's most important statement on multilingualism in *Reformed Dogmatics* (in relation to Babel, Pentecost and John's Revelation) is found in the ecclesiological section of Volume Four (*Holy Spirit, Church and New Creation*). Writing on the diversity that exists within the church, he makes a passing, but very important, comment on the introduction of linguistic diversity at Babel.

> Undoubtedly the divisions of the church of Christ are caused by sin; in heaven there will no longer be any room for them. But this is far from being the whole story. In unity God loves the diversity. Among all creatures there was diversity even when as yet there was no sin. As a result of sin that diversity has been perverted and corrupted, but diversity as such is good and important also for the church. Difference in sex and age, in character and disposition, in mind and heart, in gifts and goods, in time and place is to the advantage also of the truth that is in Christ. He takes all these differences into his service and adorns the church with them. Indeed, though the division of humanity into peoples and languages was occasioned by sin, it has something good in it, which is brought into the church and thus preserved for eternity. From many races and languages and peoples and nations Christ gathers his church on earth.[89]

In considering the relationship of Babel and multilingualism, Bavinck draws the reader back to one of Reformed theology's most obvious axioms: God is not the author of sin. Therefore, as the author of the multilingualism introduced at Babel, God was not creating something inherently wrong or sinful. Bavinck points out that this divine action was occasioned by sin, but that does not mean that the diversity of languages itself was inherently bad. Rather, Bavinck argues, it was inherently good. Indeed, multilingualism was subsequently woven into the fabric of Christ's church. Here, Bavinck is referring to Pentecost, where linguistic diversity was not removed, but rather was affirmed and clarified. Further to this, Bavinck's argument progresses, multilingualism is eternally preserved by God in heaven. This is a reference to the depiction of a redeemed heavenly church as being drawn from every linguistic group found in Rev. 7.

IX Conclusion

What do Paris and Amsterdam have to do with Babel and Pentecost? Can one draw on the neo-Calvinist tradition, a branch of Protestant Christianity, in order to argue that multilingualism is essentially good? This chapter concludes by wrestling

---

89. Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics: Holy Spirit, Church and New Creation* (ed. John Bolt; trans. John Vriend; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), p. 318. Emphasis added.

with these questions, and in so doing will turn once again to Herman Bavinck. Although Bavinck does not expand on why God's creation of multiple languages at Babel was inherently good, this chapter offers the following hypothesis.

Although Bavinck's writings on linguistics show an awareness of the nature of living languages as non-static, we should not expect Bavinck, as a nineteenth-century theologian, to consider multilingualism as a twenty-first-century linguist. That having been said, the following remains important. One of the central themes in Bavinck's worldview was the distinction between God as being and the creation as becoming.[90] In defending divine immutability, Bavinck asserts that whereas the creation is constantly changing, God remains the same. If one thinks about all aspects of created reality within this pattern of inherent mutability, languages included, it will make claims on the perfection of any one language appear rather dubious. Further to this, it will most likely incline you against claims that language is a static, immutable, unchanging, mechanical phenomenon. Such an assertion would mark out language as fundamentally out of place within a cosmos constantly in flux. Someone with Bavinck's particular theological commitments, it seems, would likely argue that living languages, as do all other created realities, become. That is to say, they are alive and organic, and undergo constant development.

Setting aside the issue of whether the language spoken at Babel was the only language to have been spoken by humans until that point (which seems to have been Bavinck's belief), one must consider the impact of theological categories like divine immutability and created mutability on how one appraises language. Initially at least, it seems theoretically problematic for someone like Bavinck to believe firmly that no linguistic diversification happened in the world prior to Babel, and it becomes very difficult to maintain that rigid monolingualism was somehow God's ideal for the world. Rather, the idea of creational potentiality seems more likely: the creational imperative (that humans be fruitful and multiply over the earth) would always entail a degree of diversification of language, albeit not at the cost of breaking the essential unity of human culture and religion. Bavinck's thoughts on the diversification of language brought at Babel as nonetheless insufficient to destroy the essential oneness of humankind seem pertinent in that light.[91]

Approaching linguistic diversification using the basic tools afforded by Bavinck (in particular, that of creation's inherent mutability) actually suggests a fundamental break with much early Christian thought on language: that its immutability was dependent on its divine origin. In the nineteenth century, the argument that as God had given Adam and Eve the gift of language, language must

---

90. James Eglinton, *Trinity and Organism: Towards a New Reading of Herman Bavinck's Organic Motif* (London and New York: T&T Clark, 2012), pp. 114–27; 'To be or to become: That is the question. Locating the actualistic in Bavinck's ontology', in John Bowlin (ed.), *The Kuyper Center Review, Volume 2: Revelation and Common Grace* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), pp. 104–24.

91. Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics: God and Creation* (ed. John Bolt; trans. John Vriend; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), p. 525.

be static in nature (as it was given by God in a complete, pure, original form), was relatively commonplace.[92] This point was used to argue against an evolutionary model of linguistics, and was also assumed by some evolutionary linguists in their arguments against theistic linguistic models.[93] Against this nineteenth-century backdrop, the theological account of language that can be made within Bavinck's various theological axioms – that the God who has created a universe that becomes, a cosmos of ceaseless becoming – becomes quite startling. In short, the doctrine of God necessitates a mutable, rather than an immutable, concept of language. The doctrine of God requires, rather than denies, a non-static view of language.

One wonders whether Bavinck's defence of multilingualism as inherently good also touches on his epistemology: to speak of an infinite God, an increasing number of languages is necessary. And in this multilingual world, wherein every language is a unique and ever-changing set of tools used by humans to grapple with the realities of God and creation, God is found to be glorious in every language.

Were Bavinck writing today, the question remains as to whether he would critique much Protestant theology for its negative view of multilingualism – a view not unlike that of the French Revolution, and one that praises the Babelites for that which was opposed by the Triune God.

92. Otto Jespersen, *Language: Its Nature, Development and Origin* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1923), p. 61.

93. For example, Jacob Grimm, *Über den Ursprung der Sprache* (1851), available in English as *On the Origin of Language* (Leiden: Brill, 1984). Grimm, a nineteenth-century defender of evolutionary linguistics, also argues that if language has divine origins, it must forever remain a static entity.

Chapter 4

REVOLUTION, THEOLOGY AND THE REFORMED: LEARNING FROM HISTORY

Mark W. Elliott

I Introduction

What was the French Revolution? Is it better explained in social or in intellectual terms? Arguing the former, Eric Nussbaum has mentioned events like the first recall of the States General since 1614, but also, the presence there of the 'Third Estate', effectively the bourgeoisie, organized through freemasonry and taught by philosophers. In terms of things achieved by the Revolution, the political principle that sovereignty resides in a nation (the French, not France) was one.

Another remarkable phenomenon was how the invasions by the allied European forces sparked nationalism and even militarism in 1792. The Republic was only proclaimed after setbacks in war after April 1792, and the following year, Year I of the new Calendar, saw previously unheard of universal military conscription. Indeed, the Jacobin Republic was ushered in by the war government on 2 June 1793, formed as it was to repress a revolt led by Girondistes (bourgeois former revolutionaries). Thus, on grounds of *force majeure*, during Robespierre's 'Terror' there were 17,000 official executions in 14 months, although Hobsbawm calls this 'relatively modest'.[1] It was only after Robespierre's fall (27 July 1794) for trying too hard to weed out corruption and inculcate a sense of awe of a Higher Being in line with Rousseau's principles that elite armies emerged, and with them Bonaparte. Hobsbawm offers a picture of the Revolution as a continued fight by the French nation for survival.

Against this one somewhat reductionist assessment might pit, as it were, in the 'pro' column: universal suffrage, the establishment of the happiness of all as the aim of government; that 'the people's rights were to be not merely available but operative'; and the abolition of slavery in colonies.[2] – so the Revolution might be viewed as 'democratic'. There was, as Jonathan Israel tells us, a General Revolution

---

1. Eric Hobsbawm, *The French Revolution* (London: Phoenix, 1995), p. 38.
2. Ibid., p. 41.

going on in the later eighteenth century, with the one in France being the successful one. These revolutionary movements included the 'Dutch Patriots' who based their activity on the idea that freedom was natural to the human condition. The flip side of this was the principle of equal opportunity at least in theory.[3] 'Law is the expression of the general will' appeared in Article 6 of the Declaration of the Rights of Man. The year 1789 was part of an 'unqualified moral universalism'.

However, along with freedom went the anthropology of voluntarism and other unpleasant side-effects. To combine passion with reason versus sentiment and tradition could well be as politically dangerous as it was philosophically unusual. In the chemistry laboratory of experimental anthropology and political science a few explosions were to be expected. Robespierre was really a reactionary against the atheist materialism of D'Holbach, Helvetius and Diderot, and when Robespierre fell and his moralistic terror with him, the Thermidorian regime that followed signified that the 'Radical Enlightenment' was back on track in constructing a Democratic Enlightenment and the *philosophes* as a breed were once again honoured in the Pantheon of Paris.[4]

The good – if there was any good – that came out of the Revolution in the eyes of the Reformed historian–theologians might have been the emergence of a Romantic Christian conservatism, best attested in the work of Chateaubriand and Hugo. There was sufficient generosity in the Reformed at least to affirm something of the Catholic literary vision – to what extent will be part of this chapter.

II Burke

The first coherent response to the events of 1789 in France came one year after, from the pen of Edmund Burke. His *Reflections on the Revolution in France* was a work as sharp-sighted in its prescience of the deeper horrors that would follow during the Terror, as it was in its analysis of what was, even then, at stake.[5] Composed as a rebuke to Rev. Price's application of Simeon's Prayer (Luke 2:22–35) to himself (4 November 1789), for Burke the British Glorious Revolution of 1688–90 had gloriously managed to balance the hereditary succession of monarchs with the establishment of the rights of citizens. In promoting an Act for declaring the rights and liberties of the subject, and for settling the succession of the crown, Burke observed:

> Government is a contrivance of human wisdom to provide for human wants.
> Men have a right that these wants should be provided for by this wisdom.

3. Jonathan Israel, *Democratic Enlightenment. Philosophy, Revolution, and Human Rights 1750–1790* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 903.

4. Ibid. last chapter 'Epilogue'.

5. F. P. Lock, *Edmund Burke Vol. II* (Oxford: Clarendon; Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), who (p. 287) points to the edition by J. C. D Clark (Stanford, 2001) as the 'best starting point for serious study of the *Reflections*'. Quotations in this chapter are taken from the 1814 'New Edition'.

Among these wants is to be reckoned the want, out of civil society, of a sufficient restraint upon their passions. Society requires not only that the passions of individuals should be subjected, but that even in the mass and body, as well as in the individuals, the inclinations of men should frequently be thwarted, their will controlled, and their passions brought into subjection. This can only be done by a power out of themselves, and not, in the exercise of its function, subject to that will and to those passions which it is its office to bridle and subdue. In this sense the restraints on men, as well as their liberties, are to be reckoned among their rights. But as the liberties and the restrictions vary with times and circumstances and admit to infinite modifications, they cannot be settled upon any abstract rule; and nothing is so foolish as to discuss them upon that principle.[6]

In other words, human subjects are rightly thankful to governments for saving them from the worst of their passions. Hence to wage revolution would be to infringe their own right to be well controlled. Education would be included in this governmental gift, a point on which the French *Déclaration* appeared to be silent.[7]

Burke was well known for his line 'Kings will be tyrants from policy when subjects are rebels from principle', which was a subtler form of the maxim 'peoples get the governments they deserve'. He further expounded this idea:

When ancient opinions and rules of life are taken away, the loss cannot possibly be estimated. From that moment we have no compass to govern us; nor can we know distinctly to what port we steer. . . . Nothing is more certain than that our manners, our civilization, and all the good things which are connected with manners and with civilization have, in this European world of ours, depended for ages upon two principles and were, indeed, the result of both combined: I mean the spirit of a gentleman and the spirit of religion.[8]

Manners, then, are what individuals receive through tradition, and thus breeding and piety work together. Burke seemed to define religion as more than just tradition, for it also had to do with the fear of God. Those who sneered at majesty found themselves part of the detritus of history.

We have not (as I conceive) lost the generosity and dignity of thinking of the fourteenth century, nor as yet have we subtilized ourselves into savages. We are not the converts of Rousseau; we are not the disciples of Voltaire; Helvetius has made no progress amongst us. Atheists are not our preachers; madmen are not our lawgivers. We know that we have made no discoveries, and we think that

---

6. Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (London: Apollo Press, 1814), p. 61.

7. Lock, *Edmund Burke Vol. II*, p. 319.

8. Burke, *Reflections*, p. 80.

no discoveries are to be made in morality, nor many in the great principles of government, nor in the ideas of liberty, which were understood long before we were born. . . . I admit that we, too, have had writers of that description who made some noise in their day. At present they repose in lasting oblivion. Who, born within the last forty years, has read one word of Collins, and Toland, and Tindal, and Chubb, and Morgan, and that whole race who called themselves Freethinkers? Who now reads Bolingbroke? Who ever read him through? Ask the booksellers of London what is become of all these lights of the world.

We know, and it is our pride to know, that man is by his constitution a religious animal; that atheism is against, not only our reason, but our instincts; and that it cannot prevail long. But if, in the moment of riot and in a drunken delirium from the hot spirit drawn out of the alembic of hell, which in France is now so furiously boiling, we should uncover our nakedness by throwing off that Christian religion which has hitherto been our boast and comfort, and one great source of civilization amongst us and amongst many other nations, we are apprehensive (being well aware that the mind will not endure avoid) that some uncouth, pernicious, and degrading superstition might take place of it.[9]

Equality of morals yes, but equality of status and income was a delusion. Some superstition can be comforting: monks are no lazier than landlords. 'Appeals to nature' and contrasts between what is 'natural' and what 'unnatural', underpin much of the argument of the *Reflections*.[10] The right to property is truly a right; a right to participate in public life is not.

History teaches how to give a theory of universal natural law its content.[11] This includes a right to 'instruction in life, and to consolation in death', so the Church should be upheld, while the right to dissent safeguarded.[12] Burke was fully assured that the Revolution was a religious matter; why else was the estate of the Duke de Rochefoucault 'considered to be more untouchable bucause' more sacred than that of the Cardinal de Rochefoucault? Inspired by the *philosophes*, revolution became the new religion for the masses, such that this was a *religious* war: something, indeed, that the Dutch, principally Groen van Prinsterer, would develop.

III Carlyle

A quite different estimation of events came some 45 years later with the book that made Thomas Carlyle's career: *The French Revolution.* For Carlyle, anticipating Hegel and Nietzsche, the emergence of Bonaparte was all the justification the process of history needed. (Carlyle's account of the French Revolution is clearly

---

9. Ibid., pp. 90–2.
10. Ibid., pp. 302, 308.
11. Ibid., p. 330.
12. Ibid., p. 319.

one of the 'Old Testament' law of retribution on decadence, but the spirit of his narrative is more that of Edward Gibbon (1737–94) than the Deuteronomistic Historian.) The fine *Dictionary of National Biography* entry by Fred Kaplan sums up the philosophy that Carlyle hewed from his personal experience, framed by his immersion in Goethe:

> Going down Leith Walk in Edinburgh on a blazing afternoon in August 1822 he realized that he had been mistaken all along in believing that 'it was with Work alone, and not also with Folly and Sin, in myself and others, that I had been appointed to struggle' (T. Carlyle, *Sartor Resartus*, in *The Works of Thomas Carlyle*, Centenary Edition, 1896–9, 99). The purpose of work was to create a visible structure that would articulate the quality of the inner spiritual life. But it was his own 'inarticulate Self-consciousness . . . which only our Works can render articulate and decisively discernible' which needed to be discovered and affirmed. (Ibid., p. 132)[13]

The barely disguised but stylized autobiography of his youthful formation led Carlyle to the view that through personal Renunciation the everlasting *no* would lead to Centre of Indifference and on to the Everlasting *yea*.

This *Lebensphilosophie*, one of 'Natural Supernaturalism', is mirrored in his approach to the French Revolution in that eponymous work, his masterpiece, which, after a second attempt at writing, made his name in mid-1830s London. In eighteenth-century France the Church had been weakened and so it and the monarchy leant on each other and collapsed together. The notion of 'Divine right' grew weak and soon was toppled by its nemesis, sansculottism. Hope kept the people going through desperate times, as the early pages of the book put it. The message seems to be that once revolution had started there was no going back, any more than there was for the Israelites in the Wilderness.

> Great meanwhile is the moment, when tidings of Freedom reach us; when the long-enthralled soul, from amid its chains and squalid stagnancy, arises, were it still only in blindness and bewilderment, and swears by Him that made it, that it will be free! Free? Understand that well, it is the deep commandment, dimmer or clearer, of our whole being, to be free. Freedom is the one purport, wisely aimed at, or unwisely, of all man's struggles, toilings and sufferings, in this Earth. Yes, supreme is such a moment (*if thou have known it*): first vision as of a flame-girt Sinai, in this our waste Pilgrimage, – which thenceforth wants not its pillar of cloud by day, and pillar of fire by night! Something it is even, – nay, something considerable, when the chains have grown corrosive, poisonous, to be free 'from oppression by our fellow-man.' Forward, ye

13. Fred Kaplan, 'Thomas Carlyle', in H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (eds.), *Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); cf. F. Kaplan, *Thomas Carlyle: A Biography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

maddened sons of France; be it towards this destiny or towards that! Around you is but starvation, falsehood, corruption and the clam of death. Where ye are is no abiding.[14]

Morality however demanded a tone of measured disgust in observing the travail of the nation in the midst of such labour pains. Yet it had to be realized that human history plays out the wrestling of opposite forces within humankind.

> That a shriek of inarticulate horror rose over this thing, not only from French Aristocrats and Moderates, but from all Europe, and has prolonged itself to the present day, was most natural and right. The thing lay done, irrevocable; a thing to be counted besides some other things, which lie very black in our Earth's Annals, yet which will not erase therefrom. For man, as was remarked, has transcendentalisms in him; standing, as he does, poor creature, every way 'in the confluence of Infinitudes;' a mystery to himself and others: in the centre of two Eternities, of three Immensities, – in the intersection of primeval Light with the everlasting dark! Thus have there been, especially by vehement tempers reduced to a state of desperation, very miserable things done. Sicilian Vespers, and 'eight thousand slaughtered in two hours,' are a known thing. Kings themselves, not in desperation, but only in difficulty, have sat hatching, for year and day (*nay De Thou says, for seven years*), their Bartholomew Business; and then, at the right moment, also on an Autumn Sunday, this very Bell (*they say it is the identical metal*) of St. Germain l'Auxerrois was set a-pealing – with effect. (*9th to 13th September, 1572, Dulaure, Hist. de Paris, iv. 289.*). . . . For though it is not Satan's world this that we live in, Satan always has his place in it (*underground properly*); and from time to time bursts up. Well may mankind shriek, inarticulately anathematising as they can. There are actions of such emphasis that no shrieking can be too emphatic for them. Shriek ye; acted have they.[15]

In Carlyle's theodicy the devil, if not quite the Prince of this world, has a very long leash. Such things happened before, and they might well happen again. Carlyle observes with the cool blood of the detached philosopher, yet not the detachment of the historian, for his account is in many ways selective. The Italian patriot Mazzini found that Carlyle's delight remained at the level of individuals. He was not interested in affairs of peoples like the Italians. 'He recognises [wrote Mazzini], and is occupied with, individuals only. . . . Individuality being everything, the doctrine of *unconsciousness* follows. . . . God and the individual man – Mr. Carlyle sees no other object in the world.'[16] Carlyle did not seem much interested in the *causes* of the French Revolution, just its scenes once it was off and running – and their impact on the reader. Indeed the work was received more as an epic poem

14. Thomas Carlyle, *The French Revolution* (London: James Fraser, 1837), I, v, v.

15. Ibid., I, v, vii.

16. See Kaplan, *Thomas Carlyle: A Biography*, 277 with reference to 'The French Revolution', *Monthly Chronicle* (January 1840), p. 73.

than a scholarly investigation. He wrote to Emerson: 'the only poetry is history, could we tell it right'.[17] It is more the lyrical response to great events and a Romantic creativity that uses the energy of the passing storm that delighted Carlyle. The dramatic ability to paint a scene can be seen in the following paragraph:

> *The Improvised Commune*
> Very frightful it is when a Nation, rending asunder its Constitutions and Regulations which were grown dead cerements for it, becomes transcendental; and must now seek its wild way through the New, Chaotic, – where Force is not yet distinguished into Bidden and Forbidden, but Crime and Virtue welter unseparated, – in that domain of what is called the Passions; of what we call the Miracles and the Portents! It is thus that, for some three years to come, we are to contemplate France, in this final Third Volume of our History. Sansculottism reigning in all its grandeur and in all its hideousness: the Gospel (*God's Message*) of Man's Rights, Man's mights or strengths, once more preached irrefragably abroad; along with this, and still louder for the time, and fearfullest Devil's-Message of Man's weaknesses and sins; – and all on such a scale, and under such aspect: cloudy 'death-birth of a world;' huge smoke-cloud, streaked with rays as of heaven on one side; girt on the other as with hell-fire![18]

The French Revolution demonstrates how Carlyle would use a work of history as a vehicle for theocratic didacticism, prophecy and a sustained political pronouncement. The work's message must not be oversimplified: but it does seem a clear statement of Carlyle's belief in the effects of the destruction of God's natural order. Indeed, history proceeds at the expense of an imploding natural order. To quote Simon Heffer:

> as faithlessness broke out and society broke down, the duty of ruling was passed to those unfitted for it, and finally to a mob. Anarchy, which Carlyle regarded as the manifestation of divine punishment, continued more and more violently until (as personified by Danton and Robespierre) exhausted with its own excesses; in the absence of a natural order came, too, rampant injustice.[19]

There is a similar note of amorality and a plain disregard for the political significance of the regicide in how Carlyle viewed the fate of the French Monarchy:

> *Chapter 3.2. VIII. Place de la Révolution*
> A King dying by such violence appeals impressively to the imagination; as the like must do, and ought to do. And yet at bottom it is not the King dying,

---

17. 'Letter to Emerson of 12 August 1834', in Joseph Slater (ed.), *The Correspondence of Emerson and Carlyle* (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1964), p. 105.

18. Carlyle, *The French Revolution* III, i.i.

19. Simon Heffer, *Moral Desperado: Thomas Carlyle* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1996), p. 167.

but the Man! Kingship is a coat; the grand loss is of the skin. The man from whom you take his Life, to him can the whole combined world do more? Lally went on his hurdle, his mouth filled with a gag. Miserablest mortals, doomed for picking pockets, have a whole five-act Tragedy in them, in that dumb pain, as they go to the gallows, unregarded; they consume the cup of trembling down to the lees. For Kings and for Beggars, for the justly doomed and the unjustly, it is a hard thing to die. Pity them all: thy utmost pity with all aids and appliances and throne-and-scaffold contrasts, how far short is it of the thing pitied![20]

To conclude: 'In his later historical work, he seeks to make history relevant by depicting it as part of such a continuum, in which all his readers were living and would continue to live.'[21] The same could be said about the early *French* Revolution, possibly because of 1830, or the British unrest going on into the 1840s. In other words, Carlyle's account struck a chord at a level other than that of Reason. He clearly anticipated revolution in Britain, before coming to realize that secular education could be as useful a means of social control as religion had been. But that did not mean that these forces that warred in human beings had gone away, or that an eruption like that of 1789 was not inevitable sooner or later. There is probably little coincidence that Carlyle went on to inspire Hitler with his 'Great Men' theory of history, with its emphasis on decisiveness, force and magnetism, set out supremely in his biography of Frederick the Great.[22]

IV Chateaubriand

Chateaubriand had published his famous *Génie du Christianisme* in 1802, the year of the new Church-State concordat agreed by Napoleon. He had already expressed France's pride in its own recent martyrs, a more 'folk' religion based around rituals of execution.[23] Chateaubriand, somewhat like Burke, saw tradition as the past beaming its light towards the world. As Phillippe Sollers comments: 'Il est pour les hommes des vérités cachées dans la profondeur du temps; elles ne se manifestent qu'à l'aide des siècles, comme il y a des étoiles si éloignées de la Terre que leur lumière n'est pas encore parvenue jusqu'à nous.' ['For men they are truths hidden in the depths of time; they are made manifest only with the help of the ages, as there are stars so far from the Earth that their light has yet to reach us.'][24]

---

20. Carlyle, *The French Revolution* IV, xvii.

21. Ibid., p. 118.

22. Thomas Carlyle, *History of Frederick II of Prussia* (Leipzig: Bernhard Tauchnitz, 1865).

23. Claude Langlois, 'Le renouveau religieux au lendemain de la Révolution', in J. LeGoff and R. Rémond (eds.), *Histoire de la France religieuse. Du Roi très chrétien à la laicité républicaine* (Paris: Seuil, 2001), pp. 415–52.

24. Philippe Sollers, *Chateaubriand à jamais* (http://www.philippesollers.net/Chateaubriand.html) (accessed 14 March 2013).

Well before all this Chateaubriand had written an *Essai sur les révolutions* in 1797 prior to his conversion but, as he would say in 1826, even if there was doubt and deism on the surface, there was faith in the depths; he presented 1789 as one of a series of revolutions in world history with an almost cyclic account of that history.[25] Also, he put the Revolution down to a change of religious ideas and nowhere was his picture of modern world more despairing: in that sense he was 'ultra-Rousseau'.

Chateaubriand had no doubt that the Revolution was a religious matter. As Marie Guedin comments,[26] Christianity was the living and animating soul of Western civilization, such that the latter could hardly afford to lose its sense of the sacred if it wanted to hold together. Christianity's greatness is to be located in the power of its images of mysterious beauty, of gentleness and serenity imposed on the collective imagination, the Augustinian, even Fénélonian inspiration here can be figured in the motif of *l'espérance de la croix*. Amazement and wonder at strange happenings cause humans to seek God's face all the more.

In the early 1790s the Abbé Raynal had stood up for his own mentor Rousseau against critics such as Burke, who had laid the blame for the Revolution squarely at the door of the *philosophes.* Perhaps the struggle with the Jansenists was more to blame in Paris for unrest, for even though Rousseau was republican, he loved the kingdom, if not what the *ancien régime* had done with it. He could not be held accountable for the abuse of his ideas by others. As Marc Fumaroli explains, Chateaubriand was somewhat in accord with Raynal here. He was as suspicious as Rousseau of the Enlightenment Rationalists, for all he was for *liberté-égalité-fraternité*, and in fact blamed Rationalism as 'sensualist', as though humans could suddenly change by themselves for the better.[27]

The Enlightenment had understood itself to be making a providential advance, but this was now doubtful. The certainty of Providence runs through all of Chateaubriand's *Essai sur les révolutions* (1797). The idea of Providence had actually threatened to disappear during the eighteenth century. Viewed properly, however, the Revolution was like penance for the exiles, even an

25. Alain and Arlette Michel, *La littérature française et la connaissance de Dieu (1800–2000)* (Paris, Genève: Le Cerf, Ad Solem, coll. Théologiques, 2008, 3 vols; 2009), p. 26. Cf. Marc Fumaroli, *Chateaubriand: Poésie et terreur* (Paris: Editions de Fallois, 2003), pp. 120–3.

26. Marie Gueden, 'Et le Verbe s'est fait chair': la littérature et Dieu ou la quête du beau par le verbe', *Acta Fabula*, Essais critiques (http://www.fabula.org/revue/document5060.php) (accessed 14 March 2013): 'Pour autant, cette réflexion sur l'échec historique du christianisme permet à l'auteur de poser deux idées fondamentales dans sa future apologie du christianisme: le christianisme est l'essence même de la culture et de la civilisation occidentales; par conséquent, il ne peut être ébranlé sans compromettre l'existence même du corps social, qui n'est justifié que s'il est ancré dans le sentiment du sacré; la grandeur du christianisme réside dans la puissance des images de mystérieuse beauté, de douceur, et de sérénité qui s'imposent à la sensibilité et à l'imagination collectives.'

27. Fumaroli, *Chateaubriand: Poésie et terreur*, p. 29.

expiation. Yet Chateaubriand was also aware that kings, above all, would be held more accountable by God than their people. Providence manifested itself sharply where irony reared its head, as in Danton falling into the trap he set for others.[28] The revolutionaries were led blindly by events, for people can walk in the way of divine purpose without knowing, and the purpose was that of a better society. Divine Providence was not visited by God directly through his own intervention, but through his unwitting agents. God could also work through the media of the moral laws that He established, as per Victor Cousin in 1828 (in the seventh lesson of his course at the *Collège de France*).

For Chateaubriand a Doctrine of Providence worked at the level of understanding history as rational and providential in its regularity, presupposing a moral order that meant that revolution simply had to happen: this was not so much a case of an avenging God, as of God being true to his legislative word.[29] The punishment of Jerusalem fitted the crime, and thus was long and supernatural in character. The very principles of the French Revolution were for Chateaubriand actually gained by the *victims* of that revolution's spiritual freedom and sense of common humanity (praying for the man who worked the guillotine) – a trope from as far back as Tertullian.

As in the time of Pastor-Popes and the pagan tribes (of the Dark Ages), the world now is in need of a second evangelization.[30] The last benefit is the abolition of slavery.[31] He writes of the natural world's enchantment and reflection of divine design, and has an interesting use of the word Providence: 'dessein visible de la Providence dans les instincts des animaux; enchantement de la nature', ('[the] visible design of Providence in the instincts of animals, the enchantment of nature').[32] Christianity *saved* civilization once – providentially – and can do it again. Christianity has preserved society and the *Lumières* from total shipwreck and will emerge triumphant from its recent trials.[33]

As Alain and Alette Michel have observed, by the end of his life Chateaubriand's optimism had waned and looked to the far horizon of hope ensured by the Cross

---

28. Bertrand Aureau, *Chateaubriand, Penseur de la Révolution* (Paris: Honore Champion, 2002).

29. Aureau, *Chateaubriand, Penseur de la Révolution*, p. 189: 'Décidément homme du XVIIIe siècle, Chateaubriand pense l'ordre naturel comme parfaitement providential en même temps. Seulement, quand un Bernardin de Saint Pierre ou un Rousseau voyaient dans la nature une grâce permanente, c'est pour Chateaubriand l'histoire avec ses déterminismes particuliers qui, par son ordre même, est ce miracle perpetual.'

30. F. R. de Chateaubriand, *Génie du Christianisme* II (Paris: Flammarion, 1993), p. 218.

31. Ibid., p. 236.

32. Ibid., p. 238.

33. 'Il est donc très probable que, sans le christianisme, le naufrage de la société et des lumières eût été total.' (Ibid., p. 248) 'Pour nous, nous sommes convaincu que le christianisme sortira triomphant de l'épreuve terrible qui vient de le purifier.' (p. 255).

of Christ.[34] Although *Genie du Christianisme* pleaded the case for Christianity as so rooted in civilization that revolution could not remove it as a political religion, nevertheless *Génie* also set forth 'une poétique de Dieu'. 'Is not God's creation wonderful enough for human happiness?' is the claim. Adam's sin was lacking patience to wait for the timing of the divine pedagogy.

The Christianity of the past could serve to save the present with a new 'modernity'. The martyrs guaranteed the possibility of progress, which required tragedy and sacrifices made out of universal love.[35] Having lost his brother and sister-in-law to the guillotine, he came to sympathize with the view that King Louis XVI's slow march to eventual death was penitential, even Christ-like.

V Lamennais

The second great French interpreter of revolution was Felicité de Lamennais, the first volume of whose *Essai sur l'indifférence en matière de religion* appeared in 1817. This work proffered a statement of decidedly ultramontane views, setting France and her king as quite distinct from the Church, and declaring a love for the Roman martyrs' relics. It would impress the great Alphonse de Lamartine (1790–1869), who saw Lamennais as '*Pascal resuscité*'. It could be that the integrity of his character meant that his book was taken more seriously than anything penned by Chateaubriand.[36] The point of the *Essai* was that doctrine made a huge difference to ethics: Vidler argues that it was actually an attack on any *moral* indifferentism.

There is a need for revelation to be believed in, yet much of this could be achieved by common sense and reason, so strong was the objective revelation. To guarantee religion and in turn society, the Papacy provides the foundation. Out of this came Lamennais' *des Progrès de la révolution et de la guerre contre l'Église* (1829), which can be seen as a *volte-face* from a theocratic towards a liberal position: the state should 'accord to the church the same freedom as it accords to other groups and individuals . . .' Yet it also looks forward to a new order in which 'the revolution will be only another stage in God's providential chastening of the nations who have abandoned His law. . . . There is no way back to health except through suffering.' The Church should abandon politics until that day of Christ came.[37]

---

34. A. Michel and A. Michel, *La littérature française et la connaissance de Dieu (1800–2000)* (Paris: Cerf, 2008), p. 221.

35. Ibid., p. 130: 'Le *Génie* avait surtout montré que le christianisme, parce qu'il appartenait au passé, pouvait sauver encore le présent et inventer une modernité. Les Martyrs, épopée des origines chrétiennes et à ce titre image archétypale de l'histoire, garantissent la possibilité du progrès: celui-ci ne peut s'opérer que dans la tragédie, il exige des sacrifices animés par l'amour universel.'

36. A. R. Vidler, *Prophecy and papacy: a study of Lamennais, the Church, and the Revolution* (London: SCM, 1954), p. 74.

37. Ibid., p. 136.

In his essay '*De l'esclavage moderne*' he had argued that conditions for common people would have to improve in fact, if rights are to be gained and the image of God re-found. In a lyrical passage we find this flight of fancy:

> Ce que veut le peuple, Dieu lui-même le veut; car ce que veut le peuple, c'est la justice, c'est l'ordre essentiel, éternel, c'est l'accomplissement dans l'humanité de cette sublime parole du Christ: 'Qu'ils soient UN, mon Père, comme vous et moi nous sommes UN! . . . La cause du peuple est donc la cause sainte, la cause de Dieu; elle triomphera donc.' (That which the people want, God himself wants; for that which the people want, is justice, is essential and eternal order, it is the accomplishment in humanity of this sublime word of Christ: 'That they might be ONE, my Father, as you and I are ONE! . . . The cause of the people is therefore the holy cause, the cause of God. It will thus triumph.')[38]

Yet he adds that God's triumph will come about more quickly if the people keep morality through self-sacrifice for the sake of all. This is no revolutionary call to arms. Rather there are echoes of postmillennialism, a Schelling-like philosophy of self-offering and a use of the New Testament to identify a political cause as theologically grounded.

The Revolution of 1830, as it replaced an absolute monarch (Charles X) with a constitutional one (Louis Philippe), was arguably the most anticlerical of the Revolutions. After 1830, in Lamennais' mind, liberalism ceased to be a strategy for an age of revolution. Political freedom became for him part of 'the liberty wherewith Christ has come to make all men free'.[39] The idea was for the church to be stronger and able to influence every area of life, and that this would go in tandem with the quest for liberties (the manifesto of the journal *Avenir*, which was agitating for Rome's support of Polish insurrection and was rebuked by the encyclical *Mirari vos* in 1832). During the late 1830s his thinking took an apocalyptic turn. The Papacy under Gregory XVI was useless for the task of renewal. 'But in the very midst of these ruins, beneath the half-collapsed vault where Providence has provided us with a little shelter, one can in the meantime taste a certain peace as one contemplates these preliminaries of a new creation and . . . this amazing work of God' ('Letter to Countess de Senfft, 25 Jan 1833').[40] The defiant *Paroles d'un croyant* of 1834 read like verses of an Old Testament prophet,[41] going back on his submission to the Pope of the previous year.

While Lamennais might seem to owe little to the Revolution of 1789, it is the idea of revolution as a process under God's judgement, of life as uncertain

---

38. Felicité de Lamennais, *Du Passé et de l'Avenir du Peuple* (Paris: Bureau de la Publication, 1868), p. 158.

39. Vidler, *Prophecy and Papacy: A Study of Lamennais, the Church, and the Revolution*, p. 164.

40. Ibid., p. 226.

41. Ibid., p. 246.

and something needing to be lived 'forward' with the help of wisdom from tradition that made his interpretation attractive in part to Herman Bavinck, as we shall see.

VI Hugo

In 1819 Victor Hugo came under the spell of Chateaubriand and for two decades adopted the Christian royalism of his hero and gave poetic form to the latter's work, *Les Martyres*, in his dramatic poem 'La Vendée'. In 1821 it was none other than Lamennais who received the first confession of the young Victor Hugo and who became his spiritual director. With Hugo, even when he changed his politics from Monarchist to Republican after 1848 and the Church's support for Napoleon III's coup, his conviction of Divine Providence remained constant.[42] It was important not to set aside the dark side of God who ruled in judgement. Emmanuel Godo avers that this conception was a cathartic one: 'L'image du Dieu destructeur revêt dans ce contexte une dimension non seulement allégorique mais encore cathartique.' ('In this context the image of God the Destroyer assumes a dimension that is not only allegorical, but also cathartic.')[43] God could be seen as the editor of history, giving a redaction to what men had done.[44] This did not mean revolutionaries were men of God, but they were used by God.

Christianity suits literary expression, thought Hugo, because both are about the mysteries of the human heart. Literature as a form of expression was restless and rebellious enough to affirm presence but not comprehension. God after all is not an idea. However, if God is so glorious as to be hidden by his light, then religious rites are useless. God is therefore to be found in consciences and in action.[45] Thus French history could also be viewed as part of sacred history. Providence was less like a hand that guided, and more like a beacon that gave hope.[46] For Hugo, revolution was something ongoing. It served not as a backdrop, but as the only way forward, although it would take a mid-nineteenth-century form.

In *Les Misérables,* that great novel of Providentialism, Hugo has two strong male characters at the beginning of the book – one ecclesial, the other civil – and

---

42. Emmanuel Godo, *Victor Hugo et Dieu. Bibliographie d'une âme* (Paris: Cerf, 2002), p. 94. In 1848 he wrote: 'le premier arbre de la liberté, c'est cette croix sur laquelle Jesus-Christ s'est offert en sacrifice pour la liberté, l'egalite et la fraternite du genre humain.' (*Oeuvres* VII, p. 131) As Godo comments: 'Dieu reste le moteur de l'histoire.'

43. Godo, *Victor Hugo et Dieu. Bibliographie d'une âme*, p. 16.

44. Victor Hugo, *Quatrevingt-treize* (Paris, 1874), *Oeuvres* XV, p. 380: 'Le rédacteur énorme et sinistre de ces grandes pages a un nom, Dieu, et un masque, Destin'.

45. Godo, *Victor Hugo et Dieu. Bibliographie d'une âme*, pp. 223–6.

46. Ibid., p. 33 'La Providence ne cesse d'opère même si elle ressemble moins à une main qui guide qu'à un faible fanal qui empêche de désespérer'.

also a weak but plucky female one. There is humour and a sense of detachment, which prevents the stereotyping from becoming too cloying. There is also a healthy distance from the establishment.[47] Even Chateaubriand is caricatured. In 1861, as he came to complete the great work, Hugo presents Jean Valjean as one who had identified with the revolt and barricades but, having renounced violence, had at last found joy in death and submission: 'l'anagke, la fatalité qui semble le pousser à sa perte et qui est en réalité maintenant l'exigence supreme de la liberté . . .' ('the necessity, the inevitability which seems to push at its loss and which is, in reality, now the supreme requirement of freedom . . .').[48]

VII *The Dutch Reformed*

Calvinism has had its issues with civil authority. From Calvin's own insistence on the Council of Geneva defending the Reformation and gospel proclamation, to Beza and Knox's dalliance with regicide, through to the Covenanters and the Huguenots, the denial of a 'two kingdoms' dichotomy inspired resistance and assertion of freedom.

The Dutch were perhaps the most obvious example of a nation formed by these principles: it is no coincidence that the father of international law, Grotius, was a Dutchman, even though writing in exile. At the same time it should be remembered that, France apart, the Revolution affected the Netherlands like no other country. The Batavian Republic with its universal suffrage, the dismissal of the influential members of the House of Orange-Nassau and for a few years, even direct rule from Paris, lasted from 1795 effectively until the demise of Napoleon in 1813. Within the Reformed Church there came to pass both disestablishment and toleration of views, but at the expense of more establishment interference through the Synod, a situation that would endure until 1951, by which time an *Afscheiding* (1834) had occurred and the *Doleantie* (1886) was perhaps unstoppable.[49] In any case no other neighbour to France had more right to voice an opinion about revolution. It would seem that by and large the neo-Calvinist view of resistance and revolution was a markedly negative one, although the sharpness of this position would decrease with time. A century after the Revolution Bavinck's response became gradually quite positive: the French Revolution helped to seal the Church-State separation.[50] What *does* seem to be a constant and enduring ground of objection to revolution

---

47. Godo, *Victor Hugo et Dieu. Bibliographie d'une âme*, p. 105: 'la ligne de fracture ne passe pas entre ceux qui croient et ce qui ne croient pas mais entre ceux qui prétendent être les représentants de dieu sur terre et ceux qui sont authentiquement.'

48. Michel and Michel, *La literature française,* II, p. 704.

49. Karel Blei, *The Netherlands Reformed Church 1571–2005* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006).

50. Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, *Vol. 4, Holy Spirit, Church and New Creation* (ed. John Bolt; trans. John Vriend; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), p. 413.

among neo-Calvinists was first, the unjust violence employed as means to secure that end, and second, the '*Ni Dieu Ni maître*' attitude of most revolutionaries. For the French Revolution set in motion a cultural philosophy that continued long after the political and the violent aspects had ceased.

VIIa Groen van Prinsterer

Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer (1801–76) made clear that the revolutions were just various epiphenomenal stages of the same phenomenon of human rebelliousness.[51] In his most famous work, *Ongeloof en revolutie*, his position is even more baldly stated: 'De Revolutie-leer is de openbaarwording van *het Ongeloof in systematischen vorm*' ('The Revolution doctrine is the making public of *unbelief in a systematic form*').[52] It was the misguided or wrong theories of State and Church that were to blame, since the protest and overthrow was systematic, not haphazard.[53] Revolution was dependent on philosophers for existence and form. But the chief of sinners, or their federal head in heretical thinking, was none other than Grotius. As mentioned above, as a Dutchman affected by the undertow and wash of the events in Paris, Groen's negative view of the Revolution had reasons that went deeper than those of Burke. His negative judgement relied on a coherent philosophy of history and an observation of events after 1790. Madame de Stael had accused the revolutionaries as using sacrifice for *la patrie* as a pretext for murder during the Terror.[54] The sacrifice of the French conscripts while defending their country and the blood of those executed by the guillotine was all too easily mixed together, without distinction.

For the Dutch Reformed, the Revolution was the worst imaginable consequence of a chain of ideas and realizations that began with their very own Grotius. When

51. G. Groen van Prinsterer, *De Anti-Revolutionaire en Confessionele partij in de Nederl. Herv. Kerk* (Goes: Oosterbaan & Le Cointre, 1954), p. 74: 'De revoluties van 1789, 1793, 1830, zijn niets dan de verschillende stadia van eenzelfde verschijnsel, verschillende bedrijven in eenzelfde drama.'

52. Ibid., p. 122.

53. Ibid., p. 119: 'Doch het is mij genoeg, zoo gij, in het nader bezien der Revolutie, gelijk zij op stelselmatige wijs in de diepten van het maatschappelijk [social] organisme en gezellig leven gewroet heeft, erkent dat, om *deze* Revolutie te doen ontstaan, er meer dan de grootste en talrijkste misbruiken noodig geweest is, en dat eene Omwenteling, wier geschiedenis op elke bladzijde de sporen van theoretische ontwikkeling vertoont, een *theoretischen* oorsprong moet gehad hebben'.

54. 'L'arbitraire sans bornes était leur doctrine; il leur suffisait de donner pour prétexte à toutes les violences le nom propre de leur gouvernement, le salut public: funeste expression, qui renferme le sacrifice de la morale à ce qu'on est convenu d'appeler l'intérêt de l'état, c'est-à-dire, aux passions de ceux qui gouvernent! (I, p. 145) Groen, *De Anti-Revolutionaire en Confessionele partij in de Nederl. Herv. Kerk*. p. 332.

it came to theories of kingship, the Leiden jurist had argued that the ruler is like the head of a family and no more. Even if sovereignty does not belong ultimately to the people, it is at the same time in the gift of an association of free human beings: and as peoples are to their countries so is the human race to the world as a whole.[55]

So from Grotius could be traced the idea that political views influenced religious ones, as well as vice versa, just as, in the Arminian account of Election the free will of people (in choosing faith) aided God to look favourably upon them,[56] Groen called on people to be prudent and responsible and to look to God for reward and comfort, as one cares for the good and for others.[57] He makes the claim that surely the Calvinist doctrine never implied any sort of Republicanism any more than it relativises Divine sovereignty.[58] As well as de Tocqueville, whose influence is more obvious, Groen was a keen reader of Lamennais, and agreed with him that theological and political errors usually coincide, as religion and society share the same principle, namely, God himself.[59]

VIIb Kuyper

Early in a lecture addressed to an American audience, Abraham Kuyper quoted Burke, then went on to argue that the three earlier great revolutions in the Calvinist world arose out of acknowledgement of God's majesty.[60] By way of contrast, the French Revolution was prayer-less, and set out to oppose God. The first article of its rebellious atheistic creed was '*ni Dieu, ni maître*'. Kuyper saw no place for divine right there, and insisted that the Republican French sovereignty was not derived from God, but proceeded from nothing deeper than human will.

Kuyper, possibly in debt to de Tocqueville, believed that God gave individuals a wide area of choice, and only interfered to reward the munificent and punish

---

55. 'Wat de Volkssouvereiniteit is voor een Land, dat is voor de wereld de Souvereiniteit der menschheid'. Groen van Prinsterer, *Ongeloof en Revolutie* (Leiden: Luchtmans, 1847), p. 397.

56. See John Witte, *The Reformation of Rights* (Cambridge-Boston: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

57. 'La solution que propose Groen van Prinsterer vis-à-vis l'idéologie révolutionnaire est celle de l'homme prudent et responsable, qui trouve sa consolation auprès de Dieu. Cette vie personnelle lui oblige également à une vie responsable, caractérisée non pas par un égoïsme matérialiste, mais par la recherche du bon chez soi-même et autrui'. Erik Plas, 'Egalitarisme et action politique. L'influence d'Alexis de Tocqueville sur le conservatisme parle aux Pays-Bas' (Utrecht, 2010), p. 46.

58. Groen, *Ongeloof en Revolutie,* p. 148: 'Voorzeker de Calvinistische leer heeft nooit naar eene soort van Republicanisme geleid'.

59. Ibid., p. 191.

60. Abraham Kuyer, *Lectures on Calvinism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1943), p. 86.

the malefactors.[61] Subsidiarity lay behind the idea of 'sphere sovereignty'. One is called to transcendence, yes, but one also should know one's place. The idea of *soevereiniteit in eigen kring* meant that responsibility was to be exercised with a humility that knows its place, and that there are laws to tell us how to operate, so that for Kuyper responsibility does not mean anything like total autonomy.

The tension in Kuyper is to be found in an admission that political liberty was helped, when all was said and done, by the Revolutionary activity.

> For it is true that, in Roman lands, spiritual and political despotism have been finally vanquished by the French Revolution, and that in so far we have gratefully to acknowledge that this revolution also began by promoting the cause of liberty . . .

However, it all ended far from happily:

> In the French Revolution there was a civil liberty for every Christian *to agree with the unbelieving majority*; in Calvinism, a liberty of conscience, which enables every man to serve God *according to his own conviction and the dictates of his own heart.*[62]

If revolution had merely chastened tyranny, in other words if it had brought down without puffing up, that would have been fine. Once more the figure of Grotius as the *Erzvater* emerges. 'Then the *Encyclopedists* arrived on the scene, the spiritual children of Hugo de Groot, an intellectual giant but also an irreconcilable enemy of Calvinism. [ct. J. F. Gronovius] Man was flattered for his excellence, while his basest passions were unleashed.'[63]

Let us hear two further pieces of Kuyperian eloquence that sound rather favourable to the legacy of the Revolution, perhaps for the same reasons that Groen van Prinsterer had condemned it thoroughly. On the positive side, God had used it as a microphone to shout at tyranny:

> But nonetheless, in spite of guilt and judgment Europe had received a blessing! What had been refused from the hand of Calvinism was eagerly accepted from the hands of the French heroes of freedom, and however Rome, Restoration, and

---

61. 'Il est clair que dans la vision de Kuyper, le gouvernement n'occupe qu'une place marginale dans la vie sociale. En extrapolant, nous pouvons avancer que la tâche de celui-ci se limite à récompenser les bienveillants et à punir les malveillants en laissant aux citoyens le choix d'aménager leurs vies selon qu'ils le veulent. Cette idée de la société civile est aussi prédominante dans la pensée tocquevillienne', Erik Plas, 'Egalitarisme et action politique. L'influence d'Alexis de Tocqueville sur le conservatisme parle aux Pays-Bas', p. 44.

62. Kuyper*, Lectures on Calvinism,* p. 109.

63. Abraham Kuyper, 'Calvinism: Source and Stronghold of our Constitutional Liberties', in James Bratt (ed.), *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), p. 313.

Romantic reactions sought to restore the former situation, the nations of Europe tolerated it no more. Thus after the revolutions of [18]30 and '48, part of the fruit of Calvinism was spate.

Then comes the antithesis: look at the state of France, where Revolution became a way of life, instability gloried in masochistically:

> What the French Revolution wrought where left to its own designs you may ask of poor France. Having exhausted itself for a false idea, having suffered fourteen revolutions, having worn out all possible forms of government, she continues to search for the freedom that ever eludes her.

Then finally the synthesis, the reconciliation of the two competing and contradictory tendencies can be viewed in the Dutch neo-Calvinist solution.

> We Dutch Calvinists want to be like Burke: *for* freedom but against the total overturning of all natural order. *For* freedom and therefore not the kind of Calvinists who seek salvation in a return to the past. Our Calvinism is alive, it has an inner power of development, so how could we long for a phase that we have long since left behind? No, we do not want a restoration of the state church, for we know how detrimental that is to our faith.[64]

Here Kuyper manages to affirm the best of the Enlightenment as well as the best of the Calvinist heritage. But there is no need for revolution: liberty can evolve and requires no interruptions of Providence or Grace.

VIIc Bavinck

What about Herman Bavinck? Well, while he seems aware of Chateaubriand and Hugo, he was especially interested in the challenge of Lamennais. To call God 'indifferent' seeks to remove the divine right to ordain how he should be worshipped. For Bavinck this is accompanied by the unwelcome idea that God is not one who has ever specified his will through revelation (especially the Old Testament). The position that the religions in essence be alike yet in form be different is much more correct in reverse: different in essence but unified in form.

> Syncretism holds the ecclesial, the deism the Christian, the modernism the objective religion, the independent morality the religious – all to be indifferent. But that which is objective is really indifferent in no way. Even the smallest part has a certain place in the whole. Man is indifferent before only that which he does not know, but God is indifferent in no respect, because he knows all. God

---

64. Ibid., p. 315.

can be found not through speech but only received with revelation, which from the first human onwards is furthered through tradition and kept in the language. This theory was skilfully defended by De Bonald, Lamennais. . . . But it received no favour in Rome. . . . In France a reaction against the Revolution and the unbelief came through Chateaubriand, de Maistre, Bonald, Lamennais.[65]

Later on he adds: 'The "traditionalists" – de Bonald, Lamennais, and Bautain – certainly went too far when they claimed that language came directly from God . . . that human beings now enjoy access to all truth from and through the language enshrined in tradition',[66] although Lamennais is listed as one who 'again brilliantly highlighted the significance of community, authority, language and tradition',[67] these things being fine if they mediate Scriptural truth from its source. In Volume II, in the middle of a discussion on Pelagianism, he writes:

in the eighteenth century, with its rationalism, individualism, and optimism, there was room for [Pelagianism]. But the sense of history that awakened after the Revolution including insight into the incalculable value of community, society and state, the organic understanding that had penetrated everywhere and above all the theory of heredity, whose meaning, also in the domains of religion and morality, has been highlighted more than in the past – all these factors have collectively put an end to the individualistic view of humanity and of the sin dominant in it.[68]

This notion, that the Revolution encouraged Christians to think in terms of organic collectives and communities seems rather generous, at least in comparison with the two earlier Dutch voices we have heard.

Bavinck mused how 'Providence' could mean God's eternal counsel concerning all details of history and also His work to execute this. Regrettably the former

65. Herman Bavinck, *Gereformeerde dogmatiek* I 5.17 (Kampen: J. H. Bos, 1895), p. 96: 'Na de revolutie kwam in Frankrijk het traditionalisme op, nl. de leer, dat de hoogere metaphysische waarheden niet door de rede te vinden zijn, maar alleen verkregen worden uit de openbaring, die van den eersten mensch af in de menschheid door traditie is |96| voortgeplant en in de taal wordt bewaard. Deze theorie werd met talent verdedigd door de Bonald, Recherches philos. sur les premiers objects des connaissances morales, Paris 1817, Lamennais, *Essai sur l'indifférence en matière de religion*, Paris 1817, en Bautain, de l'enseignement de la philos. en France au 19e siècle, 1833, Philos. du Christianisme, 1835. Maar ze kon te Rome geen genade vinden. . . . In Frankrijk kwam er reactie tegen de revolutie en het ongeloof door Chateaubriand, *Génie du christianisme*, Joseph de Maistre, † 1821, Bonald, Lamennais.'

66. Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics I: Prolegomena* (ed. John Bolt; trans. John Vriend; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), p. 378.

67. Ibid., p. 492.

68. Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics 2: God and Creation* (ed. John Bolt; trans. John Vriend; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), p. 88.

element had been lost by placing the topic after the Doctrine of Creation. The theme of Concurrence (*concursus*) was introduced by seventeenth-century divines to ward off Deism, a task which *conservatio* and *gubernatio* could not quite achieve on their own.[69] Nevertheless, an Arminian form of deism with an emphasis on divine underwriting and maintaining through inexorable laws has seeped into Christian culture. However Bavinck stops short of linking this treatment of God's action in the world to any discussion of world history from a theological point of view. One wonders whether this has to do with a view of history as being so much merely secondary flotsam and jetsam compared with the orders and institutions given in creation. It might also be because God's ongoing activity is one that is set in its tracks from creation onwards.

VIII Conclusion

What seems clear is that the French Catholic analysis of the history of the Revolution held little real interest for the Dutch neo-Calvinists, just as they seemed to assume that Grotius was to blame for an anthropocentric philosophy much more so than the French *philosophes*. Also, they rejected Romanticism with its message that individuals could be saved through fires and revolutions, since the Dutch church and nation seemed in good enough shape that they could still be saved – unlike the French church, which was a spiritual lost cause, in the Netherlands there was no need for a theology of consolation, nostalgia or hope against hope.

Chateaubriand's idea of using the energy of modernity for the ends of the gospel sounds quite different from Kuyper, who argued: 'we have to take our stand in a life-system of equally comprehensive and far-reaching power. . . . Calvinism.'[70] Does the neo-Calvinist insistence on structures and institutions allow enough focus of devotion to remain on God in Christ? Might 'the glory of God' (*soli Deo Gloria*) be confused with the need to defend a doctrine of creation to the point where God's causes had to be those that perpetuated unchanging structures? Was there a place for Providence in the sense of a shaping of a history of a counter-culture that avoids the fatalism of Carlyle and the resignation of Burke? These are things one could miss in the Dutch neo-Calvinist account, and which a reading of the French Catholics could supply. History is not a set of brute facts, but is woven out of eyewitness accounts and in the light of its earliest interpretations. The energy of revolution could be harnessed and combined with the witness of its French interpreters.

69. Ibid., pp. 596–8.
70. Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism*, p. 11.

Chapter 5

THE THEO-POLITICS OF FASHION: GROEN VAN PRINSTERER AND THE 'TERROR' OF FRENCH REVOLUTIONARY DRESS

Robert S. Covolo

I Introduction

Fashion historians are fascinated with the French Revolution. Arguably, at no other time in Western culture has dress been so deeply embroiled in political upheaval.[1] Although it might be tempting to dismiss the growing number of works exploring fashion in the French Revolution as merely modern academics picking the bones of an already overworked historical event, closer inspection reveals early accounts also spoke of the significant role dress played in the Revolution. For example, Horace de Viel-Castel wrote in 1834:

> In no other period [than the Revolution] was dress more dominated by political events, or did it react to them more; this was so to such a degree that their double history is as if confused, such that the description of one is almost the description of the other.[2]

For Viel-Castel the movements of the Revolution and developments in fashion were so deeply interlaced he felt it hard to explain the one without the other.

Neo-Calvinists have also been drawn to the French Revolution. From its inception, the neo-Calvinist movement has viewed the Revolution as a time of unique theological upheaval, the unhinging of society from its Christian foundations, the inauguration of a new age of secularization. As the neo-Calvinist forefather and historian Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer saw it, the outbreak of

---

1. Aileen Ribeiro writes, 'It should be stressed, however, that at no other time in history have politics and dress been so closely entwined as during the French Revolution.' Aileen Ribeiro, *Fashion and the French Revolution* (London: B. T. Batsford, 1988), p. 23.

2. Cited in Richard Wrigley, *The Politics of Appearance: Representations of Dress in Revolutionary France* (New York: Berg, 2002), p. 1.

the French Revolution had been for secularism what the Reformation had been for the Christian faith:

> The Revolution ought to be viewed in the context of world history. Its significance for Christendom equals that of the Reformation, but then in reverse. The Reformation rescued Europe from superstition; the Revolution has flung the civilized world into an abyss of unbelief.[3]

Groen's view that the French Revolution and the emergence of secularism were intertwined to the extent that the explanation of one required the explanation of the other raises a series of questions. What might these two understandings have to do with one another? Did fashion in the French Revolution play a role in the secularization of Europe? Was it of theo-political import?

This chapter contends that fashion in the Revolution involved rituals with deep social, political and even spiritual meaning, and, therefore, any thick account of the secularizing impulse of the Revolution should take seriously the role played by fashion.[4] To make this argument, this chapter will proceed in three movements. First, the sense in which fashion historians such as Aileen Ribeiro, Richard Wrigley, Caroline Weber and Valerie Steele understand fashion in the French Revolution will be sampled. How did fashion take on new signification in this complex set of events? Next, having discussed the role of fashion in the Revolution, the case for the secularizing power of the Revolution as represented by neo-Calvinist forefather and historian Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer will be presented. This will be done not only to retrieve Groen's understanding of the secular influences at play in the Revolution, but also to attend to his methodology – a methodology in need of a thicker description of how cultural carriers can embody the feel of the changes around them. Finally, having compared these two sources, the chapter will conclude with a brief sketch of the theo-politics of fashion in the French Revolution.

II Revolutionary fashion

Thomas Carlyle famously quipped that, 'Society . . . is founded upon cloth.'[5] If ever there was a time and place in which this was true, it was in eighteenth-century Paris. Louis XIV, the Sun King, had made fashion a critical feature at

3. See Groen Van Prinsterer, *Unbelief and Revolution*, translated and introduced in Harry Van Dyke, *Groen Van Prinsterer's Lectures on Unbelief and Revolution* (Jordan Station, Ontario, Canada: Wedge Publishing Foundation, 1989), p. 14.

4. My understanding of a 'thick' description in this chapter is drawn from Clifford Geertz. As Geertz argued, a 'thick' description of a cultural event requires attention to the complex structures of signification, including structures that are often 'superimposed upon or knotted into one another, which are at once strange, irregular, and inexplicit'. Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Culture* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), p. 9.

5. Thomas Carlyle, *Sartor Resartus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), p. 48.

Versailles. This included not only the sumptuous dress but also the complex rituals of attire that came to characterize Versailles' courtly etiquette. Few would be as painfully aware of these rituals as Louis XIV's distant relation, Marie Antoinette. Getting dressed was an arduous and intricate process for the young archduchess. Numerous individuals would be involved according to a complex political pecking order. From the huge circles of rouge, to the coiffure, to the particularly inflexible whalebone bodice known as the *grand corps*, the construction of the glory of Marie Antoinette's personal visage was to be an outward manifestation of her august standing and regal blood. Like priests consecrating the Eucharistic elements, these seemingly insignificant tasks assigned to aristocratic women attending the queen in her *toilette* were both a privilege and quasi-sacred duty.

To further assure the uniqueness of courtly glory, strict sumptuary laws had been put in place under Louis XIV. These laws dictated which articles of dress were reserved for the nobility or those shown the favour of the nobility. Although Louis XV had suspended many of these laws, convention and expense continued to mark a person's political standing through dress. But Marie Antoinette's relatively informal courtly upbringing, her disdain for the suffocating etiquette surrounding Versailles and her love for fashion all contributed to her transgression of this code.

As Caroline Weber details in her frock-by-frock account *Queen of Fashion: What Marie Antoinette Wore to the Revolution,* the Austrian archduchess had a penchant for blurring the boundaries between court dress and street style. Marie Antoinette's patronage and close association with Rose Bertin, a self-made rising star in the Parisian fashion industry, meant the queen's outfits were no longer one-of-a-kind pieces designed for royalty but merely the first of a host of 'knock-offs'.[6] The suspension of courtly dress in favour of such fashions made Marie Antoinette's *Petit Trianon* an alternative sartorial universe within the courtly dress of Versailles. Moreover, Marie Antoinette's penchant for frequenting public venues unannounced wearing her latest creation further blurred the traditional relationship between the crown and commoner.

6. Marie Antoinette's relationship with Rose Bertin is central to the development of Revolutionary fashion. Although Marie Antoinette was Bertin's most famous customer, she was by no means Bertin's only well-known customer. Born into a humble home, Bertin was a self-made woman – becoming responsible for dressing the queens of Spain, Sweden and Portugal as well as high-ranking nobility throughout Europe and Russia. She had more than 1,500 clients, including celebrity actresses and dancers. Her notoriety made her the first 'fashion designer' who was a celebrity in her own right. There is a great degree of irony in Marie Antoinette securing her position of influence in the courts throughout Europe by making Bertin an icon of social mobility. For more on Rose Bertin and Marie Antoinette, see Émile Langlade, *Rose Bertin: The Creator of Fashion at the Court of Marie-Antoinette* (trans. Angelo S. Rappoport; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1913). For a short distillation of Bertin's life see Kimberly Chrisman-Campbell, 'Bertin, Rose', *The Berg Fashion Library* (2005), http://www.bergfashionlibrary.com/view/bazf/bazf00070.xml (accessed 11 September 2012).

To make matters worse, many of Marie Antoinette's *avant-garde* fashion statements backfired. Her desire to break tradition and present a queen in equestrian portraiture reinforced salacious accusations that she was an insubordinate 'cross-dresser' who dominated Louis XVI. And the introduction of what became her signature teetering *poufs* at the coronation of Louis XVI came at a particularly bad time – showcasing a lavish hairstyle doused in flour before a bread-starved nation. But possibly her worst fashion *faux pas* was the portrait she had commissioned for a public gallery in a chemise gown titled '*La reine en gaulle*'. The dress not only was devoid of any of the standard accoutrements of royal portraiture, it communicated a gross immodesty. Marie intended the portrait to be a bold statement of her move towards a simplified style and love for nature. But most Parisians were left appalled, unable to explain why their queen would present herself in what they considered underwear. As Weber states, in *La reine en gaulle* the 'latest affront to the dignity and sanctity of the throne proved definitively what her other fashion follies implied: Marie Antoinette deserved neither her special standing nor her subjects' respect.'[7]

These outfits only added fuel to the fire of the underground print that Royal censures found themselves increasingly unable to control. The so-called Grub Street hacks – out-of-work writers disenchanted with the *ancien régime* seeking to make a quick buck – unashamedly published critical and slanderous accounts of the queen's and the royal's intimate lives. The ever-increasing release of these tabloid-like pamphlets combined with decades of writings by the *philosophes* to form a broad discontent for the received social and political order. Such was the grist fomenting outrage among the populace and fuelling rousing discussions within the Parisian salons, academies and political clubs.

This growing court of public consensus reached a critical mass in the famous Diamond Necklace Affair. A cardinal, tricked into purchasing a priceless diamond necklace by a common prostitute posing as the Queen, was put on trial. As the events unfolded and the public learned the prostitute was dressed in a chemise *gaulle* identical to the one that had previously caused such scandal, it became clear that the real person on trial was not the cardinal but Marie Antoinette. One hears this in the judge's final ruling in 1786: 'With her Most Christian Majesty's reputation for frivolity and indiscretion, with her succession of male and female "favorites" of dubious repute, we find it entirely plausible that the Cardinal de Rohan did so presume [it was the Queen, not a prostitute].'[8] As one writer later reflects, 'The Revolution was already present in the minds of those who could contemplate such an insult to the King in the person of his wife.'[9] Marie Antoinette, unleashing fashion's capricious game of popularity, had lost in spades.

The rejection of vestmental practice important for maintaining the *ancien régime* continued to break down 2 years later when, in the midst of economic

7. Caroline Weber, *Queen of Fashion: What Marie Antoinette Wore to the Revolution* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2006), p. 161.

8. Ibid., p. 170.

9. Ibid., p. 171.

crisis, Louis XVI called for a meeting of the three estates. The Marquis de Brézé (the Grand Master of Ceremonies) sent out dress instructions for the three groups: the clergy were to wear their sumptuous red, violet and gold ecclesiastical robes; the aristocrats were to be clad in rich, gold-embroidered black jackets, silk knee breeches, white silk stockings and the plumed hats of Henri IV's court; but the third estate was ordered to wear plain black outfits with untrimmed black tricorn hats. In contrast to the dignified ecclesial costumes and elegant aristocratic dress, the third estate's black uniforms reminded outraged onlookers of the stark contrast between the courtly world of Versailles and the poverty, death and mourning that plagued the rest of the country.[10] Members of the third estate protested. Feeling affronted, they said they would rather wear their everyday costume than live under the sartorial dictatorship of the current arrangement. In the weeks leading up to the famous tennis court oath, the erosion of the dress code communicated more than a disdain for the Grand Master's sense of taste – it was a rejection of the political order evoked by such styles.

Events unfolded quickly in the summer of 1789. As the Estates General set about to form a constitution independent of the ecclesial and aristocratic estates, it gained more and more support. But in July the King dismissed the people's beloved advisor Necker and called for 30,000 soldiers to surround Paris. The advances of the third estate looked to be squashed. It was at this time that clothing and accessories became powerful signifiers of the public's political intent. Those who were in favour of the third estate's rise to power began wearing large tricolour ribbon cockades. More than patriotic fervour, the tri-ribbon cockade stood as a challenge to the white cockade, symbolic of the monarchy's House of Bourbon's *fleur-de-lis*.

As Richard Wrigley details in his volume *The Politics of Appearances: Representations of Dress in Revolutionary France*, cockades on the streets of France in the summer of 1789 went viral, redounding the court of public resolve with a political practice aimed at using visual culture to commandeer a new public space.[11] In a very short time those who dared to wear cockades other than red, blue and white were targets for harassment and violence. This was especially true of those who wore the black cockade – a colour that simultaneously symbolized the army, the mourning for the recent death of the dauphin and the Austrian Royal

---

10. See Ribeiro, *Fashion in the French Revolution*, pp. 45–6. Nigel Aston adds to his colourful description the important element that these outfits were displayed as part of a religious ceremony – a procession as part of a special mass held before important political meetings. See Nigel Aston, *Religion and Revolution in France: 1780–1804* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2000), p. 122.

11. Richard Wrigley goes as far as to say, 'From the moment of its invention a patriotic badge in the summer of 1789, the cockade was to remain a continual presence throughout the revolutionary decade and beyond. Tracing its history is therefore tantamount to traversing in microcosm the larger history of the Revolution.' See Richard Wrigley's chapter 'Cockades: Badge Culture and its Discontents', in *The Politics of Appearances*, p. 97.

House of Habsburg (Marie Antoinette's royal lineage). It was only a matter of time before this violence was turned against a larger public symbol of monarchical power – the Bastille. On 17 July, 3 days after the fall of the Bastille, the people of Paris demanded that Louis XVI appear to acknowledge their triumph. Upon his arrival at the Hotel de Ville, Jean Sylvain Bailly, the newly elected mayor, presented Louis XVI with a tricolour cockade. As Louis pinned the tricolour cockade over his royal white cockade, the people burst into cheers. Dorinda Outram assesses the monumental nature of this speech act as follows:

> [The *ancien régime*] was an order which relied on the continual proclamation of difference. In this order the King – its political and ritual center – was as close to God as other men were far from the King. He was of a nature incommensurate with theirs . . . and [was] therefore the fount of difference.[12]

As Caroline Weber summarizes, 'Louis XVI had visibly ceded his God-given difference – the very underpinnings of his power.'[13] This theo-political levelling immediately displayed itself in sartorial confusion on the streets of revolutionary Paris. In a visit to Paris during this time, Chateaubriand recalled,

> walking beside a man in a French coat, with powdered hair, a sword at his side, a hat under his arms, pumps and silk stockings, while at the same time one could see a man wearing his hair short and without powder, and English dress-coat and an American cravat.[14]

Increasingly on their guard, some aristocrats showed their support (feigned or real) for the Revolution by creating new outfits utilizing tricolours and potent symbolism that demonstrated their allegiance. Other less enthusiastic aristocrats risking a walk through Paris felt the need to complement their breeches, silk stockings and vests with a Hercules Club or pocket pistol.

Among their enemies included the growing number of radical partisans of the lower and lower-middle classes called the *sans-culottes*. This group, named after their rejection of the aristocratic knee britches, chose to identify themselves with their signature red caps of liberty that harkened back to Phrygian caps worn by freed slaves.[15] Meanwhile, the National Assembly increasingly came under the

---

12. Weber, *Queen of Fashion*, p. 199.

13. Ibid. In a similar move, the archbishop of Paris exchanged his bishop's mitre for a red bonnet. See Aston, *Religion and Revolution in France: 1780–1804*, p. 188.

14. Cited in Valerie Steele, *Paris Fashion: A Cultural History* (New York: Berg, 1998), p. 43.

15. For an analysis of the evolving way the *sans-culotte* ensemble functioned as a site for asserting and challenging political values, see Richard Wrigley, 'The Formation and Currency of a Vestimentary Stereotype: The Sans-culotte in Revolutionary France', in Wendy Parkins (ed.), *Fashioning the Body Politic* (New York: Berg, 2002).

influence of the radical Jacobin, Maximilien Robespierre. Unlike the *sans-culottes*, Robespierre gave the same attention to detail in his dress as he did to his powerful oratories. Dubbed 'The Incorruptible' by his followers, Robespierre exemplified in his conservative, tidy and impeccable dress his call for a citizenry marked by virtue and discipline. His example contrasted sharply with the dubious morals that had become associated with the excesses of fashion that marked the *ancien régime*.[16]

But by 1792 visitors to Paris began reporting a change in the variety of dress that had marked the first years of the Revolution. Anyone dressed in less than a functional simplicity or clothes that required a careful manipulation of fine fabrics might be seen as harbouring distaste for republicanism. After the September massacres, fear considerably limited an individual's freedom of dress. Yet ironically, as the guillotine took centre stage and terror became the order of the day, the National Assembly decreed on 8 Brumaire (29 October 1793) that 'no person of either sex can force any citizen or citizens to dress in a particular fashion, under pain of being considered and treated as a suspect [i.e., a counterrevolutionary. . . .] Each is free to wear such clothing or attire of his sex that he chooses.'[17] The timing of this announcement is ironic, as the range of acceptable dress was being reduced daily. And the tricolour cockade had become *de facto* compulsory – as those wearing a silk cockade would often find it torn off by a fellow citizen demanding a modest large woollen one.

In July of 1793, Robespierre suggested that children too young to have been corrupted by the *ancien régime* society should begin wearing a uniform to accustom them to equality. It was also in 1793, during the height of the terror, that the *Society of Popular and Republican Arts* (a group of artists that the Convention had organized to replace the Royal Academy) began discussing dress. The result was a slim volume delivered to the Assembly in April 1794, suggesting a national costume that would promote hygiene, protect the body, provide freedom of

16. Drawing on Rousseau's disdain for fashion as a weakening and effeminate influence in French culture, Robespierre viewed fashion as an artificial and irrational influence propping up an unnatural form of social order. In response Robespierre had a very disciplined approach to dress, thereby counteracting such weakness with a virtuous and principled style concomitant with his vision of a virtuous republican citizenry. The critical nature of virtuous dress for politics becomes all the more important for Robespierre, given his view of the symbiotic relationship between virtue and democracy. Robespierre writes, 'Not only is virtue the soul of democracy; it can only exist in that form of government.' As Cited in Craig Brown, 'Democracy, Religion and Revolution' in *Thesis Eleven*, Number 99, November 2009, p. 44. For general comments on Rousseau's disdain for fashion, see Jennifer M. Jones, 'Repackaging Rousseau: Femininity and Fashion in Old Regime', *French Historical Studies* 18, 4 (Autumn, 1994), pp. 944–7. For Rousseau's views on the weakening and feminizing power of fashion, see Jennifer M. Jones, *Sexing La Mode: Gender, Fashion and Commercial Culture in Old Regime France* (New York: Berg, 2004), p. 114; 'The aristocratic elite and their artifice no longer represented the ideals of honor and virtue.'

17. Steele, *Paris Fashion*, p. 48.

movement, facilitate the birth of normal babies, abandon shapes 'frivolous despots' could use to their advantage, respect equality, not communicate rank or fortune, that would be uniform for all citizens and soldiers, would be distinct from other nations 'condemned to servitude', would reveal the beauty of the body's natural form and inspire artists seeking to immortalize the splendours of revolutionary heroism.[18]

In effect, the recommendation was for a national uniform based on classical dress. A month later, Jacques-Louis David was asked to present his own views of a national costume to the Assembly. In June 1794, David produced a series of drawings that attempted to strike a balance between the single uniform for everyone and the call for distinct uniforms for civil servants. His drawings attempted to fuse a number of motifs from the classical age, the Middle Ages and more contemporary garments. David's sketches for eclectic uniforms fell flat at the Assembly, leaving one representative to ask at a public session of the convention if David wanted them to dress 'like Arabs, Greeks, Etruscans or Romans'.[19] But before any of these discussions could materialize, the Thermidorian reaction, with its flamboyantly fashionable *Incroyables*, would put an end to the pursuit of a national uniform.

As the above suggests, fashion carried significant associations in the Revolution. To further fill in the secularizing influence of this tumultuous era, we turn to the work of Groen van Prinsterer.

III Groen and revolutionary unbelief

As far as I am aware, Groen never commented on the shifts in fashion during the Revolution, though he does mention the 'vices and fopperies' of the French monarchy in passing.[20] His fascination was with the powerful role that Enlightenment ideas played in the Revolution, not with what he considered the secondary human causes and material conditions in which these ideas manifested themselves. Fashion was simply too narrow for the scope of his interests and treatment. In his own words, 'the Revolution in its entirely [is] nothing other than the logical outcome of systematic unbelief, the outworking of apostasy from the gospel. My argument will be concerned with religion and with politics.'[21]

Given Groen's aims, it is fair to ask, what does The Hague have to do with *haute couture*? How does one reconcile reading the Revolution from ideas down with reading the events from the cultural practices up? Yet, although Groen's assessment of the Revolution is made regarding 'religion' and 'politics', such concerns are not without implications for the radical change in dress during the Revolution that

18. See Madeleine Delpierre, *Dress in France in the Eighteenth Century* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997), p. 123.

19. Katell Le Bourhis, *The Age of Napoleon: Costume From Revolution to Empire 1789–1815* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art/Harry N. Abrams Inc., 1989), p. 57.

20. Groen, *Unbelief and Revolution*, p. 359.

21. Ibid., p. 191.

fashion historians record. To better understand these implications, we turn to Groen's discussion of the French Revolution in his magisterial treatise, *Unbelief and Revolution.*

Groen's central argument in *Unbelief and Revolution* is that the seeds of Enlightenment ideas sprang up at the French Revolution, resulting in a full-scale social and political anti-Christian development – casting a pernicious malaise as it spread throughout European society. For Groen, pre-revolutionary society was marked by a respect for historically acquired rights, a recognition of what Edmund Burke called the little platoons of family, neighbourhoods and guilds, an acknowledgement of the divine right of civil authority and a cooperation between Church and State.

Groen argued that, while imperfect, these tempered monarchies struck a balance between the sovereign power of the king and an organic interlocking variety of intermediate bodies such as estates, guilds or towns. Although the old regimes suffered many abuses, Groen, echoing Burke, argued that the solution was patient reform, not rash innovation. As Groen saw it, Rousseau's doctrine of popular sovereignty was unable to provide adequate limits in the political authority of the 'general will'. The Enlightenment's elevation of reason at the cost of revelation entailed replacing God's sovereignty with that of the people. This resulted in two developments: first, political sovereignty was unhinged from a divine source; second, the state was at the same time idolized and destabilized, functioning simultaneously as an absolute centralized force, yet, oddly, at the whim of political factions and public opinion. Groen contended that because the Revolutionary doctrines were out of touch with nature and historical realities, they would never be implemented in full, inevitably carrying nations through five degenerating phases before sinking them into a despondent pragmatism that contented itself with nothing more than economic gain.

In Lectures XI–XIV of *Unbelief and Revolution*, Groen signals how these degenerating phases of all modern revolutions were exemplified in the specific events of the French Revolution. The first stage (Lecture XI) involves the developments leading up to 1789. In this stage the Reformation's life-giving effect on European society has given way to a dead orthodoxy, making the ground ripe for public intellectuals, eager to weave Enlightenment doctrine into various discourses – political theory, literature, education and even theology. Ironically, as the doctrine spreads, the aristocracy and even the royalty itself come under the influence of the doctrine. In Lecture XII Groen re-narrates the events of 1789–94 to support his claim that the succession of tumultuous events in this period (the formation of the National Assembly, the 1791 Constitution, the regicide, the fall of the Girondins) were not merely circumstantial but also the sweeping unfolding of revolutionary principles, which, in placing the well-being of the state above all other concerns, resulted in a centralization that stripped the organic nature of society. The climax of this stage, the Reign of Terror (Lecture XIII), demonstrates the Revolution's true face, not an unfortunate detour or inexplicable phenomenon.

According to Groen, the members of the Committee of Public Safety were neither malicious nor psychotic but merely acting consistently with their

uncompromising belief in the doctrines of the Revolution, especially as put forward by Rousseau. Groen reminds us that the Terror was not mere atheism but both an undoing of revealed religion as well as a return to the civil religion that shaped the pagan republics of pre-Christian antiquity. In Lecture XIV Groen covers the last three stages of Revolution in France. In the third stage (1794–1815) the Thermidorian reaction to terror and inability to find agreement within the Convention (and later, the Directory) demonstrates the volatile instability of the revolutionary principles. The fourth stage (1815–30) exhibits the doomed attempt to apply the revolutionary principles in post-Napoleonic France. Finally, in the fifth stage (1830–present), the promise of the Revolution finally wanes, being replaced in French society by a dissolute resignation to material prosperity.

IV Overlap

We now have two sketches in hand, which – when put side by side – corroborate each other on a number of points. Both accounts tell the story of the shift during the French Revolution from an organic, interlocking society to (at the height of the Terror) an autocratic, centralized state.[22] For Groen, this was the logic of a state 'whose unity and strength rests in the omnipotence of the general will'.[23] Under revolutionary doctrine Groen claimed the state became an omnipotent, indivisible, all-inclusive and absolute entity that positioned itself above the law. Within their own recounting of the Revolution, fashion historians record how dress moved from forms representing the various social bodies into which one was born, to the chaos that ensued with the break-up of the previous social order in the first year of the Revolution, to an increasing austerity, uniformity and flattening of dress as the Committee for Public Safety launched into the Terror.[24] In other words, dress during the period of the French Revolution shifted from identification with

22. The seeds of Kuyper's sphere sovereignty are clearly evident in Groen's criticism of the revolutionary state attempting, as Noah Shusterman retraces, to 'take over' the Church's role. For Shustermann's history of the usurpation of ecclesiological prerogative, see Noah Shusterman, *Religion and the Politics of Time: Holidays in France from Louis XIV through Napoleon* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2010), p. 121.

23. Groen, *Unbelief*, p. 242.

24. Groen argues that the Terror of the French Revolution was not merely an anomaly but also a harbinger of a dangerous pattern that would re-emerge in future centralized states. This is confirmed by studies that demonstrate the prevalence of uniforms in societies seeking to reinforce authoritarian control. See Jennifer Craik, *Uniforms Exposed: From Conformity to Transgression* (New York: Berg, 2005). It is also confirmed in the uniformity of dress exemplified in textiles in post-Revolutionary Russia. See Lidya Zaletova, Fabio Atti and Franco Panzini, *Revolutionary Costume: Soviet Clothing and Textiles of the 1920's* (New York: Rizzoli Publications, 1989), Irina Yassinskaya, *Soviet Textile Design of the Revolutionary Period* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1983).

one's social group in the *ancien régime*, to dress being characterized by a chaotic eclecticism after the fall of the Bastille, to the absorption of the individual within the restrictions of the Terror and under the threat of a national uniform.

Although Groen never spelt out these differences in terms of the shift in fashion, both Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavinck in their own ways picked up on the close relationship between fashion, the revolution and the vulnerability of the individual in the face of a centralized state.[25] In his speech 'Uniformity: The Curse of Modern Life', Kuyper associates the call for *liberté, égalité, fraternité* with Parisian fashion, seeing in their nexus an insidious cause for eradicating the intermediating bodies that once filled Dutch society.[26] In a similar vein, Herman Bavinck in his 1902 volume (*Hedendaagsche moraal*) drew on Kierkegaard's assessment of the conformity of individuals and assimilation into 'the crowd' to speak of the insidious role of fashion to concatenate the 'general will' of individuals into a dangerous mob that runs roughshod over morality and individual freedoms.[27] Harkening back to the French Revolution, Bavinck detests fashion's ongoing

25. For Kuyper's and Bavinck's dependence on Groen, see Harry Van Dyke, 'Groen Van Prinsterer: Godfather of Bavinck and Kuyper', *Calvin Theological Journal* 17, 1 (April 2012), pp. 72–97.

26. Kuyper writes, 'If imperial unity kept foundering on the national diversity of ethnic groups, eliminating that diversity was the goal inherent in the French Revolution. *"Liberté, équalité, fraternité"* is therefore the basic principle it seeks to inscribe in the constitutions of the peoples. For once the peoples have been robbed of their characteristic genius and rendered homogeneous, the triumph of imperial unity is assured.' This point of the French Revolution's determination to eliminate diversity among ethnic groups is picked up and expanded later in his speech in regard to the uniformity of dress that erases a host of intermediating bodies and ethnic associations: 'Compare this magnificent attire from times past with the stiff uniformity of clothing worn by the thronging spectators and you will agree that here too a deadly uniformity has doused the sparkle of life. What an enormous array of forms in the days when every difference in rank or status was openly displayed in people's dress. What a profuse diversity of styles and costumes, of fabrics and colors, when everyone, from whatever district or region, guild or group, office or occupation he might be, remained recognizable by his clothing and everyone felt the urge to show in fabric and color, in the shape and elegance of their traditional costumes, who they were.' Abraham Kuyper, 'Uniformity: Curse of the Modern Life', in James Bratt (ed.), *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), pp. 24, 28.

27. In particular Bavinck draws from Kierkegaard's understanding of individuals being 'leveled' through the 'aid of the press' into 'the public.' This abstraction is a result of a form of media (such as fashion) that allows for 'unsubstantial individuals who are never united or never can be united in the simultaneity of any situation or organization and yet are claimed to be a whole.' See Søren Kierkegaard, *Two Ages: Kierkegaard Writings* (Vol. 14; New York: Princeton University Press, 1978), pp. 90–1. Bavinck's concern that such levelling is driven by a desire to 'control' is supported in Caroline Weber, *Terror and Its Discontents: Suspect Words in Revolutionary France* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), p. 3.

levelling effect (*nivelleerend proces*), whereby the majority 'guillotines' individuals who refuse to submit to the capricious postures and assumptions that characterize contemporary culture – be it in education, science, art, religion, etc.[28]

Another way these two accounts reinforce each other regards the Revolution's relationship to historical continuity. For Groen the Enlightenment harboured an unchristian view of history.[29] Specifically, Groen detected an assumption that man could narrate his own story, thereby rejecting the larger boundaries of creation, man's limitation as a fallen creature and God's providential and sovereign control of history.[30] After all, Groen reminds us, history had already been narrated – finding its centre and climax in Christ, not a doctrine of progress and human achievement. Because God alone is sovereign, and because His ways are unsearchable, Groen believed mankind would never be in a position to control history. And, therefore, the Revolution's attempt to do so – as seen in turning the calendar back to the year zero, creating a ten-day week, etc. – represented man's arrogant attempt to neglect his status as a finite creature placed within history, rather than above it.[31]

---

28. Bavinck writes, 'Fashion, as it enlarged its dominion in church and state, in school and society, science and art, has a paralyzing effect on the individual. The most dangerous enemy of Christianity and art is what Kierkegaard called the submission of [the one by] the many. One alone would not challenge the Lord Christ in Jerusalem. But the people, the rulers, Herod and Pilate, making a pact could then feel strong, joining their voices "Crucify him". It is the number, the majority, the masses, which so often stifled the good in narrow and wider circles, erased the individual impressions, halts repentance and conversion, suppresses the individual, the heart and the passions. The Revolution has also been guilty of this. The majority has been enthroned, the authority has been stepped on. The Revolution has guillotined all those who refuse to submit to the majority. Although the guillotine has been abolished as a radical solution, the process of leveling that came from the Revolution continues in the same spirit. One style is prescribed for all, one fashion, one outfit, one practice, particular consumer goods, the same education (from the top of Holland to the bottom), the same views of conventional thought, the same idioms in literature and art, the same banal vapid religion, the same superficial veneer of morality and decency, the same civil religion, the same nice and "obedient" people!' (author's translation) See H. Bavinck, *Hedendaagsche moraal* (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1902), pp. 57–8.

29. See J. L. van Essen, 'Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer and His Conception of History' and 'God's Hand in History', in Jantje Lubbegiena van Essen and Herbert Donald Morton (eds.), *Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer: Selected Studies* (Jordan Station, Ontario, Canada: Wedge Publishing Foundation, 1990), p. 23.

30. Groen, *Unbelief*, pp. 232, 240, par. 186; see also Van Essen, *Selected Studies*, pp. 24–5.

31. There is a tension in Groen's appeal to 'ideas' given his Burkian assumption that the Revolution could not bypass historical precedent demonstrated in received customs, practices and habits. This is demonstrated in the revolutionary festivals and calendar. By taking all celebration out into nature, the revolutionaries display their desire to return to an a-historical state (Rousseau's noble savage). In his famous work on revolutionary

Respectively, fashion builds on collective memory and expresses itself within a framework of received historical practice. Even the most outrageous fashions are typically little more than playing with received styles. In this sense, fashion is a stabilizing force in society. Though colours and hemlines might change, in the eighteenth century women continued to wear dresses while men wore pants, for without some established pattern to dress, an item can no longer be deemed meaningful. Therefore, Marie Antoinette's challenge to courtly dress should not be viewed as a rejection of the eighteenth-century costume but instead the historical continuity of *royal* (i.e. in line with received history) sartorial custom.

In a similar way, the chaotic dress during the first year of the Revolution should not be seen as the rejection of known styles but instead the question of the meaning of those styles in light of social upheaval. In this regard the various options of dress decreased as the Terror set about to undo the historical precedent. Like the victims on the guillotine, the diverse styles of dress in late-eighteenth-century France that represented the received sartorial history were slowly being eradicated until – in the end – the suggestion was made to replace all dress with a rationally designed national costume. The last traces of a reliance on historical continuity that dress typically required would be eradicated.[32]

Lastly, one recognizes an overlap between these two accounts regarding the Monarchy's complicit relationship with revolutionary forces. At the heart of Groen's argument is his contention that the Revolution was born out unbelief, especially regarding the divine sanction of government.[33] One thinks of Montesquieu's suggestion that forms of government are relative to the climate of various regions,

---

festivals, Mona Ozouf writes, '[The Revolutionary consciousness] delighted in the notion that a *tabula rasa* was being made of the past. But the past that was being rejected was not the whole of the past: in destroying history, the men of the Revolution were merely retying a broken thread, either with a primitive history – a mirror that had not yet distorted nature's features – or with Nature herself, in her primal purity.' See Mona Ozouf, *Festivals and the French Revolution* (trans. Alan Sheridan; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), p. 34. In like manner, in stating that the Revolution is 'un-historical', Groen does not imply that the revolutionaries had no historical reference. Elsewhere he writes, Rousseau was very enamoured with the institutions of antiquity. Similarly, Robespierre and Saint-Just 'wished to change the manners, habits and spirit of France to turn her into a republic in the style of the ancients.' Groen, *Unbelief and Revolution*, p. 358.

32. In this sense the fate of fashion merged with Marie Antoinette, both of which were symbolic of the history the Revolution sought to erase. Proleptic of the incommensurable relationship between her existence and the requisite erasing the Revolution called for, she once stated in regard to the bloody events of October 1789, 'I have seen everything, known everything, forgotten everything.' Cited in Weber, *Queen of Fashion*, p. 289.

33. For a wonderful survey of how Groen's political views fit within broader discussions within the Reformed heritage regarding the divine institution of the state, revolution and constitutional democracy, see John W. Sap, *Paving the Way for Revolution: Calvinism and the Struggle for a Democratic Constitutional State* (Amsterdam: VU University Press, 2001).

and Rousseau's contention that man, freed from the division of inherited property and rights, might find a basis for political harmony. Groen rightly recognized that these philosophers were not merely influencing left-leaning Jacobins: unknowingly, they were being championed by the royalty itself. Likewise, as Caroline Weber claims, Marie Antoinette's disenchantment with courtly dress and her desire to set up a pastoral setting free from courtly etiquette at *Petit Trianon* can be traced (at least partially) back to Rousseau and the philosophy of the age.[34] If, in fact, Weber is right about this, Groen's claim that the cause of the Revolution must be laid on the steps of Enlightenment doctrine appears vindicated.

V Re-fashioning the Revolution

These resonances aside, Groen's approach remains in tension with the insights of fashion historians. Groen, after all, was not concerned with examining the role of cultural artefacts and the way meanings and associations are imbibed through the practices such artefacts invoked. Rather, his concern was with big ideas and their inevitable outcome. And while Groen (following François Guizot) sought to sketch the movement of Enlightenment ideas on what he called the 'anatomy' (the facts of history) and 'physiology' (the relationship between the facts) of eighteenth-century Paris, his methodology had no way to account for the work of fashion historians tracing the various associations of material and visual culture in eighteenth-century France.[35] In line with the historiography of his day, Groen held the study of such 'externals' of history as unprofitable for discovering history's 'hidden laws'. For Groen, attention to fashion would be something akin to the spurious science of *physiognomy* – the belief that one could read the character of someone by studying that person's face.[36]

34. Caroline Weber, *Queen of Fashion*, p. 132. Weber writes, 'In the cafés and bookshops of the Palais-Royal, people imbued with the philosophy of the age – the egalitarian precepts of Voltaire, Diderot, and Rousseau, whose works Marie Antoinette had favored at Trianon without grasping their seditious political implications – excitedly discussed the idea of a constitution that would curb the iniquities of the present order.' See Weber, *Queen of Fashion*, p. 187.

35. See Groen, *Unbelief and Revolution*, p. 182.

36. That Groen would use the discredited science of physiognomy to dismiss externals such as fashion demonstrates how different his assessment of change is from the impulses that drove criticism of fashion as deceitful in late-eighteenth-century France. Speaking of this period, Morag Martin writes, 'Intrinsically tied to the pseudoscience of physiognomy, the concept of the pure face was at its heart a rendition of the soul and its emotional representations on a physical surface. Artificiality was the bane of a trained physiognomist because it stood in the way of a legible reading. Though not all commentators agreed with the scientific claims of physiognomy, the belief in the legibility of a natural face was popular and highly practical in a society whose own legibility was in crisis.' See Morag Martin, *Selling Beauty*, p. 90.

It is here that Groen's preponderance for ideas proves unsatisfying for a thick description of the secularizing influences at play in the Revolution.[37] Of course, on many counts Groen is right. Enlightenment ideas undoubtedly played an important role in the Revolution, and these ideas helped unleash one of the most important events in the history of Western secularization. Groen was a pioneer, seeking boldly to set his sights on exposing the influence of these ideas on this event. His manifesto sought to lay before us in strong relief critical themes future neo-Calvinists would build on and develop. And in this sense, his work was a success.

That said, contemporary neo-Calvinist assessments of the role of the French Revolution in secularization must not merely think in terms of ideas but also – as Charles Taylor has reminded us – the larger social imaginary. In other words, a thick description must not only look at persuasive ideas but also at the way shared practices in conjunction with visual images, stories and legends shape a culture.[38] For, according to Taylor, 'new practice, with the implicit understanding it generates, can be the basis for modifications of theory, which in turn can inflect practice, and so on.'[39]

Therefore, the work of fashion historians can help furnish a more compelling contemporary neo-Calvinist grappling with the theo-politics of the Revolution. Through their work one gains a feel for the implicit associations various practices, stories and images conjured during this period. One thinks, for example, of how the contrast between the simplicity of English nobility with the excesses of French aristocratic artifice had taken a moralizing turn in the second half of the eighteenth century.[40] As this new lens emerged, critics increasingly called for an end to artifice – linking it to decay within society, deceit and a reversal of social order. Such associations could easily be carried over to the contrast between the absolutist monarchy of the French court and English constitutionalism.

Or again, the *philosophes*' ideal of returning to nature to redraw society based on the light of reason was increasingly associated with aesthetic choices in French

37. For a survey of criticisms of *Unbelief and Revolution*, see 'Controversial Issues' in Van Dyke, *Groen Van Prinsterer's Lectures on Unbelief and Revolution*, pp. 217–69. Ultimately, my critique of Groen's methodology is not founded in the work of fashion historians, but rather finds its basis in a theological source: As St James (in whose honour the Jacobin's meeting hall was named) reminds us, 'faith without works is dead'. In other words, beliefs and practices are inseparably linked in a symbiotic relationship. In light of this, Christian historiography must take both *Lex Credendi* and *Lex Orandi* into account. As this chapter argues, it is only thus that historians will recognize that (again, to borrow the language of liturgical theology) in the French Revolution the *Lex Credendi* of popular sovereignty joined with the *Lex Orandi* of fashion to reinforce a secular imagination that, as Groen rightfully sensed, would help shape post-Christian Europe.

38. Charles Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries*, p. 23.

39. Ibid., p. 30.

40. Martin, *Selling Beauty*, p. 77.

Revolutionary society – equating simplicity with transparency. Given this, choices between extravagant or simple dress implied far more than mere taste or aristocratic rank; rather, such choices were conflated with blindly receiving traditional politics or rethinking society from the ground up. Moreover, the court of public opinion expressed through the growing democratization of fashion stood in tension with both crown and mitre, apostolic succession and monarchical succession, the investiture of ecclesial and aristocratic rank.

Furthermore, as Weber convincingly reminds us, Marie Antoinette's flirtation with fashion was not merely a public relations flop; it rather involved a practice that made the divine right of kings difficult to imagine. As Weber recounts, the Queen caused a stir when she first began to make appearances in public venues. Within the social imaginary of the *ancien régime*, a visit from one's monarch was considered an auspicious occasion – the revelation of a quasi-divine personage whose iconographic dress reflected divine glory and authority. But as Marie Antoinette became a fixture of public space dressed in the latest fashion rather than traditional royal attire, it became harder and harder for her public to imagine her as part of a long line of royalty chosen by God from time out of mind. To the contrary, her dress suggested an individual calling other individuals into a sartorial dialogue aimed at mutually constructing the aesthetics of a new kind of public space.[41] If the Queen herself no longer identified herself by a (supposedly) divinely sanctioned social ontology, why should the third estate mind its place? Moreover, with the populace weighing in on each fashion choice, Parisians were being invited regularly to 'vote' on the Queen's actions, something reinforced through the steady flow of libel from the Grub Street hacks. A populace accustomed to weighing in on its monarch and joining her in constructing the aesthetics of public space has already embarked on the practices of popular sovereignty.

Accordingly, the Diamond Necklace Affair is seen as critical because it demonstrated how the tribunal of public opinion (something the monarchy was already beholding) could censure the Queen.[42] It is of little surprise that when the Revolution did unfold in the tumultuous events of the summer of 1789, it did so capitalizing on the levelling power of popular fashion. Individuals voted with their choice of dress because dress had helped make voting possible. Like the internet in the Arab Spring, the use of cockades on the streets of Paris had opened up a virtual space of unofficial (sanctioned neither by church nor crown)

41. One recognizes in the work of Elizabeth Willson an attempt to use Jürgen Habermas's notion of an early-modern 'public space' without recourse to a rising industrial or commercial bourgeoisie. For a helpful review of the various ways Habermasian public space has been adopted in various schools of interpretation of the French Revolution, see Thomas E. Kaiser and Dale K. Van Kley, *From Deficit to Deluge: The Origins of the French Revolution* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011), pp. 14–19.

42. 'Criticisms of cosmetics were intrinsically tied to creating a public sphere for political discussion and dissent.' See Martin, *Selling Beauty: Cosmetics, Commerce and French Society, 1750–1830*, p. 73.

political communication and participation. And as the Revolution moved into full swing, so did the theo-politics of fashion. Placing a cockade on someone was not just a vote for the Revolution but also an embrace of this new form of (secular) political power driven from the individual up, rather than the monarchy and church down.

Seen through this new lens, Groen's contention that the Revolution was the Reformation in reverse takes on new life.[43] Similar to the role the printing press played in the Reformation's call to *sola scriptura*, fashion in the Revolution became a summons for a new way of envisioning society. This is apparent in the term '*ancien régime*' – which came to stand for the old social order during the Revolution. The term implies that a previous political arrangement had become passé. It had fallen out of *fashion*. Therefore, it was time to update society, to re-think politics, to challenge ecclesiastical assumptions, to 'get with the times'. Even more, this term made reference to the implications of dress in Revolutionary France: Freed from its traditional role of reinforcing the existing social norms of courtly power, fashion now served to de-sacralize the monarchy, advance a new kind of public space free from religious endorsement, and reinforce popular sovereignty. Much more than the mere 'externals' of revolutionary history, fashion had acquired new social, political and spiritual meanings.

As the above indicates, fashion and secularization did indeed share a double history in the French Revolution. Their stories overlap each other – making it hard to explain one without the other.

43. Here I follow Herman Paul's suggestion of a third way beyond a traditional and historicist reading of the classics from the Christian historiographical tradition. His so-called 'critical perspective' seeks 'to derive some insights from the work of former generations that might be relevant to the debates in which they themselves are involved.' See Herman Paul, 'Guillaume Groen Van Prinsterer: A Critical Reappraisal', *Fides et Historia* XXXVI, 2 (Summer/Fall 2004), p. 68.

Chapter 6

LONG FILMS ABOUT LOVE: KUYPER AND KIEŚLOWSKI'S *THREE COLOURS* TRILOGY

Alissa M. Wilkinson

I Introduction

What is required to sustain a good society? To the founders of the French Revolution, the key was to be found in their tripartite motto: liberty, equality and brotherhood. These ideals, they believed, when embraced by people and governments alike, would bring about a truly good society.

Centuries after the French Revolution, on 27 June 1941, a boy named Krzysztof Kieślowski was born in Nazi-occupied Warsaw. Kieślowski was raised and educated in communist, Soviet-bloc, deeply Catholic Poland. It took him three tries to get into film school but he eventually succeeded, and while there he gained rare access to American and Western European films just as the European 'art film' was enjoying its heyday.[1] Kieślowski eventually became a film director known for being part of the movement sometimes called the 'Cinema of Moral Concern', as a result of his documentary work and some early ventures into features – many of which indirectly and quietly criticized the oppressive government under which he lived and worked. Films such as *Camera Buff, Blind Chance* and *No End* reflect the desperate situation of his native country. Yet because of the regime, Kieślowski developed a style of filmmaking in which he kept his audience guessing about the themes of his work. Kickasola says,

> While not visibly active in politics, Kieslowski documented a reality the Polish people longed to see: their own. In subtle ways, Kieslowski exposed the weaknesses of a totalitarian regime, and audiences became adept at looking for the political critique (what amounted to a 'conspiracy' between filmmaker and audience . . .)[2]

1. Joseph G. Kickasola, *The Films of Krzysztof Kieslowski: The Liminal Image* (London: Continuum, 1st edn., 2004), p. 11.
2. Kickasola, *The Films of Krzysztof Kieslowski: The Liminal Image*, p. 12.

This subtlety and even subterfuge would become a hallmark of Kieślowski's work, suffusing his films even when he moved to working in Western Europe. Throughout his filmography, Kieślowski quietly and ambiguously plays with the concepts with which he was working, often exposing their weaknesses thereby. Late in his career, Kieślowski would claim that he was not a political filmmaker:

> During martial law, I realized that politics aren't really important. In a way, of course, they define where we are and what we're allowed or aren't allowed to do, but they don't solve the really important questions. . . . Even when my films were about people involved in politics, I always tried to find out what sort of people they were. The political environment only formed a background. Even the short documentary films were always about people, about what they're like. They weren't political films. Politics were never the subject.[3]

Yet Kieślowski scholars and fans alike have challenged this idea, citing the many critiques of both his home regime and Western ideals embedded in his work. Sedinger takes it one step further: 'If Kieslowski indeed gave up on political cinema, why allude to the central values of political modernity in his final films?'[4] Haltoff sums it up: 'there are more questions than answers in [Kieslowski's] cinema and everything here is geared toward mystery.'[5]

Whatever Kieślowski's status as a political filmmaker, it is undoubtedly true that his later work explored explicitly political concepts: from *The Decalogue* (1988), a series of one-hour television episodes produced for and aired on Polish television that explored the Ten Commandments; through the enigmatic *The Double Life of Veronique* (1991), which takes as at least one of its subjects the divide between Eastern and Western Europe; and his last work, *Three Colours* (1993–94), a trilogy of films named for the three colours of the French flag and the ideals they represent – liberty in *Blue* (1993), equality in *White* (1994) and brotherhood in *Red* (1994).

This final trilogy of Kieślowski's career was a French–Polish–Swiss production financed by director-turned-producer Marin Karmitz, who had produced films by Godard, Chabrol and Malle. The set was unusually cosmopolitan, with four languages spoken on set – Polish, English, French and German – and it was shot continuously, one film after another, which fatigued Kieślowski. The filmmaker died shortly after the completion of *Red*, though he was in the process of writing another trilogy of films (to be called *Heaven, Hell* and *Purgatory*).

3. Danusia Stok, *Kieślowski on Kieślowski* (London: Faber & Faber, 1995), p. 144.
4. Tracey Sedinger, 'The Kindness of Strangers: On the Political Modernity of Kieslowski's "Red"', *Literature* 18 (2007), p. 238.
5. Marek Haltoff, *The Cinema of Krzysztof Kieslowski: Variations on Destiny and Chance* (New York: Wallflower Press, 2004), p. 124.

In *Three Colours*, Kieślowski worked with many of his usual collaborators – a brotherhood, of sorts:

> As always, Kieslowski surrounds himself with the same group of collaborators. Apart from co-scriptwriter Piesiewicz and composer Preisner, he also works with his earlier cinematographers Slawomir Idziak (*Blue*), Edward Klosinski (*White*), and Piotr Sobocinski (*Red*). In a typically unselfish manner, he acknowledges their great contributions not only as cinematographers but as 'script consultants.' In addition, he acknowledges as 'script consultants' the help of his friends, distinguished Polish film-makers Agnieszka Holland and Edward Zebrowski, with whom he worked closely together on earlier projects but whose contributions were not previously credited. Kieslowski also chose Jacques Witta, the editor who worked with him on *The Double Life of Veronique*.
>
> Given the fact that, in true auterial fashion, Kieslowski works with the same collaborators-friends, it comes as no surprise that the trilogy is ostensibly self-reflexive and self-referential . . .[6]

The movies were a major event on the film circuit in 1993 and 1994. *Three Colours: Blue* – released the year after the Maastricht Treaty was signed – debuted at the Venice International Film Festival in September 1993, where it won the Golden Lion (jointly with Robert Altman's *Short Cuts*). Juliette Binoche also won Best Actress, while the cinematographer won Best Photography. At the Berlin Film Festival the following February, *Three Colours: White* premiered and won the Silver Bear award in the Best Director Category. Then, in May 1994, *Three Colours: Red* premiered at Cannes. It lost the Palme d'Or to *Pulp Fiction*, but garnered three Academy Award nominations in 1995, four BAFTA nominations, the Grand Prix at the Vancouver International Film Festival and the LA and NY Film Critics' awards for Best Foreign Film.

Each film operates as a complete work on its own, not depending on the others for coherence or structure. Each is shot in a different location (Paris, Poland, Geneva); each has its own cast; each has its own themes. Yet, the films also interlock. Characters from *Blue* and *White* briefly occupy the same courtroom and appear in both films; a character from *Red* is stranded in *White*; and at the end of the trilogy, all three collide, with the leads from each film appearing in the final scene in *Red*. Thematically, they interlock as well – and this is important, because it is difficult to separate their themes neatly or draw perfect conclusions from them. Coates explains,

> Just as each section of *The Decalogue* activates several of the Ten Commandments, so each portion of *Three Colours* arguably revolves around more than one of

---

6. Haltoff, *The Cinema of Krzysztof Kieslowski: Variations on Destiny and Chance*, p. 124.

the hallowed revolutionary watchwords, dramatizing both its own ostensible keyword and – in undertones – those of the other sections.[7]

In this chapter, I explore the critique of the ideals of the French Revolution as presented in Kieślowski's trilogy. It is useful to couple these critiques with the critiques offered by Abraham Kuyper, the nineteenth-century Dutch theologian and statesman, who repeatedly pointed to the French Revolution as a model for what is *wrong* with an over-emphasis on the individual's autonomy as the source of authority, rather than a recognition of rights as granted by a sovereign God who ought to be worshiped. Religion, Kuyper believed, is essential to the practice of true liberty; the *Imago Dei* is the indispensable fountain of human dignity and civil liberty, and the social spheres set in place by God are both necessary and inevitable.

Why read *Three Colours* through this lens? Simply put, reading these often enigmatic and baffling films through a Kuyperian lens helps clarify what Kieślowski is doing. Kuyper argues that religion (which Kieślowski translates as 'divine love') is essential to liberty; that individual rights are hollow when derived from the individual's status in the eyes of the state ('the citizen') rather than from the image of God; and that liberty, equality and fraternity cannot be enacted in a social vacuum that assumes the universality and individuality of humankind, but rather in a society that recognizes the purposes of liberty, the challenges to equality and the fundamental necessity of a charity that goes beyond exclusion. And Kieślowski's staging of these conflicts in narrative form helps point out places where Kuyper might have served up an even stronger critique, emphasizing the missing element in all of these films.

I will explore each film in turn, looking at its themes and their resonances in Kuyper's conceptions of these ideals. After that, I will show how Kuyper and especially Kieślowski seem to agree that something is missing from the French Revolution's ideals, and argue that the quality is necessary for the establishment of a good society: love. As Coates says, in these films, 'Biblical morality deepens and gives substance to the revolutionary one.'[8]

II Liberty: Blue

Julie (played by Juliette Binoche) is married to an eminent composer who has been commissioned to write a symphony for the Unification of Europe, to be played in twelve European cities simultaneously when Europe is unified. But her husband and young daughter are killed in a car crash. Divested of her family, Julie decides to cut all her ties – house, friends, her own musical work – and move into Paris, to a tiny apartment where nobody will be able to locate her. She sheds

7. Paul Coates, 'The Sense of an Ending: Reflections on Kieslowski's Trilogy', *Film Quarterly* 50, 2 (1996), p. 23.

8. Coates, 'The Sense of an Ending: Reflections on Kieslowski's Trilogy', p. 26.

her responsibilities and is accountable to no one. Even her Alzheimer's-stricken mother can't recognize her.

This complete freedom from human ties is symbolized one day when Julie watches a man get mugged on the street outside her house. She watches silently, not calling out or trying to help. Her *laissez-faire* attitude is taken to the extreme.

Yet Julie cannot stay hidden forever. Her husband's assistant, Olivier, tracks her down one day as she sits in a cafe. Olivier – who has been in love with Julie for years – begs her to help him finish the symphony her husband had begun. She reluctantly becomes involved in the life of a female sex worker who lives in her building and needs her help. She meets with a young boy who witnessed the car accident and gives him her crucifix. Slowly, as she forms new ties and performs acts of charity, she becomes whole again. All of this comes to a head when she finds out about and then meets her husband's mistress, who, she discovers, is pregnant with her husband's child.

In *Blue*, Kieślowski is confronting competing definitions of *liberty* – the quality of the tripartite motto symbolized by the blue in the French flag. But what is this liberty? According to Article 4 of the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen*, 'Liberty consists of being able to do anything that does not harm others; thus, the exercise of the natural rights of every man or woman has no bounds other than those that guarantee other members of society the enjoyment of these same rights.'

This definition is about being freed *from* responsibilities and constraints as much as possible – a type of liberty that Julie pursues at the beginning of the film. She is devastated to be made tragically free of her husband and child, but then seeks to free herself from all the constraints that had once bound her and provided structure and direction to her life: she disposes of Olivier, who loves her; she abandons her home; she stands idly by when she see the man being mugged; she abandons her music, though it is clear that she is a talented composer, and attempts to destroy the manuscripts of the composition her husband was working on; she abandons all human contact, existing alone, completely free to be autonomous, with no occupation, no friends, no family, no lover.

Julie's pursuit of extreme liberty – or what she sees as liberty – can be read, perhaps, as a post-traumatic attempt to find peace after her world has been turned upside-down. Without any ties or connections, little tragedy can befall her. She has nothing to lose anymore. And yet, as Haltoff points out, 'The self-imposed detachment from the world – personal liberty according to the film's ruling concept – does not help Julie to achieve calm.'[9] Julie is still distraught, unhappy and haunted by her losses despite being detached. Her tidy, clean, uncomplicated existence cannot bring her comfort. It is only when she *chooses* to be involved in the lives of others – to abandon her uncomplicated life – that she begins to *live*. This echoes Proverbs 14.4: 'Where there are no oxen, the manger is clean, but abundant crops come by the strength of an ox.'

9. Haltoff, *The Cinema of Krzysztof Kieslowsk: Variations on Destiny and Chance*, p. 126.

In *Blue*, Kieślowski takes the concept of liberty embedded in the tripartite motto – liberty as freedom *from* responsibilities and constraints – and shows the poverty of such a conception. When humans are detached from each other, they find, like Julie, that they ultimately cannot live. Life without responsibility to others becomes tiring and meaningless. Liberty, Kieślowski seems to be saying, can only be found in becoming responsible to another. Julie finds her true liberty – her life – in making herself accountable and available to others.

Abraham Kuyper had a similar conception of liberty. In *The Problem of Poverty*, he says:

> The French Revolution threw out the majesty of the Lord in order to construct an artificial authority based on individual free will. . . . The Christian religion seeks personal human dignity in the social relationships of an organically integrated society. The French Revolution disturbed that organic tissue, broke those social bonds, and left nothing but the monotonous, self-seeking individual asserting his own self-sufficiency.[10]

The French Revolution's conception of liberty, Kuyper says, is based on *individual free will*, and herein lies its downfall. The problem is not necessarily that people have the ability to direct their lives and be responsible for their actions; it is that individuals become the *ultimate* authority, without responsibility to each other or to God. Personal human dignity, Kuyper argues, comes *because* of social relationships – we find and express our dignity in our *responsibility* to each other. Christian liberty looks different, Kuyper argues. In the *Lectures on Calvinism*, he speaks of liberty this way: 'In the French Revolution a civil liberty to agree with the unbelieving majority; in Calvinism, a liberty of conscience, which enables every man to serve God according to his own conviction and the dictates of his own heart.'[11]

The liberty of the Christian is found in serving God, and, by extension, serving one another. Kieślowski's film makes the same argument: Julie ultimately finds liberty in giving – she gives the home she had abandoned to her husband's mistress and child; she gives her talent to create the music that will celebrate the unification of Europe; she gives help to the sex worker; she gives away her crucifix; she gives her heart to Olivier. It is indeed true that Kieślowski does not explicitly link this to serving God. However, in the final scene, Julie and Olivier are making love, and Kieślowski drifts into a montage of the people whose lives Julie has touched – her husband's mistress, the boy, and so on – and during this, the lyrics to the orchestral score are 1 Cor. 13. As Haltoff says:

> Preisner's music explodes with the 'European Concerto,' which employs St. Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians stressing the absolute love of God

10. Abraham Kuyper, *The Problem of Poverty* (trans. James W. Skillen; Sioux Center: Dordt College Press, 2011), pp. 37–8.

11. Abraham Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1943), p. 109.

and the necessity for a human being to reciprocate that love. . . . Julie's true liberation comes with accepting Olivier's love and showing affection and generosity toward others.[12]

In *Blue*, Kieślowski shows us competing definitions of liberty that agree with and reinforce Kuyper's assessment of liberty: freedom *from* responsibility to others is empty and hollow and can destroy us – but freedom *for* service to one another brings us fulfilment.

III Equality: White

Karol is a Polish hairdresser in Paris; his wife, Dominique, is divorcing him because he cannot consummate their marriage, and she is (not surprisingly) frustrated by this. She taunts him angrily, humiliating him and she burns down his business. Despondent, penniless and alone, Karol returns to his native Poland, where he slowly, purposefully, and shrewdly becomes a wealthy man. Now powerful, he concocts a plan to get even with Dominique, to make her feel his shame and humiliation, this time on his own turf. What he was not counting on was that his feelings would return when he saw her again – with serious consequences for both him and Dominique.

White is Kieślowski's film about equality – or, rather, about competing definitions of equality. Haltoff says that *White* 'deals with the issue of equality in an unconventional way – it offers a vengeance story, a tale about getting even'.[13] This 'getting even' is key: equality, at its core, is all about who has power. Kieślowski underlines this point about power throughout the film in myriad ways. Dominique hates Karol precisely because she feels the power in their relationship is imbalanced. Karol has not been able to consummate their relationship since their marriage because he is so in awe of her. She cannot be with someone with whom she cannot be equal in some meaningful way. Furthermore, Karol is also a foreigner. His French is poor – though, tellingly, it becomes better over the course of the film, a phenomenon we notice every time he needs to assert himself. Some – among them Haltoff – think that the film is also about the balance of power in Europe after the cold war: weak, Polish Karol returns to Eastern Europe, only to become strong and overtake his Western European wife.

What is equality? Article 6 of the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen* characterizes it this way: '[The law] must be the same for all, whether it protects or punishes. All citizens, being equal in its eyes, shall be equally eligible to all high offices, public positions and employments, according to their ability, and without other distinction than their virtues and talents.' The power and agency of each citizen is equal in the eyes of the state, which makes the people equal as well.

12. Haltoff, *The Cinema of Krzysztof Kieslowski: Variations on Destiny and Chance*, p. 130.
13. Ibid., p. 133.

What is especially important here is that for citizens to be equal, they must be equal in the eyes of *the state* and its laws. Equality, in the French Republic, is found through undifferentiated treatment by the state. All men are essentially the same – they simply have different virtues, abilities and talents. But strip away these outer characteristics and the state considers everyone the same. Sedinger reads this into Karol's predicament:

> Because the rights of man are immanent – inalienable, neither derived from God nor dependent on social status, religion, or, eventually, gender – they have been disappeared into the rights of the citizen, which nation-states enforce. *White* similarly illustrates that without the nation-state's authority and power the rights of man mean nothing, provide no protection from the kinds of social and physical violence that Karol suffers. The most basic of human needs and affections depend upon citizenship papers; being without a passport condemns Karol to becoming, quite literally, human baggage.[14]

In *White*, we see the impoverished nature of a world in which men's equality and power is based on factors set and controlled by the state and its laws – on citizenship, on money, on language. Karol is not equal while in France not only because of his impotence, but because he is poor and does not speak the language and is not, ultimately, a citizen. A non-citizen, though human, is not equal, because the state does not have any framework for this person. And the non-equal – like Karol – are therefore trampled and forgotten. This point is one that concerned Kuyper in *The Problem of Poverty*:

> The ineradicable inequality between men produced a world in which the stronger devours the weaker. . . . The stronger, almost without exception, have always known how to bend every custom and magisterial ordinance so profit is theirs and the loss belongs to the weaker. . . . The more powerful exploited the weaker by means of a weapon against which there was no defense.[15]

'The cause of evil,' Kuyper continues, 'lay in this: that men regarded humanity as cut off from its eternal destiny, did not honor it as created in the image of God, and did not reckon with the majesty of the Lord, who alone by his grace is able to hold in check a human race mired in sin.'[16] Here, Kuyper – along with Kieślowski, in his portrayal of the injustice enacted upon (and eventually by) Karol – argues that state-mandated equality is ineffectual, largely because power tends to corrupt. A recognition of something greater than the republic is necessary for true equality. But what is true equality?

Here, again, Kuyper is ready with an answer. Equality in the Christian sense is found when individuals are considered to be equal in the eyes of *God*.

---

14. Sedinger, 'The Kindness of Strangers: On the Political Modernity of Kieslowski's "Red"', p. 257.

15. Kuyper, *The Problem of Poverty*, pp. 25–6.

16. Ibid., p. 26.

Bolt, explicating Kuyper's view, says that 'individual persons as well as social institutions such as the family do not derive their rights and legitimacy immediately from the state but immediately from Sovereign God Himself'. In *The Problem of Poverty*, Kuyper explains:

> The church influenced society instituting the *equality of brotherhood* (in contrast to difference in rank and station) both by abolishing all artificial demarcations between men and by joining rich and poor in one holy food at the Lord's Supper.[17]

Note here that there are two parts to this: seeing equality this way means that we get rid of 'artificial demarcations' between men – but that does not mean those men cease to be rich or poor. It recognizes the fallenness of the world, in which some do have more agency than others, but does not idealistically hook their equality to their power. Rather, the way they become equal is through partaking in a loving meal: the Lord's Supper. At that table, they are in fellowship with each other. It is only a loving relationship mediated by Christ himself in the Eucharistic meal that can accomplish this true equality.

Similarly, Kieślowski shows that it is love that transforms the relationship between Dominique and Karol, who are still not 'equals' in the eyes of the state. In fact, at the end of the film, they have traded places: it is Dominique, not Karol, who is poor and – quite literally – imprisoned in a country that is not her own, where her own language is not spoken. But there is something more. Karol's 'victory' – his revenge – becomes hollow the moment he realizes that he loves Dominique. And yet now she loves him, too. Love has been the transforming factor. Haltoff explains,

> The film ends with a close-up of Karol's face with tears in his eyes. He knows that his is a Pyrrhic victory after realising that he still loves [Dominique]. Kieslowski insists that his film offers a happy ending: 'For me the essential thing was a kind of "happy end," and the fact that between these two people, who hated each other and ought to have hated each other – her hating him and him hating her for humiliating him – love won out over hatred'. As Kieslowski comments in another conversation, the film's happy ending is clear only after viewing the third part of the trilogy.[18]

We do know by the end of *Red* that there is a happy ending for Karol and Dominique, now that love has made them equal in this way: they are seeing each other through sacrificial eyes, accepting the person of the other – and not insisting, any more, that they must be the 'same' to be equal. Again, love – which is becoming a stand-in for God (as, through common grace, it sometimes operates) – is what makes them equal, not the state.

17. Ibid., p. 34.
18. Haltoff, *The Cinema of Krzysztof Kieslowski: Variations on Destiny and Chance*, p. 135.

IV Fraternity: Red

The third film in the trilogy, *Red*, is perhaps more sophisticated and certainly more mysterious and layered than *Blue* or *White*. It also completes the stories of the other two films, containing as it does the consummation of Kieślowski's thoughts about how the three ideals of the tripartite motto might work together – and what is required to complete them.

In *Red*, Valentine (whose name, it would seem, is no accident) is a student and a model in Geneva with a jealous long-distance boyfriend – who is, incidentally, stranded in *White*. By accident, she meets an old man, a retired judge, who lives an isolated life but listens to others' conversations on the phone. Valentine is morally disgusted by the judge, who is not friendly towards her. But the two slowly become friends, and the old judge grows through this experience, coaxed back into life and connection through Valentine's sweetness and good nature. There is a secondary, seemingly disconnected narrative thread as well, featuring a character named August. His life seems to parallel eerily what we know of the judge – as if he is his double, living the judge's life 40 years after the judge, but with the possibility of an altered outcome. Valentine and August continually cross paths throughout the film, but they never see one another.

At the end of the film, the judge is in his house watching television when news of a ferry accident is broadcast. The ferry was on its way to England – and Valentine was on the boat. The judge watches as the survivors are announced: Olivier and Julie, Dominique and Karol, and Valentine and August, who don't appear to know each other – yet (as well as a British ferry barman – make of that what you will). These people alone have survived this accident.

In *Red*, Kieślowski is exploring brotherhood – community. And as is his wont, he illustrates not just community, but also the tension between the competing definitions and claims of community, and brings up questions about what is the good, what divides 'brothers' from 'others', and how exclusion is maintained by the law. Furthermore, in *Red*, Kieślowski gives us a sort of 'last word' on the subject and themes of the previous films. Community and brotherhood are about saying who is and who is *not* with us – about building an exclusion that is maintained by law. The law tells us who is 'us', and who is 'the other' – and this is intricately linked with questions of liberty and equality, which help us understand who is our brother and who is not.

When we define our life together, we are forced to confront questions about the good. What will define what is good for us and our brothers? And how do we balance the good of the brotherhood with what we view as our individual good? This issue is pervasive throughout *Red*, as Sedinger explains:

> In Kieslowski's view, fraternity, the community of brothers, endangers liberty, the singular goods of others. . . . For example, how do we adjudicate between different and competing goods? What if my good entails my neighbor's harm? . . . Once the bonds of fraternity are loosened, once the boundaries that had structured political modernity – public and private, brother and other – no

longer hold steady, liberty reveals the vacuity of a supposedly universal humanism that would render experience and expectation commensurable. . . . Red stages a variety of questions about the good. . . . These concerns indicate the conflict between fraternity and infidelity; the latter comes to symbolize the impossibility of reconciling individuals' goods, the lack of a calculus that would balance one's good and another's harm and therefore preserve the stability of community.[19]

The law is designed to preserve that stability, providing the limits and boundaries that define our collective and individual liberty and equality, and therefore shape our fraternity. This seems to be in the back of Kieślowski's mind throughout the trilogy: courts and judges are a recurring motif (in *Blue*, Julie is looking for her husband's mistress, who is a lawyer, in the courtroom when she briefly crosses paths with *White*'s Karol and Dominique; two of the three major characters in *Red* are judges as well). The law is important to Kieślowski not only because it provides a handy character or plot detail, but because it is the place where the ideals of the tripartite motto are put to the test. Ideals *begin*, but do not *complete* the work of making a well-ordered society. It is the law, ideals codified, that governs our lives together – our brotherhood.

The story of *Red* points to this vital importance of justice, and yet it hints that there is something missing – that justice is inadequate. Kuyper repeatedly pointed out the ultimate injustices perpetuated by the French Revolution's ideals: they stripped away the 'natural order' of things, he said, something that is required to allow people to live the good life. Instead, they substituted an appeal to autonomous man, codified in the laws of the Republic. Similarly, Kieślowski seems to want his viewer to recognize the vital importance (and yet inadequacy) of justice in the midst of liberty, equality and brotherhood. Again, they *begin*, but do not *complete*, the work of making us whole as a society. There is something missing.

This missing element is hinted at in an exchange between the judge and Valentine about a man that the judge did not put behind bars even though, as he found out later, the man was, indeed, guilty.

> Valentine: What happened to him?
> Judge: I did my own investigation. He got married. Has three children and now a grandson, too. They love him. He pays his taxes. All the trees he planted in front of his house have taken root and give fruit every year.
> Valentine: That means you did the right thing. Good. Can't you see that?
> Judge: As far as judiciary skills are concerned, I committed a very grave error.
> Valentine (shouts): You saved him!

19. Sedinger, 'The Kindness of Strangers: On the Political Modernity of Kieslowski's "Red"', p. 245.

Judge: Let's say. . . . But just think: how many others could I have acquitted? Even though they may have been guilty? I've handed out hundreds of verdicts, but have I ever got to the truth? Is there such a thing as truth? And even if there is, and I've found it, then what for? Judging, sentencing. . . . The very feeling of being able to decide what the truth is and what isn't. . . . Now, I think it's a lack of humility.
Valentine: Vanity?
Judge: Vanity.
[He considers what he has just said. They don't say anything for a while.][20]
(Screenplay for *Red*, 263–5)

Justice, alone, is not enough to create an equitable, good life together. As the judge points out, the idea that we can adequately and accurately adjudicate the common good through mere law is a lack of humility – it is vanity. Something more is needed to govern our lives together – to sustain our brotherhood. Justice alone cannot keep us together as brothers; brotherhood and equality, as Kuyper says in *The Problem of Poverty*, are linked hand in hand, and derive from our equality in the eyes of God, which link us to one another in mutuality and make space for that needed element: love and mercy.

V All you need is . . .

That missing element – the one that supplements the law to promote liberty, equality and brotherhood – is not something that Kuyper, admittedly, often addresses in his work on the French Revolution. Whenever he confronts the ideals of the Revolution, Kuyper condemns the focus on the individual and the rejection of God. But in the *Three Colours* trilogy, Kieślowski seems to imply that something further is needed: as Haltoff says, these films are 'long films about love'.[21] Love – sacrificial, self-denying love – is a key motif.

In each of the films, Kieślowski sets up a contrast, examining the problems inherent in competing definitions of the ideals of the French Revolution. And yet he does not leave it there: he gives us an answer. In *Blue*, what transforms liberty *from* responsibility into liberty *in order* to be responsible to others? In *White*, what transforms equality that demands we *conform* into equality that celebrates God's unique image in each of us? In *Red*, what transforms mere brother- (or other-) hood that is maintained by law into, perhaps, friendship – into something greater than justice? The answer is love: love for the other, the different – a sacrificial love and a mercy derived from knowledge that the law comes from beyond us. It is not

20. Krzysztof Kieślowski and Krzystof Piesiewicz, *Three Colors Trilogy: Blue, White, Red* (trans. Danusia Stok; London: Faber & Faber, 1998), pp. 263–5.

21. Haltoff, *The Cinema of Krzysztof Kieslowski: Variations on Destiny and Chance*, p. 122.

mere tolerance except when it crosses my boundary lines; rather, it is a love that reaches past those boundaries.

This underlying theme of the necessity of love to heal the wound inflicted by unmoderated liberty, state-defined equality, or law-enforced brotherhood is clear throughout the films in various ways. One seemingly minor motif seems especially important here (it also occurs in the film before this, *The Double Life of Veronique*). In this motif, an old person carries a glass bottle to a recycling bin on the kerb and attempts to push it in. Haltoff explains:

> [In *Red*], a shot familiar from the three previous films is repeated this time as well, albeit somewhat different . . .
>
>   . . . Unlike former protagonists, who either passively observed the elderly man (Karol), did not notice the old woman because of their preoccupation with their own problems (Julie) or at least appeared to be willing to help the old woman (Weronica and Veronique) . . .
>
>   . . . the generous Valentine actually helps the old woman. Dave Kehr writes that this 'simple act of kindness is the climax of the entire trilogy, the gesture that saves the world'.[22]

The act of love is the gesture that saves the world – Valentine gives up at least momentary liberty to obligate herself to someone who is not 'equal' to her (a poor, old woman) and treat her with respect and, yes, love. And this love is, if not explicitly, at least implicitly linked to not just human, but divine love. As Coates says:

> In the passage from 1 Corinthians 13 set to music by Patrice/Julie, nothingness summons forth love, its opposite, in the verse that states 'If I have not charity, I am nothing'. The antithesis is at the film's heart, though Kieslowski's penchant for 'asymmetrical composion' . . . reserves its explicit formulation for the end.[23]

Sedinger makes the link more explicit:

> What apparently makes the kindness of strangers possible in *Blue* is the Christianity that suffuses the film: in Paul's Letter to the Corinthians, in the golden cross that Julie loses in the automobile accident and that a stranger later returns to her. The purported universality of Pauline discourse, its elision of racial, sexual, and cultural differences in the face of a performative faith, is what perhaps provides the foundation for a charity that embraces others as well as brothers.[24]

AQ: Can we run in the text from "… the generous Valentine…" with the previous line and delete one set of ellipsis points. So that the revised text reads "woman (Weronica and Veronique) . . . the generous Valentine".

22. Ibid., p. 146.
23. Coates, 'The Sense of an Ending: Reflections on Kieslowski's Trilogy', p. 20.
24. Sedinger, 'The Kindness of Strangers: On the Political Modernity of Kieslowski's "Red"', p. 255.

The trilogy concludes with the news of the boating accident, and it is not insignificant that the survivors – Patrice and Julie, Karol and Dominique, August and Valentine – are the three pairs who have *found* love (August is the Judge's double, and has been transformed through the love shown to him by Valentine, and in this way, Kieślowski implies that Valentine has saved August). Could it be that Kieślowski intends the final boating accident to be a sort of metaphor, a warning that the soon-to-be unified Europe would sink if it relied on hollowed-out definitions of liberty, equality and brotherhood to define its life together?

When Kuyper writes of love, he explicitly finds the origin of this love in God. Here is how he puts it in *Problem of Poverty*:

> The tremendous love springing up from God within you displays its radiance not in the fact that you allow Lazarus to quiet his hunger with the crumbs that fall from your overburdened table. All such charity is more like an insult to the manly heart that beats in the bosom of the poor man. Rather, the love within you displays it radiance in this: Just as rich and poor sit down with each other at the communion table, so also you feel for the poor man as for a member of the body, which is all that you are as well. . . . You, too, must suffer with your suffering brothers. Only then will the holy music of consolation vibrate in your speech. Then driven by this sympathy of compassion, you will naturally conform your action to your speech.
>
> For *deeds* of love are indispensable. Obviously, the poor man cannot wait until the restoration of our social structure has been completed. Almost certainly he will not live long enough to see that happy day. Nevertheless, he still has to live; he must feed his hungry mouth and the mouths of his hungry family. Therefore, vigorous help is necessary. However highly I am inclined to praise your willingness to make sacrifices – and this is possible through God's grace to many of you – nevertheless, the holy art of 'giving for Jesus' sake' ought to be much more strongly developed among us Christians. Never forget that all state relief for the poor is a blight on the honor of your Savior.[25]

When taken together, Kuyper and Kieślowski help to build out a cogent critique of the tripartite motto of the French Revolution – not only because Kuyper makes a theological argument against the individual-centred ethos, but also because in embodying those ideas in characters and narrative, Kieślowski unearths the problem with dealing in abstract ideas: we experience dissonance when they confront the world in which we live, which is not an abstract, ideal universe. As Kickasola says,

> Just as the *Decalogue* builds its narratives around the themes of the Ten Commandments, the *Three Colours* trilogy utilizes the themes symbolized in the French flag (liberty, equality and fraternity) for stories of universal import.

25. Kuyper, *The Problem of Poverty*, p. 69.

Like the *Decalogue*, they are not so much moral tales illustrating virtues, but *stories that exemplify the inherent tensions these ideals generate as they clash with an all too imperfect universe.* These themes embody not only French ideals, but also those of any democratic society. . . . All three films end with a protagonist experiencing some sort of grace in their circumstance, weeping.[26]

Kieślowski concurred with this idea; in a manifesto from 1981 (12 years before *Blue* was released) saying that 'today the truth about the world, which for me continues to be a basic precondition, is not enough. One has to search out more dramatic situations, postulates that reach beyond everyday experience, diagnoses that are wiser and more universal.'[27] Kuyper, too, would likely welcome Kieślowski's films as a needed expansion: in the *Lectures on Calvinism*, he says of art that it 'reveals ordinances of creation which neither science, nor politics, nor religious life, nor even revelation can bring to life'.[28]

The narratives of the *Three Colours* films help to flesh out a critique of the ideals of the French Revolution in a way that complements and expands upon the Kuyperian critique: that the abstract values of liberty, equality and brotherhood are not, alone, enough. The justice required to keep these together must be tempered by love – for the other, and for each other – in order to sustain a truly good society, one that can seek a deeper and fuller liberty, a more realistic equality and a robust brotherhood.

26. Kickasola, *The Films of Krzysztof Kieslowski: The Liminal Image*, p. 263. Emphasis added.
27. Ibid., p.17.
28. Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism*, p. 162.

Chapter 7

DUTCH ORTHODOX PROTESTANT PARTIES AND
THE GHOST OF THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

Ewout Klei

I Introduction

Some events have had a great impact on history, creating a collective memory like the Second World War, or more recently 9/11. The impact of these events not only serves to inspire many writers, but also plays an important role in the political debate even in the present day. The memory of the Second World War separates good from evil in the Western world: democracy, freedom of expression and toleration of ethnic minorities are right, while dictatorship, censorship and discrimination are wrong. The memory of 9/11 has a similar moral function. In the Western view of democracy, patriotism and women's rights are good, while terrorism, religious fundamentalism and a traditional patriarchal society are evil.

The aftermath of the French Revolution of 1789 created a collective memory in the nineteenth century heavily impacting the political debate. On the one hand, the ideals of the French Revolution – liberty, equality and fraternity – contributed greatly to the development of three political ideologies: liberalism (freedom), socialism (equality) and nationalism (fraternity). On the other hand, there were also political ideologies which opposed the French Revolution and its ideals. Conservatism, developed by political philosophers such as the Anglo-Irish politician Edmund Burke, the francophone writer Joseph de Maistre and the German ecclesiastical lawyer Friedrich Julius Stahl, promoted traditional and Christian values and institutions and defended the privileges of both the nobility and the State Church.

In the Netherlands the French Revolution was heavily criticized by Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer, a devout Christian historian and politician. Groen was influenced by Burke and Stahl and promoted his own orthodox Protestant version of conservatism. But Groen did not call himself a conservative, a counter-revolutionary or a reactionary. He rejected the entire available spectrum of political positions, promoting a 'radical alternative in politics, along anti-revolutionary,

Christian-historical lines'.[1] The real political antithesis was not the antithesis between conservatism and progressivism, but the antithesis between belief and unbelief.

According to French revolutionaries sovereignty resides in the people and not in God. For this reason Groen condemned the French Revolution as unbelief, as a rebellion against the authority of God. Other revolutions, for example the Belgian Revolution of 1830 and the Spring of Nations of 1848 were also condemned by Groen. In fact, all revolutions and all non-Christian ideologies were considered unbelief, and therefore should be condemned. To the contrary, however, the Dutch Revolt in the sixteenth century against Spain was approved by Groen, because this was a Calvinist rebellion against Catholic Spain and the Dutch rebels acknowledged God's sovereignty. Their rebellion was not motivated by revolutionary ideas but by Christian principles.

Groen is the godfather of the anti-revolutionary movement in the Netherlands. Not only the Anti-Revolutionary Party (1879–1980) of Abraham Kuyper (1837–1920) was part of this movement, but also the Christian-Historical Union (1908–80) of A. F. de Savornin Loman (1837–1924), and small orthodox Protestant parties like the SGP (*Staatkundig Gereformeerde Partij*, Political Reformed Party) (1918–), the GPV (*Gereformeerd Politiek Verbond*, Reformed Political Alliance) (1948–2000) and the RPF (*Reformatorische Politieke Federatie*, Reformed Political Federation) (1975–2000).

The ARP and CHU often participated in the Dutch government. The ARP represented approximately 10 per cent of the Dutch votes and the CHU 8 per cent. Before World War II, they had a dominant role in Dutch politics because the largest political party, the KVP (*Katholieke Volks Partij*, Catholic People's Party) preferred coalitions with these Protestant parties. Many Dutch people still considered the Netherlands to be a Protestant nation. After the war, however, the KVP for some time preferred coalitions with the PvdA (*Partij van de Arbeid*, Labour). In response to secularization and the loss of votes, the ARP, CHU and KVP decided to merge. In 1980 the Christian Democratic Appeal was founded, a Christian democratic party for Protestants and Catholics, but also for Muslims and other non-Christians. In its heyday the CDA represented 35 per cent of the votes.

The SGP, GPV and RPF together represented 5 per cent of the Dutch votes. These small Christian parties were testimonial parties and focused on their principles, rather than adapting them to local or temporal issues in the pursuit of coalition government participation. Theirs was a marginal role in Dutch politics. The SGP, GPV and RPF each believed itself to be the true heir of Groen's legacy. In 2000, the GPV and RPF merged into the *ChristenUnie* (ChristianUnion), representing 3 per cent of the Dutch votes. The ChristenUnie did not want to stay a testimonial party and, from 2007 to 2010, it participated in a centre-left

---

1. H. Van Dyke (ed. and trans.), *Groen van Prinsterer: Lectures on Unbelief and Revolution* (Jordan Station: Wedge Publishing Foundation, 1989), pp. 3–4.

government minority coalition. The SGP too aspired to more influence on the government and, from 2010 to 2012, gave passive support to a centre-right minority coalition.

This chapter will research the function of the ghost of the French Revolution and the legacy of Groen van Prinsterer in the political ideology of the orthodox Protestant parties: the SGP, GPV, RPF and ChristenUnie from 1945 to the present. Why was the French Revolution so important to the collective memory and identity of these parties, even after other big historical events, such as World War II and the 9/11 attacks?

II Fighting the ghost: Verbrugh's vision

One of neo-Calvinism's most peculiar political philosophers is A. J. Verbrugh. He was the ideologue of the GPV and represented the party in the Dutch Parliament from 1971 to 1981.[2] Verbrugh was steeped in the ideas of Groen, especially those concerning the ideal of the Christian State. Groen criticized the Dutch liberal constitution of 1848 because of its ungodly and revolutionary principles, but his criticism was theoretical and he did not develop a real alternative. Verbrugh did. In response to the secular constitutions of the Netherlands and of France, he advocated a Christian constitution based on God's Law.

The French constitution of 1791 originally stemmed from the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen* of 1789. This *Declaration* had a humanist spirit and advocated the political principles of the Enlightenment: authority is not God-given but comes from the people, humans have inalienable human rights, and society is made up of individuals with equal rights, instead of different groups with different privileges.

The French *Declaration* had a strong influence on Dutch civil rights. In 1796, one year after French armies invaded the Netherlands and the Batavian Republic was established, church and state were separated. Before 1796, only members of the Dutch Reformed Church were allowed to occupy public positions. The Batavian Republic's first National Assembly, however, had Catholic, Jewish and Protestant dissenter representatives. However, when Emperor Napoleon met his Waterloo at Waterloo and the House of Orange regained its power, the separation of church and state was undone. After 1848 Catholics, Jews, Protestant dissenters and new groups like atheists were fully emancipated, thanks to the new liberal constitution of Johan Rudolf Thorbecke.

Because of its influence on the Dutch Constitution, Verbrugh pays much attention to the French *Declaration* in his magnum opus *Universeel en antirevolutionair* (Universal and Anti-revolutionary). The French revolutionaries borrowed the familiar iconography of the Ten Commandments and wrote their Declaration on

---

2. A. J. Verbrugh, *Jong zijn en oud worden: (scheppende leiding in een periode vanaf ca. 1920)* (Amsterdam: Buijten & Schipperheijn, 2002).

two tablets of stone. This could be considered as a rebellion against God. For Christians the Ten Commandments are the Law of God, written by God himself. The *Declaration* on the other hand is the Law of Man, written by the representatives of the People.[3]

According to Verbrugh, a good constitution is based on the Law of God. Verbrugh therefore advocates a Christian constitution with an explicit reference to God. A Christian constitution protects the Christian State against the (possibly unchristian) will of the majority, in order to preserve the Christian identity of the nation.

For extra protection, Verbrugh promotes the establishment of a Supreme Court with authority to overrule democratic lawmaking by Parliament. The Supreme Court will be presided over by the king, thereby increasing royal political powers.[4] The vision of Verbrugh is a departure from the separation of powers, defended by the French philosopher Montesquieu. The power of the legislature is thus strongly limited.

It is possible that Verbrugh's ideas for constitutional reforms were inspired by F. C. Gerretson, an ultra-rightwing member of the CHU who flirted with fascism in the Interwar Period. In 1934 Gerretson wrote a controversial booklet called *Koninklijk kabinet of dictatuur?* (Royal Cabinet or Dictatorship?). In this pamphlet Gerretson advocated an authoritarian government, headed by the Dutch monarch, and wanted to limit the power of parliament.[5] After the war Verbrugh advocated the same ideas and he called Gerretson a 'great Dutchman' because of his staunch opposition to the decolonization of the Dutch East Indies and European integration.[6]

In *Universeel en antirevolutionair*, Verbrugh makes perfectly clear that he is not in favour of a democratic government. He links democracy with popular sovereignty, which was fiercely condemned by Groen van Prinsterer. Verbrugh cites approvingly a statement by Groen (who, in turn, cited the Swiss Protestant Alexandre Vinet) concerning the impossibility of a Christian democracy, because 'in such a combination of words the noun devours the adjective'.[7] According to Verbrugh, the Dutch political system is not a democracy but a constitutional monarchy with a parliament, universal suffrage and important fundamental rights such as the freedom of religion. Despite the fact that Verbrugh opposes democracy, he does not advocate the idea of theocracy. Verbrugh advocates

---

3. A. J. Verbrugh, *Universeel en antirevolutionair. Toelichting bij de richtlijnen voor de nationaal-gereformeerde, dat is universeel-christelijke en antirevolutionaire politiek* (Groningen: Vuurbaak, 1980), pp. 36–40.

4. Verbrugh, *Universeel en antirevolutionair*, pp. 67–82.

5. F. C. Gerretson, *Koninklijk kabinet of dictatuur? Open schrijven aan dr. H. Colijn nopens een actueel vraagstuk van staatkunde en staatsrecht* ('s-Gravenhage: Van Stockum, 1934).

6. A. J. Verbrugh, 'Prof. dr. F. C. Gerretson (1884–1958)', *Ons Politeuma*, December 1958.

7. Verbrugh, *Universeel en antirevolutionair*, p. 74. See also, G. Groen van Prinsterer, *Ongeloof en evolutie* (2nd edn. (1868), ed. H. Smitskamp; Franeker: Wever, 1952), p. 150.

freedom of religion and opposes discrimination and persecution of religious minorities and does not want to revoke the civil rights of Catholics, Jews or even atheists. Furthermore, he rejects the idea of a state church. The fact that the state should be a Christian state, does not mean that the state has to recognize one church as the true church.[8]

For the GPV, the ghost of the French Revolution was an important identity marker. In 1976, the party commemorated Groen van Prinsterer, who had died a century before. The GPV invited only the SGP to this celebration, not the ARP or CHU. According to Verbrugh, these two moderate Protestant parties had betrayed the anti-revolutionary legacy of Groen. 'The Christian democratic parties have lost their chance to be strong in the fundamental debate, because they have surrendered to the ideology of neutrality.'[9]

A year later, during the general elections campaign, the GPV attacked the CDA. In 1977 the ARP, CHU and KVP still existed as separate political parties, but for the first time they joined forces in the elections and presented a common CDA list. Party leader Dries van Agt (a Roman Catholic) said at the CDA congress that there were three ideological movements in the Netherlands: the liberals who were the party of freedom, the socialists who were the party of equality and the Christian democrats who were the party of brotherhood. The GPV fiercely condemned van Agt's statement. The Christian democrats now exposed themselves as a Revolutionary party. The GPV of Verbrugh on the other hand was, of course, loyal to the anti-revolutionary principles of Groen. In fact, the GPV was one of the few political parties to still resist the dangerous ideas of the French Revolution and uphold the belief that all authority was God-given.[10]

Verbrugh left Parliament in 1981; his successor Gert Schutte was not an intellectual but his colleague Eimert van Middelkoop, Member of Parliament from 1989 to 2002, was. Van Middelkoop considered himself to be Verbrugh's political pupil and defended his master's voice both in Parliament as well as in the *Groen van Prinsterer Stichting*, the political think tank of the GPV. According to van Middelkoop, the Netherlands were ruled by a democratic consensus. Of course, the liberals of the VVD (*Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie*, People's Party for Freedom and Democracy), the social-democrats of the PvdA, the social-liberals of D66 (*Democraten 66*, Democrats 66) and the Christian democrats of the CDA had different opinions about some political issues, for example, the economy and the welfare state. In principle, however, they shared the same democratic ideology; they were all heirs of the French Revolution. These democratic parties all supported the ideas of equality, the right of self-determination and popular sovereignty. Only the GPV, SGP and RPF, the heirs of Groen van Prinsterer, resisted the democratic doctrine and remained loyal to their own beliefs. For this reason the small Christian parties were alienated by a democratic and secular

8. Verbrugh, *Universeel en antirevolutionair* 47, pp. 117–34.
9. Verbrugh, 'Niet kleingelovig zijn', *Ons Burgerschap*, 5 June 1976.
10. 'Tweestromenland', advertentie GPV voor Statenverkiezingen, *Trouw*, 22 March 1978.

majority who did not anticipate the conscientious contributions to the political debate they would make.[11]

It is worth mentioning that van Middelkoop was more cautious than his mentor. He did not attack democracy as such, only the democratic consensus. Where Verbrugh uses Groen's anti-democratic analysis to formulate an alternative political system, van Middelkoop uses the analysis of both Groen and Verbrugh to portray the small Christian parties as endangered parties, marginalized by the majority. He hereby contributed strongly to the orthodox Protestant self-image as a tiny group of faithful Christians in a secular society, threatened by a hostile majority whose secret goal is to expel them, an image the GPV shared with the SGP and RPF. Verbrugh himself did not use this image because he was an optimist who thought that his ideal of a Christian state was within reach. In response to the secularization of Dutch society the GPV became more pessimistic. Especially during the two Purple Coalitions (1994–2002), when Christian parties for the first time since 1918 were excluded from government and euthanasia and same-sex marriages were legalized, the GPV feared that the ghost of the French Revolution had definitely won.

The anti-democratic and anti-theocratic vision of Verbrugh makes his political philosophy unique. His political pupil, van Middelkoop, used his political philosophy in a different context and portrayed the small Christian parties as marginal parties, endangered by a democratic and secular majority. The SGP and RPF also considered themselves as heirs of Groen. The way they approach the French Revolution is quite similar, though not identical.

III Fighting the ghost: Spiritual warfare

Verbrugh approached the French Revolution in a very elementary way: its constitutional legacy must be stopped and therefore the state must introduce a Christian constitution. This approach can perhaps be explained by the rational Calvinist culture of the Reformed Churches (Liberated) in the Netherlands. All members of the GPV were members of this church, the theology of which is strictly orthodox as well as rational. Liberal theology, of course, is fiercely condemned by Liberated Reformed theologians, but humans are rational beings and are able to understand the Word of God.

In contrast to the culture of the GPV and the Liberated Reformed pillar, the political cultures of the SGP and the RPF were less political, less rational and more spiritual. Nevertheless they shared a similar self-image with the GPV, that of a group of true Christians who were marginalized or even persecuted by a hostile secular majority. The SGP, established in 1918, was first led by strongly Calvinist

---

11. E. van Middelkoop, 'Secularisatie, staat en politiek', in E. M. H. Hirsch Ballin, C. J. Klop and E. van Middelkoop (eds.), *Christelijke politiek in een geseculariseerd Nederland* (Barneveld: De Vuurbak, 1991), pp. 28–43.

theologians. In its early years the ultra-orthodox party warned against modernity, rejected the authority of both parliament and democracy and, in its opinion, the Roman Catholic Church was the Antichrist. The party was in fact far more radical than the godfather of the anti-revolutionary movement Groen van Prinsterer himself, who accepted parliament and tolerated (to a certain degree) the Roman Catholics. Reverend G. H. Kersten, the first party leader of the SGP, however, often cites anti-Catholic phrases from the works of Groen. His main purpose was to show the ARP and the CHU that they had betrayed Groen's legacy because they formed a government coalition with the Catholics. Under the leadership of Kersten the SGP was a true testimonial party. Kersten was a dishonoured prophet. In parliament nobody really listened to his warnings or took him seriously.[12] After World War II the SGP became less counter-revolutionary and more anti-revolutionary. The party resisted the consequences of the cultural revolution of the 1960s, especially feminism and gay rights. In their opinion, the Cultural Revolution of the 1960s was a fruit of the French Revolution of 1789, driven by the same unbelief.[13]

In 1989, remembering the 200th anniversary of the French Revolution, party leader Bas van der Vlies criticized the legacy of the French Revolution and condemned it in abstract, spiritual language. The French Revolution was the antipode of the Reformation of the sixteenth century. The Revolution was rebellion against God; the Reformation was submission to God. The French Revolution was human pride, 'a new Tower of Babel'. According to Van der Vlies, '1789 was the year when the political *emancipation* of unbelief started.'[14] In addition to this, Van der Vlies criticized the Christian Democratic Party, the CDA, because this moderate Christian party was reconciling itself to the revolution and not resisting revolutionary tendencies. The noun *democracy* indeed 'devours' the adjective *Christian*.

The SGP was in favour of Calvinist theocracy; however the party realized that its political ideal was very difficult to achieve. Therefore, the party adopted a defensive strategy.[15] The main purpose of the SGP was to uphold the rights and privileges of ultra-orthodox Protestant Christians as a separate group, the ultra-orthodox Reformed Pillar. Ultra-orthodox Protestant parents must have the right not to vaccinate their children and to send their children to ultra-orthodox Protestant elementary and secondary schools. Furthermore, in municipalities

12. E. H. Klei, '*Klein maar krachtig, dat maakt ons uniek'. Een geschiedenis van het Gereformeerd Politiek Verbond, 1948–2003* (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Bert Bakker, 2011), pp. 24–5; P. Bootsma and C. Hoeting, *Over lijken. Ontoelaatbaar taalgebruik in de Tweede Kamer* (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Boom, 2006), pp. 66–70.

13. A. A. van der Schans, *De Franse revolutie.* Uitgave van het Landelijk Verband van Staatkundig Gereformeerde Studieverenigingen. SGP jongeren (The Hague: Landelijk Verband van Staatkundig Gereformeerde Studieverenigingen/SGP Jongeren, 1989), pp. 50–4.

14. B. J. van der Vlies, 'Kort en bondig', *De Banier* 68 (16 June 1989). Italics added.

15. J. Zwemer, *In conflict met de moderne cultuur. De bevindelijk gereformeerden en de Nederlandse samenleving in het midden van de twintigste eeuw* (Kampen: De Groot Goudriaan, 1992).

where the SGP does have a majority, swimming pools and shops must be closed on Sundays. Finally, the SGP wants to have the right to exclude the election of women in parliament.

The SGP is threatened by progressive political parties such as the PvdA, D66 and *GroenLinks* (GreenLeft) and the feminist Clara Wichmann Fonds. They want to force the SGP to treat women and men equally, after all. The will of the secular majority in the Netherlands, which is quite intolerant towards the convictions, and especially the practices, of the SGP and the ultra-orthodox pillar it represents, is interpreted in an anti-revolutionary way. During the French Revolution the secular majority brought terror and persecuted Christians who upheld their convictions, the secular majority in the Netherlands is marginalizing these true Christians now and will, so the SGP foresees, expel them in the future.[16]

The RPF was even more spiritual in its criticism of the legacy of the French Revolution. The party called itself theocratic in spirit, but considered itself democratic in practice. In 1992 André Rouvoet of the *Marnix van Sint Aldegonde Stichting*, the party's think tank, formulated his vision in a quite different way than Verbrugh. Nevertheless his actual political vision was substantially the same. He also advocated a Christian state with freedom of religion for minorities.[17]

Members of the RPF were Reformed Protestants and evangelicals. The RPF had strong ties with evangelical organizations, like the EO (*Evangelische Omroep*, Evangelical Broadcasting Company), the EA (*Evangelische Alliantie*, Evangelical Alliance) and the EH (*Evangelische Hogeschool*, Evangelical College) in Amersfoort. Together with these organizations, the RPF formed its own pillar, the evangelical pillar.

The RPF and the evangelical pillar can both be compared with the Christian Right movement in the United States, where evangelical Christians fight a culture war against progressive values. The RPF saw itself not only as a political party in the strict sense, but as a broad social movement. Instead of a defensive strategy the party adopted an offensive, sometimes militant strategy. The struggle against the legacy of the French Revolution was a culture war, a war against feminism, gay rights and 'ungodly' science (especially the theory of evolution). Groen van Prinsterer's critique of the French Revolution was interpreted in an evangelical way.[18] The GPV and SGP were only fundamentalist in theology; the RPF was also fundamentalist in attitude.

Furthermore, like the other small orthodox Protestant parties, the RPF was very fearful of the majority rule, concerned that secular democracy would end in tyranny, as it did during the French Revolution. The democratic majority not

16. J. T. van den Berg, 'Kwestie SGP heeft diepere ideologie dimensie', *Reformatorisch Dagblad*, 10 August 2012.

17. A. Rouvoet, *Reformatorische taatsvisie. De RPF en het ambt van de overheid* (Nunspeet: Marnix van St. Aldegonde Stichting, 1992).

18. N. C. van Velzen (ed.), *Reformatie & revolutie: 200 jaar Franse evolutie* (Nunspeet: Marnix van St. Aldegonde Stichting, Wetenschappelijk Studiecentrum van de RPF, 1989).

only legislated laws that were considered to be unchristian (the Equal Treatment Act and the laws enabling abortion and euthanasia under certain conditions), but in the view of the RPF also threatened the rights of minorities (especially the rights of orthodox Protestant Christians). According to R. H. Matzken, a philosophy teacher at the Evangelische Hogeschool, Christians are discriminated against by the secular society if they do not submit themselves to the humanist discourse.[19]

During the Purple Cabinets many supporters of the RPF felt that Christians were being discriminated against, when party leader Leen van Dijke was given a fine of 300 guilders because of the offensive nature of remarks he made about homosexuals. In an interview in 1996, van Dijke said that he considered homosexual people who practise their orientation to be in the same category as swindlers. Van Dijke himself considered his case as a test case for the freedom of religion in the Netherland. 'Are Christians still allowed to repeat what the Bible has to say about this?'[20] In the year 2001 however, he was cleared by High Court. Because van Dijke's remarks were based on his religious conviction, he was allowed to make them.[21] The Netherlands was not a secular tyranny yet.

IV　The ghost after 9/11 and the Arab Spring

The Second World War had relatively little impact on the political ideology of orthodox Protestant Christians. Political groups that identified themselves as anti-fascist were (radical) left-wing. Political values which became very important after this war, democracy and non-discrimination, were contested as revolutionary values by the orthodox Protestant parties.

The political – theological impact of 9/11, however, was greater. The SGP became more and more critical of Islam and developed a hostile attitude towards it. On the other hand, the Roman Catholic Church was no longer seen as a threat. On the contrary, conservative Catholics like Mariska de Haas-Orbàn of the *Katholiek Nieuwsblad* (Catholic Newspaper) were welcomed as allies. The old Calvinist slogan 'Rather Turkish than Papist' was inverted and replaced with the slogan 'Rather Papist than Turkish'.[22]

The SGP proposed a ban on minarets, because these were symbols of Islamic imperialism and a threat to Dutch (Judeo-Christian) culture. As such, the Islamic

19. R. H. Matzken, 'Wel Groen, maar dan van Prinsterer!', *Nieuw Nederland. Officieel orgaan van de Reformatorische Politieke Federatie (RPF)* 15 (August 1989), p. 3.

20. 'Vorm centraal in affaire-Van Dijke', *Reformatorisch Dagblad*, 26 March 1998.

21. R. van Mulligen, 'Tussen evangelisch en reformatorisch. Het politiek getuigenis van de RPF (1975–2003)', in J. Hippe and G. Voerman (eds.), *Van de marge naar de macht. De ChristenUnie 2000–2010* (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Boom, 2010), pp. 31–50.

22. D. J. H. van Dijk, 'Laat SGP samenwerken met rooms-katholieken', *Reformatorisch Dagblad*, 10 October 2012.

minority of 800,000 people in the Netherlands would be allowed freedom of conscience, but denied freedom of religion. Because theocracy is nowadays associated with (fundamentalist) Islam, the SGP, for opportunistic and strategic reasons, does not use the word theocracy anymore. Party leader Kees van der Staaij has, from time to time, described the SGP as democratic, because his party has accepted democracy in practice (though not in principle).

The vision of the ChristenUnie is more moderate. The party nowadays officially defends democracy, but interprets democracy in an orthodox Protestant way and is still hostile towards the democratic principle of majority rule. According to the ideologues and representatives of the ChristenUnie, Muslim citizens in the Netherlands deserve the same civil and political rights as Christians. Nevertheless they considered (political) Islam as a dangerous threat to (their own limited interpretation of) democracy, but especially to Christians.

In 2011, former party ideologue senator Roel Kuiper, a political pupil of Verbrugh, wanted an absolute ban on Sharia legislation in the Dutch Constitution, a proposal which was hailed by the populist politician Geert Wilders of the far right PVV (*Partij van de Vrijheid*, Freedom Party). For Kuiper, the democratic rule of the constitutional state (which he implicitly defined as Christian) was more important than the democratic principle of majority rule. Like Verbrugh he wanted to protect the Christian heritage of the Netherlands by constitutional reforms. Kuiper was afraid of the (theoretical) possibility of Muslims gaining a majority in the Netherlands and passing legislation that threatens the Christian minority.[23]

Interestingly, party ideologue and current member of parliament Gert Jan Segers, the former director of the *Groen van Prinsterer Stichting*, the political think tank of the Christian Union, had compared Islam as a political ideology with secularism. In Islamic countries, the rise of Islamic fundamentalism after 9/11 and the Arab Spring threatened the civil rights of religious minorities, especially Christians, who are persecuted. In the Netherlands the rise of secularism threatened the freedom of religion. According to Segers, despite the fact that Christians are not (yet) persecuted, the Dutch situation may develop in the same direction.[24]

Kees van der Staaij, leader of the SGP, subscribed to Segers' critical analysis of the situation of Christians in the Middle East during the Arab Spring. He invoked the ghost of the French Revolution explicitly when he wrote about the situation in Egypt after the fall of Mubarak: 'In Egypt it is a time of transformation, a time

23. See: J. Langelaar, 'ChristenUnie-senator wil verbod op sharia in grondwet', *Elsevier*, 19 February 2011; A. Rouvoet and R. Kuiper, 'Anti-sharia-bepaling geeft duidelijkheid', *Trouw*, 26 February 2011; G. Wilders and M. de Graaf, 'Sharia verbieden is heel goed plan', *Trouw*, 26 February 2011.

24. A. Slob and G. J. Segers, 'Liberalen, verdedig vrijheid van godsdienst ook hier', *de Volkskrant*, 10 June 2011.

of hope and fear. In such a time it is very important to draw clear lines, because it may all develop in the wrong way. After the French Revolution at the end of the eighteenth century the guillotine came. After the Iranian Revolution of the twentieth century there came a dreadful dictatorship.'[25]

V Conclusion

It is very interesting to see that despite the fact that history moves on, the historical analysis of the political situation stays the same. On the one hand, Dutch orthodox Protestant parties were conservative and anti-revolutionary in their appreciation and condemnation of the French Revolution. The GPV, SGP, RPF and ChristenUnie have never criticized Groen's analysis and, as such, have maintained their vision.

On the other hand, the actualization of the French Revolution by the orthodox Protestant parties was flexible. They adapted their vision constantly. The French Revolution was relevant for Verbrugh's analysis of the Dutch Constitution, but it was relevant too for distinguishing themselves from the moderate Christian democratic parties and for their negative reaction to the cultural revolution of the 1960s. Not only liberalism and socialism, but also feminism, the theory of evolution and gay rights were revolutionary. Furthermore, even the Arab Spring of 2011 was interpreted by the small orthodox Protestant parties in an anti-revolutionary, Groenian way.

Two aspects of the French Revolution, in particular, were important for the Dutch orthodox Protestant parties. First was the fact that the French Revolution had a secular foundation – that is, it was rooted in unbelief. Second was the fact that the French Revolution resulted in tyranny and that majority rule is a dangerous threat for Christians. The first aspect has everything to do with the striving of Dutch orthodox Protestant parties to establish a Christian state, the dream of these parties to dominate the political theatre, despite the fact that this was, of course, impossible. The second aspect, however, has everything to do with the greatest fear of these parties, to be subjected to marginalization and repudiation by a hostile society, and perhaps a hostile government.

Senator Gerrit Holdijk of the SGP once approvingly cited a statement by the theologian A. A. van Ruler, who said that for Christians there were two political realities: theocracy or persecution of Christians.[26] Van Ruler denied the possibility that a Christian minority could participate in a secular society and a secular political system. Both the ChristenUnie and the SGP now call themselves democratic. It is, however, still difficult for them to accept democracy, because their minority

25. K. van der Staaij, 'Versterk de rechtstaat in Egypte', *Novini*, 1 March 2012. See http://www.novini.nl/versterk-de-rechtstaat-in-egypte/ (accessed 6 May 2013).

26. B. de Rooy and W. Dekker, 'Interview met senator Holdijk', *Wapenveld* 51, 5 (October 2001), pp. 37–40.

opinions often conflict with mainstream opinions in the Netherlands, which are liberal and secular.[27]

Finally, despite the fact that orthodox Protestant parties say they want to protect the rights of (Christian) minorities, they are often intolerant towards the so-called double minorities, people who happen to be a minority of a minority. In the SGP, women do not fit the mould and, for the ChristenUnie, the admission of homosexuals is a highly controversial issue. The SGP denies women the freedom to be elected in parliament and therefore to have equal rights; the ChristenUnie similarly denies freedom and equal rights to homosexuals. The inner-party politics of both parties are therefore very anti-revolutionary, because their too-orthodox Protestants fight the ghosts of French Revolution.

27. Cf. George Harinck and Hugo Scherff, 'Oude wijn in nieuwe zakken. Over de continuïteit in politieke visie en standpunten tussen GPV en RPF en ChristenUnie', in Joop Hippe and Gerrit Voerman (eds.), *Van de marge naar de macht. De ChristenUnie 2000–2010* (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Boom, 2010), pp. 133–56.

Chapter 8

KUYPER'S ANTI-REVOLUTIONARY
DOCTRINE OF SCRIPTURE

Hans Burger

I Introduction

Theologians critical of modernity also often tend to be critical of foundationalism. According to foundationalism, propositions with the status of 'knowledge' are (i) self-evident to reason and can function as a foundation of our knowledge, or are (ii) justified by a foundational proposition. Rational knowledge must be based on a solid and firm foundation.[1] In this respect, the evocative metaphor of a house with a solid foundation is vivid and influential. Central to foundationalism is the epistemological quest for absolute certainty. The reverse side of this quest for certainty is the so-called 'Cartesian anxiety' that sees only two alternatives: we find an objective and solid foundation for our knowledge or the danger of relativism and subjectivism looms.[2]

---

1. G. van den Brink, *Almighty God. A Study of the Doctrine of the Omnipotence of God* (Studies in Philosophical Theology 7; Kampen: Kok Pharos Publishing House, 1993), pp. 11–13; C. E. Gunton, *The One, the Three and the Many. God, Creation and the Culture of Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 132; J. Hoogland, 'Orthodoxie, moderniteit en postmoderniteit', in G. van den Brink et al. (eds.), *Filosofie en theologie. Een gesprek tussen christen-filosofen en theologen* (Amsterdam: Buijten en Schipperheijn, 1997), pp. 135–6; M. Sarot, 'Christian Fundamentalism as a Reaction to the Enlightenment', in B. Becking (ed.), *Orthodoxy, Liberalism, and Adaptation: Essays on Ways of Worldmaking in Times of Change from Biblical, Historical and Systematic Perspectives* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), pp. 259–61; B. van den Toren, *Breuk en brug. In gesprek met Karl Barth over postmoderne theologie en geloofsverantwoording* (Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, 1995), pp. 56–9; N. Wolterstorff, *Reason within the Bounds of Religion* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2nd edn, 1999), pp. 28–30.

2. The term 'Cartesian anxiety' comes from R. J. Bernstein, *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism: Science, Hermeneutics, and Praxis* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983).

When theology followed the strategy of foundationalism in Modernity, it had the choice of taking the Scriptures, religious experience or an infallible pope as its epistemological foundation.[3] Nowadays, however, alternatives are developed due to criticism of foundationalism. This might lead to a change of position for the doctrine of Scripture in Reformed systematic theology. The doctrine of Scripture, for example, is made part of the doctrine of the means of grace or of the doctrine of the church.[4]

However, according to Abraham Kuyper's rectorial address *The Biblical Criticism of the Present Day*, doing so would be a symptom of 'the revolution in theology'.[5] He writes:

3. Nancey Murphy shows both possibilities: conservative foundationalism that took the Scriptures as foundation, or liberal foundationalism focusing on religious experience. See N. Murphy, *Beyond Liberalism & Fundamentalism. How Modern and Postmodern Theology set the Theological Agenda* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1996), pp. 4–28. Sarot interprets both the defence of the inerrancy of Scripture and the proclamation of the infallibility of the pope in 1870 as consequences of a foundationalist strategy, see M. Sarot, 'Christian Fundamentalism as a Reaction to the Enlightenment'. See further on conservative foundationalism, Van den Brink, *Almighty God*, pp. 13–14; J. Hoogland, 'Orthodoxie, moderniteit en postmoderniteit', pp. 135–6; E. van Staalduine-Sulman, 'The Evangelical Movement and the Enlightment', in C. van der Kooi et al. (eds.), *Evangelical Theology in Transition* (Amsterdam: VU University Press, 2012), pp. 54–5; N. Wolterstorff, *Reason within the Bounds of Religion*, pp. 58–62. On the development of the views on Scripture from Calvin to Warfield and Bavinck, see H. van den Belt, *The Authority of Scripture in Reformed Theology: Truth and Trust* (Leiden: Brill, 2008); on neo-Calvinist views of Scripture, see K. van Bekkum, 'Zekerheid en schriftgezag in Neo-Calvinistische visies op de historiciteit van de Bijbel', in K. van Bekkum and R. Rouw (eds.), *Geloven in zekerheid? Gereformeerd geloven in een postmoderne tijd* (Barneveld: De Vuurbaak, 2000), pp. 77–108.

4. See, for example, A. van de Beek, *Lichaam en Geest van Christus. De theologie van de kerk en de Heilige Geest* (Zoetermeer: Meinema, 2012), pp. 275–338; G. van den Brink and C. van der Kooi, *Christelijke dogmatiek. Een inleiding* (Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, 2012), pp. 483–516; B. Kamphuis, 'Systematische Theologie', in A. L. Th. de Bruijne (ed.), *Gereformeerde theologie vandaag: oriëntatie en verantwoording* (TU-Bezinningsreeks nr. 4; Barneveld: De Vuurbaak, 2004), p. 66.

5. A. Kuyper, *The Biblical Criticism of the Present Day*, trans. J. H. de Vries, http://ia600307.us.archive.org/13/items/biblicalcriticis00kuyp/biblicalcriticis00kuyp.pdf (accessed 10 April 2012), p. 415. On the historical background of this rectoral address, see C. Augustijn, 'Kuypers rede over "De hedendaagsche schriftcritiek" in haar historische context', in C. Augustijn and J. Vree (eds.), *Abraham Kuyper: vast en veranderlijk* (Zoetermeer: Meinema, 1998), pp. 109–48. On its theological importance, see H. Berkhof, 'Neocalvinistische theologie van Kuyper tot Kuitert', in K. U. Gäbler et al. (eds.), *Geloof dat te denken geeft. Optellen aangeboden aan prof. Dr. H.M. Kuitert* (Baarn: Ten Have, 1989), pp. 32–4; Van Bekkum, 'Zekerheid en schriftgezag', pp. 94–6; J. Veenhof, 'Honderd jaar theologie aan de Vrije Universiteit', in M. van Os and W. J. Wieringa (eds.), *Wetenschap en rekenschap 1880–1980.*

Encyclopedically this was most sharply declared in the claim that the *locus de S. Scriptura* should be removed from the gable of dogmatics, and be given a place in the transept of the *media gratiae*.[6]

This revolution is the theological expression of what the French Revolution represented in politics and society. In Kuyper's view, a 'philosophical revolution-principle'[7] was at work in theology, and especially in the doctrine of Scripture and in biblical criticism.

In this chapter I will investigate this rectorial address in an effort to answer to the following questions: What did Kuyper mean by this 'philosophical revolution-principle'? What did Kuyper propose as an alternative? In which sense was this alternative anti-revolutionary and anti-modern, and in which sense was it modern itself? Was it foundationalist? What does this imply for the location of the doctrine of Scripture in systematic theology?

II Revolution in theology

Most characteristic of Kuyper's view of the spirit of revolution is that it 'has transposed the entire human consciousness in every department of life'.[8] For theology, this implies that God's Word spoken from 'God's own self-consciousness'[9] is no longer the source of knowledge of God, but the human consciousness of God. Conscious knowledge of God springs 'from the unconscious mystery of the soul',[10] by 'impressions on the conscience, or impulses of feeling', or 'by the inoculation of a lymph of life'.[11]

This transposition has consequences for one's view of the Bible and of inspiration. '[T]he Holy Scripture as a book of divine authority'[12] is abolished and a difference no longer exists between inspiration and illumination. Kuyper refers to the German theologian Richard Rothe (1799–1867). According to

---

Een eeuw wetenschapsbeoefening aan de Vrije Universiteit (Kampen: Kok, 1980), pp. 50–1. More generally on Kuyper's doctrine of Scripture, see D. van Keulen, 'The Internal Tension in Kuyper's Doctrine of Organic Inspiration of Scripture', in C. van der Kooi and Jan de Bruin (eds.), *Kuyper Reconsidered. Aspects of his Life and Work* (Amsterdam: VU Uitgeverij, 1999), pp. 123–30; D. van Keulen, *Bijbel en dogmatiek. Schriftbeschouwing en schriftgebruik in het dogmatisch werk van A. Kuyper, H. Bavinck en G.C. Berkouwer* (Kampen: Kok, 2003), pp. 20–67.

  6. Kuyper, *Biblical criticism*, p. 415.
  7. Ibid., p. 417.
  8. Ibid., p. 415.
  9. Ibid., p. 416.
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid., p. 417.
12. Ibid., p. 433.

Rothe, the Holy Spirit may elevate sinful human life as he did with the writers of the Bible, 'which made their consciousness of God more clear, and from this brightened consciousness of God they were able to produce rich and new thoughts'.[13] But Rothe,

> held that there can be no mention of an infallibility of Scripture; that most of the writers, but never the Scripture itself, can be called inspired; that inspiration differs greatly in degree among the writers severally; and that therefore the explanation given by the apostles of the Scripture of the Old Covenant often seems to him incorrect; that their representation of Christian truth cannot be taken to be normative for us per se; and that, which is especially noteworthy, even the image, the picture, given us of the Christ is not of itself possessed of a guarantee of being a faithful reproduction.[14]

As a result of this view of knowledge of God,

> you have no right to value your perceptions as being essentially higher than ours: they do not differ specifically, but at most only in degree of development; in the religious life also there is a Darwinistic process. And thus the wall of separation between the holy and the profane fell away; the chasm between the sacred and the common was filled in; idolatries were not taken as the religions of the nations; and, together with the sacred writings of other people, the sacred books of Israel were tested by the touchstone of all profane literature.[15]

Theology is changed into the 'science of religion' without any clear, absolute, normative knowledge of God. To summarize, the revolution in theology is a shift from God's consciousness to the human religious consciousness, from the Word of God as *principium theologiae* to human religiosity as the source of knowledge of God, from a view of the Word of God as inspired by the Holy Spirit to the result of religious impressions of pious men, and from theology to religious studies.

Kuyper pictures the consequences of this shift in dramatic language. He compares the detailed historical critical analysis of the Bible to 'microscopical analysis' without 'holy synthesis',[16] or to 'vivisection', forbidden when the human body is concerned but allowed as biblical criticism.[17] He formulates his speech as one large complaint against the modern and ethical theologians of his age; according to Kuyper, 'to be ethical of tendency and clear seem never capable of

13. Ibid., p. 437.
14. Ibid.
15. Ibid., pp. 418–19.
16. Ibid., p. 414.
17. Most explicitly, ibid., pp. 666–7; and further pp. 413, 420, 677, 685, 686.

going hand in hand'.[18] They leave the church with a theology that is no longer theology. How can young men who have studied this theology start working as ministers in the church? Kuyper writes:

> You offer her a science which has no connection with her confession, and you send her pastors who, however learned and reverend, if in other ways they are serious, must confess shamefacedly their ignorance of the things of the Spirit, and, instead of feeding the church, must needs be fed and warmed by her. And so it is no wonder, that diseases in the church are on the increase hand over hand, that sects are multiplying, that practice does not follow the teaching, and that 'shepherd and flock,' distrustful of each other, stand mutually opposed, instead of unitedly enjoying the glory of Jesus' name. Even society at large, yes the country, suffers by it. For a spiritual circle which finds its image in a marsh, instead of in a clear lake, throws out of necessity poisonous vapors, which spoil the national spirit. By robbing the church of her theology, she is robbed also of that wonderful power of thought which made us Calvinists for ages together an invincible stronghold in the midst of the land; and, by presenting wandering ethical ideas in the stead of the nourishing bread of practical theology, discipline and order are undermined, and the moral sense of justice is weakened.[19]

Even nationalist feelings are mobilized to support his argument. Calvinists made Holland a free nation; this revolutionary spirit however demolishes the free and strong spirit of Dutch Calvinism. 'As a free-born son of a nation which purchased its liberty from Spain',[20] Kuyper argues, he has to protest against this vivisection of Scripture.

III *Kuyper's alternative*

In another passage we start to discover what Kuyper is seeking. He wants to allow a strong Christian life, one born out of a deep conviction, to flourish. He writes:

> For to obtain real peace, an unshakable faith, and a full development of powers, our soul must, in the depth of depths and forsaken of all men, depend on God Almighty alone. To draw one's being immediately from God's own hand, consciously and continuously, this renders one invincible, enables one to become heroic, and makes us surpass ourselves. This was the secret of the

18. Ibid., p. 434.

19. Ibid., pp. 420–1.

20. Ibid., p. 686. Veenhof mentions that, according to Kuyper, the decline of theology in the Netherlands was caused by foreign (German) influences. See Veenhof, 'Honderd jaar theologie aan de Vrije Universiteit', p. 46.

power by which Calvinism once astonished the world. That forms character, steels the will with energy, and sets man, the citizen, the confessor of Jesus, truly free.[21]

Here we discover two central motives of Kuyper's own position: dependence on God alone[22] and an unshakable faith.[23] The first motive of dependence on God alone has a clear anti-modern direction, against the modern perceived disappearance of God's activity in the world.[24] Kuyper's prayer at the beginning of his address exemplifies this motive:

> And may He, before whose glory I reverently bow and for the welfare of whose church I plead, be in this the inspirer of my word and the judge of my thoughts; while in this sacred task, also, our help is in the name of the Lord Jehovah, the Rock of our strength, and the Strength of our life.[25]

Kuyper not only presents himself as a strong Dutch Calvinist, but also as a pious simple 'day-labourer' who is addressed personally by 'the Lord my God' when he reads the Bible.[26] He is one 'with the simple-minded people of God confessing my ignorance'[27] while feeling 'the "zeal of God" come over me'.[28]

The dependence upon God and especially upon God's Spirit returns again and again. It comprises the entire movement from God's conscious self-knowledge (*theologia archetypa*) via revelation, inspiration, regeneration and illumination to human conscious knowledge of God (*theologia ectypa*) gained from the reading and interpretation of Scripture. Kuyper writes:

> In anthropology, man is the centrum, and the Almighty is considered only as the interpretation of the religious sense; but in theology God himself is the centrum, and no mention of man is justified, except in so far as God uses him for his own sake.

21. Ibid., p. 678. Here we see the experience of faith function as one of Kuyper's starting points, although Augustijn denies this is the case. See Augustijn, 'Kuypers rede', p. 119. The same is the case when Kuyper starts his second part and tells how he reads the Bible together with the other members of the congregations. See Kuyper, *Biblical criticism*, pp. 422–5.

22. Cf. W. van der Schee, 'Kuyper's Archimedes' Point', in *Kuyper Reconsidered*, pp. 102–10.

23. Van Keulen, 'The Internal Tension', pp. 129–30; Van Keulen, *Bijbel en dogmatiek*, pp. 31–3, 43–4, 61–2.

24. Cf. Kuyper, *Biblical Criticism*, p. 673: 'The "wisdom of the world" constantly seeks to reduce the immediate work of God in history to ever smaller dimensions, and cannot rest until the factor "God" has entirely disappeared from the same.'

25. Kuyper, *Biblical Criticism*, p. 410.

26. Ibid., p. 422.

27. Ibid., p. 676.

28. Ibid., p. 677.

Again, in all other sciences man observes and thoughtfully investigates the object, and subjects it to himself, but in theology the object itself is active; it does not stand open, but gives itself to be seen; does not allow itself to be investigated, but reveals itself; and employs thinking man as instrument only to cause the knowledge of his Being to radiate . . .

And, finally, theology is not born, like other sciences, from the motive of need or from the impulse after knowledge, but from the impulsion of the Holy Spirit. In giving us a theology, God has a purpose to fulfil. He wills that the knowledge of his Being shall be received by us; and that, having been cast into the furrows of our minds and hearts, it shall germinate; and, having germinated, that it shall bear fruit to the honor of his name.[29]

The Bible as a book is not as such especially valuable. Only in relation to God, when the Holy Spirit casts his light of illumination on it, does Scripture become precious. Kuyper compares this to the beauty of a diamond being seen only if light shines on it. Furthermore, although he writes that the image is profane, he nevertheless uses the image of a telephone, suggesting that through the book God is speaking as someone speaks from a distance through the telephone.[30] In opposition to the active knowing subject of modernity, Kuyper places God, who makes himself known to human beings.[31] This knowledge of God is the central element in Kuyper's view of an unshakable faith, his second motive. In his emphasis on absolute, determinate knowledge, Kuyper follows modernity's foundationalist quest by focusing on epistemological questions.

Foundationalism approaches scientific knowledge by using the model of a building, built on a solid foundation of absolute propositions. This influence is not so much evidenced by his use of foundational imagery: only twice does Kuyper refer to theology as a building.[32] Significant however is the foundational twist Kuyper gives to the image of a rock in a passionate passage dealing with human anxiety and the thirst for certainty. Whereas in the Bible God himself is referred to as a rock, Kuyper uses the image of a rock to refer to the Scriptures.

Thus a conflict is waged as of giant-forces in his breast, and that oppresses him; he sees no way of escape; he faints beneath its tension, except He who is compassionate takes compassion on him, and sets him up upon the Rock

---

29. Ibid., p. 411; cf. p. 669.

30. Ibid., p. 424. In 1894 Kuyper used the telephone metaphor again but in that instance without mentioning its profanity. See A. Kuyper, *Encyclopedia of Sacred Theology; Its Principles* (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1898), http://archive.org/stream/cu31924029192115#page/n7/mode/2up (accessed 10 April 2012), p. 364.

31. Cf. Veenhof, 'Honderd jaar theologie aan de Vrije Universiteit', pp. 49–50.

32. Kuyper, *Biblical criticism*, pp. 411, 669. In his *Encyclopedia*, Kuyper does use this foundational imagery, see Kuyper, *Encyclopedia*, pp. 155–6, 161, 164.

of the Word. Only when he stands on that Word, does the oil of gladness drip in his soul instead of mourning, and the garments of praise begin to shine forth in place of the spirit of heaviness, and the man breaks forth in singing the praises of Him who has set him free from bonds; also from those oppressing bonds of dependency upon man, who at best is but a creature of dust.[33]

Moreover, the core of his address is his defence of the Scriptures as a firm foundation for the absolute knowledge of God. Kuyper makes a comparison between the Scriptures and God's work of creation:

> It is a mystery of love and comfort which can be explained only when each and every writer, whose inestimable grace and honor it was to record a larger or smaller part of that Scripture, was not his own master in the writing, but only rendered service as an instrument of the Holy Ghost, and was so wrought upon and directed by the Holy Ghost, that the page of Scripture, which, after pencil and pen had been laid aside, lay before him, contained and was possessed of equal fixedness, as though it had originated by an immediate, divine creation.[34]

Kuyper does not claim the inerrancy of Scripture. Nevertheless, he writes 'it would be presumptuous and disrespectful' to exclude that the autographs were infallible. It is possible that the autographs were written without error, but we cannot exclude that they were faultless.[35]

Further, the rhetorical structure of his argument evidences that absolute knowledge is at the heart of his address. In the first encyclopaedic part, Kuyper safeguards that theological knowledge is built on determinate communication of truth from God's self-consciousness by God himself in a form appropriate to our consciousness. The second step of Kuyper's argument consists of an exposition of his doctrine of the inspiration of Scripture. Kuyper's aim is to defend that God spoke 'with indeclinable certainty in the highest form, namely, in that of the Conscious Word'.[36] After the explanation of inspiration, Kuyper concludes:

> Hence the result is, that, apart from the question whether the writers realize it or not, by them as instruments a book or song or epistle was written, which in its original form, i.e., as *autographon*, bare in itself the infallible authority of having been wrought by the Holy Ghost.

---

33. Ibid., p. 678.
34. Ibid., pp. 426–7; cf. p. 425. More generally on Kuyper's doctrine of inspiration, see van Keulen, *Bijbel en dogmatiek*, pp. 28–36.
35. Ibid., p. 671.
36. Ibid., p. 425.

According to Kuyper, the central issue is whether 'the fact of inspiration remains untouched and its result immovable'. Again we see the centrality of the motive of certain knowledge. He writes:

> The divine fixedness over against the uncertainty of all human ponderings is chiefly that which makes the Holy Scripture 'holy,' i.e. a bible for the church of God.[37]

The important question in studying the Scripture is,

> only and exclusively whether it leaves us in the possession of such an inspiration of the Scripture, whose result offers us for its entire content the unweakened guarantee of divine certainty.[38]

Kuyper continues with a critical discussion of modern and ethical theology. Here again his focus is on the defence of Scripture as a foundation. He states very clearly a diametrical antithesis between the spirit of the world and the philosophy of our age on the one hand and the Spirit of God on the other hand. The spirit of this world bends 'its energies toward the breaking down of the authority of the Scripture'.[39] He concludes his discussion with a diagnosis of the spiritual impulse of his age 'to transpose in every way the "*Deushomo*" into the "*Homo-deus*,"' a 'humanizing of the Scriptures'.[40]

He then finishes his treatment of inspiration with a short discussion of several problems that might threaten this divine certainty. The introduction of this discussion is significant:

> That, after the subtraction of all this, there still remain serious objections at several points to the absoluteness of the inspiration of the Scripture, we neither deny nor hide, even though one readily sees to what small dimensions this mountain of insurmountable obstacles has already fallen away.[41]

Then follows the third part, which starts with the most passionate defence of our human need of absolute certainty. 'A troubled soul, tossed with tempest and not comforted, is filled with anxiety, and thirsts after certainty.'[42] But immediately from God's hand we receive the life that 'renders one invincible, enables one to become heroic, and makes us surpass ourselves'.[43]

---

37. Ibid., p. 433.
38. Ibid., p. 433.
39. Ibid., p. 668.
40. Ibid., pp. 674–5.
41. Ibid., p. 675.
42. Ibid., pp. 677–8.
43. Ibid., p. 678.

Once again, Kuyper discusses the problems that threaten this absolute certainty: the number of books in the canon, the errors in the received text of Scripture, the fact that we usually need a translation, and the problem of interpretation. These four problems constitute a serious threat to the foundationalist model. They question the absoluteness of the foundation, the possibility of knowing this foundation, and our capacity to draw absolute and certain conclusions from this foundation. Kuyper solves this serious difficulty for his foundationalism by transcending its horizon. Within the horizon of foundationalism, we only find *fides humana*, no 'absolute faith'.[44] However, God gives a more than satisfying treatment of these problems. It is the immediate divine witness of the *testimonium spiritus sancti* that guarantees absolute assurance:

> a witness of the Holy Spirit which is born, as Calvin puts it, when that same God the Holy Spirit who spoke centuries ago through the mouth of the apostles and prophets enters into my heart, and by a supranatural witness imparts to me the indisputable assurance: I, God-myself, have inspired this Scripture, this divine Word.[45]

It is the Holy Spirit who provides the necessary assurance.

The result of this transcending move is an unsatisfying theoretical discussion of the four mentioned problems. Kuyper leaves two questions unanswered: first, are the Scriptures really a solid foundation? And second, does the foundationalist model really work in theology, or is the model itself inadequate? Instead, the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit functions on the theoretical level as a reflection stopper. Further, one might ask whether we feel the Cartesian anxiety in Kuyper's dealing with these problems: is his strategy a symptom of fear? Although it is difficult to answer this psychological question, it is significant that Kuyper himself pictures the absolute certainty in question as an answer to human anxiety.[46]

In Kuyper's treatment of these problems we see a combination of the two motives: dependence on God alone for absolute, determinate, certain knowledge. The two motives are intertwined in a pneumatologically embedded foundationalism.

---

44. Ibid., p. 682.

45. Ibid., p. 683.

46. Ibid., p. 678. According to Augustijn, Kuyper was afraid of these problems. J. Kamphuis denies this is the case, but does not confront himself with the unsatisfying theoretical treatment of the problems that pose serious problems to a foundationalist model. Van Bekkum also states that Kuyper was not afraid of modern biblical studies and questions the relevance of such a psychological interpretation. Nevertheless, Van Bekkum also leaves open the possibility that fear played a role and signals the theoretical weaknesses in Kuyper's model. See Augustijn, 'Kuypers rede', pp. 120, 142; J. Kamphuis, *Signalen uit de kerkgeschiedenis. Over de toekomst en de canon* (Groningen: De Vuurbaak, 1975), p. 183; Van Bekkum, 'Zekerheid en schriftgezag', pp. 94, 97, 100, 103, 107–8.

Together, the graphical inspiration of the Scriptures and the internal testimony of the Spirit safeguard absolute certainty.[47] In fact, it is clear from the beginning of his address that this is Kuyper's position, when he says:

> Hence the confession of God, the Holy Spirit, speaks of him also as, Ὁ θεόλογος *Ecclesiae Doctor*; 'the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God,' 'for the Spirit searcheth all things. Yea, the deep things of God' (1 Cor. ii. 10); and all real theology is essentially one beautiful building which, in all ages and among all nations, has been reared, according to a fixed plan, by that *Spiritus Architectonicus* whom we, who are called theologians, merely assist as upper servants.[48]

In his *Encyclopdedia*, we find the same foundationalism, but there Kuyper has further developed the pneumatological embedding. When dealing with science in a fallen world, Kuyper uses two types of imagery. First, he uses organic imagery to distinguish between two kinds of people, due to the *paliggenesia*: the people of the wild vine and the regenerated people of the true vine.[49] This pneumatological emphasis is elaborated Christologically. According to Kuyper, humanity has a general subject: science. An individual scientist is organically related to this general subject. The general subject of the renewed humanity is Christ. In Him the revealed knowledge of God is taken up into the human consciousness.[50] Second, Kuyper uses the image of two different buildings to refer to two kinds of science with two different starting points.[51] The image of a house with a foundation, referring to science, is combined with the Christological-pneumatological image of the new organism of humanity. The same combination of organic and foundational imagery is more frequently found in Kuyper's work, *Geworteld en gegrond*.[52]

IV Evaluation

What we find in Kuyper is, on the one hand, an anti-modern defence of God's activity in the world and hence of God's essential activity in theology. According

---

47. Cf. Van Keulen, *Bijbel en dogmatiek*, pp. 33, 42–4.

48. Kuyper, *Biblical criticism*, p. 411.

49. Kuyper, *Encyclopedia*, pp. 150–4.

50. Ibid., pp. 67, 85, 101, 150, 283–8, 291–2, 296, 584. Hence, Van Bekkum's sketch of a development from a Christological view of the Scriptures in 1870 to a pneumatological view in 1880 has to be completed with the development of a Christological and pneumatological view in his *Encyclopedia* in 1894. Cf. Van Bekkum, 'Zekerheid en schriftgezag', pp. 98–9.

51. Ibid., p. 155.

52. A. Kuyper, *'Geworteld en gegrond': De kerk als organisme en instituut. Intreêrede uitgesproken in de Nieuwe Kerk te Amsterdam, 10 Augustus 1870 door Dr. A. Kuyper* (Amsterdam: H. de Hoogh & Co., [1870]).

to Mark Alan Bowald, the eclipse of God's agency is one of the big problems of the epistemology of modernity.[53] He values a hermeneutic that acknowledges the divine activity. Accordingly, we should positively value the opposition to the spirit of modern revolution in theology, and the emphasis on the work of the triune God, in Kuyper's thought. On the other hand, Kuyper is clearly influenced by modernity's quest for absolute certainty. His formal defence of Scripture fits very well in the conservative type of theological foundationalism.[54] In the anti-modern and anti-revolutionary defence of his first motive he uses the very modern model of foundationalism.

This conclusion of an analysis of Kuyper's *The Biblical Criticism of the Present Day* evokes two pairs of questions: (a) Is it wrong to oppose modernity with the means of modern foundationalism, or is it just a good example of doing contextual theology? What is the conceptual price of foundationalism? (b) What should we do in the twenty-first century after the development of criticisms of foundationalism? What does this imply for the location of the doctrine of Scripture in systematic theology?

IVa Kuyper and contextual theology

Kuyper's theology is an example of contextual theology. Whether we judge it with hindsight as a good example or not depends on the conceptual price of Kuyper's solution.

First, it is important to see that when Christian theology follows the strategy of modern foundationalism, a caricature of a good Christian motive becomes regulative in practising theology.[55] The modern foundationalism of Descartes and Kant sought for certain, unbiased, and unprejudiced knowledge, apart from the Christian faith. They retained the old ideal of truth with universal implications, but changed their concept of rationality into a universal and certain quasi-divine reason. John Perry and Marcel Sarot suggest a shifting view of authority in the background. During the Middle Ages *auctoritates* were trustworthy persons or texts that could differ and contradict each other. Creative interpretations did not undermine their authority. In the rise of modernity, the credibility of traditional

---

53. M. A. Bowald, *Rendering the Word in Theological Hermeneutics: Mapping Divine and Human Agency* (Aldershot/Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007), pp. 1–23.

54. Cf. Augustijn, 'Kuypers rede', pp. 119, 121, 142–4; Van Bekkum, 'Zekerheid en schriftgezag', pp. 94–5, 104, 106–8; Van Keulen, *Bijbel en dogmatiek*, pp. 61–4.

55. Cf. A. L. Th. de Bruijne, 'Geworteld en dan opgebouwd wordend in Hem', in Van den Brink et al. (eds.), *Filosofie en theologie*, pp. 156–7. This interpretation of modern motives as lost sons of Christianity is also found in Oliver O'Donovan's *A Desire of the Nations*, where he understands late Modernity as 'a parodic and corrupt development of' Christianity. See O. O'Donovan, *The Desire of the Nations. Rediscovering the Roots of Political Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 275.

auctoritates was undermined, and was replaced by indubitable foundations.[56] The focus of foundationalists narrowed to an isolated treatment of epistemological questions in the light of an ideal of objective absolute knowledge.[57]

The influence of foundationalism can be seen in different aspects of Kuyper's treatment of Scripture. First, he shares the isolated focus on epistemological questions and foundationalism's ideal of absolute certain knowledge. Second, his defence of Scripture in formal terms shares its ideal of objectivity and universality. The content of the gospel of Jesus Christ itself does not play a role in his argument.[58] Third, we might feel the Cartesian anxiety, where Kuyper explicitly refers to anxiety as well as where he deals with problems that threaten absolute certainty. In any case, his discussion of these problems is not satisfying in a theoretical perspective.

When modern foundationalism becomes regulative in theology, theology follows a theory that is itself doomed to fail. In the crisis of postmodernity we see that foundationalism could not offer the absolute certainty it promised, and has failed as an epistemological theory for different reasons.

First, nobody has succeeded in determining the collection of basic propositions. All philosophical attempts to demarcate a solid foundation have failed.[59] Moreover, in terms of theology, this situation cannot be changed by claiming the Scriptures as a foundation. Absolute certainty cannot be given, due to problems concerning the number of books in the canon and the received text of Scripture, the difference

---

56. J. Perry, 'Dissolving the Inerrancy Debate: How Modern Philosophy Shaped the Evangelical View of Scripture', *Quodlibet Journal* 3 (2001) 4, http://www.quodlibet.net/articles/perry-inerrancy.shtml (accessed 9 April 2012); Sarot, 'Christian Fundamentalism', pp. 255–9.

57. The question as to what extent Christianity itself is partly accountable for this development is interesting. Gunton sees the influence of a monolithic conception of God and truth working in the ideals of objectivity and universality. See Gunton, *The One, the Three and the Many*, p. 129. Further, the quest for absolute epistemological foundations might be analogous to Calvin's earlier defence of Scripture as a solid foundation. Calvin's decision to prove the authority of Scripture over unbelief and in the conflict with Rome on the authority of the church, already contains a certain ambivalence, leading to a formal defence of the authority of Scripture in later Reformed Orthodoxy. Cf. Van den Belt, *The Authority of Scripture*, pp. 65–70.

58. This is remarkable given that the young Kuyper longed for a return to the subject matter of the Scriptures, back from the bibliolatry of the Reformed Orthodoxy that reduced the Scriptures to a collection of divine words. See Augustijn, 'Kuypers rede', p. 111; Van Bekkum, 'Zekerheid en schriftgezag', p. 98. Cf. Veenhof, 'Honderd jaar theologie aan de Vrije Universiteit', p. 52.

59. Van den Brink, *Almighty God*, pp. 15–17; Hoogland, 'Orthodoxie, moderniteit en postmoderniteit', pp. 134–5; Murphy, *Beyond Liberalism & Fundamentalism*, pp. 90–4; Van den Toren, *Breuk en brug*, pp. 57–60; Wolterstorff, *Reason within the Bounds of Religion*, pp. 46–55.

between the original text and its translation and questions of interpretation. Kuyper knew this, but did not really face these problems. He could not solve this problem theoretically, but presented the immediate divine witness of the *testimonium spiritus sancti* as its solution (albeit one insufficient at a theoretical level). Furthermore, we cannot give a satisfying theoretical justification for the choice for the Bible as foundation.[60]

Second, attempts have failed to formulate a rule that describes when a proposition is justified by the foundation or when such a justification is impossible. Since foundationalism is aimed exactly at regulating the building of a scientific theory, this is a fatal problem to the very foundationalist operation.[61] Third, theoretical attempts to establish final foundations lead to the 'Münchhausen Trilemma' of three unsatisfying options: an infinite regress, a logical circle or an abrupt termination without good reasons.[62] The third option is found as a reality in Kuyper's rectorial address. Finally, human beings have deep convictions that they will never give up. However, these deep convictions are always borne in relation to our actions in practical contexts. The mistake of foundationalism is to think that practical convictions need a justification in terms of, and a translation into, absolute theoretical certainty.[63] We see Kuyper doing this when he tries to give a theoretical justification for the practical assurance of faith.

IVb Implications in the twenty-first century

What does this imply for practising theology in the twenty-first century? Valuable in Kuyper's position is his emphasis on divine activity. The problem of Kuyper's pneumatological embedded foundationalism is not the emphasis on our dependence upon God, but the foundationalist focus on absolute determinate certain knowledge. This implies that Kuyper's opposition to the spirit of revolution in theology has to be distinguished from his defence of foundationalism. Kuyper's own pneumatological embedding of his foundationalism already indicates that the foundationalist model does not suffice. The essential activity of God's Holy Spirit in theology can be defended without an epistemological foundationalism

---

60. Murphy, *Beyond Liberalism & Fundamentalism*, pp. 14, 80; Wolterstorff, *Reason within the Bounds of Religion*, pp. 58–62.

61. Hoogland, 'Orthodoxie, moderniteit en postmoderniteit', p. 134; Van den Toren, *Breuk en brug*, p. 60; Wolterstorff, *Reason within the Bounds of Religion*, pp. 35–45.

62. I. U. Dalferth, *Die Wirklichkeit des Möglichen. Hermeneutische Religionsphilosophie* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), pp. 359–60. Also I. U. Dalferth, *Gedeutete Gegenwart. Zur Wahrnemung Gottes in den Erfahrungen der Zeit* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1997), pp. 154–5.

63. Dalferth, *Gedeutete Gegenwart*, p. 155; Dalferth, *Die Wirklichkeit des Möglichen*, p. 360; Van Bekkum, 'Zekerheid en schriftgezag', pp. 106–7; Cf. L. Wittgenstein, G. E. M. Anscombe and G. H. von Wright, *On Certainty* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972).

in the philosophical sense. It is the Spirit who guides us in all truth, it is the Spirit who renews our understanding, it is the Spirit who enables us to understand the Scriptures. Consequently, it is not revolutionary to understand all hermeneutics and all reflection on Scripture theologically as part of soteriology and pneumatology.

However, the question nonetheless remains as to whether this leads us towards non-foundationalism, as Nancey Murphy and others claim. Ingolf Dalferth warns against tribalism: when God is God and truth is truth, we as a group do not determine what is true, and what is truly said about God concerns everyone and has to be justified in public.[64] Comparably, Colin Gunton warns against intellectual sectarianism, and suggests the option of 'non-foundationalist foundations . . . in a reasoned approach to truth'.[65] Ad de Bruijne claims that 'Reformed theology will not survive without a foundation-model', although it has to be supplemented by a hermeneutical approach.[66]

In the search for non-foundationalist foundations, it is important to see how the foundation metaphor is used in the New Testament. Sometimes foundation (*themelios*) refers to Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 3.10-11) or to the preaching of the gospel that makes Christ known (Rom. 15.20). Paul furthermore speaks of the foundation of apostles and prophets, with Jesus Christ himself as the chief cornerstone (*akrogoonia*) in whom the church grows as a holy temple (Eph. 2.20-21). The image of cornerstone returns in 1 Pet. 2.5-6. In 1 Tim. 3.15 Paul describes the church as the 'foundation' (*edraiooma*) of the truth. Expressions like 'being firmly established' (Eph. 3.17-18) and 'built up in Him' (Col. 2.7) are related architectural images.[67] The foundation metaphor is a soteriological and ecclesiological one, referring to Christ Jesus or to the apostles and prophets as founding members of the church.[68] As a consequence, the model of a building with a foundation should not be understood as an epistemological model, but as a soteriological and ecclesiological model. The church is the temple of the Holy Spirit and Christ is its cornerstone. It has epistemological implications, because in doctrine the instruction of Jesus Christ and his apostles is decisive for the church and its members.

However, the metaphor itself is broader, referring to the new life in Christ lived in the communion of the church. If the Scriptures are used as foundation, they have this significance only as part of the new churchly life in Christ. We do not read the Scriptures for formal reasons, but because we find in them Jesus Christ, the new life He gives, and the message of his gospel. We use the Scriptures because God uses them to transform us into the likeness of Christ. Kuyper's view of Scripture as

---

64. Dalferth, *Gedeutete Gegenwart*, pp. 19–21, 277.

65. Gunton, *The One, the Three and the Many*, p. 134.

66. De Bruijne, 'Geworteld en dan opgebouwd wordend in Hem', p. 157.

67. See further Luke 12.32-33; 1 Tim. 6.19; 2 Tim. 2.19.

68. On this metaphor, see D. J. Williams, *Paul and his Metaphors. Their Context and Character* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1999), pp. 14–17 and 245, and de Bruijne, 'Geworteld en dan opgebouwd wordend in Hem', pp. 158–9.

rock and foundation of theology isolates the Scriptures from this churchly life and does not fit with the use of the foundation metaphor in the New Testament.

To avoid epistemological foundationalism, both Murphy and Gijsbert Van den Brink follow Willard Van Orman Quine in his plea for epistemological holism and use his alternative metaphor of a Web or network.[69] I will follow their plea for epistemological holism, which implies that hermeneutics and the doctrine of Scripture are part of soteriology, pneumatology or ecclesiology. In so doing, we return in a real anti-revolutionary spirit to the order of the Nicene Creed, where the Scriptures are mentioned between pneumatology and ecclesiology. Epistemology 'is a reflexive, not an absolute, intellectual operation'.[70] However, this needs to include the obligation to do theology in a rational, publicly accessible way, always giving understandable justifications of what we do in theology. In practising theology this way, as much concordance with the Scriptures as possible is one of the criteria for good systematic theology.[71] We might use the foundation metaphor to refer to this criterion of scripturally justified theology in the sense of a non-foundationalist foundation. If in this way we do what we can to give the Scriptures the decisive voice in theology, the place in systematic theological order where we reflect on the Scriptures is not as decisive as Kuyper claimed.

To conclude, for the twenty-first century this implies that we acknowledge that epistemological reflection is a secondary, reflexive activity. In the order of systematic theology, the doctrine of Scripture can be made part of soteriology, pneumatology or ecclesiology. Following the order of the Nicene Creed, this order is even more anti-revolutionary than Kuyper's modern foundationalist order. Consequently, we can still appreciate Kuyper's anti-revolutionary intention: in receiving, reading and understanding the Scriptures we are dependent on God. Furthermore, justification of our theology in the light of the Scriptures remains an important obligation: the canonical Scriptures should have the decisive voice in theology.

---

69. Van den Brink, *Almighty God*, pp. 22–5; Murphy, *Beyond Liberalism & Fundamentalism*, pp. 90–5.

70. Cf. O. O'Donovan, *Resurrection and Moral Order. An Outline for Evangelical Ethics* (Leicester: Apollos/Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 2nd edn, 1994), p. 76.

71. Cf. H. Burger, *Being in Christ. A Biblical and Systematic Investigation in a Reformed Perspective* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2008), pp. 23–5; Van den Brink, *Almighty God*, pp. 33–40; Van den Toren, *Breuk en brug*, pp. 37–42.

Chapter 9

'Marie Antoinette' or Mystical Depth?: Herman Bavinck on Theology as Queen of the Sciences

Wolter Huttinga

I Introduction: An outdated statement

Considering theology as the queen of the sciences in a modern secular sphere can be perceived as a baffling, arrogant or simply ridiculous thing to do. Not by coincidence, it is usually theologians who re-invoke this ancient statement on theology. Most of the time theologians stay peacefully in their kennels, but every so often one of them jumps out and barks at the secular situation of the university. Claims made in this context regarding theology as 'the queen of the sciences' sound both misplaced and shrouded in romanticism, sitting happily together with a desire for medieval castles and cathedrals, riding horses and fighting dragons. In short, it appears to be a statement for the same people that participate in fantasy role-play.

As is well known, theology's 'royal status' sat comfortably in a medieval worldview and fitted particularly well with the way the universities came into existence. As universities had emerged from monastic (or at least ecclesial) teaching institutions, the quest for knowledge had always stood in a theocentric context. Knowledge was not something for its own sake, but was ultimately derived from and tending towards God. Although there has always been a tension between faith and knowledge, this tension was increasingly felt in the late medieval and early modern period in which the separation between 'revealed' and 'natural' knowledge was made manifest. From this period onwards, theology could be seen more and more as an irritating and superfluous discipline, based on a highly debatable authority.

One of the most prominent outbursts of this sentiment was the French Revolution. Now that the light of reason finally demanded its rightful place, the time for dwelling in the darkness of religious superstition was over. From the point of view of the French Revolution, claiming the status of 'queen of the sciences' for theology was not only outdated, it was also dangerous. Claiming to be a queen in a time in which the status and the authority of the queen are subject to

intense scrutiny can simply lead to her decapitation. In this sense, theology since the French Revolution can perhaps be more accurately described as the 'Marie Antoinette of the sciences'.

In his *Critique of Pure Reason*, we can hear Immanuel Kant giving eloquent testimony to the deposed queen's despised character:

> There was a time when metaphysics was called the *queen* of all the sciences, and if the will be taken for the deed, it deserved this title of honour, on account of the preeminent importance of its object. Now, in accordance with the fashion of the age, the queen proves despised on all side; and the matron, outcast and forsaken, mourns like Hecuba: 'Greatest of all by race and birth, I now am cast out, powerless.'[1]

Of course, Kant himself in the end did not mourn the demise of this status for theology, but intended to give it a new and fruitful place in the context of morality. Theology lost its claims in the field of knowledge, but remained safe in the realm of faith, although it was rendered harmless there.

Why then does the neo-Calvinist theologian Herman Bavinck revive this ancient statement about theology at the end of the nineteenth century? In his inaugural address in Kampen from 1883, he makes a statement that almost sounds like a direct response to Kant's account:

> [Theology] is *the* science, 'Regina Scientiarum'. High she stands above all the sciences. . . . Not as a favour, but as a right the first place, the place of honour, is due to her. If this place is denied to her, she should be proud enough not to degrade herself as a slave. A queen she remains, even if she is defamed.[2]

Why is he flirting with such an unfashionable statement? Is he simply daydreaming about a once glorious past, as an academic bereft of the power his discipline used to have? Is he in a state of what Nietzsche would call the resentment of the slaves who want to be lords? Or is it a misplaced arrogance?

In this chapter I hope to clarify why Bavinck uses this statement on theology as queen of the sciences. At least in three parts of his oeuvre, which will be discussed here, we find expositions on theology as queen of the sciences that all

---

1. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* (trans. P. Guyer and A. W. Wood; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 99. The quote at the end is derived from Ovid's Metamorphoses. Kant, of course, is discussing metaphysics and not theology. Metaphysics, however, has an ambiguous meaning in his *Critique*, but in this context it clearly represents dogmatic or 'scholastic' theology, as he states in the following: 'In the beginning, under the administration of the *dogmatists*, her rule was despotic.'

2. H. Bavinck, *De wetenschap der h. godgeleerdheid* [*The Science of Holy Divinity*]. (Kampen: Zalsman, 1883), p. 34 (author's translation, incl. quotations).

shed their light on Bavinck's intentions in using it. I will contend that Bavinck's statement about the *regina scientiarum* is not a slip of the tongue or made in the heat of an *ad hoc* argument, but makes complete sense within the framework of his theology. His view on what theology is, and what its status is as an academic discipline, stands within the larger framework of how he considers the relation between God and the world. Furthermore, I contend that his view is not as silly as it may sound. Considering theology as the queen of the sciences is not a misplaced, condescending statement of one academic discipline towards the others, but is rather an affirmation of the glory of science and knowledge in general.

In the first place, we will look more closely at the aforementioned quote, taken from his inaugural address in 1883, and its context. In the second place we will look at a second important context where the *regina scientiarum* is mentioned again: his exposition on theology in the *Reformed Dogmatics*. This calls for a rendering of what I see as the main theological motives underlying Bavinck's statements. Third, the discussion of a third occurrence of the statement (found in his lecture 'Common grace', held in Kampen in 1894), follows. Here his statement has a different, more 'christocentric' sound, but nevertheless remains rooted in the same manner of reasoning as the former two.[3]

II Inaugural address

There are different ways in which we can come to an understanding of Bavinck's opinion that theology can be called queen of the sciences. The first example of his statement can be found in his inaugural address in Kampen, quoted above, and it offers good reason to look in the first place at the historical circumstances in which he composed it.

Bavinck opens his lecture with a quotation of his former teacher at the theological faculty in Leiden, the liberal Prof. L. W. E. Rauwenhoff, who had recently contended that theology should be 'secularised' to keep a rightful place at the universities. 'It all depends,' he had stated, 'on the degree in which theology will meet the demand of secularisation.'[4] Speaking about the French Revolution, Rauwenhoff's statements clearly resonated with the spirit of the Revolution, since both present the same demand to theology and the church: to surrender (to secular reason) or die. Responding to such statements, we find Bavinck in his most anti-revolutionary mode, as he states: 'against this Revolution we have to erect a

---

3. On this point I am indebted to Matthew Kaemingk (Fuller Theological Seminary), who provided me with a quotation from this work. Thanks to him I have been able to provide a discussion of this work here as well, which opens up a deeper understanding of Bavinck's intentions.

4. H. Bavinck, *De wetenschap der h. godgeleerdheid*, p. 5 (author's trans.).

dam, to remain standing and to maintain the sacred that is handed over to us'.[5] Bavinck, at the very beginning of his career at the Theological School of the simple, orthodox devout people of the Dutch Church of the Secession, the *Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerk* (Christian Reformed Church), praises its secession of the *Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk* (Dutch Reformed Church) because in this way the sacred was kept sacred: 'not in secularisation, but in keeping sacred what is sacred lies the preservation of theology'.[6]

In Bavinck's context, it was a hard time for theology as an academic discipline – as it still is today. For many it was a serious question as to why a completely biased and seemingly unfruitful discipline like theology could have a place at the university, where there should be room only for disciplines that prove their use day by day, that invent new things, that have actual results and bring the world further in its increasing development and understanding. Accusations like this were expressed loudly in Bavinck's day and they can of course be heard these days as well, even if the twentieth century brought different approaches to science which are, to put it briefly, more hermeneutical, and place more emphasis on the positive role of the scientific community and tradition.

In this context, Bavinck is making a plea for theology as an academic discipline. But what of his audience? It seems that his statement about theology as queen of the sciences, which occurs in the same address, is simply made in the sphere of an anti-revolutionary *oratio pro domo*. His devout, orthodox audience expects him to be critical about culture in general and science in particular. They expect him to elevate faithful theology as highly as possible. Unsurprisingly, Bavinck gives them exactly what they want, an attitude that seems to render any statement about theology in his speech as simply a crowd pleaser. However, we also know that Bavinck was not afraid to criticize his own Seceder brothers and sisters, to which his lecture 'De katholiciteit van christendom en kerk' ('The Catholicity of Christianity and Church') can serve as a good example.[7] As we will see, Bavinck's plea for theology goes arm in arm with an embracing of the glory of science and culture, which is in contradiction with the strongly world-avoiding stance observed by Bavinck in his own circles.

That having been said, Bavinck's statement on theology as queen of the sciences is driven by more than its historical context or the expectations of his audience. When Bavinck praises the discipline of theology he does not do so within a framework that praises faith as opposed to knowledge. On the contrary, the fact that theology 'seeks God in everything' does not render it unworldly, but ultimately 'worldly'. Certainly, theology seeks the 'things that are above', and therefore the incentive for theology is wonder. But having wonder as its starting point is something theology shares with all the sciences. The eternal, unseen things 'urge themselves to us' through the created world, 'with so much power, in such a compelling beautiful shape and with such a holy, sovereign truth, that the demand

5. Ibid., p. 7.

6. Ibid., p. 6.

7. H. Bavinck, *De katholiciteit van christendom en kerk* (Kampen: Zalsman, 1888).

to know her is inescapable'.[8] This urge for knowing goes out from God himself, and therefore, Bavinck cannot think why theology should not be a science and even calls her 'queen of the sciences'. This, Bavinck adds, by no means implies 'that theology would like to rule over its sisters'. It is fitting that 'she as a queen, just like Christ, the King, only rules and is victorious by moral and spiritual weapons'. But theology as queen of the sciences implies,

> that all sciences have a side with which they touch theology. All the special objects of these sciences . . . again have their ground in God who carries them, maintains them in their distinctiveness and binds them together as a cosmos. The more deeply all these particular disciplines penetrate the depth of created life, the more they will directly, face to face, come to stand before Him, who created the fullness of this life and still maintains it, and who is the object of theology.[9]

In this sense, to push Bavinck a bit further, theology should perhaps not even be called the queen of the sciences, but it should be called the *eschatology* or *telos* of the sciences. Science, realizing itself in the deepest and fulfilled sense, becomes theology. This is affirmed by Bavinck at the end of his lecture, where he remarks that the *regina*-character of theology exists in its prophetic task. She already stands on Mount Nebo and sees the Promised Land. She will one day lead all who love her there, where she will shine in full glory. In the present, there still has to be a difference between theology and other disciplines. 'But then the battle of the faculties will come to an end. There are no separated, no sacred or profane sciences. There will be only one sacred, glorious science, which is theology: to know all things in God, and God in all things.'[10]

Instead of interpreting these quotations as triumphant, exaggerated statements about theology, it should be maintained that Bavinck moves the discussion away from a simple disagreement between academic disciplines, and takes on a higher point of view. 'Theology' thus becomes much more than an academic discipline and 'science' is much more than 'that which is done in the universities': it receives a mystical depth. 'Knowing' in this way becomes more than the narrow conception of knowing in enlightened rationalism. The task Bavinck sees for theology is in fact 'mystagogical': theology leads the other disciplines into the realm of 'seeing'. Not that theology can state that she is already there and the others simply have to

---

8. That they 'urge themselves' is a translation of '*zij dringen zich op*', *Wetenschap*, pp. 32, 33. The Dutch expression '*opdringen*' can have a forceful connotation, in the sense that one can 'force oneself' to another person. In this context it emphasizes Bavinck's belief in realism, in that the high status of reality simply shines forth in everything, it spontaneously 'emerges' and you do not have to do any difficult exercises to see it, but simply accept it as it gives itself everywhere.

9. *Wetenschap*, p. 35.

10. Ibid., pp. 48–9.

follow her, since like Moses, she stands on Mount Nebo, which is seeing, but not entering the Promised Land. When Bavinck uses the word 'theology' in this last quotation, he is pointing to something that lies far beyond the academic discipline of theology. The discipline of theology itself *needs* the other sciences to find final glory together with her sisters. For a better understanding of the mystical depth implied in Bavinck's view on theology, we move on to a discussion of Bavinck's use of the *regina scientiarum* descriptor in his *Reformed Dogmatics*.

III Reformed Dogmatics

In a larger quotation, taken from the first part of *Reformed Dogmatics*, Bavinck develops an argument that leads to the statement that theology is, 'provided this expression is correctly understood', *regina scientiarum*.

> Every creature as such exists by and, hence, for God. Science also exists for God's sake and finds its final goal in his glory. Specifically, this then is true for theology; in a special sense it is from God and by God, and hence for God as well. But precisely because its final purpose does not lie in any creature, not in practice, not in piety, or in the church, amidst all the sciences it maintains its own character and nature. Truth as such has value. Knowing as such is a good. To know God in the face of Christ – by faith here on earth, by sight in the hereafter – not only results in beatitude but is as such beatitude and eternal life. It is this knowledge dogmatics strives for in order that God may see his own image reflected and his own name written in the human consciousness. And for that reason theology and dogmatics do not belong, by the grace of a positivistic science, in a church seminary, but in the *universitas scientiarum*. Furthermore, in the circle of the sciences, theology is entitled to the place of honour, not because of the persons who pursue this science, but in virtue of the object it pursues; it is and remains – provided this expression is correctly understood – *regina scientiarum*.[11]

This passage contains Bavinck's complete view on theology in summary form, in addition to the reason he calls it, albeit with some careful hesitation, the 'queen of the sciences'. In what follows, the embeddedness of this quotation in the whole of Bavinck's theology in the *Dogmatics* will be demonstrated.

In the first place, this passage shows how theocentric, and therefore dynamic, Bavinck's worldview is. Creation in Bavinck's thought is not a static reality, but stands in a glorifying movement. It comes from God and it tends towards God. In his doctrine of God, he accords completely with the Platonic-Christian synthesis

---

11. H. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics: Prolegomena* (ed. John Bolt; trans. J. Vriend; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), pp. 53–4; H. Bavinck, *Gereformeerde dogmatiek* 1 (Kampen: Kok, 4th edn., 1928), p. 31. In this translation I follow the English version with some small but significant changes that will be justified in the development of this chapter.

in which 'being' can only be rightly ascribed to God, and in which creation only exists because it participates in this being. When God creates, nothing is suddenly added to the divine being, which is already full and glorious. So the world is not something which is 'other than' God. When God loves creatures, 'he loves himself in them', Bavinck writes, so through creatures, God's love returns to himself.[12] The same is true of God's will. 'He wills creatures, not for something they are or that is in them, but for his own sake. He remains his own goal. He never focuses on creatures as such, but through them he focuses on himself. Proceeding from himself, he returns to himself.'[13]

Interestingly, although Bavinck is extremely critical of neo-Platonism, these quotes can be found almost literally in Plotinus and Proclus, as well as in the Christian adaptations of neo-Platonism, for example in Pseudo-Dionysious.[14] To the modern reader, this allegiance to pre-modern Platonic thought may seem shockingly misplaced. Where is the integrity of created being in all this? It even seems that God is 'egoistic', because everything centres on his own being. Bavinck, however, in accordance with the Platonic-Christian tradition, considers this view as the very 'gospel' for creation. We exist not in an unhappy independence, but rather in 'grace', in a receiving and passing on of being, goodness and love.

This movement 'from God to God', in which creation stands, is then connected to theology and its relation to the other sciences. As creation stands in this divine movement, the *exitus* and *reditus*, so also do the sciences, and so also does theology, 'in a special sense'. Bavinck's argument is not that theology has a different and independent status because it simply has a different object to the other sciences. His argument is not: 'All sciences have valuable objects of investigation, but theology has the highest object of all, God, so theology is the queen of the sciences.' He claims that theology *in a special sense* stands in the same movement every academic discipline stands in. Theology does what all the sciences do in an intensified form: it stands in the divine movement and purposely, consciously, it wants to *make this movement*. It does not stand still somewhere, but keeps moving. Again, in this sense, theology is to Bavinck the 'eschatology' of the sciences.

Although Bavinck generally uses the Reformed distinction between *theologia archetypa* (God's knowledge of himself) and *theologia ectypa* (our knowledge of

---

12. H. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*: *God and Creation* (ed. John Bolt; trans. J. Vriend; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), pp. 211, 216; H. Bavinck, *Gereformeerde dogmatiek* 2 (Kampen: Kok, 4th edn, 1928), pp. 179, 183.

13. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics: God and Creation*, p. 233; Bavinck, *Gereformeerde dogmatiek* 2, p. 202.

14. When speaking about love having its origin in God and through creatures returning to God, Bavinck quotes Pseudo-Dionysious favourably, who said that God's love is 'an endless circle [travelling] through the Good, from the Good, in the Good, and to the Good, unerringly turning, ever on the same centre, ever in the same direction, always proceeding, always remaining, always being restored to itself'. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*: *God and Creation*, p. 216; *Gereformeerde dogmatiek* 2, p. 184.

God, as he has revealed himself), it is the case for Bavinck that any knowledge we have of God participates in God's self-knowledge. There is for Bavinck a necessary 'being in' or at least a 'being utterly attuned to' the object of the subject. Although he insists that theology does not deserve a high status 'because of the persons who pursue this science, but in virtue of the object it pursues', he in no way sets the knower and that which is known against each other, again as if he were saying that theology offers some pure divine authority that leaves those who occupy themselves with it unaffected. To the contrary, Bavinck's work repeatedly points to the 'correspondence' of subject and object. In strictly separating them he is post-Cartesian. In his keeping them closely related he is, besides Romantic, also once again found drinking from Platonic-Christian sources. From Plato to (at least) Thomas Aquinas it has been maintained that 'like can only be known by like'. Bavinck applies this ancient view of knowledge to all the sciences, again in a special way to theology. If you want to know, you have to be wise. If you want to know what goodness is you have to be a good person. If you want to know truth, you have to be truthful. And if you want to know God, you have to be godly, pious. Therefore any scientist, anyone who aims for truth, should be a virtuous person, since if there is to be any knowledge, object and subject must correspond. Piety, therefore, which to Bavinck in this context consists mainly in a love for truth, is the pre-eminent characteristic of any scientist.[15]

When he emphasizes that 'truth as such has value' and 'knowing as such is a good',[16] Bavinck again refrains from opposing theology and the other disciplines, implying something like 'we all occupy ourselves with knowledge, but other sciences work within the earthly, created realm of knowledge, whereas theology works with revelatory knowledge, which is much higher and more trustworthy'. On the contrary, again, we have to be aware of the all-important movement at work here: knowledge as such participates in the divine. Science, by occupying itself with knowing, stands in this movement, and theology only intensifies it, makes it more conscious *as a movement*. 'To know God in the face of Christ not only results in beatitude but is as such beatitude'.[17] Again, Bavinck moves in the classic theological Platonic tradition in which it is not the case that you first have to know God and then in the second place gain something salvific. 'Heaven' and

---

15. The scientific investigator 'should be as much as possible a normal human being, and should not bring false presuppositions to his work but be a man of God, completely equipped for every good work'. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics: Prolegomena*, p. 43; *Gereformeerde dogmatiek* 1, p. 19.

16. The English translation has 'knowledge', but it is important that it is 'knowing', the act of knowing, '*het kennen*' in Dutch, which emphasizes the 'movement' and not knowledge as some static *depositum*.

17. The English translation has 'blessedness', and one could also translate 'salvation'. The Dutch has '*zaligheid*', which is probably best rendered with the word *beatitude*, the Dutch as well as the English word being importantly vague concerning that in which this 'blessedness' actually exists.

'eternal life' are not realities waiting somewhere in the distant future. Instead, this very world would be hell if it did not somehow participate in their reality. Bavinck, of course, has in mind one of his favourite passages from Scripture, Jn 17.3: 'this is eternal life, that they may know you'. Epistemology is not some kind of difficult gate you have to pass through before you can sit round the theological table and start the meal, as is the case in a typical modern philosophical framework. Knowledge is the meal itself, it is eating, and this is the reason why the prolegomena in Bavinck's *Dogmatics* are already so theological. When I say, 'I know God,' I in fact say that 'God knows himself through me.' By knowing, I participate in the divine movement of God seeing himself reflected in creation. Therefore, Bavinck does not contrast theological knowledge with 'secular scientific' knowledge. There is only one knowledge, and that is something divine, something mysterious, something worth fighting for.

I hope my interpretation of this part of the *Reformed Dogmatics* has added to what Bavinck considered a 'correct understanding' of the expression about theology as *regina scientiarum*. An 'incorrect understanding' would be that theology anachronistically, even comically, would try to wear a suit that is far too big. For Bavinck it is certainly not the case that theology is so glorious that it can adopt the status of a queen. It is reality, God's reality, that is so glorious, and which produces the very glory of all the sciences. In short, Bavinck is considering theology the way it was done in the first millennium of Christianity at least: as a mystical discipline. He does not construe mysticism as moving away from everyday reality to enter some higher secret ground, known only to a happy few, but rather as moving yourself in an intense and concentrated way in the heart of what life is all about: God.

IV   Common grace

It is telling that a third occurrence of the *regina scientiarum* statement is in the context of a lecture on 'common grace', held in the circle of teachers and students of the Theological School in Kampen, 11 years after his inaugural address. This lecture can be read as a follow-up to his more famous speech on catholicity from 1888.[18] Again, Bavinck complains about the world-avoiding image of Calvinists – whether this image is right or not. He criticizes a dualistic conception of the world that separates natural and supernatural, as he sees it, particularly in Roman Catholic thought. Rome develops its thought in two deficient directions, Bavinck claims: on the one hand there is too great an optimism about nature, which yields

18. This is Bavinck's own contention as he states 'The subject of this oration was chosen following on and as fundamental justification of the idea which . . . was developed in my oration on *The Catholicity of Christianity and Church*,' H. Bavinck, *De algemeene genade* (Kampen: Zalsman, 1894), p. 7n1. An English translation of the whole oration by R. C. Van Leeuwen can be found in *Calvin Theological Journal* 24, 1 (1989), pp. 35–65.

a purely rationalistic theology, and on the other hand it stretches immediately out to the supernatural, as he sees it in monasticism, and in the veneration of sacred objects.

This is a separation of the sacred, the supernatural, from the natural. It was, says Bavinck, Calvin's teachings of the *gratia communis* that kept the natural and the supernatural together well. 'From this common grace stems all the good and true which we also discern in fallen human beings.'[19] Bavinck, as he often does, emphasizes the classic statement that grace does not destroy nature, but rather confirms and restores it. The critical development, however, soon follows: 'If it is the case that we stand in this grace, in this freedom,' Bavinck writes, 'we have to show our Christian faith in the first place in a faithful practising of our earthly profession.'[20] He laments that the following is too often the case among Christians: 'A normal human being, practising his daily job with God and with honour, almost does not seem to count'. After all, what does he do 'for the kingdom of God'? You have to evangelize, be a member of several Christian institutions; you have to do something 'extraordinary' to count in God's kingdom. 'One seems to be Christian to the extent to which one ceases to be human, and differs from ordinary people in speech, clothing and habits.' It is clear that Bavinck criticizes his own Reformed people on this point, and longs for a more 'worldly', a more 'natural' attitude in spirituality.

Then Bavinck moves over to the realm of art and science, which should be embraced by orthodox Christians, not despised. They belong to the world of common grace and as such, Christian theologians have at all times profited from pagan art and science. Theology as a science would not have been possible had not 'the thinking conscience of man, sanctified by faith . . . tried to penetrate revelation and understand its content'. Therefore,

> Theology's honour is not that she sits enthroned above them as *Regina scientiarum* and waves her scepter over them but that she is permitted to serve them all with her gifts. Theology also can rule only by serving. She is strong when she is weak; she is greatest when she seeks to be least. She can be glorious when she seeks to know nothing save Christ and him crucified.[21]

If one took this quotation without the context, it would seem to say the very opposite of what Bavinck contends in the former two parts that articulate the view that theology is the queen of the sciences. In fact, it even seems to deny that theology is the queen of the sciences. That, however, is not the case. It only emphasizes more strongly than in the other two occasions the character in which

19. *Algemeene genade*, p. 28.

20. Ibid., p. 48. Bavinck here presents an interpretation of the Protestant stance towards the world quite similar to that of Charles Taylor in *Sources of the Self*, which he calls 'the affirmation of ordinary life', C. Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 211–304.

21. Ibid., p. 53. Here I adopt Van Leeuwen's translation, p. 65.

this queenly 'rule' exists: it rules by serving. Bavinck is by no means suddenly retracting what he just said about the common grace in which theology also shares. Indeed, he has just defended that there is one being, one life, one world which exists in this same simple, divine word: 'grace'. He does not move away from that, suddenly withdrawing into a Christological corner that has nothing to do with 'the world'.

Bavinck is, however, standing in what Andrew Louth aptly called an 'unresolved tension' in patristic theology. As we saw, Bavinck fully develops his thinking within the framework of the Platonic-Christian synthesis, which was the backbone of patristic theology. This means he also shares the patristic tensions. Louth describes this as a cross-shaped tension, since it involves two movements.[22] On the one hand, it is a movement of elevation or ascension. In Platonism, man was of an essential spiritual nature. The soul functioned as that part of reality that is immediately in touch with the divine. By a way of concentration, purification and intensification one could reach the divine, which is man's one source and goal. On the other hand, there was the movement of incarnation, or descent. As Christians we share in the 'Word that became flesh', so by being in the body, that is by sharing in the pain, the suffering and the humility of Christ, we connect with the divine-human mediator. Not by fleeing the body, but by intensely inhabiting it, salvation can be found. The cross-shaped tension speaks of two ways of connecting with the divine: one of elevation and the other of brokenness. Both are necessary if one is to speak in a balanced way about our sharing in the divine life.[23]

Speaking approximately, we find Bavinck more on the first in the former *regina*-quotes, and more on the second side of this cross-shaped tension in the latter. On the one hand, theology is queen, not because she overrules the others, but because she intensifies the movement of the other sciences. Theology in a more elevated, concentrated form is pointed at the same reality towards which all the sciences tend: God's fullness. On the other hand, Bavinck is clear that this is not something that is reached in a neat and straightforward ascending development in 'Hegelian' style, but has to share in the weakness and humility of Christ.

V Conclusion

Nowadays, we can safely store the slogan 'theology is the queen of the sciences' in a museum. It is simply too much of an anomaly in our secular, modern culture. It belongs to a cultural framework that is too alien to use. If theologians take up this

22. A. Louth, *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition: From Plato to Denys* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2nd edn, 2007), xiii.

23. Ibid., xii–xiii. Most exemplary, the breach between the two emphases is described between Origen and Athanasius: pp. 74–5. The tension is also clearly present in Augustine, who, as he describes in Book VII of his *Confessiones*, in fact 'saw the light' through the Platonists, but there lacked both the stability to hold fast to this insight and the humility of the incarnation which he still had to find in Christ, the mediator.

slogan again, they risk being decapitated like Marie Antoinette, albeit academically. Quite simply, it challenges everything the French Revolution represented: freedom, equality and brotherhood.

Furthermore, it seems to combine those two special things the French Revolution detested: authority and the divine. However, there are still people who allude to it now and then, but they do it in a 'playful but serious' manner. If it is used with a sense of irony, then it can be acceptable. Peter Leithart, for example, recently wrote a short essay with the telling title 'Death to the Copulative and long live the Queen', in which he pleaded for a theology that is itself philosophical, political and cultural – in short, that is fully in touch with 'worldly affairs', alluding favourably to a time in which 'every question about everything was a theological question,' and referring to John Milbank's statement that theology should overcome the false humility which it has acquired in modernity.[24]

Bavinck's use of the statement in different contexts shows that he also used the slogan in a somewhat playful or at least loose manner. Telling, therefore, is his remark in the *Dogmatics*: 'provided this expression is correctly understood'. On the other occasions he makes clear that he does not mean to point in any authoritarian direction – perhaps because his head is dear to him. But of course, as we can expect from a serious man like Herman Bavinck, it is not only playing that is involved here. If he is playing, he does it very seriously.

As we saw, when he calls theology 'queen', he considers it in fact not as the ruler, but more as the *eschaton* of the sciences. Compared to the other sciences, theology is 'plugged in' to the movement of this world from God, to God, in an intensified way. Therefore the task of theology can be said to have a *mystagogical* character. It does not simply position itself in a higher position based on its supposed revealed knowledge, but it intensifies and concentrates the movement of knowing in which all the sciences share. In fact, it invites them to enter this movement more consciously. In this way, Bavinck's understanding of 'theology' crosses the borders of theology as an academic discipline and becomes something more encompassing. It becomes a mystical vision. Although his understanding seems to render theology as something that aims metaphysically to gain 'the higher' by overcoming 'the lower', his Christocentric view emphasizes the humble, serving and suffering character of Christ in which theology shares. The movement of elevation, which is the movement creation shares in according to Bavinck, is necessarily crossed by a movement of descent and incarnation. In summary, Bavinck's statement that theology is the queen of the sciences does not aim at 'haughty elevation', but at 'humble intensification'. In this way, Bavinck does not install an arrogant, misplaced statement of an authority that is in practice despised, in opposition to modernity and the French Revolution; rather, he pictures a vision of the divine height and depth in which reality participates.

---

24. P. J. Leithart (28 September 2012), *Death to the Copulative and Long Live the Queen*, http://www.firstthings.com/onthesquare/2012/09/death-to-the-copulative-and-long-live-the-queen (accessed 29 October 2012).

Chapter 10

FRENCH SECULARITY AND THE ISLAMIC HEADSCARF: A THEOLOGICAL DECONSTRUCTION

Matthew Kaemingk

[I]n placing man where God had been, we took as our task the unveiling of reality.[1]

–Markha Valenta

I Introduction

This chapter will explore a uniquely *theological* method of analysing the beliefs and behaviour of post-Revolutionary France. First developed in the Netherlands during the nineteenth century, this unique method of revolutionary analysis made a curious decision. Rather than reading 1789 as a revolution in politics, economics, philosophy or culture, this Dutch method framed it as a revolution in *religion*. The French Revolution, it argued, was the advent of a new *religion* – the religion of modern secularity. This uniquely *religious* reading of the French Revolution opened up a fresh and innovative way of interpreting the beliefs and behaviour of post-Revolutionary France and modernity at large.

In order to test the interpretative power of this religious reading of post-Revolutionary France, this chapter will apply it to contemporary France and its current treatment of Islamic immigrants. The spirit of the Revolution is still alive and well in contemporary France, particularly in discourse surrounding the term *laïcité* (French secularity). The modern French habitually refer to the ideas, events, and figures of the Revolution to make their case for the continued dominance of the beliefs of *laïcité* over other faiths. This chapter will therefore ask a simple question, what can be learned by reading the current conflict over Islam as a clash

---

1. Markha Valenta, 'How to Recognize a Muslim When You See One: Western Secularism and the Politics of Conversion', in Hent de Vries and Lawrence Eugene Sullivan (eds.), *Political Theologies: Public Religions in a Post-Secular World* (New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2006), p. 472.

between *two religions* – the religion of Islam and the religion of the Revolution. Because the debate over Muslim headscarves in schools has been a centrepiece in the French debate it will play a central role in my own analysis.

II *The French Revolution and Dutch Neo-Calvinism*

The French Revolution sent cultural, economic and political shockwaves throughout the West. This much is surely a truism. In its wake a bevy of international observers attempted to understand the origin, essence and ends of the insurrection. The English examinations of Edmund Burke and Thomas Carlyle, and the American interpretations of Thomas Jefferson and Thomas Paine, are among the most notable examples of this worldwide desire to understand the spirit of the Revolution and its implications for the future of the West.[2]

Outside the anglophone world, the Netherlands generated its own assortment of reflections on the Parisian revolt. Many Hollander evaluations either echoed the liberal praise of Jefferson and Paine or the conservative warnings of Burke. That said, in addition to these rather predictable evaluations, the Dutch also produced a curious *third* way to interpret the causes, meaning and significance of the Revolution. Fundamentally, this alternative method was neither liberal nor conservative. It was *theological*.

This third method recognized the historical role of economic disparity, political tyranny, cultural conservatism and religious malfeasance in the run up to the Revolution. Each of these was important as a catalyst in inspiring the fury and terror of the French Revolutionaries. However, this alternative method insisted that the acute violence and pervasive destruction of the Terror could not have taken place without a serious *theological* disruption in the hearts of the French people.

According to this third mode of analysis the Revolution's *theological* decision to marginalize the divine and divinize the humane is absolutely pivotal to understanding the true origin, essence and ends of the French Revolution. The revolutionaries had seized the divine throne and declared themselves the ultimate arbiters of truth, goodness and justice for all. Now fully divine, the people could destroy the old cultural, economic and political structures and radically re-imagine the whole of society according to their own will. Reducing the Revolution to a new political or economic technique does not take into account the full depth and breadth of the revolutionary dream. This alternative method of analysis postulated

---

2. Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (London: MacMillan and Co., 1790); Thomas Carlyle*, The French Revolution: A History* (Vols. I–III; London: Chapman and Hall, 1837); Connor Cruise O'Brien*, The Long Affair: Thomas Jefferson and the French Revolution, 1785–1800* (Chicago: University Press, 1996); Thomas Paine, *The Rights of Man: Being an Answer to Mr. Burke's Attack on the French Revolution* (London: J. S. Jordan, 1791).

that France's *apotheosis* of the people suggested the advent of a new religion: one that would ultimately bring violence and oppression, not peace and justice.

Two Dutch Calvinists led the way in articulating this new method, Groen van Prinsterer and Abraham Kuyper. In *Unbelief and Revolution* (1847) the historian Groen van Prinsterer argued that the Revolution was ultimately the result of *ongeloof* (unbelief).[3] Without a belief in the Christian God, the revolutionaries no longer possessed a bulwark against their own cultural or political ambitions. Free from divine restraint, the will of the majority would determine the will of all. Groen insisted that this tyranny of *ongeloof* would lead to the death of freedom, rather than to its birth.

Greatly influenced by van Prinsterer's analysis, Abraham Kuyper often used the language of unbelief to describe modern France as well. That said, throughout his career Kuyper began to display some ambivalence towards van Prinsterer's claim of French unbelief.[4] Kuyper began to speak of the Revolution not so much as unbelief but as a *new* belief. The French Revolution was, in fact, a new way of seeing the world, a new worldview. Kuyper increasingly argued that modern France was not philosophically empty, neutral, open or aimless. The French may have killed their king and denied their God but this did not mean that their thrones remained empty. No-one, Kuyper argued, could 'rest content with such a bare negation'.[5] Having 'dethroned' God and king, something else would inevitably be 'placed on the vacant seat'.[6] However much the children of the Revolution 'rage against dogmas, they themselves are the most stubborn of dogmatists'.[7] The Revolution was not simply a new economic or political *technique,* it was the beginning of a new and 'all-embracing *life-system*'.[8]

Kuyper did not stop by describing the Revolution as a new philosophy, worldview or life-system. At multiple points he began to intimate that the secular modernity emerging from Paris looked and behaved very much like a *new religion*. Kuyper insisted that this was not merely a game of 'oratorical phraseology', but a 'purely logical' conclusion.[9] He describes a community that has rendered ultimate sovereignty to something (the will of the people). These people put their complete

3. Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer, *Ongeloof van Prinsterer: een reeks van historische voorlezingen* (Leiden: S. en J. Luchtmans, 1847). English translation by Harry Van Dyke, *Groen van Prinsterer's Lectures on Unbelief and Revolution* (Jordan Station, Canada: Wedge Publishing Foundation, 1989).

4. Abraham Kuyper's reflections on the French Revolution are spread across a wide range of speeches, lectures, articles and books. This chapter will reference some, but not all, of his comments on the subject.

5. Abraham Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953), p. 23.

6. Kuyper, *Lectures*, p. 87.

7. Abraham Kuyper, 'Modernism: A Fata Morgana', in James Bratt (ed.), *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), p. 115.

8. Kuyper, *Lectures*, p. 11.

9. Kuyper, *Ons Program* (trans. Harry Van Dyke; forthcoming), pp. 74–5.

trust in its knowledge and power; they believe it represents the ultimate end of cultural and political history. Further to this, they believe that opponents of this ultimate authority must either convert or die. On this basis, then, they make claims about the ultimate nature of humanity, community, justice, truth and the meaning of the good life. They expend a great deal of energy attempting to make others conform to their beliefs, customs and institutions. What else can one call such a community, Kuyper asks, but a religion? What else can one conclude? By all rights it appears that the 'revolution in Paris proved to be not just a change in regime but a change . . . of general human theory. In place of the worship of the most high God came . . . the worship of man.'[10]

Look at what they are doing, Kuyper exclaimed. The children of the Revolution were developing their own modern dogmas, churches, catechisms, priests and evangelistic efforts. They clearly held zealous plans for *a-theocractic* domination. Kuyper took to labelling them 'doctrinaire revolutionaries',[11] and listed their modernistic taboos, superstitions and dogmatic prejudices.[12] He spoke of their mystical devotion to 'the Catechism of Rousseau and Darwin'.[13] He labelled their academies the 'sectarian schools of Modernism'.[14] He insisted that these 'neutral' institutions of the Revolution were, in fact, the 'counter-churches'[15] of a new modern priesthood. These fanatical priests of the Revolution were trying to 'convert' other religions through a new civilizing offensive.[16] For,

> 'Clerical' comes from the word '*Clerus*' and '*Clerus*' was what people called the class of religious people that claimed they were the only ones that knew how things were, and expected nothing from the rest of the people except to learn how things were. And now have not our liberals lent themselves to the charge of dividing the nation into a *Clerus* class who knew, and a class of lay people, who had no right to speak? . . . these spiritual leaders . . . demand that the state become the organ with which to force their doctrine on the people . . . and in order to crown everything with the beautiful system they have made up, they charge a tithe from their opponents, for the arming of the army with which they will accomplish their revolt.[17]

10. Kuyper, 'Maranatha', in *Centennial Reader*, p. 212.

11. Kuyper, *Ons Program,* p. 476.

12. Kuyper, 'Calvinism: Source and Stronghold of Our Constitutional Liberties', in *Centennial Reader*, p. 303.

13. Kuyper, *Lectures*, p. 189.

14. Kuyper, *Ons Program,* p. 465.

15. Ibid., p. 208.

16. Kuyper, *Gemeene Gratie* (Vol. III; Leiden: Donner, 1905), p. 186.

17. Abraham Kuyper, *De Schoolkwestie II. De Scherpe Resolutie En Het Decretum Horribile* (Amsterdam: J. H. Kruyt, 1875), p. 3. Quoted and translated in Wendy Naylor, 'Abraham Kuyper and the Emergence of Neo-Calvinist Pluralism in the Dutch School System' (PhD Diss., University of Chicago, 2006), p. 247.

How Modernists had once ridiculed those little [Christian] tracts! How droll they had found those Sunday Schools! How often had they made our Young Men's Societies the butt of their jokes! What fun they had at the expense of those 'piety factories'! But now. . . . Modernists distribute their own little tracts . . . [organize their own] Sunday schools [and] Societies. . . . Once they expected to celebrate our funeral; now we see them robed in what they thought were our winding-sheets.[18]

The children of the Revolution had not transcended religion – they simply developed a new one.

This chapter is not a work of history, sociology or political science. It might be best described as a theological experiment. It rests on a theological belief held by Abraham Kuyper that God has created humanity with a *sensus divinitatus* – a sense of the divine. According to this theological belief, *all* people – religious or secular – are haunted by an internal desire to worship, serve and cleave to something greater than themselves. According to Kuyper the children of the Revolution could not free themselves from their worshipping desires. Instead they began to worship, serve and cleave to the ideas and authors of the Revolution – in short, themselves. This chapter is therefore a theological experiment, one that asks: do the contemporary French still evince a religious nature? Can one still perceive a sense of the divine in the beliefs and behaviour of contemporary France? In the next section I will examine the French response to Islam using Abraham Kuyper's *theological* method of revolutionary analysis. Do the children of the Revolution still behave like the followers of a religion? We will see.

III French laïcité and the Islamic hijab

In early 2004, the French government passed a law prohibiting from any public school any clothing the clearly indicated a pupil's religious affiliation. Although worded in a religion-neutral way, everyone understood the law to be aimed at keeping Muslim girls from wearing headscarves in schools. . . . Given that relatively few disputes over scarf-wearing ever went beyond the classroom and that virtually no one accused scarf-wearing girls of presenting a serious danger to French society. . . . Why focus on this issue above all others?[19]

– John Bowen

Why would France, famous defender of *liberté*, pass such a restrictive law? How could a small piece of cloth on a schoolgirl's head dominate a nationwide debate on Islam and immigration? In the tradition of Edmund Burke and Thomas Jefferson,

18. Kuyper, 'Modernism: A Fata Morgana', in *Centennial Reader*, p. 107.

19. John Bowen, *Why the French Don't Like Headscarves: Islam, the State, and Public Space* (Princeton: University Press, 2008), pp. 1–2.

the American anthropologist John Bowen attempted to interpret the beliefs and behaviour of modern France. Bowen's book *Why the French Don't Like Headscarves* compiles a long list of factors that would ultimately inspire the now infamous 2004 ban. In what follows, I will briefly summarize the five most prominent reasons Bowen cites for the eventual passing of the law.

First, Bowen points to the modern French attitude towards 'religion'. In France, traditional religion is largely viewed as inherently divisive, irrational, regressive and violent. Secularity, on the other hand, is depicted as religion's exact opposite: universal, rational, progressive and peaceful. This religious/secular dichotomy has been constructed by the modern French through the development of a distinct French historiography. According to this narrative, France's past was marked by religious wars, religious bigotry, religious oppression and religious backwardness. France's present, on the other hand, is defined by secular peace, secular tolerance, secular freedom and secular progress. Through this constructed historical lens religion is consistently depicted as *the problem* to which secularity is *the solution*.

The French state has historically *solved* the problem of religion through one of two strategies: secular exclusion or Gallican management. In secular exclusion, religions are systematically marginalized from a public square dominated by *laïcité*. In Gallican management, the secular state monitors and controls religions through a complex system of bureaucratic levers. In the 2004 ban on the Islamic headscarf, one can clearly see the French tradition of secular exclusion at work. If *laïcité* is to be publically dominant, Islam must be privatized.

Second, Bowen reminds his readers that North Africans and Arabs have historically been the objects of French racism, colonialism and cultural imperialism. Uneducated, uncivilized and violent, these immigrants are consistently described by the modern French as the problem. The French state (once again) is described as the solution. The French state must, therefore, educate, civilize and pacify the North African and Arab immigrants. This is their burden. Through this Orientalist lens, the ban on the hijab was framed as one necessary piece within a much larger state strategy to integrate a lower culture into a higher one. Such blatant paternalism has not been well received by North African and Arab immigrants. As Bowen notes, in modern France the 'term *integration* has come to mean quite different things to those who see themselves as the reference point and those who see themselves described as "the problem"'.[20]

Third, in the run up to the 2004 ban, Bowen points his readers to a growing French perception that 'Islam' was in direct conflict with modern beliefs and culture. On the questions of sex, family, fashion, morality, religion and politics, Islam is consistently described as the *absolute* other of French modernity. According to Bowen, the issue of sexuality is particularly acute in the debate over the headscarf. The Islamic hijab is perceived as a direct assault on women's rights, identity and sexuality. Framed in this manner the proposed ban on the hijab was described as an act of benevolent sexual liberation for young girls who are oppressed by their religion.

20. Ibid., p. 247.

Fourthly, Bowen argues that post-Revolutionary France has historically asked state schools to take rural and Catholic French children and *transform* them into modern French republicans. It was not enough to be educated about the Republic, these children had to be *converted* to its modern and secular way of life. As Muslim immigrants began arriving in France, state schools were increasingly asked to return to this transformational task. In the run up to the 2004 ban there was a sense that the schools were failing to assimilate Muslim children into the secular whole. The schoolgirl's headscarf began to represent, for the French, continued Islamic resistance to *laïcist* assimilation. Moreover, many saw a ban on the hijab as an act of political solidarity and support for beleaguered urban teachers fighting bravely in the clash of civilizations between Islam and *Laïcité*.

Fifthly, Bowen points to the power of the French media and the emerging influence of right-wing nationalists in the lead up to the 2004 ban. The media, he argues, successfully linked Islam to nearly every French woe – international and domestic. Thanks to a media-constructed narrative war, terrorism, immigration, poverty, crime, illiteracy and domestic violence suddenly became *about* Islam. At the same time right-wing nationalists consistently spoke of France as a ghettoized and fragmenting society in need of a strong and uniting *laïcist* renewal. Muslim immigrants were destroying the nation's former glory and France needed to forcefully reassert its secular beliefs and identity. Long marginalized by the political centre, the rhetoric of right-wing nationalists went mainstream as the perceived national threat of Islam grew. Soon enough, Bowen notes, 'politicians on the left and right sought to outdo each other in defending *laïcité*'.[21] The 2004 ban was seen as a necessary step to ensure that France would remain one nation firmly united under *laïcité*.

According to Bowen, these and many other factors all contributed to a widespread French desire to 'do something' about Islam and, more specifically, the schoolgirl's headscarf. French politicians, in a stunning display of swift responsiveness and political cooperation, combined forces to send a clear message to Islam. In a matter of months, the national ban on the schoolgirl's headscarf had the force of law.

IV A lingering question

There is no doubt that Bowen's text presents an extremely helpful overview of the many reasons why the *laïcist* French believed a ban on the headscarf was reasonable and necessary. That said, a pressing question lingers: Why did this small piece of cloth constitute *the centre* of a national debate about Islam, immigration, religious freedom, and the future of France?

With their history of *laïcité* why did the French people not focus their ire on the fact that the secular state was providing funding to the Great Mosque in Paris?

21. Ibid., p. 242.

With their history of racism why did they not focus on inhibiting African and Arab immigration? With their history of feminism why did they not focus on providing more educational or economic opportunities for women? While these issues have all received a hearing in French discourse *none* of them reached the level of attention, passion and intensity of the schoolgirl's headscarf. Why? Bowen's text adequately describes *Why the French Don't Like Headscarves* but not why it filled them with such obsessive loathing, frustration and anxiety.

V A sixth factor

> [After the ban, a] girl of Turkish origin, who had worn the voile in school for several years, showed up with a knit cap and was refused entry. She was brought to see the principal who told her to take it off. When she refused, she was kept in a windowless room all day. Distraught, that night she cut off all her hair and shaved her head.[22]

> – John Bowen

> In constructing artificial distinctions between religious and secular violence, types of violence and exclusion labelled secular have escaped full moral scrutiny.[23]

> – William Cavanaugh

If one wants to truly understand the behaviour of post-Revolutionary France, Abraham Kuyper insisted, one had to read it as a new religion. As has been acknowledged, Kuyper was adamant that this was not a game of 'oratorical phraseology' but was rather a 'purely logical' conclusion.[24] Their beliefs and behaviour bore the classic marks of a *religious* regime.

In his analysis, John Bowen never explicitly describes French *laïcism* as a new religion. He does, however, speak of those committed to *laïcité* as a tight ideological community with a high level of philosophical consensus. He speaks repeatedly of their possession of a strong sense of mission, a dominant historical narrative, a strong set of core beliefs, a structure of community discipline, a list of historical saints and martyrs, institutions of moral formation, sacred spaces, sacred leaders, eschatological hope and an aggressive attitude towards unbelievers. Quite unintentionally, Bowen paints an evocative picture of a dominant religious regime responding to a heretical insurgency.

In this section I will use Bowen's own reflections on contemporary France to demonstrate the explanatory power and strength of Kuyper's religious reading of

22. Ibid., p. 147.

23. William Cavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence* (Oxford: University Press, 2009), p. 230.

24. Kuyper, *Ons Program*, pp. 74–5.

French secularity. Here we will see how Bowen is not so much describing a clash between races, classes or cultures but a clash of *religions* – the religion of Islam and the religion of *Laïcité*. From this point forward *Laïcité* will be capitalized to indicate this religious shift in interpretation.

Religious communities typically reference the historical moment of their founding with great reverence. This moment of inception is interpreted as a revelatory and normative event applicable to the future lives of the faithful. Moreover, religious communities typically believe that history has a specific meaning, purpose and telos. Their adherents often believe that the founding of their faith actively *reveals* the ultimate meaning of history to the entire world. These communities frequently venerate the original participants in the founding events. They repeatedly ask how these historical figures would respond to the current challenges facing the religious community. Their present actions are guided and justified by the teachings and actions of leaders from the past.

According to Bowen, *Laïcists* perform each of these actions with surprising regularity, for, whenever *Laïcists* wish to 'explain and justify policies regarding religion and society, they often begin by talking about history'.[25]

> I am often struck by the tendency of French public figures to frame the discussion of nearly any important social issue in terms of [France's] long-term history. You must look back to Phillippe Auguste or Henri IV, Robespierre or Rousseau . . .[26]

The *Laïcists* demonstrate 'collective narrative habits which shape the ways' they 'attempt to resolve problems'.[27] Figures in Revolutionary history are treated as exemplary models for social and political life. The historical experience of secularization in France is universalized by *Laïcist*s as a global narrative. According to 'the dominant narratives of *laïcité*, history has moved toward the removal of religion from the public sphere, the Hegelian working out of a logic of *laïcité*'.[28] The *Laïcists*' historical experience of secularization is imposed on arriving immigrants as *the* defining narrative for them and their lives. History is not meaningless for *Laïcists*, Bowen insists: indeed, it is 'about laïcité'.[29] The powerful stories about the history of '*laïcité* give . . . a historical *telos* or purpose [to the nation] . . . to the extent that this history has a direction, progress can be claimed'.[30] For them, *Laïcité* is 'a Historical Actor'.[31]

Religious communities often demand a high level of dogmatic and moral uniformity. This uniformity is traditionally enforced through a system of structural

---

25. Bowen, *Why the French Don't Like Headscarves*, p. 13.
26. Ibid., p. 5.
27. Ibid.
28. Ibid., p. 21.
29. Ibid.
30. Ibid.
31. Ibid., pp. 32–3.

discipline for heretical challenges to orthodoxy. Bowen notes that *Laïcists* have long 'conceived of laws as ways to teach the French people moral lessons'.[32] He speaks regularly of their desire to send Islam a 'message' through the secular state. For *Laïcists*, 'living together in a society requires agreement on basic values. . . . It requires the state to construct institutions and policies designed to integrate newborns and newcomers into French society by teaching them certain ways of acting and thinking'.[33] *Laïcité*, Bowen argues, has 'developed well beyond the dictates of the laws to become a set of norms'.[34]

Religious communities are rarely satisfied with educating minds or controlling actions – they want to change hearts and beliefs. The *Laïcist's* desire to transform the hearts of Muslim children is perfectly captured in these reflections from French teachers. One teacher insisted that the 2004 ban must be the beginning of a larger *Laïcist* mission to Muslim children. For, 'if you made them take off the voile, you would not change anything. . . . You have to work on values first'.[35] Another French teacher insisted that, 'You do not attend school as you go to the post office or to another public service'.[36] 'We' teachers actively 'defend la *laïcité*. . . . The school is a place where we share universal values of freedom, equality, and fraternity. The school's mission has a liberating ambition to give citizens-in-the-making the means to free themselves . . .'[37] A French swimming teacher complained that Muslim,

> girls and boys cover themselves with a kind of violence that makes one ill at ease. . . . [They believe in] the notion that the head ought to be covered because the body itself presents a problem. . . . We even *had* to refuse their demand for separate toilets for girls and boys, so as to avoid an anti-Republican politics . . .[38]

In this comment, Bowen notes, 'the field of combat is no longer the school but the girls' attitudes toward their own bodies. . . . [Their "Islamic shame"] must be fought even at the cost of the girls' well-being'.[39] The moral liberation of Muslim boys and girls was so vital the teacher felt *forced* to have them share toilets.

Consider, as well, the application process some Muslim immigrants have had to endure in order to attain citizenship in France. It is not enough for an applicant to demonstrate that they have followed the laws of France during their stay; a

---

32. Ibid., p. 243.
33. Ibid., p. 11.
34. Ibid., p. 34.
35. Ibid., p. 212.
36. Ibid., p. 96.
37. Ibid.
38. Ibid., p. 211.
39. Ibid.

'candidate must show "good morals"' as well.[40] In their interviews immigrants were asked a wide range of invasive questions. 'One lawyer from Morocco was asked how many times a week she ate couscous, how often she travelled to Morocco, of what nationality her friends were, and which newspapers she read. A Tunisian was asked why he had made the pilgrimage to Mecca twice.'[41]

While some religious communities do not prioritize evangelism, *Laïcism* is quite missional in its posture towards the unconverted. According to Bowen, many *Laïcists* viewed the 2004 ban as the *beginning* of a much broader secular mission to Islam. After all, one newspaper lamented, if the ban would not fully 'vaccinate' the sickness of 'religion', a more expansive *Laïcist* mission would be required.[42]

In the wake of the law some *Laïcists* elected to take the necessary 'next steps'[43] in the secularist mission to Islam. One French mayor declared 'that no parent going along on [school] outings would be allowed to display religious signs'.[44] Muslim mothers would now be forced to unveil for all the French children and parents to see. 'In some cities, mayors refused entry to city hall to women in headscarves.'[45] 'A mayor of a small town ordered a man working at the municipal pool to shave off his beard.'[46] '[A] university student canteen in Paris refused to serve a student because she wore a headscarf.'[47]

It is common for religious communities to develop a cadre of elite religious leaders who interpret, mediate and enforce the beliefs and practices of the faith. According to Bowen, a relatively small

> handful of contemporary historians and sociologists function as the recognized experts on *laïcité*. . . . Henri Pena-Ruiz [for example] puts himself forward in print and on television as *laïcité*'s high priest. . . . These *laïcité* experts are 'public' intellectuals in the two closely intertwined French senses of the term: they speak to a general educated public as well as to academic audiences, and they work with or in the state as well as in the universities or research settings.[48]

In Catholic France, a tight group of elites who mediated between the past and the present, and who dictated the beliefs and practices of the people, were traditionally called 'priests'. Henri Pena-Ruiz's self-designation as '*laïcité*'s high priest' is consistent with this French tradition. Bowen repeatedly remarks on

40. Ibid., p. 196.
41. Ibid.
42. Ibid., p. 147.
43. Ibid.
44. Ibid., p. 148.
45. Ibid.
46. Ibid., p. 149.
47. Ibid.
48. Ibid., p. 21.

how these public intellectuals or 'priests' of *Laïcité* are unusually tight in their level of intellectual, cultural and political consensus. According to Bowen, French 'intellectuals, editors, and producers are caught up in webs of reciprocal promotion; it would be an unusually independent thinker who could free her or himself . . . they are subject to unusually strong channelling forces'.[49]

This secular faith relies on a particularly zealous media to interpret international and domestic events through the dogmatic lens of *Laïcité*. The moral language and goals of *Laïcism* are remarkably uniform throughout the French media. According to Bowen,

> Between September 2003 and February 2004, [French citizens] would have read an average of two articles each day on the voile in each of the three major news dailies, including stories about a series of Islam-related threats to the Republic: covered women at swimming pools threatening *mixité*, patients refusing to be treated by male doctors, jurors wearing scarves while in court, and Muslims approving the stoning of adulterous women and booing the interior minister.[50]

The *Laïcist* meta-narrative of minority religions as *the* problem to which the *Laïcist* state is the solution was repeatedly reinforced by the daily micro-narratives of the press. The evening news became, in essence, a brief *Laïcist* sermon pointing to the evils of Islam and the universal salvation that could be found in a return to *Laïcité*.

Religious communities regularly attach significant meaning and purpose to the human body. They are often quite concerned with the way in which the body is clothed. Clothing practices not in line with the religion's specifications are interpreted as evidence of some sort of sin or heresy. Moreover, aberrations in clothing are often received as a direct assault on the faith and a rejection of its ultimate claims. Furthermore, in more traditional religions the body and clothing of *women* receive significantly more attention and scrutiny than those of men.

Within the *Laïcist* faith it is believed that a woman's body should be sexually free, open and expressive. Likewise, compared to Muslim women, *Laïcist* women are expected to clothe their bodies in colourful, revealing and sexually performative ways. The *Laïcist* reaction to the Islamic hijab is, in many ways, predictable. The headscarf is interpreted as being in direct conflict with the dogma of *Laïcité*. It represents an affront to *Laïcité*'s beliefs about the body, fashion and sexuality. According to Bowen, this perceived conflict elicits anxiety, dread and frustration in the *Laïcist*. One French woman declared that the sight of a woman wearing the hijab is experienced, by her, as 'an assault'.[51] 'It was that they were throwing their difference right at me, that they had these principles, and were making me notice

49. Ibid., p. 3.
50. Ibid., p. 125.
51. Ibid., p. 211.

them.'[52] Among the *Laïcists,* there is a 'sense that another's appearance or actions, even when not directed towards me, offend me to the point of visually assaulting me'.[53] Former French President Jacques Chirac explains the revulsion in this way: the veil is 'a kind of aggression that is difficult for the French to accept'.[54] In the run up to the 2004 ban, one teacher declared that headscarves were 'aggressive . . . we cannot teach in such a climate'.[55]

For many *Laïcists* there are only two possible explanations for why women would wear the veil. They either do it 'to reject the Republic or because of pressure from Islamists'.[56] Bowen explains that when 'Muslim women in headscarves say that it is with *these* clothes and *this* religion that they choose to abide by the rules of the Republic . . . they are challenging the conditions for belonging to the nation.'[57] We have, in essence, a contest over the true meaning of the Republic.

Laïcité's reaction to the veils of Muslim women appears to indicate that, if it is indeed a religion, it should be categorized as a rather traditional and conservative one. After all, the body and clothing of Muslim women is clearly a matter of higher concern than that of Muslim men. The beards, clothing and head coverings of Muslim men in France rarely receive any national attention from the *Laïcists*.

When dominant religious communities experience a wane in their collective enthusiasm or a loss of doctrinal clarity, renewal movements often arise to restore the fundamentals of the faith. Anxious battles ensue as to the true nature of the religion. Globalization and contact with competing religions can raise this level of internal anxiety even further. Threatened religions often feel pressed to unite and respond to religious challengers with strength – as one.

Bowen speaks repeatedly of the French feeling overwhelmed and backed into a corner by Muslims. Islam's arrival, he argues, has forced the French to examine the core principles of *laïcité*. They have been forced to return to the fundamentals of *Laïcité* and imagine how they should live out their historic faith today. Bowen notes that the 2004 ban 'was one of those key moments in a country's life at which certain anxieties and assumptions come to the surface, when people take stock of who they are and of what kind of social life they want to have'.[58] Bowen explains that as Islam grew, 'tempestuous debates' ensued 'about what *laïcité should* be and how Muslims *ought* to act, not in light of a firm legal and cultural framework, but in light of a disappearing sense of certitude about what France was, is, and will be. Hence the desperation; hence the urgency'.[59] During the twentieth century postmodern deconstructions of

52. Ibid., p. 212.
53. Ibid., p. 174.
54. Ibid., p. 127.
55. Ibid., p. 122.
56. Ibid., p. 244.
57. Ibid., p. 249.
58. Ibid., p. 2.
59. Ibid., p. 33.

the modern dogmas of universal reason, values and neutrality have weakened the French people's faith in *Laïcité*.

The arrival of another religion resistant to modernity forced *Laïcists* to reassert their dominance despite their internal doubts. The pluralizing forces of globalization caused great anxiety for a faith accustomed to national uniformity and hegemony. According to Bowen, throughout France there was a 'general sense that Islam had invaded the public sphere'.[60] The *Laïcist* media regularly lamented that there were now many 'urban sectors where many women wore headscarves, *halal* food was served, and people prayed in makeshift prayer halls'. They 'decried these public spaces as lost to the Republic and to *laïcité*'.[61] Other articles bemoaned 'the lost territories of laïcité'.[62] Another dared to question directly the hope the French had placed in the secularization thesis asking 'Is Islam dissolvable into the Republic?'[63] According to Bowen, the fears of *Laïcists* 'go beyond racism or xenophobia (not that those are absent) to fears that the emergence of a public Islam challenges the particular institutions that guarantee life together in the Republic – a public space from which ethnic, religious, and other characteristics are erased'.[64] One *Laïcist* documentary rhetorically asked its viewer if Islam was attempting 'to forge an identity or to do good?'[65] This question implied, of course, that Muslims could *either* forge an identity distinct from *Laïcité* or they could do good – they could not do both.

The arrival of Islam sparked a heated debate within *Laïcism* itself. Debates between moderate and fundamentalist *Laïcists* were rancorous. Moderate members argued for a warmer, more inviting secular mission to Islam. The *Laïcist* mission should be respectful, kind and even generous in its attempt to monitor, manage and eventually convert Muslims. Fundamentalists, however, wanted the faith to formulate a more aggressive response to the rising heresy. Muslims, they argued, must be given one of three options: convert, privatize or immediately leave. While the debates between moderates and fundamentalists burned intensely, the smoke from their battles obscured an important fact: both sides *agreed* that it was Islam, and not *Laïcité,* that needed to change.

In their response to heresy, fundamentalist religious communities rarely consult the heretics in question. During the 2003 government hearings on the headscarf, veiled women were excluded from the deliberations. According to Bowen, in the *Laïcist* mind 'It was useless to ask them to speak, because they would simply parrot the words of their puppeteers. But [Muslim women] who refused (note: "refused") to wear the voile had the right to speak, because they had found their agency . . .'[66]

60. Ibid., p. 109.
61. Ibid., p. 171.
62. Ibid., p. 31.
63. Ibid., p. 60.
64. Ibid., p. 247.
65. Ibid., p. 174.
66. Ibid., p. 245.

'Only the secularist Muslims earned the right to speak.'[67] Only those who had found liberation and Enlightenment in *Laïcité* were capable of determining what should be done with the heretics.

Finally, almost every religious community will develop spaces for catechesis. These catechetical spaces initiate or induct children and recent converts into the beliefs and practices of the faith. It is also common for religious communities to construct sacred spaces. These holy places often possess the power to uplift, transform and even save the individuals who enter them. Such spaces must not, under any circumstance, be defiled by heretical objects, practices or teachings.

For the *Laïcist* religion, state schools function as *both* a space of catechesis and a sacred space. According to Bowen, 'Many in France place great hope in, and are repeatedly disappointed by, the public schools . . . they are supposed to create French citizens, erase social inequalities, make everyone accept the same values, and serve as "the only space allowing each individual to live total freedom of conscience".'[68] President Jacques Chirac described the French school as a 'Republican sanctuary'.[69] These schools, he insisted, must be safe havens free from 'the evil winds that divide, separate, and pit some against others'.[70] According to the *Laïcist* mind, each morning Muslim schoolgirls enter a 'Republican sanctuary that is supposed to save them'.[71] The schools 'are central for both conceptual and historical reasons. Conceptually, they play the role of public socializing agent. Historically, they provided the central mechanism to produce citizens over and against two cleavages: regional and religious.'[72] The Muslim girl's headscarf, therefore, inhibits the school's ability to 'model for their pupils the erasure of differences and the collective embrace of the Republic'.[73]

Now we are beginning to arrive at a much more acceptable answer to our lingering question. *If the Laïcist school functions as a both a sacred space and a system of catechesis for the religion of Laïcism, this explains the anger, anxiety, and attention the headscarf received. The schoolgirl's headscarf not only disrupted Laïcist catechesis, it was a heretical symbol taken directly into the heart of Laïcité's holy of holies.* The headscarf constituted the *Laïcist* equivalent of 'the abomination that causes desolation' (Dan. 8.13, Mt. 24.15, Mk 13.14).

The schoolgirl's headscarf was a poignant visual reminder that *Laïcité*'s civilizing mission to Islam had failed. These girls were, in essence, rejecting *Laïcité*'s offer of liberation, salvation and Enlightenment. The scarves directly questioned the universality and efficacy of *Laïcité's* message and mission. One Muslim schoolgirl reported being asked by her French classmates 'Why do you wear the headscarf?',

67. Ibid.
68. Ibid., p. 163.
69. Ibid., p. 157.
70. Ibid., p. 158.
71. Ibid., p. 211.
72. Ibid., p. 12.
73. Ibid., p. 247.

to which she responded, 'Why do you ask that question? Do I ask you why you wear that sweater or those jeans? Why is it I and not you who has to justify my choice?'[74] This girl's question, stated firmly within the centre of the 'Republican sanctuary', disrupts and unsettles young *Laïcist*s who have never considered their dogmas contestable.

Why did the schoolgirl's headscarf so capture the attention of the French nation? In describing *Laïcité* as a previously dominant and now contested religion the answer becomes much clearer.

> [W]ho, in fact, are fundamentalists? To put it simply, a fundamentalist does not believe in something, but rather knows it directly. In other words, both liberal-skeptical cynicism and [religious] fundamentalism share a basic underlying feature: the loss of the ability to believe in the proper sense of the term. For both of them, religious statements are quasi-empirical statements of direct knowledge: fundamentalists accept these statements as such, while skeptics mock them. What is unthinkable for both is the 'absurd' act of a decision which installs every authentic belief, a decision that cannot be grounded in the chain of 'reason', in positive knowledge.[75]
>
> – Slavoj Žižek

VI *Abraham Kuyper and secular constantine*

> [The modern] tries to force his consciousness upon us, and claims that our consciousness has to be identical with his own. From his point of view nothing else could be expected . . .[76]

> One type must answer for all, one uniform, one position and one and the same development of life; and whatever goes beyond and above it, is looked upon as an insult to the common consciousness.[77]

> It is therefore a duty . . . to give an accurate account of what the men of the Revolution are doing and what they mean by 'neutrality.'[78]
>
> – Abraham Kuyper

Whether in the nineteenth or the twenty-first century, Abraham Kuyper's religious reading of French secularity clearly functions as an insightful hermeneutical window into the beliefs and behaviour of modern France. In this concluding section I would like to explore briefly one additional insight that Abraham Kuyper

---

74. Ibid., p. 78.

75. Slavoj Žižek, The *Universal Exception* (eds. Rex Butler and Scott Stephens; London: Continuum, 2007), pp. 308–9.

76. Kuyper, *Lectures*, p. 137. Emphasis added.

77. Ibid., p. 27.

78. Kuyper, *Gemeene Gratie* Vol III, p. 279.

provides on the religion of the Revolution. This particular insight will have special relevance for the current conflict over Islam in post-Revolutionary France.

It should, of course, be noted that Kuyper's prophetic jeremiads against the Revolution can sometimes become hyperbolic and bombastic. Accordingly, this chapter will not attempt to smooth out, nuance or apologize for his bold claims. It is left to the reader to discern the merits of his prophetic deconstruction of modernity.

Abraham Kuyper argued that all religions and ideologies were tempted to pursue something he called 'the dream of uniformity'. According to Kuyper, the desire to impose one's own beliefs and practices on the lives of others was a pervasive human malady. All religious groups felt what he called a 'yearning for false unity'.[79] This dream of uniformity 'dominates the course of world history'.[80] Within this dream,

> there lies a quiet charm, an apparent source of order, a prophecy of peace that seduces the peoples. Once articulated and accepted as a life principle, it is irresistible in its urgency, a powerful leaven that runs through all the arteries of life and never rests until all that lives and moves has been distorted by its fatal standards.[81]

Why would human beings desire this flat uniformity? Why would they want to force it on others? Kuyper had two chief replies. First, he argued that human beings were designed by God to experience unity with one another and their creator. In its sin, humanity broke its unity with God and as a result the race quickly divided. Kuyper argued that humanity's *contemporary* yearning for unity was, in this sense, 'nothing but a looking backward after a lost paradise'.[82]

Second, Kuyper believed that humanity felt an eschatological pull towards a future unity that God would re-establish at the end of time: humans long for the heavenly city that will unite the nation. While they desire this city, they could not build or announce it. God alone would establish the city and call the nations together. In this sense, Kuyper argued that the 'mistake of the Alexanders, and of the Augusti, and of the Napoleons, was not that they were charmed with the thought of the *One World Empire,* but it was this – that they endeavored to realize this idea [immediately] notwithstanding that the force of sin had dissolved our unity'.[83] Sin had made *immediate* human unity impossible.

Kuyper made a critical distinction between 'unity' and 'uniformity'. While God desired unity, humans wanted uniformity. God desired a flourishing diversity of peoples, cultures, and communities all united with Him. Creation's diversity could only find its unity in heaven – not on earth. Because of sin, humans would try to

79. Kuyper, 'Uniformity: The Curse of Modern Life', p. 24.
80. Ibid.
81. Ibid., p. 35.
82. Kuyper, *Lectures*, p. 80.
83. Ibid.

establish an immediate uniformity around some earthly object, leader or ideology. God loathed this uniformity. Kuyper instructed his audience to 'look about you in the theater of nature and tell me: where does creation, which bears the signature of God, exhibit that uniform sameness of death to which people are nowadays trying to condemn all human life?'[84] This, he argued, was the difference between divine unity and human uniformity. The unity of God brought diversity and life. The uniformity of humanity brought homogeneity and death.

Kuyper lamented that Christianity had fallen prey to this temptation of uniformity. He repeatedly mourned the Constantinian turn of the church in the Middle Ages. Even Kuyper's beloved Reformer John Calvin had tied the heretic Servetus to the stake. Few things pained Kuyper more than the history of national churches that bound themselves to the state. For, he argued, the 'church never sank away more deeply than when she went back to the inn and sought to become a national or state church; neither did she revive again in spiritual vigor, except when the Lord drove her out of the inn and pointed her back to the stable'.[85] It is no secret that Christianity has historically imposed itself on the lives of others. Kuyper's recognition of this fact was by no means groundbreaking. However (and here Kuyper's insight into the Revolution arrives), Christendom's 'striving for imperial unity was *not* abandoned by the revolution; on the contrary, the goal has remained the same'.[86] The French Revolution and Christendom *shared* a common intolerance for diversity and a pressing desire to establish uniformity. 'But,' Kuyper hastened to add,

> here is the difference. Whereas in the past that unity would be imposed upon the life of the nations externally – by the sword – today it would be insinuated into the very heart of the peoples by its own fermentation. The bare political unity of the past was metamorphosed by the catastrophe of 1789 into a *social* unity . . . with the French Revolution people opted for another strategy. They prepared to take a longer road . . .[87]

Kuyper argued that modern secularity had succeeded where Christendom had failed. Whereas Christendom applied force externally, modernity pressed for uniformity through more patient, intimate and bureaucratic avenues.

Through the construction of the modern nation state, Kuyper argued that the world's diversity would meet an 'all-compelling, all-regulating, and all-levelling power'.[88] The French had 'rightly cursed the violence of the "*ancien regime*"'.[89]

---

84. Kuyper, 'Uniformity: The Curse of Modern Life', p. 34.

85. Abraham Kuyper, *Keep Thy Solemn Feasts* (trans. John Hendrik Devries; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1928), pp. 78–9.

86. Kuyper, 'Uniformity: The Curse of Modern Life', p. 24. Emphasis added.

87. Ibid.

88. Ibid., p. 33.

89. Kuyper, 'Calvinism: Source and Stronghold', p. 282.

But, Kuyper insisted, 'let us not forget that the sector of our life over which the State spread its net back then had hardly one tenth the reach of our present government'.[90] The post-revolutionary state was far more capable of achieving the uniformity humanity had long sought. Soon enough the modern state would spread its tentacles into every aspect of life, standardizing, levelling and smoothing out every difference. Slowly but purposefully it would bring all into the modern whole.

In this, modernity's mission was much more intimate and ambitious than medieval Christendom's had ever been. Modern uniformity, Kuyper argued, 'ferments' throughout the 'arteries' of life.[91] Kuyper's descriptions foreshadow, in many ways, Michel Foucault's thesis that the disciplinary power of modernity is 'capillary'.[92] According to Foucault, modernity's ability to discipline, assimilate and create uniform modern citizens could be found in a diffuse and 'capillary' collection of cultural practices and institutions. Through this diffuse modern push towards uniformity, the diversity of the world is made docile, obedient and ultimately obsolete. This, Kuyper and Foucault argue, is how modernity works. Patiently and diffusely it presses for everything and everyone to

> become one, indivisibly one . . . and every difference . . . planned away and hollowed out until on the surface of the whole earth there would be just one people and one language – one vast cosmopolis in which there would no longer be any east or west, north or south, but all of human life would be the same because it would collectively bear the uniform features of death.[93]

Hence the diversity of God's creation is 'overlaid with a web of uniformity all the threads of which are pulled by a power-hungry centralizing monster'.[94] 'Having estranged the nations from God, [the Revolution] can hold out to them no other dream [than] . . . imperial unity'.[95]

Abraham Kuyper could hear his own hyperbole. He knew moderns would recoil from the claim that they desired 'uniformity'. Kuyper therefore promised 'to demonstrate from experience and observable facts that [modern uniformity] really dominates our time'.[96] Throughout his famous address 'Uniformity: the Curse of Modern Life', Kuyper investigates and uncovers modernity's drive for uniformity within the cultural realms of education, fashion, architecture, urban planning, gender, family, sexuality, language and religion. Kuyper discusses the

90. Ibid.
91. Kuyper, 'Uniformity: The Curse of Modern Life', p. 35.
92. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (trans. Alan Sheridan; New York: Random House, 1995).
93. Kuyper, 'Uniformity: The Curse of Modern Life', p. 33.
94. Ibid., p. 32.
95. Ibid., p. 23.
96. Ibid., p. 20.

banality of modern homes and streets, the loss of regional diversity to national homogeneity, the standardized techniques of modern education, and the imposition of Revolutionary French fashion on the diverse peoples and classes of Europe. In this, he argued, 'Humanity fashions for itself an iron fence made up of identical stiles. That is its unity. . . . It trims frolicsome shrubbery into smooth hedge . . .'[97]

Kuyper argued that this pervasive modern drive for uniformity would have particularly disastrous effects for religious minorities. Religious communities that refused to assimilate would suffer great injustice under the hegemony of the Revolution. Having rejected the unity of God for the uniformity of man, the Revolution would have little patience for the diversity of religions. In declaring themselves divine, the children of the Revolution had created a political culture in which a citizen 'grovels before his fellowmen' for rights that are already bestowed on him by God.[98] Kuyper argued that, after 1789, minorities would depend upon the benevolent generosity of the, now divine, revolutionaries. Hence, after the 'French Revolution,' it is considered 'a civil liberty for every Christian *to agree with the unbelieving majority*'.[99] Religious minorities are free to leave their faith but not free to stay. Abraham Kuyper loathed the modern practice of 'tinseling over this self-abasement'.[100] Religious minorities were free because Jesus Christ had commanded it, and not because revolutionaries allowed them to be so. No citizen should have to 'grovel' for rights that are already hers in Christ.

The children of the Revolution were fond of claiming that by transcending religion, they had become enlightened. They were interested in facts rather than superstitions. By framing modern secularity as a new religion, however, Abraham Kuyper destroyed the artificial dichotomy the secularists had constructed. In demolishing this hierarchy, Kuyper sat Secularism alongside Protestantism, Catholicism, Judaism and Islam as one worldview among many. The claim that religion could be escaped or transcended was, to Kuyper's mind, a deeply dangerous claim. Democracy could not endure if one group claimed it had transcended the limitations of all the others. For the 'partial view of religion – religion as pertaining not to all, but only to *the group of pious people*' would ultimately bring 'about the limitation of its group'.[101]

How is it that revolutionaries could not recognize their own religious particularity? How could they not see that their principles rest on foundations of faith? Why did the anthropologist John Bowen not recognize that he was describing a clash of *two* religions? Kuyper argues that moderns ultimately do not wish to see that their principles rest on a fervent *belief* in their own autonomy, rationality and sovereignty. They are aware of the superstructure of their beliefs, but '*the ground*

---

  97. Ibid., p. 36.
  98. Kuyper, *Lectures*, p. 88.
  99. Ibid., p. 109.
100. Ibid., p. 88.
101. Ibid., p. 51.

on which the lowest points of these piles rest is not explored'. To the misfortune of all, an investigation 'is abandoned before it is finished'.[102]

> [W]hat is needed in the current moment of political chaos is not so much stringent and pious calls for the reassertion of secularism but a critical analysis of what has been assumed to be the truth of secularism, its normative claims, and its assumptions about what constitutes 'the human' in this world.[103]
>
> – Saba Mahmood

102. Kuyper, *Encyclopedia*, p. 129. Emphasis added.

103. Saba Mahmood, 'Secularism, Hermeneutics, and Empire: The Politics of Islamic Reformation', *Public Culture* 18 (2006), p. 347.

Chapter 11

ANOTHER REVOLUTION: TOWARDS A NEW EXPLANATION OF THE RISE OF NEO-CALVINISM[1]

Hugo den Boer

I Introduction: The problematic relationship between the French Revolution and Neo-Calvinism

In an article on the influence of the French Revolution upon G. Groen van Prinsterer, the great father of anti-revolutionary thought, the Dutch historian George Puchinger observed the following:

> In a lecture on the French Revolution which Prof. Dr. P. Geyl held in Leiden in 1964, he demonstrated how variously it has been and continues to be interpreted: terms such as 'good' and 'evil', 'necessary' and 'lamentable' are interspersed throughout the 23 pages of his clear and summary observations.
>
> Geyl was ready to recognize 'that our modern western world has been largely shaped by the French Revolution', but was quick to add: 'Yet it was shaped by both opposition and support; by the enthusiasm for what it boldly attempted, as well as by the warning sounded by its partial failure; by the battle between the various groups which either adorned themselves with its name, or else abhorrently rejected it.'
>
> . . .
>
> Also in the Netherlands, as Geyl correctly pointed out, the French Revolution has seen 'different groups . . . which either adorned themselves with its name, or else abhorrently rejected it.'
>
> The French Revolution gave the Netherlands a powerful, initially unexpected push toward a Christian, anti-revolutionary conscience, which continues even today to promote the message and rights of religion, which was neglected

altogether by the proponents of the French Revolution and whose significance was in any case seriously undermined.

The French Revolution has indirectly resulted in the Netherlands in the emergence of Christian political parties, which have been allowed to develop in all freedom and which to this very day have exercised a radical influence on the 'government of the land'.[2]

The consensus in historiography is that neo-Calvinism finds its roots in the French Revolution, and the neo-Calvinists themselves contributed significantly to this understanding as a result of their own fierce anti-revolutionary rhetoric.[3] My reason for citing Puchinger and his account of Geyl's interpretation of the French Revolution at length is not so much that it departs from the general consensus regarding the relationship between the French Revolution and the rise of anti-revolutionary thought at the basis of neo-Calvinism – the modern life- and worldview developed in particular by Kuyper, that is. Rather, my reason for citing this passage is that it embodies three markers that I propose to use to connect the rise of neo-Calvinism not so much with the French Revolution, but rather with another revolution, which I will define below as the 'historical revolution'.

The first marker is that of perspective. The quotation from Puchinger points out to us that the French Revolution can be interpreted in many different ways: 'good' and 'evil', 'necessary' and 'lamentable'. The '*Ni Dieu, ni maître*' ideology which the neo-Calvinists identified as the basis of the French Revolution caused them to identify it, above all, with evil. All the same, they did accept the practical results of the Revolution, going so far as to claim that they were in essence Calvinistic. D. Chantepie de la Saussaye already pointed Groen van Prinsterer to this ambiguity of rejection and acceptance when he asked him: 'Revolution is an anti-Christian principle; but is revolution one and the same thing a sour modern society?'[4] The 'ease' with which the neo-Calvinist leaders explained the inconsistency of their posture towards the French Revolution and modern culture[5] may well be acceptable

2. G. Puchinger, 'Groen van Prinsterer, aangestoken door de Franse Revolutie', *Radix* 15 (1989), pp. 114–20. Puchinger's citations from Geyl are found in P. Geyl, 'De Franse Revolutie', in Z. R. Dittrich, P. C. A. Geyl, J. H. A. Logemann et al. (eds.), *Zeven revoluties* (Amsterdam: De Bussy, 1964), pp. 77–101, (p. 79).

3. Cf. Beatrice de Graaf, 'Franse Revolutie', in G. Harinck, H. Paul and B. Wallet (eds.), *Het gereformeerde geheugen. Protestantse herinneringsculturen in Nederland, 1850–2000* (Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, 2009), pp. 199–210. See also Peter S. Heslam, *Creating a Christian Worldview. Abraham Kuyper's Lectures on Calvinism* (Grand Rapids: Cambridge 1998), pp. 96–101.

4. D. Chantepie de la Saussaye, *Brief aan G. Groen van Prinsterer, ten geleide van eene tweede uitgave van 'De Nood der Kerk'* (Rotterdam: Tassemeijer, 1865), p. 107.

5. With this I mean the notion that God uses evil to produce something good. Kuyper wrote that the 'judgment of God in 1789', in which God used the French revolutionaries in order to put an end to 'the degrading situation' under the *ancien regime*, still does not

from a theological perspective, but historically it remains fraught with problems. George Harinck has formulated these problems in convincing fashion, pointing out that, as a historical term, Modernism refers to 'practices': 'the introduction of freedom, democracy, development and progress. Defined in this way, everyone agrees that neo-Calvinism was a modern movement.'[6] Yet the neo-Calvinists appear not to oppose the French Revolution's *practices*, but rather its *program*: 'the emancipation from the pre-modern worldview and the implementation of the worldview of the French Revolution, with at its core the rejection not just of the church, but of God and religion'.[7]

While there may still be truth in the common perception that the neo-Calvinists simply used modern means for the spread of their anti-Modernism,[8] it remains an unsatisfying solution as long as the French Revolution (and, in its trail, Modernism) is considered to explain the rise of neo-Calvinism.[9] This can be demonstrated by two observations. In the first place, the revolutionary marginalisation and rejection of church and Christianity was not simply an excess of the Revolution, but the two were thereafter quickly restored to their former position under Napoleon and in the Restoration.[10] In the second place, the French Revolution (and, in the Netherlands, the Batavian Revolution) must be relativized as a revolution because it was the result and practical outcome of the reform that

acquit them of what they did. A. Kuyper, *Niet de vrijheidsboom maar het kruis. Toespraak ter opening van de tiende deputaten vergadering in het eeuwjaar der Fransche Revolutie* (Amsterdam: Wormser, 1889), pp. 9–10. Bavinck wrote: 'God is doing great things in these times. And because we believe that He is the one who upholds and governs all things also in this century by his almighty and ever-present power, we receive with thanksgiving and hope the world which he causes us to know through science, and in whose midst he has given us our place. In this we do, of course, draw a distinction between the facts that science gives to us and the considerations that are often attached to them by those who engage in it.' H. Bavinck, *Modernisme en orthodoxie. Rede gehouden bij de overdracht van het rectoraat aan de Vrije Universiteit op 20 october 1911* (Kampen: Kok, 1911), pp. 11–12.

6. George Harinck, 'The religious character of modernism and the modern character of religion: a case study of Herman Bavinck's engagement with modern culture,' *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* 29, 1 (2011), pp. 60–77, (p. 62).

7. Ibid.

8. B. Wittrock proposes: 'The age of modernity is characterized by the fact that the opponents of emblematic modern institutions cannot but express their opposition, cannot but formulate their programs with reference to the ideas of modernity.' Cited in N. C. F. van Sas, *De metamorfose van Nederland. Van oude orde naar moderniteit, 1750–1900* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2004), p. 24.

9. Cf. Harinck, 'The religious character of modernism and the modern character of religion'.

10. Cf. Alec R. Vidler, *The Church in an Age of Revolution* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1977), pp. 11–32.

had already been envisaged for the preceding half century.[11] The neo-Calvinist perspective on its own relationship to the French Revolution, therefore, places us before a problem of historical interpretation. That problem is one of 'perspective': was the French Revolution good, evil or both?

The second marker is that of dialectic. What is striking about Puchinger's and Geyl's evaluation is their determination that modern Western culture was indeed 'largely shaped by the French Revolution', but that it also owed a lot to the reactions and opposition it elicited. This is an interesting observation, since it relativizes the predominant significance of the French Revolution as an *identity marker* of modern Western culture. The Enlightenment and the Revolution did indeed incite movements opposed to their inclinations, such as Romanticism, Idealism and the various revival movements which exerted great influence upon the character of modernity in the nineteenth century. Recently, several scholars have emphasized that these movements may have arisen as a response to the Enlightenment and the Revolution, but still interacted more and displayed greater continuity with them than has been assumed up until now. Nineteenth-century historiography was long dominated by the social sciences, but under the influence of intellectual cultural historians the next century saw a revision take place, which put greater emphasis on the continuity between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This revision also implied a change to the antithetical vision of the relationship between the Enlightenment and the anti-Enlightenment, as demonstrated in the following quotation: 'The Parisian philosophes with their fervent secularism appear now as just one strand within a plurality of enlightenments that included protestant and ecclesiastical movements.'[12]

Over the course of the nineteenth century, anti-Enlightenment thinkers and movements produced a wide variety of ways for uniting Christianity and culture, tradition and modernity. They abandoned the radical absolutism of the eighteenth century, but still remained firmly entrenched on Enlightenment ground.[13] Conversely, the very characteristics that anti-Enlightenment movements claimed exclusively for themselves – so as to distance themselves from the Enlightenment! – could not be denied to the Enlightenment. Knudson has observed that, although historicism, as the movement tied to Romanticism and Idealism, 'originated by emptying the Enlightenment of a sense of history', the Enlightenment was still not an ahistorical movement.[14] Rather, there appeared to be a 'direct correlation between the political radicalization and spread of the Enlightenment and the

11. Van Sas, *Metamorfose*, p. 19; Vidler, *The Church*, p. 14.

12. Cf. Mark Bevir, 'The long nineteenth century in intellectual history', *Journal of Victorian Culture* 6, 2 (2001), pp. 313–35, (p. 315).

13. J. A. Bornewasser, 'Christendom en Aufklärung. Over geschiedenis en interpretatie', in J. A. Bornewasser (ed.), *Kerkelijk verleden in een wereldlijke context* (Amsterdam: Van Soeren, 1989), pp. 218–30.

14. Jonathan Knudson, 'The Historicist Enlightenment', in Keith Michael Baker and Peter Hanns Reill (eds.), *What's Left of Enlightenment. A Postmodern Question* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), pp. 39–49, (p. 40).

intensified interest in history'.[15] That this continuity was found more in a historical method than in a historical 'sensibility' does not detract from the fact that a historical consciousness and knowledge were required for the emergence of a 'separate identity of civil society', which also played an important role in the rise of neo-Calvinism.[16]

Geyl's and Puchinger's claim that modernity was shaped by both proponents as well as opponents of the Revolution is entirely correct. Yet the above should also demonstrate that it is not so simple to speak in terms of a 'for' and an 'against'. The realization that there was much greater continuity with and interaction between the Enlightenment and the Revolution and their opponents raises for us the question of the precise historical relationship between the French Revolution and modernity, between modern Christianity and culture, and between neo-Calvinism and Modernism. The ambiguity this involves is already evident in the question as to whether it was in fact 'the place of reason in a life built on faith' that the people were after, or else 'the place of faith within a life founded on reason'.[17] Kuyper and Bavinck themselves testified to this ambiguity in that they accepted the *practices* deriving from the French Revolution, but at the same time placed the Christian faith in absolute opposition to the so-called principles of the French Revolution out of which Modernism had arisen.[18] Given this ambiguity, it seems justified not to conceive of the relationship of neo-Calvinism to the French Revolution and to Modernism in terms of absolute opposition and antithesis. Rather, as is true of other anti-Enlightenment movements, neo-Calvinism, the French Revolution and Modernism appear to stand in a dialectical relationship to each other. In view of this dialectical relationship, one wonders whether, historically, the adherents of anti-revolutionary thought had the correct revolution in mind with their mantra 'The gospel against revolution' ('tegen de Revolutie het Evangelie'). Below we will consider what consequences this question has for the historical relationship between neo-Calvinism and Modernism (neo-Protestantism).

Finally, the citation from Puchinger and Geyl guides us in our examination of the role played by the French Revolution in the rise of modern religious pluralism. This brings us to the third marker, namely, that of integration. In the Netherlands, the French Revolution gave 'a powerful, initially unexpected push toward a Christian, anti-revolutionary conscience'. As Puchinger concluded, it also 'indirectly resulted in the Netherlands in the emergence of Christian political parties, which have been allowed to develop in all freedom'. This view places the French Revolution at the earliest origins of neo-Calvinism, as a movement that supported the place of religion in the post-revolution era. Through the Christian anti-revolutionary response, the French Revolution became an indirect cause for the rise of modern pluralism. This system of thought, so it was assumed, was the only one that proved

15. Ibid., p. 42.

16. Ibid.

17. Bornewasser, 'Christendom en Aufklärung', p. 229.

18. Cf. Heslam, *Creating* a *Christian worldview*, pp. 96–101; Harinck, 'The religious character of modernism and the modern character of religion'.

capable of bringing order to the diversity of views and currents. It was in this modern (religious) pluralism alone that the integration of religion and modernity could receive concrete shape, as it did in neo-Calvinism, for example.

The French Revolution (understood in terms of its *practices*) indeed created important conditions for the rise of modern pluralism. In particular the separation of church and state, and the uncoupling of social life from church and state so as to create a *civil society*, created sufficient room for the development of the pluralism that was necessary for the integration of religion and modernity. Partly due to the aforementioned problems of neo-Calvinism's perspective on, and dialectical relationship to, the French Revolution, one wonders whether the Revolution really was the cause for its rise as the expression of the modern religious pluralism in which religion and modernity could be fully integrated.

Having demonstrated along the marks of perspective, dialectic and integration that the relationship between neo-Calvinism and the French Revolution (and, as a result, the former's opposition to Modernism) is historically not unambiguous, I propose to seek the basis for the problem of neo-Calvinism's relationship to Modernism in another revolution.

II Historical revolution

The three aforementioned elements (perspective, dialectic and integration) of the quotation, in which the historical relationship between neo-Calvinism and the French Revolution takes centre stage, raise the question as to whether the French Revolution must be taken as the Archimedean point for modernity to begin with. The unbelief identified by the neo-Calvinists at the root of the French Revolution and Modernism cannot be attached to it without any qualification. After all, as we have seen, the French Revolution appeared to constitute primarily a change in 'practices', which the neo-Calvinists themselves did not hesitate to follow. For that reason, I propose that the cause for the rise of neo-Calvinism must not be sought in the French Revolution, but in the so-called 'historical revolution'.

While in the eyes of the neo-Calvinists the French Revolution represented a radical break with the past and could therefore easily be viewed as the starting-point for modernity, this does not apply to the phenomenon of the 'historical revolution'. The 'historical revolution' was not a radical break, but a gradual, slow change in the people's thinking and mentality. Whereas the French Revolution was something that could be supported or opposed, the 'historical revolution' was a turn in thinking and mentality that affected everyone, regardless of their religious convictions or ideology. A further important difference is the fact that the accent in the 'historical revolution' was on continuity within the process of transition to modernity. Historical thinking was not observed in the public domain or in cultural, religious and political life until around 1800, but has its roots in the Renaissance and Reformation. Although it is less revolutionary and less visible in character, in my view the 'historical revolution' had a much greater impact than the French Revolution on the rise of the Modernism and modern religious pluralism

in which neo-Calvinism too must be situated. The Jesuit scholar Adrianus van Gestel (1830–1900), who identified the origins of modernity in religion through the separation of church and state in the revolutionary years around the turn of the century, clearly expressed the core of the difference rather than the changes that were paired with the rise of modernity: 'Every change in politics was preceded by a change in religion.'[19]

Van Gestel, as many others then did and still do now, saw the origins for modernity in eighteenth-century rationalism.[20] But, in the context of the above description of the modern understanding that modernity was formed by the interaction between the Enlightenment and anti-Enlightenment, Mark Bevir speaks rather of a twofold origin of 'Enlightenment and romanticism, with their inner diversities', representing 'the two great pan-European beginnings to the modern age'.[21]

> The romantics rejected the Enlightenment view of mind as passive and inert. They emphasized the living nature of the inorganic . . . and thus the ability of living things to create a fluid, changing order for themselves through activity infused with purpose, thought, and imagination. . . . Questions of time, dynamics, and evolution challenged those of system, statics, and balance.[22]

What I mean by the 'historical revolution' is forcefully expressed in this citation as a (difference in) view towards time and history, dynamics and evolution, unity and diversity, a mechanical and an organic worldview, rationalism and imagination, universalism and localism. In the eighteenth century, there was an increasing awareness of the problems surrounding such concepts as 'time' and 'perspective', and this gradually found concrete expression in the nineteenth century in new social and political systems, in a civil society, and in many religious currents and organizations each of which represented an aspect of, or a view on, the problem of 'time' and 'perspective'. What I have termed the 'historical revolution' is in fact a sweeping change in early modern and modern thought towards a state of 'historical consciousness'. Parker defines the rise of historical consciousness as,

> the intellectual transition from pre-modern limitations imposed by dogma and ecclesiastical faith claims, toward a historicizing study of sacred and revered texts, and the rational critique of religious truth claims based on divine revelation and providential intervention in human history.[23]

19. Adrianus van Gestel, *Het Christendom en de staat in onzen tijd* (Amsterdam: Van Langenhuysen, 1864), p. 91.

20. Ibid.

21. Bevir, 'The long nineteenth century', p. 316.

22. Ibid., pp. 315–16.

23. Kenneth L. Parker, 'The rise of historical consciousness among the Christian churches: an introduction', in Kenneth L. Parker and Erick H. Moser (eds.), *The Rise of Historical Consciousness among the Christian Churches. Studies in Religion and the Social Order* (Lanham: The University Press of America, 2013), pp. 1–16, (p. 1).

Parker points out that it 'is commonly assumed that this was an Enlightenment era phenomenon – an expression of secularity and the elevation of human rationality above dogmatic belief systems'.[24] In this chapter I follow the position defended by the editors of this collected volume, which emphasizes that historical consciousness was a Christian phenomenon to which everyone – whether secular or religious, enlightened or unenlightened – had to relate. In the French Revolution we see much of the rationalist Enlightenment thought regarding 'system, statics and balance', while we see greater emphasis in the 'historical revolution' on the triad of 'time, dynamics and evolution' commonly associated with anti-Enlightenment thinking. Yet the two cannot be considered apart from each other, and it is precisely this *dialectic* that we see at work in the nineteenth century in the context of the question concerning the particular historical *perspective* that must be taken as determinative for the problem of the *integration* of religion and modernity. In what follows, I will examine these three aspects as markers of the 'historical revolution' with a number of examples, in order to explain the rise of neo-Calvinism.

III First marker: Perspective

Under the influence of a greater temporal consciousness – the concept of a century as a period of one hundred years, for example, did not arise until the sixteenth century – the eighteenth century saw the rise of the notion that history is not only about establishing facts and recording events, but also demands perspective.[25] This insight was initially still situated within a framework of objectivity, although the boundaries between groups began increasingly to be determined by the historical perspective – and this was not only on an epistemological level, but also in terms of life-view, culture and theology. From this perspective, 'the historicising of human consciousness' is at times referred to as 'the decisively new element in modern Western thought'.[26] Or, to use the words of Meinecke: historicisation was 'one of the greatest intellectual revolutions experienced by Western thought' ('eine der größten geistigen Revolutionen, die das abendländische Denken erlebt hat').[27]

Ever since Eusebius of Caesarea in his *Historia Ecclesiastica* outlined a concept of time and history emphasizing historical changelessness and unity because absolute truths do not relate well to discontinuity and development, time stood still. Such a historical perspective of changelessness and continuity in the period

24. Parker, 'The rise of historical consciousness', p. 1.

25. Cf. P. B. M. Blaas, *De Burgerlijke Eeuw. Over eeuwwenden, liberale burgerij en geschiedschrijving* (Hilversum: Verloren, 2000), pp. 15–23.

26. Ninian Smart, 'Introduction', in N. Smart, J. Clayton, P. Sherry, and S. T. Katz (eds.), *Nineteenth Century Religious Thought in de West* (Vol. I; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp. 1–16, (p. 11).

27. Friedrich Meinecke, *Die entstehung des historismus* (Vol. I; München: Oldenbourg 1936), p. 1.

between Christ's ascension, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and Christ's return matched well with the unity and catholicity of the Roman Catholic Church and the unity of church and state.[28] The Renaissance and Reformation, however, brought enormous changes to this static interpretation of time. The consciousness of discontinuity and change was accompanied by the notion of diversity and pluriformity:

> The Renaissance and the Reformation precipitated a historical revolution . . . so profound that it reversed the Western perception of the past within a single generation, from a perception of unity to one of division and difference, from a stillness to a dynamic motion. New ideas had superseded the old, and with supersession came the perception of motion.[29]

In what follows, I will provide a brief survey of church history's new role within theology and the institutional church resulting from the historical revolution, in the hope that it will provide us with greater insight into the influence of modern historical consciousness on the rise and legitimacy of ecclesiastical pluriformity and modern religious pluralism.

Until the eighteenth century, historical arguments were used time and again in order to demonstrate the legitimacy of the institutional church and of Christian doctrine, while the aims of church history were first and foremost apologetic in nature. Influenced by the new historical consciousness, the New Testament scholar and church historian J. S. Semler (1725–91) attempted to use historical scholarship in order to discover a norm by which, regardless of the change in the history and doctrines of the church, the truth of Christianity and the constancy of the institutional church could be safeguarded. Semler, however, failed to find such an unchangeable norm for the truth of Christianity, for the very reason that his studies showed that the Christian faith had manifested itself in different forms and content over the course of time. While for Semler this initially served to prove the dynamics of and variety within Christianity itself, in the end he could no longer escape the problems of relativism which his research had elicited for him. He solved this problem theoretically by arguing that the change in perspective formed a part of the work of divine providence. And yet, he in the end gave up his faith in normativity. In his mind, early Christianity and the apostles could not serve as the norm for the later centuries. It was the task of the church historian to seek the unity in the diversity. As a result, Semler undermined the foundations for belief in the absolute necessity of the institution of the church, whose task it was to protect the unchangeable dogmas of the Christian faith. In the end, he followed Kant in arguing that our task in the institutional church was to make that church unnecessary. The disappearance of the institutional church was, for him, a sign of the realization of God's kingdom.

28. Anthony Kemp, *The Estrangement of the Past. A Study in the Origins of Modern Historical Consciousness* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), pp. 3–65.

29. Kemp, *Estrangement of the past*, p. 104.

Semler's historical studies brought him to the realization of the pluriformity and changeability of the Christian faith at the exclusion of every normative measure for its truth, and therefore posed a serious challenge to the legitimacy and necessity of the institutional church. Not all his contemporaries and students followed him in this step, however. Two Göttingen church historians, G. J. Planck (1751–1833) and K. F. Stäudlin (1761–1826), did accept Semler's methods, but maintained the Bible as a norm that could not be read without supernaturalist presuppositions. Therefore, as they saw it, the task of the church historian was to point to the normativity of early Christianity for his own views and for those of his contemporaries. Planck and Stäudlin viewed the Reformation and the Protestant Enlightenment as being in continuity with the Gospel: Luther had rediscovered the original message, through which the line to normative early Christianity was restored. Planck and Stäudlin saw the institute and doctrines of the church legitimated in the New Testament. In their view, Christ had not instituted the church only to eliminate it in the course of time because of its greater humanity and morality. The abiding significance of the institutional church consisted in the positive and powerful effect that the unchangeable doctrines exercised upon the principles of morality. According to Stäudlin, the doctrine and institution of the church had been given once and for all in Jesus Christ. This meant that the greatest responsibility for the church historian was to consider the degree to which the 'idea of the church' had unfolded itself:

> Stäudlin could admit in history no steady progress from statutary to purely reasonable religion but saw a constant struggle of different forms of statutary religion with each other; the moral faith alternatively receded and advanced. . . . The church historian must be able to assert, not simply that Christianity has advanced reasonable and moral religion, but as well that the divinely-legitimated source of the fixed norm of faith stands behind the enduring necessity of the institution and its positive doctrine. The positive and particular were not destined to wither away, nor would the institution disappear.[30]

Abraham Kuyper's approach to the origin of the pluriformity of the institutional church, and to the role of history and of the church historian for the institutionalized, pluriform church closely followed that of Planck and Stäudlin. Kuyper argued that the Reformation's '*principium unum* par excellence was the return to the Holy Scriptures'; since then, the emphasis had come to be placed on the 'flourishing of pluriformity'.[31] Kuyper denied that Luther and Calvin had intended such pluriformity, for they 'still lived in the unshakable conviction that

---

30. The above is based on and cited from John Stroup, 'Protestant church historians in the German Enlightenment', in H. E. Bödeker, G. G. Iggers, J. B. Knudson and P. H. Reill (eds.), *Aufklärung und Geschichte. Studien zur deutschen Geschichtswissenschaft im 18. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1986), pp. 169–92, (p. 189).

31. Abraham Kuyper, *Encyclopaedie der Heilige Godgeleerdheid* Dl. II, Algemeen deel (Kampen: Kok, 2nd rev. edn, 1909), p. 614.

the confession to which they themselves adhered had an absolute and exclusive character'.[32] Lutherans and Calvinists not only considered their own church to be relatively the purest church, but in fact the one and only lawful continuation of the apostolic church. Kuyper argued that things could not have been any other way, since,

> for centuries people had been used to the conception that truth, which they considered to be absolute, also had to retain this absolute character in a unity of form and expression; and, since the rigorous continuation of the church's unity alone had made this result possible, the possibility of a certain pluriformity in church life could not even be considered for a moment. The concept of unity was so deeply rooted in the imagination of those times that, although pluriformity already was a fact and showing its effects, the people still continued to reason and act as if there never could be anything except the one, uniform church.[33]

Luther's protest against the pope and the church of his days had made some room for pluriformity, and won a legitimate place for the principle of subjective religion. The *kirchenbildende* power of a particular religious current then determined whether or not it was viable and would survive.

> And thus, history has taught [us] that the church of Christ had to reveal itself in more than one form, and at the same time, that this plurality of its revelation was not arbitrary or capricious, but was determined by the spiritual and formative power that was or was not present in every current that raised its head. . . . This pluriformity was given, unconsciously, in the doctrine of the *ecclesia visibilis* as the revelation of the *ecclesia invisibilis*.[34]

According to Kuyper, church historians have the specific task 'to point to the historical reality that there are different streams in the church's life, which had been repressed under the false unity engendered by the pope'.[35] He further draws a clear distinction between the task of the theologian and that of the church historian. While theology (as a 'free science') has the task 'to maintain the essential unity of the church amidst the pluriformity of streams',[36] the church historian – aided by Scripture as his ahistorical norm – must point out which church is the purest in the midst of the historical unfolding of the pluriform church, and display 'how the pure idea of the institute has struggled to break through in the course of the centuries, and that it only gradually came to unfold its content after it had first undergone many changes'.[37]

32. Kuyper, *Encyclopaedie*, p. 615.
33. Ibid., pp. 615–16.
34. Ibid., pp. 618–19.
35. Ibid., p. 621.
36. Ibid., p. 623.
37. Ibid., pp. 260–93, (p. 262).

Under the influence of historical consciousness, the Reformation had thus – at times, still unconsciously and unintentionally – postulated the pluriformity of the church and Christianity, and further separated theology from the institutional church so that, as a free science, it could translate its unity from within the pluriformity of historical reality.

IV Second marker: Dialectic

Kuyper thus turned pluriformity into a defining marker of modernity since the time of the Reformation. Yet, according to him, the institution of the church is only one of the forms in which the Christian life manifests itself.[38] For Kuyper, as for Planck and Stäudlin, the dialectical relationship towards modernity becomes evident in the church's application of the modern historical consciousness. All three held to the Scriptures as the unchanging, ahistorical norm that receives a pluriform expression through human activity and is subjected to historical development – that is, as the expression of the immeasurable richness and diversity of God, which cannot be encapsulated in one human form alone.

This dialectical position comes out emphatically in Kuyper's aversion to the French Revolution. In his speech *Eenvormigheid, de vloek van het moderne leven* ('Uniformity, the curse of modern life'), he fiercely attacked the uniforming tendency of the Revolution, which he considered to be in conflict with the Christian freedom that God had given the nations in their own culture and history. While 'unity is the final goal to which God directs his ways', 'that same ideal has been usurped by the world's sinful striving, as it too pursues unity'.[39] The entire course of history witnesses this pursuit for unity. 'Both the Word of God and the pursuit of sin demand a single kingdom encompassing all kingdoms, a unity encompassing all parts.'[40]

Here we see the recurring problem that typifies the troubled relationship between religion and modernity. There is a continuous tension between the ideal of unity and centralization, as opposed to the individual's rights, freedoms and identity that must be protected at the same time. Kuyper describes the difference between Christian and secular unity as follows, when he writes that, 'in God's ways, that living unity must grow with internal power from that very difference between the nations and generations', while sin seeks unity by 'recklessly leveling and flattening out all diversity'.[41] Kuyper's problem with 'the turn made by France, the birth of modern life', is that it appears to have succeeded in achieving this unity. The French Revolution's cry for 'liberty, equality and fraternity' does not

---

38. Ibid., p. 261.

39. A. Kuyper, *Eenvormigheid, de vloek van het moderne leven* (Amsterdam: H. de Hoogh, 1870), p. 4.

40. Ibid., p. 5.

41. Ibid., p. 7.

aim at a state-imposed unity, but rather a social unity, which is much tighter and more powerful than one imposed by the state but is not experienced by the state's own citizens. This pursuit for social unity will mean the end of national pride, and undermine the love of one's country. It is under 'false pretences' that the 'revolution's cry for "equality, liberty, fraternity" was derived from Scripture'. 'But what people overlooked is this: that the unity of our human race may be sought at the beginning and end of its road alone, in its origin and destination, and not in the developmental phases through which it must pass along that road.'[42] Instead of seeking unity in Christ, the Revolution sought it in uniformity, in homogeny and in the unity of social, cultural and political life.

The next question is, of course, whether this imposed uniformity was unique to the Revolution. Although this may be what we expect, Kuyper claims that it is not so: 'This dominion of uniformity has in fact been prepared by the church more than anything else.'[43] From its very beginnings, the church was confronted with the same question that has governed its entire history: 'how, out of the rich variety of powerful personalities shaped by the Spirit, could the unity grow that it essentially already possessed in Christ'?[44] The Reformation broke with the false uniformity of the Roman Catholic Church, but that old uniformity soon returned. According to Kuyper, this also explains what has happened to the church, as well as the battle between the various currents of the modern era, since spiritual freedom and institutional uniformity simply cannot coexist for long.

The problem that Kuyper claimed to be a Christian tension with respect to the homogenizing power of modernity and the Revolution was in fact a broader tension between unity and diversity inherent to modernity. The difference between the two consists above all in a difference between the particular historical perspective chosen. This is emphasized by Nipperdey in his analysis of the problem of 'unity and diversity' (*Einheit und Vielfalt*) in the modern era:

> In this respect, the century of the revolutions too continued to dwell in a paradoxical dualism. The modern world can be described as a world of growing diversity or plurality, particularly when the accent is placed on Reformation and Renaissance and Enlightenment; or else it can be described as a world of uniformity, when the accent is placed on absolutism and revolution. Stated negatively, the modern world witnesses either a homogenising mechanism of leveling, or else a pluralizing anarchy.[45]

A free public sphere ought in the end to do justice to everyone, and solve the problem of unity and diversity: 'The uniformity of conditions alone enables the plurality of consequences – not, as in the ancient world, a unity of religion

42. Ibid., p. 23.
43. Ibid., p. 26.
44. Ibid.
45. Thomas Nipperdey, 'Einheit und vielfalt in der neueren Geschichte', *Historische Zeitschrift* 253 (1991), pp. 1–20, (p. 5).

and a diversity of institutions, but rather a unity of institutions and a diversity of beliefs and lifeviews.'[46] The victory in the nineteenth century of history and sociology over the eighteenth-century hegemony of philosophy demonstrates that the notion of plurality refused to allow itself to be overrun by the modern pursuit for centralization and uniformity. Rather, 'the nineteenth century is moved by the dialectic of what I have called "depluralization" (*Entpluralisierung*) and "repluralization" (*Neupluralisierung*)'.[47]

Nipperdey explains modernity against the tension between depluralization and repluralization – a dialectical model in which Kuyper's neo-Calvinism fits seamlessly, for example, in its association of nationalism and sovereignty within one's own circle, and of the catholicity and pluriformity of the church. Combined with Christian freedom, diversity ought only to increase. Unity may well have been the ideal, but could not be realized on earth. Unity would not be restored until the return of Christ – and not because we ourselves bring that unity closer to us, but because it comes to us.[48]

V Third marker: Integration of religion and modernity

Neo-Calvinism sought to provide a worldview adapted to the times. In neo-Calvinism, a biblical-Christian (Calvinist) perspective and a dialectical relationship to modernity were amalgamated into a modern worldview. Neo-Calvinism succeeded in creating room for itself within the modern era, and therefore functions as a good example of the way in which religion has influenced the form and structure of modernity.[49] A powerful historical consciousness and the acceptance of pluriformity in the form of communities, each of which has its own identity, have legitimated the integration of religion and modernity and guaranteed its acceptance and effective power. If, as I am proposing, we are to explain neo-Calvinism against the background of the historical revolution rather than the French Revolution, we are left with greater continuity between neo-Calvinism and modernity than we would if we were to continue in the antithetical perspective that identifies the origins of Modernism in the French Revolution.

It is striking that, at the beginning of the twentieth century, the liberal Protestants were the ones to draw attention to what they considered the problematic nature

---

46. Ibid., p. 8.

47. Ibid., p. 10.

48. A. Kuyper, *Eenheid, rede ter bevestiging van ds. P. Van Son* (Amsterdam: H. de Hoogh, 1873).

49. For the influence of religion on modernity, see, for example, Thomas Albert Howard, *Religion and the Rise of Historicism. W.M.L. de Wette, Jacob Burckhardt, and the Theological Origins of Nineteenth-century Historical Consciousness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); and for the development of Protestantism in the modern era, see, for example, B. A. Gerrish, *The Old Protestantism and the New. Essays on the Reformation Heritage* (Chicago: University Press, 1982).

of the way in which the neo-Calvinists integrated religion and modernity.[50] Disappointed in Modernism, which had fallen as a result of the success of its own message of humanization and individualism, liberal Protestants sought a solution for the viability of the message and direction they supported. They accomplished this by at once rooting liberal Protestantism in humanism and Reformation[51] and seeking suitable forms of community in which their modern religious message could obtain a lasting form. Whereas the neo-Calvinists viewed themselves in line with historical Calvinism, the liberal Protestants similarly considered themselves to be the historical continuation of neo-Protestantism, a term coined by Troeltsch for the new Christian world as it had set in with the Enlightenment.[52] The liberals of course had their own organizations, but it 'became clear that no association of *people* could bear the liberal-religious life of our entire nation'.[53]

In this context of a liberal neo-Protestantism, which industriously sought a lasting form for the integration of modernity and religion, and a neo-Calvinism, which had found a firm basis for itself in its integration of religion and modernity, a lengthy debate arose over the relationship between, and legitimacy of, Modernism and orthodoxy.[54] This debate was eventually determined by the half century of struggle experienced by both groups. The central question concerned the legitimacy of neo-Calvinism's roots in historical Calvinism. For, had the neo-Calvinists not accepted so much modern thought and methods that one could no longer speak of orthodoxy? [55] More importantly, had the neo-Calvinists in their

50. For an analysis of the relationship between neo-Calvinism and 'culture Protestantism', see Arie L. Molendijk, 'Neo-calvinistisch cultuurprotestantisme. Abraham Kuypers *Stone Lectures*', *Documentatieblad voor de Nederlandse Kerkgeschiedenis na 1800* 29 (2006), pp. 4–19.

51. See, for example, J. Lindeboom, *Geschiedenis van het vrijzinnig protestantisme* (3 vols.; Assen: Van Gorchem, 1929–33).

52. Cf. Bornewasser, 'Christendom en Aufklärung', p. 220; H. J. Birkner, 'Über den Begriff des Neuprotestantismus', in H. J. Birkner and D. Rösler (eds.), *Beiträge zur Theorie der neuzeitlichen Christentums* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1968), pp. 1–15; Lindeboom, *Geschiedenis van het vrijzinnig protestantisme* Vol. I, p. 12.

53. W. Noordhoff, *Het godsdienstig gemeenschapsleven in het Nederlandsch vrijzinnig protestantisme. Een sociaal-psychologische studie* (Lochem: De Tijdstroom, 1933), p. 19.

54. For this debate, see R. H. Bremmer, *Herman Bavinck als dogmaticus* (Kampen: Kok, 1956), pp. 115–50; C. M. van Driel, *Dienaar van twee heren. Het strijdbaar leven van theoloog-politicus B. D. Eerdmans (1868–1948)* (Kampen: Kok, 2005), pp. 244–365; George Harinck, 'Why was Bavinck in need of a philosophy of revelation?'. Paper given at the Abraham Kuyper Conference, 16–18 April 2009: *Philosophy and Revelation. A celebration of the centenary of Herman Bavinck's 1908–09 Stone Lectures*.

55. This subject was the occasion for two further, lengthy studies. See C. B. Hylkema, *Oud- en nieuw-calvinisme. Een vergelijkende geschiedkundige studie* (Haarlem: Willink, 1911) and L. J . Hulst en G. K. Hemkes, *Oud- en nieuw Calvinisme* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1913).

acceptance of modernity, just like the liberals, not taken a place that was much more in the neo-Protestant rather than the orthodox tradition? The instigator from the liberal side, B. D. Eerdmans, argued that 'the same Dr. A. Kuyper, who sought to combine reformed theology with the spirit of this age', had also given Reformed theology a new character. Eerdmans suggested that Kuyper and his followers in fact failed to remain Reformed, but still assumed this title in order to maintain their draw among the orthodox.[56] Bavinck later responded in a speech in which he acknowledged that neo-Calvinism, under the influence of (historical) scholarship, had undergone a significant change in its world-*perspective* (*wereldbeeld*); it accepted the modern world-*perspective*, which was largely shared with the liberals. However, the time had not yet come for a new world*view* (*wereldbeschouwing*), resting exclusively upon the insights of scholarship. While neo-Calvinism's world-perspective was modern, its worldview and the underlying theology remained Reformed. For Bavinck, this represented the most important distinction between the Calvinists and the liberals.[57]

In this debate between Modernism and orthodoxy, in which the integration of religion and modernity stood front and centre, the historical revolution played a double role. While the liberals measured neo-Calvinism historically against sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Calvinism with the goal of denying its orthodox identity, the neo-Calvinists found in their continuity with original Calvinism the very motive for a modern-religious worldview and perspective. The two groups thus in fact denied the legitimacy of the other's historical perspective. Neo-Protestantism and neo-Calvinism may have shared the 'neo-' in their names, but differed in that they were historically oriented to enlightened Protestantism and to orthodox Calvinism, respectively. It is remarkable that this group of liberals (of neo-Calvinist bent) increasingly saw the importance of history and community as conditions for the continued existence of liberal Protestantism. In the words of Troeltsch, they came to see that,

> [r]ationalism cuts religion off from corporate and historical resources, and finally results in radical religious individualism'. . . . History is the source of concrete content and religious community, and it is the bearer of redeeming forces. . . . We do not derive religious community from the voluntary association of similarly stirred subjectivities, but rather from an historical community engendered in the past which flows into the present.[58]

Influenced by the results of later scholarship, the liberal church historian J. Lindeboom attempted in 1924 to give a religion-psychological explanation of the historical difference between the orthodox and the liberals, and concluded that their existence was unavoidable given that there were both pessimistic and

---

56. B. D. Eerdmans, *De theologie van dr. A. Kuyper* (Leiden: Van Doesburgh, 1909).

57. H. Bavinck, *Modernisme en orthodoxie*.

58. Walter E. Wyman, *The Concept of Glaubenslehre. Ernst Troeltsch and the Theological Heritage of Schleiermacher* (Chicago: Scholars Press, 1983), p. 175.

optimistic people.[59] Using the same psychological approach, the Christian-Reformed (*christelijk-gereformeerde*) theologian J. J. van der Schuit identified neo-Calvinism as a 'third group' between 'Modernism' and the 'biblical-confessional current'. This classification demonstrates how, in the eyes of both the modernists and the strict orthodox, the neo-Calvinists had succeeded in integrating modernity and the Christian faith.[60]

VI Neo-Calvinism and the historical revolution: Impact

I have attempted to demonstrate that the common tendency to explain the rise of neo-Calvinism as a reaction to the French Revolution is, historically speaking, problematic. I have further attempted to demonstrate along the markers of perspective, dialectic and integration that the neo-Calvinist understanding of the relationship between religion and modernity must indeed be understood in the context of the impact of the French Revolution, but must historically be rooted in the so-called 'historical revolution'. Modern historical consciousness and its application to theology, to the history of Christianity, to the Revolution and to modern culture does not conflict with the rise of neo-Calvinism, but is related to it as the expression of modern religious pluralism. The historical perspective was largely determinative for the neo-Calvinist orientation towards early modern Calvinism, and saw at the Reformation the unfolding of an altogether necessary pluriformity that at once turned theology into a 'free science' and kept institutional Christianity close to its biblical purity.

This historical perspective on pluriformity as a constitutive part of God's revelation in the world ensured that neo-Calvinism would fiercely oppose the homogenizing power of the French Revolution, although it in fact adopted the Revolution's practical consequences as essentially Calvinistic in nature. As such, neo-Calvinism partly followed the process of 'depluralisation and repluralisation' which had been set in motion by the Revolution, so as to give a shape of its own to the way in which religion and modernity were integrated. Neo-Calvinism distinguished itself from neo-Protestantism in its historical perspective on the Bible as the ahistorical norm for the historical development of Christianity, and on Calvinism as the purest expression of the Christian faith. Neo-Protestantism found its own historical perspective in a humanistic, enlightened Protestantism.

The historical consciousness raised the modern problem of unity and diversity, which we see reflected in politics, society, and church and religion. Neo-Calvinism as a worldview is one 'historical product' among others of this tension, for which reason the rise of neo-Calvinism is better explained from the 'historical revolution' and its dialectical relationship to the French Revolution.

59. J. Lindeboom, *De psychologische beteekenis der richtingsverschillen* (Baarn: Hollandia-Drukkerij, 1924).

60. Cf. K. Schilder, *Dr. A. Kuyper en het 'Neo-Calvinisme' te Apeldoorn veroordeeld? (De rectorale rede van docent J.J. v.d. Schuit)* (Delft: Meinema, 1925).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Ager, Dennis Ernest. *Sociolinguistics and Contemporary French* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

D'Aubigné, J. H. Merle. *The History of the Reformation in the Sixteenth Century* (trans. Henry Beveridge; Glasgow: William Collins, 1845).

Augustijn, C. 'Kuypers rede over 'De hedendaagsche schriftcritiek' in haar historische context', in Augustijn, C. and Vree, J. (eds.) *Abraham Kuyper: vast en veranderlijk* (Zoetermeer: Meinema, 1998), pp. 109–48.

Bavinck, Herman. *De wetenschap der h. godgeleerdheid* (Kampen: Zalsman, 1883).

—*De theologie van prof. dr. Daniel Chantepie de la Saussaye. Bijdrage tot de kennis der ethische theologie* (Leiden: D. Donner, 1884).

—*De katholiciteit van christendom en kerk* (Kampen: Zalsman, 1888).

—*De algemeene genade* (Kampen: Zalsman, 1894).

—*Het vierde eener eeuw. Rede bij gelegenheid van het vijf en twintig-jarig bestaan van de 'Standaard'* (Kampen: J. H. Bos, 1897).

—'Naar Groen terug (I)', *De Bazuin*, 23 November 1900.

—*De welsprekendheid* (Kampen: G. H. Zalsman, 1901).

—*De zekerheid des geloofs* (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1901).

—*De wereldverwinnende kracht des geloofs. Leerrede over 1 Joh. 5: 4b, uitgesproken in de Burgwalkerk te Kampen den 30sten juni 1901* (Kampen: Ph. Zalsman, 1901).

—*Godsdienst en godgeleerdheid. Rede gehouden bij de aanvaarding van het hoogleeraarsambt in de theologie aan de Vrije Universiteit te Amsterdam op woensdag 17 december 1902* (Wageningen: Vada, 1902).

—'Voorrede', in G. Groen van Prinsterer (ed.), *Ongeloof en revolutie. Een reeks van historische voorlezingen* (Kampen: J. H. Bos, 1904[3]).

—*De nieuwe opvoeding* (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1917).

—*Gereformeerde dogmatiek* 1 (Kampen: Kok, 4th edn, 1928).

—*Gereformeerde dogmatiek* 2 (Kampen: Kok, 4th edn, 1928).

—'Common Grace', trans. Raymond van Leeuwen, *Calvin Theological Journal* 24, 1 (1989), pp. 35–65.

—*Reformed Dogmatics: Prolegomena* (ed. John Bolt; trans. John Vriend; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003).

—*Reformed Dogmatics*: *God and Creation* (ed. John Bolt; trans. John Vriend; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004).

—*Reformed Dogmatics: Holy Spirit, Church and New Creation* (ed. John Bolt; trans. John Vriend; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008).

Bavinck, Johan Herman. *An Introduction to the Science of Missions* (trans. David Freeman; Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1960).

van de Beek, Abraham. *Lichaam en Geest van Christus. De theologie van de kerk en de Heilige Geest* (Zoetermeer: Meinema, 2012).

van Bekkum, Koert. 'Zekerheid en schriftgezag in Neo-Calvinistische visies op de historiciteit van de Bijbel', in van Bekkum, K. and Rouw, R. (eds.), *Geloven in zekerheid? Gereformeerd geloven in een postmoderne tijd* (Barneveld: De Vuurbaak, 2000), pp. 77–108.

van den Belt, Henk. *The Authority of Scripture in Reformed Theology: Truth and Trust* (Leiden: Brill, 2008).

Benes, Tuska. *In Babel's Shadow: Language, Philology and the Nation in Nineteenth-Century German* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2008).

van den Berg, J. 'Kwestie SGP heeft diepere ideologie dimensie', *Reformatorisch Dagblad*, 10 August 2012.

Berkhof, H. 'Neocalvinistische theologie van Kuyper tot Kuitert', in Gäbler, K. et al., (eds.), *Geloof dat te denken geeft. Optellen aangeboden aan prof. Dr. H.M. Kuitert* (Baarn: Ten Have, 1989), pp. 30–48.

Bernstein, R. *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism: Science, Hermeneutics, and Praxis* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983).

Bootsma, P. and Hoeting, C. *Over lijken. Ontoelaatbaar taalgebruik in de Tweede Kamer* (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Boom, 2006).

Bowald, M. *Rendering the Word in Theological Hermeneutics: Mapping Divine and Human Agency* (Aldershot/Burlington VT: Ashgate, 2007).

Bowen, John. *Why the French Don't Like Headscarves: Islam, the State, and Public Space* (Princeton: University Press, 2008).

Bratt, James. 'Abraham Kuyper, American History, and the Tensions of Neo-Calvinism', in Harinck, George and Krabbendam, Hans (eds.), *Sharing the Reformed Tradition: The Dutch-North American Exchange, 1846–1996* (Amsterdam: VU Uitgeverij, 1996), pp. 97–114.

—*Abraham Kuyper: Modern Calvinist, Christian Democrat* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013).

O'Brien, Connor Cruise. *The Long Affair: Thomas Jefferson and the French Revolution, 1785–1800* (Chicago: University Press, 1996).

van den Brink, Gijsbert. *Almighty God. A Study of the Doctrine of the Omnipotence of God* (Studies in Philosophical Theology 7; Kampen: Kok Pharos Publishing House, 1993).

van den Brink with van der Kooi, C. *Christelijke dogmatiek. Een inleiding* (Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, 2012).

de Bruijn, J. and Harinck, G. *Een Leidse vriendschap. De briefwisseling tussen Herman Bavinck en Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje, 1875–1921* (Baarn: Ten Have, 1999).

de Bruijne, Ad. 'Geworteld en dan opgebouwd wordend in Hem', in van den Brink, Gijsbert et al. (eds.), *Filosofie en theologie: een gesprek tussen christen-filosofen en theologen* (Amsterdam: Buijten en Schipperheijn, 1997), pp. 155–63.

Brunot, Ferdinand. *Histoire de la langue française* (Paris: Librairie Armand Colin, 3rd edn, 1947).

Burger, Hans. *Being in Christ. A Biblical and Systematic Investigation in a Reformed Perspective* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2008).

Burke, Edmund. *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (London: MacMillan and Co., 1790).

Buys, J. 'Een casus positie', *De Gids* 38 (1874), pp. 49–85.

Carlyle, Thomas. *The French Revolution: A History* (Vols. I-III; London: Chapman and Hall, 1837).

Cavanaugh, William. *The Myth of Religious Violence* (Oxford: University Press, 2009).

César, Waldo. 'From Babel to Pentecost: A Social-Historical-Theological Study of the Growth of Pentecostalism', in Corten, André and Marshall and Fratani Ruth (eds.), *Between Babel and Pentecost: Transnational Pentecostalism in Africa and Latin America* (London: Hurst, 2001), pp. 22–40.

Clark, Gordon. *Language and Theology* (Jefferson: The Trinity Foundation, 1980).

Coates, Paul. 'The Sense of an Ending: Reflections on Kieslowski's Trilogy', *Film Quarterly* 50, 2 (1996), pp. 19–26.

Conley, John. *Adoration and Annihilation: The Convent Philosophy of Port-Royal* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2009).

Cook, Melanie and Simpson, James. 'Discourses about linguistic diversity', in Martin-Jones, Marilyn, Blackledge, Adrian and Creese, Angela (eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Multilingualism* (New York: Routledge, 2012), pp. 116–29.

Cook, Vivian and Newson, Mark. *Chomsky's Universal Grammar: An Introduction* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2007).

Currid, John. *Genesis: Volume 1* (New York: Evangelical Press USA, 2003).

Dalferth, Ingolf. *Gedeutete Gegenwart. Zur Wahrnemung Gottes in den Erfahrungen der Zeit* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1997).

—*Die Wirklichkeit des Möglichen. Hermeneutische Religionsphilosophie* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003).

van Dijk, D. 'Laat SGP samenwerken met rooms-katholieken', *Reformatorisch Dagblad*, 10 October 2012.

Dillow, John. *Mijn eerste Bijbel* (Alphen aan de Rijn: Parragon, 2001).

O'Donovan, Oliver. *Resurrection and Moral Order. An Outline for Evangelical Ethics* (Leicester: Apollos/Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2nd edn, 1994).

—*The Desire of the Nations. Rediscovering the Roots of Political Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

Van Dyke, Harry. *Groen van Prinsterer's Lectures on Unbelief and Revolution* (Jordan Station, ON: Wedge Publishing Foundation, 1989).

—'How Abraham Kuyper Became a Christian Democrat', *Calvin Theological Journal* 33 (1998), pp. 420–35.

Eco, Umberto. *The Search for the Perfect Language* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1995).

Eglinton, James. 'To be or to become: That is the question. Locating the actualistic in Bavinck's ontology', in Bowlin, John (ed.), *The Kuyper Center Review, Volume 2: Revelation and Common Grace* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), pp. 104–24.

—*Trinity and Organism: Towards a New Reading of Herman Bavinck's Organic Motif* (London and New York: T&T Clark, 2012).

Feitsma, Anthonia. 'The Reformation and the Vernacular', in Gorter, Durk, Hoekstra, Jarich, Jansma, Lammert and Ytsma, Jehannes (eds.), *Fourth International Conference on Minority Languges, Vol. II: Western and Eastern European Papers* (Avon: Multilingual Matters, 1989), pp. 1–10.

Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (trans. Alan Sheridan; New York: Random House, 1995).

Franklin, Julian H. (ed.), *Constitutionalism and Resistance in the Sixteenth Century* (New York: Pegasus, 1969).

Gerretson, F. *Koninklijk kabinet of dictatuur? Open schrijven aan dr. H. Colijn nopens een actueel vraagstuk van staatkunde en staatsrecht* ('s-Gravenhage: Van Stockum, 1934).

Gordon, C. *Before Columbus: Links Bewteen the Old World and Ancient America* (New York: Crown, 1971).

Goslinga, A. (ed.), *Briefwisseling van Mr. G. Groen van Prinsterer met Dr. A. Kuyper* (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1937).

Grimm, Jacob. *Über den Ursprung der Sprache* (1851).

—*On the Origin of Language* (Leiden: Brill, 1984).

Groen van Prinsterer, Guillaume. *Ongeloof en revolutie* (2nd edn (1868), ed. H. Smitskamp; Franeker: Wever, 1952).

Gunton, Colin. *The One, the Three and the Many. God, Creation and the Culture of Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univesity Press, 1998).

Haltoff, Marek. *The Cinema of Krzysztof Kieslowski: Variations on Destiny and Chance* (New York: Wallflower Press, 2004).

Hamilton, Victor. *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament: The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990).

Harinck, G., van der Kooi, C., Vree, J. '*Als Bavinck maar eens kleur bekende*', aantekeningen van H. Bavinck over de zaak-Netelenbos, het Schriftgezag en de situatie van de Gereformeerde Kerken (november 1919) (Amsterdam: VU Uitgeverij, 1994).

—'Twin sisters with a changing character. How neo-Calvinists dealt with the modern discrepancy between Bible and natural sciences', in van der Meer, Jitsd and Mandelbrote, Scott (eds.), *Nature and Scripture in the Abrahamic Religions: 1700-Present* (vol. 2; Brill: Leiden/Boston, 2008), pp. 317–70.

—*Mijn reis was geboden: Abraham Kuypers Amerikaanse tournee* (Hilversum: Uitgeverij Verloren, 2009).

Hartley, John. *New International Bible Commentary: Genesis* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 2000).

Heeroma, K. *Nader tot een taaltheologie* (Den Haag: Bert Bakker, 1967).

Higman, Francis. *The Style of John Calvin in his French Polemical Treatises* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967).

Hoogland, J. 'Orthodoxie, moderniteit en postmoderniteit', in van den Brink, Gijsbert (ed.), *Filosofie en theologie. Een gesprek tussen christen-filosofen en theologen* (Amsterdam: Buijten en Schipperheijn, 1997), pp. 132–54.

Isidore of Seville. *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville* (trans. Stephen A. Barney, W. J. Lewis, J. A. Beach and Oliver Berghof; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

Israel, Jonathan. *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity, 1650–1750* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

—*Enlightenment Contested: Philosophy, Modernity, and the Emancipation of Man 1670–1752* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

—*A Revolution of the Mind: Radical Enlightenment and the Intellectual Origins of Modern Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009).

—*Democratic Enlightenment: Philosophy, Revolution, and Human Rights 1750–1790* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

—'What Samuel Moyn got wrong in his "Nation" article', posted 27 June 2010 at History News Network. http://hnn.us/articles/128361.html, consulted 8 March 2013.

Janse, Maartje. *De afschaffers. Publieke opinie, organisatie en politiek in Nederland 1840–1880* (Amsterdam: Wereldbibliotheek, 2007).

Jespersen, Otto. *Language: Its Nature, Development and Origin* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1923).

Johnston, Timothy. *The Writings of the New Testament* (London: SCM, 1999).

Kamphuis, Barend. 'Systematische Theologie', in de Bruijne, Ad. (ed.), *Gereformeerde theologie vandaag: oriëntatie en verantwoording* (TU-Bezinningsreeks nr. 4; Barneveld: De Vuurbaak, 2004), pp. 59–71.

Kamphuis, Jaap. *Signalen uit de kerkgeschiedenis. Over de toekomst en de canon* (Groningen: De Vuurbaak, 1975).

Kant, Immanuel. *Critique of Pure Reason* (trans. P. Guyer and A. W. Wood; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

van Keulen, Dirk. 'The Internal Tension in Kuyper's Doctrine of Organic Inspiration of Scripture', in van der Kooi, C. and de Bruin, J. (eds.), *Kuyper Reconsidered. Aspects of his Life and Work* (Amsterdam: VU Uitgeverij, 1999), pp. 123–30.

—*Bijbel en dogmatiek. Schriftbeschouwing en schriftgebruik in het dogmatisch werk van A. Kuyper, H. Bavinck en G.C. Berkouwer* (Kampen: Kok, 2003).

Kickasola, Joesph. *The Films of Krzysztof Kieslowski: The Liminal Image* (London: Continuum, 1st edn, 2004).

Klei, Ewout. *'Klein maar krachtig, dat maakt ons uniek'. Een geschiedenis van het Gereformeerd Politiek Verbond, 1948–2003* (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Bert Bakker, 2011).

Koch, Jeroen. *Abraham Kuyper: een biografie* (Amsterdam: Boom, 2006).

Koerner, E. *Practicing Linguistic Historiography* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1989).

Kossmann, Ernst. Heinrich. *The Low Countries, 1780–1940* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978).

Kuiper, Roel. *'Tot een voorbeeld zult gij blijven.' Mr. G. Groen van Prinsterer (1801–1976)* (Amsterdam: Buijten & Schipperheijn, 2001).

Kuyper, Abraham. *'Geworteld en gegrond': De kerk als organisme en instituut. Intreêrede uitgesproken in de Nieuwe Kerk te Amsterdam, 10 Augustus 1870 door Dr. A. Kuyper* (Amsterdam: H. de Hoogh & Co., 1870).

—*De Schoolkwestie II. De Scherpe Resolutie En Het Decretum Horribile* (Amsterdam: J. H. Kruyt, 1875).

—*Encyclopedia of sacred theology; its principles* (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1898).

—*Niet de Vrijheidsboom maar het Kruis* (Amsterdam: J. H. Wormser, 1889).

—*De Gemeene Gratie*, Eerste Deel, *Het Geschiedkundig Gedeelte* (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1901).

—*De Gemeene Gratie*, Derde Deel (Leiden: Donner, 1905).

—*Pro Rege, of Het Koningschap van Christus* (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1911).

—*Keep Thy Solemn Feasts* (trans. John Hendrik Devries; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1928).

—*The Problem of Poverty* (ed. Skillen, James; Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1991).

—'The blurring of the boundaries', in Bratt, James (ed.), *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998).

—'Calvinism: Source and Stronghold of Our Constitutional Liberties', in Bratt, James (ed.), *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), pp. 279–322.

—'Sphere Sovereignty', in Bratt, James (ed.), *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), pp. 461–90.

—'Manual Labor', in Bratt, James (ed.), *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), pp. 231–54.

—'Maranatha', in Bratt, James (ed.), *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), pp. 205–30.

—'Modernism: A Fata Morgana', in Bratt, James (ed.), *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), p. 115.

—'Uniformity: The Curse of Modern Life', in Bratt, James (ed.), *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), pp. 20–44.

—*Lectures on Calvinism* (Hendrickson: Peabody, 2008).

—*The Biblical Criticism of the Present Day*, trans. de Vries, J. http://ia600307.us.archive.org/13/items/biblicalcriticis00kuyp/biblicalcriticis00kuyp.pdf (accessed 10 April 2012).

—*Ons Program* (trans. Harry Van Dyke; forthcoming).

Kwakkel, Gert. 'In het begin: Welke boodschap beluisterde Israël in Genesis 1?', in Kwakkel, Gert and van Houwelingen, Rob (eds.), *In den beginne en verder: Een bijbels-theologische reflectie op de schepping* (Barneveld: De Vuurbaak, 2012), pp. 9–24.

Lancelot, Claude and Arnauld, Antoine. *Grammaire générale et raisonnée contenant les fondemens de l'art de parler, expliqués d'une manière claire et naturelle* (Paris: chez Durand, 1780).

—*General and Rational Grammar: The Port-Royal Grammar* (trans. Jacques Rieux and Bernard E. Rollin; The Hague: Mouton, 1975).

Langelaar, J. 'ChristenUnie-senator wil verbod op sharia in grondwet', *Elsevier*, 19 February 2011.

Langeveld, Herman. 'Protestantsche Christenen van Nederland, verenigt u', in Schutte, Gerrit Jan (ed.), *Een Arbeider is zijn loon waardig* ('s Gravenhage: Meinema, 1991), pp. 103–41.

Lefranc, Abel. *Calvin et l'éloquence française* (Paris: Librairie Fischbacher, 1934).

Leithart, Peter (28 September 2012), *Death to the Copulative and long live the Queen* (Retrieved 29 October 2012), http://www.firstthings.com/onthesquare/2012/09/death-to-the-copulative-and-long-live-the-queen.

Ling, Tan-Chow May. *Pentecostal Theology for the Twenty First Century: Engaging with Multi-Faith Singapore* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007).

Lloyd-Jones, Sally. *The Jesus Storybook Bible: Every Story Whispers his Name* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Kids, 2007).

Louth, Andrew. *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition: From Plato to Denys* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2nd edn, 2007).

Mahmood, Saba. 'Secularism, Hermeneutics, and Empire: The Politics of Islamic Reformation', *Public Culture* 18 (2006), pp. 323–47.

Majérus, Pascal. 'What Language Does God Speak? Exiled English Nuns and the Question of Languages', *Trajecta* (21 February 2012), pp. 137–52.

Matzken, R. 'Wel Groen, maar dan van Prinsterer!', *Nieuw Nederland. Officieel orgaan van de Reformatorische Politieke Federatie (RPF)* 15 (August 1989).

van Middelkoop, Eimert. 'Secularisatie, staat en politiek', in Hirsch Ballin, E., Klop, C. and van Middelkoop, E. (eds.), *Christelijke politiek in een geseculariseerd Nederland* (Barneveld: De Vuurbak, 1991), pp. 28–43.

Morris, Henry. *Scientific Creationism* (Green Forest: Master Books, 1985).

—*The Biblical Basis for Modern Science* (Green Forest: Master Books, 2002).

Moyn, Samuel. 'Mind the Enlightenment', *The Nation*, 31 May 2010.

van Mulligen, R. 'Tussen evangelisch en reformatorisch. Het politiek getuigenis van de RPF (1975–2003)', in Hippe, J., and Voerman, G. (eds.), *Van de marge naar de macht. De ChristenUnie 2000–2010* (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Boom, 2010), pp. 31–50.

Murphy, Nancey. *Beyond Liberalism & Fundamentalism. How Modern and Postmodern Theology set the Theological Agenda* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1996).

Naylor, Wendy. 'Abraham Kuyper and the Emergence of Neo-Calvinist Pluralism in the Dutch School System' (PhD Diss., University of Chicago, 2006).

Norby, Catrin and Hajek, John (eds.), *Uniformity and Diversity in Language Policy: Global Perspectives* (Bristol: Multilingual Matters, 2011).

Noordegraaf, Jan. 'The *Volksgeist* Concept in Dutch Linguistics', in Jankowski, Kurt (ed.), *History of Linguistics 1993* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Co., 1995), pp. 245–54.

Oustinhoff, Michael (ed.), *Traduction et Mondialisation* (Paris: CRNS Editions, 2011).

Paine, Thomas. *The Rights of Man: Being an Answer to Mr. Burke's Attack on the French Revolution* (London: J. S. Jordan, 1791).

Pannier, Jacques. *Calvin écrivain: Sa place et son rôle dans l'histoire de la langue et de la littérature française* (Paris: Librairie Fischbacher, 1930).

Pennock, Robert. *Tower of Babel: The Evidence against the New Creationists* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1999).

Perry, John. 'Dissolving the Inerrancy Debate: How Modern Philosophy Shaped the Evangelical View of Scripture', *Quodlibet Journal* 3 (2001), http://www.quodlibet.net/articles/perry-inerrancy.shtml.

Reyburn, William and McG. Fry, Euan. *A Handbook on Genesis* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1997).

Rivarol, Antoine de. *De l'universalité européenne de la langue française* (Paris: chez Cocherie, 1784).

de Rooy, B. en Dekker, W. 'Interview met senator Holdijk', *Wapenveld* 51, 5 (October 2001), pp. 37–40.

Rouvoet, A. *Reformatorische staatsvisie. De RPF en het ambt van de overheid* (Nunspeet: Marnix van St. Aldegonde Stichting, 1992).

Rouvoet, A. with Kuiper, R. 'Anti-sharia-bepaling geeft duidelijkheid', *Trouw*, 26 February 2011.

Sanders, Ruth. *German: Biography of a Language* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

Sanneh, Lamin. *Religion and the Variety of Culture: A Study in Origin and Practice* (Valley Forge: Trinity Press International, 1996).

—*Whose Religion is Christianity? The Gospel Beyond the West* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003).

—*Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2008).

Sap, John. *Paving the Way for Revolution: Calvinism and the Struggle for a Democratic Constitutional State* (Amsterdam: VU Uitgeverij, 2001).

Sarna, Nahum. *The JPS Torah Commentary: Genesis* (New York: The Jewish Publication Society, 1989).

Sarot, Marcel. 'Christian Fundamentalism as a Reaction to the Enlightenment', in Becking, Bob (ed.), *Orthodoxy, Liberalism, and Adaptation: Essays on Ways of Worldmaking in Times of Change from Biblical, Historical and Systematic Perspectives* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), pp. 249–67.

van der Schans, A. *De Franse revolutie.* Uitgave van het Landelijk Verband van Staatkundig Gereformeerde Studieverenigingen. SGP-jongeren (The Hague: Landelijk Verband van Staatkundig Gereformeerde Studieverenigingen/SGP Jongeren, 1989).

van der Schee, W. 'Kuyper's Archimedes' Point', in van der Kooi, C. and de Bruin, J. (eds.), *Kuyper Reconsidered. Aspects of his Life and Work* (Amsterdam: VU Uitgeverij, 1999), pp. 102–10.

Schleicher, August. 'The Darwinian Theory and the Science of Language (1863)', trans. Alexander V. W. Blikkers, in Koerner, Konrad (ed.), *Amsterdam Studies in the Theory and History of Linguistic Science I, Amsterdam Classics in Linguistics Vol. 6: Linguistics and Evolutionary Theory, Three Essays by August Schleicher, Ernst Haeckel, and Wilhelm Bleek* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1983), pp. 1–72.

Schutte, Gerrit Jan. 'Arbeid, die geen brood geeft', in Schutte, Gerrit Jan (ed.), *Een Arbeider is zijn loon waardig* ('s Gravenhage: Meinema, 1991), pp. 10–32.

Scott, Graham and Scott, Eleonora. 'Heart-Langauge Worship in Multilingual Contexts', *Crucible* 4, 1 (April 2012), pp. 1–17.

Sedinger, Tracey. 'The Kindness of Strangers: On the Political Modernity of Kieslowski's "Red"', *Literature* 18 (2007), pp. 237–59.

Silva, Moisés. *God, Language and Scripture: Reading the Bible in the Light of General Linguistics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990).

Sinke, Suzanne. *Dutch Immigrant Women in the United States: 1880–1920* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2002).

Slob, Arie and Segers, Gert Jan. 'Liberalen, verdedig vrijheid van godsdienst ook hier', *de Volkskrant*, 10 June 2011.

Smith, James. *Speech and Theology: Language and the Logic of Incarnation* (London: Routledge, 2002).

Spurgeon, Charles. *Lectures to my Students* (Fearn: Christian Focus Publications, 1998).

van der Staaij, K. 'Versterk de rechtstaat in Egypte', *Novini*, 1 March 2012.

van Staalduine-Sulman, E. 'The Evangelical Movement and the Enlightment', in van der Kooi, C. et al (eds.), *Evangelical Theology in Transition* (Amsterdam: VU University Press, 2012), pp. 40–67.

Stok, Danusia. *Kieślowski on Kieślowski* (London: Faber & Faber, 1995).

Swiggers, Pierre and Wouters, Alfons. 'Langues, Situations Linguistiques et Réflexions sur le Language dans l'Antiquité', in Swiggers, Pierre and Wouters, Alfons (eds.), *Le Langage dans l'Antiquité* (Leiden: Leiden University Press, 1990), pp. 10–46.

Taylor, Charles. *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

—*A Secular Age* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007).

van Tijn, Theo. 'De sociale bewegingen van 1876 tot 1887', in Blok, Dirk Pieter (ed.), *Algemene geschiedenis der Nederlanden* (vol. 13; Haarlem: Fibula-Van Dishoeck, 1978), pp. 90–100.

—'De Doleantie kwam niet alleen', *Documentatieblad voor de Nederlandse kerkgeschiedenis van de negentiende eeuw* 10 (January 1986), pp. 41–6.

Tippett, Alan Richard. *Introduction to Missiology* (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1987).

van den Toren, Benno. *Breuk en brug. In gesprek met Karl Barth over postmoderne theologie en geloofsverantwoording* (Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, 1995).

Valenta, Markha. 'How to Recognize a Muslim When You See One: Western Secularism and the Politics of Conversion', in de Vries, Hent and Sullivan, Lawrence Eugene (eds.), *Political Theologies: Public Religions in a Post-Secular World* (New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2006), pp. 444–74.

Veenhof, Jan. 'Honderd jaar theologie aan de Vrije Universiteit', in van Os, M. and Wieringa, W. (eds.), *Wetenschap en rekenschap 1880–1980. Een eeuw wetenschapsbeoefening aan de Vrije Universiteit* (Kampen: Kok, 1980), pp. 44–104.

van Velzen, N. (ed.), *Reformatie & revolutie: 200 jaar Franse revolutie* (Nunspeet: Marnix van St. Aldegonde Stichting, Wetenschappelijk Studiecentrum van de RPF, 1989).

Verbrugh, Albertus. 'Prof. dr. F.C. Gerretson (1884–1958)', *Ons Politeuma* (December 1958).

—'Niet kleingelovig zijn', *Ons Burgerschap*, 5 June 1976.

—*Universeel en antirevolutionair. Toelichting bij de richtlijnen voor de nationaal-gereformeerde, dat is universeel-christelijke en antirevolutionaire politiek* I (Groningen: Vuurbaak, 1980).

—*Jong zijn en oud worden: (scheppende leiding in een periode vanaf ca. 1920)* (Amsterdam: Buijten & Schipperheijn, 2002).

van der Vlies, B. 'Kort en bondig', *De Banier* 68 (16 June 1989).

Vree, Japser. 'Hoe de citadel ontstond. De consolidatie der Vereniging 1892–1905', in Wolthuis, L. and Vree, J. (eds.), *De Vereniging van 1892 en haar geschiedenis* (Kampen: Kok, 1992), pp. 113–60.

—'"Het Réveil" en "het (neo-) Calvinisme" in hun onderlinge samenhang (1856–1896)', *Documentatieblad voor de Nederlandse Kerkgeschiedenis na 1800* 38 (June 1993), pp. 24–54.

Kuipers, Tjitze. *Abraham Kuyper: An Annotated Bibliography 1857–2010* (Leiden: Brill, 2011).

Waltke, Bruce. *Genesis: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001).

Walton, John. *Genesis: The NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001).

Welker, Michael. *God the Spirit* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994).

Wilders, G. and de Graaf, M. 'Sharia verbieden is heel goed plan', *Trouw*, 26 February 2011.

Williams, D. *Paul and his Metaphors. Their Context and Character* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1999).

Wise, Hilary. *The Vocabulary of Modern French: Origins, Structure and Function* (London: Routledge, 1997).

Wittgenstein, L., Anscombe, G. and von Wright, G. *On Certainty* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972).

van Wolde, Ellen. *Words become Worlds: Semantic Studies of Genesis 1–11* (Leiden: Brill, 1994).

Wolterstorff, Nicholas. *Reason within the Bounds of Religion* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2nd edn, 1999).

Žižek, Slavoj. *The Universal Exception* (eds. Butler, Rex and Stephens, Scott; London: Continuum, 2007).

Zwemer, J. *In conflict met de moderne cultuur. De bevindelijk gereformeerden en de Nederlandse samenleving in het midden van de twintigste eeuw* (Kampen: De Groot Goudriaan, 1992).

SUBJECT INDEX

NAME INDEX

AQ: Please check the first name of the author "Pilate" as it was taken from internet.