

## WHO WAS GROEN?

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### **Groen's Life**

#### **Introduction.**

Writing a few pages about the life of Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer presupposes that he is worthy of our consideration. He is that, not only historically speaking. In that way also, for indeed a study of his life is most rewarding. His was a Christian witness in a decadent age. And an analysis of such a witness is always a lesson for other witnesses. But this is not the angle from which we take our vantage point in this essay. We will not study Groen as an exemplary personage. Rather, Groen is worthy of our attention since we, as sons of the Reformation, must continue the witness which he began.

This implies that Groen's life is of international significance, his work of continuing import. What we mean by this assertion is this: as an actual historical figure Groen transcends the boundaries of his action (The Netherlands) and also the limits of his time (mid-nineteenth century). The deeds done, and the words spoken are of a prophetic character. They give concrete expression to ideas, and have (or should have) led men to further action. The ideas had their rootage primarily in Calvinistic Christianity of Western Europe. They were expressed in an age which almost entirely repudiated this Christianity. The general tendency of the Western World, both in Europe and America, was moving away from the belief of the Christian religion in theory, and only clung to some religious practices which had been severed from the basic root. This does not mean that there was a complete apostasy from the Christian faith. Many indeed of the lower classes held firmly to the faith of their fathers. But the leaders of the Western world, the leaders in education, politics and church, had turned their backs towards Christianity as it is defined in the Word of God and in the ecclesiastical confessions. And whenever we think of history we think of those men who had given leadership to an age, of those men who have given concrete manifestations of their ideas in cultural forms and action in various aspects of life. Since the ideas which were thus expressed were not rooted in Biblical revelation, but rather in the imagination of men, we can justifiably term the last century a decadent age.

Groen is worthy of our attention because he, more than anyone we can think of in the Calvinistic circles, opposed the general degeneration, and attempted to lead men in their practice in such a way that it again conformed to the Word of God, and did not neglect the historical development of one's nation, church and government.

Before we turn to Groen himself, we will briefly give a background sketch of the days in which he was born, lived and died.

## Background-sketch

### 1. Historically:

1789	French Revolution
1812	Napoleon's Russian Campaign
1815	Congress of Vienna: "Reaction" to Revolution
1830	Belgium gains independence from Holland Other revolutions in Greece and Poland.
1848-49	Further revolutionary outbreaks: France, Austria, Germany, Hungary.
1853-56	Crimean War.
1870	Franco-Prussian War: Bismarck.

### In America:

1812	War with England.
1823	Monroe Doctrine
1861-65	Civil War

### 2. Ideologically:

1800	Romanticism
1808	Goethe's Faust
1810	Laplace's <i>Mechanique Celeste</i> .
1820	Industrial Revolution
1848	Karl Marx, <i>Communist Manifesto</i>
1859	Charles Darwin's <i>Origin of Species</i> .
1870	Vatican Council.

In the eighteenth century the Enlightenment was dominant. This movement is characterised primarily by a rejection of the authority of revelation and church, and by an acceptance of the authority of reason as the basis for a view of things. Since the reason is a faculty common to all, it will be the basis for a new natural religion, government, education. The more reason is allowed to govern men, it was thought, the more man can control the order and development of history. Here we see the origin of the optimism that was to form a strong force up to the First World War.

The components of the religion of the Enlightenment are God, virtue and immortality. Jesus is the divine example for men. Since all religions strive for the same end, i.e., a virtuous life, tolerance was the watchword of the day. Man was considered to be essentially good. His imperfections can be removed, at least controlled, by reason. Man naturally strives for the "summum bonum," for the union with the universe.

In the beginning of the nineteenth century there was a change in some of the ideals of the Enlightenment, but the essential views remained. Kant had severed morality from religion. Hegel and Schleiermacher preached the union of finite and infinite, God and man. While there had been a strong emphasis on the idea of science in the eighteenth century, in reaction there was now a stress on personality (Romanticism). But this did not mean that a basic change had come. It may be said that reason did not play as large a part in men's thinking as it did previously, and that the focus now changed to be in man's feeling. This is true, but at the centre is yet MAN as the point of reference. The humanism, which originated in the late Middle Ages in the Renaissance movement, was not repudiated. Also, the cosmos, and God were yet defined in terms foreign to divine revelation.

There had been a reaction against the radicalism of the revolutionary ideas (as they had been put into practice by Napoleon) in the Congress of Vienna, but the real ideology behind the revolution had become common stock of almost everyone endowed with a leading function. The belief in man's sovereignty was well-nigh universal in the Western world. This gave rise to liberalism, which was to dominate most governments of the last century. The revolutionary ideas had not been killed: they were put again into practice in 1830 and 1848. The forces of liberalism did not stem the tide. A significant product of radicalistic thought (in line with Hegel's idea of history) is the appearance in 1848 of Marx' Communist Manifesto.

### **Groen's youth.**

If we want to gain a correct view of Groen's later life, we must see how it stands in relation to his first thirty years. A change took place in his life in 1828, which dominated the rest of his life. The question is important: from what did he change?

Groen was born (1801) in a "worldly" atmosphere: his parents were of the well-to-do. His mother had received a rather large inheritance, which brought the family in a higher "social class." His father, a physician, had been the personal attendant of King Loius (brother of Napoleon) and thus was, in higher circles, a respected person. The life of the family was like that of others. Besides the regular work, the time would be spent in visits and sports. Life was superficial, and people were content with that. If the duties expected of their class were fulfilled, they were largely satisfied. The golden middle-way was their daily path: Please both man and God.<sup>1</sup> And which method can be better than to please one's fellow men, and consider God to be content with this?

The first decades of the last century were the years of the old liberal theology, of the rationalistic supranaturalism, which was an attempt to combine the orthodoxy of the Canons of Dordt with the rationalism of the eighteenth century.<sup>2</sup> One ought to be Biblical, not dogmatic. Reason and revelation had to be united. Jesus was considered an exceptional person, whose virtue and dutifulness were an example for all. The ministers

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<sup>1</sup> C Tazelaar. De Jeugd van Groen, p. 4.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 42.

whom Groen heard as a boy did not deny man's fall into sin, but nevertheless maintained the purity of his rational nature.

It was not proper to emphasise the extremities of the ecclesiastical confessions, but strive toward a "Vermittlungs-theologie." In practice this type of Christianity, to which Groen's parents assented wholeheartedly, involved a moralistic, "good" behaviour. Sermons centred around the admonition to be brave, mild, wise, tolerant and sedate. This theology was but the "faithful reflex" of the spirit of the age.<sup>3</sup> Optimism cut through all areas of life, and especially through that of religion. The court-preacher, Dermout, under whom Groen received his catechetical training, is characterised especially as a man of his time. Since he had a very forceful personality, and since Groen's father cherished exactly the same ideas, this influence must have been great on the younger Groen. In the end of his life he characterised his early training as "liberal and Christian."

In his youth, he received the best education possible. His father figured largely in this, first by beginning the training, and later by controlling Groen's teachers, choice of subjects, and thoroughness of treatment personally. This personal scrupulous "control," which often bordered on the fantastic, lasted until Groen had passed through his university studies.

A private teacher was engaged till Groen was eight years old, when he entered a government school. At the age of twelve he entered a "Latin School," to prepare for university. When he was about seventeen, he commenced his university career at Leyden.

In the university he excelled in achievements. This is shown in the relation to his professors, who had great respect for him, and in the student activities, in which he took a prominent place. The attitude toward life, which is sketched above, is not changed in Groen, except for this, that he becomes more independent in his views. It must be admitted, for example, that in some phases of life he is not in harmony with the spirit of the age. He opposes the generally accepted idea of people's sovereignty, and favoured a tempered monarchy. This is also his view later, but for far different reasons. One may assume that even this variance from the usual is the result of his contacts with the great poet and thinker Bilderdijk, who at this time is the only person of national fame opposed to the revolutionary, rationalistic tendencies of the day, and stands squarely on the gospel message of sin and salvation. Bilderdijk is not Groen's spiritual father, but his influence on the later Groen is significant.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 44.

<sup>4</sup> Groen was one of the members of the Reveil group after his conversion. This "revival" movement had its origin in Switzerland, and found a rather large following among the students of Bilderdijk. It meant a change from the errors of the day to a recognition of the truth of God's Word, besides the Secessionist movement of 1834. This secession movement is also the "start" of the Christian Reformed Church, historically speaking. It is of significance to note here that the Christian Reformed Church has been influenced almost exclusively by the Secession, while any attempt to break through the "isolation" attained by that influence with the "line Reveil-Groen-Kuyper" has been opposed in varying degrees.

In December, 1823, Groen defended two dissertations at the university. At the age of twentytwo he had composed one for the juridical faculty,<sup>5</sup> and one for the literary faculty, entitled *Prosopographia Platonica* (a study of “personalities” in the writings of Plato). One comment must be made here. Groen’s later scientific productions were in the field of history. This seems rather strange compared to the fields of his academic pursuits. These two theses are also primarily historical writings in the fields of literature and law.

### **Life’s task.**

After the completion of his academic aims, Groen turned to the next important question. What will be his life’s work? Three times his name had been mentioned in connection with a professorship at his alma mater, Leyden University.<sup>6</sup>

In 1827 Groen received the position of Referendary to the King’s cabinet. This post was not one which he had longed for. For a few years he had practised law, and this experience had not been pleasant to him since it did not allow him to use sufficient time for private study. His new occupation did not permit that either. However, through this position various changes occurred in Groen’s life, which eventually completely changed his outlook on life. From 1829 to 1833 he served King William I as Secretary of the Cabinet. This office was one close to the supreme monarch and gave Groen the opportunity to study “practical politics” from a closer view.<sup>7</sup> His weak health forced him to resign from this office. This resignation led to his next and final appointment as archivist of the personal papers of the House of Orange-Nassau. This occupation presented necessary leisure for study, turned his attention to the rich history of the Netherlands, and helped develop his Christian-historical ideas.

### **Change in spiritual life.**

Groen’s early life and letters tell us that his interest in spiritual matters had always been great. But this interest had been nourished by the religious ideas of his parents, his minister, his teachers and professors, which were at best liberal. We read, however, that he was greatly touched by the baptism of Da Costa, already in 1822.<sup>8</sup> Personally Groen attempted to fulfill his intellectual and spiritual needs by the reading of Rousseau,

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<sup>5</sup> With the title *De juris Justiniani prestantis ex rationibus ejus manifesta* (Concerning the superiority of Justinian justice as manifested by its effects).

<sup>6</sup> His name was mentioned when there was a vacancy in the faculty of literature. This was when Groen was a student. His remarkable qualities in the field of classical languages was a cause of this. In 1824 his professors desired his appointment in the faculty of history. The King, who decided these matters, thought that Groen was too young. In 1825 he was nominated with another, more experienced professor, for the faculty of jurisprudence. Most probably Groen’s independence in ideas occasioned the appointment of his competitor.

<sup>7</sup> “Sitting at the dinnertable with the Revolution.” (Gerretson).

<sup>8</sup> Da Costa, a pupil of Bilderdijk, was the originator and main force in the Dutch Reveil group. The Reveil had probably received its clarion-call in the publication of Da Costa’s *Bezwaren tegen de Geest der Eeuw* (Objections against the Spirit of the Age, 1823).

Madame de Stael, etc. He preferred the “golden middle-way: the safe path.” He considered his own age to be the most enlightened, and was satisfied with this.<sup>9</sup>

In 1828 we find the first inclinations toward a change. The greatest factor was his marriage to Miss Elizabeth van der Hoop (1807-1878). She was a confessing Christian, and guided her husband to accept her own convictions: in Christ alone there is salvation. Groen expected much of this marriage on the “infallible grounds of religion, reason and morality.”<sup>10</sup> A slow change took place in Groen’s thinking; a very slow one. A person so thoroughly grounded in the religion of rationalism could not turn to a religion of complete self-surrender so soon.

His position with the Cabinet brought Groen to Brussels, where he met the court preacher Merle d’Aubigne, also a man of the (Swiss) Reveil-movement. D’Aubigne preached a simple but forthright gospel message. He was a man of academic standing, and, since he was an authority on the field,<sup>11</sup> he introduced Groen to the Christianity of the Genevan Reformation.

In 1830 the Belgian revolt broke out, and Groen began to realise the causal connection between unbelief and revolution. This is a very important point. Of the leading confessors of the gospel Groen is almost the only one to realise that man’s apostasy from God will end in a revolution, conceived in the broadest sense of that word: our own imaginations which are put into practice. That this is so, almost from the beginning of his conversion, can be seen in a letter where Groen expresses the fact that he does not see the relation between faith and life as well as he should: “With me religion is yet too much a matter of intellect; while I am more and more convinced of the truth of the gospel as time goes by, I yet feel with sadness that this conviction has yet too little influence on my heart. One is so soon content while hardly anything is accomplished.”<sup>12</sup>

Other factors enter into the picture that make up the tremendous change in his views. In 1832 Groen was seriously ill, and was confronted with the question: How can I die? But a certainty enters in: “I believe in Christ, though with little influence on my life, yet with more influence on my heart.”<sup>13</sup> De Clerck, who introduced him to the Reveil men in Holland, helped to solve the “problem” of faith and science. All Groen’s talents must be sanctified and used.

It seems strange to us, but we are confronted with this strange paradox: in 1833 Groen did not feel capable to lead family devotions, and yet at this time he is very much concerned about the spiritual condition of the age.<sup>14</sup> He criticised the educational system thus: “It concerns itself with the intellectual achievements and in the desire for virtue and respect.”

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<sup>9</sup> P A Diepenhorst. Groen van Prinsterer. Kampen: J H Kok, 1932, p. 32.

<sup>10</sup> These are Groen’s own words. Cf. Diepenhorst, *ibid.*, p. 28.

<sup>11</sup> See his *History of the Reformation*.

<sup>12</sup> Groen, *Briefwisseling*, I, p.17.

<sup>13</sup> Diepenhorst, *ibid.*, p. 42.

<sup>14</sup> Diepenhorst, *ibid.*, p. 49.

The cause of all the evils of the day he finds in “the systematic apostasy from Christianity.”<sup>15</sup> Indeed a quick, penetrating spiritual insight. The reading of Burke and Von Haller helped him to put his own inclinations into concrete forms. These men aided Groen to make a radical break with the spirit of the age.<sup>16</sup>

We must carefully analyse what this regeneration and conversion meant to Groen. “Our times, as far as can be seen now, will become times of self-denial and of strife. May we, looking to Christ, and strong in His power, fulfill the duties assigned to everyone who recognises the Satanic character of contemporary ideas.”<sup>17</sup> Groen is changed; and as a new man he went to fulfill his life’s task. And in no way will he avoid the contempt involved in remaining true, in life as well as in thought, to this confession.

One would expect that Groen would now quietly work in the archives of the previous rulers, and listen to the advice of his friends and fellow-confessors. This did not happen. Groen leads but does not follow. This is so, since he immediately recognised after his conversion that there must come a change in men’s ideas and practices, if utter ruin will not be the end.

## **General picture of his life 1833-1876**

### **1. Historian.**

In 1833 Groen’s main occupation was the editing and publishing of the personal papers of the rulers of the Netherlands from 1552 to the present time. Fifteen volumes of these he published during his lifetime, covering the period up to 1688. He also published an extensive manual on Dutch history, and concluded his main historical writings with *Ongeloof en Revolutie* (Apostasy and Revolution) in 1847.

Groen is not a “voraussetzungslos” historiographer. In the introduction to the *Archives de la Maison d’Orange* and in the other works mentioned he writes with definite principles in mind. These can be summed up as the “unconditional subjection to the law of God who has revealed Himself in the Holy Scriptures.”<sup>18</sup> Groen does not consider it correct to set aside the highest truth in the writing of a science which is called to give witness to the whole truth.<sup>19</sup> This view found much reaction, especially after the publication of the *Manual*, but later historians (e.g. Fruin and Motley) have recognised that in this way Groen was the pioneer of modern historiography.<sup>20</sup> Groen was historian as gospel-confessor; this was his strength.

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<sup>15</sup> November, 1831, cf. Diepenhorst, *ibid.*, p. 46.

<sup>16</sup> Diepenhorst, *ibid.*, p. 53.

<sup>17</sup> Groen, *Briefwisseling*, I, p. 558.

<sup>18</sup> Diepenhorst, *ibid.*, p. 183.

<sup>19</sup> Diepenhorst, *ibid.*, p. 187.

<sup>20</sup> Diepenhorst, *ibid.*, p. 198.

## 2. Statesman.

Groen was not a politician or statesman in the first place, although he served in parliament several times. Not a statesman, but a confessor of the Gospel.<sup>21</sup> This does not mean that Groen was a “preacher” in the chambers of Parliament. It means that he wanted to represent the nation in such a way that his activity as a politician did not jeopardise his confession, but that the latter two were always at harmony. The first was based on the latter. The party which he represented was based on the same confession. In that unity of faith he found the power and purpose of his politics.

As statesman, and as leader of the people, Groen made three journalistic attempts. From 1829 to 1832 he published “Nederlandsche Gedachten” (Dutch Thoughts), which concerned itself primarily with the Belgian Revolt. Writing this weekly paper helped establish his views more firmly, although he had not yet attained the maturity one discovers in later publications. With his intimate friend Wormser (1834 Secessionist) he published a daily from 1850-1855. There was little interest in this venture since those who could intelligently follow Groen’s arguments were rather in disagreement with him, and since those who were one with him in spirit usually could not understand his discussions. In a twofold sense Groen was thus a “general without an army.” This lack of interest forced him to quit this attempt to reach the masses. Thirdly, from 1869-1876, he again put out “Nederlandsche Gedachten.” For a thorough understanding of Groen’s political views these publications are highly important, and one may not be satisfied with a mere biographical sketch.

Three times Groen was an active parliamentarian. In 1840, when the constitution was revised, he gave lengthy advice on various matters. From 1849 to 1856 he was a member almost continually. The battle concerning Christian education forced him to resign. A last try was made from 1862 to 1865. At this time the opposition had become so strong that he again resigned. In parliament (Second Chamber) the opponents did not take him seriously. Thorbecke was prime minister at this time.<sup>22</sup> Groen hoped that in 1862 he would be assisted by Thorbecke in the attempts to gain freedom for education. What Thorbecke meant by freedom, however, was not the same that Groen meant. No assistance came, nor was there interest. Avoidance of the tiresome Groen became the aim of most representatives. For this reason resignation was perhaps the best way to solve the problem, and work outside of parliament more effective.

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<sup>21</sup> “Een staatsman niet! een evangeliebelijder!” Cf. Diepenhorst, *ibid.*, p. 341 f.

<sup>22</sup> Thorbecke had been Groen’s personal acquaintance, if not friend, almost continually from the time they both had been at the university. Then they had the same outlook on life, sharing the optimistic, liberal and rationalistic ideas and ideals. Immediately after Groen’s conversion the difference becomes apparent. Both are aware of this, but maintain their mutual respect. As time passed by, their viewpoints became almost completely opposite. (“In verhouding tot den grondtroon der eeuw staan we lijnrecht tegenover elkaar,” Groen wrote in 1870. Cf. Diepenhorst, *ibid.*, p. 147. When Thorbecke became Prime Minister for the first time in the 1850’s, the differences came out in the debates in parliament, but a friendly relation remained. Groen was of the opinion that ultimately Thorbecke’s liberalism would bring about a national (spiritual) disaster; Thorbecke considered Groen’s views outmoded by about three hundred years.



In his political activity Groen tried to co-operate as much as possible with the conservative party, with which most Christians had also affiliated themselves. Frequently Groen was assisted by these, and he found it very difficult to operate without them. However, when the issues of the day became more and more apparent, when Groen did not show any inclination to compromise on the essential points of his programme, and when the conservatives themselves, even the confessing Christians, had shown that they did not carefully detect the spiritual decadence of the age, Groen severed his relation with them. This happened in 1871, when the conservative party had consistently refused to help Groen in the fight for educational liberties. At this time also the young Kuyper began to co-operate with Groen.<sup>23</sup>

What is the value of Groen's parliamentary activity? He was the leader of the anti-revolutionary or Christian-historical party, which had existed as a political "view" from about 1832, when Groen began writing about his interpretation of the Belgian conflict, and as an active party from 1848 on. We cannot measure his success by present-day standards. Why not? Simply because in that light he accomplished extremely little. He attempted to steer the action of the government away from the liberalistic tendencies of Thorbecke's regime, but without much effect. He fought for the freedom of (Christian) education, but only saw that the opposition increased - even from the ranks of believers. He desired to have the mass of confessors rally behind his witness in the Hague, but here he also lost ground.

Groen laid foundations. The ideology behind the party formation in Western Europe and America was somewhat after this fashion. With the French Revolution a climax was reached in the development of political thought-put-into-practice. From Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau and other political philosophers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the trend had been to sever all authority from a divine being and entrust it to men. Government, Rousseau said, is the result of the social contract in which citizens surrender some (no definite limit) power to the ruling agency. The source of power then is found in the sovereignty of the populace, and not in the sovereignty of God (*droit divin*). In a rather peaceful manner these ideas were put into the foundation of American democracy, the Declaration of Independence, and also carried out in the history of the American peoples.<sup>24</sup> In France, practice was not so peaceful. No life was spared which could hinder the realisation of a people's democracy. When the power in Paris finally was "given" to

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<sup>23</sup> Diepenhorst, *ibid.*, p. 152 f. For the relation between Groen and Kuyper see *Briefwisseling Groen en Kuyper*, and A Goslinga's Introduction. In the great reformatory work which Kuyper was now beginning he considered himself a "disciple" of Groen. It is evident, however, that the stature of both men implied in(ter)dependence. Kuyper continued the work begun by Groen, but with another approach and sometimes with different methods.

<sup>24</sup> With Guizot Groen did not put the American Revolution on the same level as the French Revolution. Cf. *The Anti-Revolutionary Principle*, p. 41, or *De Anti-Revolutionnaire en Confessionele Partij*, p. 134f. I would nevertheless maintain that a re-interpretation of American history, from the time of the Puritans till the present day, is highly necessary so that the Christians of this day may more clearly recognise their state and standpoint in the development of the U.S. Groen's views will here prove to be of inestimable value.

Napoleon, the devastating results of these ideas soon shook the whole of European civilisation. These results were the reason for the reaction of the Vienna Congress: “status quo.” There was a reaction against the extremities of the practical results of the ideas. But this did not mean that the ideas were repudiated and governmental authority again seen as divine in origin. Metternich remained enlightened! And so did all the leaders of Europe. The ideas of Rousseau and Montesquieu were the common property in every civilised country. The only point where there was any disagreement was in the area of the practical. Robespierre had immediately put the ideas into practice, and guillotined his opponents from the king on down. After 1815 people were not so radical and consistent anymore.

The main divisions in the contemporary political outlook find their roots here. “The Left wishes to push on to as full a realisation as possible of the ‘principles of 1776 and 1789,’ the democratic aims of the American and French Revolution, and on the whole the Right wishes a much less democratic society.”<sup>25</sup> This characterisation is quite correct, if we but keep in mind (with Brinton) that on the basic issue, the origin of authority, both Left (i.e. ‘liberal’ - what a beautiful word for such an erroneous idea!) and Right (i.e. ‘conservative’) agree wholeheartedly. On this basic issue the Democrats, who are generally liberal, and the Republicans, stand together. Only on such questions as states’ rights, civil rights, relation of Government to labour and industry, does the Democratic Party take a more leftist stand, which will undoubtedly be the stand of the Republicans a few years from now!<sup>26</sup>

Groen laid foundations. As a confessor of the gospel he recognised that this dilemma (between liberal and conservative) was a false one. The Christian cannot attach himself to either side. And the position of many believers was wrong, since they had made a synthesis between their religious faith and the “practice” of the conservative party. Groen’s significance lies herein, that he broke with this dilemma and put the political issue on the proper basis: it was a matter for or against the Christian religion; for or against the recognition of God’s sovereignty in public life also; faithful obedience to the law of God, also in parliament, or a (more or less systematic) denial of God’s demands. Tertium non datur: all shades of difference between liberalism and conservatism are the same for the person standing on the anti-revolutionary or Christian-historical view.<sup>27</sup> There cannot be a “status quo” since history will move men from their compromising stand as conservatives to the more liberal, until finally radicalism will control the minds and deeds of the leaders.<sup>28</sup>

Not many understood Groen’s message. But when that section of Holland which had become ecclesiastically self-conscious in 1834 also awoke politically after Groen’s forty

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<sup>25</sup> Crane Brinton. *The Shaping of the Modern Mind*, p. 182.

<sup>26</sup> It might be conjectured that one reason for Eisenhower’s popularity is the fact that he is among the “left” in the party of the “right.” This is the reason so many independents and “loose” democrats can vote for him, since much of Eisenhower’s program is conditioned by Roosevelt’s New Deal.

<sup>27</sup> Diepenhorst, *ibid.*, p. 312.

<sup>28</sup> Karl Marx and Fr. Engels published their Communist Manifesto a year after Groen had written his *Ongeloof en Revolutie*, in which he points out the causal connection between unbelief and revolution. This “prophecy” can be seen most clearly in the development of communism.

years of prodding, Abraham Kuiper and his associates could build upon the strong foundation of Groen, and with the guidance of the Spirit accomplish the great revival of Reformed Christianity which gave rise to two national Christian political parties, Christian labour unions, and a national Christian school system. If we consider that these concrete results are not the most important in the life of a Christian, but that the first condition is whether the church realises that God's laws and ordinances must be obeyed in the totality of the life of its members, then we must say that Groen's activity is highly significant, since his witness did very much to bring about that condition.

### **3. Groen and the church.**

Groen believed in the infallibility of God's word, in the substitutionary atonement of Christ's death. It can be readily understood how he did not feel at home in the general atmosphere of the Hervormde Kerk (Reformed State Church). He sympathised greatly with the Seceders of 1834 since he knew that their faith was his. In 1837 Groen published a critique of the government's action and attitude towards this group.<sup>29</sup> He considered the persecution and opposition to be highly unjustified.

But he did not favour the Secession itself. This, he thought, had been too hastily accomplished.<sup>30</sup> One cannot easily conceive of Groen, the "aristocrat," among the seceders. Whether his standpoint was correct cannot be readily ascertained. But in our consideration of this relationship we must always remember that Groen did not forget his duty in the church in which he remained. In 1842 he was the leader of the "Zeven Haagsche Heeren" (Seven Gentlemen from the Hague) who protested against the general spirit of modernism in the church, especially among the ministry.<sup>31</sup> With a view to the present condition in the Dutch Hervormde Kerk it is of interest to note that Groen does not favour various "modalities" or views co-existing peacefully in one denomination.<sup>32</sup>

Space does not permit us to enter into Groen's view about the relation of church and state. The beginning of the sovereignty of each can be found in his writings.<sup>33</sup>

### **4. Groen and education.**

Groen desired that the nation be instructed again in the principles of the Christian religion. The schools, he thought, must be employed for this purpose. As one could expect, the nature of education in the public schools was very much in harmony with the ideals of the age (as it is presently too). Groen first wanted to change this, and have teachers instruct in the public schools according to the main religious differences of the day ("facultative splitsing"). His attempts in this direction failed completely (except for

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<sup>29</sup> "De Maatregelen tegen de Afscheidenen aan het Staatsrecht Getoetst."

<sup>30</sup> Diepenhorst, *ibid.*, p. 249.

<sup>31</sup> Diepenhorst, *ibid.*, p. 259.

<sup>32</sup> Diepenhorst, *ibid.*, p. 294.

<sup>33</sup> Diepenhorst, *ibid.*, p. 285.

the “kind” permission received, that private schools could be established after taxes had been paid for state-controlled schools!)

After this failure he changed procedure, and began to strive for the freedom of private education. Again the results were very small, so that Groen changed to his first method, of promoting the separation of pupils in the schools according to religious background. This was shortly before his death in 1876, and it did not result in any change.<sup>34</sup>

## **Conclusion.**

Groen suffered much. He was the object of contempt, of ridicule. His friends and acquaintances dared not strengthen him, for they lacked the stability of principle and the courage of faith.

For that was needed. Groen’s battle was one of faith; one for faith. Groen was thus a witness for his Saviour. More than any officially ordained servant of the church, Groen preached! In fact, the opposition which cut the deepest into his heart came from the ministry of the church. Groen realised that a theology, even if it were dogmatically sound, could not save the church. TOTAL obedience is demanded by our Lord.

Groen was a sole fighter on the battlefield. But he was not lonely. Faithfulness to revealed principle provides strength. His motto “Our isolation is our strength” must not be interpreted wrongly. Groen did not desire isolation from the field of battle, but in the dependence upon God’s word and its light he entered the struggle of the day, or the age.

We must be proud that we can be his spiritual sons in some ways. This is not a light heritage! It presents us with a challenge. We, each in our own small measure, but in the magnitude of trust in the Lord, must do for our day what Groen did for his. We must call men back to God, and to an obedience of His ordinances.

Groen lived in Holland. But if it is true that Holland occupies a unique position among the nations in its Christian cultural life and its Christian political theory and practice, then Groen’s significance as a maker of history extends far beyond the borders of his land.<sup>35</sup>

Holland occupies a unique place in the modern world since we discover there a realisation of the proper methods and practices the Christian should follow in the duty to witness for his King, Jesus Christ. In other words, the type of Calvinism which developed there is not one conditioned primarily by historical factors. Holland is but a part of the whole Western world, and the three great forces of protestantism, humanism and Catholicism are manifest there as elsewhere. The revival of Calvinistic protestantism

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<sup>34</sup> Kuyper later defended the privately controlled parental school, to be subsidised equally with the state-controlled institutions. This program was finally agreed upon.

<sup>35</sup> J P A Mekkes, “Groen Van Prinsterer in die Historie.” *Anti-Revolutionaire Staatkunde*, July, 1947, p. 112.

there for the last hundred years is successful also because Groen had given it a tremendous impetus in his faithful witness from 1832 to 1876.

Kuyper once said that a thorough revival of Biblical Christianity can only be in the form of a return to Calvinism. This is so, for there only do we find a proper stress on the faithful obedience to the will of our Saviour in the totality of our existence.

Since Groen van Prinsterer showed how this obedience is to be made evident for the believer in the Western world, we cannot without impunity neglect him and his witness.