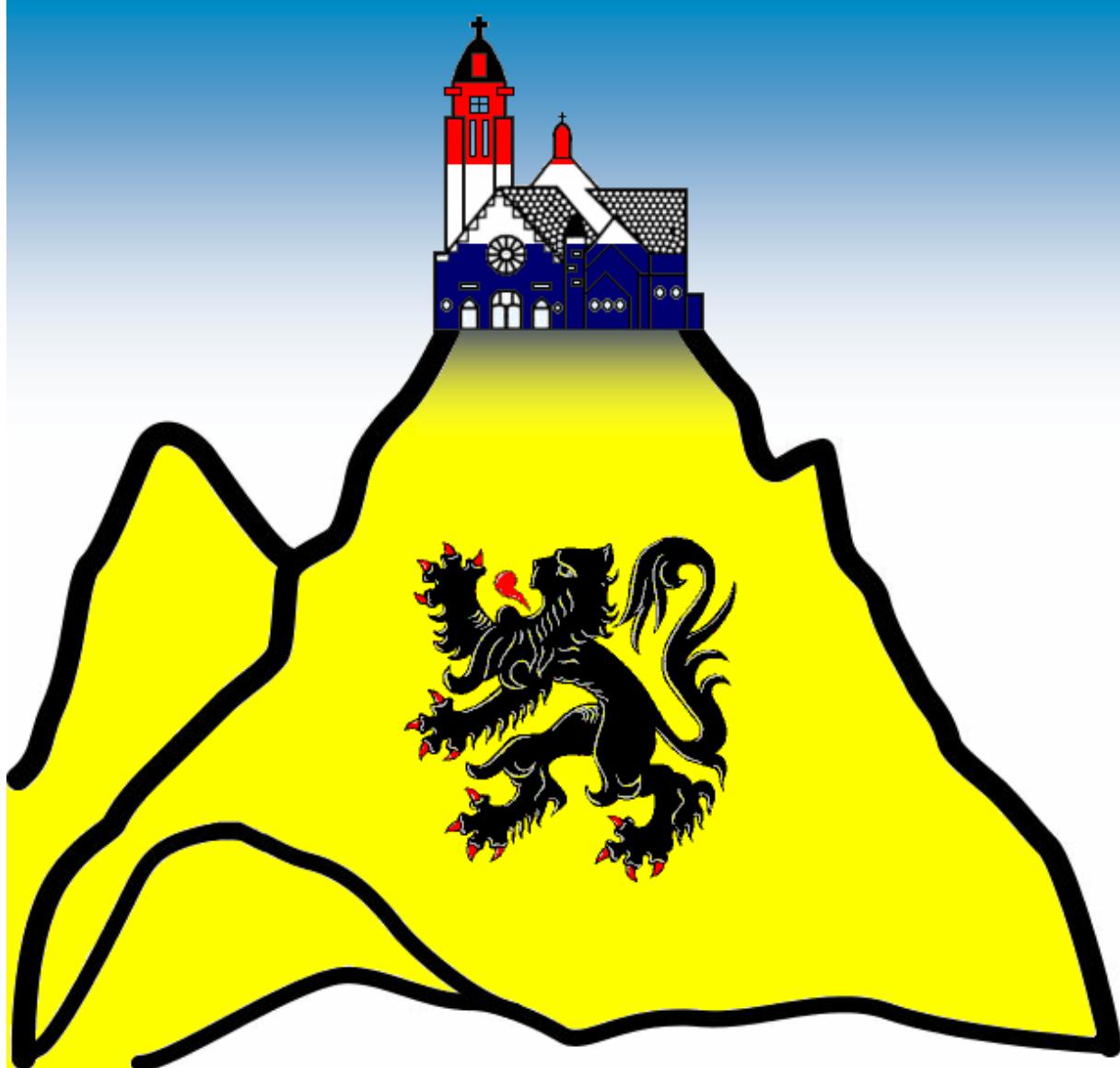


# A DUTCH CITY UPON THE FLEMISH HILL

Neo-Calvinist church life in Dutch-speaking Belgium  
(1894-1978)



Thesis in completion of the Research Master 'History: Cities, States and Citizenship'

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“Niet alle Kuyperianen [kunnen] nu eenmaal Kuypers zijn.”  
( “Not all Kuyperians can be like Kuyper.” )

J.M. Romein and A.H.M. Romein-Verschoor,  
*Erfelaters van onze beschaving. Nederlandse gestalten uit zes eeuwen*  
(Amsterdam [1940] 1977), 754



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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

• <b>A.G.S. GKN</b>	<i>Acta van de generale synode der Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland</i>
• <b>ARP</b>	Anti-Revolutionaire Partij
• <b>BCZK</b>	Belgische Christelijke Zendingskerk
• <b>BEZ</b>	Belgische Evangelische Zending
• <b>B.O.P.</b>	<i>De Open Poort (Belgian edition)</i>
• <b>BSP</b>	Belgische Socialistische Partij
• <b>CGK</b>	Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerk(en)
• <b>CRC</b>	Christian Reformed Church (in North America)
• <b>CVP</b>	Christelijke Volkspartij
• <b>GG</b>	Gereformeerde Gemeenten (in Nederland en Noord-Amerika)
• <b>G.K.</b>	gereformeerde kerk ( <i>local congregation</i> )
• <b>G.K.B.</b>	<i>Gereformeerde Kerkbode voor België</i>
• <b>GKB</b>	Gereformeerde Kerken in België
• <b>GKN</b>	Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland
• <b>FPG</b>	Faculteit voor Protestantse Godgeleerdheid ( <i>in Brussels</i> )
• <b>HKB</b>	Hervormde Kerk van België
• <b>IKON</b>	Interkerkelijke Omroep Nederland
• <b>IKOR</b>	Interkerkelijk Overleg inzake Radioaangelegenheden
• <b>NCRV</b>	Nederlandse Christelijke Radio-Vereniging
• <b>NEHK</b>	Nederlandse evangelische hervormde kerk ( <i>congregation in Brussels</i> )
• <b>NGKD</b>	Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerken (dolerende)
• <b>NHK</b>	Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk
• <b>N.O.P.</b>	<i>De Open Poort (Dutch edition)</i>
• <b>PEKB</b>	Protestants-Evangelische Kerk van België
• <b>PKB</b>	Protestantse Kerk van België
• <b>PRT</b>	Protestantse Radio en Televisie
• <b>PTF</b>	Protestantse Theologische Faculteit ( <i>in Brussels</i> )
• <b>RCA</b>	Reformed Church in America
• <b>R.-K.</b>	rooms-katholiek ( <i>Roman Catholic</i> )
• <b>VPCO</b>	Vereniging voor Vlaams Protestants-Christelijk Onderwijs (in België)
• <b>VPKB</b>	Verenigde Protestantse Kerk in België
• <b>VU</b>	Vrije Universiteit ( <i>in Amsterdam</i> )

# INTRODUCTION

## 1. The «Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland»

“As Hermon’s dew, the dew that doth  
on Sion’s hills descend:  
For there the blessing God commands,  
life that shall never end.”<sup>1</sup>

On June 17<sup>th</sup>, 1892, the solemn sound of Psalm 133:3 filled the church hall of the «Keizersgrachtkerk» in Amsterdam. There, in a neo-Gothic church building in the centre of the Dutch capital, which could seat up to sixteen hundred churchgoers, two leaders of two different church groups held out a hand to each other, with which they symbolically sealed the amalgamation of the two denominations involved. One of these men was Rev. W.H. Gispen, who represented the «Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerk» (CGK) – which had come into being in 1869 as a unification of the «Christelijke Afgescheiden Gemeenten» and the «Gereformeerde Gemeenten onder het Kruis», two Calvinist dissenting communities whose roots could be traced back to the «Afscheiding» of 1834, a schism in the «Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk» (NHK, the old quasi-established Church)<sup>2</sup> – and delivered a speech that made a deep impression on the persons present; he knew for sure that the late ‘founding fathers’ of the «Afscheiding», who had been severely persecuted by the government<sup>3</sup>, exulted at this ecclesiastical amalgamation in the Kingdom of Heaven.<sup>4</sup> The other was Dr. A. Kuyper, the undisputed leading man of the «Nederduitsche Gereformeerde Kerken (dolerende)» (NGKD) – a denomination which had seceded from the «Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk» in 1886, during the so-called «Doleantie»<sup>5</sup> –, who depicted the coalescence as the beginning of a new Reformation, which would not only reform the ecclesiastical sphere, but *every* domain of society and *every* aspect of life: “[d]e strijd begint nu eerst recht. Het groote werk der Reformatie loopt nu niet ten einde, maar moet nu eerst terdege ter hand genomen [worden]. Ook wij moeten eene strijdende Kerk blijven. Veroveren moet ons doel blijven.”<sup>6</sup> It was, Kuyper emphasised, the God-given ‘vocation’ of Holland to revitalise Calvinism worldwi-

<sup>1</sup> Psalm 133:3. *Scottish Metrical Psalter of 1650*. In the Dutch rhymed version of the Psalms that was in use in 1892, the so-called *Metrical Psalter of 1773* («Berijming van 1773» or «Statenberijming»), Psalm 133:3 was sung as follows: “Waar liefde woont, gebiedt de Heer den zegen; / Daar woont Hij Zelf, daar wordt Zijn heil verkregen, / En ‘t leven tot in eeuwigheid.”

<sup>2</sup> For a detailed history of the «Afscheiding» of 1834, see: C. Smits, *De Afscheiding van 1834 I-IX* (Oudkarspel and Dordrecht 1971-1991); W. Bakker et.al. eds., *De Afscheiding van 1834 en haar geschiedenis* (Kampen 1984); T.N. Schelhaas et.al. eds., *De afgescheidenen van 1834 en hun nageslacht* (Kampen 1984).

<sup>3</sup> See, for example: A.C.L. Zwaan, *Civilisering en decivilisering. Studies over staatsvorming en geweld, nationalisme en vervolging* (Amsterdam 2001), 144.

<sup>4</sup> *Acta G.S. GKN* (Amsterdam 1892), art. 5.

<sup>5</sup> For a detailed history of the «Doleantie» of 1886, see: G. Kuypers, *Iets goeds uit Voorthuizen? Amsterdam en de moederkerk der Doleantie* (Kampen 1985); W. Bakker et.al. eds., *De Doleantie van 1886 en haar geschiedenis* (Kampen 1986); P. van Beek et.al. eds., *De dolerenden van 1886 en hun nageslacht* (Kampen 1986).

<sup>6</sup> *Acta G.S. GKN* (Amsterdam 1892), art. 6.

de. After these addresses, some few words of several other theologians and a couple of formal announcements, the first joint synodical meeting of the new united Church was closed. With the exception of three congregations (in Noordeloos, Teuge and Zierikzee), four ministers and seven hundred members of the CGK<sup>7</sup>, the «Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerk» and «Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerken (dolerende)» became one – an unprecedented event in the history of Dutch Calvinism, known as the «Vereniging» of 1892.<sup>8</sup> The «Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland» (GKN) were born.

The new denomination, consisting of 189.000 members and 394 churches of the former CGK and 181.000 members and 306 congregations of the NGKd<sup>9</sup> – after 1892, approximately eight to ten percent of the entire Dutch population belonged to the GKN<sup>10</sup> –, presented itself as the orthodox counterpart of the «Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk», which was, in light of the genesis of the «afgescheiden» and «dolerende» churches, not very surprising. Both the CGK and the NGKd had been founded by conscience-stricken traditionalist Calvinists, who had raised their voice against the ‘spirit of latitudinarianism’ that was abroad in the NHK: an increasing number of ministers denied the old Calvinist tenets of foreordination, the innate depravity of mankind and Christ’s physical resurrection – all doctrines of Dutch Calvinism, which were (formally) the principles on which the NHK was based, were recorded in three confessional documents («belijdenisgeschriften»), the so-called «‘Drie Formulieren van Enigheid’» (‘Three Forms of Unity’), viz. the Belgic Confession (written in 1561 by Guido de Brès), the Heidelberg Catechism (put in writing in 1563) and the Canons of Dordt (formulated in 1618/1619) –, congregations were obliged to sing hymns – whose optimistic and rationalistic undertone tended to conflict, in the eyes of orthodox Calvinists, with the aforementioned tenets –, and the church discipline in doctrinal matters – members and ministers who publically rejected the teachings of the Three Forms of Unity should be placed under a ban – had become a dead letter. According to these traditionalists, the «Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk», which was called «‘Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk’» or ‘Public Church’ before the nineteenth century and was closely connected

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<sup>7</sup> For the number of congregations, see: O.J. de Jong, *Nederlandse kerkgeschiedenis* (Nijkerk 1978), 359. For the number of ministers, see: J. van Putten, *Zoveel kerken, zoveel zinnen. Een sociaal-wetenschappelijke studie van verschillen in behoudendheid tussen gereformeerden en christelijke gereformeerden* (Kampen 1968), 217. For the number of members, see: G.J. Schutte, ‘Over ’86 en ’92 en daarna: Kuypers gereformeerde wereld herdacht’, *Bijdragen en mededelingen betreffende de geschiedenis der Nederlanden* CX (1995), 515-547, there 533. The three CGK congregations that kept aloof from the unification continued to call themselves «‘Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerk’». In the 1890s and 1900s, they were joined by hundreds of men and women who did not feel at ease in the new united Church, particularly due to objections against some aspects in the theology of former «dolerende» ministers.

<sup>8</sup> For a detailed history of the «Vereniging» of 1892, see: L.J. Wolthuis et.al. eds., *De Vereniging van 1892 en haar geschiedenis* (Kampen 1992).

<sup>9</sup> For the number of members, see: M. Golverdingen, *Kleine geschiedenis van de gereformeerde gezindte. Een ontwikkeling in hoofdlijnen* (Heerenveen 2006), 68. For the number of congregations, see: C. Augustijn and J. Vree, *Abraham Kuypers vast en veranderlijk. De ontwikkeling van zijn denken* (Zoetermeer 1998), 204.

<sup>10</sup> D. Damsma, ‘De Doleantie (1886)’, in: E.M. Kloek ed., *Verzameld verleden. Veertig gedenkwaardige momenten en figuren uit de vaderlandse geschiedenis* (Hilversum 2004), 121-124, there 124.

with the Dutch legislature and magistracy<sup>11</sup>, had already slowly deteriorated in the eighteenth century, under influence of the Enlightenment and the French seizure of Holland, but it had definitively fallen into disrepair in 1816. That year, king Willem I, first monarch of the United Netherlands, had replaced the term «‘gereformeerd’» permanently with «‘hervormd’» – the latter was a ‘Dutchification’ of the former<sup>12</sup> –, had given the NHK a new, centralist and hierarchic administration – he placed himself at head of the ecclesiastical chain of command<sup>13</sup> – and had decreed new prescriptions for persons-to-be – with which the sovereign tried to stamp out religious ‘fanaticism’, for he regarded orthodoxy (whether Catholic or Protestant) as a potential threat to the internal stability and governability of his kingdom.<sup>14</sup> As a result of his measures, liberal theology («vrijzinnigheid»), which questioned conventional dogmas, became the new standard among Reformed ministers and began to oust orthodox Calvinism with rapid strides.

A part of the orthodox churchgoers were unable to reconcile these drastic changes with their conscience and saw, ultimately, no other course than to secede from the «Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk». A first ‘wave’ of dissenters left the NHK in 1834 (the «Afscheiding»), a second ‘troop’ of secessionists went its own way in 1886 (the «Doleantie»). Both groups founded churches of their own, which they provided with the old name «‘gereformeerd’» – for them, «‘hervormd’» was a byword for everything that they detested – and immediately restored orthodox customs and beliefs: they only sang Psalms instead of Psalms *and* hymns, reintroduced the church discipline in doctrinal matters, condemned the liberal theologians’ historical-critical method of studying Scripture and substituted the church hierarchy of the NHK for the old «Dordtse Kerkorde», a system of ecclesiastical governance that emphasised the autonomy of the local congregation.<sup>15</sup> As has been said before, the majority of the «afgescheidenen» and the entire group of «dolerenden» amalgamated into the «Gereformeerde

<sup>11</sup> In the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, only practising members of the Dutch Reformed Church could hold public offices. See: I. Schöffer, ‘De Republiek der Verenigde Nederlanden 1609-1702’, in: I. Schöffer, H. van der Wee and J.A. Bornewasser eds., *De Lage Landen van 1500 tot 1780* (Amsterdam and Brussels 1983), 210-211.

<sup>12</sup> C.N. Impeta, *Kaart van kerkelijk Nederland* (Kampen 1961), 101.

<sup>13</sup> A.J. Rasker, *De Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk vanaf 1795. Haar geschiedenis en theologie in de negentiende en twintigste eeuw* (Kampen 1981), 25.

<sup>14</sup> According to Willem I, doctrinal differences between churches were nothing more than ‘relics’ from the past with no significance whatsoever for the present. This idea was the basis principle of his policy regarding ecclesiastical affairs. In the first years of his reign, he even had the ambition to undo the division between Roman Catholicism and Protestantism (!), with himself in the role of ‘pope’ of a ‘National Christian Church’. Later, he moderated his aspiration and hoped he could fuse all Protestant denominations in Holland together. See: H.Th. Colenbrander, *Willem I. Koning der Nederlanden II. 1815-1830* (Amsterdam 1935), 263; J.P. de Valk, ‘Landsvader en landspaus? Achtergronden van de visie op kerk en school bij koning Willem I (1815-1830)’, in: C.A. Tamse and E. Witte eds., *Staats- en Natievorming in Willem I’s Koninkrijk (1815-1830)* (Brussels and Baarn 1992), 76-97.

<sup>15</sup> For a detailed account of the genesis of the «Gereformeerde Kerken», from a Neo-Calvinist perspective, see: J.C. Rullmann, *De Afscheiding in de Nederlandsch Hervormde Kerk der XIX<sup>e</sup> eeuw* (Kampen [1912] 1916); J.C. Rullmann, *De Doleantie in de Nederlandsch Hervormde Kerk der XIX<sup>e</sup> eeuw* (Kampen 1916); L. Praamsma, *Het dwaze Gods. Geschiedenis der Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland sinds het begin der 19<sup>e</sup> eeuw* (Wageningen 1950); H. Algra, *Het wonder van de negentiende eeuw. Van vrije kerken en kleine luyden* (Franeker 1965).

Kerken» in 1892. Although the GKN reacted against the «Hervormde Kerk», they did not simply want to be an orthodox ‘rehash’ of the NHK; the «gereformeerde» identity, mentality and theology differed fundamentally from the «hervormde» *way of being* in both the latter’s liberal *and* orthodox manifestations (one must keep in mind that far from *all* orthodox Calvinists had left the «Hervormde Kerk» in 1834 or 1886, as a result of which there was still a significant traditionalist faction within the NHK<sup>16</sup>). Already in the decade that preceded the «Vereniging» of 1892, Herman Bavinck, the most prominent theologian in the CGK, and Abraham Kuyper, the editor-in-chief of the daily «*De Standaard*» as well as general editor of the church newsletter «*De Heraut*» as well as creator of the «Anti-Revolutionaire Partij» (ARP, ‘Anti-Revolutionary Party’) as well as founder of the «Vrije Universiteit» (VU) in Amsterdam, who was the driving spirit behind the «Doleantie» movement and would become prime minister of the Netherlands in 1901<sup>17</sup>, had tried to adapt the Calvinist orthodoxy to modern times – or, as they said themselves, to bring Calvinism “in rapport” with the present.<sup>18</sup> They were convinced that orthodox Calvinism could only survive if it would be made fit for the contemporary democratic and multiconfessional organisation of Dutch society.

After the coming into existence of the GKN, both theologians worked in close cooperation with each other to harmonise their views<sup>19</sup> – for the most part, they already had similar ideas – and to lay a firm ideological foundation for the new united Church. The result of their mutual theologisation, which took a definite shape around 1900, came to be known as ‘Neo-Calvinism’, or the ‘Reformed principles’ («‘de gereformeerde beginselen’»). Kuyper and Bavinck managed to give the «Gereformeerde Kerken» a distinct identity – which was different from the «Hervormde Kerk» and from several smaller denominations that called themselves «‘gereformeerd’» as well and whose roots could be traced back, just as those of the GKN, to the «Afscheiding» of 1834, but which had kept themselves apart from the «Vereniging» of 1892 (e.g. the three already-mentioned congregations of the CGK<sup>20</sup> and the «Gereformeerde Gemeenten (in Nederland en Noord-Amerika)» / GG<sup>21</sup>) – and to turn traditional

<sup>16</sup> There were two orthodox factions within the «Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk»: the «Confessionele Vereniging» (founded in 1864) and the «Gereformeerde Bond» (established in 1906). Next to these organisations, there was also a group of moderate orthodox «Nederlands-hervormden», called «‘ethischen’» or «‘ethisch-irenischen’».

<sup>17</sup> For a detailed account of Kuyper’s prime ministership, see: D.Th. Kuiper and G.J. Schutte eds., *Jaarboek voor de geschiedenis van het Nederlands protestantisme na 1800 IX. Het kabinet-Kuyper (1901-1905)* (Zoetermeer 2001).

<sup>18</sup> A. Kuyper, *Encyclopaedie der Heilige Godgeleerdheid I. Inleidend deel* (Amsterdam 1894), I.

<sup>19</sup> J. Veenhof, ‘Geschiedenis van theologie en spiritualiteit in de gereformeerde kerken’, in: M.E. Brinkman ed., *100 jaar theologie. Aspecten van een eeuw theologie in de Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland (1892-1992)* (Kampen 1992), 14-95, there 22.

<sup>20</sup> See: note 7.

<sup>21</sup> The «Gereformeerde Gemeenten (in Nederland en Noord-Amerika)» were created in 1907 as a fusion of the so-called «‘ledeboerianen’» and «‘kruisgezinden’», two church groups that had come into being some years after the «Afscheiding» of 1834, but had stood aloof from the «afgescheiden» *mainstream* and had not merged into the «Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerk» in 1869. For a detailed history of the genesis of the «Gereformeerde Gemeenten», see: H.A. Hofman, *Ledeboerianen en Kruisgezinden. Een kerkhistorische studie over het ontstaan van de Gereformeerde Ge-*

Calvinism into an all-encompassing world view and philosophy of life. Thanks to their efforts, a «‘nationaal-gereformeerd’» or ‘Neo-Calvinist’ subculture («cultuurpatroon») came into being<sup>22</sup>, which was characterised by strict Sunday observance; strong views regarding the biblical division of roles between men and women – until the 1960s, only «gereformeerde» men («‘mannenbroeders’») were entitled to occupy ecclesiastical and political offices<sup>23</sup> –; a central role of the church in everyday life; the idea that the «gereformeerden» embodied the true character («‘grondtoon’») of the Dutch nationality – they claimed to be the “kern der natie” (‘nucleus of the nation’)<sup>24</sup> –; the striving for a government based on biblical (i.e. orthodox Calvinist) principles; a disapproval of cinema attendance, card playing, modern dancing and theatregoing; reading some chapters in the Bible several times a day (particularly before every family meal); distinct opinions on societal and political issues – Neo-Calvinists were renowned for their law-abidingness, based on the thirteenth chapter of Paul’s Epistle to the Romans<sup>25</sup> –; a theological emphasis on baptism, foreordination and covenantalism – which strengthened the idea of the «gereformeerden» as a chosen people<sup>26</sup> –; and a flourishing club life.<sup>27</sup>

Members of the GKN lived their lives completely different from other socio-religious groups in Dutch society (like liberal Protestants, Roman Catholics and socialists), in a many-branched network of interrelated organisations (which is called a «‘zuil’» in Dutch sociology and historiography). In every sphere of public life, «gereformeerden» organised themselves along denominational lines: in fifty years time, they created a daily («*De Standaard*», first issued on April 1<sup>st</sup>, 1872), a trade union («‘Patrimonium’», constituted in 1876), a political party (the «Anti-Revolutionaire Partij», founded

*meenten (1834-1927)* (Utrecht 1977); P. van de Breevaart et.al. eds., *De vereniging van 1907. De vereniging van de Ledeboeriaanse Gemeenten en de Gereformeerde Gemeenten onder het Kruis* (Houten 1984).

<sup>22</sup> The term «‘nationaal-gereformeerd cultuurpatroon’» is used, among others, by: Van Putten, *Zoveel kerken, zoveel zinnen*, 169, 176, 210, 229; D.Th. Kuiper, ‘De Doleantie en de Nederlandse samenleving’, in: W. Bakker et.al. eds., *De Doleantie van 1886 en haar geschiedenis* (Kampen 1986), 203-239, there 233; C. de Gast, *Godsdienst en samenleving in het Land van Heusden en Altena. Confessie, bevinding en verzuiling, 1900-1961* (Tilburg 1993), 131; D.Th. Kuiper, *Tussen observatie en participatie. Twee eeuwen gereformeerde en antirevolutionaire wereld in ontwikkelingsperspectief* (Hilversum 2002), passim.

<sup>23</sup> It was not until 1952 that the «Gereformeerde Kerken» granted their female members the right to vote in parochial church council elections. In 1969, the offices of minister, elder and deacon were no longer reserved for men. See: A. Amelink, ‘Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland’, in: G. Harinck et.al. eds., *Christelijke Encyclopedie I* (Kampen 2005), 643-646, there 646. The first female representative of the «Anti-Revolutionaire Partij», which was closely allied to the GKN, was elected in parliament in 1963. See: J.P. Stoop, ‘De ARP in het interbellum’, in: G. Harinck, R. Kuiper and P. Bak eds., *De Antirevolutionaire Partij 1829-1980* (Hilversum 2001), 171-197, there 177.

<sup>24</sup> Augustijn and Vree, *Abraham Kuyper*, 37.

<sup>25</sup> B. van Kaam, *Opstand der gezagsgeworden: mannenbroeders en zonen in de jaren 1938-1945. Een journalistieke verkenning in kranten, tijdschriften, pamfletten, dagboeken, illegale bladen, brochures, brieven en andere documenten uit een bewogen periode* (Wageningen 1966), 121.

<sup>26</sup> See, for example: Van Putten, *Zoveel kerken, zoveel zinnen*, 207-208; F.A. Groot, *Rooms, rechtzinnigen en nieuwlichters. Verzuiling in een Hollandse plattelandsgemeente, Naaldwijk 1850-1930* (Hilversum 1992), 92-93; J. Verrips, *En boven de polder de hemel. Een antropologische studie van een Nederlands dorp, 1850-1971* (Amsterdam [1977] 2005), 94; J. van Eijnatten and F.A. van Lieburg, *Nederlandse religiegeschiedenis* (Hilversum 2006), 286.

<sup>27</sup> P.J. Horsman, ‘Inventarisatie van Gereformeerde Kerkarchieven. Voordracht gehouden op de studiedag over de problematiek rond de inventarisatie van kerkelijke archieven, georganiseerd door de Rijksarchiefschool op 8 maart 1982 te Utrecht’, *Nederlands Archievenblad LXXXVII* (1983), 33-47, there 41.

in 1879), an institute for higher education (the «Vrije Universiteit», established in 1880), schools ('schools with the Bible'), all kinds of interest groups and church-related institutions, a radio broadcasting corporation (the «Nederlandse Christelijke Radio-Vereniging»/NCRV, whose first transmission was broadcast in 1924) and numerous other associations of their own, with which they tried to protect themselves against the 'negative influence' of non-Calvinist ideologies and to 're-Christianise' Holland (to make Neo-Calvinist opinions and beliefs the leading values in society).<sup>28</sup> Most of these organisations had already been founded *before* the creation of the «Gereformeerde Kerken» in 1892, but because Kuyper, who passed away in 1920, had been involved with the establishment of nearly all of them, they became almost exclusively affiliated to the GKN after the «Vereniging». <sup>29</sup> A minority of orthodox «hervormden» participated in these organisations as well, but there is no gainsaying the fact that the «gereformeerden» held sway over them.<sup>30</sup> Due to the creation of a Neo-Calvinist *way of being* and the institutionalisation of this «cultuurpatroon» in a «zuil», members of the GKN were a clearly identifiable population group, both in doctrine and practice.

## 2. The «Gereformeerde Kerken in België»

The last secessionist movement (the «Doleantie») did not halt at the borders of Holland. A group of (mostly Dutch) Kuyperian-minded members of the «Nederlandse evangelische hervormde kerk» (NEHK) in Brussels, led by the Dutchman A.G. van Deth, who was the owner of a delicatessen store in the Belgian state capital and a personal friend of Abraham Kuyper, sympathised with the «Doleantie» and saw parallels between the discontentment of the «dolerenden» with the liberal predominance within Dutch Calvinism and the situation of orthodox Protestants in Belgium.<sup>31</sup> The NEHK in Brussels was a member church of the «Bond der Protestants-Evangelische Kerken van het Koninkrijk België», which was created in 1839 as a confederate league of sixteen – older studies say eight<sup>32</sup> – Protestant

<sup>28</sup> For a detailed account of the history of «*De Standaard*», see: B. van der Ros, 'De Standaard', in: B. van der Ros ed., *Geschiedenis van de christelijke dagbladpers in Nederland* (Kampen 1993), 25-70. For «'Patrimonium'», see: W.P. Beekers and R.E. van der Woude, *Niet bij steen alleen. Patrimonium Amsterdam: van sociale vereniging tot sociale onderneming 1876-2003* (Hilversum 2008). For the «Anti-Revolutionaire Partij», see: G. Harinck, R. Kuiper and P. Bak eds., *De Antirevolutionaire Partij 1829-1980* (Hilversum 2001). For the «Vrije Universiteit», see: A.Th. van Deursen, *Een hoeksteen in het verzuild bestel. De Vrije Universiteit 1880-2005* (Amsterdam 2005). For 'schools with the Bible', see: A.C. Rosendaal, *Naareen school voor de gereformeerde gezindte. Het christelijke onderwijsconcept van het Gereformeerde Schoolverband (1868-1971)* (Hilversum 2006). For the «Nederlandse Christelijke Radio-Vereniging», see: H. Algra, C. Rijnsdorp and B. van Kaam eds., *Vrij en gebonden. 50 jaar NCRV* (Baarn 1974).

<sup>29</sup> Kuiper, *Tussen observatie en participatie*, 51.

<sup>30</sup> A.G.H. Anbeek and J.Th.M. Bank, 'Verzuilde literatuur. Een verkennung', *Nederlandse letterkunde* I.2 (1996), 125-137, there 129; J.P. Stoop, "Om het volvoeren van een christelijke staatkunde". *De Anti-Revolutionaire Partij in het interbellum* (Hilversum 2001), 71; *Reformatorisch Dagblad*, 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2007.

<sup>31</sup> For a detailed account of the genesis of the first Belgian «gereformeerde kerk» (in Brussels), see: A. de Raaf, *Guido de Brès-kerk van Brussel (voorheen Gereformeerde Kerk). Historisch overzicht 1894-1984* (Brussels 1985); A. de Raaf, 'De instituering van de Gereformeerde Kerk van Brussel (1891-1896), begeleid door Kuyper zelf', *Jaarboek voor de geschiedenis van de Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland* II (1988), 69-96.

<sup>32</sup> See, for example: *De Kruisbanier* XVI.33 (13<sup>th</sup> August 1960), 2-4, 6-7, there 6.

churches that had been incorporated into the «Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk» by king Willem I during the reunification of the Northern and Southern Netherlands (1815-1830).<sup>33</sup> According to Van Deth and his supporters, the «Bond van Kerken» in general and the NEHK in particular tolerated liberal theological teachings, because both lacked a well-defined creed, and renounced the spiritual heritage of the Reformation and its martyrs, just as the «Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk» did.<sup>34</sup> The «Doleantie» in Holland had opened their eyes for the ‘lamentable’ state of the «Bond van Kerken», which was seen by them as the Belgian equivalent of the «Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk», and stimulated them to swing into action as well; the factional struggle within the Dutch NHK (resulting in the schism of 1886), was, so to speak, ‘projected’ on Protestantism in Belgium, even though there was no sign of a widespread agitation between liberal and orthodox Protestants south of the Moerdijk *before* the «Doleantie» and the «Bond van Kerken» could not be compared with the NHK just like that.<sup>35</sup> From 1891 onwards, Van Deth wrote several letters, which were dictated to him by Kuyper (!)<sup>36</sup>, to the consistory of the «Nederlandse evangelische hervormde kerk», in which he urged the church council to accept the Three Forms of Unity and to (re)introduce some form of church discipline in doctrinal matters («‘leertucht’»). When he met with a refusal, Van Deth and his fellow Kuyperians seceded, on the advice of Kuyper, from the NEHK in 1893, held Sunday reading services in the delicatessen store thereafter and founded a genuine «gereformeerde kerk», by electing elders and deacons from their midst, on December 30<sup>th</sup>, 1894.<sup>37</sup>

Already in 1893, the group of «gereformeerden» in Brussels had asked the general synod of the «Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland» to help them in their endeavour to establish a congregation of their own. However, the highest church council of the GKN declared their request inadmissible and instructed them to seek contact with the local Dutch-speaking community of the «Belgische Christelijke Zendingskerk» (BCZK).<sup>38</sup> Yet, Van Deth, Kuyper and several other prominent «dolerenden» – among whom Prof. Dr. F.L. Rutgers, professor in church history and church government at the «Vrije Universiteit» in Amsterdam, Rev. K. Fernhout, minister in Dordrecht, and Rev. J.C. Sik-

<sup>33</sup> See, for example: D. van Wageningen, ‘Kort historisch overzicht van het Belgische protestantisme’, *Belgische protestantse biografieën A-1* (1987), 1-6, there 1. See also: W.A.J. Munier, ‘Voorbode van de PKN in 1816?’, *Tijdschrift voor Nederlandse Kerkgeschiedenis* VII.1 (2004), 3-7.

<sup>34</sup> *Brief van A.G. van Deth c.s. aan de kerkenraad van de Nederlandse evangelische hervormde kerk in Brussel*, dated 5<sup>th</sup> January 1891 [archive of the G.K. in Brussels].

<sup>35</sup> Although most of the congregations of the «Bond van Kerken» were Calvinist, there were Lutheran churches as well. The «Nederlandse evangelische hervormde kerk» in Brussels, for example, which joined the «Bond van Kerken» in 1850, had Lutheran roots. See: G.L.J. Liagre, *Anders geloven. Geschiedenis van het Nederlandstalig protestantisme te Brussel en zijn organisaties* (Brussels 2004), 102-104.

<sup>36</sup> These letters are preserved in the archive of the (former) «gereformeerde kerk» of Brussels, which is located in the «(verenigde) protestantse kerk» of Brussels at the «Nieuwe Graanmarkt».

<sup>37</sup> *Mededelingenblad van de gereformeerde kerk te Brussel (Kerkbrief)* V.12 (December 1969), 5. For a detailed account of the history of the «Nederlandse evangelische hervormde kerk», see: L. Rooze-Sacré, *Zo groeide het... Geschiedenis van de Nederlandse Evangelische (Ned. Herv.) Kerk te Brussel (1840-1965)* (Brussels 1964).

<sup>38</sup> *Acta G.S. GKN* (Dordrecht 1893), art. 116.

kel, parson in The Hague<sup>39</sup> – thought that joining this primarily Walloon-oriented and French-speaking denomination, with which the old «Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerk» in Holland – and hence the GKN since 1892 – maintained relations, was absolutely no satisfying alternative, because it had a rather hierarchic structure that differed from the «Dordtse Kerkorde» and a less confessional character than the GKN.<sup>40</sup> More than likely, the Francophone identity of the BCZK and the Dutch orientation of the «gereformeerden» in Brussels will have had something to do with it as well. Thanks to the support of the aforementioned «dolerenden», Van Deth's request came up for discussion again at the next general synod, which was held in Middelburg in 1896, and received, unlike three years earlier, general approval: by common assent, the «gereformeerde kerk» in Brussels was incorporated into the GKN.<sup>41</sup> In the years to come, it turned out that this synodical decision set a precedent for orthodox Calvinists in other Belgian towns who were, just as the group around Van Deth, dissatisfied with the existing local Protestant churches too: following Brussels, «gereformeerde kerken» were established in Antwerp in 1899 (the formation of an orthodox faction had begun in the early 1890s)<sup>42</sup>, in Ghent in 1926 (the first orthodox agitation dated back to 1897)<sup>43</sup> and in Mechlin in 1938 (the core of the «gereformeerde kerk» consisted of a group which had seceded from the local «evangelische (hervormde) kerk» already in 1912).<sup>44</sup> Evangelisation activities resulted in the founding of churches in Denderleeuw in 1953 (the «gereformeerden» held services there since 1923)<sup>45</sup>, in Boechout in 1955 (the Dutch businessman K. Sluys was the driving force behind church planting in this town near Antwerp)<sup>46</sup>, and a semi-independent congregation in Hoboken (which was officially an ‘annex’ to the «gereformeerde kerk» in Antwerp) in 1955 (evangelism activities had started two years before).<sup>47</sup> Although these churches did not form an independent denomination – they belonged to and fell within the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of the GKN –, they were usually referred to as the «‘Gereformeerde Kerken in België’» (GKB).

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<sup>39</sup> De Raaf, ‘De instituering van de Gereformeerde Kerk van Brussel (1891-1896)’, 82-85.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> *Acta G.S. GKN* (Middelburg 1896), art. 132.

<sup>42</sup> H.R. Boudin and M. Blok, *Synodaal gedenkboek van de Verenigde Protestantse Kerk in België, 1839-1992/Mémoires synodale de l'Église Protestante Unie de Belgique, 1839-1992* (Brussels 1992), 20-22, there 21.

<sup>43</sup> M.R. Barritt, P. van Beek and A. de Raaf, *Inventarissen van de archieven van de Gereformeerde Kerk te Londen 1939-1979, Gereformeerde Kerk te Curaçao 1930-1984, Classis België van de Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland 1950-1978* (Utrecht 1988), 83-84; A. de Raaf, *Een open poort naar het zuiden. Geschiedenis van het deputaatschap voor de ‘Zaken van de Belgische Kerken’ (v/h voor de ‘Evangelisatie in België’) van de Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland (1927-1992)* (Delft 1997), 22-35.

<sup>44</sup> *Van G.K.B. naar V.P.K.B.* (Mechlin 1978), 7-13; S.H. Fuite, *In een straat genaamd de Rechte. Geschiedenis van de protestantse kerkgemeenschap te Mechelen-Noord 1844-1994* (Mechlin 1944), 182-187, 209-211.

<sup>45</sup> De Raaf, *Een open poort*, 38. For a detailed account of the genesis of the «gereformeerde kerk» in Denderleeuw, see: C. Van Adinkerke, *De tempel. De geschiedenis van een protestantse gemeente in Vlaanderen* (n.pl. 1957).

<sup>46</sup> Several years after the establishment of the «gereformeerde kerk» in Boechout, K. Sluys wrote a book about the (successful) church planting: *Het wonder van Boechout. Doorbraak van het Evangelie in Vlaanderen* (Franeker 1959).

<sup>47</sup> De Raaf, *Een open poort*, 67-68; N.O.P. XXXV.10 (October 1955), 4.

### 3. The «gereformeerden» as a socio-religious entity: a historiographical overview

In recent years, the «Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland» have been the subject of inquiry of several theological and institutional-historical studies. To name just a few standard works: as regards the theological positioning of the GKN within Dutch Protestantism as well as Calvinism worldwide and the development of Neo-Calvinist theology, three books were published in the past two decades which focus on the formulation of Neo-Calvinism by Kuyper and Bavinck as well as the way in which succeeding generations of theologians have dealt with their heritage: «*100 jaar theologie. Aspecten van een eeuw theologie in de Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland*», issued in 1992<sup>48</sup>, «*Theologie op de drempel van 2000. Terugblik op 100 jaar ‘Gereformeerd Theologisch Tijdschrift’*», put in print in 1999<sup>49</sup>, and «*Bijbel en dogmatiek. Schriftbeschouwing en Schriftgebruik in het dogmatisch werk van A. Kuyper, H. Bavinck en G.C. Berkouwer*», which went to press in 2003.<sup>50</sup> The chronological history of the GKN as an institution, with an emphasis on an enumeration of facts and a description of the events that changed the structure and further development of the «Gereformeerde Kerken», has been written, among others, by A.P. Crom et al. in the twelve-volume «*Anderhalve eeuw gereformeerden in stad en land*», published between 1983 and 1986<sup>51</sup>, Dr. J. Plomp in «*Een kerk in beweging. De Gereformeerde Kerken na de tweede wereldoorlog*», publicised in 1987<sup>52</sup>, and Rev. H.C. Endedijk in his two-volume «*De Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland*», edited in 1990 and 1992.<sup>53</sup> Next to these enumerative and descriptive chronicles, numerous monographs on particular GKN-related (sub)topics have been published, for example J. Ridderbos's dissertation «*Strijd op twee fronten*», printed in 1994<sup>54</sup>, about the so-called «‘Vrijmaking’» of 1944 – a schism that resulted in the exodus of approximately ten percent of the members of the GKN (who created the «Gereformeerde Kerken (vrijgemaakt)»)<sup>55</sup>) and would have severe consequences for the ecclesiastical orientation of the GKN –, K.W. de Jong's PhD thesis «*Ordening van dienst. Achtergronden en ontwikkeling in de eredienst van de Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland*», published in 1996<sup>56</sup>, which deals with liturgical developments

<sup>48</sup> M.E. Brinkman ed., *100 jaar theologie. Aspecten van een eeuw theologie in de Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland* (Kampen 1992).

<sup>49</sup> W. Stoker and H.C. van der Sar eds., *Theologie op de drempel van 2000. Terugblik op 100 jaar ‘Gereformeerd Theologisch Tijdschrift’* (Kampen 1999).

<sup>50</sup> D. van Keulen, *Bijbel en dogmatiek. Schriftbeschouwing en Schriftgebruik in het dogmatisch werk van A. Kuyper, H. Bavinck en G.C. Berkouwer* (Kampen 2003).

<sup>51</sup> A.P. Crom et.al. eds., *Anderhalve eeuw gereformeerden in stad en land I-XII* (Kampen 1983-1986).

<sup>52</sup> J. Plomp, *Een kerk in beweging. De Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland na de tweede wereldoorlog* (Kampen 1987).

<sup>53</sup> H.C. Endedijk, *De Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland I-II* (Kampen 1990-1992).

<sup>54</sup> J. Ridderbos, *Strijd op twee fronten. Schilder en de gereformeerde ‘elite’ in de jaren 1933-1945 tussen aanpassing, collaboratie en verzet op kerkelijk en politiek terrein I-II* (Kampen 1994).

<sup>55</sup> For the percentage, see: Amelink, ‘Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland’, 645. For a detailed account of the genesis of the «Gereformeerde Kerken (vrijgemaakt)», from a «vrijgemaakt» perspective, see: D. Deddens and M. te Velde eds., *Vrijmaking – Wederkeer. Vijftig jaar Vrijmaking in beeld gebracht, 1944-1994* (Barneveld 1994). See also: note 627.

<sup>56</sup> K.W. de Jong, *Ordening van dienst. Achtergronden van en ontwikkelingen in de eredienst van de Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland* (Baarn 1996).

within the GKN, and «*Geschiedenis van de Theologische Universiteit in Kampen, 1854-2004*», written by B.A. Jansen-de Graaf and G.J. van Klinken in 2005<sup>57</sup>, a research that throws a light on the Theological Seminary in Kampen – which had been the old intellectual centre of the «Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerk» before 1892, and was used, together with the «Vrije Universiteit» in Amsterdam, as training institute of «gereformeerde» ministers after the «Vereniging». As these studies prove, the (turbulent) history of the «Gereformeerde Kerken» has received a fair amount of interest from theologians and historians during the last quarter of a century.

Sociologists can be added to the list as well: since the late 1960s, a couple of social-scientific inquiries have been published that look at the members of the GKN as a distinct socio-religious entity within Dutch society, accentuating their *ideas*, their *way of life*, their *attitude towards society at large* and their *self-image*, and that try to explain why the «gereformeerden» chose to ‘isolate’ themselves, by creating an all-encompassing life sphere of their own (the Neo-Calvinist «zuil»), parallel to society at large, in the *fin-de-siècle* era, and why they ultimately dropped their self-chosen isolation as well as their Neo-Calvinist identity, by assimilating into (the secular) general society, from the mid-1960s onwards. In these surveys, the emphasis is not on the *institute* of the «Gereformeerde Kerken», but on the *collective characteristics* and *group life* of the *members* of the «Gereformeerde Kerken». The first (historical-)sociological study was J. van Putten’s dissertation «*Zoveel kerken, zoveel zinnen*», publicised in 1968<sup>58</sup>, about the social differences between «gereformeerden» – at that time, 844.591 persons were registered in the membership records of the GKN – and members of the «Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken», the denomination that had been founded by the three CGK congregations in Noordeloos, Teuge and Zierikzee which had kept aloof from the «Vereniging» of 1892 and which had been joined by orthodox Calvinists in other towns who did not feel at ease in the GKN, in the following decades – in 1967, there were 67.500 «christelijk-gereformeerden» and 150 CGK churches<sup>59</sup>. As the subtitle of his PhD thesis indicates – «*Een sociaalwetenschappelijke studie van verschillen in behoudendheid tussen Gereformeerden en Christelijke Gereformeerden*» –, Van Putten explains the coming into existence of orthodox Calvinist ‘enclaves’ as a *protectionist* reaction to the secularisation of Dutch society, the dominance of liberalism in State and Church and the popularisation of scientific theories – Darwinism, for instance – that denied the traditional Christian world view: the «gereformeerden» responded to these challenges of modern times by participating in society as a well-demarcated *group*, which could be recognised by a specific ‘way of life’ (the «‘nationaal-gereformeerde cultuurpatroon’») and created all sorts of organisations of its own, and the «christelijk-gereformeer-

<sup>57</sup> B.A. Jansen-de Graaf and G.J. van Klinken, *Geschiedenis van de Theologische Universiteit in Kampen, 1854-2004* (Kampen 2005).

<sup>58</sup> For the bibliographical details of this publication, see: note 7.

<sup>59</sup> For the numbers of «gereformeerden» and «christelijk-gereformeerden» in 1967, see: *Ibid.*, 88.

den» even secluded themselves from society at large as much as they could (an attitude to life called «‘wereldmijding’»). The latter as well as the former, Van Putten concludes, were actuated by protectionist intentions, as a result of which both the «gereformeerden» and the «christelijk-gereformeerden» began to accentuate their ‘otherness’ compared to the rest of society. As regards the members of the GKN, this ‘otherness’ took shape in the «‘nationaal-gereformeerd cultuurpatroon’» mentioned earlier.

Three years later, J. Hendriks drew an opposite conclusion: the Neo-Calvinist identity and Neo-Calvinist organisations were not, first and foremost, created by the «gereformeerden» to protect themselves against modernity’s negative influences, but rather for *emancipatory* reasons. In his doctoral thesis *«De emancipatie van de gereformeerden»*<sup>60</sup>, this sociologist says that the «gereformeerden» designed and institutionalised a specific ‘way of being’ primarily to get ahead in society, as a means to free themselves from the liberals’ patronising attitude towards them and the liberal dominance in Church and State. Although orthodox Calvinists were, in view of the Dutch population as a whole, only a minority, they strived, nonetheless, for a total ‘re-Christianisation’ of the entire society; to achieve this ultimate aim, they had to become dominant themselves. To prove his argument, Hendriks uses an analytical framework he had made in advance, with which he segmented the *Werdegang* of the Neo-Calvinist community into several ‘stages’ or ‘phases’. Every emancipation movement – the «gereformeerden» were depicted as such – passes through these phases: in the first stage, well-defined group characteristics and behaviours are essential to mark off the own group from the rest of society, but in the end, when all phases have been passed and the emancipation has been achieved, they loose their function and are pushed aside by the group. To put it briefly, according to Hendriks, the assimilation of the «gereformeerden» was an insurmountable process that *had* to end the way it ended.

The thesis of Hendriks did not pass unchallenged. D.Th. Kuiper, who obtained his doctorate in 1972, with a dissertation on the creation and preservation of a Neo-Calvinist ‘elite’<sup>61</sup>, labels *«De emancipatie van de gereformeerden»* as an ‘ahistorical’ and ‘finalistic’ study: because Hendriks analysed the identity and development of the «gereformeerden» with a preconceived scheme, he simply searched for facts, features and components that fit his framework, while neglecting other fundamental aspects. In *«Tussen observatie en participatie»*, published in 2002<sup>62</sup>, Kuiper agrees with Hendriks that the Neo-Calvinists have been an emancipation movement indeed, but he sees their emancipa-

<sup>60</sup> J. Hendriks, *De emancipatie van de Gereformeerden. Sociologische bijdrage tot de verklaring van enige kenmerken van het huidige gereformeerde volksdeel* (Alphen aan den Rijn 1971).

<sup>61</sup> D.Th. Kuiper, *De voormannen. Een sociaal-wetenschappelijke studie over ideologie, konflikt en kerngroepvorming binnen de Gereformeerde wereld in Nederland tussen 1820 en 1930* (Meppel and Kampen 1972).

<sup>62</sup> For the bibliographical details of this publication, see: note 22.

tion, contrary to Hendriks, not as an intended objective or an inevitability, but rather as an unintentional consequence of their endeavour to ‘re-Christianise’ society: to effectuate this aspiration, the «gereformeerden» needed to participate actively in all spheres of public life (in the field of politics, education, media, etc.), as a result of which they established a network of interrelated, Neo-Calvinist organisations. The «zuil» that thus came into being, gave them opportunities to climb the social ladder and to obtain a position in society equal to other population groups.<sup>63</sup> The singularity of Kuiper’s approach is that he deals with the influence of theological changes on the Neo-Calvinist identity as a *separate* variable, whereas other sociologists tend to see them as subordinate to changes in society at large.

J.E. Post, whose dissertation «*Gereformeerd zijn en blijven, een wankel evenwicht?!*» was put in print in 1998<sup>64</sup>, adopts the line of reasoning put forward in «*De wankele zuil. Nederlandse katholieken tussen assimilatie en pluralisme*», written in 1971 by J.M.G. Thurlings<sup>65</sup>, who explained the sociological development of the Dutch Roman Catholics – who have had, just as the «gereformeerden», a «zuil» of their own – by looking at the *differences in identity* as well as the *power relations* between the Roman Catholic community and the rest of society. If a certain cultural/religious segment of a nation’s population perceives that there is a great distance between itself and general society, as was the case with Dutch Catholics in the late nineteenth century, it will accentuate its particularities and features which distinguish it from society at large. Because the group involved considers general society to be a constant threat to its distinctiveness, Thurlings states that it will try to protect itself against ‘contamination’ from the outside world by formalising and institutionalising its identity – i.e. by founding all kinds of group-related organisations. However, as Kuiper argued as well, since these organisations will ultimately alter the power relation between the group and society – the former moves up to the latter –, the in-between distance, and hence the importance that is attached to the group identity, *decreases*. Post says something similar in reference to the «gereformeerden»: in accordance with the Catholics, they also felt ‘different’ from general society, founded organisations of their own and climbed the social ladder. When the distance was fully bridged, he concludes, the maintenance of the «‘nationaal-gereformeerd cultuurpatroon’» simply lost its significance.

Other monographs have elucidated other characteristics of the «gereformeerden» as a socio-religious entity. In his PhD thesis «*En boven de polder de hemel. Een antropologische studie van een*

<sup>63</sup> A similar viewpoint was put forward by two political scientists at the University of Leyden: “Tussen 1900 en 1965 [hadden] de 40 procent katholieke en 10 procent gereformeerde Nederlanders tal van eigen organisaties. Daarin konden ze maatschappelijk opklimmen. (...) De zuil [bood] (...) de mogelijkheid posities met aanzien te verwerven.” See: *Nederlands Dagblad*, 27<sup>th</sup> February 2009.

<sup>64</sup> J.E. Post, *Gereformeerd zijn en blijven, een wankel evenwicht?! Een historisch-sociologisch onderzoek naar de ontwikkelingen van de Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland, de Gereformeerde Bond in de Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk en de Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken in de twintigste eeuw* (Heerenveen 1998).

<sup>65</sup> J.M.G. Thurlings, *De wankele zuil. Nederlandse katholieken tussen assimilatie en pluralisme* (Nijmegen 1971).

*Nederlands dorp, 1850-1971*», published in 1977<sup>66</sup>, J. Verrips studies the long-term consequences of the «Doleantie» for the mutual relations between those who joined this secessionist movement – the «gereformeerden» – and those who did not – orthodox «hervormden» – in a case study of the Dutch provincial village Ottoland. As regards the identity of both groups, Verrips shows that there are two striking differences. First, whereas the «gereformeerden» zealously created faith-related institutions and derived their identity, in large part, from participation in these organisations, the «hervormden», who outnumbered the members of the GKN, lacked a «zuil» of their own. A «‘nationaal-hervormd cultuurpatroon’» has therefore never come into being: because the «Hervormde Kerk» was composed of four ‘factions’, ranging from liberal to highly orthodox, the «gereformeerden» had, both politically as well as culturally and theologically, a leading role in Dutch (orthodox) Protestantism until way into the 1950s. For that reason, some orthodox «hervormden» sympathised with the Neo-Calvinist «zuil», but others, especially on the local level, would have nothing to do with the «gereformeerden», all the more since the spirituality of the former – this is where Verrips’s second main observation comes in – contrasted with the way the latter experienced their faith. Although both groups attached much doctrinal value to the Three Forms of Unity and Calvinist dogmas as preordination and covenantalism, the effect of these teachings on the religious life of the two collectivities was antipodal: whilst the «gereformeerden» had, in general, the optimistic belief that salvation would be granted to all of them if they would hold on to the Reformed principles – as has been said before, they saw themselves as God’s elect –, orthodox «hervormden» (together with members of the CGK and GG) were in constant doubt whether they were elect or not. The self-confidence of the former was, of course, a greater incentive to strive for a ‘re-Christianisation’ of society and, consequently, to participate in all spheres of life than the passivity and «‘wereldmijding’» of the latter.

The books «*Gereformeerden in meervoud. Een onderzoek naar levensbeschouwelijke waarden van de verschillende gereformeerde stromingen*», published in 1989, in which the sociologists G. Dekker and J.W.M. Peters compare the distinguishing features of the members of the «Gereformeerde Kerken» with those of other strict Reformed Protestants (such as orthodox «hervormden» and members of the «Gereformeerde Gemeenten»)<sup>67</sup>, «*De stille revolutie. De ontwikkelingen van de Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland tussen 1950 en 1990*», written by G. Dekker in 1992 as an account of the post-World War II transformation of the GKN<sup>68</sup>, «*Mondig, bondig, zondig. Drie stromingen binnen de gereformeerde wereld in Nederland*», M.P. Veerman’s 1995 dissertation that resembles the

<sup>66</sup> For the bibliographical details of this publication, see: note 26.

<sup>67</sup> G. Dekker and J.W.M. Peters, *Gereformeerden in meervoud. Een onderzoek naar levensbeschouwing en waarden van de verschillende gereformeerde stromingen* (Kampen 1989).

<sup>68</sup> G. Dekker, *De stille revolutie. De ontwikkelingen van de Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland tussen 1950 en 1990* (Kampen 1992).

first-mentioned study of Dekker and Peters<sup>69</sup>, «*De gereformeerden*», published by J.B.G. Jonkers in 1997<sup>70</sup>, and «*De gereformeerden*», A. Amelink's 2001 best seller<sup>71</sup>, are more descriptive than explanatory and characterise the Neo-Calvinists as a secessionist movement that started out as a very orthodox community of faith, clinging to a strict compliance with the Three Forms of Unity and aiming for a total reformation of society along (Neo-)Calvinist lines, but that became rather introvert and self-congratulatory in the interwar period, with which the initial zeal waned, and that gradually lost its orthodox identity from the 1960s onwards. Amelink aptly describes the 'life history' of the «*gereformeerden*», with a reference to historian and GKN member H. Algra, who had called the genesis of the «*Gereformeerde Kerken*» the 'marvel' of the nineteenth century<sup>72</sup>, as the 'mystery' of the twentieth century.<sup>73</sup> Sociologists, anthropologists and historians give diverse explanations, but they all agree that the «*gereformeerden*» had an identity completely different from other population groups, that their creation of a «zuil» had both emancipatory and protectionist intentions – as the paragraphs above have tried to demonstrate, scholars disagree which objective predominated – and that they have occupied a unique position in the Dutch civil order in general and Dutch Protestantism in particular; their influence on society as a whole was greater than their numbers might suggest.

Another striking similarity is that all scholars mentioned above look at the identity of the Neo-Calvinists *in relation to* their organisations. Apart from the specific Neo-Calvinist *way of life* and *opinions*, the mere fact of being a member of the «Anti-Revolutionaire Partij», a subscriber to «*De Standaard*» or a listener of the NCRV distinguished the «*gereformeerden*» from the rest of Dutch society. In the «*Gereformeerde Kerken*», membership of and active participation in these associations was seen as something evident and necessary: in 1946, for example, the general synod of the GKN condemned individual affiliation to non-Christian organisations and urged the «*gereformeerden*» to stand by their principles – only *confessional* associations were said to be consistent with an orthodox Reformed conviction.<sup>74</sup> Because of this attachment to and emphasis on the essentiality of having (Neo-) Calvinist-based institutions, the «*gereformeerden*» were known as the “*kampioenen van de verzuring*” ('champions of socio-political compartmentalisation')<sup>75</sup>, though they were not the only ones

<sup>69</sup> M.P. Veerman, *Mondig, bondig, zondig. Drie stromingen binnen de gereformeerde wereld in Nederland* (Gorinchem 1995).

<sup>70</sup> J.B.G. Jonkers, *De gereformeerden* (Kampen 1997).

<sup>71</sup> A. Amelink, *De gereformeerden* (Amsterdam 2001).

<sup>72</sup> See: note 15.

<sup>73</sup> Amelink, *De gereformeerden*, 214.

<sup>74</sup> “Het is (...) duidelijk de roeping der Kerk er op toe te zien, dat haar leden in hun levensopenbaring in de breedste zin des woords zich niet schuldig maken aan het overtreden van enig gebod Gods, zich niet voegen in een levensverband, waarin zij gehinderd worden de Heere te dienen naar Zijn Woord, en hetwelk, hetzij in grondslag, hetzij in zijn doelstelling of arbeidsmethode, uitdrukkelijk of metterdaad de geopenbaarde wil Gods verwerpt.” See: *Acta G.S. GKN* (Zwolle 1946), art. 342. See also: note 311.

<sup>75</sup> H. te Velde, ‘*Het calvinistische Nederland*’, *Groniek XXVII* (1993-1994), 58-66, there 62.

who organised themselves along denominational lines: other population groups, most notably socialists and Roman Catholics, had a distinct «zuil» of their own as well. This segmentation, which divided general society, so to speak, in several ‘sub-societies’ on an ideological basis, was not a typically Dutch phenomenon: in other countries, such as Belgium<sup>76</sup>, there were also one or more ‘blocks’ of institutionalised political and / or religious sections of the population. Yet, in nearly all these nations, compartmentalisation was primarily championed by Roman Catholics<sup>77</sup> and, though to a lesser extent, socialists<sup>78</sup>; liberals only founded organisations of their own when a nation’s specific circumstances forced them to do so (in Holland and Belgium, for instance)<sup>79</sup> and Protestants kept aloof from institutional segmentation almost completely. This last peculiarity was due, on the one hand, to the fact that in most countries with a Catholic «zuil», the Protestant segment of society was simply too small to have any real influence on society, and, on the other hand, to the condition that most countries with a significant Protestant population or even a Protestant majority were Lutheran instead of Calvinist. Lutheranism was usually the established religion in regions in which it was dominant, as a result of which its adherents saw no reason to found confessional-based organisations, and made a much stricter division between the ecclesiastical domain and the profane sphere than Calvinism.<sup>80</sup>

In fact, the Neo-Calvinist «zuil» in Holland is seen as an anomaly, as one of a kind, without equivalent in another country.<sup>81</sup> What is more, in the Netherlands, orthodox Protestants – or to be more specific: *Kuyperians* – took the lead in the process of social segmentation; they were the first to create a network of interrelated, principle-based organisations and inspired other minorities to do the same.<sup>82</sup> In this compartmentalisation of Dutch society, not just Calvinism, but *Neo-Calvinism* is the determinant factor: other orthodox Calvinists who distanced themselves from the Neo-Calvinist

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<sup>76</sup> For a detailed account of the socio-political segmentation in Belgian society, see, for example: J. Billiet ed., *Tussen bescherming en verovering. Sociologen en historici over zuilvorming* (Leuven 1988).

<sup>77</sup> S. Hellemans, *Pleidooi voor een internationale en tegen een provincialistische benadering van verzuiling* (Leuven 1990), 31, 35. See also: J.A. Righart, *De katholieke zuil in Europa. Het ontstaan van verzuiling onder katholieken in Oostenrijk, Zwitserland, België en Nederland* (Meppel and Amsterdam 1986).

<sup>78</sup> Hellemans, *Pleidooi*, 35; ‘Nederlandse politiek in vergelijkend perspectief. Zuilen en verzuiling in Europa’, in: U. Becker ed., *Maatschappijen Nederlandse politiek: historisch en vergelijkend* (Amsterdam 1998), 257-283, there 271.

<sup>79</sup> Hellemans, *Pleidooi*, 41.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 44-45; ‘Nederlandse politiek in vergelijkend perspectief’, 275.

<sup>81</sup> “[D]e protestantse zuil in Nederland [lijkt] de enige in zijn soort.” See: Hellemans, *Pleidooi*, 44. “[D]e protestants-gereformeerde zuil in Nederland [staat] in de lijst van zuilen alleen (...) in zijn soort.” See: Hellemans, ‘Nederlandse politiek in vergelijkend perspectief’, 275. “[D]e protestants-christelijke verzuiling is (...) alleen in Nederland bekend.” See: Righart, *De katholieke zuil in Europa*, 27. J.C.H. Blom makes mention of a (former?) Protestant «zuil» in Ireland, though he does not illustrate his claim with arguments or sources. See: J.C.H. Blom, ‘Vernietigende kracht en nieuwe vergezichten. Het onderzoeksproject verzuiling op lokaal niveau geëvalueerd’, in: J.C.H. Blom and J. Talsma eds., *De verzuiling voorbij. Godsdienst, stand en natie in de lange negentiende eeuw* (Amsterdam 2000), 203-236, there 211. More than likely, Blom refers to Northern Ireland, for he describes a Protestant «zuil» in this part of the United Kingdom in another publication. See: J.C.H. Blom, ‘Pillarisation in perspective’, *West European Politics* XXIII (2000), 153-164, there 162. P.E. Werkman says there is (was?) a little Protestant «zuil» in Switzerland as well. See: P.E. Werkman, “*Laat uw doel hervorming zijn!*” *Facetten van de geschiedenis van het Christelijk Nationaal Vakverbond in Nederland (1909-1959)* (Hilversum 2007), 350, note 40.

<sup>82</sup> Hellemans, *Pleidooi*, 44.

«zuil» at first – some orthodox «hervormden» and the members of the «Gereformeerde Gemeenten», whose attitude to life can be characterised with the word «‘wereldmijding’» – founded a «zuil» of their own in the 1970s, when the Neo-Calvinist organisations lost their original (orthodox) identity, but they would not have done so if the «gereformeerden» would not have set the standard.<sup>83</sup> Although it would be an anachronism to label Kuyper, the originator of Neo-Calvinism, as the ‘architect’ of the partitioning of the Dutch civil order along political and / or religious lines, Neo-Calvinism did give strong incentives for the ultimate coming into existence of a separate «gereformeerde» «zuil». The principle of ‘sphere sovereignty’ («‘soevereiniteit in eigen kring’») states that the God-created social reality is made up of several ‘life spheres’ (the Church, the State, the family, school education, the academy, the economy, etc.) which are not ranged in a hierarchy of subordination, but rather in a relation of equivalence. Consequently, the State is not entitled to interfere in the other ‘domains’; its only task is to make sure that all separate ‘spheres’ can develop themselves without being hindered by other ‘spheres’. Because this Neo-Calvinist doctrine teaches that Christ is the Supreme Sovereign of the universe, Christians should bear witness of His overlordship in *all* spheres of life.<sup>84</sup> Another inducement to establish a «zuil» was given by the maxim of ‘common grace’ («‘gemeene gratie’»), which learns that Christians should not seclude themselves from secular society, because God restrained the destructive effects of sin (a consequence of Adam’s fall) in Creation – “if it were not for common grace holding back the spread of evil,” the American theologian J. Begbie recapitulated Kuyper’s concept briefly, “mankind and the world as a whole would fall apart and disintegrate”<sup>85</sup> – and gradually brought Creation to full development, as Lord’s Day 48 of the Heidelberg Catechism explains, until His Kingdom on earth would come, finally, to completion.<sup>86</sup> Christians had the God-given calling to make themselves subservient to this coming Kingdom and to strive to augment the ‘good’ that was, in spite of the sinfulness of mankind and thanks to God’s ‘common grace’, still present in the world. In addition, the distinction Neo-Calvinism makes between the Church as ‘institute’ and as ‘organism’ stimulated the «gereformeerden» to create organisations as well: preaching the Gospel was a task of the ‘institute’, but, as the expression goes, putting flesh on the Gospel was the duty of confessional-based institutions, which collectively gave shape to the ‘organism’.<sup>87</sup> Lastly, the principle of the ‘antithesis’ was an important factor in the founding of a «zuil» too: since Neo-Calvinism

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<sup>83</sup> *Reformatorisch Dagblad*, 15<sup>th</sup> May 2009.

<sup>84</sup> “There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, Who is sovereign over *all*, does not cry: ‘Mine!’” Quoted in: J.D. Bratt, *Abraham Kuyper. A Centennial Reader* (Grand Rapids 1998), 461. See also: G.J. Schutte, ‘Soevereiniteit in eigen kring’, in: G. Harinck et.al. eds., *Christelijke Encyclopedie III* (Kampen 2005), 1666-1668.

<sup>85</sup> J. Begbie, *Voicing Creation’s Grace. Towards a Theology of the Arts* (London and New York 1991), 87.

<sup>86</sup> For a detailed explanation of this Neo-Calvinist concept, see: A. Kuyper, *De gemeene gratie I-III* (Kampen 1902-1904).

<sup>87</sup> G.D.J. Dingemans, *In vredesnaam. Religie in een democratische samenleving* (Kampen 2007), 186-187.

says that society is split in two by an invisible dividing line (the ‘antithesis’) between a secular block on the one hand and an (orthodox) Christian block on the other, it was necessary that the latter, the adherents of the ‘true’ Reformed creed, put up an institutional ‘dam’ in order to contain – and, ultimately, push back – the ‘disastrous’ influence of the former.<sup>88</sup> Hence, Neo-Calvinism and the «gereformeerde» «zuil» were closely intertwined. It is therefore not a coincidence that the organisations in this «zuil» lost their original (orthodox) identity when (the majority of theologians in) the «Gereformeerde Kerken» pushed Neo-Calvinism aside as an all-encompassing theological, political and societal system of values in the 1960s and 1970s.

#### 4. Research question

In the preceding paragraph, the characteristics of Neo-Calvinism and the corresponding «‘nationaal-gereformeerd cultuurpatroon’» as well as the way in which the members of the GKN gave shape to these characteristics (most notably by founding Reformed-based organisations) have been described and interpreted. Additionally, a link has been made to the socio-political compartmentalisation of Dutch society and to institutionalised societal segmentation of minorities in general. Scholars who have studied these phenomena conclude that the creation of «zuilen» (‘pillars’) was inspired by both protectionist and emancipatory incentives and that the Neo-Calvinist «zuil» in Holland was one of a kind. This last conclusion is perhaps true when only European countries are taken into consideration, but it falls short when one glances across the ocean. In North-America, Dutch Neo-Calvinist immigrants followed the example of their Dutch brethren and founded all kinds of organisations of their own.<sup>89</sup> Particularly the Dutch journalist A. Amelink and the American historian R.P. Swieren-ga have shown that Kuyperians from Holland began to build a «zuil» in their new homeland almost immediately after their arrival.<sup>90</sup> The «gereformeerde» ‘way of being’ was literally ‘exported’ to the United States and Canada, and lead to the development of a distinct Reformed ‘subculture’.<sup>91</sup> Some have even said that Calvinists in South Africa (who were of European descent and claimed Kuyper for their own ends) instituted a «zuil» as well<sup>92</sup>, though it is questionable whether «‘zuil’» is an appropriate designation in this context – the segmentation in South African society was more based on

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<sup>88</sup> G. Dekker, *Van het centrum naar de marge. De ontwikkeling van de christelijke godsdienst in Nederland* (Kampen 2006), 106.

<sup>89</sup> The first paragraph of the first chapter considers this at length.

<sup>90</sup> “De gereformeerden planten de maatschappelijke zuil uit Nederland over naar hun nieuwe vaderland.” See: *Reformatorsch Dagblad*, 11<sup>th</sup> October 2006.

<sup>91</sup> *Trouw*, 30<sup>th</sup> September 2003; 8<sup>th</sup> October 2003; 17<sup>th</sup> October 2003; 22<sup>nd</sup> October 2003; 31<sup>st</sup> October 2003; 5<sup>th</sup> November 2003; 13<sup>th</sup> November 2003; 14<sup>th</sup> October 2006.

<sup>92</sup> V. Brümmer and J.R. Hinnells, *Brümmer on Meaning and the Christian Faith. Collected Writings of Vincent Brümmer* (Aldershot and Burlington 2006), 7.

ethnicity and nationalism than on religion – and others have strongly opposed this view.<sup>93</sup> Yet, where Neo-Calvinism exerted influence, a tendency to self-chosen institutionalised isolation becomes manifest, especially when the surrounding society at large was already compartmentalised or fit for compartmentalisation.

The Belgian civil order was (and to a certain extent still is) institutionally segmented as well: a distinction can be made between a Roman Catholic, a socialist and a liberal «zuil»<sup>94</sup>, which were initially nationally organised – though the «zuilen» had a different position of power in both parts of Belgium: the Catholic «zuil» was dominant in Flanders, the socialist one in Wallonia<sup>95</sup> – but have been split up along the lines of the language boundary in the past decades. In Holland, there was a *fourth* (Neo-Calvinist or orthodox Protestant) main «zuil» next to these three, but in Belgium, Protestantism was, numerically, simply no significant factor. Yet, the small number of Protestants is, in itself, not sufficient to explain this: the «gereformeerd-vrijgemaakten», those who had seceded from the «Gereformeerde Kerken» in 1944, for example, managed to found a little albeit all-encompassing «zuil» of their own – they even had their own political party and a caravan club – in Holland<sup>96</sup>, whereas the number of «vrijgemaakten», expressed as a percentage of the Dutch population as a whole, was even considerably smaller than the number of all Belgian Protestants together. Moreover, since the identity of the «gereformeerden» was so closely connected with their endeavour to ‘re-Christianise’ Holland and with the founding of (Neo-)Calvinist-based organisations that resulted from this, since they were known as ‘champions of compartmentalisation’, and since they have actively strived for the creation of a «zuil» in North America as well, they will almost certainly have made plans to establish confessional-based institutions in Belgium too. Besides, the fact that a Protestant «zuiltje» has never come into being in Belgium does not mean that no initiatives have been made to found one. In this respect, for the reasons mentioned above, it is very interesting to look at the Neo-Calvinists: have they strived for the formation of an institutional block of orthodox Protestants in Belgium as well? Has the coming into existence of Neo-Calvinist church life in Flanders, for instance, lead to an increase of the number of Protestant institutions (such as schools)?

Yet, being a Neo-Calvinist was more than simply establishing organisations: it was a distinct *way of living*. As Amelink has pointed out with regard to North America, «gereformeerden» accen-

<sup>93</sup> J.C. Sturm, L.F. Groenendijk, B. Kruithof and J.A. Rens, ‘Educational Pluralism. A historical study of so-called ‘polarization’ in the Netherlands, including a comparison with some developments in South African education’, *Comparative Education* XXXIV.3 (1998), 281–297, there 283.

<sup>94</sup> S. Hellemans, *Strijd om de moderniteit. Sociale bewegingen en verzuiling in Europa sinds 1800* (Leuven 1990), 230.

<sup>95</sup> W. Blomme, ‘De massa in beweging’, in: C. Devos ed., *De kleermakers en de keizer. Inleiding tot politiek en politieke wetenschappen* (Ghent 2006), 191–245, there 204–205.

<sup>96</sup> For a detailed account of the history of the «vrijgemaakte» «zuil», see: J.C. Kennedy, ‘De kerk als tegencultuur. Vrijgemaakte G-organisaties in historisch perspectief’, in: R. Kuiper and W. Bouwman eds., *Vuur en vlam II. De organisatie van het vrijgemaakte-gereformeerde leven* (Amsterdam 1998), 302–319.

tuated their ‘otherness’ in comparison with the rest of society: “[r]egelrecht vanuit het verzuilde Nederland van de jaren vijftig, stelden ze er een eer in om de gereformeerde levensstijl van thuis zo goed mogelijk voort te zetten, met alles erop en eraan.”<sup>97</sup> Their life style even differed from other, non-Reformed immigrant countrymen. Does this observation apply to the «gereformeerden» in Belgium as well? How did they give concrete shape to their identity in Belgium, a country without a long-standing Calvinist tradition, or, to use an aphorism, how did they *practice* what they *preached*? Contrary to the churches of Dutch Neo-Calvinist immigrants in America, the GKB were an integral part of the «Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland» and did not consist exclusively of Hollanders: through the years, especially after the constituting of the churches in Denderleeuw and Boechout, the number of Belgian-born GKB members increased, as a result of which the numerical preponderance of Dutchmen diminished. What consequences did this have for the development of the GKB? Has a genuine *Flemish* way of being «gereformeerd» come into being? Or did the church life of the GKB congregations stay completely in line with the church life of the «gereformeerde kerken» in the Netherlands? When the first GKB congregations were founded, there were already two Protestant denominations in Belgium with a predominantly Calvinist orientation. How have the «gereformeerden» legitimised the creation of separate churches? Why did their attitude towards the «Bond van Kerken» and the «Belgische Christelijke Zendingskerk» alter? After all, the willingness of the GKB to amalgamate with these two church groups—which had, at that time, new names—into the «Verenigde Protestantse Kerk in België» in 1979 can only be explained by a fundamental change in attitude. How did (these) other Protestants in Belgium look at them? And how did they look at themselves? Their position in Belgian society was different from the position of their brethren in Dutch society. What were their thoughts and opinions concerning societal issues as education, (party)politics, the cultural dominance of the Roman Catholic Church, evangelisation, interdenominational cooperation and ecumenism? In sum, *how have the «gereformeerden» (Neo-Calvinists) in Belgium positioned themselves in Belgian society at large, in Belgian Protestantism in particular and within the denomination of «Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland», during the existence of separate «gereformeerde kerken» in Flanders in the period between 1894 and 1978?*

## 5. Status *questionis*

The memory of the presence of the former «gereformeerde kerken» in Belgium is chronicled in a handful of commemorative monographs. In his book «Een open poort naar het zuiden», published in 1997<sup>98</sup>, A. de Raaf, the former secretary of the «‘kring België’» (a meeting platform of the GKB), tells the his-

<sup>97</sup> Trouw, 30<sup>th</sup> September 2003.

<sup>98</sup> For the bibliographical details of this publication, see: note 43.

tory of the «‘deputaatschap voor de Evangelisatie in België’», a special commission established by the general synod of the GKN to advise, assist and financially support the six Flemish «gereformeerde kerken», and devotes several paragraphs to the genesis of these congregations. On the basis of documents preserved in the archive of the church in Brussels, to which he, as archivist, had full access, De Raaf gives a detailed history of the GKB parish in the Belgian capital in *«Guido de Brès-kerk van Brussel»*, put in print in 1984 on the occasion of the congregation’s ninetieth anniversary<sup>99</sup>, and in an article in the second volume of the *«Jaarboek voor de geschiedenis van de Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland»*, issued in 1988<sup>100</sup>, in which he focuses on Kuyper’s involvement with the establishment of this first «gereformeerde kerk» in Belgium. Next to De Raaf’s publications, a small amount of booklets and brochures, ranging from less than twenty to more than fifty pages, deal with the local histories of the churches in Antwerp—M.J. Hillaert’s *«De geschiedenis van de Gereformeerde Kerk van Antwerpen»*(1964)<sup>101</sup>—, Boechout—K. Sluys’s *«Het wondervan Boechout»*(1959)<sup>102</sup> and J. Jancu’s *«Geschiedenis van de Evangelische Kerk van Boechout»*(1979)<sup>103</sup>—, Denderleeuw—C. Van Adinkerke’s *«De tempel»*(1957)<sup>104</sup> and *«Vijftigjarig bestaan van de Evangelische Kerk te Denderleeuw»*, written in 1979 by P. De Braekeleer and Rev. G.K. Geerds<sup>105</sup>—, and Mechlin—*«Van G.K.B. naar V.P.K.B.»*(1978)<sup>106</sup> and A. Eberson’s undergraduate thesis *«Protestanten aan de Zandpoortvest te Mechelen-Zuid»*(2003).<sup>107</sup> The only GKB church missing in this list is Ghent, though the history of this congregation (as well as of the other «gereformeerde kerken») frequently received attention in the Dutchedition of the *«De Open Poort»*, a periodical with which the GKB informed interested church members in Holland about the state of affairs in their church life, in the 1950s and 1960s.

The coming into existence of the six separate churches is also briefly mentioned, in no more than just one or a few pages, in the *«Gids voor het Gereformeerde leven in België en Frankrijk»*(1938)<sup>108</sup>, the brochure *«Met het oog op België»*(1975)<sup>109</sup>, the twelfth volume of *«Anderhalve eeuw gereformeerden in stad en land»*(1986)<sup>110</sup>, an inventory of the Public Record Office in Utrecht(1988)<sup>111</sup>,

<sup>99</sup> For the bibliographical details of this publication, see: note 31.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>101</sup> M.J. Hillaert, *De geschiedenis van de Gereformeerde Kerk van Antwerpen* (n.pl. 1964). [Unfortunately, this publication proved to be untraceable, though it is mentioned in H.R. Boudin’s *«Bibliografie van het Belgisch protestantisme/Bibliographie du protestantisme belge»* (Brussels 1999).]

<sup>102</sup> For the bibliographical details of this publication, see: note 46.

<sup>103</sup> J. Jancu, *Geschiedenis van de Evangelische Kerk van Boechout* (n.pl. 1979). [Unfortunately, this publication proved to be untraceable, though it is mentioned in H.R. Boudin’s *«Bibliografie van het Belgisch protestantisme»*.]

<sup>104</sup> For the bibliographical details of this publication, see: note 45.

<sup>105</sup> P. De Braekeleer and G.K. Geerds, *Vijftigjarig bestaan van de Evangelische Kerk te Denderleeuw* (n.pl. 1979).

<sup>106</sup> *Van G.K.B. naar V.P.K.B.* (Mechlin 1978).

<sup>107</sup> A. Eberson, *Protestanten aan de Zandpoortvest te Mechelen-Zuid. Een historie* (Brussels 2003).

<sup>108</sup> *Gids voor het Gereformeerde leven in België en Frankrijk* (Antwerp and Hilversum 1938).

<sup>109</sup> E. van Beilen, *Met het oog op België. Informatie-brochure van de Gereformeerde Kerken in België* (n.pl. 1975).

<sup>110</sup> The following articles in the twelfth volume of *«Anderhalve eeuw gereformeerden in stad en land»* (for bibliographical data, see: note 51) deal with the GKB: A. de Raaf, ‘Kuyper stond ook aan de wieg van de gereformeerde kerken in

the «*Synodaal gedenkboek van de Verenigde Protestantse Kerk in België*» (1992)<sup>112</sup> and two encyclopaedic articles.<sup>113</sup> Additionally, local GKB churches enter the scene in books about the history of the ‘SILO Gospel Mission’ in Brussels (Laken) – «*Een eeuw SILO*» (1983)<sup>114</sup> –, of the «zendingskerk» in Antwerp – «*Bewaar het pand*» (1993)<sup>115</sup> –, of the «protestantse kerk» in Mechlin – «*In een straat genaamd de Rechte*» (1994)<sup>116</sup> –, and of Dutch-speaking Protestantism in Brussels – «*Anders geloven*» (2004).<sup>117</sup> Yet, the majority of these publications are more descriptive than explanatory and focus on the *institutional* side of the GKB’s history; they reconstruct the course of development and growth of the «gereformeerde kerken» in a factual and chronological way, by telling something about membership figures, church-related organisations (Sunday schools, Bible classes, youth clubs, for instance), important events (such as the occupation of a new church building, the purchase of a new church organ or the arrival of a new parson) and all kinds of anecdotes and *petites histoires* that keep the memory of bygone days alive. This thesis, on the other hand, does not want to look at the *churches* as such – the literature mentioned above has already done this –, but takes the church *members* as its focal point; instead of focusing on the «Gereformeerde Kerken in België», it centres on the «gereformeerden» as a *socio-religious entity* in Belgian society, in Belgian Protestantism and in relation to their fellow churchmen in Holland. In accordance with the studies discussed in the historiographical overview, this treatise places the identity and mentality of the «gereformeerden» on the forefront: it portrays, analyses and interprets their way of life, their opinions, their self-image, their attitude towards other Belgian Protestants as well as Belgian society and culture in general, their relationship with the ‘mother church’ in Holland, the way they legitimised their presence in Belgium and the way others reacted to their presence – or to put it differently, this thesis examines *how* their (Neo-Calvinist) identity took concrete shape in the specific Flemish context, sketched against the background of the developments in the Belgian civil order, Belgian Protestantism and the Dutch denomination (the GKN) to which they belonged. In doing so, it contributes to the historiography of Protestantism in Belgium as well as the «Gereformeerde Kerken» and religious minorities in the twentieth-century Belgian society.

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België’, 14-16; H. Eikelboom, ‘Een Sant in eigen land?’, 16-17; R. Zwaan, ‘Christelijk onderwijs sloeg in België niet aan’, 17-18.

<sup>111</sup> For the bibliographical details of this publication, see: note 43.

<sup>112</sup> Boudin and Blok, *Synodaal gedenkboek*, 20-22, 27-28, 35-37, 55-56, 81-82, 92-93 and 123-124.

<sup>113</sup> B.W. Ganzevoort, ‘België’, in: C.W. Mönnich et.al. eds., *Encyclopedie van het Christendom I. Protestants deel, met medewerking van Oud-Katholieken* (Amsterdam 1955), 207-208; C.B. Bavinck, ‘België’, in: F.W. Grosheide and G.P. van Itterzon eds., *Christelijke encyclopedie I* (Kampen 1956), 544-548.

<sup>114</sup> A. de Raaf, *Een eeuw SILO, 1883-1983* (Laken 1983).

<sup>115</sup> A. de Raaf, *Bewaar het pand. Een eeuw Protestantse Kerk aan de Bexstraat te Antwerpen* (Antwerp 1993).

<sup>116</sup> For the bibliographical details of this publication, see: note 44.

<sup>117</sup> For the bibliographical details of this publication, see: note 35.

## **6. Methodology/sources**

To answer the central research question stated above, it was necessary to rely heavily on primary rather than secondary (the literature mentioned in the preceding two paragraphs) sources, all the more, since the «gereformeerden» in Belgium have never been studied as a distinct socio-religious group before. The source material consists of GKN- and GKB-related periodicals and magazines – for example the «*Gereformeerde Kerkbode voor België*» (which existed between 1904 and 1914), the «*Maandblad ten dienste van de Gereformeerde Kerken in België*» (the successor to the aforementioned journal in the 1930s), the Belgian and Dutch editions of «*De Open Poort*», and the «*Vlaams Kerkblad*» (K. Sluys's magazine, published between 1954 and 1965) –, local church bulletins of the Flemish «gereformeerde kerken» and other Protestant congregations – for example the newsletter of the «Nederlandse evangelische hervormde kerk» in Brussels –, minutes of the «kring Brussel» (later known as «kring België»), the «classis Dordrecht» and the «classis België» – the Flemish «gereformeerde kerken» regularly met each other in these supralocal church councils – and of the consistories of some local GKB congregations, proceedings of the general synod of the GKN, brochures published by «‘De Open Poort’» (the evangelism publishing house of the GKB) and (other) documents that relate to the «gereformeerde kerken» in Belgium. These written sources are filed away on different locations and have been examined, for the most part, on the spot, in the libraries of Utrecht University, the Free University in Amsterdam, the Protestant Theological University (the former Theological Seminary of the GKN) in Kampen, the Theological University of the «Gereformeerde Kerken (vrijgemaakt)» in Kampen, Ghent University and the Faculty of Protestant Theology in Brussels, the archives of the «gereformeerde kerken» in Boechout, Brussels, Denderleeuw and Ghent (located in the neighbouring town of Lovendegem), and the national record offices in Utrecht («Utrechts Archief»), The Hague («Koninklijke Bibliotheek»), Antwerp («Erfgoedbibliotheek Hendrik Conscience») and Brussels («Koninklijke Bibliotheek van België»). In doing so, *all* relevant (primary) source material has been scrutinised.

GKB-related periodicals and newsletters of the local «gereformeerde kerken» are a treasury of information concerning nearly eighty-five years of Neo-Calvinist church life in Belgium. Because they informed the direct ‘rank and file’ of the GKB (the members of the six churches) and interested church members in Holland, fulfilled the role of ‘opinion makers’ in Flemish Reformed circles and were used as a medium with which the «Gereformeerde Kerken in België» presented themselves to the outside world (the Belgian edition of «*De Open Poort*» and the «*Vlaams Kerkblad*» were used as handouts during evangelisation activities), these magazines show how those who acted as ‘leading men’ of the GKB positioned the Neo-Calvinist community in Belgium in society at large, how they thought about the issues mentioned earlier (such as politics, education and ecumenism) and how

they tried to give shape to the «gereformeerde» ‘way of being’ in Flanders. Since a distinct *Flemish* Neo-Calvinist church life had to be build up from nothing – in Holland, the development of the «Gereformeerde Kerken» and the corresponding «‘nationaal-gereformeerd cultuurpatroon’» had, on the contrary, been the result of a long, phased process and was embedded in the development of Dutch society as a whole –, it is interesting to look at the guiding influence these journals had on the development of the «gereformeerde» community in Belgium. In addition, church bulletins and weeklies were in the Neo-Calvinist church life, more than in adjacent Protestant milieus or Roman Catholic circles, a vital and characteristic element;<sup>118</sup> the editors of these magazines had, in general, great authority among their reading public. Their impact should not be underestimated: due to them, the church-goers got (highly) involved in the events that took place in the denomination as a whole, as a result of which they dictated the course of events to a large extent. The «Vrijmaking», the schism within the GKN in 1944, for example, can simply not be separated from the quarrels that were fought out in Neo-Calvinist church bulletins in the preceding decade and the effect these conflicts had on the (irreversible) diverging of opinions within the «Gereformeerde Kerken».

Moreover, the Protestant periodic press, particularly periodicals with a limited reach (such as those related to the GKB), is still largely a closed book; in 1995, the (Roman Catholic) historian J.M.H.J. Hemels even complained that the historical study of (Protestant) magazines did not receive the attention it deserved – he spoke, in this respect, about “het in Nederland zo verwaarloosde historisch tijdschriftonderzoek.”<sup>119</sup> This observation applies to Belgium as well: the «*Gereformeerde Kerkbode voor België*» and the Belgian and Dutcheditions of «*De Open Poort*», for example, have never been examined integrally and systemically from beginning to end. The research on which this thesis is based, fills this historiographic lacuna: all relevant magazines have been studied, insofar as they are preserved (unfortunately, some editions have not survived the ravages of time), from the first to the last volume (or, in those cases in which the periodical still existed after 1978, until the coming into existence of the «Verenigde Protestantse Kerk in België»/VPKB), to obtain a picture of the «gereformeerden» in Flanders as complete as possible. Since only *those* thoughts and sentiments to which the (leading men of the) Neo-Calvinist community wanted to give publicity, were brought into the open in the periodicals mentioned before, minutes and proceedings of local consistories, regional church

<sup>118</sup> “Het aantal kerkbodes en kerkelijke weekbladen was binnen kerkelijk-gereformeerde kring groot en was onderdeel van de kerkelijke cultuur.” See: G. Harinck, *De Reformatie. Weekblad tot ontwikkeling van het gereformeerde leven, 1920-1940* (Baarn 1993), 14. In 1919, Rev. K. Schilder, who would become the leader of the «Vrijmaking» in 1944, even sighed: “[o]verigens vind ik, dat er in onze Gereformeerde kerken veel te veel kerkbodes zijn.” See: *Gereformeerde Kerkbode van Vlaardingen* IV.144 (30<sup>th</sup> August 1919), 1. See also: *Gereformeerde Kerkbode. Officiële Orgaan van de Gereformeerde Kerken der Classis Gorinchem* VII.2 (25<sup>th</sup> October 1919), 2. Many a polemic was fought out in the columns of «gereformeerde» church bulletins.

<sup>119</sup> J.M.H.J. Hemels, ‘Recensie van “De Reformatie. Weekblad tot ontwikkeling van het gereformeerde leven, 1920-1940”’, *Bijdragen en mededelingen betreffende de geschiedenis der Nederlanden* CX (1995), 308-310, there 310.

councils and general synods – which have a more confidential character than periodicals – have also been studied. These sources not only give additional information, but also throw a light on the internal relations among the six GKB churches and their relationship with the «Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland».

By taking the whole period of existence of the GKB, starting with the founding of the «gereformeerde kerk» in Brussels in 1894 and ending with the creation of the «Verenigde Protestantse Kerk in België» in 1978/1979, as its scope, this thesis tries to portray and analyse the *evolution* of Neo-Calvinist church life in Belgium; in Holland, the «Gereformeerde Kerken» went through a process of radical alterations – called ‘the silent revolution’<sup>120</sup> – in the period after the Second World War – especially in the 1960s and 1970s –, which had severe consequences for the identity and group characteristics of the «gereformeerden». The mere fact that the GKB were willing to amalgamate with the two denominations from which they had ‘seceded’, suggests that the churches in Belgium were not immune to fundamental changes either.

## 7. Outline

Contrary to the publications which deal with the institutional history of a local Belgian «gereformeerde kerk» or the GKB as a whole and which are mentioned in the fourth paragraph of this introduction, this thesis is structured *thematically* instead of *chronologically*. The first chapter discusses the opinions with regard to the creation of Protestant organisations that were voiced by (leading) «gereformeerden» in Belgium. As has been said already, Dutch Neo-Calvinists saw Reformed-based institutions as a necessary ‘buffer’ against ‘unwanted’ influences from the non-Christian world and as indispensable ‘instruments’ with which the “[neo]calvinistische geloofsleven tot in alle uithoeken van de samenleving (...) [kon] doordringen” (‘Neo-Calvinist religious life could penetrate into all domains of society’).<sup>121</sup> Besides, in Holland, the identity of the «gereformeerden» was closely intertwined with (participation in) their own organisations. For these reasons, the first chapter zooms in on the views of Neo-Calvinists in *Belgium* concerning education – «gereformeerden» were fierce advocates of Christian-based schools –, politics – political engagement was seen as a plight of every Christian, but there was no Belgian equivalent to the «Anti-Revolutionaire Partij» – and the establishment of institutions in general. It turns out that the «gereformeerden» played a dominant role in the «‘Vereeniging voor Vlaamsch Protestantsch-Christelijk Onderwijs’» (VPCO) – an interest group which strived for the founding of ‘schools with the Bible’ in Flanders and even had its own periodical («*De Torenwachter*») in the early 1930s and late 1940s – and that they commented on (Belgian) po-

<sup>120</sup> See: Dekker, *De stille revolutie* (note 68).

<sup>121</sup> J.P.M. Koch, *Abraham Kuyper. Een biografie* (Amsterdam 2006), 98.

itics rather ambiguously. Special attention is paid to the viewpoints of other Protestant church groups in Belgium and the cultural-political dominance of Roman-Catholics in Flanders.<sup>122</sup>

In the second chapter, the self-image of the «gereformeerden» and their position in Belgian society receive full attention. In Holland, the Neo-Calvinists had both emancipatory and protectionist traits: they struggled out of liberal dominance and withdrew into an institutional ‘shelter’ (the Neo-Calvinist «zuil») to keep secularist and other ‘anti-Christian’ tendencies at a safe distance. In Belgium, on the other hand, they were obviously not an emancipatory movement – (former Roman Catholic) Flemings who joined the GKB fell, on the contrary, into social isolation –, but also not a protectionist one – there was simply no ‘heritage’ to defend, since there was no long-standing (Neo-) Calvinist tradition south of the Moerdijk. Yet, in spite of their diminutiveness, the «gereformeerden» themselves thought otherwise: they did not want to be a Dutch Protestant immigrant community, but were convinced to have a special mission in Belgian society. This section also examines the matter of evangelisation, which was taken up in Belgium with much more fervour than in the Netherlands.

The third chapter focuses on the attitude the «gereformeerden» have adopted towards other Protestant church groups in Belgium, their position within the «Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland» and their contribution to the ultimate coming into existence of the VPKB on January 1<sup>st</sup>, 1979. As regards these issues, developments within the GKN proved to be a dominant factor, though developments in *Belgian* Protestant began to play a bigger role from the late 1940s onwards: the GKB dropped their hesitation towards interdenominational cooperation and became fused with the broader Belgian Protestantism to an increasing extent. Since the «gereformeerden» legitimised their thoughts and deeds with an appeal on the ‘Reformed principles’, (changes in) Neo-Calvinist theology pass in review too.

The conclusion brings these three lines together and weaves them into an analytical synthesis that gives an answer to the central research question.

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<sup>122</sup> In Wallonia, the situation was different: there, socialism was a major societal force, at the expense of the influence of the Roman Catholic Church. The «gereformeerden» have written very little about this part of Belgium, since their congregations were all located in Flanders.

# **1. BETWEEN ISOLATION AND COOPERATION: REFORMED ‘COMPARTMENTALISATION’ IN BELGIUM**

## **1. Reformed from the cradle to the grave**

In his best-selling chronicle «*De eeuw van mijn vader*» (literally: *My Fathers’ Century*), Dutch author Geert Mak, the son of a «gereformeerde» minister, gives a comprehensive insight into the Neo-Calvinist way of life in twentieth-century Holland. Being an archetypical Reformed «mannenbroeder», his late father, Rev. Catrinus Mak, personifies the particularities and then-current opinions of the Dutch orthodox Protestant minority. A set of well-defined and biblically justified do’s and don’ts, the so-called «gereformeerde zede», determined which actions and thoughts were decent for a Reformed Christian and which were sinful. Among other things, these ethical prescriptions included a strict interpretation of the Fourth Commandment – eating an ice-cream on Sunday was absolutely ‘not done’,<sup>123</sup> –, the custom to read the Bible before and after every family meal, the convention to re-create, marry and do business exclusively with fellow church members, the rejection of birth control, public cinema, card playing and dancing, and – until the 1930s – the ban on wearing flesh-coloured tights.<sup>124</sup> De «gereformeerde zede» was, so to speak, the concretisation of the antithesis between the regenerated (Reformed) people («wedergeborenen») and unregenerated outside world («niet-wedergeborenen») as an all-encompassing attitude to life. Indeed, as Geert Mak points out, the «gereformeerden» (who saw themselves, according to Kuyper’s doctrine of presumptive regeneration, as a born-again – and hence predestined – community) lived their lives different and rather isolated from Dutch society at large:

“De groenteboer was gereformeerd, de kruidenier was gereformeerd, ons brood was gereformeerd, de padvinderij was gereformeerd, mijn ouders stemden op de gereformeerde partijen. De hele wereld was gereformeerd, zelfs de hekjes van de huizen en de bladeren van de bomen.”<sup>125</sup>

Looking back on his childhood in the 1940s and the 1950s, Mak remembers that it seemed as if the “whole world” adhered to the Reformed creed. With people with liberal, socialist or Roman Catholic life stances, referred to as the «andersdenkenden» (literally: ‘those who thought differently’), orthodox Calvinists seldom came into contact in a group context. Since the 1880s, as the introduction has indicated, the «gereformeerden» had been building a network of interconnected organisations (a «zuil»), which was more or less completed in the 1910s and encompassed all spheres of life. The

<sup>123</sup> See for example: Amelink, *De gereformeerden*, 163-182; J.J. van den Berg, *Deining. Koers en karakter van de ARP ter discussie, 1956-1970* (Kampen 1999), 242-243; Damsma, ‘De Doleantie (1886)’, 124.

<sup>124</sup> Ethics professor R. Schippers gives a detailed description of the «gereformeerde zede» in his book of the same name, published in Kampen in 1954. See also: B. van Kaam, *Parade der mannenbroeders. Flitsen uit het protestantse leven in Nederland in de jaren 1918-1938* (Wageningen 1964), 170-172.

<sup>125</sup> G.L. Mak, *De eeuw van mijn vader* (Amsterdam 2000), 404.

reason for this compartmentalisation along religious lines was twofold: on the hand, in order to protect their own community from becoming «wereldgelijkvormig» (becoming prey to negative, ‘un-Christian’ influences like dancing and incredulity) and to break away from liberal dominance, the «gereformeerden» needed a sheltered environment to which they could retreat; on the other hand, the «zuil» was the vehicle for influencing the outside world with Reformed opinions and for realising the ideal of ‘re-Christianisation’. Mak therefore characterised Dutch Neo-Calvinists as both a “politieke emancipatiebeweging” and a “calvinistische opwekkingsbeweging.”<sup>126</sup> In the process of creating numerous institutions, the emancipation and protection of the own group as well as the stimulation of a religious ‘awakening’ or ‘revival’ thus went hand in hand. Based on the membership figures of the «Gereformeerde Kerken» – about one-tenth of the population belonged to the GKN –, Neo-Calvinists did not have enough strength to fulfil these ambitious goals all by themselves. Some organisations, like the parochial associations of little boys («knapen»), adolescents («jongelingen») and girls and young women («meisjes») did not welcome members of other Calvinist denominations – because these did not subscribe to all the doctrines (the presumptive regeneration in particular) that were taught by the GKN –, but in other fields, where doctrinal quarrels were of less importance (for example in politics or in primary and secondary education), the support of «christelijk-gereformeerden», «gereformeerde-bonders» and other «orthodoxe hervormden» was *indispensable* for the success of the Neo-Calvinist cause. Thanks to the Kuyperian principles of ecclesiastical pluriformity and the distinction between the Church as institution and as organism, the «gereformeerden» could work closely with the three aforementioned groups outside the church-related sphere. Although the Reformed or ‘pan-Protestant’ «zuil» primarily rested on the GKN, non-GKN Calvinists participated in it as well. Until the 1960s, when the «Gereformeerde Kerken» gave up most of their Neo-Calvinist teachings and – as a consequence – institutions like the «Anti-Revolutionaire Partij» and Christian schools lost their distinct Neo-Calvinist identity, the «zuil» would be a solid citadel of Protestant orthodoxy.

The founding of a separate Calvinist ‘living-space’ within society was not, as is often assumed<sup>127</sup>, a typical Dutch phenomenon – in Canada and the United States of America, Reformed-minded and Kuyperian Protestants, who were more often than not (descendants of) Dutch immigrants with «afgescheiden» or «dolerende» roots, also established schools, libraries, retirement centres and all kinds of clubs of their own. The construction of a «zuil» came at full speed in the New World after

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<sup>126</sup> Koch, *Abraham Kuyper*, 313.

<sup>127</sup> See, for example: Hellemans, ‘Nederlandse politiek in vergelijkend perspectief’, 275.

the post-1945 Dutch emigration wave<sup>128</sup>, but as early as the 1870s, orthodox Protestants from Holland had begun establishing confessional primary schools on American soil.<sup>129</sup> Compared to the old Reformed Church in America (RCA), the former North American ‘branch’ of the «Nederlandse Her-vormde Kerk» that was instituted by Dutch settlers in the seventeenth century, the younger Christian Reformed Church (CRC), which had come into existence after some discontented orthodox members had separated from the RCA in 1857 and which had been allied to the «Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerk» before 1892, was much more active in promoting and founding separate Reformed organisations.<sup>130</sup> Especially when «dolerende» Kuyperians joined the CRC’s «afgescheiden» ranks in the 1890s and 1900s, the number of denominational schools increased spectacularly.<sup>131</sup> The Neo-Calvinist «zuil» in America has never reached the magnitude and comprehensiveness of its Dutch counterpart, but, contrary to the «zuil» in the Netherlands, it did not collapse in the turmoil of the roaring *sixties* and exists to this very day. On Curaçao, a Dutch isle in the Caribbean, members of the local «gereformeerde kerk» also felt the urge to give their children a Christian education. After a failed attempt to found a school in 1938, several Protestants, including many «gereformeerden», set up the «Vereniging voor Protestants Christelijk Onderwijs op Curaçao» (literally: the ‘Association for the benefit of Protestant Christian Education on Curaçao’) in 1950 and managed to build a school that same year.<sup>132</sup> Next to that, the Curaçaoan «gereformeerden» – most of them were (families of) Dutch businessmen –, were the driving force behind the «Curaçaosche Protestantsche Partij», a local copy of the ARP, led by the «gereformeerde» Wybo Jan Goslinga<sup>133</sup>, and behind Protestant transmissions on the local radio and television broadcast.<sup>134</sup> As regards the construction of separate institutions, Neo-Calvinists outside of Holland thus were certainly not second to their Dutch *confreres*. From the cradle to the grave and in all spheres of life, a «gereformeerde» moved primarily within a context of like-minded men and women.

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<sup>128</sup> As A. Amelink indicates in her book *Gereformeerden overzee. Protestants-christelijke landverhuizers in Noord-Amerika*, published in Amsterdam in 2006.

<sup>129</sup> See: G. Stob, *The Christian Reformed Church and Her Schools* (Princeton 1955).

<sup>130</sup> The RCA was in favour of public, non-denominational schools. See: R.P. Swierenga, *Dutch Chicago. A History of the Hollanders in the Windy City* (Grand Rapids 2002), 354-355.

<sup>131</sup> “Although Kuyperians were a small minority among Dutch Americans, it was their impetus in the pre-World War I decades that led to the establishment of the church-supported schools and social agencies.” See: R.P. Swierenga, ‘Dutch’, in: S. Thernstrom ed., *Harvard Encyclopedia of American Ethnic Groups* (Cambridge (Ma.) [1980] 1994), 284-295, there 291.

<sup>132</sup> G. Statius Muller, ‘De Vereniging Protestants Christelijk Onderwijs’, in: O.B. Linker and G. Vrieze eds., *Op Mundo Nobo valt een orgel stil. Meer dan een halve eeuw gereformeerde kerkelijk leven op Curaçao* (Curaçao 1984), 147-151, there 148-149.

<sup>133</sup> J. Hartog, *Journalistiek leven in Curaçao* (Willemstad 1944), 79.

<sup>134</sup> H. Wiersinga, ‘De jaren zestig. De Gereformeerde Kerk van Curaçao en de Antilliaanse oecumene’, in: O.B. Linker and G. Vrieze eds., *Op Mundo Nobo valt een orgel stil. Meer dan een halve eeuw gereformeerde kerkelijk leven op Curaçao* (Curaçao 1984), 57-80, there 64.

## 2. Education

Just as in the Netherlands, the United States, Canada and Curaçao, Neo-Calvinists in Belgium displayed a lot of organisational activity and particularly stressed the necessity of own schools. In an environment that was, according to the «*gereformeerden*», full of disbelief, superstition and hatred against Protestants, the Reformed community had to be on its guard. In the very first issue of the «*Ge-reformeerde Kerkbode voor België*», published on the 1<sup>st</sup> of May in the year 1904, J. den Boeft, headmaster of the Protestant primary school in Brussels, therefore warned his readers against modernity's dangers in an article that was perfectly clear:

“DOOR GEVAREN OMRINGD is zeker het leven der geloovigen in de tegenwoordige Maatschappij. En dan is een der eerste gevaren van onzen tijd wel: Wereldgelijkvormigheid. Juist in groote steden als Antwerpen en Brussel, waar de beschaving fijn-bedorven is; waar het kwaad, zich in een prachtig kleed hult; waar naast de gemeente van Christus, die als een stad op een berg moet zijn, het Sion Gods, ook de bergen Basans, d.i. de wereld, zich met al hunne hoogheid en trotschheid fier verheffen; moet de geloovige zich zeer in acht nemen. Waarvoor? Voor veel en velerlei.”<sup>135</sup>

Since children were more vulnerable to society's threats, they had to be raised and educated in an atmosphere wherein the love *of* and the love *for* Christ were neither challenged nor questioned. If (orthodox) Protestants, irrespective of their marginal position within Belgian society, did not strive for Christian-based education, it would just be a matter of time when Protestantism in Belgium would be completely a thing of the past; “wij achten het eenvoudig God verzoeken,” Den Boeft said, “indien we niet zorgen voor *Christelijk* onderwijs voor onze kinderen, waar dit mogelijk is.”<sup>136</sup> Protestants in Belgium should follow the example of their Dutch brethren, who made a lot of sacrifices and took great pains to provide their youngsters with sound Christian tuition, and had to be behind the ideal of Protestant schools *unanimously*. After all, disagreement on the indispensability of such schools would be devastating; Christian schools would be viable only when *all* Protestants would support them financially and send their children to them. To his own astonishment, Den Boeft noticed that a significant number of Protestants, however, preferred the public education system to confessional schools. “[W]ij meinen,” he admonished, “dat sommige Christenen zich wel eens *het stof uit de oogen mogen wrijven*, die zich met ‘n laatdunkend gebaar van de aktie op het gebied van het Christelijk onderwijs afkeeren en voor hun kinderen de voorkeur blijven geven aan openbaar, *zogenaamd* neutraal, maar in den grond *anti-christelijk* onderwijs.”<sup>137</sup> How could people who called themselves Christians, he asked rhetorically, be so blind and uninvolved?

<sup>135</sup> G.K.B. I.1 (1<sup>st</sup> May 1904), 3-4, there 3.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.* I.9 (21<sup>st</sup> August 1904), 3-4, there 3.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, 3-4.

Den Boeft's complaint would often be repeated in the «*Gereformeerde Kerkbode voor België*». In the September 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1906 edition, for example, the periodical expressed its disapproval of the indifference towards Christian-based education of the Protestants who kept sending their children to public state schools.<sup>138</sup> Nine months later, the Reformed weekly pointed out that providing baptised kids and juveniles with Christian schooling was not a redundancy but a *plight*, for parents had promised, during the christening of their infants, before God and in the presence of their fellow parishioners to instruct their child(ren) in the Church's doctrines and to have their child(ren) educated therein. The refraining from this pledge was no less than apostasy or, to use a common expression, a neglect of the «gereformeerde beginselen» (the Kuyperian Reformed principles). In Brussels, the 'Church Messenger' observed with disappointment, only a small number of parents kept their promise.<sup>139</sup> The high frequency with which the 'education question' was discussed – every volume, several articles were dedicated to school-related topics –, was meant to create a sense of urgency. Even in one of the last issues of the magazine (the edition of June 14<sup>th</sup>, 1914), the «*Kerkbode*» still felt the need to impress the absolute necessity of separate Protestant schools on its readers. During his exploration of the possibilities of building such a school in Antwerp, Rev. Hepp, local pastor of the «gereformeerde kerk», had experienced more scepticism than support, the periodical told its subscribers. "Voor een deel is dat hieraan toe te schrijven," the clergyman stated while shaking his head, "dat de schoolvergaderingen niet al te getrouw bezocht worden. Moedeloosheid schijnt zich van velen te hebben meester gemaakt."<sup>140</sup> Notwithstanding all the efforts undertaken by the «*Gereformeerde Kerkbode*» in the years between 1904 and 1914, Protestants had certainly not become consentaneous when it came to education.

In the late 1920s and early 1930s, little had changed; advocates of (primary) Protestant Christian schools were still asking "of de geloolige Protestantsche Christenen wel diep doordrongen zijn van het overwegend belang eener degelijke, Christelijke opleiding hunner kinderen aan een beslist Christelijke school."<sup>141</sup> In the post-World War I decade, their actions had nevertheless increased: they were united in a Protestant school union, the «*Vereeniging voor Vlaamsch Protestantsch-Christelijk Onderwijs*», in 1922<sup>142</sup> and even published their own monthly, called «*De Torenwachter*» (*The Tower Guard*), since 1927. A centrally coordinated 'awareness campaign', for which Den Boeft had already called in 1904<sup>143</sup>, was seen by the VPCO members (of whom many were «gereformeerd») as

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<sup>138</sup> G.K.B. III.62 (2<sup>nd</sup> September 1906), 4.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.* IV.82 (9<sup>th</sup> June 1907), 4.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.* XI.265 (14<sup>th</sup> June 1914), 2-3, there 3.

<sup>141</sup> *De Torenwachter* V.2 (September 1931), 1-2, there 1.

<sup>142</sup> R. Zwaan, 'Christelijk onderwijs sloeg in België niet aan', in: A.P. Crom et.al. eds., *Anderhalve eeuw gereformeerden in stad en land XII. Buitenlandse kerken* (Kampen 1986), 17-18, there 18.

<sup>143</sup> G.K.B. I.15 (13<sup>th</sup> November 1904), 4.

a means to persuade wavering or indifferent elements within the Belgian Protestant community. «*De Torenwachter*»'s main aim was, consequently, to give as many arguments as possible why Protestant parents should withdraw their children from public education and wholeheartedly embrace the VPCO's ideal of founding Christian-based schools in *every* town or city where a Protestant church existed. Even when the chances of succeeding were only minor, Protestants still had to *try* building schools of their own with might and main: “[a]ls ouders hebt ge de Christelijke school voor uw kinderen te zoeken. En als die er niet is? Dan moet die erkomen!”<sup>144</sup>, Rev. W.W. Meijnen, minister of the «gereformeerde kerk» in Dordrecht (Holland), once recited at a VPCO meeting. In the opinion of «*De Torenwachter*», the arguments in favour of Protestant schools were simply irrefutable.

First, state schools claimed to be ‘religiously neutral’, but were, in fact, not impartial at all. ‘Neutrality’ was a false notion, since one could be, as is put forward in Matthew 12:30 and Luke 11:23, either *for* or *against* Christ.<sup>145</sup> The choice between accepting or rejecting Christ as Saviour had severe consequences for the ‘atmosphere’ in which children received their education. Of course, «*De Torenwachter*» said, one plus one equalled two in public as well as Protestant schools, but only the latter acknowledged that it was God Who invented the laws of math and physics. In other courses (history lessons, for example), it was evident that state and religious education differed from one another: public schools had to interpret historical events like the Reformation or the French Revolution without causing harm to anyone, and *biblical* history did not even belong to their curriculum. Yet, the *content* of the lessons was only of secondary importance: “[h]et zijn niet de sommetjes of de taallesjes, ook niet de leesboekjes of de lessen in geschiedenis of natuurkennis – zelfs nog niet in de eerste plaats het ochtend- en avondgebed, dat de school maakt tot een christelijke school. Het is de sfeer, die alles doortrekt. Uw kind behoort in een christelijke sfeer, daar moet het zich thuis voelen.”<sup>146</sup> Moreover, the so-called ‘neutral’ public education system was chameleonesque: it usually adopted the prevailing political and ecclesiastical preferences of the surrounding area. On the countryside, state schools were therefore generally no different from Roman Catholic schools<sup>147</sup>, while in urban regions, the teaching staff predominantly consisted of ‘Reds’ (men with socialist or even communist sympathies).<sup>148</sup> All in all, public schools should be ‘no-go areas’ for Protestant children.

Second, the VPCO recognised, following Reformed school associations in the Netherlands, the potential of Christian schools as «*evangelisatiemiddel*», as agencies to spread the Gospel.<sup>149</sup>

<sup>144</sup> *De Torenwachter* VI.3 (November 1932), 1.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.* IX.2 (November-December 1935), 1.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.* IX.4 (March-April 1936), 4.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.* VI.3 (November 1932), 1.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.* IV.4 (September 1930), 2; IV.5 (October 1930), 2; IV.6 (November 1930), 1-2, there 2; IV.7 (December 1930), 2; IV.11-12 (April-May 1931), 3; VI.4 (January 1933), 2.

Whereas the schools' staff policy ought to be very strict – only professing members of a Protestant denomination were allowed to teach –, its *admission* policy should be generous. Protestant-based education served, obviously, Belgium's Protestant community in the first place, but it could also bring children who grew up in Roman Catholic or secular milieus into contact with the biblical facts of salvation.<sup>150</sup> What is more, by admitting non-Protestant youngsters, their *parents* could be reached: “[h]et komt meermalen voor,” one of «*De Torenwachter*»'s editors wrote, “dat ouders door hunne kinderen weer tot verlevendiging hunner [godsdiestige] belangstelling gebracht worden.”<sup>151</sup> If the ‘full light’ of the Gospel wanted to break through the ‘darkness’ that Rome had cast upon Belgium, Protestant schools were indispensable. Third, the VPCO considered school education to be in line with church and family life. When a child was raised in the «vreze des Heeren» – raised with high regard, awe and love for God –, his tuition should be founded on this same principle: “[e]en school met den Bijbel is een noodzakelijk uitvloeisel van een gezin met den Bijbel.”<sup>152</sup> Besides, although the ‘family’, the ‘church’ and the ‘school’ were separate ‘sectors’ in the Kuyperian theory of sphere sovereignty, *all* domains had been instituted by God and therefore owed obedience to the laws and teachings He had rooted in Scripture.

The fourth argument the «*De Torenwachter*» used to convince irresolute Protestants to support the VPCO, was a juridical one. Just as in the Netherlands, the government in Belgium had committed itself to subsidising non-public (religious) schools when certain preconditions – school associations should build the schoolhouses themselves and their schools were required to have a sufficient number of pupils – were met.<sup>153</sup> It would be a missed opportunity when Protestants did not make use of that.<sup>154</sup> And if the state's preconditions could not be met, Calvinists in Holland («gereformeerden» in particular) would be glad to chip in and supplement the necessary budget (as a result, more often than not, well over three-quarters of the total costs were defrayed by Dutchmen). A fifth motive the VPCO's monthly regularly mentioned, was related to the fourth. Given the fact that the Dutch were highly involved with Protestant activities in their southern neighbouring country, Protestantism was seen as something ‘foreign’ or even ‘hostile’ to the Belgian society and (assumed) Catholic identity (the second chapter will consider this at length). Not only did Dutch Protestants pay for the construction and maintenance of their southern brethren's *schools*, they supported the Protestant *churches* in Belgium as well. Especially in the first half of the twentieth century, the «Gereformeerde Kerken in België», the Dutch-speaking congregations of the «Belgische Christelijke Zen-

<sup>150</sup> “De scholen bedoelen de Vlaamsch-Protestantsche gemeenten en kringen allereerst te dienen en tevens middelen te zijn tot evangelisatie der niet-Protestantsche jeugd.” See: *De Torenwachter* IV.7 (December 1930), 2.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.* IV.6 (November 1930), 1-2, there 2.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.* IV.11-12 (April-May 1931), 2. See also: *Ibid.* IV.10 (March 1931), 1.

<sup>153</sup> Zwaan, ‘Christelijk onderwijs sloeg in België niet aan’, 17.

<sup>154</sup> *De Torenwachter* IV.2 (July 1930), 2-3; IV.9 (February 1931), 2; IV.11-12 (April-May 1931), 2.

dingskerk» and – though to a lesser extent – the Flemish branch of the «Bond van Kerken» (the only state-aided Protestant church) were highly dependent on assistance from coreligionists in Holland. “Heel vaak is uit den mond van Vlamingen [dan ook] vernomen,” «*De Torenwachter*» wailed in 1946, “dat het allemaal bijna [sic] vreemdelingen zijn, die in de zaak van het Evangelie werkzaam zijn. Maar dat is en dat wordt hoe langer hoe meer de schuld van de Vlamingen zelf. Omdat ze zelf niet komen.”<sup>155</sup> In other GKB-related periodicals (such as «*De Open Poort*» and the «*Vlaams Kerkblad*») and internal reports, similar grievances were uttered. If Protestant Flanders wanted to get rid of its image of being a Hollandic ‘import item’, it had to become less reliant on Dutch aid and more self-sufficient. By educating the Protestant adults of the future, Christian-based schools could fill that need: “[o]m protestantsche generaties te vormen, [zijn] protestantsche scholen noodig.”<sup>156</sup>

Sixth, ‘worldliness’ («wereldgelijkvormigheid») was a constant threat to the well-being of the (Protestant) Christian community.<sup>157</sup> The materialistic world view of the modern age, with all kinds of malignancies (a focus on temporal luxury, earthly possessions, the immediate fulfilment of needs and sinful activities) in its wake, undermined the supreme authority of God and Scripture and alienated tens of thousands of people from the Church. In Belgium specifically, Protestants were confronted with a cultural climate that incorporated almost everything they rejected. After all, Roman Catholicism was by far the dominant religion and propagated a very different (less puritan) way of life. Swearing<sup>158</sup>, for example, was generally accepted, and street processions, pilgrimages, carnivals, public entertainment on Sundays, visits to bars (whether or not on Sundays), Marian devotions and the ‘first holy communion’ were cultural elements no one questioned. The last-mentioned custom was a menace in particular<sup>159</sup>: Protestant children could become charmed by the festivities, exuberances and presents that accompanied the communion ceremony, and were being laughed at by Roman Catholic pupils (even in public schools) because they did not participate in the Catholic Church’s initiation rite. Little Protestants should not be exposed to this, or one of the other cultural practices mentioned earlier, Rev. Ganzevoort accentuated in «*De Torenwachter*»:

<sup>155</sup> *De Torenwachter* XIX.1 (June 1946), 5. More than likely, «*De Torenwachter*» was not published between January 1937 and June 1946.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.* IV.10 (March 1930), 3.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.* VI.6 (May 1933), 1; VII.1 (November 1933), 1; VIII.2 (September-October 1934), 2.

<sup>158</sup> Particularly «*De Open Poort*» and the «*Vlaams Kerkblad*» addressed the issue of swearing. It was mentioned at least once in «*De Torenwachter*» (see two notes below).

<sup>159</sup> Being raised a Catholic himself, Rev. Lauwers warned against the ‘first holy communion’ in the August 1930 issue of «*De Torenwachter*» (pages 1-2). Klaas Sluys, the Boechout evangelist, did the same in «*De Open Poort*» (Belgian edition) of December 1953 (cover page): “Aan een Rooms-Katholieke school zijn (...) vele bezwaren verbonden, niet alleen vanwege het Godsdiensonderwijs dat daar gegeven wordt, doch ook terwille van de onvermijdelijke eerste en plechtige communie, die daarvan het uiteindelijk resultaat is. Vooral het laatste is in Vlaanderen een groot familiefeest, dat met evenveel luister wordt gevierd als een huwelijk, en waaraan men zich eigenlijk niet kan onttrekken, tenzij men de kinderen resoluut naar een school met de Bijbel stuurt.”

“Zegenen wij onze kinderen, wanneer we hen zenden in een omgeving, waar gevloekt wordt en gespot met het Evangelie? Dacht ge, dat het kind den rijkdom van het Christenleven gaat zien, wanneer het thuis hoort van den Heiland, maar op school alles zonder dien Heiland wordt gesproken en gedaan? (...) Het kinderhart is zoo ontvankelijk. Hoe gaarne luistert het kind naar de geschiedenissen van den Bijbel; ja, maar hoe gemakkelijk neemt het ook een vloek over. En hoe taai is dat onkruid, als het eenmaal wortel heeft geschenen.”<sup>160</sup>

Since protection against the world’s evils was a number one priority, a school ought to be a safe and sheltering environment – a *school upon a hill*, to use a metaphor derived from the Bible. Nonetheless, ‘reclusion’ («wereldmijding») was just as condemnable as ‘worldliness’. Although a (Reformed) Christian was, based on covenant theology, considered to be *in this world but not of this world*, and had to take, consequently, an antithetical attitude to life – “we moeten tegenover de gevallen wereld positie kiezen”<sup>161</sup>, Rev. J.C.B. Eykman of Antwerp’s «zendingskerk» underlined –, he should not live his life as a hermit or in social isolation.<sup>162</sup> Thanks to common grace, the world had not fallen into total wretchedness after Adam’s fall and still provided opportunities to serve and glorify God. Because it was man’s plight to ‘work and take care of the world’ (Genesis 2:15), a Christian needed to exert influence over culture and place himself in full service of God’s (coming) Kingdom. Accordingly, schools should not cultivate passivity or an aversion to the world, but, on the contrary, stimulate their pupils to use their talents for the benefit of their fellow creatures and society at large. Only then could the cultural mandate God had given mankind in Genesis 1:28, be put into effect.

A seventh (and final) argument the VPCO put forward, was identical to the one mentioned earlier in relation to the «*Gereformeerde Kerkbode voor België*». Once a child had been baptised, parents had committed themselves to educate him/her in accordance with the Word of God and should do whatever it took to accomplish this: “[t]reffend is dat woord *onderwijzen* in ons doopformulier. Stond er opvoeden, dan zouden we misschien nog een uitvlucht zoeken, doch nu is er geen ontkomen aan.”<sup>163</sup> Anyone who refrained from doing so, broke his promise to the merciful Lord, Who, for His part, would *never* break the promises He had made to mankind. Here, covenant theology proved to be the trump card of the advocates of Christian-based schools, as Rev. Meijnen’s speech to local VPCO assemblies in Antwerp, Brussels and Ghent – not quite surprisingly, these three cities were, at the time, the only municipalities in Belgium where instituted «gereformeerde kerken» existed –, signifies:

<sup>160</sup> *De Torenwachter* IV.8 (January 1931), 2.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.* VI.6 (May 1933), 1.

<sup>162</sup> “[W]ij bereiken evenmin ons doel, als wij angstvallig ons afgezonderd houden van de ons omringende wereld of trachten op onze wijze den invloed daarvan te neutraliseeren. Wie meent dat onze schoolbeweging daarvoor alleen dienen moet, verstaat haar geheel verkeerd,” Rev. Lauwers emphasised in the June 1930 issue of «*De Torenwachter*» (page 1).

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.* VI.9 (February 1931), 2.

“God komt tot geloolige ouders met Zijn eisch, die zich grond in de uitverkiezing. (...) Gen. 17:7 zegt: ‘En Ik zal Mijn verbond oprichten tusschen Mij en tusschen u, en tusschen uw zaad na u.’ Het kind staat dus op den grondslag des geloof. Zoolang het tegengestelde zich niet openbaart, hebt ge dus als geloolige vader en moeder uw kind te zien als Gods kind, als een kind, waarmee God Zijn verbond heeft opgericht. Die lijn van het verbond hebt gij dus ook door te trekken. De Christelijke school is de consequentie van het beginsel. (...) Bij den doop van uw kind hebt ge beloofd en u voorgenomen, uw kind, als het tot verstand zou gekomen zijn, in de leer naar Gods Woord, naar uw vermogen te doen te helpen onderwijzen. Dat was een eed.”<sup>164</sup>

Clearly, the orator was a genuine Kuyperian: children should be treated as though they were born-again, included in the covenant and—hence—elect, unless their conduct in life would prove otherwise. Yet, being included in the covenant was not just a unilateral gift, it involved certain God-given *demands* as well: if a Christian wanted to lay claim to the covenant promise (i.e. salvation through Christ), he/she had to obey God, accept Christ as Saviour and uphold His honour in all spheres of life. In other words, God’s bestowal of grace required a *human* answer. By stressing the importance of obeying the covenant demands, education should correspond with this and prepare children for a life as devoted, intellectual and antithetically-minded Christians. All Protestants who did not see the urgency and necessity of building schools of their own, did not realize man’s responsibility in the covenant of grace, Meijnen implied. Others, among them Rev. H.J. Winter of the «gereformeerde kerk» in Antwerp, expressed themselves in similar terms.<sup>165</sup>

For all its efforts, the VPCO did not quite succeed in changing the minds of indifferent, undecided or otherwise-minded coreligionists in the Belgian Protestant ranks. The latter were afraid of institutionalising some sort of ‘sectarian ghetto’ or a ‘cocoon’, whereas their children should rather get used to being a religious and cultural minority in a country in which Roman Catholicism set the tone. Some were opposed to confessional schools in general; others denied the desirability of Protestant schools *in Belgium* specifically, because these would not contribute to the ideal of rooting Protestantism firmly in Belgian society. In public schools, they asserted, their children came into contact with other religious and ideological preferences, and, what is more, non-Protestants came into contact with *them*.<sup>166</sup> Out of this contact, the opponents of Protestant-based schools hoped, mutual respect and sympathy would arise. Besides, although the VPCO could claim otherwise, *non*-Protestants would certainly not be too eager to send their children to Protestant schools.<sup>167</sup> Their religion was already

<sup>164</sup> *De Torenwachter* VI.3 (November 1932), 1.

<sup>165</sup> For Winter, see: *Ibid.* VI.6 (May 1933), 1; VII.3 (November 1933), 3; XIX.1 (October 1946), 1. For others, see: *Ibid.* IV.5 (October 1930), 1 and 2; *B.O.P.* XII.8 (August 1932), 4.

<sup>166</sup> *De Kruisbanier* XIX.22 (15<sup>th</sup> June 1963), 2.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.* According to Rev. Ganzevoort, a fierce apologist of Christian-based education, opponents said there was public distrust of Protestant schools within Belgian society.

seen as something ‘outlandish’, so it would be better if Protestants did not barricade themselves in a self-constructed ‘fortress’.

The opposition to Protestant-based education proved to be more durable than the proponents initially expected. As early as 1910, the «*Gereformeerde Kerkbode voor België*» wrote with sorrow that the initiative to found a Christian school in Antwerp received support almost exclusively from members of the local «gereformeerde kerk». <sup>168</sup> Although such a school would be built in 1926, Protestants of other denominations apparently did not share the Neo-Calvinists’ sense of urgency. The VPCO could not hide its disappointment concerning the lack of back up for its cause, either. In 1931, «*De Torenwachter*» noticed that the Protestant school association was being tormented by a sentiment of ‘waning interest’ and ‘stagnation’; it was truly unsatisfactory, “dater in Vlaanderen nog zoo weinig echt Christelijke gezinnen gevonden worden, welke ons de ontbrekende elementen voor de toekomst van ons Christelijk onderwijs in dit land kunnen leveren.”<sup>169</sup> Surprisingly, in spite of lamentations like these and the economic depression that left an enduring mark on the 1930s, the prayers of the VPCO were answered: on the eve of World War II, the bond managed to open new schools in Ghent, Mechlin, Genk, Denderleeuw, Ronse, Ichtegem and Komen. Together with the older schools in Sint-Maria-Horebeke, Antwerp and the two schools in Brussels – of which one was affiliated to the ‘SILO Gospel Mission’ and the other (the «*Prinses-Julianaschool*») recruited its pupils mainly from Protestant Dutch families residing in the Belgian state capital –, the VPCO had now become the coordinating board of *eleven* Protestant primary education institutions.<sup>170</sup> Of course, the advocates of Christian-based schools were pleased and grateful, but some questioned the viability of the newly established schools in the densely populated municipalities: “[a]ls ge eenigszins met den toestand van dit onderwijs op de hoogte zijt,” VPCO secretary G.G. de Lang warned in 1946, “zult ge toch moeten toestemmen, dat het leeuwendeel in dit werk geschied [sic] door krachten, die niet voortgekomen zijn uit eigen volk.”<sup>171</sup> A decade later, it turned out De Lang was absolutely right: the school in Denderleeuw had already been closed (temporarily) in 1942<sup>172</sup> – a new school was built in 1954<sup>173</sup> –, and the schools in Ronse, Ichtegem and Komen had shut their doors completely.<sup>174</sup> In addition, the

<sup>168</sup> G.K.B. VII.159 (22<sup>nd</sup> May 1910), 4.

<sup>169</sup> *De Torenwachter* V.1 (July 1931), 3.

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.* XIX.3 (June 1946), 5. Between 1921 and 1929, there had been a Protestant school in the East Flemish town of Geraardsbergen as well. See: De Raaf, *Een eeuw SILO* (note 114).

<sup>171</sup> *De Torenwachter* XIX.3 (June 1946), 5.

<sup>172</sup> De Raaf, *Een open poort*, 78.

<sup>173</sup> De Braekeler and Geerds, *Vijftigjarig bestaan van de Evangelische Kerk te Denderleeuw*, 34-35.

<sup>174</sup> Looking back on the forty year history of the VPCO, «*De Kruisbanier*» informed its readers: “In de veertig jaren, die voorbijgingen, zijn ook op andere plaatsen scholen of schooltjes opgekomen of verdwenen. Maar er zijn er ook, die zich mochten handhaven en tot bloei zijn gekomen: Gent, Mechelen, Genk, Denderleeuw, Boechout.” See: *De Kruisbanier* XVIII.22 (2<sup>nd</sup> June 1962), 1. After the June 1946 edition of «*De Torenwachter*» had mentioned the existence of Protestant schools in Ronse, Ichtegem and Komen, the latter two were talked about in the October 15<sup>th</sup>, 1955 edition of

seven others (still) relied heavily on financial and material aid from Holland. Consequently, the VPCO felt compelled to attract the attention of the Protestants in Belgium with renewed vigour. Since «*De Torenwachter*» had died a silent death in the late 1940s and its successor (a periodical called «*VPCO Mededeelingen*», of which no copies seem to have been saved) had a very limited circulation, public VPCO messages and announcements were published once and then in «*De Kruisbanier*». <sup>175</sup> It was appalling to note that, more than forty years after the foundation of the VPCO, a significant number of Protestants in Belgium were still questioning the *raison d'être* of confessional schools, the «gerefiformeerde» Rev. Ganzevoort yammered in 1963. <sup>176</sup> As far as that goes, little had changed; consider, for example, this «*De Torenwachter*» article, published in the autumn of 1936:

“Zoo af en toe bereiken ons uitingen, die van natuur zijn, ons de haren ten berge te doen rijzen. Uitingen uit den mond van mensen, die we meenden tot de onzen te mogen rekenen. Het is de wonderlijke, ik zou haast zeggen: de ongelooflijke uitspraak, dat onze vereeniging haar reden van bestaan zou verloren hebben. (...) Geen reden van bestaan? En dat, terwijl er nog zoo talrijke kinderen op Roomsche en ‘neutrale’ scholen gaan, die thuis hooren in een Christelijke school? (...) Geen reden van bestaan? Welk een dwaasheid!”<sup>177</sup>

Why could not all Protestants recognise that they should not be satisfied with the so-called ‘neutral’ education the Belgian state offered, but that they were involved in a ‘school struggle’ («schoolstrijd») and urgently needed to swell the ranks of the VPCO?<sup>178</sup>

The term ‘school struggle’ was used in two different (though interrelated) ways: the Protestant school association did not only fight against the government-sponsored schools and the (presumed) liberal, socialist and / or Roman Catholic influence to which these were subjected, it also had to give an *internal* ‘battle’, as it could not rely on the support of the majority of the Protestant population. When magazines like the «*Gerefiformeerde Kerkbode voor België*», «*De Torenwachter*» and «*De Kruisbanier*» addressed the issue of the «schoolstrijd», they usually hinted at the term’s second meaning. This internal ‘battle’ the VPCO had to give, was, more than likely, aimed against members

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«*De Kruisbanier*», though it is uncertain whether these schools had already been closed. The school in Ronse had to close in 1955. See: De Raaf, *Een eeuw SILO*, 127. In his book *Guido de Brès-kerk van Brussel*, De Raaf also mentions the existence of a school in (Sint-Jans-)Molenbeek (a municipality in Brussels), though he does not tell when this school was founded or closed (page 186).

<sup>175</sup> For example: *De Kruisbanier* VIII.19 (10<sup>th</sup> May 1952), 1; X.25 (22<sup>nd</sup> May 1954), 2; XI.41 (15<sup>th</sup> October 1955), 3; XII.16 (21<sup>st</sup> April 1956), 2; XII.19 (5<sup>th</sup> May 1956), 2; XIV.1 (4<sup>th</sup> January 1958), 1-2, there 2; XIV.23 (31<sup>st</sup> May 1958), 1.

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.* XIX.22 (15<sup>th</sup> June 1963), 2.

<sup>177</sup> *De Torenwachter* IX.7 (September-October 1936), 2. [Erroneously, this edition was distributed as the *sixth* issue of the ninth volume.]

<sup>178</sup> Since the «Prinses-Julianaschool» gave up its Protestant identity and became a mixed Catholic-Protestant institution in 1972, it left the VPCO that same year. See: Zwaan, ‘Christelijk onderwijs sloeg in België niet aan’, 17. Consequently, the «*Jaarboek voor de Protestantse Kerken in België 1972*» does not mention the «Prinses-Julianaschool» in its list of VPCO member schools. The other Protestant school in Brussels (linked to the ‘SILO Gospel Mission’) had been closed in 1961, primarily due to “een gebrek aan belangstelling van de kant der protestantse ouders.” See: De Raaf, *Een eeuw SILO*, 115.

of other Protestant denominations and *not* against the Belgian «gereformeerden». The sources studied do not suggest that the latter did not acknowledge the importance of Christian-based education – on the contrary, they indicate that, when it came to building Protestant schools, the Neo-Calvinists were in front. Although some initiatives to establish confessional schools had already been undertaken in the nineteenth century, *before* the founding of the «gereformeerde kerken» – such schools had existed in Ghent before 1865<sup>179</sup>, in Brussels (related to the «Nederlandse evangelische hervormde kerk») between 1853 and 1895<sup>180</sup>, and in Antwerp somewhere around the middle of that century<sup>181</sup>, and still existed in Sint-Maria-Horebeke (built in 1819<sup>182</sup>) and in Brussels (the SILO school, founded in 1901<sup>183</sup>) –, and just one «gereformeerde» belonged to the ‘founding fathers’ of the VPCO<sup>184</sup>, the campaign to institute Christian-based schools was revitalised in the twentieth century only *after* the establishing of the GKB. It is significant that the creation of Protestant schools in Brussels (the «Prinses-Julianaschool»), Antwerp, Mechlin, Ghent, Denderleeuw and Boechout is connected *directly* to the arising of local Neo-Calvinist church life<sup>185</sup>, and that the «gereformeerden» were also involved with the founding of the Protestant school in Genk. Moreover, with the exception of Antwerp, Ghent and Genk, all of these schools were accommodated in the local «gereformeerde kerk» the first year(s) of their existence<sup>186</sup> (in Boechout, the situation was the other way around: there, the «gereformeerde kerk» held its first services in the ‘school with the Bible’<sup>187</sup>). The «gereformeerden» were the *only* Protestant community in Belgium who could send their children to a Christian-based school in *all* of the cities where their churches were located. Additionally, in 1969, six out of a total of nine VPCO board members were members of the GKB (of whom some were involved in the association since the

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<sup>179</sup> *De Torenwachter* VIII.1 (July-August 1934), 3.

<sup>180</sup> Liagre, *Anders geloven*, 120-129 and 188-190.

<sup>181</sup> *De Torenwachter* VIII.3 (January-February 1935), 3.

<sup>182</sup> A. De Jonge, *De Geuzenhoek te Horebeke. Van geslacht tot geslacht* (Sint-Maria-Horebeke 1993), 29 and 56. The school in Horebeke had to close in 1982.

<sup>183</sup> De Raaf, *Een eeuw SILO*, 108.

<sup>184</sup> *De Kruisbanier* XVIII.22 (2<sup>nd</sup> June 1962), 3. These men were the ‘founding fathers’ of the VPCO: C. Blommaert, O. Blommaert, L. Bruyneel, J. Chrispeels, F. Decoster, P. Joelants, P. Neven, W. Pijl, A. Vietti and J. Visch. Only Neven was «gereformeerd».

<sup>185</sup> In Brussels, the reason to found a school was motivated by the fact “dat er eenige gezinnen in de Geref. kerk waren, die kinderen hadden, die allengs den schoolplichtigen leeftijd bereikt hadden, en die van de noodzakelijkheid van een christelijke school overtuigd waren.” See: *De Torenwachter* VII.5 (March-April 1934), 1-2, there 2. The school board members were all members of the local «gereformeerde kerk». See: De Raaf, *Een eeuw SILO*, 117. In Antwerp, the local association for founding a Protestant school consisted almost exclusively of «gereformeerden». See: *G.K.B.* VII.159 (22<sup>nd</sup> May 1910), 4 and *Ibid.* VII.160 (5<sup>th</sup> June 1910), 2-3, there 3. In Mechlin, no steps to build a Protestant school were taken *until* a local «gereformeerde kerk» came into being. See: *De Torenwachter* VI.1 (July 1932), 2. In Ghent, the contribution of the «gereformeerden» to the local Protestant school association was decisive. In Denderleeuw and Boechout, the «gereformeerden» were the only Protestants in the village, so it is evident that they were the ones who strived for the establishing of a Christian school.

<sup>186</sup> For Brussels, see: *De Torenwachter* VII.6 (May-June 1934), 1-2, there 1; for Denderleeuw, see: De Raaf, *Een open poort*, 78; for Mechlin, see: *Van G.K.B. naar V.P.K.B.*, 15 and *De Torenwachter* IX.6 (July-August 1936), 1. [Erroneously, this edition was distributed as the fifth issue of the ninth volume.]

<sup>187</sup> Sluys, *Het wonder van Boechout*, 123.

late 1920s!).<sup>188</sup> Even more indicative: in 1986, the only VPCO member schools (or, as was the case with the «Prinses-Julianaschool», *former* Protestant school) that still existed, were those in the seven municipalities mentioned above (i.e. the ones that had been established by, or with the aid of, the «gereformeerden»).<sup>189</sup> And when Dutch Neo-Calvinist immigrants in the French town of Sens/Paron called Rev. Winter of the «gereformeerde kerk» of Antwerp in 1946, a local Protestant school (the only one in France!<sup>190</sup>) was built almost immediately after his arrival.<sup>191</sup> These facts all confirm that the «gereformeerden» in Belgium have been, just as their fellow churchmen in the Netherlands, *the advocates of Christian-based education*.

A thorough analysis of the articles published in the *interdenominational* journals «*De Torenwachter*» and «*De Kruisbanier*», gives further proof of the Neo-Calvinist dominance in the endeavour to found Protestant schools on Belgian soil. The bulk of the editorials, reports and reviews dealing with the issue of the ‘school struggle’ were written by the parsons of the GKB – Rev. Ganzevoort, Rev. Winter and Rev. Hegger in particular – or Reformed laymen like the Ghent evangelist Jonkers and the Boechout businessman Sluys. Furthermore, the list of received donations and collections, which was printed on the rear of every «*De Torenwachter*» edition, shows that Dutch «gereformeerde kerken» were the most generous contributors. Individual supporters – most of them were Dutchmen – were simply referred to by their initials, but it is, based on the aforesaid, beyond all doubt that the majority of them were «gereformeerd». The VPCO and its schools in Brussels, Antwerp, Mechlin, Ghent, Denderleeuw, Boechout and Genk (even though this last town did not have a «gereformeerde kerk») were financially and materially supported by the GKN’s «deputaatschap voor de Evangelisatie in België»<sup>192</sup> – as far as could be traced, no other denomination in Holland or Belgium has financed the Protestants schools on a similar structural and regular base.<sup>193</sup> The coverage of VPCO-related news in the Dutch daily «*De Standaard*» (the newspaper founded by Abraham Kuyper), its successor «*Trouw*» or the weekly «*Centraal Weekblad ten dienste van de Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland*» also indicates how much the «gereformeerden» in the Netherlands were con-

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<sup>188</sup> *De Kruisbanier* XXV.20 (6<sup>th</sup> September 1969), 2. C. Zwaan and Rev. B.W. Ganzevoort had been involved with the VPCO since the late 1920s and were still active in the organisation in the late 1960s!

<sup>189</sup> Zwaan, ‘Christelijk onderwijs sloeg in België niet aan’, 17.

<sup>190</sup> *De Stem XCIV*.4 (21<sup>st</sup> February 1965), 1.

<sup>191</sup> *De Kruisbanier* XXI.1 (8<sup>th</sup> January 1965), 3.

<sup>192</sup> De Raaf, *Een open poort*, 76.

<sup>193</sup> This does not mean that other (Dutch) denominations did not give any support to the Protestant schools in Belgium at all. In 1947, for example, the «Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk», the «Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken» and the «Evangelisch-Lutherse Kerk in het Koninkrijk der Nederlanden» recommended, together with the «Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland», their local consistories to make a collection in favour of the aforementioned schools. See: De Raaf, *Een eeuw SILO*, 110.

cerned with the Protestant schools in their southern neighbouring country.<sup>194</sup> Moreover, in Wallonia, the French-speaking part of Belgium where the Dutch influence was only minor and where the Neo-Calvinists did not have a single church, Christian-based schools did not exist at all.<sup>195</sup> Though the «gereformeerden» were one of the smallest church communities in Flanders, it is thus as plain as day that their contribution to the building up of Protestant schools was disproportionately large.

And even if this had not been the case, the *sceptics* of Christian-based education could not help feeling that the campaign to found Protestant schools in (Flemish) Belgium was indeed primarily a Reformed affair. Some even called it “‘n liefhebberijtje van de Gereformeerde Kerk”,<sup>196</sup> a Neo-Calvinist ‘hobby’, inspired by Kuyperian zealotry and self-assertion. Being entangled in a dispute with Rev. Hegger, who was one of the biggest defenders of Protestant schools, one opponent snapped at the «gereformeerde» minister that he was ‘trapped’ in the mindset of Abraham Kuyper. Protestants in Belgium, he emphasised, were confronted with a situation very different from that in Holland and did not need schools of their own: “dominee, a.u.b., werp nu niet onmiddellijk de overgrote meerderheid van het Belgische Protestantisme op de hoop der ‘ongehoorzame broeders’ (...). In elk geval schijnt het geringe aantal christelijk[e] scholen er op te wijzen dat de overgrote meerderheid van het Belgisch Protestantisme niet overtuigd is van die ‘absolute noodzaak’. Trouwens, enkele van die scholen zijn zuiver Nederlandse kolonie-scholen.” He also stressed the fact that Protestants in Wallonia would not even *consider* building confessional schools and “wij, Vlamingen, zouden [ook] nooit aan ons zelf er aan gedacht hebben.”<sup>197</sup> A kindred spirit of Hegger (a Fleming and *not* a member of the GKB) said in reply that the efforts of the VPCO had nothing to do with Kuyperian thinking: “[h]et is niet omdat Kuyper zei: Christus koning op alle gebied van het leven, dat de school met de Bijbel er moet zijn. Maar die school moet er zijn omdat God [het] zegt.”<sup>198</sup>

In spite of these words, the adversaries could not be persuaded. Although the VPCO was not surprised by the opposition to its cause on the part of ‘liberal-minded Protestants’ – in the eyes of its supporters, the repugnance was concentrated especially in the «Bond van Kerken» (later the «Pro-

<sup>194</sup> Newspapers that were not linked to the GKN, for example the «Nederlands-hervormde» daily «*De Nederlander*», paid only little attention to the opening of new Protestant schools in Belgium, if they paid attention to it at all. The negative reaction of «*De Nederlander*» to the founding of a «gereformeerde» school in Brussels (the precursor of the «Prinses-Julianaschool») is illustrative in this respect. See: *De Torenwachter* VII.6 (May-June 1934), 1-2, there 1 and De Raaf, *Guido de Brès-kerk van Brussel*, 175. «*De Nederlander*» regarded the school to be a Neo-Calvinist ‘hobby’ and got entangled in a fierce polemic with the «*Gereformeerde Kerkbode voor België*». See: *G.K.B.* VIII.202 (14<sup>th</sup> January 1912), 1-3; VIII.204 (11<sup>th</sup> February 1912), 1-2; VIII.206-207 (10<sup>th</sup> March 1912), 5-9 (this double issue was dedicated, to a great extent, to the school quarrels).

<sup>195</sup> *De Kruisbanier* XI.44 (5<sup>th</sup> November 1955), 2-3 and *N.O.P.* L.4 (April 1970), 3.

<sup>196</sup> *De Torenwachter* VII.6 (May-June 1934), 1-2, there 1.

<sup>197</sup> *De Kruisbanier* XI.39 (1<sup>st</sup> October 1955), 2.

<sup>198</sup> *Ibid.* XI.44 (5<sup>th</sup> November 1955), 2-3, there 3.

testants(-Evangelisch)e Kerk van België»)<sup>199</sup> –, the school association did not think there would be scepticism in orthodox Protestant circles as well. The advocates of Christian-based education could therefore not believe their ears when «*Onze Hoop*», the magazine of the Baptist-oriented «Belgische Evangelische Zending» (BEZ, a denomination which would be later described as ‘fundamentalist’<sup>200</sup>), published a scathing judgement in the early 1930s. According to the BEZ journal, ‘a spirit of apostasy, biblical criticism, worldliness and political objectives’ underlay the initiative to build Protestant schools – an initiative that would only produce a ‘fake and lackadaisical Christianity’. Only *churches* could bring people to faith in Christ; to think profane institutions like schools could also serve evangelistic purposes, was nothing less than blasphemy. What is more, schools, whether public or confessional, should be avoided completely, «*Onze Hoop*» incited; parents could only be certain that their children would not be exposed to undesirable influences from the outside (non-Christian) world, if they educated their youngsters themselves.<sup>201</sup> Rev. Ganzevoort and Rev. Lauwers were the first to express their astonishment at these ‘discourteous’ and ‘non-brotherly’ statements. The BEZ, with its practice of adult baptism, convulsively clung to the ‘unscriptural’ tendency to withdraw itself completely from the world and passively wait for the second coming of Christ. Whereas most denominations, including the «Gereformeerde Kerken», interpreted the ‘millennium’ (as foretold in the Book of Revelations) symbolically as the period between Christ’s ascension and His second advent (atheological opinion called ‘amillennialism’), the BEZ considered it to be a *real* thousand-year period, preceding the Day of Judgement (‘chiliasm’). Because, Lauwers explained in «*De Torenwachter*», the BEZ believed the millennium would come soon, it did not share the sense of necessity the «gereformeerden» had to strive for the establishing of Protestant schools:

“De Belgische Evangelische Zending huldigt de leer van het ‘duizendjarig rijk’ dat – naar hun overtuiging – binnen kort zal geopenbaard worden en een aanvang zal nemen. U en ik, met vele andere geloovige Christenen, verwachten ook de wederkomst van onzen Heiland en Heere. Wij ook, wij letten op de teekenen der tijden (...), alhoewel wij, naar onze diepe overtuiging, in de Schriften niet kunnen vinden wat anderen er meenen te mogen uithalen. Nu vrees ik (...) dat de oppositie, die van rechtgeloovige zijde, als die van ‘Onze Hoop’, aan hun diepe overtuiging van den aan de deur staande Heiland te wijten is.”<sup>202</sup>

Christians, he concluded, should not speculate on Christ’s second coming and had to put themselves in the service of the coming Kingdom – to which the founding of Christian-based schools, obviously,

<sup>199</sup> As late as 1978, on the eve of the founding of the VPKB, a minority of the «gereformeerde kerk» in Mechlin had serious doubts about the intended church unification, because of the local PKB’s ‘negative’ attitude towards the local Protestant school. See: *Stemmotivering gereformeerde kerk van Mechelen*, dated 3<sup>rd</sup> June 1978 [archive of the G.K. in Boechout].

<sup>200</sup> N.O.P. XLIX.1 (January 1969), 2-3, there 2.

<sup>201</sup> *De Torenwachter* IV.8 (January 1931), 2.

<sup>202</sup> *Ibid.* IV.9 (February 1931), 2.

contributed. Next to «*De Torenwachter*», the «*Maandblad ten dienste van de Gereformeerde Kerken in België*», which appeared between 1930 and 1939, criticised «*Onze Hoop*» too. It was no coincidence that, of all Belgian Protestants, the «gereformeerden» were the ones to act in response: when someone questioned the essentiality of the Protestant schools, they put pen to paper immediately. In consequence, they were involved in *every* polemic with regard to the education issue – irrespective of the year or the magazine in which these took place. Although, as this chapter has tried to demonstrate, no other Protestant group in Belgium defended the Christian-based schools with an enthusiasm and unanimity similar to the «gereformeerden», of course not *all* advocates of these schools were members of the GKB – there were also individuals who supported the VPCO in the «*Bond van Kerken*», the BCZK, the «*Belgische Methodistenkerk*», de «*Vergadering van Gelovigen*» and (later) even in the BEZ.<sup>203</sup> After all, notwithstanding the Neo-Calvinist preponderance, the VPCO still was an *inter-denominational* organisation.<sup>204</sup>

The history of the «*Vereeniging voor Vlaamsch Protestantsch-Christelijk Onderwijs*» not only brings to the fore the major role the small Reformed community has played in defending the VPCO's cause, but also that the «gereformeerden» had a rather difficult relationship with the school union in the first years of its existence – precisely *because of* its interdenominational character. Since the curriculum the VPCO member schools offered had to be acceptable to *all* church groups involved, it was soon criticised by the «gereformeerden» as being not orthodox enough. Even though fellow advocates of Christian education urged them not to separate themselves from the *confessional* schools – “het [is] een onverkwiklijk gedoe den kerkelijken strijd op de school over te brengen”<sup>205</sup>, Rev. Eykman of the BCZK congregation in Antwerp declared – and they themselves said that *denominational* schools were not their ideal<sup>206</sup>, Neo-Calvinists have strived for schools that were exclusively related to the GKB on several places for shorter or longer time. Only when it became clear that such schools had no chance to survive and brought the inter-Protestant schools into trouble as well, the «gereformeerden» were content with the latter.

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<sup>203</sup> The ‘school with the Bible’ in Genk (founded in 1937) is affiliated to the local parish of the BEZ. A female member of the «gereformeerde kerk» in Antwerp was the school's first principal. See: *Mededelingenblad van de gereformeerde kerk te Antwerpen* 313 (23<sup>rd</sup> November 1951), 1.

<sup>204</sup> In the late 1980s/early 1990s, the VPCO apparently did not show much activity. The school in Denderleeuw even had to close in 1988, and the one in Boechout at the end of the 1990s. Yet, Evangelical-oriented Protestants (who were members of churches other than the VPKB) opened new confessional schools in Bilzen, Lommel and Kortrijk at the same time. Together with the older schools in Mechlin, Ghent and Genk (which previously had been members of the VPCO), these founded a new school union, called «‘Raad van Inrichtende Machten van het Protestants-Christelijk Onderwijs’» (IPCO), and merged into the «*Scholengemeenschap ‘Scholen met de Bijbel’*». The IPCO now has ten member schools: next to those in the six aforementioned cities, there are also ‘schools with the Bible’ in Aarschot, Brussels (French-speaking), Charleroi (French-speaking) and one school for special education with divisions in Kortrijk and Genk. The «*Prinses-Julianaschool*» in Brussels and the «*Burgemeester-Marnixschool*» in Antwerp (former members of the VPCO) are no part of the IPCO.

<sup>205</sup> *De Torenwachter* IV.4 (September 1930), 3.

<sup>206</sup> G.K.B. VII.159 (22<sup>nd</sup> May 1910), 4 and VII.160 (5<sup>th</sup> June 1910), 2-3, there 3.

One of the towns where members of the local GKB initially tried to found a «*gereformeerde*», church-related school, was Brussels. There, as has been said earlier, a school that was linked to the «Nederlandse evangelische hervormde kerk» existed in the second half of the nineteenth century. According to Rev. A.G.B. ten Kate, parson of the NEHK at the «Sint-Katelijneplaats» from 1927 until his death in 1947<sup>207</sup>, the Kuypers were the ones responsible for the ultimate closure of this school; in the same consistory meeting in which the NEHK was given notice of the formation of a local «*gereformeerde kerk*», the school was being closed permanently. “Kerkelijke oneenigheid is de dood dier school geweest en niets anders”<sup>208</sup>, Rev. Ten Kate complained in retrospective. Although the other then-existing Protestant school in Brussels (the SILO school) received support from the «*ge-reformeerden*» (at least they claimed so<sup>209</sup>), they were not going to send their own children to this school, probably because it was affiliated to the SILO Gospel Mission – which was, in turn, linked to the «Bond van Kerken», just as the NEHK they had left! – and followed a Belgian instead of a Dutch curriculum. One must keep in mind that the «*gereformeerde kerk*» was a distinct Dutch immigrant church in those days and that its members wanted to give their children an education consistent with the Dutch identity of their (church) community. To succeed in building a school of their own, the «*ge-reformeerden*» established the «‘Vereeniging tot stichting en instandhouding eener Christelijke School te Brussel’», which was founded on the Belgic Confession, in 1899<sup>210</sup> and raised enough money to start a school two years later. Yet, *opening* a school was one thing, *keeping it viable* was quite another; the school’s board of directors repeatedly expressed its concern about finances and the (low) number of students. By broadening its base – new members of the aforementioned local school association<sup>211</sup> no longer had to endorse the Belgic Confession – and acquiring pecuniary aid from the Dutch(!) ministry of Foreign Affairs (since 1922 from the Dutch department of Education), the school (named after princess Juliana<sup>212</sup>) managed, however, to secure its future.<sup>213</sup>

In Antwerp, Neo-Calvinists were originally neither pleased with a broad-based Protestant school. After a failed venture to set up a «*gereformeerde*» education institution in 1901 and subsequent years, they made a new attempt in 1928, two years after the opening of the interchurch «Burgemeester-Marnixschool» (initiated by the local «protestantse kerk»<sup>214</sup> at the «Lange Winkelstraat»).

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<sup>207</sup> For a detailed account of Rev. Ten Kate’s period as minister of the NEHK in Brussels, see: Liagre, *Anders geloven*, 225-246.

<sup>208</sup> *De Torenwachter* VIII.1 (July-August 1934), 3.

<sup>209</sup> *Ibid.* VII.6 (May-June 1934), 1-2, there 2.

<sup>210</sup> *Ibid.* VII.5 (March-April 1934), 1-2, there 2.

<sup>211</sup> It was renamed «‘Nederlandsche Christelijke School voor Lager en Meer-Uitgebred-Lager Onderwijs te Brussel’» in 1908.

<sup>212</sup> In 1976, De Raaf put the history of the school in writing, titled *75 jaar Nederlands onderwijs in Brussel* (published in-house).

<sup>213</sup> For a detailed history of the «Prinses-Julianaschool», see: De Raaf, *Guido de Brès-kerk van Brussel*, 174-186.

<sup>214</sup> This church was part of the «Bond van Kerken».

The earlier quoted remark of Rev. Eykman to keep ecclesiastical conflicts out of the classroom must be read against this background: in 1930, when his assertion was published in «*De Torenwachter*», reconciliation between the «gereformeerde» and the ‘Marnix’ group still seemed far off. The former soon found out, nevertheless, that even a city as large as Antwerp was not big enough to accommodate two Protestant schools. Now the endeavour to build a school of their own had to be put aside, the «gereformeerden» admitted that the previously rejected «Burgemeester-Marnixschool» was still preferable to the ‘neutral’ state education – not the mention the abundantly present Catholic-based schools. In consequence, the VPCO journal could announce its readers that the Reformed had decided to join the other Protestants and support the «Marnixschool» in September 1933.<sup>215</sup> Being ‘disappointed’ about the past quarrels, Rev. Winter, minister of the «gereformeerde kerk», said time had come to look forward and cooperate with each other without bearing malice.<sup>216</sup> Several months later, at the annual VPCO assembly, Rev. P. de Haan, servant of the Gospel in Antwerp’s «protestantse kerk», expressed himself in a similar fashion; in the words of «*De Torenwachter*», he gave “uiting aan zijn groote voldoening, dat de vereischte samenwerking met de gereformeerden was bereikt en hij twijfelde er niet aan, of deze zou in de toekomst ongeschonden blijven.”<sup>217</sup> Indeed, he was right: the school’s board of directors welcomed a representative of the «gereformeerden» in their midst and appreciated the input and commitment of the Neo-Calvinist community. Just as the «Juliana-school» in Brussels, the «Marnixschool» was subsidised by the Dutch ministry of Education until the end of the 1990s.<sup>218</sup>

The «gereformeerden» in Ghent participated, contrary to their fellow churchmen in Brussels and Antwerp, from the very beginning in the local inter-Protestant school association (founded in 1922, four years before the constituting of the «gereformeerde kerk»), but they chose to go their own way in 1936, two years after the interdenominational association had opened the «Gaspard de Colignyschool»<sup>219</sup>, all the same. Conducted by Rev. Ganzevoort, they established a new, church-related organisation whose aim was to start a ‘school with the Bible (based) on (Neo-)Calvinist principles’.<sup>220</sup> The proceedings of the general synod of the «Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland», held in Amsterdam in 1936, reveal that the «gereformeerden» saw no other alternative but to dissociate themselves from the «Colignyschool», because they were, for some reason, no longer represented in this school’s governing board: “[d]oor een eigenaardige wijziging in de leiding der christelijke

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<sup>215</sup> *De Torenwachter* VII.2 (September 1933), 2.

<sup>216</sup> Rev. H.J. Winter in the «*Maandblad ten dienste van de Gereformeerde Kerken in België*» (August 1933 edition), quoted in: De Raaf, *Een open poort*, 77.

<sup>217</sup> *De Torenwachter* VII.6 (May-June 1934), 2.

<sup>218</sup> *Trouw*, 1<sup>st</sup> December 1994 and 27<sup>th</sup> January 1995.

<sup>219</sup> In 2009, a memorial volume dedicated to the history of the «Gaspard de Colignyschool» (edited by A. Rambaut and J. Temmerman), was published.

<sup>220</sup> Zwaan, ‘Christelijk onderwijs sloeg in België niet aan’, 18.

school, die ongedacht geheel onder vlaamschen invloed kwam, ontstond de noodzaak een eigen school op te richten.”<sup>221</sup> The indignation about the *Flemish* monopoly in the board of directors is meaningful: the «gereformeerden» were much more oriented to Holland than other Protestant groups in Flanders. From January 1936 onwards, «gereformeerde» children therefore received separate lessons, which were probably held in rooms of the «gereformeerde» church building.<sup>222</sup> Whereas «*De Torenwachter*» had informed its subscribers about the disagreements concerning the Christian-based education in Antwerp some years earlier, it said, quite amazingly, absolutely nothing about the school controversy in Ghent – implicitly nor explicitly. Perhaps the magazine’s editors (of whom some were members of the GKB) were a bit embarrassed with the issue (the *second* school-related discord in just a few years time) and did not want to add oil to the flames. The «deputaatschap voorde Evangelisatie in België» was also troubled by the subject; the GKN subdivision more or less forced the Ghent «gereformeerden» to rejoin the «Gaspard de Colignyschool», which they did in the spring of 1943.<sup>223</sup>

Meanwhile, in May 1936, «gereformeerden» had opened a school in Denderleeuw as well. There, on the East Flemish countryside, they were an isolated ‘isle’ in the midst of an almost homogeneous Catholic area<sup>224</sup> – which had an impact on the education the state offered – and strongly felt the need for a Protestant school. Although the number of potential pupils was small – the school never had more than seventeen students during the first years of its existence<sup>225</sup> –, they accomplished, with the aid of the «deputaten» and the sister church in Brussels, to keep an own school (wearing the name of Guido de Brès) open until the middle of the Second World War.<sup>226</sup> In September 1954, not least thanks to the efforts of the new parson (Rev. Hegger)<sup>227</sup> and the generosity of «gereformeerden» in the Netherlands, the school reopened, and, after being accommodated in a newly constructed building in 1955, even obtained a state grant. Due to subsidy reductions, it had to close in 1988.<sup>228</sup> Concurrently with Rev. Hegger’s venture to reinstitute a Christian school in Denderleeuw, the evangelistic businessman K. Sluys was striving for Protestant education in Boechout. Just as in the first-mentioned town, the opposition on the part of the Roman Catholics was fierce in the beginning; the «ge-

<sup>221</sup> *Acta G.S. GKN* (Amsterdam 1936), addendum XXIIa.

<sup>222</sup> Neither De Raaf (*Een open poort*, 79) nor Zwaan (*op. cit.*) says where the «gereformeerde» school in Ghent was located.

<sup>223</sup> In reviews of the history of the «Gaspard de Colignyschool» in the January 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1960 and July 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1962 editions of *De Kruisbanier*, not a single word is dedicated to the (temporary) separation of the «gereformeerden».

<sup>224</sup> Next to the «gereformeerde kerk», there was a small Baptist community in Denderleeuw, a SILO congregation in Aalst, a «vergadering van gelovigen» in Ninove and a SILO parish in Geraardsbergen. See: *De Kruisbanier* XVI.17 (23<sup>rd</sup> April 1960), 3.

<sup>225</sup> De Braekeler and Geerds, *Vijftigjarig bestaan van de Evangelische Kerk te Denderleeuw*, 28.

<sup>226</sup> De Raaf, *Een open poort*, 78.

<sup>227</sup> As early as October 18<sup>th</sup>, 1952, «*De Kruisbanier*» told that Rev. Hegger had launched a campaign to reinstitute the «Guido de Brès school». He also organised ‘begging tours’ or ‘fundraisers’ («bedeltochten») through Holland.

<sup>228</sup> De Raaf, *Een open poort*, 78.

reformeerden», presenting themselves as the «Vereniging ‘Een school met de Bijbel’», even had to make use of a figure head – a liberal notary in Antwerp was willing to play that role<sup>229</sup> – to purchase a parcel on which a school could be build. Prior to the completion of the school house (in September 1955), lessons (of which the first started on April 26<sup>th</sup>, 1954) were held in an old castle.<sup>230</sup> Because of the local «gereformeerde» community’s spectacular growth, known as the ‘marvel of Boechout’, the «school met de Bijbel» flourished during the 1950s and 1960s, but it could no longer be maintained in the late 1990s, nonetheless.

While the Neo-Calvinists in Brussels, Antwerp and Ghent were not satisfied with broad-based Protestant education at first, and their coreligionists in Denderleeuw and Boechout had little to do with people outside their own community (as a result of which their schools were automatically church-related), the «gereformeerden» in Mechlin worked in close harmony with members of other Protestant denominations. In the city of the Belgian archbishop, members of the «protestantse» (or «evangelischehervormde»), «methodistische» and «gereformeerde» churches and the «vergadering van gelovigen»<sup>231</sup> came together to discuss the possibility of establishing a Christian school in 1931 and realised their plan in November 1932.<sup>232</sup> C. Zwaan, one of the founders of Mechlin’s «gereformeerde kerk», was elected as the chairman of the local school association and would occupy an influential position in the (national) VPCO for nearly forty years.<sup>233</sup> The school, named after the legendary Lutheran king Gustavus Adolphus («Gustaaf Adolf») of Sweden, moved from the «gereformeerde kerk» into a new habitation in 1937.<sup>234</sup>

As said earlier, the «deputaatschap voor de Evangelisatie in België» of the GKN gave full support to the VPCO in general and the schools that were located in towns with a «gereformeerde kerk» in particular. Although it championed a predominant influence of the «gereformeerden» in the local school associations and shared some of the worries about the content of the education given in *inter-denominational* schools<sup>235</sup> – after all, since not all church groups involved could agree with the (Reformed) Three Forms of Unity, the confessional base of the schools had to be broader –, the «deputaatschap» was not very pleased with the stubbornness of the «gereformeerden» in Antwerp and Ghent. The Neo-Calvinist communities in Belgium were simply too small to preserve schools of their

<sup>229</sup> Sluys, *Het wonder van Boechout*, 118.

<sup>230</sup> De Raaf, *Een open poort*, 80.

<sup>231</sup> De Raaf (*ibid.*, 79) does not mention the latter, but «De Kruisbanier» (X.41 (11<sup>th</sup> September 1954), 3 and XVI.2 (9<sup>th</sup> January 1960), 2-3) tells they were involved in the school association as well.

<sup>232</sup> The school took over the furniture of a disbanded Methodist school in Brussels. See: *De Kruisbanier* XVI.2 (9<sup>th</sup> January 1960), 2-3, there 2. Unfortunately, no further information on this school could be found.

<sup>233</sup> De Raaf, *Een open poort*, 79.

<sup>234</sup> The «Gustaaf Adolfschool» is currently named «De WEGwijzer».

<sup>235</sup> It is, in this respect, significant to note that the «deputaatschap» gave financial aid to the exclusive-«gereformeerde» school, after the «gereformeerden» had separated themselves (temporarily) from the «Gaspard de Colignyschool» in Ghent in 1936! See: *Acta G.S. GKN* (Amsterdam 1936), addendum XXIIa.

own; “[s]amenwerking op schoolgebied in België,” the proceedings of the general GKN synod of 1939 reported, “wordt door deputaten – voor zover dit mogelijk is – wenselijker geacht dan té ver doorgeweerd isolement.”<sup>236</sup> It was hard enough to guarantee the viability of the inter-Protestant schools, so the «gereformeerden», the «deputaten» implied, could not do without the help of (non-Reformed) persons of the same mind. A. de Raaf has even called the VPCO member schools a constant source of anxiety («‘zorgenkind’»)<sup>237</sup>: their student numbers were relatively low and they were highly dependent on external aid (from charitable Protestant Belgians and Dutchmen). Yet, the prediction of some of the VPCO’s critics that the Protestants-based schools would not be attractive to parents and children with another life stance, proved to be incorrect: although, according to R. Zwaan, Christian education has not caught on well in Belgium – «‘Christelijk onderwijs sloeg in België niet aan’» was the title of his contribution to the memorial volume of the one hundred fifty-year history of the GKN –, not all the school’s pupils were Protestants; on the contrary, almost half of their students came from outside the Protestant community.<sup>238</sup> The schools were appreciated by the local authorities<sup>239</sup> and were renowned for their consistent use of the Dutch standard language («Algemeen Beschaafd Nederlands»)<sup>240</sup> instead of the local dialect. Of course, the VPCO interpreted this as a token of gratitude, but there was a drawback to it as well: the more backing and appreciation from the outside, the more aggravating and painful it was for the advocates of Christian-based education that not all *their* coreligionist saw the surplus value of Protestant schools.

### 3. The antithesis in Belgian society

Because the support to their cause was smaller than they had hoped for, the VPCO’s proponents not only used the term ‘school struggle’ as a rhetoric trick, as a linguistic cleverness to create a sense of urgency or to point out a parallel between the old strife of Protestants in Holland for total state recognition of their confessional schools and the situation in Belgium<sup>241</sup>; they perceived it to be a genuine reality also. This was even more so, since Belgian *Catholics* felt being entangled in a ‘school struggle’ as well. Reaching a climax in the late 1950s, disagreements between clerical (Catholic) and non-/

<sup>236</sup> *Acta G.S. GKN* (Sneek 1938/1939), addendum XXXI.

<sup>237</sup> De Raaf, *Een open poort*, 80.

<sup>238</sup> Zwaan, ‘Christelijk onderwijs sloeg in België niet aan’, 17.

<sup>239</sup> In Ghent, the «Gaspard de Colignyschool» had a good reputation: the municipal executive and the provincial governor were present at the twenty-fifth anniversary of the school, and some non-Protestant students were children of the local university’s professors! See: *De Kruisbanier* XVIII.22 (2<sup>nd</sup> June 1962), 2-3, there 2. In Mechlin, the mayor gave his personal support to the opening of a Protestant kindergarten (which was attached to the school). See: *De Kruisbanier* XVI.2 (9<sup>th</sup> January 1960), 2-3, there 3.

<sup>240</sup> In an advertisement, the «Burgemeester-Marnixschool» said that ‘civilised’ Dutch was not only spoken in the classroom, but also during playtime! See: *De Kruisbanier* XVI.31 (30<sup>th</sup> July 1960), 1.

<sup>241</sup> For a detailed account of the Dutch «schoolstrijd» (which was permanently settled in 1917), from «gereformeerd» perspective, see, for example: P.A. Diepenhorst, *Onze strijd in de Staten-Generaal* I. *De schoolstrijd* (Amsterdam 1927) and D. Langedijk, *De schoolstrijd* (The Hague 1935).

anti-clerical (liberal and socialist) political parties over the unequal financing of public (state) schools and free (confessional- or philosophical-based) schools had dragged on during the entire first half of the twentieth century. The former were still being favoured over the latter and since the Protestant (VPCO member) schools were, just as those with a Roman Catholic identity, part of the ‘free’ education network, the financial inequality had consequences for them too. At least, P. Neven, who had been the headmaster of the «Prinses-Julianaschool» in Brussels at an earlier date<sup>242</sup>, *alleged* that this was the case in the Dutch edition of «*De Open Poort*» in April 1955. Notwithstanding the possibility the Belgian government offered to open Protestant schools, the legislation was not aimed at guaranteeing their existence, Neven told its Dutch reading public:

“De schoolstrijd, zoals deze de laatste decenniën wordt gevoerd, loopt *uitsluitend* over de subsidiëring der vrije school. Het is dus nimmer een *beginselquaestie*, doch puur een *geldquaestie*. (...) Nu geef ik dadelijk toe, dat een *geldquaestie* tevens een *rechtsquaestie* kan zijn. De lezers van ‘*De Open Poort*’ begrijpen natuurlijk onmiddellijk, dat, wanneer er voor de Protestantse scholen in Mechelen, Denderleeuw en Boechout in het buitenland moet worden gebedeld, er in de Belgische wetgeving iets niet in de haak is.”<sup>243</sup>

It was rather ‘unfair’ that state aid could only be obtained if a certain number of students was reached and a school could prove that this number would be stable or increasing over the medium term. The legislative body should, instead, do whatever it took to enable that every religious minority (even Protestants) could find a school to its liking in its vicinity. «*De Torenwachter*» could therefore understand the Roman Catholic agitation against (the favouring of) public education<sup>244</sup> and said that Protestants should not deny their confessional antagonists the right to establish schools of their own: “*wij* wenschen Rome niet te bestrijden door aan Rome het recht te ontzeggen eigen scholen te hebben.”<sup>245</sup> Instead of *facilitating* the founding of free (Protestant) schools, «*De Kruisbanier*» complained in 1962, the state did quite the opposite – even after clericals and anti-clericals had reached an agreement on school financing (the so-called «‘schoolpact’») in 1958.<sup>246</sup> As a result of the «schoolpact», public schools were now *obliged* to offer lessons in a selected amount of life stances and religions – Roman Catholicism, Protestantism, Judaism or non-confessional moral philosophy (since 1958),

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<sup>242</sup> De Raaf, *Guido de Brès-kerk van Brussel*, 186.

<sup>243</sup> N.O.P. XXXV.4 (April 1955), 2-3, there 2.

<sup>244</sup> “Wanneer we dan zien, dat Rome zich inspant om zijn kinderen een kerkelijke opvoeding te geven, ten einde de jeugd voor de kerk te behouden, zal niemand onzer dit in Rome kunnen afkeuren,” Neven wrote in the April-May 1931 edition of «*De Torenwachter*» (page 2).

<sup>245</sup> *De Torenwachter* IV.7 (December 1930), 2.

<sup>246</sup> For a detailed account of the Belgian «schoolstrijd» and the pacification («schoolpact») that ended the quarrels in 1958, see: E. Witte, J. De Groof and J. Tyssens eds., *Het schoolpact van 1958. Ontstaan, grondlijnen en toepassing van een Belgisch compromis/Le pacte scolaire de 1958. Origines, principes et application d'un compromis belge* (Brussels 1999).

Islam (since 1978), (Eastern) Orthodox Christianity (since 1989) and Anglicanism (since 1991)<sup>247</sup> –, irrespective of the number of pupils that opted for one of these options. If, for example, the parents of just *one* pupil in a class of twenty-five wanted their child to be educated in Protestant ethics, the school involved still had to make sure that this one student could follow the religious course of his (parents') choice. According to a VPCO spokesman in «*De Kruisbanier*», Protestants who already saw no reason to support the confessional schools or who were indifferent towards these schools, would now turn their backs on the VPCO permanently – unjustly, of course, since the ‘atmosphere’ in public education institutions still was very different from the sheltered environment Christian-based schools provided<sup>248</sup>: “als onze eigen mensen nu gemakshalve ook maar de openbare scholen verkiezen: ‘want daar wordt toch ook bijbels onderwijs gegeven’, dan krijgt onze school daarin een nieuwe vijand.”<sup>249</sup> ‘A new enemy’; although the intentions of the «schoolpact» were good (which the VPCO representative acknowledged<sup>250</sup>), the government had now set itself up as a *direct* competitor to the Protestant school association. The VPCO should therefore not be satisfied with the situation the «schoolpact» had created and continue its struggle for the sake of the ‘eternal well-being of the child’.

With regard to the economic and material side of the matter, VPCO proponents and Catholics shared the same objective: both advocated the financial equalisation of public and free schools. Nevertheless, the former would not even consider to side with the latter; in fact, ‘Rome’ was seen as an equal threat to the Belgian education system as the state (schools), if not an even greater threat. One could question *why* the defenders of Protestant-based schools saw it that way, for (Reformed) Protestants in Holland had taken a very different position towards *their* Catholic countrymen in their mutual strife for total recognition of confessional schools. One reason has already been mentioned: the supporters of the VPCO were worried about the (presumed) Catholic influences on the public schools. Moreover, the situation in Belgium could not simply be compared with the internal power relations in the Netherlands. Whereas the «gereformeerden» were convinced that an imaginary dividing line (an ‘antithesis’) partitioned Dutch society in one block of adepts of secular or humanistic

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<sup>247</sup> R. Verstegen, ‘Godsdienst en levensbeschouwing in het onderwijs in België’, in: H. Warnink ed., *Godsdienst en levensbeschouwing in het onderwijs/Godsdienstonderrig op skool* (Leuven 2003), 11-32, there 14.

<sup>248</sup> The same spokesman (who apparently was a physician) added more persuasiveness to his argument, by stating that he was once told that a ‘feeble minded’ boy was named ‘Jesus-when-He-was-six-years-old’ in a public school: “Bij een bezoek bij een patiëntje, liet dit manneke mij vol trots een groepsfoto van zijn klas zien uit de openbare school in de buurt. Toen ik één der kinderen op de foto aanwees, omdat ik meende die te herkennen, zei de moeder: ‘O nee, dat is een jongetje dat een beetje onnozel is, de meester noemt hem: ‘Jezus, als-t-ie zes jaar was’. Begrijpt u het? Toen de gezegende Heiland onzer kinderen zes jaar was, was hij maar een onnozel manneke. (...) Dit is de sfeer van het ‘onderwijs zonder Bijbel’ (...). Tweemaal per week wordt op die school, dank zij het «schoolpact», protestants godsdienstonderwijs gegeven dat het volgende uur weer naar beneden wordt gehaald met [e]en schimpscheut op Jezus.” See: *De Kruisbanier* XVIII.22 (2<sup>nd</sup> June 1962), 1-2, there 2.

<sup>249</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>250</sup> After all, the «schoolpact» *did* give Protestants the chance to bring children from secular backgrounds into contact with the Gospel, though it would be misleading to think that non-Protestant children would opt for Protestant lessons in large numbers.

systems of thought, and another block of (orthodox) Christians (whether Catholic or Protestant) who rejected the autonomy of the human individual and confessed man's total dependence upon God – or, to put it more specifically, a non-confessional block («de linkerzijde», consisting of liberals (primarily liberal Protestants), socialists, communists and a handful of marginal groupings) and a confessional block («de rechterzijde», corresponding with the political factions of the Roman Catholics, the (mostly «gereformeerde») «Anti-Revolutionaire Partij» and the (mainly «Nederlands-hervormde») «Christelijk-Historische Unie»)<sup>251</sup> –, they believed *Belgian* society to be split up along the lines of clericals (Catholics) versus non-/anti-clericals (liberals, socialists and all others). In Reformed point of view, an antithesis existed in Belgium as well, but it was (slightly though significantly) different from the one north of the Moerdijk. There was, however, one meaningful similarity: the antithesis asserted its influence, both in the Netherlands and in Belgium, first and foremost in the ‘school struggle’: “[d]e tegenstelling loopt tussen ‘rechts’ – d.i. de R.K. partij – ‘links’ dat zijn de Liberalen en Socialisten (...). De ‘Antithese’ is hier in België bijzonder scherp, en doet zich niet alleen op politiek terrein, maar ook op het gebied van het onderwijs en van de wetenschap sterk gevoelen.”<sup>252</sup> Although ‘anti-clerical’ and ‘anti-religious’ were sometimes seen as two sides of the same coin (especially in socialist circles), the Belgian ‘left side’ was much more tolerant towards Protestants than the Catholic ‘right side’.<sup>253</sup> District councils with a Roman Catholic majority, the «gereformeerden» wrote in their journals, did everything they could to prevent Protestants from building churches and schools – according to K. Sluys, Protestants were thwarted by an ‘invisible enemy’: [d]ie gemeente-of rijksambtenaar waar ge mee te maken hebt, is vaak allerbeminnelijkest, en ge zoudt er niet de minste tegenkanting van duchten. Maar nauwelijks hebt ge uw rug gedraaid, of hij telefoneert naar mijnheer pastoor, of andere roomse mandaatgevers, en stelt hen op de hoogte van wat wij hebben gevraagd of zinnens zijn te doen. En handelt dan volgens de instructies die hij krijgt”<sup>254</sup> –, while city boards dominated by liberals and/or socialists were usually helpful and supportive. In the Netherlands, on the contrary, Neo-Calvinists saw left-wing politicians as their biggest competitors. Consequently, «*De Torenwachter*» told its readers, the (dissimilar) situations in Belgium and Holland should not be put on a part too quickly: “Hollandsche schooltoestanden en zelfs schoolstrijd op Vlaamsch gebied te wil-

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<sup>251</sup> Next to these three, there were several smaller Christian factions (which usually had one to three seats in parliament), like the «Staatkundig Gereformeerde Partij» (founded in 1918; here, «gereformeerd» does not relate to the «Gereformeerde Kerken», but to the ultra-orthodox «Gereformeerde Gemeenten»!), the «Hervormde (Gereformeerde) Staatspartij» (created in 1921; «hervormd-gereformeerde» refers to the «Gereformeerde Bond in de Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk»), the «Rooms-Katholieke Volkspartij» (established in 1922) and the «Gereformeerde Politiek Verbond» (founded in 1948; the party of the «vrijgemaakt-gereformeerden»). Christian-socialist parties as the «Christelijk-Sociale Partij» (later to be renamed «Christelijk-Democratische Unie») and the «Bond van Christen-Socialisten» belonged to the ‘left side’ («de linkerzijde») of parliament.

<sup>252</sup> N.O.P. XXXIV.5 (May 1954), 1-2, there 1.

<sup>253</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>254</sup> Sluys, *Het wonder van Boechout*, 164.

len overplanten, is zeer schadelijk en voor *ons* streven schadelijk.”<sup>255</sup> The message was evident: the «schoolstrijd» in Belgium was not and should not become a ‘copy’ or a ‘mimicry’ of the old Dutch ‘educational disputes’.

Although one representative of the VPCO admitted that the concept of a ‘school with the Bible’ was imported from Holland<sup>256</sup> – he apparently forgot that Protestant schools had existed in Belgium in the nineteenth century –, the advocates of Christian-based education had to fight their *own* battle – independent of their Roman Catholic countrymen (with whom they shared the ideal of financial equalisation) and their Dutch coreligionists (of whom many wished the VPCO well). For the «gereformeerden», it was hard enough already to keep the peace while working together with other Protestant groups – the history of the aforementioned schools in Brussels, Antwerp and Ghent has made this very clear –, so it would be out of the question that the proponents of free, non-public schools (Protestants and Catholics) would raise their voices against the state education in chorus (as those in the Netherlands had done prior to the settlement of the Dutch «schoolstrijd»). The VPCO’s grassroots support paled into insignificance compared to the following its sister organisations (the «Unie ‘Een School met den Bijbel’», the «Vereeniging voor Christelijk-Nationaal Schoolonderwijs»<sup>257</sup> and the «Vereeniging voor Gereformeerd Schoolonderwijs»<sup>258</sup>) had in Dutch Protestantism. Besides, the position of Roman Catholic education in society at large was much stronger in Belgium than in Holland. Even in the public schools, the Catholics’ influence was noticeable: particularly on the countryside, state schools were practically run by adherents of the Roman creed. They should therefore not complain about the way the Belgian school system functioned, P. Neven said in the Dutch edition of «*De Open Poort*» in April 1955; already, a *third* of the state’s entire educational budget was spent on Roman Catholic schools.<sup>259</sup> The ‘injustice’ about which the Catholics spoke in this respect, was thus not as lamentable as they declared; in Belgium, being a Catholic still was more advantageous than being a Protestant, Neven concluded.

Though the Catholics strived for ‘free’ (non-state) schools, it was certainly not *their* merit, the «gereformeerden» experienced, that (free) ‘schools with the Bible’ could exist on Belgian soil; the Catholics would even prefer to deny the Protestants the rights that they claimed for themselves.

<sup>255</sup> *De Torenwachter* IV.7 (December 1930), 2.

<sup>256</sup> *De Kruisbanier* XVIII.22 (2<sup>nd</sup> June 1962), 1-2, there 2.

<sup>257</sup> The «gereformeerde» school in Ghent, which existed between 1936 (after the «gereformeerden» had separated from the «Gaspard de Colignyschool») and 1943, was a member school of the «Vereeniging voor Christelijk-Nationaal Schoolonderwijs» (VCNS). The membership was mentioned on the school’s notepaper. See also: De Raaf, *Een open poort*, 78. Before the founding of the VPCO, the «Prinses-Julianaschool» in Brussels had been a member of the VCNS as well. See: De Raaf, *Guido de Brès-kerk van Brussel*, 181.

<sup>258</sup> It was renamed «‘Gereformeerd Schoolverband’» in 1906. See: Rosendaal, *Naar een school voor de gereformeerde gezindte*, 105.

<sup>259</sup> *N.O.P.* XXXV.4 (April 1955), 2-3, there 2.

By quoting a local parochial magazine, Rev. G.R. Visser, a «gereformeerde» minister in Amsterdam who was one of the editors of the Dutch version of «*De Open Poort*», gave clear evidence of this: according to the pastor-dean of Kontich, a village near Boechout, Protestant schools were even worse than the ‘religiously neutral’ education the government offered. He forbade his parishioners to send their children to the (then) new ‘school with the Bible’ in Boechout – more than likely under penalty of exclusion from the sacraments.<sup>260</sup> Since Catholics did everything they could to boycott the VPCO and its schools – in the words of Rev. Visser, the condemnation of the abovementioned Protestant school had even been dictated from the pulpit<sup>261</sup> –, it would have been obvious that the «gereformeerden» turned to the liberals to safeguard the rights of the ‘schools with the Bible’. Yet, even though councils dominated by liberals were more sympathetic to Protestants than those with a Catholic majority, the Reformed attitude towards the liberals was somewhat ambiguous. «*De Torenwachter*», for example, thanked them for their efforts to strip the public education of Catholic moral restraint – “[t]oen in de vorige eeuw de Roomsche kerk de school overheerschte, heeft het liberalisme met recht de school van deze tirannie bevrijd”<sup>262</sup> –, but reminded its readers that the ‘religiously neutral’ school was cherished by the liberals as their ‘brainchild’ («geesteskind»).<sup>263</sup> As a result, the anti-clericals, fierce opponents of non-public education, had to be kept at a distance: “[w]ij moeten den strijd in, wij moeten den kamp aanbinden met materialisme en liberalisme en humanisme – met ongeloof en halfheid en valsche neutraliteit.”<sup>264</sup> «*De Open Poort*» approached them with a similar reticence: on the one hand, Rev. C.B. Bavinck of the «gereformeerde kerk» in Brussels said in 1955, liberals admired the way Protestants gave expression to their faith, but on the other, Bavinck questioned whether this admiration was sincere or motivated by electoral considerations.<sup>265</sup> Moreover, Neven had written three months earlier, the Protestant schools that had existed in the nineteenth century, had been given the deathblow by liberals (the Frère-Orban administration in particular).<sup>266</sup> And were the Christian-based schools’ viability and right to exist, the supporters of the VPCO asked rhetorically, not primarily threatened because of the rejection they received from *liberal-minded* («vrijzinnige») Protestants?<sup>267</sup> All in all, it would be wrong to see the liberals as allies or even as friends.

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<sup>260</sup> N.O.P. XXXIV.10 (October 1954), 3.

<sup>261</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>262</sup> *De Torenwachter* IV.3 (August 1930), 2-3, there 2.

<sup>263</sup> *Ibid.* IX.4 (March-April 1936), 4.

<sup>264</sup> *Ibid.* IX.3 (January-February 1936), 1.

<sup>265</sup> N.O.P. XXXIV.5 (May 1954), 1-2, there 2.

<sup>266</sup> N.O.P. XXXIV.2 (February 1954), 2-3, there 3. The administration headed by H.J.W. Frère-Orban and P.E. Van Humbeeck, which was in office between 1878 and 1884 and consisted entirely of liberals, issued a law abolishing both state-aid to and (the obligatory) religious education in non-public schools. As a consequence of this law, a first ‘school struggle’ broke out in Belgium. See: G. Deneckere, 1900. *België op het breukvlak van twee eeuwen* (Tielt 2006), 45-64.

<sup>267</sup> *De Torenwachter* IV.9 (February 1931), 2.

#### 4. Politics

Despite the ‘threat’ liberals posed to the non-public ‘schools with the Bible’ in the opinion of the «gereforneerden», periodicals like «*De Open Poort*» and «*De Torenwachter*» wrote less frequent and less disapproving about liberalism than about socialism, communism and political Catholicism. Whereas, as the preceding paragraph has demonstrated, liberalism was not simply condemned, these three last-mentioned ideologies received nothing but denunciation. The reason for this seems to have been twofold. First, the Neo-Calvinists probably did not take liberalism’s political striking power and electoral appeal too seriously. Being clamped between a dominant Catholic party – the «Christelijke Volkspartij» (CVP), comparable to the Dutch «Katholieke Volkspartij» – in Flanders and a socialist preponderance in Wallonia, liberalism always came third. In 1947, a year after the first post-War general elections in Belgium, Rev. Ganzevoort even wrote in the Belgian edition of «*De Open Poort*» that the Liberal Party had lost its strength as well as its standing and had become a ‘plaything’ («speelbal») in the hands of the socialists and communists.<sup>268</sup> The «gereforneerde» minister referred to the election results of 1946, when only 8.9 percent of the franchised population – an all-time low – had voted liberal and the communists had reached their electoral peak, receiving 12.7 percent of the votes.<sup>269</sup> Second, although liberalism was in favour of public education and recruited its adherents mostly from the «vrijzinnigheid»<sup>270</sup>, it still was preferable to socialism and political Catholicism. In comparison to ‘Rome’ and the Reds, who were, according to the «gereforneerden», aiming to establish a form of ‘corporatist state socialism’, a society in which civil liberties would be reduced to a minimum and civilians would be treated as incompetent infants<sup>271</sup>, liberalism was seen as a better protection of the rights of religious minorities, or, to put it less sympathetically, as less malevolent. Socialism was based on a militantly anti-religious world view and Catholic politicians hindered the Protestants where they could: they tried to forbid open-air evangelism – in Denderleeuw, local parishioners successfully persuaded the town mayor to prohibit street preaching<sup>272</sup> –, expres-

<sup>268</sup> B.O.P. XXVII.3 (March 1947), 1-2, there 1.

<sup>269</sup> K. Deschouwer, ‘De gemeenteraadsverkiezingen van 1946. De reconstructie van een partijsysteem’, in: E. Witte, J.C. Burgelman and P. Stouthuysen eds., *Tussen restauratie en vernieuwing. Aspecten van de naoorlogse Belgische politiek (1944-1950)* (Brussels 1989), 59-76, there 71.

<sup>270</sup> As has been told in the introduction, «vrijzinnigheid» referred to liberal Protestantism in the Netherlands and to secular humanism/freemasonry/anti-clericalism in Belgium. Nonetheless, political liberalism had an appeal to liberal Protestants in Belgium as well, especially in the nineteenth century. See: J. Temmerman, *Van Reveil tot liberaal protestantisme. Geschiedenis van de Protestantse Brabantdamkerk te Gent tijdens de 19de eeuw* (Brussels 1996). In the middle of the twentieth century, the Walloon Protestant Jean Rey, who later became chairman of the European Commission, was a prominent liberal. See: H.R. Boudin and B. Denuit eds., *Van Leopold I tot Jean Rey. De Protestanten in België van 1839 tot 1989* (Brussels 1990).

<sup>271</sup> Rev. Ganzevoort warned: “Roomschen Rood, zien we hen niet samen op weg naar het Staatssocialisme, waarin van onze vrijheden stuk voor stuk wordt afgeknagen, de burgers hoe langer hoe meer onder curatele komen te staan en het staatsvermogen leidt tot volksonvermogen?” See: B.O.P. XXVII.3 (March 1947), 1-2, there 2.

<sup>272</sup> De Braekeler and Geerds, *Vijftigjarig bestaan van de Evangelische Kerk te Denderleeuw*, 3. See also: N.O.P. XXXV.1 (January 1955), 2-3, there 2; Van Adinkerke, *De tempel*.

sed their disgust of the ‘heretical’ schools with the Bible and tried to obstruct the Neo-Calvinists’ plans to build new churches (as was the case in Denderleeuw and Boechout). Compared to all this, the (potential) danger posed by liberalism was rather inconsiderable.

In contrast, Catholicism was a political threat that should *not* be underestimated: it could not only mobilise tens of thousands of people and demanded *absolute* loyalty of its believers, but it also stimulated the rise of vehement social opposition. After all, in countries wherein the Roman Catholic Church was dominant and powerful, left-wing parties usually did well and were generally more radical than their comrades in nations with a Protestant tradition. For example, Belgium’s Socialist Party, «*De Open Poort*» claimed, was less moderate and more anti-religious than the Labour Party in Holland or Britain. Although, the «*gereformeerden*» stated, the French Revolution of 1789 had been responsible for the genesis and breakthrough of socialism, communism, liberalism and (secular) conservatism – Neo-Calvinists referred to these ideologies when they spoke of the ‘Revolution’ (with a capital ‘R’ and without further description); for that reason, the political party of the Dutch «*gereformeerden*» was called ‘Anti-Revolutionary Party’<sup>273</sup> –, the Revolution itself was, in turn, a consequence of Roman Catholicism. It was definitely no coincidence, Rev. Ganzevoort concluded in 1940, that the social and political upheavals of 1789 had started in France, the Catholic country *par excellence* where Protestants (Huguenots) had been cruelly persecuted and massacred.<sup>274</sup> Besides, ‘revolutionary’ movements – especially anti-clerical communism – flourished nowhere more than in France and its (Catholic) neighbour states. In the eyes of Rev. Ganzevoort, this was not surprising at all: both the ‘revolutionary’ ideologies and the Roman Catholic Church bred a ‘mass mentality’ in which individuals were not taught how to think for themselves, and fobbed people off with a false sense of redemption.<sup>275</sup> Next to left-wing radicalism, the «*gereformeerde*» clergyman saw parallels with right-wing totalitarianism as well. The political dictatorships Mussolini and Hitler had created in Italy and Germany were simply complementary to the *spiritual* autocracy the Catholic

<sup>273</sup> ‘Anti-revolutionary’ thus meant: anti-socialist, anti-liberalist, anti-communist, anti-conservative and anti all world views and political ideologies that rejected God’s supreme authority. The (political) philosophies that came to the fore in the wake of the French Revolution thought they could build a new social order, by rejecting ‘God’s ordinances’ (the laws and sovereignty of God). Nevertheless, Abraham Kuyper, the ‘architect’ of anti-revolutionary thinking, did not want to return to the pre-1789 society. “Rather, he intends a progressive movement that will operate with principles opposed to the relativistic, atheistic autonomy claims of the revolutionaries and many liberals. (...) Recognizing or not recognizing the realities of sin and redemption – that is what divides the people of faith from the followers of the Revolution, according to Kuyper.” See: J.W. Skillen and R.M. McCarthy, *Political Order and the Plural Structure of Society* (Grand Rapids 1991), 236-237. The anti-revolutionary movement was not a reaction to the French Revolution specifically, but to the ‘Revolution’, the life stance that lay behind it and the aforementioned philosophies that resulted from it, in general. The «*Anti-Revolutionaire Partij*» “arose in the 1840s as a response to the secularism that pervaded the Netherlands after French armies in 1795 introduced the ideals of the Revolution of 1789 and its humanistic, Enlightenment ideology.” Its goal “was to battle the spirit of secularism in public life and institutions, including government itself, by building a network of separate institutions, especially Christian schools, with the goal of reforming society along Christian (...) lines.” See: Swierenga, *Dutch Chicago*, 51.

<sup>274</sup> *B.O.P.* XX.1 (April 1940), 4.

<sup>275</sup> *Ibid.*

Church exerted over its flock: Rev. Ganzevoort could therefore explain “waarom het Roomsche-Katholicisme en het Fascisme zoo dicht bij elkander staan. Om de massa in den band te houden, is ernaast de dictatuur in het geestelijk leven noodig een dictatuur in het staatsleven.”<sup>276</sup> Three years before, in 1937, evangelist Jonkers had already stressed the close connection between ‘Rome’ (Catholicism) and ‘Revolution’ (secular ideologies). The latter was a *result of* as well as an *oppositional force to* the power-hungry Catholic Church: the Papal despotism had brought nothing but religious hostilities and (social) uprisings to the world. One just had to look to the present-day Catholic realm, where revolutions and civil wars were ‘the order of the day’ and where rebellion was always directed against clerical privileges and abuse of power.<sup>277</sup> Roman Catholicism reaped, in other words, what it sowed.

In other articles, editors of «*De Open Poort*» did not present left- and right-wing extremism as the inevitable consequences of the Catholic system of thought, but as its *cognates*. Since the ‘Revolution’ – with its megalomaniac pretension to construct a new societal order – and the Roman Catholic Church – with its (assumed) doctrine of justification through good works and its theological conception that the sacrament of baptism “purifies, justifies and sanctifies” the sinner<sup>278</sup> – thought mankind was less depraved than the Reformed orthodoxy believed, the ‘Revolution’ bore more resemblance to ‘Rome’ than to the Reformation: “de leer van de Roomsche-Katholieke Kerk,” Rev. Ganzevoort wrote in 1939, “[staat] veel dichter (...) bij die van de Revolutie dan bij die van de Hervorming, en de overgang van de R.K. leer tot die van de Revolutie [is] dan ook veel gemakkelijker (...) dan de overgang van de leer der Hervorming tot die der Revolutie.”<sup>279</sup> The premise of Catholics and liberals – men like De Lamennais, Guizot and Cousin<sup>280</sup> – that Luther, Zwingli and Calvin had paved the way for the French revolutionaries, was a falsification of history. Furthermore, secular tyrants took example from the Pope and were inspired by the hierarchy, discipline and power structure of the Catholic Church’s organisation. «*De Open Poort*» saw striking similarities between the leaders of the fascist mass movements – «der Führer» and «il Duce» – and the Catholic «Pater Patrum»; all three were after world domination, did not shrink from using excessive violence and incited hatred against dissenters. “Zoudt gij willen,” Jonkers asked his readers, “dat hier in België een man als Mussolini of Hitler aan de macht kwam? (...) Ge gevoelt bij intuïtie, dat het stelsel van een dictator niet

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<sup>276</sup> B.O.P. XX.1 (April 1940), 4.

<sup>277</sup> “De geestelijke dictatuur van Rome heeft de wereld niet anders gebracht dan godsdienstoorlogen en revoluties. Zie slechts, lezer, naar de katholieke landen, waar revoluties en burgeroorlogen aan de orde van den dag zijn. En altijd weer is de revolutie gekeerd tegen de R.K. Kerk.” See: *Ibid.* XVII.1 (May 1937), 3.

<sup>278</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church. Popular and Definitive Edition* (New York [1994] 1999), 280.

<sup>279</sup> B.O.P. XIX.11 (November 1939), 3. [Erroneously, this edition was distributed as the eleventh issue of the *eighteenth* volume.]

<sup>280</sup> G. Groen van Prinsterer, the ‘mentor’ of Abraham Kuyper who was the first to give the term ‘anti-revolutionary’ a political connotation, had already contradicted this presupposition in his magnum opus *Ongeloof en Revolutie*, published in 1847 (pages 152-179).

deugt, dat het principieel fout is (...). Welnu, zoo is het nu ook met den paus. Hij is de kerkelijke dictator, onder wiens geest Protestant wil staan.”<sup>281</sup> Because the worldly aspirations of the occupant of the Holy See were not inferior to the lust and ambition for power of the Axis nations, «*De Open Poort*» even dared to put the Pope on the same level as the German and Italian autocrats.<sup>282</sup> The call of their pseudo-Gospel, which substituted the biblical imperative to glorify God for personality cults, would, however, be drowned out by the call of the *real* Gospel on the long term. Their temporal leadership would prove to be no match for the supreme authority of the only, genuine Leader. Consequently, people should not set their hopes on self-proclaimed ‘Führers’, ‘Duces’ and ‘Vicars of Christ’ – who promised salvation other than through the Son of God – but faithfully listen to the Word of the Lord. Whereas the prosperity human rulers could bring was only provisional, repentance and conversion, Jonkers said on the eve of the Second World War, brought eternal blessing: “[t]ot boete en bekeering moet deze oorlog u brengen. Verlangt geden Vrede? Zoek dan vrede met God door onzen Heere Jezus Christus. Dan hebt geden oorlog gewonnen en zijt ge overwinnaar door Hem, Die ons zoo uitnemend heeft liefgehad.”<sup>283</sup>

These closing sentences of Jonkers are exemplary for the way the «gereförmeerden» wrote about politics and current events. Until about the beginning of the 1960s, nearly all articles that were published in GKB-related journals and dealt with politics, ended with a call for humility («oproep tot verootmoediging»). Forthcoming elections were seized as an opportunity to accentuate the necessity of conversion and accepting Christ as Saviour. In 1946, for example, Rev. Ganzevoort made a comparison between voting and making a choice for or against God. Now that Nazism had been defeated and Belgians would go to the polls for the first time in seven years, the «gereförmeerde» parson remarked, it was time to draw a line under the past – not only with regard to politics, but also to people’s personal lives. Preferably, a vote for a new government should therefore be accompanied with the life-changing decision to become a disciple of Christ:

“Ge kunt uw plichten als staatsburger weer vervullen (...) [maar] er is iets, dat van nog grooter beteekenis is. (...) Het is niet genoeg, dat het Nationaal-Socialisme is neergeslagen, hoe dankbaar we hiervoor ook moeten zijn. Ge hebt nu de vrijheid ook te gebruiken in positiever zin, dat is als een middel om het leven te richten op den heiligen God, naar de orde, die Hij voor ons menschelijk leven heeft gesteld.”<sup>284</sup>

Next to elections day, remarkable speeches of party chieftains or mass meetings of political movements were similarly commented on. In this respect, an article in «*De Open Poort*» of January 1936 may serve as an illustrative example. The editorial concerned reported on a blasphemous lecture Willy

<sup>281</sup> *B.O.P.* XVII.1 (May 1937), 3.

<sup>282</sup> “Wie is de beste leider? Is het Hitler? Is het Mussolini? Is het de paus?” See: *B.O.P.* XVII.8 (August 1937), 1.

<sup>283</sup> *B.O.P.* XIX.11 (November 1939), 2. [Erroneously, this edition was distributed as the first issue of the eighteenth volume.]

<sup>284</sup> *Ibid.* XXVI.2 (February 1946), 5-6.

Becker, regional leader of the Nazi trade union in the old Prussian province of Hesse-Nassau, had given on a convention of the Hitler Youth and in which he had put Hitler and Christ on an imaginary scale. After enumerating the ‘good qualities’ of «der Führer», the Redeemer was weighed … and found wanting, leading Becker to conclude that ‘Christ was great, but Adolf Hitler is even mightier!」<sup>285</sup> «De Open Poort» editor could have reacted by quoting Proverbs 11:1<sup>286</sup> or Proverbs 20:23<sup>287</sup> – obviously, two ‘divers weights’ (which were not comparable) were put on a ‘false balance’ – but chose, instead, to elaborate on Becker’s strain of thought. Even though they would probably recoil from repeating him, there was no doubt that socialists and communists silently agreed with the German fascist union leader: “er [zijn] velen die bewust of onbewust zijn als Willy Becker. Bij de socialisten zijn Marx en Bebel groter; bij de Communisten is het Lenin die groter is dan Christus.”<sup>288</sup> The Nazis at least publicly *admitted* that they were enemies of Christianity; some left-wing radicals, on the other hand, did not put all *their* cards on the table and even turned Christ into the first genuine socialist. The «*Gereformeerde Kerkbode voor België*» had already warned Christians in 1910 not to fall prey to the ‘mirage’ of a socialist utopia or the Marxists’ allusion to charity. All who thought that Christendom and socialism were not incompatible, should read the passages in Leviticus 20 about Moloch: in a socialist commonwealth, the State will be modelled after this Old-Testament idol and force parents to sacrifice their children on the altar of public education.<sup>289</sup>

Thirty-seven years later, Rev. Ganzevoort echoed this admonition in «*De Open Poort*»: the newly founded Dutch Labour Party («Partij van de Arbeid»), which several prominent, progressive Christians (so-called «‘Doorbraak’-christenen») joined<sup>290</sup>, was perhaps not as radical as its Belgian sister party, but it was a threat to the Christian basis of society nonetheless. Socialists north and south of the Moerdijk just used different tactics: while they had to fight an omnipresent Catholic Church in Belgium, they could not do without the support of Christians in Holland. Their ultimate goal – overthrowing God’s ordinances and making the State the object of a religious cult – was, however, the same.<sup>291</sup> Yet, the «*De Open Poort*» said in 1936, not giving Christ the honour He deserved, was not something of which only fascists and socialists were guilty – even in the life of a Christian, Christ too

<sup>285</sup> “Christus was groot, maar Adolf Hitler is nog groter!” Quoted in: *B.O.P.* XVI.1 (January 1936), 4.

<sup>286</sup> “A false balance is abomination to the LORD: but a just weight is His delight.” *King James Version of the Bible*.

<sup>287</sup> “Divers weights are an abomination unto the LORD; and a false balance is not good.” *Ibid.*

<sup>288</sup> *B.O.P.* XVI.1 (January 1936), 4.

<sup>289</sup> *G.K.B.* VII.153 (27<sup>th</sup> February 1910), 3. The connection the «*Gereformeerde Kerkbode voor België*» saw between socialism and public schools shows once again how important the issue of education was to the «gereformeerden» in Belgium.

<sup>290</sup> The «Partij van de Arbeid» (PvdA) was established in 1946 as an amalgamation of the socialist «Sociaal-Democratische Arbeiderspartij», the left-liberal «Vrijzinnig-Democratische Bond» and the progressive-Christian «Christelijk-Democratische Unie». A handful of progressive-minded Catholics and members of the «Christelijk-Historische Unie» strengthened the party’s ranks as well. «Gereformeerden» rejected the PvdA unanimously. See: J.Th.M. Bank, ‘Doorbraak’, in: G. Harinck et.al. eds., *Christelijke Encyclopedie I* (Kampen 2005), 454-455.

<sup>291</sup> *B.O.P.* XXVII.3 (March 1947), 1-2.

often came second: “[b]lijkt dan niet, dat het ‘Ik’ verreweg in alles overheerscht en dat Christus tevreden moet zijn met een heel klein plaatsje? Zegt ge dus feitelijk niet hetzelfde als Willy Becker: Christus is groot, maar ‘Ik’ ben groter?”<sup>292</sup> There was a ‘Willy Becker’ inside all of us. Whether the object of worship was the Ego, the Pope, Mammon, Hitler or the State, idolatry exerted a powerful influence on people, since it provided an instant sense of comfort and contentment. But in the end, only God gave *real* happiness. Consequently, only those who would subordinate their own will to the will of God, would be initiated into ‘the secret of a truly blissful, Christian life’: “Christus groot, ik klein.”<sup>293</sup> Again, a political exposé served to emphasise the absolute indispensability of repentance and conversion.

Although the fascist danger was past after 1945, the Roman Catholics and the Reds were still threatening society in general and the Protestant community in particular. In fact, now that the communists received more support than ever before – in Belgium (as has been said earlier) *and* in Holland (ten percent of the franchised population voted for the Communist Party)<sup>294</sup> – and ‘Moscow’ had replaced the axis Rome-Berlin as the common enemy of the free West, a new bicephalous monster appeared on the world stage: the axis Rome-Moscow. According to «*De Open Poort*», it would certainly not be surprising if the Roman Catholic Church forged an alliance with Russia. After all, notwithstanding its rabid anti-clerical rhetoric, communism was a *consequence* (or a *congener*) of Catholicism and differed little from it in essence. The anxiety Rome had of left-wing radicalism was therefore not unfounded, the more so since socialism was a threat to its position of power. “Daarom,” Rev. Ganzevoort noted, “zullen we ons niet verwonderen, wanneer we Rome nog eens met Moskou zullen zien samengaan, hoezeer het Communisme als een gevaar gezien wordt. (...) Want Rome zoekt den communist te verzoenen met de kerk[.]”<sup>295</sup> A couple of years before, the «gereformeerde» minister explained, a similar fear of fascism had caused the Catholic Church to collaborate with the Nazis.

Around 1950, the interconnections between Catholicism and socialism were a recurring theme in «*De Open Poort*». In 1952, Rev. Hegger, a former priest himself, even dedicated a whole series to the issue. Published under the title «‘Vaticaan of communisme?’» (‘The Vatican or Communism?’), this sequence of articles was written in response to Rome’s claim that the world was given no other option than to choose between Soviet socialism or Catholic Christianity. Of course, Rev. Hegger did not agree – not only because the only decision in life that really mattered was the choice for or against Christ, but also because the world view of both Rome and Moscow was based on the

<sup>292</sup> B.O.P. XXVII.3 (March 1947), 1-2.

<sup>293</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>294</sup> A.P.M. Lucardie, *Nederland stromenland. Een geschiedenis van de politieke stromingen* (Assen 2002), 50.

<sup>295</sup> B.O.P. XXVII.3 (March 1947), 1-2, there 2.

same principles of class inequality and totalitarianism. Contrary to the priesthood of all believers – a Protestant doctrine that says all humans have access to God through Christ and do not need the mediation of ordained clergymen<sup>296</sup> – and in accordance with the distinction Bolsheviks made between ‘haves’ and ‘have-nots’, the Roman Catholic Church maintained a sharp division between clerics and laypeople. As a consequence, Rev. Hegger ratiocinated, communism had such an appeal in Catholic countries.<sup>297</sup> A year later, Rev. Ganzevoort repeated his confrere, by stating that Catholicism had only itself to blame for the growing number of communist sympathisers. Although the Vatican, which had reacted to Stalin’s death with ‘feelings of deep compassion’, could allege that socialism drove millions of people into ‘misery’ and ‘eternal damnation’, it should rather search its own conscience: of all places, fascism had prospered and communism still flourished *in its own backyard* (i.e. Italy)! Ganzevoort’s message was unequivocal: it was true that communism led the masses up the garden path, but it was *Rome* that had driven them into communism!<sup>298</sup>

As the examples in the preceding paragraphs indicate, the anti-Roman Catholic disposition of the (foremen in the) Reformed community was given a *political* undertone – especially in «*De Open Poort*», which was distributed as a free local evangelistic magazine. The rise of right-wing extremism before 1940 and the revival of left-wing radicalism after 1945: Rome was the main culprit in both cases. Yet, remarkably enough, the anti-Catholicism of the «gereformeerden» did not result in a condemnation of the «Katholieke Partij» (Catholic Party)<sup>299</sup> or its post-World War II successor, the «Christelijke Volkspartij» (Christian People’s Party). Moreover, despite the Neo-Calvinists’ aversion to socialism and their ambiguous attitude towards liberalism, the Marxist «Kommunistische Partij van België», the social-democratic «Belgische Socialistische Partij» (BSP) and the «Liberale Partij» («Partij voor Vrijheid en Vooruitgang» after 1961) have never been condemned too. On the contrary, after the Mechlin archbishop J.E. Cardinal Van Roey had said in 1957 that voting for the BSP was incompatible with practising Catholicism<sup>300</sup>, the «gereformeerde» ‘opinion leaders’ – i.e. the ministers who wrote in GKB-related magazines – even felt the need to give him a public re-

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<sup>296</sup> W.M. Alston Jr., *The Church of the Living God. A Reformed Perspective* (Louisville 2002), 45-48.

<sup>297</sup> B.O.P. XXXII.10 (June 1952), 2-3, there 3.

<sup>298</sup> “[H]oevelen heeft de Roomse Kerk zelf den weg van kwaad en ondergang opgedreven? Gaat het buiten haar om, dat juist in Roomse landen de geest van Godloochening en revolutie zich zo fel heeft geopenbaard en nog openbaart? Is het toeval, dat Italië zoveel communisten telt? Hoevelen zouden er hier in België zijn, die door de Roomse Kerk aan geloof en godsdienst den rug hebben toegekeerd?” See: *Ibid.* XXXIII.5 (March 1953), 1-2, there 1.

<sup>299</sup> The «Katholieke Partij» was founded in 1878 as a federation of several Catholic and conservative electoral associations. It was renamed «‘Katholieke Unie’» (Catholic Union) in 1921 and «‘Blok der Katholieken’» (‘Catholic Block’) in 1937. See: J. Billiet and E. Gerard, ‘Kerk en politiek: de lastige relatie tussen de katholieke organisaties en hun politieke partij tot 1940’, in: K.M.Th. Dobbelaere et.al. eds., *België en zijn goden. Kerken, religieuze groeperingen en lekenbewegingen* (Leuven 1985), 87-118.

<sup>300</sup> In 1954, bishops in Holland had said the same; they had promulgated a decree – the so-called «bisschoppelijk mandement» – in which they held out the prospect of exclusion from the sacraments to members of socialist organisations. See: *De katholiek in het openbare leven van deze tijd. Bisschoppelijk mandement 1954* (n.pl. 1954), 43.

primand. Although the «Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland» had done something similar in 1936 – that year, the general synod had dictated that all members of the fascist «Nationale-Socialistische Beweging» and the Christian-socialist «Christelijk-Democratische Unie» should be excluded from the Lord's Supper<sup>301</sup> – and were certainly not pleased with socialist sympathies either<sup>302</sup>, the editors of «*De Open Poort*» responded to Van Roey that (a leader of) a church denomination should not meddle in party politics. By prohibiting Belgian Catholics from voting “ten voordele van een partij, welke de godsdienstige en zedelijke belangen bekampt of in gevaar brengt” – ‘in favour of a party that contends with or harms the religious and ethical interests (of the Roman Catholic Church)’ –, the archbishop implicitly expressed disapproval of all parties other than the CVP.<sup>303</sup> In an open letter, Rev. Hegger found a connection between the cardinal’s pastoral letter and the composition of the then government: since 1954, the liberals and socialists had kept the CVP out of the coalition cabinet, as a result of which the Catholic Church was deprived of influence on government policy. The decree was thus not issued out of sincere concern for the spiritual welfare of Catholic labourers, but simply as a means to win back decision authority!

Nevertheless, Rev. Hegger remarked, Van Roey’s advice on how to vote would be counter-productive. Precisely *because* Rome interfered in politics, people turned towards non-confessional parties and left the Catholic Church: “doordat de rooms-katholieke kerk in België zich zozeer met de politiek bemoeit, daardoor worden de kerken steeds leger. U is daardoor mede schuldig aan de steeds verder voortschrijdende ontkerstening van België.”<sup>304</sup> Whereas the bishops continuously antagonised liberals and socialists – it was just a matter of time, the «gereformeerde» parson knew for sure, that these would get tired of going to a church where they were given the cold shoulder<sup>305</sup> –, the GKB did not make a distinction between political preferences of its members. “God heeft niets tegen socialisten” – ‘God has nothing against socialists’ –, Rev. Lauwers is supposed to have said during his first open-air evangelistic meeting in Denderleeuw.<sup>306</sup> Since the sinfulness of mankind was something universal and (hence) affected all parties equally, Rev. Hegger would abstain from denouncing the Liberal, Socialist or Catholic Party: “overal waar mensen zijn wordt er gezondigd. Of ze nu lid van de socialistische of de liberale partij zijn of van de CVP; of ze nu r. katholiek of protestant [sic] zijn.

<sup>301</sup> *Acta G.S. GKN* (Amsterdam 1936), art. 272 and addendum LXIV; K. Schilder, *Geen duimbreed! Een synodaal besluit inzake 't lidmaatschap van N.S.B. en C.D.U.* (Kampen 1936).

<sup>302</sup> In 1946, the GKN had denounced the membership of non-Christian organisations and had prevented a theological candidate with socialist sympathies from becoming a minister. According to sociologist G. Dekker, a «gereformeerde» himself, some «gereformeerde» consistories wanted to exclude members of the «Partij van de Arbeid» from the sacraments. See: G. Dekker, *Een moeizaam gevecht. Mijn geschiedenis met de kerk* (Hilversum 2005), 14.

<sup>303</sup> *B.O.P.* XXXVII.14 (September 1957), 2.

<sup>304</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>305</sup> “Begrijpt U dan niet, dat de socialisten en liberalen het op de [sic] duur moe worden om elke zondag naar een kerk te gaan, die steeds weer hun politieke overtuiging aanvalt met haar geestelijke macht?” See: *Ibid.*

<sup>306</sup> *De Stem CIV.*12 (June 1975), 4-5, there 5.

Dat blijft hetzelfde.”<sup>307</sup> The monthly bulletin of the «gereformeerde kerk» in Ghent was of the same mind: as even politics that adorned itself with the adjective ‘Christian’ was nothing more than man’s fallible handiwork, the ‘Church of Jesus Christ’ should not identify itself with a certain political party.<sup>308</sup> ‘Rome’ had better take this to heart.

Clearly, the close links between the Dutch «Gereformeerde Kerken» and the «Anti-Revolutionaire Partij» – both institutions had been founded by Kuyper (!) – were completely overlooked in these denunciations of the Catholic Church’s partiality for the CVP. True, with the exception of 1936, the GKN refrained from making political pronouncements or judgements until the middle of the 1960s – for the simple reason that they did not need to occupy themselves with politics. On the basis of the Kuyperian principle of ‘sphere sovereignty’ and the distinction between the Church as institution and as organism, Neo-Calvinists kept the world of politics and the ecclesiastical domain strictly separate. Yet, being Reformed was not limited to church attendance on Sundays: a «gereformeerde» was «gereformeerd» in *all* spheres of life and should take possession of all those spheres in the name of Christ. To realize this, Kuyper had established the «Anti-Revolutionaire Partij» in 1879<sup>309</sup> – nominally an interdenominational party, but the preponderance of members of the «Gereformeerde Kerken» could not be denied. Consequently, the ARP more or less played the role of the GKN’s political sounding board and voiced the common opinions of the «gereformeerden» and kindred church groups (the «christelijk-gereformeerden» and «gereformeerde-bonders»).<sup>310</sup> Before the 1970s, a «gereformeerde» who did not vote for the ARP was as peculiar as a Samaritan among Jews. Voting for the «Anti-Revolutionaire Partij» was even taken for granted to such an extent, that some local «gereformeerde» consistories did not see any objections to pin up ARP posters inside their church buildings.<sup>311</sup> To put it briefly, «gereformeerd» and «antirevolutionair» were seen as interchangeable terms.

In the Netherlands, members of the GKN almost unanimously sided with the «Anti-Revolutionaire Partij», but in Belgium, such a consensus could not exist. There, Protestants were generally ‘afraid’ of (party) politics – as a consequence of the Catholic Church’s political activism – and held

<sup>307</sup> B.O.P. XXXVII.17 (October 1957), 2-3, there 3.

<sup>308</sup> *Mededelingenblad van de gereformeerde kerk te Gent* XI.7 (July-August 1957), 4.

<sup>309</sup> According to sociologist J.T. Sunier, the fact that the ARP was founded several years *before* the GKN shows that the «gereformeerde» subculture was as political as it was religious. See: J.T. Sunier, *Emancipatie en subcultuur. Sociale bewegingen in België en Nederland* (Amsterdam 2000), 163.

<sup>310</sup> Though they were outnumbered by members of the GKN, these two minorities expressed their concern and discontent about the dominance of «gereformeerden» in the ARP quite often. To keep them satisfied, some «christelijk-gereformeerden» and «gereformeerde-bonders» were appointed to the position of senior party members. See: W. Fieret, ‘De verhouding tussen de ARP en de SGP tijdens het interbellum’, in: G. Harinck, R. Kuiper and P. Bak eds., *De Antirevolutionaire Partij 1829-1980* (Hilversum 2001), 157-170.

<sup>311</sup> Dekker, *Een moeizaam gevecht*, 14.

aloof from partisan engagement.<sup>312</sup> However, as Rev. J. Nijs – a retired VPKB clergyman – has observed, a small minority within the Protestant community did not reconcile itself to this apolitical attitude and dreamt of founding a party of its own: “[t]och waren er ook predikanten en andere ingeweken protestanten, die voor de christenheid wel degelijk een taak zagen liggen op het politieke terrein. Maar dat veronderstelde, ja vereiste in hun gedachtengang [sic], het bestaan van een eigen *protestantchristelijke politieke partij*. Zij waren in dit opzicht zeer ‘beginselvast’.”<sup>313</sup> This observation applied to the «Gereformeerde Kerken in België» more than to any other denomination. It is significant that Rev. Nijs talked about ‘ministers *and other immigrant Protestants*’: during nearly their entire eighty-five year history, the GKB consisted of more (native) Hollanders than Belgians – only in the 1970s, the latter were slightly more numerous than the former<sup>314</sup> – and were pastorally served by Dutch parsons.<sup>315</sup> Although the leaders of the GKB did not meddle in partisan politics and chided the Belgian Catholic Church for giving compelling advices on how to vote, the want of a Flemish ‘ARP’ was deeply felt by them: “[m]en mist wel een sterk een positief Prot. Chr. Partij”<sup>316</sup>, Rev. Bavinck lamented in 1955. Nevertheless, those who complained about the lack of a Belgian Protestant party knew that their ideal would never be realised, the more so since «gereformeerde» immigrants from Holland – the fiercest proponents of such a party – were usually not entitled to vote in Belgium. Most of them spent only a few years – a decade or two at most – south of the Moerdijk and did not apply for Belgian citizenship. Yet, around the same time Rev. Bavinck wrote the above jeremiad, Protestants who *were* enfranchised were given the opportunity to exert influence – however small – in the national political arena.

In the fall of 1956, the «Belgische Socialistische Partij» decided to bind practising Christians with socialist sympathies more closely to its organisation. Probably after the example of the Dutch «Partij van de Arbeid», where special commissions for Protestants and Catholics had been created in 1946<sup>317</sup>, a Christian study group – the «‘Werkgemeenschap van Christenen in de BSP’» –

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<sup>312</sup> “Voor alles wat met politiek te maken heeft, is de Vlaamse protestant eerder kopschuif. Waarschijnlijk speelt de vermenging van kerk en politiek, die ze in het verleden maar al te dikwijls meegeemaakt hebben, hierbij een rol.” See: *B.O.P. LIX.11* (November 1979), 1-3, there 3.

<sup>313</sup> J. Nijs, ‘Protestanten en de politiek’, in: P.M. Bouman ed., *Een andere weg. Protestantten in de Vlaamse samenleving* (Amstelveen 1986), 181-189, there 183.

<sup>314</sup> M.J. Beukenhorst et.al., *Met z’n drieën op stap, maar waar naar toe?* (n.pl. n.y.), III [archive of the G.K. in Boechout].

<sup>315</sup> See also: note 403.

<sup>316</sup> *N.O.P. XXXIV.5* (May 1954), 1-2, there 1.

<sup>317</sup> Namely: the «‘Protestants-Christelijke Werkgemeenschap’» (to be renamed «‘Werkgemeenschap van Protestantse Christenen’» in 1965) and the «‘Katholieke Werkgemeenschap’». Together with the «‘Humanistische Werkgemeenschap’» (founded in 1947), these working groups were disbanded in 1969 and amalgamated into the ecumenical «‘Centrum voor Levensbeschouwing en Politiek’» in 1973. J.H. Scheps, who had worked as an evangelist in the service of the «Gereformeerde Kerken in België» between 1923 and 1924 (!), was one of the moving spirits behind the «‘Protestants-Christelijke Werkgemeenschap’». For more information on the «werkgemeenschappen», see: M. Campfens, B.

was established, in which a separate Protestant subdivision came into being.<sup>318</sup> Two theologians – C.G.A. Lecompte and the aforementioned J. Nijs – were leading figures in the «Werkgemeenschap» in the first years of its existence.<sup>319</sup> According to the latter, the founding of the working group was followed by the development of a similar initiative in the «Liberale Partij» several years later and elicited contradictory responses from Belgium's Protestant community.<sup>320</sup> Some were surprised, others reacted with disapproval and ‘many’ welcomed the decision to do something about the Protestants’ political timorousness. In view of the Neo-Calvinists’ depreciation of non-Christian politics in general and socialism in particular at that time – no «gereformeerde» in Belgium has written more about socialism than Rev. Ganzevoort, who, as has been indicated, took a hard stand against left-wing political philosophies – and in spite of their desire to become politically active and politically emancipate the Belgian Protestants, it is more than likely that *they* were not very pleased with the socialist «Werkgemeenschap». Of all sources studies, only *one* – i.e. a note in the minutes of the «kring Brussel» (the coordinating assembly of the six Belgian «gereformeerde kerken»), dated 10<sup>th</sup> October 1960 – makes mention of this committee. Because the «Werkgemeenschap» had requested to hold a meeting in the cellar below the «gereformeerde kerk» in Ghent, the consistory took counsel with its sister churches. Although none of the Ghent «gereformeerden» wanted anyone to think that the church took sides with the BSP, some liked the idea of the Socialist Party, irrespective of its left-wing persuasion. However, an influential member of the «gereformeerde kerk» in Ghent banged on the table and wondered aloud whether a Christian could and should participate in a party that rejected the supreme authority of God. Moreover, he hoped that someday a genuine Protestant-based party, modelled after the Dutch ARP, could be established. The «kring» declared itself in favour of neither him nor those who were sympathetic towards the proposal of the «Werkgemeenschap», but deemed it unwise to comply with the request.<sup>321</sup> It is uncertain whether this advice has been followed or brushed aside. Anyhow, the founding of a Protestant party, at which one of the Ghent «gereformeerden» hinted, was never put into effect.<sup>322</sup> And the socialist «Werkgemeenschap» did not have the effect its propo-

Duijings and J.M. Welcker, *De Nederlandse archieven van het Internationaal Instituut voor Sociale Geschiedenis te Amsterdam* (Amsterdam 1989), 32-33.

<sup>318</sup> Nijs, ‘Protestanten en de politiek’, 184.

<sup>319</sup> For more information on the «‘Werkgemeenschap van Christenen in de BSP»», see: J. Nijs, *De Werkgemeenschap van Christenen in de B.S.P. (Protestantse Afdeling)* (Genk 1956).

<sup>320</sup> Nijs, ‘Protestanten en de politiek’, 184. In the monograph mentioned in the note above (page 5), Nijs says some Protestants feared that ‘the red peril’ would infiltrate into and damage Protestantism: “[s]ommige geloofsgenoten vreesden in ons de stoottroepen van het ‘rode gevaar’ te moeten begroeten.”

<sup>321</sup> *Kringnotulen*, dated 10<sup>th</sup> October 1960 [archive of the G.K. in Boechout].

<sup>322</sup> One source says that *several* initiatives have been undertaken to effectuate some form of Protestant political participation: “[o]nze groep is helaas ook te klein voor het vormen van een eigen partij, vleugel of Prot.-Chr. werkgroep in een bepaalde partij (hoewel in het verleden zulke pogingen wel zijn gedaan).” See: *N.O.P.* XLVIII.4 (April 1968), 3-4, there 3. The sources studied do not give any proof of this allegation, with the exception of the «werkgemeenschappen» in the Socialist and Liberal Party.

nents had hoped for.<sup>323</sup> All in all, a distinct *Protestant* voice has never joined the cacophony of Belgian (partisan) politics.

One could wonder *why* the sources studied – with the notable exception of the one mentioned above, a paragraph in confidential minutes of the «kring» – did not refer to the «Werkgemeenschap» and thus *why* the «gereformeerden» did not pay attention to this socialist committee. It is out of the question that they were unaware of its existence – not only since the «Werkgemeenschap» was talked about in the «kring», but also because the «gereformeerde» ministers – ‘veteran’ Rev. Ganzevoort in particular – were generally well informed about the situation of Protestants in Belgium. Perhaps they did not agree with the creation of the working group – either because of its socialist character or because they feared that it would diminish the chances of founding a Protestant-based party, should such an initiative ever be undertaken. Or, they did not want to declare themselves openly against or in favour of whichever political party, even though socialism *as a life stance* was unambiguously rejected in «*De Open Poort*» before the mid-1960s. As the example of Rev. Hegger’s open letter to Cardinal Van Roey has showed, the editors of GKB-related periodicals did not want to be(come) involved in party politics. For the same reason, the «kring» did not explicitly decide in favour of the «gereformeerde» in Ghent who was opposed to the request of the «Werkgemeenschap». <sup>324</sup> In their capacity as ‘opinion leaders’, the GKB ministers felt compelled to make a stand against all philosophies – whether these were political, religious or cultural – that conflicted with ‘God’s ordinances’ and the ‘Reformed principles’ («de gereformeerde beginselen»), but – and this is crucial – they did not link this to a *party political preference*. They preferred the abstract level of ‘principia’ to the profane terminology of partisan politics.<sup>325</sup>

Admittedly, simultaneously condemning socialism as an outlook on life and not denouncing the *party* that gave shape to this *Weltanschauung* was rather a nuance. Yet, the GKB’s ‘opinion leaders’ held on to this subtle distinction carefully – mainly for two reasons. First of all, the «Gereformeerde Kerken in België» did not want to be designated as hotbeds of political opposition or as houses of refuge for all who detested the (Catholic) CVP. The Roman Catholic Church already tried to link Protestantism to freethinking, Freemasonry – which was a factor of consequence in Belgian po-

<sup>323</sup> “Schuchtere pogingen in de herfst van 1956 om met een ‘werkgemeenschap van christenen in de BSP’ ook in de socialistische partij een pluralistische geestesgesteldheid binnen te brengen en een ‘open socialisme’ te realiseren, dooden als een kaarsje uit.” See: M. Ruyts, *De Vlamingen. Een volk in beweging, een natie in wording* (Tielt and Utrecht 1972), 161. The last meeting of the «Werkgemeenschap» was held in 1973. See: J.J. Berends, *De Verenigde Protestantse Kerk in België in het Belgische protestantisme. De weerslag van een niet-hiërarchische structuur op de ideologische oriëntering van een religieuze minderheid* (Ghent 1987), 24.

<sup>324</sup> “De Kring (...) spreekt zich niet uit over confessionele en niet-confessionele politieke groepering.” See: *Kringnotulen*, dated 10<sup>th</sup> October 1960 [archive of the G.K. in Boechout].

<sup>325</sup> “Wel mogen we ons uitlaten over politieke *beginselen*, maar in de *actueele politiek* mogen we ons niet mengen.” See: *G.K.B. VIII.189* (16<sup>th</sup> July 1911), 3-4, there 4.

itics<sup>326</sup> –, liberalism and radicalism. This was, possibly, a legacy of the nineteenth century, when several notable Protestants – among them Emile de Laveleye (1822-1892), professor in political economics at Ghent University, Paul Fredericq (1850-1920), a historian who worked at the same academy, and Eugène Goblet d'Alviella (1846-1925), professor in the history of religions at the Free University of Brussels – had been prominent adherents of the liberal, anti-papal «vrijzinnigheid».<sup>327</sup>

Three examples may serve as illustrations of the identification between Protestantism and political anticlericalism from Catholic quarters. In 1946, «*De Kruisbanier*» was amazed at the result of the municipal election in Sint-Maria-Horebeke, a Protestant enclave in the province of East Flanders that is known as the «‘Geuzenhoek’»: according to a regional newspaper, the ‘Protestant Party’ had acquired four seats in the town council, one less than the ‘Catholic Party’. However, none of the participating parties had presented itself as ‘Protestant’! The editor of the regional gazette had probably assumed that all Protestants in Horebeke had voted for the *Liberal* Party, since the name of a Protestant had figured on its list of candidates.<sup>328</sup> In 1959, K. Sluys, editor-in-chief of the «*Vlaams Kerkblad*», observed with similar amazement that the parochial magazine «*De nieuwe Boodschap – bode van het Heilig Hart*» had put the Free University in Brussels on a par with the Free University in Amsterdam.<sup>329</sup> This was a blatant misrepresentation of the facts: the former was reputed to be a breeding place of atheism, whereas the latter was ‘the most puritan academy in entire Europe’, a product of Kuyprian Neo-Calvinism and hence closely related to the «Gereformeerde Kerken». In the opinion of Sluys, «*De nieuwe Boodschap*» had deliberately treated both academies as equals, to give the «gereformeerden» a bad reputation: after all, VU professors – like S.U. Zuidema, professor in Calvinist philosophy<sup>330</sup>, and J.H. Bavinck, a missiologist who was an older brother of Brussels parson Rev. C.B. Bavinck<sup>331</sup> – were frequently invited to give lectures at discussion evenings organised in Boechout’s ‘school with the Bible’. The readers of the parochial monthly could therefore get the impression that the «gereformeerden» were kindred spirits of the «vrijzinnigen».<sup>332</sup> Sluys knew the perfect remedy to counter this false image: every Catholic who believed the ‘nonsense’ of «*De*

<sup>326</sup> D.-J. Eppink, *Avonturen van een Nederbelg. Een Nederlander ontdekt België* (Tielt 2004), 215-232.

<sup>327</sup> For De Laveleye and Fredericq, see: Temmerman, *Van Reveil tot liberaal protestantisme*. For Goblet d'Alviella, see: G.L.J. Liagre, *Graaf Eugène Goblet d'Alviella (1846-1925). Proeve van een cultuurhistorisch en religieus portret (1846-1900)* (Brussels 1998).

<sup>328</sup> *De Kruisbanier* II.48 (30<sup>th</sup> November 1946), 4.

<sup>329</sup> *De nieuwe Boodschap – bode van het Heilig Hart. Maandblad van het apostolaat des gebeds* LXXXVI.6 (June 1959), 205-207.

<sup>330</sup> *Vlaams Kerkblad* IV.3 (July 1957), 92 and V.10 (February 1959), 320.

<sup>331</sup> *Ibid.* V.5 (September 1958), 160 and VIII.5 (September 1961), 89.

<sup>332</sup> “De lezer die niet op de hoogte is van de verhoudingen in Nederland, moet uit Uw artikel wel de indruk krijgen dat de sprekers die in Boechout worden uitgenodigd, uit eenzelfde soort ongelovige hogeschool komen als de ‘vrije’ universiteit in Brussel is. U moet echter weten dat de Vrije Universiteit in Amsterdam de meest rechtzinnige universiteit is die er in Europa bestaat, uitdraagster en verdedigster van het schriftuurlijk Evangelie zoals dit door de grote hervormers, in het bijzonder Calvijn, weer aan het licht is gebracht.” See: *Ibid.* VI.4 (August 1959), 115-118, there 116.

*nieuwe Boodschap*», should run to the library of the Catholic University of Leuven and borrow one of the many books written by Dr. Kuyper. Roman Catholics not only linked Protestantism to liberalism, they also claimed that reformational Christians collaborated with the socialists. In 1957, «*De Beiaard*», defined as a ‘CVP periodical’ by «*De Open Poort*»<sup>333</sup>, accused Belgian Protestants of plotting together with the Van Acker administration – a cabinet in which the CVP was not represented – in order to gain pecuniary benefit: “het Protestantisme (...) [is] een bedekte recruteringskern en een propagandamachine (...) van het socialisme in ruil voor de financiële steun, die het van de huidige loge-regering ontvangt.”<sup>334</sup> The article made this allegation as a result of the state aid the ‘school with the Bible’ in Denderleeuw had managed to obtain two years earlier, whereas the government had the intention to reduce its financial support to the non-public education sector. Rev. Hegger thought this accusation was rather unfair: Catholics denied Protestants a right – the right to ask for government subsidies – to which they laid claim themselves! Should Roman Catholicism then be considered as a ‘recruitment agency and propaganda machine’ of socialism as well?

Second, none of the political parties that existed in Belgium could meet with the Neo-Calvinists’ general approval. According to Rev. C.B. Bavinck, voting was simply making a choice between three ‘evils’: the Liberal Party, the BSP or the CVP. As long as Protestantism would remain a peripheral phenomenon in Belgian society, enfranchised Protestants had to vote for a party with which they did not feel a strong bond and which they saw as the lesser evil.<sup>335</sup> It was up to the individual constituents to make this comparative assessment *themselves*<sup>336</sup>; «gereformeerden» in Belgium should not have to feel guilty for voting for a party to which their fellow churchmen in the Netherlands would never give their vote. Although a vote for the CVP did not speak for itself, Rev. Bavinck thought that all three aforementioned parties received an equal amount of votes casted by Belgian Protestants. In spite of its Catholic character, it would not be far from the truth to presume that some still preferred the ‘Christian Democratic’ fundamentals of the CVP to the secular principles of the liberals and socialists.<sup>337</sup> Rev. M.J. Vos, minister of the «gereformeerde kerk» in Ghent, did not quite agree: he could not imagine that *any* Protestant would vote for the CVP. Yet, there was another alternative to the BSP and Liberal Party: the Flemish nationalist Volksunie undoubtedly had a certain electoral appeal to part of the Protestant population. None of the parties, Rev. Vos guessed, towered above all the others

<sup>333</sup> B.O.P. XXXVII.15 (September 1957), 1.

<sup>334</sup> Ibid. XXXVII.16 (October 1957), 1.

<sup>335</sup> N.O.P. XXXIV.5 (May 1954), 1-2, there 2.

<sup>336</sup> The «*Gereformeerde Kerkbode voor België*» wrote in 1911 that it would ‘not hurt’ if the enfranchised «gereformeerden» in Belgium would receive some ‘political information’, because they had to make a *conscious* electoral choice: “[z]ij moeten het met hun geweten uitmaken, hoe zij stemmen.” See: G.K.B. VIII.189 (16<sup>th</sup> July 1911), 3-4, there 4.

<sup>337</sup> N.O.P. XXXIV.5 (May 1954), 1-2, there 2.

as the absolute favourite of Belgian Protestants.<sup>338</sup> K. Sluys has also pointed out the divergent political preferences of the «gereformeerden»: in his hometown Boechout, three quarters of the local GKB's members voted liberal or socialist.<sup>339</sup> But he could not tell which party predominated, either. After all, in the absence of an 'ARP', it was not very easy to make a conscious choice for one of the existing parties.<sup>340</sup>

Besides, giving advices on how to vote did not belong to the 'core business' of Reverends; politics did not belong in the pulpit. Contrary to the «Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk», the «Gereformeerde Kerken» (the Church as institute) would not give their opinion on political matters, for this was a task of the Church *as organism* (i.e. the ARP).<sup>341</sup> Only in the 1970s, under the influence of the changes in Reformed theology – which will be discussed in more detail in the third chapter –, this would alter: in that decade, some Neo-Calvinists said that the Church should not flinch from making political statements and that it should explicitly side against social wrongs (e.g. apartheid in South Africa, the discrimination of minorities in society and nuclear weapons). In fact, they incited the general synod of the GKN to *actively* engage itself in politics. In Holland, these church members, known as the «‘evangelisch-radicalen’», were eager to transform the rigid, dogmatic and orthodox image non-«gereformeerden» had of the «Gereformeerde Kerken» into a *leftish* image and pushed the Kuyperian ‘antithesis’ between Christian and non-Christian politics radically aside. For them, voting for the ARP was no longer something obvious: they could identify themselves more with the progressivism of the left-wing parties than with the confessional conservatism. Because these ‘radicals’ were relatively well represented on the synodical level, they had a strong influence on the decisions the «Gereformeerde Kerken» made in the 1970s and 1980s.<sup>342</sup> Paradoxically, due to their efforts, the GKN became politicised while the connection between the GKN and the ARP became considerably less tightly-knit.<sup>343</sup>

In Belgium, the internal relations were less polarised. The differences of opinion between church members who were open to change («vernieuwers») and those who were worried about the crumbling of old certainties («verontrusten») passed over the GKB for the most part, even though, as the third chapter will indicate, some «gereformeerden» in Belgium shared the worries of the latter and others sympathised with the former. As regards politics, the unanimous rejection of ecclesiasti-

<sup>338</sup> N.O.P. XLVIII.4 (April 1968), 3-4, there 3.

<sup>339</sup> Vlaams Kerkblad VIII.10 (February 1962), 209-213, there 213.

<sup>340</sup> N.O.P. XLVIII.4 (April 1968), 3-4, there 3.

<sup>341</sup> H. van de Wal, *Een aanvechtbare en onzekere situatie. De Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk en Nieuw-Guinea 1949-1962* (Hilversum 2006), 33 and 250.

<sup>342</sup> For more information on the influence of «evangelisch-radicalen» on the evolution of the «Gereformeerde Kerken», see: Plomp, *Een kerk in beweging* and Dekker, *De stille revolutie*.

<sup>343</sup> Moreover, due to the «evangelisch-radicalen», the ARP moved towards the left side of the political spectrum. See: P.L. van Enk, *De aftocht van de ARP. Jaren van strijd tussen macht en beginsel* (Kampen 1986).

cal involvement with non-church-related affairs came under review. In the bulletin of Antwerp's «protestantse kerk», «gereformeerde kerk» and «zendingskerk», a (former) member of the «gereformeerde» church council denounced the casualness with which the Church abstained from making political statements. The Bible, so he said, urged instead to do the *opposite*: several prophets, in both the Old and the New Testament, had not been afraid to fight political inequity. Did Elijah turn away when God asked him to stand up against the perfidious king Ahab?<sup>344</sup> And did John the Baptist hesitate to reprimand Herod Antipas for his unjust behaviour?<sup>345</sup> To ask the question was to answer it. After the example of these two divine messengers and for the sake of its own credibility, the Church had to take sides in political and social debates.<sup>346</sup> In 1969, five years before this opinion article in the Antwerp newsletter, Rev. Eikelboom had already expressed his discontentment with the existing dividing line between the political and ecclesiastical sphere. By *crossing* this line, the Church of the future would be totally different from the law-abiding and inward-looking institution it had been in the past; among other things, it should put pressure on the common opinion, participate in activities that were intended to change the established political and civil order and stimulate political parties to increase development funds.<sup>347</sup> In the 1960s and 1970s, these were typical demands of left-wing, progressive parties. «*De Open Poort*», edited by Rev. Eikelboom since 1969, *explicitly* sided with progressivism in a 1977 special edition, which was completely dedicated to the relationship between Christianity and politics.<sup>348</sup> In the last resort, a Church should even support armed resistance of oppressed peoples – blacks in Namibia, for example<sup>349</sup> – and not condemn (socialist) single-party states beforehand!<sup>350</sup> Although not all contributions to this edition were written by «gereformeerden», the mere fact that the editorial staff published these articles in their entirety in «*De Open Poort*» *without any comment*, says enough.

Only fifteen years ago, this would have been unthinkable: in the early 1960s, the Reformed evangelistic periodical was still exclusively filled with meditations, calls for repentance and conversion, and editorials that stressed the differences between Catholicism and Protestantism. To take just

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<sup>344</sup> King Ahab was an idolater of Baal and had misappropriated the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite. Elijah was his biggest rival. See: 1 Kings 21.

<sup>345</sup> Herod Antipas had married Herodias, the wife of his half-brother Herod Philip. John the Baptist did not agree with this marriage and was sentenced to death. See: Mark 6:14-29.

<sup>346</sup> *Band VII.9* (1<sup>st</sup> May 1974), 15.

<sup>347</sup> *B.O.P. XLIX.10* (October 1969), 19-23, there 23.

<sup>348</sup> *Ibid. LXXVII.1-2* (January-February 1977).

<sup>349</sup> *Ibid.*, 14-15.

<sup>350</sup> «*De Open Poort*» cited Kenneth Kaunda, the then president of Northern Rhodesia/Zambia, with approval: “Het één-partijstelsel is niet synoniem met diktatuur. De volkswil kan ook op andere wijze in het overheidsbeleid worden verdiskonterd dan via het ons bekende meer-partijenstelsel (...). We moeten ook niet vergeten dat dit systeem meer past bij de Afrikaanse maatschappij dan de Westerse vorm van demokratie. (...) Het één-partijstelsel ontstond in de meeste landen vooral omdat de bevrijdingsbewegingen de massale steun kregen van de bevolking. In veel landen was dit zelfs een kriterium voor de koloniale regering om uit te maken wanneer zij zich terug kon trekken.” *Ibid.*, 16-17, there 17.

one example: in November 1962, Rev. Ganzevoort reiterated the already mentioned claim that revolutionary radicalism was much more accepted in countries in which Roman Catholics prevailed than in those with a Protestant majority. Both ‘Rome’ (Catholicism) and the ‘Revolution’ (non-Christian world views) repudiated the sole authority of God, and had therefore more in common with each other than the ‘Revolution’ and the ‘Reformation’ (Protestantism).<sup>351</sup> Clearly, the «*De Open Poort*» in the Ganzevoort period was a completely different magazine than the «*De Open Poort*» under the editorship of Rev. Eikelboom. The old Neo-Calvinist distinction between the Church as institute and as organism was removed.<sup>352</sup> As a result, lamentations about the lack of a Flemish Protestant political party died down. Here again, a paradox emerged: before the 1970s, the fiercest advocates of a Protestant party had been *Dutch* «gereformeerden», and thereafter, the ones who reconceptualised the relationship between Church and politics were *Dutch* «gereformeerden» as well. It is rather a pity that almost all articles that were published in GKB-related periodicals were written by Dutchmen; although Rev. D.C. van Lonkhuijzen, servant of the Gospel in Mechlin, had said as early as 1942 that the «Gereformeerde Kerken in België» needed to develop a way of living and dealing with problems tailored to the conditions in Flanders<sup>353</sup>, such a distinct *Flemish* way of being Reformed has never come into being. Opinions that were common in the GKN – with regard to education, politics, theology and interdenominational relations – were being ‘copied’ to Belgium and brought into the GKB by Dutch ministers and church members. For good reason, an old saying states: if Holland sneezed, Belgium got a cold.<sup>354</sup>

## 5. The «zuil» that never came into being

From the very beginning of Neo-Calvinist church life in Belgium – the history of the future GKB began in Brussels in the early 1890s –, «gereformeerden» were characterised by the same drive to revitalise the Calvinist heritage that typified their fellow churchmen in Holland. Although they were a tiny community, this should not come as a surprise: especially in the initial period of their existence, the «gereformeerde kerken» in Belgium were mainly populated by Dutchmen and had the appearance of distinct «Doleantiekerken» – churches whose founding took place in the wake of or was inspired by the «Doleantie» –, with the accompanying activistic mentality. Directly after the establishing of

<sup>351</sup> B.O.P. XLII.11 (November 1962), 7-8, there 8.

<sup>352</sup> Even Rev. Ganzevoort acknowledged in 1967 that, because of the absence of a Protestant political party, political statements made by the Church were justified to some extent: “In onze Belgische wereld kennen we geen eigen organisaties van Protestantse kant op het terrein van het sociale en het politieke leven. Daardoor hebben wij ook geen organen om op een eigen wijze publiek te getuigen, met name ook in bijzondere omstandigheden. Daardoor komt eerder de behoefte op om in zulke omstandigheden als kerk een uitspraak te doen.” See: *Ibid.* XLVII.6 (June 1967), 2.

<sup>353</sup> “Het is daarom beslist noodzakelijk, wil ooit het gereformeerde leven in Vlaanderen tot grooten bloei komen, dat we krijgen een eigen typisch Vlaamsch gereformeerde levenswijze.” See: *Ibid.* XXII.6 (June 1942), 4.

<sup>354</sup> In Dutch: ‘Als het regent in Nederland, druppelt het in België.’

churches of their own – and in Ghent, Mechlin and Boechout even *before* a first church council was chosen<sup>355</sup> –, the «gereformeerden» devoted themselves to build ‘schools with the Bible’. They experienced their efforts to accomplish this as a ‘school struggle’ – a *twofold* struggle even: they had not only to fight for their rights as a religious minority; they also had to persuade fellow Protestants of the necessity and indispensability of confessional schools. For them, however, the need for such schools was evident: their children should receive a solid, Christian-based education, in accordance with the sound doctrines of reformational orthodoxy. At first, the «gereformeerden» carried this through to such an extent that they dissociated themselves from existing *interdenominational* initiatives to found Protestant schools in three places (Brussels, Antwerp and Ghent). Only when they realised that it was simply impossible to keep «*gereformeerde*» schools viable, did they reconcile with Protestants from other denominations.

In fact, the way in which the «gereformeerden» in Belgium dealt with the issue of Christian-based schools, was exemplary for their attitude in general. In the first half of the twentieth century, the GKB were rather introvert and led an isolated existence; they were “te Nederlands” (‘too Dutch’) and “te afgezonderd van de Belgische samenleving” (‘too much isolated from the rest of Belgian society’).<sup>356</sup> The churches were primarily oriented towards Holland and had only limited contacts with other Belgian Protestants. Given their genesis, the «gereformeerden» distanced themselves from the two ‘biggest’ denominations, the «Bond van Kerken» (referred to as the ‘State Church’, since this was the only Protestant church body that was recognised by the Belgian government) and the «Belgische Christelijke Zendingskerk» (a denomination with which they actually had much in common); being of the opinion that their isolation was their strength<sup>357</sup>, they secluded themselves to safeguard the sound faith. They would only come out of their self-chosen seclusion when there was no other alternative, as was the case in the field of primary education or nursing.<sup>358</sup> Although the need for organisations of their own was deeply felt by the «gereformeerden», their dedication to the Reformed principles and their strict interpretation of the Three Forms of Unity made working together with other Protestants practically impossible. And since the Neo-Calvinist community was too small to main-

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<sup>355</sup> The moment on which a first church council is elected (called «‘institueringsdatum’ » in Dutch), is usually seen as the founding date of a church.

<sup>356</sup> *Tussentijds rapport van de deputaten voor de zaken van de Belgische kerken aan de generale synode van Haarlem, 1973/74*, dated 18<sup>th</sup> June 1974 [archive of the G.K. in Boechout]. See also: De Raaf, *Een open poort*, 84.

<sup>357</sup> An old anti-revolutionary ‘battle cry’ says: “in ons isolement ligt onze kracht!” For more information on this ARP motto, see: J. Kamphuis, *Evangelisch isolement. Over de zinspreuk ‘In ons isolement ligt onze kracht!’, ter nagedachtenis aan Mr. G. Groen van Prinsterer, overleden 19 mei 1876, de vader van de antirevolutionaire richting* (Groningen 1976).

<sup>358</sup> In 1910, the «Nederlandse evangelische hervormde kerk» in Brussels approached the local «gereformeerden» to set up a Protestant infirmary together. The latter agreed. See: Liagre, *Anders geloven*, 206-210; G.K.B. VII.158 (8<sup>th</sup> May 1910), 2; VII.159 (22<sup>nd</sup> May 1910), 2-3; VII.161 (19<sup>th</sup> June 1910), 2-3; VII.163 (17<sup>th</sup> July 1910), 3-4; VII.164 (31<sup>st</sup> July 1910), 2-3; VII.171 (6<sup>th</sup> November 1910), 2-3; VII.172 (20<sup>th</sup> November 1910), 2-3; VII.179 (26<sup>th</sup> February 1911), 2.

tain associations all by itself, the only organisations that could be established were *church-related*, such as study groups for adolescents, men and women («jongelings-, mannen- en vrouwenverenigingen»). Yet, after 1945, this would change: the «gereformeerden» abandoned their isolation and actively sought contact with other Belgian Protestants.

It is not a coincidence that this change of mentality occurred in the late 1940s and early 1950s: at that time, the «Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland» (the ‘mother churches’ of the GKB) became more receptive to interchurch cooperation – which resulted in the founding of the worldwide ‘Reformed Ecumenical Synod’ («Gereformeerde Oecumenische Synode») and the Dutch ‘Assembly of Reformed Churches’ («Contactorgaan Gereformeerde Gezindte») –, the Protestant churches in Belgium grew towards each another – the first result of this ‘spirit of fraternisation’ was the creation of «*De Kruisbanier*»<sup>359</sup> –, and the «Gereformeerde Kerken in België» began to see their (strong) ties with Holland more and more as oppressing and impeding. As a result, the GKB decided to participate in the ‘Federation of Protestant Churches in Belgium’ («Federatie van Protestantse Kerken in België», founded in 1923) somewhere in the late 1940s<sup>360</sup>, the ‘Belgian Society for Protestant Missions in the Congo’ («Belgisch Genootschap voor Protestantse Zendingen in Congo», founded in 1910) in 1952<sup>361</sup>, Protestant radio and television transmissions (out of which the «Protestantse Radio en Televisie» / PRT – somewhat comparable to the Dutch IKOR / IKON, though with less broadcasting time – came into being<sup>362</sup>), the schooling of teachers of religion (which was a consequence of the obligation the «schoolpact» had given public schools to offer lessons in Protestantism for students who wanted to take such lessons), the pastoral care for hospitalised and imprisoned persons, interdenominational youth and evangelisation activities<sup>363</sup>, and, ultimately, the ‘Protestant Theological Faculty’ («Protes-

<sup>359</sup> Because of the Second World War, the Protestant churches in Antwerp decided to convene joint youth activities and evening meetings. The contacts that were made at that time, laid the foundation of «*De Kruisbanier*», which first issue was published on January 13<sup>th</sup>, 1945. See: *De Kruisbanier* V.53 (31<sup>st</sup> December 1949), 2. Some were sceptic about the initiative, particularly because of the involvement of the «gereformeerden» (!): “[t]egenover de Gereformeerden en hun dogma’s – o, die zwaarbelaste term – was er grote reserve.” See: *Ibid.* XXV.11 (7<sup>th</sup> June 1969), 1. Another article tells that «*De Kruisbanier*» resulted from the (illegal) smuggling of Bibles and evangelical literature to Belgian young men who were involuntarily employed in Nazi Germany. J. Du Meunier, who later became minister of the «protestantse kerk» in Mechlin, played a key role in this operation and is considered to be the ‘spiritual father’ of the evangelical weekly. See: *Ibid.* XXIX.36 (25<sup>th</sup> October 1973), 12-3.

<sup>360</sup> The exact date of the GKB’s entry into the Federation could not be ascertained. In 1939, the GKB were not included in the Federation’s list of member churches – see: *De Protestantsche Kerkbode* XXX.2 (June 1939), 2 –, but around 1950, their name was mentioned in Federation-relation articles.

<sup>361</sup> De Raaf, *Guido de Brès-kerk van Brussel*, 119.

<sup>362</sup> The «Protestantse Radio en Televisie» is now called the «‘Protestantse Omroep’» (PRO). Evangelical Protestants, centered around the «Belgische Evangelische Zending», have their own broadcasting corporation, the «‘Evangelische Radio- en Televisiestichting’» (ERTS).

<sup>363</sup> From 1961 onwards, Protestant teenagers and young adults issued a magazine titled «*Op Vrije Voeten*». Although the GKB were a bit sceptic at first (they feared that their church-related youth work would suffer from this initiative – see: *N.O.P.* XLI.10 (October 1961), 2-3, there 2 –), they would quickly change their minds and give full support to the periodical. Partly due to this magazine, a feeling of ‘togetherness’ began to emerge among the youth of the various Belgian Protestant churches in the 1960s. In 1970, the Brussels «‘Gereformeerde Jeugdvereniging’» even merged with the

tantse Theologische Faculteit»/PTF, established in 1950) in 1969.<sup>364</sup> These cooperative projects would lay the foundation for the coming about of the «Verenigde Protestantse Kerk in België» in 1979.

The difference between the pre- and post-War period was striking: whereas the «gereformeerden» in Belgium had always been rather hesitant about intensive cooperation with other church groups, they were highly involved in inter-Protestant projects in the years after 1945. Neo-Calvinists became convinced that they could not do without the help of coreligionists if they wanted to build organisations of their own *outside the ecclesiastical sphere* as well. After all, although the abovementioned projects and institutions gave the Protestant community a common identity and made Protestantism more visible in Belgian society, they were all directly related to the domain of the *churches* – or, to put it Kuyperian: to the domain of the churches *as institutes*. Yet, the «gereformeerden» emphasised, Christians were called upon to confess the Lordship of Christ in *all spheres* of life. Consequently, Rev. Ganzevoort urged the readers of «*De Kruisbanier*» in a 1956 article to widen the interdenominational activities to the domain of society and politics: “het zou naar mijn overtuiging van veel groter waarde zijn, wanneer we als Evangelische Christen onze eigen sociale en politieke organisaties hadden, die als zodanig in het volksleven konden getuigen van den zegen, die er ligt in het houden van Gods geboden.”<sup>365</sup> Perhaps the Reverend was unaware of this, but in the past, some concrete (albeit failed) attempts to establish Reformed-based organisations had already been made: as early as 1911, the «*Gereformeerde Kerkbode voor België*» had complained about the lack of a Flemish Protestant daily – since the Catholic, liberal and socialist newspapers, the Reformed periodical claimed, were full of blasphemy, profanity, lies and terms of abuse, these could not serve as daily source of information for ‘God-fearing Christians’ – and incited the Protestant community to create such a gazette<sup>366</sup>; in 1950, a member of the «gereformeerde kerk» in Antwerp (probably K. Sluys,

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«‘Jonge Kathelijners’» (related to the NEHK, the church from which the «gereformeerden» had seceded in the 1890s!). See: Liagre, *Anders geloven*, 261-262.

<sup>364</sup> The «Protestantse Theologische Faculteit» has its roots in the Second World War, when communication lines with foreign countries as Holland, France and Switzerland – where intended ministers of the Belgian Protestant churches received their theological education – were cut off. The «Bond van Kerken» and the «Methodistische Kerk» established a genuine institution in 1950; the «Belgische Christelijke Zendingskerk» joined them in 1955. See: *Advies Kring België der Gereformeerde Kerken ten aanzien van de verhouding tot de Theologische Faculteit te Brussel*, undated (probably 1967/1968) [archive of the G.K. in Boechout]. Until the late 1960s, the «Gereformeerde Kerken» did not see the need to give structural support to the PTF, because they already had two theological training centres – the theological faculty of the Free University in Amsterdam and the Theological Seminary in Kampen – and were not pleased with the PTF’s multi-confessional base. See: *Ontwerp voorstel aan generale synode-1961 inzake de Brusselse Theol. Fakulteit*, undated; *Enkele opmerkingen ten aanzien van de situatie in en rond de Gereformeerde Kerken in België*, dated July 1966 [archive of the G.K. in Boechout]. Even after the GKN’s decision to participate in the PTF in 1969, students who wanted to become a minister in the «Gereformeerde Kerken» still needed to take additional courses in Amsterdam or Kampen. See: *Acta G.S. GKN* (Sneek 1969 / 1970), art. 169. The PTF is currently called «‘(Universitaire) Faculteit voor Protestantse Godgeleerdheid’».

<sup>365</sup> *De Kruisbanier* XII.28 (7<sup>th</sup> July 1956), 1-2, there 2.

<sup>366</sup> “Het peil van de Belgische pers staat niet hoog. (...) De Belgische bladen zijn voor onze gezinnen in het minst niet bruikbaar. (...) De Hollandsche anti-revolutionaire bladen kunnen in deze leemte niet voorzien. Die kunnen niet genoeg

the editor of the local church bulletin) informed his fellow churchmen about the initiative to found a «Belgische Christelijke Radio-Vereniging» (a Belgian equivalent to the Dutch NCRV) and asked them to make a donation to the «Belgische Vereniging van Protestantse Radioluisteraars»<sup>367</sup>; and in 1951, Rev. W. Baas of the «gereformeerde kerk» in Brussels hinted at the creation of a fully-fledged Protestant academy (modelled after the «Vrije Universiteit» in Amsterdam).<sup>368</sup> Noteworthy initiatives that were undertaken *after* Rev. Ganzevoort's incitement include the attempt of C. Zwaan, a prominent member of the «gereformeerde kerk» in Mechlin, to establish a «Belgische Evangelische Filmorganisatie» (a film production company that would make cinematographic material for the benefit of evangelistic activities)<sup>369</sup>, and the intention of several Protestants in Brussels to build a Christian-based secondary school.<sup>370</sup>

None of these plans would ever be realised; the majority of Protestants apparently did not see the need for the abovementioned organisations or considered it undesirable to build an institutional 'fortress' around their community of faith. Even in «gereformeerde» circles, where the construction of organisations based on reformational principles had always been something obvious, some began to question the indispensability of such organisations in the late 1960s and 1970s. Influenced by changed/changing theological insights, these «gereformeerden» came to realise that the Belgian situation, which was totally different from the position of (Reformed) Protestantism in the Netherlands, required a specific *Belgian* approach. According to two GKB ministers (!), the transfer of the Dutch way of thinking and acting to Flanders – i.c. institutional separation from the rest of society – even hindered the GKB in their missionary work. Both parsons feared that the «gereformeerden» would end up in a self-constructed 'ghetto' – in their opinion, the Holland-oriented GKB were already too isolated from society at large and should drop their old adage that their isolation was their strength.<sup>371</sup> Was it really necessary to have a «Belgische Christelijke Radio-Vereniging» or a «Belgische Evangelische Filmorganisatie»? An increasing number of (Reformed) Protestants – in Belgium and Holland – began to answer this question negatively.

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rekening met België houden. Protestanten in Vlaanderenland, waarom zijt ge zoo hard slapende?" See: *G.K.B.* VII.181 (26<sup>th</sup> March 1911), 3-4.

<sup>367</sup> *Mededelingenblad van de gereformeerde kerk te Antwerpen* 272 (16<sup>th</sup> March 1950), 1; 273 (30<sup>th</sup> March 1950), 3; 274 (13<sup>th</sup> April 1950), 2; 275 (27<sup>th</sup> April 1950), 1; 276 (11<sup>th</sup> May 1950), 2. The «Belgische Vereniging van Protestantse Radioluisteraars» was headed by W.A. van Kekem, evangelist of the NEHK in Brussels. See: Liagre, *Anders geloven*, 264-265. The ultimate goal of this broadcast association – the creation of a 'BCRV' – would never be realised.

<sup>368</sup> *De Kruisbanier* VIII.45 (8<sup>th</sup> November 1952), 1-2.

<sup>369</sup> "Moeten we hier die schone gave Gods die we in de geluidsfilm hebben ontvangen, uitsluitend in handen laten van de wereld en daardoor prijs geven aan hen die uit winstbejag de film exploiteren? (...) Als Christenen dringt zich dan ook de vraag aan ons op: mogen we langer lijdelijk blijven toeziен, of moeten we in het offensief gaan en dit machtige middel der moderne techniek ook dienstbaar maken om onze Christelijke getuigenissen de wereld te doen uitgaan?" See: *Ibid.* XIV.26 (21<sup>st</sup> June 1958), 2.

<sup>370</sup> *Ibid.* XXIII.3 (11<sup>th</sup> February 1967), 3.

<sup>371</sup> *Tussentijds rapport van de deputaten voor de zaken van de Belgische kerken aan de generale synode van Haarlem*, 1973/74, dated 18<sup>th</sup> June 1974 [archive of the G.K. in Boechout].

A genuine Protestant «zuil» has therefore never come into being in Belgium. True, Protestants had their own organisations – the PRT, the PTF, ‘schools with the Bible’ – and the *contours* of a distinct block of interrelated confessional-based institutions became visible, but it would be going too far to call this a «zuil». Two essential elements of a «zuil» were missing: first, Protestants lacked a political party of their own – the Belgian sociologist J. Billiet states that *political representation* is a necessary condition for a population group to be called a «zuil»<sup>372</sup> – and second, there was no Protestant ‘lay’ elite (at least not in the *twentieth century*<sup>373</sup>) that promoted the general interests of a congenial and well-delineated group<sup>374</sup> – more than that: because of the absence of an ‘elite’, *ministers* fulfilled the role of (opinion) leaders. As this chapter has showed, *clergymen* were the ones who set themselves up as advocates of Christian-based schools, who stimulated organisational activity and who wrote about political, educational and societal matters in a handful of magazines, which were – of course – edited by themselves. Almost all initiatives to found Protestant organisations were made by preachers. In Holland, ministers were involved in non-church related activities as well – parsons were usually members of the local Protestant school’s board of governors and some emeriti were members of local councils on behalf of the ARP –, but the division between the Church as institute and as organism was enforced more rigorously than in Belgium.<sup>375</sup> South of the Moerdijk, however, Neo-Calvinist church life had to be created out of nothing; the «gereformeerden», determined to *re-form* Catholic Flanders, had no socio-political institutions on which they could fall back. As a consequence, parsons, who already had a natural authority – because they came from the Netherlands (the cradle of Neo-Calvinism) and were at the ‘head’ of a congregation –, were automatically the ‘shepherds’ outside the ecclesiastical sphere as well. The small «gereformeerde» community in Belgium took a lot after the Old Testament ‘band of Gideon’ – with the ministers in the role of Gideon. Just as the Hebrew judge, they were resolute to fulfil their mission.

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<sup>372</sup> J. Billiet, ‘Verzuiling, ontzuiling, verzuiling in België’, *Ons Erfdeel. Kultureel tijdschrift voor Zuidvlaamse werking in Vlaams-Nederlands-Suidafrikaanse samenwerking* XVII.3 (1974), 349–358.

<sup>373</sup> Rev. C.A.F. van Stipriaan Luiscius, editor-in-chief of «*De Stem*», the periodical of the Dutch-speaking congregations of the «Protestants-Evangelische Kerk in België» (the new name of the «Bond van Kerken»), said in 1963 that the lack of a Belgium-born Protestant ‘elite’ was the reason why Protestantism was still seen as something ‘outlandish’ by the majority of the Belgian population: “Van R.K. zijde wordt het protestantisme verweten, dat het in Vlaanderen volksvreemd is. In zekere zin is dit niet geheel ten onrechte. Het zijn toch immers voor het merendeel de Hollanders, die hier het kerkelijk leven leiden en vormen (...). Omdat tot dusver een Protestantse Vlaamse intelligentsia ontbroken heeft (...), heeft onze kerk geen eigen karakter weten te krijgen. Hier ligt dus een der voornaamste oorzaken, waarom haar apostolaire kracht beneden de maat is gebleven.” See: *De Stem* XCII.16 (March 1963), 1. In the *nineteenth century*, however, there had been such an elite: several prominent liberals – De Laveleye, Fredericq, Goblet d’Alviella – were members of a Protestant chuch.

<sup>374</sup> A population group needs to have an ‘elite’ to be called a «zuil». See: H.F.J.M. van den Eerenbeemt, *In het spoor van de vooruitgang. Het moderniseringssproces in de Nederlandse samenleving* (Tilburg 1989), 152.

<sup>375</sup> The distinction between ‘institute’ and ‘organism’ sometimes led to confusion. In 1911, Rev. Chr. Warner of the «gerefommerde kerk» in Brussels urged the persons present on the local Protestant school’s annual meeting not to call each other ‘brother’ and ‘sister’ anymore, because these terms of address should only be used in an ecclesiastical context! See: De Raaf, *Guido de Brès-kerk van Brussel*, 176.

## **2. A LIGHT IN THE MIDST OF DARKNESS: NEO-CALVINIST SELF-POSITIONING IN BELGIAN SOCIETY**

### **1. A Gideon's band upon a hill**

The sixth, seventh and eighth chapters of the Book of Judges tell the story of Gideon, a member of the tribe of Manasseh whom God had chosen to free the Hebrews from foreign oppression. At that time, the Midianites, one of the neighbouring tribes of God's covenant people, ruled over Israel, as a Godly punishment for the latter's idolatrous and disloyal behaviour. But after seven years, the Hebrews became remorseful and begged the Lord for forgiveness and freedom. Their prayers were swiftly answered: Gideon received two theophanies in which he was told to destroy the village-altar to the idol Baal and rise in arms against the Midianite despots. Turning to his own tribe and those of Asher, Zebulun and Naphtali for support, he managed to mobilise an army of 32,000 men – a number that paled into insignificance in comparison to the troops of their oppressors and that would even be reduced to just 300 men, because God did not want the Hebrews to think that they could defeat their antagonists through their own merit. Gideon was now confronted with a humanly impossible task, but trusted in God and did what he was told. In return for his loyalty, the covenant people were given victory by the Lord and ousted their enemies. In the following forty years, during Gideon's judgeship, Israel experienced a period of peacefulness and stability.<sup>376</sup>

Since then, the term 'Gideon's band' («'Gideonsbende'») has become synonym to a small albeit militant group that is striving for the realisation of an almost unachievable goal, but draws inspiration and strength from its diminutiveness and the unattainability of its objective, and is resolute to succeed. In the context of orthodox Christianity, the word relates to a religious community that considers itself to be a spiritual vanguard amidst a 'heathenish' environment, appointed by God to lead people to the 'true' worship and knowledge of Christ. Comparisons with Old Testament Israel and its chieftains – with Gideon and others – are quickly made by such communities of faith: in the history of the Low Countries, for example, the sixteenth-century Sea Beggars («Watergeuzen») have been described as a 'host of the Lord' («'heerschaar des Heeren'»)<sup>377</sup>, William of Orange has been cheered as a 'second Moses',<sup>378</sup> seventeenth-century Calvinists called Holland 'a second Israel'<sup>379</sup>

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<sup>376</sup> Judges 6:1-8:32.

<sup>377</sup> H.A. Meijer, *Heemskerk* (Amsterdam 1848), 193.

<sup>378</sup> G. Groenhuis, *De Predikanten. De sociale positie van de gereformeerde predikanten in de Republiek der Verenigde Nederlanden voor ± 1700* (Groningen 1977), 79.

<sup>379</sup> C. Huisman, *Neerlands Israël. Het natiebeseef der traditioneel-gereformeerden in de achttiende eeuw* (Dordrecht 1983), 56. The name 'second Canaan' has also been used. See: J. van Genderen, 'Herman Witsius (1636-1708)', in: T. Brienen ed., *De Nadere Reformatie. Beschrijving van haar voornaamste vertegenwoordigers* (The Hague 1986), 193-218, there 196.

and their Church was referred to as a ‘Gideon’s band’ in the first years of its existence.<sup>380</sup> The «Gereformeerde Kerken» in both Holland in Belgium have also derived images from the Bible to portray themselves.<sup>381</sup> Especially in the latter country, an analogy with the aforementioned chapters of the Book of Judges was obvious. First, Neo-Calvinists were convinced that God had sent them to Flanders to stir a religious revival, establish new churches, remind its inhabitants of the Calvinist intermezzo in Flemish history, bring them back to the ‘pure’ Gospel (stripped of false Roman interpretations) and free them from the ‘Papal slavery’ by which they had been weighed down for centuries<sup>382</sup> – similar to Gideon’s God-given calling to liberate the Hebrews from their servitude to the Midianites. Second, the «gereformeerden» saw the (Catholic) society in which they were placed as just as hostile to God and just as idolatrous as the tribes that had surrounded Old Testament Israel. Third, their community resembled Gideon’s army in actual size – at the beginning of the twentieth century, when the GKB consisted of only two churches (one in Brussels and one in Antwerp), even some Protestant chroniclers were unaware of their existence and overlooked them completely<sup>383</sup> –, from which they derived fortitude and a warlike spirit. Articles, brochures, sermons and tracts that were written by GKB ministers were therefore full of military figurative language: (Reformed) Christians were called ‘warriors’, charged with the ‘plight to fight’,<sup>384</sup> equipped with a celestial ‘suit of armour’,<sup>385</sup> and ‘marching’ under ‘the banner of the Gospel’.<sup>386</sup> Fourth (and last), the thought of being a ‘Gideon’s band’ was strengthened because of the embedment of the doctrine of foreordination within the fabric of Neo-Calvinist theology. In the «Gereformeerde Kerken», the idea that God had decided who would be endowed with eternal life and who would be sent to the ‘outer darkness’ in afterlife, did not cause

<sup>380</sup> W. Bergsma, *Tussen Gideonsbende en publieke kerk. Een studie over het gereformeerde protestantisme in Friesland, 1580-1650* (Hilversum and Leeuwarden 1999), passim; G.J. Schutte, ‘De Gereformeerde kerk in de Republiek’, in: G.J. Schutte ed., *Het Indisch Sion. De Gereformeerde kerk onder de Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie* (Hilversum 2002), 15-23, there 19; S. Groenveld, *Huisgenoten des geloofs. Was de samenleving in de Republiek der Verenigde Nederlanden verzuild?* (Hilversum 1995), 20; A. Kuyper, *Locus de salute, ecclesia, sacramentis. College-dictaat van een der studenten II* (Kampen 1910), 37.

<sup>381</sup> Abraham Kuyper was a master at comparing the genesis and history of the «Gereformeerde Kerken» as well as the community of the «gereformeerden» with biblical imagery. After his death, he himself has been described as a ‘second Moses’. See: Koch, *Abraham Kuyper*, 307.

<sup>382</sup> “[T]erugkeer tot Rome betekent terugkeer tot de slavernij waaruit onze vaderen zich hebben vrijgevochten en die voor miljoenen anderen oorzaak werd om met God en Kerk voorgoed te breken.” See: *Vlaams Kerkblad* X.10 (February 1964), 268-273, there 272. Elsewhere, the word ‘slavery’ was used to describe the Roman Catholic sacrament of penance. See: *Ibid.* X.1 (May 1963), 7-19, there 8. The Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of Pennsylvania (the highest authority within the community of Jehovah’s Witnesses) was also accused of ‘enslaving’ its followers. See: *Ibid.* IV.4-5 (August-September 1957), 100-103, there 102.

<sup>383</sup> G.K.B. VI.156 (10<sup>th</sup> April 1910), 2.

<sup>384</sup> E.g.: *B.O.P.* XVIII.10 (October 1939), 1. [Erroneously, this edition was distributed as the tenth issue of the *eighteenth* volume.]

<sup>385</sup> E.g.: *Ibid.* XXXII.6 (April 1951), 2. [Erroneously, this edition was distributed as the sixth issue of the *thirty-first* volume.]

<sup>386</sup> *Vlaams Kerkblad* II.8 (December 1955), 236-237, there 237. The word «‘gereformeerd’» had a comical connotation in Belgium, because the same term was used in the *real* Belgian army to declare a conscript unfit for military service. See: *Ibid.* VIII.10 (February 1962), 190-194, there 191.

uncertainty among church members about their individual salvation, but functioned rather as a confirmation that they were *all* included in God's covenant—and hence that they were a chosen people—as well as an underpinning of their ecclesiastical self-awareness. Since it should be presupposed that all who were baptised in the «Gereformeerde Kerken» were born-again (and elect), unless they would apostatise in later life, every Neo-Calvinist could be confident of his election.<sup>387</sup>

Another biblical metaphor that typifies the self-identity and self-perception of the GKB is the image of the ‘city upon a hill’.<sup>388</sup> Through history, this allegory—recorded in the fifth chapter of the Gospel according to Matthew, in which Christ sticks up for those who are in misery, prophesies about the Kingdom of God and urges His followers to act as “the salt of the earth”, “the light of the world”, “a city that is set on a hill”<sup>389</sup>—has inspired many religious communities in their mission to purify the spiritual and social conditions of their environment. The most well-known example of this self-identification with the ‘city upon a hill’ is, without doubt, the sermon Rev. John Winthrop gave in 1630, aboard the ship with which the Pilgrim Fathers set course for the current United States of America. In the New World, the Puritan Pilgrims should be notable for their modesty, charitableness, devotion and high ethical standards. The eyes of the entire world, the clergyman preached, were upon them; they, the self-proclaimed “God’s special people, the successors of the ancient Hebrews in a new divine covenant”<sup>390</sup>, could not afford to make a shameful exhibition of themselves, for this would reflect on God Himself, precisely because of their claim to personify the purest form of Christianity.<sup>391</sup> They should therefore be a paragon of virtue, a shining example that would arouse admiration and imitation from other communities in their new country-of-residence.

Abraham Kuyper linked the ‘hill’ metaphor to the revitalisation of Calvinism in the late nineteenth century, for which he himself was responsible to a large extent. In his famous *Stone Lectures*, delivered at Princeton University during a publicity tour around America in 1898, Kuyper echoed the Puritan Reverend, by stating that

“there is a concentration of religious light and life in the Church, but then in the walls of this church, there are wide open windows, and through these spacious windows, the light of the Eternal radiates over the whole world. Here is a city, set upon a hill, which every man can see afar off. Here is a holy salt that penetrates in every direction, checking all corruption. And even he who does not yet imbibe the higher light,

<sup>387</sup> “[Kuyper] leerde de zogenaamde ‘veronderstelde wedergeboorte’: van een dopeling mocht worden aangenomen dat hij wedergeboren was, tenzij later het tegendeel bleek. Zo’n uitgangspunt bevorderde het zelfbewustzijn van het nieuwe volksdeel als een Gideonsbende, aangezien elke gereformeerde zich uitverkoren kon weten.” See: Van Eijnatten and Van Lieburg, *Nederlandse religiegeschiedenis*, 286.

<sup>388</sup> Already in the first edition of the «Gereformeerde Kerkbode voor België», published on May 1<sup>st</sup>, 1904, the image of the ‘city on a hill’ was used to describe what the GKB should be. See: note 135.

<sup>389</sup> Matthew 5:13-14. *King James Version of the Bible*.

<sup>390</sup> E.J. McManus, *Law and Liberty in Early New England. Criminal Justice and Due Process 1620-1692* (Amherst [1993] 2009), 21.

<sup>391</sup> N. Guétin, *Religious Ideology in American Politics. A History* (Jefferson 2009), 6.

or maybe shuts his eyes to it, is nevertheless admonished, with equal emphasis, and in all things, to give glory to the name of the Lord.”<sup>392</sup>

In the Netherlands, the Reformed ‘hill’ had eroded as a consequence of latitudinarianism and tergiversation and as a result of which the ‘city’ (the «Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk») had almost slipped down to the ground level of the worldly abyss, but the «Afscheiding» and «Doleantie» movements built a new ‘city’ (the «Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland») that restored the old Reformed Church of the Dutch Republic’s heydays. Finally, the ‘light of the Eternal’ could once again shine upon the Netherlandish lowlands. The ‘city on a hill’ analogy did not encourage the Neo-Calvinists to seclude themselves from the ‘world’ – as was the case with the American Puritans –, but rather to participate actively in society at large: from both the Church as institute (the GKN) and as organism (the Protestant organisations), the ‘pure’ Word of Scripture would penetrate into all spheres of life and make short work of secularising tendencies. This way, the «gereformeerden» thought, a ‘re-Christianisation’ of society could be realised.<sup>393</sup> The «Gereformeerde Kerken in België» were motivated by a similar objective to reform the civil order along Calvinist lines: rising unbelief, widespread (Catholic) superstition and increasing indifference in Protestant quarters were life-threatening attacks on man’s spiritual welfare. Perhaps Belgium, a country dominated by ultramontanist Papists and unbelieving Freemasons, needed a collective conversion («algehele volksbekering») even more than Holland, which was – at least in name – still primarily Protestant. And since conversion was seen in Neo-Calvinist theology as a work of God’s grace that could only be brought about by the preaching of the Gospel<sup>394</sup>, the «gereformeerden» in Belgium saw it as their God-given task to evangelise and lead the Flemish people to the true (Reformed) faith. Their churches ought to be ‘cities on a hill’, or, to use another figure of speech, ‘lighthouses’: to break through the ‘darkness’ in which Flanders was plunged since the fall of Antwerp in 1585, the ‘light’ of the Gospel – which the GKB radiated – should spread out to the farthest corners of the country.<sup>395</sup> Not for nothing, Jeremiah 22:29 – “o land, land,

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<sup>392</sup> A. Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism. Six Lectures Delivered at Princeton University, 1898 under the auspices of the L.P. Stone Foundation* (Grand Rapids [1898] 1931), 53.

<sup>393</sup> Neo-Calvinists were convinced that organisational activity was the key to success in their endeavour to achieve a ‘re-Christianisation’ of society: “[v]ia christelijke organisaties werden binnen de dijken van de antithese steeds nieuwe terreinen ‘ingeëpolderd’ voor het Rijk van God.” See: G. Heitink, *Een kerk met karakter. Tijd voor heroriëntatie* (Kampen 2007), 51. According to sociologist J. Hendriks, the Neo-Calvinist ideal of ‘re-Christianisation’ was an *all-embracing* attempt to reform society and culture: “secularisatie wordt gezien op talrijke terreinen, zoals het onderwijs (...), de politiek (...), de wetenschappen en de kunst (...) en verder ook in het recht, de ethiek en de theologie.” See: Hendriks, *De emancipatie van de Gereformeerden*, 98-99.

<sup>394</sup> “De bekering geschiedt altijd door het Woord.” See: B. Wentsel, *Dogmatiek IVa. De Heilige Geest, de Kerk en de laatste dingen. De persoon en het werk van de Heilige Geest* (Kampen 1995), 818.

<sup>395</sup> In Neo-Calvinist circles (especially in Belgium), the contrast between ‘light’ and ‘darkness’ was a recurring and favourite theme to express the differences between (Reformed) Protestantism and Roman Catholicism. This distinction was used as a metaphor in countless articles – in the «Vlaams Kerkblad» in particular – and even in the titles of two books that were written by two GKB ministers: Rev. Hegger’s *Mijn weg naar het licht* (published in 1959) and *Van sche-*

land! hoort des HEEREN Woord” (‘o earth, earth, earth! hear the Word of the LORD’)<sup>396</sup> – served more or less as a motto of «*De Open Poort*», the GKB-related evangelistic periodical, until the mid-1960s. Because a city on a hill (or a lighthouse) rises high above the landscape, an antithesis becomes observable: in the vale, the city (the Church) was visible from far afield and was something to which people could look up to – literally and figuratively. In everyday life, members of the «Gereformeerde Kerken» tried to give shape to this antithesis: they wanted to attract attention in a positive way, on account of their impeccability and devotion to Christ. Next to preaching, the way they lived their lives was seen by the «gereformeerden» as a form of public testimony of their faith.

## 2. Evangelisation

Although the city was, so to speak, located on a hill, it had to be accessible to all who sincerely sought (communion with) God and who were eager to be educated in the sound doctrines of reformational orthodoxy. The gate that gave access to the city should therefore not be hard to pass through, like a lift bridge; on the contrary: there should be no barriers or obstacles whatsoever that could discourage people from entering – the GKB monthly was named «*De Open Poort*» (literally: ‘The Open Gate’) for good reason. New church members or people who visited a Sunday service for the first time, particularly those with a Roman Catholic background, should feel welcome in a «gereformeerde kerk». The first impression the Reformed community made was not to be underestimated: “[I]aten ‘wij in de kerk’,” the bulletin of the church in Ghent wrote in October 1972, “intussen niet vergeten van onze kerk en onze kerkdienst een ‘open hof’ te blijven maken, dat openstaat ook voor nieuwkomers en voorbijgangers. Voor velen kan de eerste keer ook de laatste keer zijn.”<sup>397</sup> In 1948, the newsletter of the church in Antwerp had expressed itself in similar terms<sup>398</sup> and stressed the importance of hospitality once more in 1949, by stating that first-time-visitors may feel left out when no-one pays attention to them.<sup>399</sup> In Ghent, the congregation was given a good telling off after the Reverend had noticed that none of the regular churchgoers had had a little chat with a newcomer.<sup>400</sup> Cordiality was the

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merlicht tot volle licht of Rev. Lauwers (probably published in 1952, when it appeared as a serial in the Belgian edition of «*De Open Poort*»).

<sup>396</sup> The Dutch phrase is quoted from the *Statenvertaling*, the English translation is taken from the *King James Version of the Bible*.

<sup>397</sup> *Mededelingenblad van de gereformeerde kerk te Gent XXVI.10* (October 1972), 2-3.

<sup>398</sup> *Mededelingenblad van de gereformeerde kerk te Antwerpen 227* (27<sup>th</sup> May 1948), 1.

<sup>399</sup> “Toen ik hier nog maar kort was,” Rev. Baas told his readers, “trof het me dat vele gemeenteleden een oogje in ’t zeil hielden, om na de dienst vreemdelingen op te vangen, een praatje met hen te maken en hen zo mogelijk eens bij zich thuis uit te nodigen. Verbeeld ik me, dat de waakzaamheid de laatste tijd een beetje verslapt?” See: *Ibid.* 253 (10<sup>th</sup> June 1949), 1-2, there 2.

<sup>400</sup> “Het komt zoo zelden voor, dat we het eerst bijna niet geloofden. Er werd ons n.l. de opmerking gemaakt, dat er een gast in de kerk zou geweest zijn, en niemand had deze gegroet of een praatje mee gemaakt. (...) Een gast moet zich direct in Gent thuis gevoelen, en laten we dan ook niet wachten op een ander, om eens een gesprek aan te knopen.” See:

church's 'front piece' («'visitekaartje'») to the outside world and was essential to counteract negative images and stereotypes; the Ghent church bulletin even wrote about a former priest who was interested in Reformed Protestantism, but did not want to go to the «gereformeerde kerk» because its members gave him the impression that the church was rather 'stiff'.<sup>401</sup> Such images could hinder the spreading of the Gospel. The Neo-Calvinist 'city on a hill' should not only be *visible*, but also be a living testimony of the old Heidelberg triad: it had to radiate *thankfulness* for the *redemption* with which Christ frees mankind of its *misery*. "Een stad, die op een berg ligt. Het is alleen een getuigenis voor Jezus Christus, als die stad niet alleen zichtbaar is, maar als er ook iets *goeds* aan te zien is. Uw komst in de kerk is een getuigenis als u met verlangen binnengaat en met blijdschap buitenkomt"<sup>402</sup>, Rev. H. Wiersinga, the then minister of the «gereformeerde kerk» in Ghent, told his parishioners. Moreover, although the 'city' (the GKB) was part of a Dutch 'municipality' (the GKN), it needed to prevent people from thinking that it was only open to Hollanders.

Yet, as has been said earlier, the «Gereformeerde Kerken in België» – with the exception of the congregations in rural Boechout and Denderleeuw – were seen as 'Dutch immigrant churches' or 'churches of the Dutch colony in Belgium' for a long time indeed. The mere fact of belonging to a Dutch denomination had far-reaching consequences for the organisation and construction of their church life: the decisions that were made by the general synod of the GKN were fully applicable to the churches in Belgium – as a result of which developments in *Dutch* Calvinism affected the GKB more than those in Belgian Protestantism, at least in the first half of the twentieth century – and since only theologians who had been educated at the Theological Seminary in Kampen or the Free University in Amsterdam were entitled to exercise the ministry within the «Gereformeerde Kerken», almost *all* parsons that served the GKB were Dutchmen as well.<sup>403</sup> From the 1950s onwards, particularly this last feature came to be regarded more and more as a problem – even by the Reverends themselves. In 1959, for example, a prominent member of the «gereformeerde kerk» in Ghent said in the Dutch edition of «*De Open Poort*» that it would be better to involve more native-born Flemings in evangelisation activities. That way, the Flemish people would see that the GKB did not consist entirely of Dutch-

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*Mededelingenblad van de gereformeerde kerk te Gent* II.10 (July 1948), 1. The issue was addressed once again in the edition of October 1955 (page 2).

<sup>401</sup> *Ibid.* XIV.3 (March 1960), 3.

<sup>402</sup> *Ibid.* XII.6 (June 1958), 1-2, there 2.

<sup>403</sup> Only three ministers who served the GKB were native-born Flemings: Rev. A. Lauwers (1870-1955), Rev. C.L.A.M. Van Puyvelde (1877-1972) and Rev. E.A. Rooze (1948-). Rev. Lauwers served the church of Denderleeuw (before it was constituted) between 1920 and 1941 (according to *Honderdvijftig jaar gemeenten en predikanten*), in his capacity of evangelism pastor of the church in Brussels. Rev. Van Puyvelde was parson of the «gereformeerde kerk» in Zuilen (near Utrecht) from 1928 up to and including 1943. After he was given emeritus status in the last-mentioned year, he moved (back) to Belgium and took the pulpit in the new church in Boechout between 1955 and 1956. Rev. Rooze succeeded the late Rev. A.J. Verbeek (1934-1978) as minister of the «gereformeerde kerk» in Mechlin on October 8<sup>th</sup>, 1978. Nearly three months later, his tenure of office in the «Gereformeerde Kerken» ended, because on January 1<sup>st</sup>, 1979, the «Verenigde Protestantse Kerk in België» came into being.

men and that they were not just a Hollandic ‘import item’.<sup>404</sup> Besides, a Fleming was less inclined to talk about religious matters with a Hollander than with a fellow countryman, because the former was reputed to be a Calvinist zealot who looked down on his southern neighbours and approached them with a similar disdain with which European colonials and missionaries approached heathenish natives in unconquered Africa!<sup>405</sup> Especially the editor of the ecclesiastical section in the Roman Catholic «*Gazet van Antwerpen*» (the priest K. Debra, who wrote under the pen name ‘Gladius’)<sup>406</sup>, accused the «gereformeerden» of haughtiness and made no secret of his antipathy towards their teachings and evangelism methods: he called them “Hollandsche Farizeën” (‘Dutch Pharisees’)<sup>407</sup>, and described them as bigoted men who, driven by a pretentious Dutch feeling of moral superiority, tried to ‘civilise’ the Flemish people in the field of religion.<sup>408</sup> ‘Gladius’ was, nonetheless, not afraid that (Reformed) Protestantism would gain a firm foothold in Dutch-speaking Belgium: the Flemings, so he stated, were too commonsensical to become involved with this ‘foreign’ branch of Christianity.<sup>409</sup>

Although the «*De Open Poort*» and the «*Vlaams Kerkblad*» contradicted the cutting remarks of ‘Gladius’, the «gereformeerden» knew perfectly well that they – as well as the other Protestant communities in Flanders – were dependent on financial aid and personnel from the Netherlands to a large extent. In the late 1960s, two reports that held the evangelisation activities of the GKB to the light, even saw the strong ties with Holland as a severe obstacle to the fulfilment of their apostolic and missionary task in Belgian society.<sup>410</sup> At that time, Belgians made up almost half of the total number of GKB members, but Dutchmen were still overrepresented in consistories and other church bodies (like the «deputaatschap», the «kring» and committees within the framework of the «Federatie van Protestantse Kerken in België»). If the «Gereformeerde Kerken» would really want to obtain a firm establishment in Belgian society in general and in Belgian Protestantism in particular, the numerical balance between Flemings and Dutchmen had to become noticeable in the pulpit, in the consistory

<sup>404</sup> “Waar het mogelijk is, late men de Vlaming op de voorgrond treden.” See: *N.O.P.* XXXIX.5 (May 1959), 2-3, there 3.

<sup>405</sup> *B.O.P.* XIV.7 (July 1934), 2-3, there 3.

<sup>406</sup> Karel Debra was curate in the parish of the Sacred Family and the Holy Cornelius in Borgerhout (a suburb of Antwerp) and, after 1936, teacher of religion in the secondary school of Deurne. In his capacity of columnist, he vehemently opposed the evangelisation activities and anti-Catholic articles of the «gereformeerden». Apparently, he targeted them quite often, since his name first appeared in the «*De Open Poort*» in the early 1930s and was still mentioned in the mid-1960s! The Boechout-based «*Vlaams Kerkblad*» was also engaged in many polemics with Debra in the 1950s and 1960s. The priest condemned Protestantism as being something ‘Dutch’ and hence ‘foreign’ to Flemish society, but he was, according to K. Sluys, the editor-in-chief of the «*Vlaams Kerkblad*», a Dutchman himself! See: *Vlaams Kerkblad* VIII.2 (June 1961), 45. ‘Gladius’ means ‘Sword’ in Latin.

<sup>407</sup> *B.O.P.* XXII.6 (June 1932), 2.

<sup>408</sup> “‘t Zijn Hollanders, die zoogenoemde ‘evangelisten’, mannen die met hunnen pretentieuzen Hollandschen superioriteitswaanzin de Vlamingen moeten ‘beschaven’ op godsdiestig gebied!” See: *Ibid.* XIV.7 (July 1934), 2-3, there 3.

<sup>409</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>410</sup> *Enkele opmerkingen ten aanzien van de situatie in en rond de Gereformeerde Kerken in België*, dated July 1966; *Over- en vooruitzicht van het evangelisatiewerk der Gereformeerde Kerken in België*, undated (probably 1967) [archive of the G.K. in Boechout].

room and in the fields of religious education and «Federatie»-related working groups. That is why the GKB persistently pressed the GKN to structurally support and officially recognise the «Protestantse Theologische Faculteit» in the 1960s – with which the general synod, albeit with some restrictions<sup>411</sup>, agreed in 1969. The complexity of being Dutch churches, located on Belgian soil and with a mixed Flemish/Dutch membership, was not perceived as a problem only in the last decades of the GKB's existence; already before the middle of the twentieth century, some warned that, if the Dutch element would remain predominant, the GKB's heterogeneous composition could have severe consequences for their future. An article in the June 1942 edition of «*De Open Poort*», written by Rev. Van Lonkhuijzen, is illustrative in this respect. The parson of the «gereformeerde kerk» in Mechlin feared that, if the number of Belgian-born church members would increase in the following years, a sharp division and mutual alienation between Flemings and Dutchmen would become visible in the churches, due to the different ‘national characters’ of both groups. Up until then, this threat of an ‘internal segmentation’ along national lines had been averted, because the former tend to copy the habits and opinions of the latter: “een mogelijkheid die in de praktijk de eenheid zeer heeft bevorderd, is dikwijls ge-weest dat gereformeerde Vlamingen nogal sterk vernederlandschten (...). Vooral waar een tweede of derde geslacht uit een familie reeds tot onze kerken behoort, doet zich dat verschijnsel voort.”<sup>412</sup> Rev. Van Lonkhuijzen regretted this ‘Dutchification’, for it would discourage the GKB from rooting firmly in society and thwarted the coming into being of a “typisch Vlaamsch gereformeerde levenswijze” (‘a specific Flemish way of being Reformed’).<sup>413</sup> The ‘Dutchification’ of Belgian church members was, as a matter of fact, not a phenomenon with which only the «Gereformeerde Kerken» had to contend; in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, for example, Flemings who converted to Protestantism and joined the ‘SILO Gospel Mission’ were called “theepot-protestanten” by their fellow countrymen – a reference to the typical Dutch habit of drinking tea at any moment of the day.<sup>414</sup> To disprove the allegation that Protestantism in Flanders was merely a ‘hobby’ of zealous Hollanders, all evangelists of SILO had to be native-born Belgians.<sup>415</sup>

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<sup>411</sup> If a PTF graduate, the general synod decreed in 1969 (and confirmed in 1977), wanted to become a minister in the GKB, he / she was fully eligible. If a PTF graduate, however, wanted to become a minister in the GKN, he / she had to be a practising member of a «gereformeerde kerk» in Belgium (members of a «gereformeerde kerk» in the Netherlands were, in this case, not permitted to study at the PTF) and still needed to follow a supplementary programme at the Theological Seminary in Kampen or the Free University in Amsterdam. See: *Acta G.S. GKN* (Sneek 1969/1970), art. 169; *Acta G.S. GKN* (Zwolle 1977-1979), art. 178.

<sup>412</sup> *B.O.P. XXII.6* (June 1942), 4.

<sup>413</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>414</sup> E.A.D. Pichal, *De geschiedenis van het protestantisme in Vlaanderen* (Antwerp and Amsterdam 1975), 189.

<sup>415</sup> Rev. N. de Jonge (1845-1898), the Dutch (!) founder of SILO, acknowledged that the spreading of the Gospel in Flanders would be severely hindered if the evangelists would not be Flemings themselves. “Het evangelie gebracht door vreemden, zou beschouwd worden als een vreemde religie.” See: De Raaf, *Een eeuw SILO*, 16-17.

Even though the «Gereformeerde Kerken» did not follow this example of the ‘SILO Gospel Mission’ – some of their evangelists were Belgians, like L. Debontridder (the GKB’s first evangelist, who was attached to the «gereformeerde kerk» in Brussels from June 1912 to 1917), and F.A.R. Rigo (active in Ghent in the middle of the 1960s); others were Dutchmen, for example J.H. Scheps (who worked as a colporteur between May 1923 and August 1924), H.A. Jonkers (evangelist from June 1930 to June 1959) and B. ter Haar (who worked for the GKB between February 1932 and January 1946)<sup>416</sup> –, they understood that spreading the Gospel in Belgium differed from evangelising in Holland.<sup>417</sup> On the one hand, Christianity and Roman Catholicism were interchangeable terms for Belgians, as a result of which they were not familiarised with Protestant terminology and had a lot of prejudice against (Dutch) Calvinism<sup>418</sup>, and on the other hand, Dutch Protestants had difficulty making the biblical truths ‘understandable’ to Catholics and putting themselves in the position of Flemings, because of the cultural gap between Roman Flanders and Calvinist Holland.<sup>419</sup> Consequently, the GKB provided the perfect work area for a specific group of ministers: former priests. No less than four ex-clerics have been parsons in one of the «Gereformeerde Kerken in België»: Rev. A. Lauwers (the evangelism pastor of the church in Brussels, who conducted services in Denderleeuw between 1920 and 1941 – before the local «gereformeerde kerk» was constituted – and edited «*De Open Poort*» and «*De Torenwachter*»), Rev. C.L.A.M. Van Puyvelde (who assisted the church in Boechout in the first year of its existence and contributed to «*De Kruisbanier*»), Rev. H.J. Hegger (who was minister in Denderleeuw from 1951 up to and including 1959 and contributed to both «*De Open Poort*» and «*De Kruisbanier*») and Rev. G.M.A. Hendriksen (who was also parson in Denderleeuw, from 1967 to 1975).

In comparison to the «Gereformeerde Kerken» as a whole, the number of priests-turned-minister was nowhere higher than in the GKB. But this should not come as a surprise: former clerics were suited to work in a predominantly Roman Catholic environment *par excellence*. Being educated as priests, they knew the Catholic way of thinking and culture like the back of their hand, knew the shortcomings of the Catholic system of thought and its differences with (Neo-)Calvinist orthodoxy very well and knew how a Catholic should be approached. Rev. Lauwers and Rev. Van Puyvelde were, moreover, native-born Belgians. Even though the «Gereformeerde Kerken» contended with great

<sup>416</sup> De Raaf, *Een open poort*, 245.

<sup>417</sup> For that reason, the bulletin of the «gereformeerde kerk» in Ghent said in 1959 that an evangelist should preferably be a Fleming: “de kerkeraad [was] ervan overtuigd, dat een voor [de evangelisatie] geschikte Vlaming steeds de voorkeur verdient boven een geschikte Nederland. Bij het werk van een colporteur geldt nog sterker dan voor het werk van een predikant: hij moet de Vlamingen een Vlaming zijn!” See: *Mededelingenblad van de gereformeerde kerk te Gent* XIII.10 (October 1959), 1-2. Consequently, the three last evangelists who were attached to the church in Ghent, were Flemish.

<sup>418</sup> N.O.P. XXXIX.4 (April 1959), 1-2; XXXIX.5 (May 1959), 2-3.

<sup>419</sup> *Ibid.*

emphasis that it should not matter whether the Gospel was preached by a Fleming or a Dutchman<sup>420</sup> – given the stipulation that only alumni of the Theological Seminary in Kampen or the theological faculty of the Free University in Amsterdam were qualified to ascend a «gereformeerde» pulpit, it was anything but evident for a Belgian to be(come) a minister in the «Gereformeerde Kerken» –, it was certainly seen as a plus when a minister or an evangelist in service of the GKB was a Belgian himself<sup>421</sup> – especially after 1950. In 1958, for instance, the monthly of the church in Ghent was jubilant about a lecture Rev. Van Puyvelde had given a month earlier, because it had sounded ‘more familiar’ for the Flemings present that the Gospel had been preached by a countryman instead of a Hollander.<sup>422</sup> After the Hungarian-born Rev. J. Végh had accepted the call of the «gereformeerde kerk» in Boechout to become its new minister<sup>423</sup>, the same bulletin even said it was glad that he was not a Dutchman: “helaas geen Vlaming, maar gelukkig nu ook eens geen Nederlander.”<sup>424</sup> From the 1950s onwards, the call for more Flemish personnel became louder and louder.<sup>425</sup> Slowly but surely, the GKB began to distance themselves more and more from the GKN and from their image of being Dutch immigrant churches.

Contrary to the «gereformeerde kerken» in Antwerp, Brussels, Ghent and Mechlin, the churches in Denderleeuw and Boechout had come into existence entirely as a result of evangelism and occupied a special place within the GKB. It is therefore not a coincidence that the ministers with a Roman Catholic background – the four mentioned on the page before – stood in the pulpit in these two rural communes: there, almost all church members – K. Sluys said that four out of five «gereformeerden» in Boechout were native Belgians<sup>426</sup> – were Flemings who had converted from Catholicism to

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<sup>420</sup> See, for example: *De Torenwachter* IV.7 (December 1930), 2; XIX.3 (June 1946), 5; *B.O.P.* XII.6 (June 1932), 2-3; XIV.7 (July 1934), 2-3; XV.6 (June 1935), 2-3; XX.4 (April 1940), 3; *N.O.P.* XXXII.1 (January 1952), 4; XXXIX.4 (April 1959), 1-2; *Vlaams Kerkblad* VIII.2 (June 1961), 45.

<sup>421</sup> Next to the ministers mentioned in note 403, there has been another Belgian clergyman who served the «Gereformeerde Kerken»: Rev. J.B. Vanhaelen (1899-1981). He was parson of the «gereformeerde kerk» in Hoek (1925-1932), Gerkesklooster-Stroobos (1932-1947) and Mijdrecht (1947-1965). See: *Honderdvijftig jaar gemeenten en predikanten*, 278. In 1933, «*De Torenwachter*» mentioned that Rev. Vanhaelen had become the VPCO’s new contact person in the three northern provinces of the Netherlands. See: *De Torenwachter* VI.6 (March 1933), 2. See also: T.B. van Houten, ‘In memoriam Ds. J.B. Vanhaelen (26 november 1899 – 18 september 1981)’, *Jaarboek GKN LXV* (1982), 532-533.

<sup>422</sup> “Ds. van [sic] Puyvelde sprak ondanks – en meer nog: dankzij – zijn 80 jaren zeer indrukwekkend. Vooral, geloof ik, omdat hij Vlaming is, en omdat in zijn Vlaamse taal het Evangelie de mensen veel vertrouwder klinkt dan uit een Nederlandse mond.” See: *Mededelingenblad van de gereformeerde kerk te Gent* XII.12 (December 1958), 2.

<sup>423</sup> At that time, Rev. J. Végh was parson of the «gereformeerde kerk» in Andijk, the birthplace of K. Sluys (!), Boechout’s most prominent Protestant. See: *Honderdvijftig jaar gemeenten en predikanten*, 15; *Vlaams Kerkblad* VI.5 (September 1959), 145; VII.8 (December 1960), 237-241; *N.O.P.* XL.12 (December 1960), 4.

<sup>424</sup> *Mededelingenblad van de gereformeerde kerk te Gent* XIII.3 (March 1959), 4.

<sup>425</sup> See, for example: *N.O.P.* XXXIX.5 (May 1959), 2-3, there 3; *Advies Kring België der Gereformeerde Kerken ten aanzien van de verhouding tot de Theologische Faculteit te Brussel*, undated (probably 1967 / 1968) [archive of the G.K. in Boechout]. For some older calls, see: *De Torenwachter* IX.5 (July-August 1936), 1-2, there 2 [erroneously, this edition was distributed as the fifth issue of the ninth volume]; XIX.3 (June 1946), 5.

<sup>426</sup> *Vlaams Kerkblad* VI.5 (September 1959), 145; VII.12 (April 1961), 359-374, there 361; XI.1 (May 1964), 24; *De Roepstem. Evangeliebrief van de Protestantse Kerk van Boechout* 162 (10<sup>th</sup> June 1961), 1-3, there 1; *Kort verslag van de besprekking tussen de kerkenraad van de gereformeerde kerk van Boechout en een delegatie van de kring België inzake*

Protestantism. The GKB made use of their history as priests not just in the pastoral care, but also in evangelisation activities. To substantiate the Neo-Calvinists' claim that Protestantism was not an 'import item', the former clerics regularly wrote (polemical) articles in GKB-related magazines and accentuated that they had once worn the sacerdotal vestment. When someone questioned the necessity of Christian-based schools in 1931, for example, Rev. Lauwers was the first to respond, because he, being a former Catholic clergyman, a Fleming, a minister in a strict Reformed church and an evangelist 'amidst the children of our people'<sup>427</sup>, knew more than anybody else that Catholicism permeated *every* aspect of Belgian society, including (public) education. Eleven years later, Rev. Winter implied that it was essential for the GKB to place ex-priests in the forefront<sup>428</sup>, so that 'Rome' could not demur that the «gereformeerden» distorted the Catholic doctrines and failed to convince Catholics of the 'rightness' of their teachings. Later, Rev. Hegger would even declare that the «Gereformeerde Kerken» cherished him as a 'victory trophy'<sup>429</sup>; after all, he and as his fellow priestly *repentis* were the living proof that the Roman Catholic Church did not preach the pure Gospel of Jesus Christ, which the «gereformeerden» asserted in their evangelistic periodicals for many years. The priests-turned-minister gave testimony of this in several personal conversion histories, such as Rev. Lauwers's «*Van schemerlicht tot volle licht*», Rev. Van Puyvelde's «*Laatste etappe van een overgang tot een kerk der Reformatie*», Rev. Hegger's «*Mijn weg naar het licht*» and Rev. Hendriksen's «*Van dominicaan tot dominee*».<sup>430</sup> The two first-mentioned ex-clerics have also written a handful of dogmatic and exegetical brochures and tracts, which dealt with Catholic 'deviations' as Mariolatry and Papal overlordship, and which were issued by the GKB's own publishing house «'De Open Poort'» in Boechout. Especially Rev. Ganzevoort, who made intensive study of the Catholic world view and philosophy of life in his capacity of evangelism pastor<sup>431</sup>, showed himself to be a prolific apologist;

*de bezwaren van Boechout tegen de voorgestelde "officiële besprekingen" inzake een mogelijke eenwording van de Hervormde Kerk van België, de Protestantse Kerk van België en de Gereformeerde Kerken in België*, dated 5<sup>th</sup> July 1971 [archive of the G.K. in Boechout]; *Brief van de kerkenraad van de gereformeerde kerk van Boechout aan de kring België der Gereformeerde Kerken*, dated 25<sup>th</sup> August 1971 [archive of the G.K. in Boechout]. In 1967, Rev. Melse even said that nine out of ten «gereformeerden» in Boechout were Flemings. See: *N.O.P.* XLVII.5 (May 1967), 4.

<sup>427</sup> "Uoordeelt dat ik als gewezen R.K. priester, als Vlaming, als predikant eener streng orthodoxe kerk en als Evangelist onder de kinderen van ons volk, meer wellicht dan anderen, een juiste kijk in die dingen zou kunnen hebben." See: *De Torenwachter* IV.8 (January 1931), 2.

<sup>428</sup> *B.O.P.* XXII.6 (June 1942), 2.

<sup>429</sup> *Trouw*, 16<sup>th</sup> March 2002. Rev. Hegger left the «Gereformeerde Kerken» in 1979, because he was worried about the growing influence of liberal theology. See: H.J. Hegger and W.G. Hegger-Kleinhou, *Denacht is ver gevorderd. Daarom verlieten wij de Gereformeerde Kerk* (Velp 1979). Later, he would associate himself with the orthodox «Gereformeerde Bond in de Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk». See: *Nederlands Dagblad*, 27<sup>th</sup> July 2006.

<sup>430</sup> A. Lauwers, *Van schemerlicht tot volle licht* (Boechout n.y.); C.L.A.M. Van Puyvelde, *Laatste etappe van een overgang tot een kerk der Reformatie* (Boechout 1949); H.J. Hegger, *Mijn weg naar het licht* (Franeker 1959); G.M.A. Hendriksen, *Van dominicaan tot dominee. Vrijmoedige notities bij een overgang naar de Reformatie* (Franeker 1971). Next to the conversion histories of Rev. Lauwers and Rev. Van Puyvelde, «'De Open Poort'» has also published the conversion history of a member of the «gereformeerde kerk» in Ghent: *Beatrice. De bekeringsgeschiedenis van de schrijfster* (n.pl. 1959).

<sup>431</sup> *N.O.P.* XXXIV.7-8 (July-August 1954), 1-2.

the majority of booklets that the «‘De Open Poort’» published, came from his pen. During its existence, this publishing house issued more than thirty (!) different tracts about (the differences between) Catholic and Protestant dogmas, reformational church history, the Bible and the heterodoxy of Jehovah’s Witnesses.

These brochures, which varied in length from ten to nearly hundred pages, were published as serials in «*De Open Poort*», «*De Kruisbanier*» and the «*Vlaams Kerkblad*» – these magazines were partially distributed as free local papers in the towns where a «gereformeerde kerk» was located – or, in 1954 and 1955, issued in their entirety as special editions of «*De Open Poort*», distributed as free handouts on special occasions – lectures or the annual Antwerp «Bijbeldag», a public manifestation of the Belgian Protestant denominations<sup>432</sup>, for example – and sold by way of colportage or in market booths. Next to the publishing of religious leaflets, the GKB evangelised in a way that A. de Raaf has described as ‘traditional’: <sup>433</sup> evangelists and assistant ministers, sometimes aided by members of a local «gereformeerde kerk», made house visits – and, on request, follow-up visits –, sold New Testaments or complete Bibles – even versions that were in use in the Roman Catholic Church; although these translations deviated from the Protestant Dutch Authorised Version («Statenvertaling») or the 1951 Dutch Bible Society Translation, the «gereformeerden» did everything they could to encourage Catholics to read the Word of God<sup>434</sup> –, arranged meetings – in the GKB’s own ‘Gospel Centre’ in Laken, a suburb of Brussels, or in accommodations in other towns that were rented on an ad hoc basis<sup>435</sup> –, set up Bible study groups and devoted themselves to ‘soapbox preaching’ («straatprediking»). Only in the mid-1960s, this would change: secularisation, waning interest for gatherings with a religious character, theological and liturgical alterations within the «Gereformeerde Kerken» and the image of being Dutch ‘enclaves’<sup>436</sup> forced the GKB to reconsider their evangelism methods.<sup>437</sup> Contemporary non-practising Christians and non-church members, the Dutch edition of «*De Open Poort*» explained its readers in 1968, could no longer be reached with soapbox preaching and door-to-door colportage: “[h]et klassieke voorbeeld van een Belg, die op de markt voor het eerst een Nieuw

<sup>432</sup> Until the early 1970s, the «Bijbeldag» was primarily an affair of the denominations that merged into the VPKB in 1978 and the «Belgische Evangelische Zending». Nowadays, it is organised by the BEZ and several smaller evangelical church groups.

<sup>433</sup> De Raaf, *Guido de Brès-kerk van Brussel*, 103; De Raaf, *Een open poort*, 63.

<sup>434</sup> See, for example: *Vlaams Kerkblad* III.10 (February 1957), 299.

<sup>435</sup> Next to Brussels(-City), Antwerp(-City), Ghent, Mechlin, Denderleeuw, Boechout and Hoboken, the GKB have evangelised in Jette / Ganshoren (29), Laken (37), Anderlecht (64), Berchem (66), Deurne-North (66), Mortsel (67), Ninove (70), Heusden (71), Maldegem/Eeklo (71) [the numbers between brackets refer to: De Raaf, *Een open poort*], Muizen (B.O.P. XVII.2 (February 1937), 4), Schoten (N.O.P. XXXIV.5 (March 1954), 3) and Dillingen (Luxembourg) (N.O.P. XLVIII.2 (February 1968), 4). The «gereformeerden» in Boechout have tried to set up evangelism activities in Lier (*Vlaams Kerkblad* VII.8 (December 1960), passim).

<sup>436</sup> For the negative consequences of the GKB’s Dutch image, see: *N.O.P. XLVII.5* (May 1967), 1-2, there 1; *Kringnotulen*, dated 28<sup>th</sup> March 1968/6<sup>th</sup> April 1968 [archive of the G.K. in Boechout].

<sup>437</sup> *Verslag van het gesprek over het evangelisatiewerk in België*, dated 8<sup>th</sup> November 1969 [archive of the G.K. in Boechout].

Testament koopt, of die op een zomeravond voor het eerst door het evangelie wordt ‘gepakt’ in een tentsamenkomst, of die zijn deur opent voor een bijbelcolporteur, die hem de weg wijst naar Jezus, komt minder en minder voor.”<sup>438</sup> Several months later, the same periodical even uttered the word ‘malaise’ in this respect.<sup>439</sup> Under the leadership of Rev. H. Eikelboom, «*De Open Poort*» therefore changed its tune radically: from the late 1960s onwards, the magazine sought the dialogue instead of the confrontation; its focus shifted from admonishing non-Protestants by reciting Scriptural passages to fostering sympathy for the Reformed minority opinion. This was a transformation that should not be underestimated, indeed: an issue of «*De Open Poort*» from the year 1960 bore more resemblance to an edition from thirty years later than to an edition from fifteen years later.<sup>440</sup> The old Kuypelian antithesis was definitively pushed aside.<sup>441</sup>

### 3. ‘Re-Calvinising’ Flanders

Until, approximately, the beginning of the 1960s, both the GKN and the GKB cherished the ideal of ‘re-Christianisation’, the ideal of pushing back ‘revolutionary’ ideologies, (re-)organising society along the lines of ‘God’s ordinances’ and the ‘Reformed principles’, and submitting all spheres of life to the sole and supreme authority of Christ. At least, the «gereformeerden» said that their ultimate aim was to ‘re-Christianise’ society—not just in Holland, but even in Belgium. In 1954, for example, K. Sluys wrote in the second edition of the «*Vlaams Kerkblad*» that the mission of his periodical was to ‘bring the Bible back to Flanders’.<sup>442</sup> Twenty-one years earlier, «*De Torenwachter*» had already expressed its hope that the Christian-based schools would lay the foundation of an Evangelical—with a capital ‘E’—‘popular movement’,<sup>443</sup> for the Protestant schools aimed, ultimately, at reaching the *entire* Flemish population with the Gospel. And in 1943, «*De Open Poort*» articulated that it was intended to turn ‘swearing Flanders’ (back) into ‘praying Flanders’.<sup>444</sup> In almost all the volumes of these GKB-related magazines, the «gereformeerden» addressed the collective Flemish people and implied over and over again that their objective was to incite them to read the Bible, to exhort them to subject themselves to the will of God—hence, the majority of articles ended with a call for repentance and conversion—and to stir up a religious ‘awakening’ or ‘revival’. To put it shortly, they not only

<sup>438</sup> N.O.P. XLVIII.3 (March 1968), 1.

<sup>439</sup> Ibid. XLIX.12 (December 1969), 5-6, there 5.

<sup>440</sup> Dekker argues something similar with regard to the «Geref. Kerken» as a whole. See: Dekker, *De stille revolutie*, 15.

<sup>441</sup> At the beginning of the 1970s, Rev. Eikelboom drew up a new ‘guidebook’ for the purpose of evangelisation, in which he explicitly stated that the goal of evangelism activities should not be to *persuade* people, but, first and foremost, to give a *testimony of faith*. See: H. Eikelboom, *Verantwoording afleggen van de hoop die in ons is. Lees-, praat- en werkboek over de getuigende gemeente, opgesteld naar aanleiding van de Evangelisatieconferentie van de Gereformeerde Kerken in België* (Wemmel n.y.).

<sup>442</sup> *Vlaams Kerkblad* I.2 (June 1954), 36.

<sup>443</sup> *De Torenwachter* VII.2 (September 1933), 1-2, there 2.

<sup>444</sup> B.O.P. XXIII.11 (November 1943), 4.

aimed at a conversion of the individual sinner, but also at a reformation of the *entire* Flemish people and of Flemish society *as a whole*. Some noticed that the presence of the «gereformeerden» in Dutch-speaking Belgium began to bear fruit and even declared that the ‘revival’ or ‘reformation’ for which they hoped, gradually began to emerge. Particularly the «*Vlaams Kerkblad*» gave proof of this conviction; judging by the spectacular growth of his own congregation in Boechout, its editor-in-chief Sluys knew for sure that Protestantism was on its way to win over Flanders<sup>445</sup> and that the Roman Catholic Church should seriously worry about its position of power:<sup>446</sup> “[o]ok in Vlaanderen dringt de zeterugkeer naar het echte Evangelie met verrassende snelheid door, en in ons gewest is Boechout het centrum van een altijd maar groeiende kring van mensen, die rust vinden [in] het eenvoudige evangelische geloof.”<sup>447</sup> Several times, he went into raptures over the genesis of ‘a new people’: “[e]r groeit een nieuw volk in Vlaanderen. Een Evangelisch volk. Een waarachtig Christenvolk.”<sup>448</sup>

The remarks of Sluys did not come out of the blue; the ambition to ‘re-Christianise’ Flemish society was as old as the GKB themselves. Around 1900, Dutch «gereformeerden» had not only exported the «Doleantie», a conflict within Dutch Calvinism that had absolutely nothing to do with Belgian Protestantism, to Flanders – out of which the «gereformeerde kerken» in Brussels and Antwerp had come into being –, but also the «dolerende» *way of thinking*, in which the concept of ‘re-Christianisation’ played a dominant role. Already in the March 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1907 edition of the «*Gereformeerde Kerkbode voor België*», Rev. Hepp echoed Abraham Kuyper, by claiming that the small Neo-Calvinist community carried a ‘principle of life’ which should infiltrate all spheres of Belgian society:

“Wij zijn de dragers van een levensbeginsel, dat voor ons land in zijne tegenwoordige gesteldheid ook nieuw is. Dat moet ook in onze maatschappij worden ingedragen en zoo de Geest de harten ontvankelijk maakt, zal het in den weg van geloof en bekeering zich vastzetten en ons volksbestaan vernieuwen.”<sup>449</sup>

It may seem odd and perhaps somewhat haughty that the «gereformeerden», who were a diminutive religious minority and even paled into insignificance in comparison to other *Protestant* church groups, said they were a ‘vanguard’ that tried to reform the Belgian civil order, but for them themselves, it was evident. Men like Rev. Hepp and Sluys were absolutely convinced that God was (exclusively) on their side and that He would bless their endeavour to take open action against the dominant Roman Catholic Church and build new reformational churches, next to the Protestant churches that already

<sup>445</sup> “De schare wordt met de dag groter. In Boechout en overal. Vlaanderen was een Evangelisch land, en het zal weer Evangelisch worden.” See: *Vlaams Kerkblad* II.2 (June 1955), 40-42, there 42.

<sup>446</sup> “Hoewel moeilijk te bewijzen, zijn we heel zeker dat de invloed van dit blad gemerkt is in heel de Vlaamssprekende katholieke wereld.” See: *Ibid.* I.12 (April 1955), 361-363, there 362.

<sup>447</sup> *Ibid.* II.3 (July 1955), 68-70, there 69.

<sup>448</sup> *Ibid.* I.11 (March 1955), 324-325, there 325. See also: *Ibid.* II.1 (May 1955), 13; II.3 (July 1955), 68-70, there 70; XI.3-4 (July-August 1964), 73-75, there 75.

<sup>449</sup> G.K.B. III.75 (3<sup>rd</sup> March 1907), 2-3, there 3.

existed in Belgium. Gideon's army had also been small, but it had triumphed over its enemies nonetheless, because God had been on the side of the Hebrews. For a similar reason, David had managed to defeat Goliath. The Bible thus proved that 'smallness' was not an impeding factor; as Psalm 118:6 affirms: those who have God on their side, have nothing to fear. It all came down to perseverance in faith, fidelity to His Word and allegiance to the Reformed principles.

Furthermore, by stating that their aim was to 're-Christianise' Flemish society, the GKB gave themselves a right to exist and legitimised their presence in Flanders. After all, it was anything but evident that the «Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland» instituted churches in *Belgium* – the congregations in Brussels and Antwerp were the first GKN churches that were not located in Holland itself (!)<sup>450</sup> –, all the more since the GKN maintained correspondence with the «Belgische Christelijke Zendingskerk», a denomination based on the *Confessio Belgica* (one of the Three Forms of Unity) and, in general, more orthodox than the «Bond van Kerken».<sup>451</sup> According to the «gereformeerde» rules governing church life, church members who went abroad, should join sister churches of the GKN (like the CRC in America) or churches with which the GKN corresponded (which was the case with the

<sup>450</sup> After the founding of the «gereformeerde kerken» in Brussels (Belgium, 1894) and Antwerp (Belgium, 1899), several other GKN churches were established outside the Netherlands: Buenos Aires (Argentina, 1901), Tres Arroyos (Argentina, 1908), Chubut/Comodoro Rivadavia (Argentina, 1912), Rosario (Argentina, 1916), Ghent (Belgium, 1926), Carambeí (Brazil, 1933), Mechlin (Belgium, 1938), London (Great Britain, 1939), Paris (France, 1944), Sens (France, 1946), Curaçao (Netherlands Antilles, 1950), Castrolanda (Brazil, 1952), Paramaribo (Surinam, 1953), Denderleeuw (Belgium, 1953), Boechout (Belgium, 1955), Mar del Plata (Argentina, 1955), São Paulo (Brazil, 1955), Sarmiento (Argentina, 1956), Châtillon-Coligny (France, 1957) and Arapoti (Brazil, 1960). According to a little map in «*Anderhalve eeuw gereformeerden*» (volume XII, page 25), there have also been «gereformeerde kerken» in Rio de Janeiro (Brazil), Campinas (Brazil), Tandil (Argentina) and Colonia San Francisco de Bellocq – erroneously called 'Francesco de Bellocq' – (Argentina). The «Evangelisch-Altreformierte Kirchen in Niedersachsen», which were / are located in the German towns of Uelsen (1838), (Bad) Bentheim (1840), Emlichheim (1845), Wilsum (1848), Veldhausen (1849), Campen (1854), Emden (1856/1858), Bunde (1858), Ihrhove (1860), Neermoor (1861), Laar (1885), Duisburg (1898), Gronau (± 1900), Ruhrort (1902), Brandlecht (1911), Homberg / Hasselbek / Heiligenhaus (1913), Nordhorn (1915) and Hoogstede (1953) were semi-autonomous (contrary to the GKB!) and associated themselves with the GKN in 1923. So, even though most of these churches were *older* than the «gereformeerde kerken» in Brussels and Antwerp, they did not belong to the GKN before 1923. The «Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederlands-Indië» in Batavia/Jakarta (1877), Surabaya (1881), Yogyakarta (1913), Bandung (1916), Medan (1917), Semarang (1918), Solo (1919), Magelang (1921), Pematang Siantar (1930), Malang (1931), Palembang (1933) and Makassar (1948) also had a *status aparte* – they were, just as the churches in Germany, a so-called «'particuliere synode'», a status which the GKB did not have. The churches in Batavia and Surabaya were older than those in Brussels and Antwerp, but the Dutch East Indies were an integral part of the Kingdom of the Netherlands and thus not a foreign country. The years between brackets refer to the years in which the churches were founded. Churches that came into existence as a result of missionary activity («zendingswerk») of the «Gereformeerde Kerken» are not included in this enumeration.

<sup>451</sup> In 1925, Rev. G. Keizer, secretary of the general synod and parson of the «gereformeerde kerk» in Rheden-De Steeg, dedicated a four-part serial to the bond of correspondence between the GKB and the BCZK, which existed since 1877 (see also the note below). See: G. Keizer, 'Korte schets van de geschiedenis der Belgische Christelijke Zendingskerk en onze correspondentie met haar', *Gereformeerd Theologisch Tijdschrift* XXXVI.10 (1925), 433-452; XXXVI.11 (1925), 481-499; XXXVI.12 (1925), 530-544; XXXVII.1 (1925), 17-34. When Rev. Keizer wrote these articles, the «Gereformeerde Kerken» seriously doubted whether this formal relation with the BCZK should be preserved or not. At the request of the GKB (*Brief van de GKB aan het deputaatschap voor de Correspondentie met Buitenlandsche Kerken*, dated 26<sup>th</sup> May [archive of the G.K. in Brussels]), the relationship was broken off in 1933. See: De Raaf, *Een open poort*, 22. Already in 1898, Kuyper and Rev. Th.A. Eggenstein, parson of the «zendingskerk» in Antwerp, had been engaged in a polemic about the relations between the BCZK and the GKN/GKB. See: *De Heraut* 1046 (9<sup>th</sup> January 1898), 2; 1047 (16<sup>th</sup> January 1898), 3; 1050 (6<sup>th</sup> February 1898), 3; 1052 (20<sup>th</sup> February 1898), 3-4; 1053 (27<sup>th</sup> February 1898), 3; 1060 (17<sup>th</sup> April 1898), 3.

BCZK).<sup>452</sup> For that reason, a majority of members of the 1893 general synod – those with a background in the «afgescheiden» CGK, in particular<sup>453</sup> – did not see the necessity to found «gereformeerde kerken» in Belgium.<sup>454</sup> It was only thanks to the efforts of influential «dolerenden» (especially Kuyper and Rev. K. Fernhout, parson in Dordrecht), that the next synod, which was held in Middelburg in 1896, dropped the initial objections to church planting in Flanders and accepted the church in Brussels and church-to-be in Antwerp as members of the «Gereformeerde Kerken».<sup>455</sup>

In addition, with ‘re-Christianisation’ and evangelisation as their spearheads, the GKB tried to deny the allegation that they were merely Dutch ‘colonies’ and did not have any embedment in Flemish society. Evangelisation was, so to speak, the ‘core business’ of the GKB; in no other territorial district of the «Gereformeerde Kerken» – perhaps with the exception of the Dutch provinces of North Brabant and Limburg, whose population was also predominantly Roman Catholic<sup>456</sup> – have churches evangelised with as much fervour as in Belgium. It is significant that the church commission that advised and assisted the GKB was called «‘deputaatschap voor de *Evangelisatie* in België»», even though it did much more than aiding the GKB with their evangelism activities.<sup>457</sup> Comparisons were drawn with the East Indies, Brazil and Argentina, where the «Gereformeerde Kerken» brought the Gospel to indigenous, non-Christianised peoples: the «gereformeerden» saw Belgium as a “zendingsveld” (‘mission field’)<sup>458</sup> and called their six churches “zendingsposten” or “zendingsgemeenten” (‘mission stations’).<sup>459</sup> What is more, by implying that the reformation of entire Flanders was its ultimate goal, the small Reformed community made itself greater than it actually was. As said before, the GKB were one of the smallest Protestant denominations in Belgium: at the beginning of the 1960s, there were twenty-two Methodist churches, thirty-six churches of the «Protestants-Evangelische Kerk van

<sup>452</sup> The «Gereformeerde Kerken» made a distinction between ‘sister churches’ and ‘churches with which they corresponded’. Although the GKN recognised the latter group of denominations as ‘churches of Christ’, their ties with these churches were less strong than their bonds with the former category.

<sup>453</sup> After all, the friendly relation with the BCZK dated from the period *before* the founding of the «Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland» and had been concluded by the «Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerk» («afgescheidenen»), not by the «Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerken (dolerende)»!

<sup>454</sup> *Acta G.S. GKN* (Dordrecht 1893), art. 116.

<sup>455</sup> *Acta G.S. GKN* (Middelburg 1896), art. 132.

<sup>456</sup> Because of the similarities between Flanders and the two Roman Catholic provinces of the Netherlands, the GKB requested several times – in 1901 (*Tussentijds rapport van de deputaten voor de zaken van de Belgische kerken aan de generale synode van Haarlem, 1973/74*, dated 18<sup>th</sup> June 1974 [archive of the G.K. in Boechout]), in 1927 (*Vorming van een classis Brussel. Rapport opgesteld naar aanleiding van het door de generale synode van Dordrecht 1971/1972 terzake genomen besluit, dienende als basis voor het gesprek binnen de Kring België, met deputaten voor Zaken van de Belgische Kerken en de classis Dordrecht*, dated September 1972 [archive of the G.K. in Boechout]) and in 1973 (*Kringnotulen*, dated 27<sup>th</sup> January 1973 [archive of the G.K. in Boechout]) – to be unlinked from the «classis» Dordrecht, which was finally effectuated in 1974, when the six «gereformeerde kerken» became a separate «classis» and came under the jurisdiction of the «particuliere synode» of North Brabant and Limburg.

<sup>457</sup> It was renamed «‘deputaatschap voor de Zaken van de Belgische Kerken’» in 1975. See: De Raaf, *Een open poort*, 11.

<sup>458</sup> *Rondschrijven van stichting ‘De Open Poort’, gericht aan de kerkenraden en predikanten der Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland*, undated (probably 1948) [archive of the G.K. in Boechout].

<sup>459</sup> *Mededelingenblad van de gereformeerde kerk te Gent IX.8* (August 1955), 2; *XII.3* (March 1958), 1.

België» (PEKB, the former «Bond van Kerken»), forty-seven congregations of the «Belgische Evangelische Zending», forty-eight BCZK churches and just six «gereformeerde kerken». <sup>460</sup> But none of the other church groups, the «gereformeerden» contended, had the intention to ‘re-Christianise’ society as a whole: according to them, the established churches – the «Bond van Kerken» and the BCZK – had ‘dozed off’ and were infected by liberal theology <sup>461</sup>, whereas the Methodist- and Baptist-oriented denominations – which were younger than the «gereformeerde kerken» in Brussels and Antwerp <sup>462</sup> – focused on the conversion of the *individual* sinner and had no political or societal aspirations whatsoever. <sup>463</sup> Hence, Neo-Calvinists thought that their contribution to Belgian Protestantism, notwithstanding their diminutive size, would give it new vitality and a new élan; thanks to them, reformational Christianity would gain back the self-awareness and strength it had had in the days of the Reformation: “[...] langzamerhand herstelt Vlaanderen zich van deze geweldige beproeving en vernedering. Er komt steeds meer ontwaking, bewustwording. Dit zal echter niet mogelijk zijn dan door tevens grondig kennis te nemen van de geschiedenis van land en volk. De geschiedenis is de beste leermeessteres.”<sup>464</sup>

The GKB-related periodicals have therefore paid a lot of attention to ecclesiastical history, especially to the sixteenth century, when Lutheranism, Anabaptism and Calvinism had spread rapidly throughout the Southern Netherlands. Before 1566, the year in which Catholic church buildings were stripped of their altars, sculptures, paintings and relics by militant Reformation-minded (Calvinist) crowds, Protestant sects had a larger following in Flanders and Wallonia than in the later Dutch Republic. <sup>465</sup> In the Low Countries, the cradle of the Reformation was located in the south: the first Netherlandish martyrs for the faith lost their lives in Brussels <sup>466</sup>; Guido de Brès, the author of the *Confessio Belgica* – to which the «gereformeerden» attached great value –, was born in the Walloon town of Mons <sup>467</sup>; and in the late 1570s, anti-Spanish freedom fighters founded short-lived Calvinist ‘re-

<sup>460</sup> *Vlaams Kerkblad* VIII.10 (February 1962), 190-194, there 190-191.

<sup>461</sup> Although the «Belgische Christelijke Zendingskerk» had come into existence as an orthodox ‘alternative’ to the «Bond van Kerken», the «gereformeerden» said it was not completely free of liberal elements. See: *Kerkenraadsnotulen G.K. Brussel*, dated 8<sup>th</sup> March 1920 [archive of the G.K. in Brussels]; *Ibid.*, dated 19<sup>th</sup> April 1920 [archive of the G.K. in Brussels]; *Rapport uitgebracht aan deputaten voor Verband met Buitenlandsche Kerken aangaande het bezoek gebracht op de synode van Juni 1931 der B./C.]Z.K.*, undated [archive of the G.K. in Brussels]; *Brief van de GKB aan het deputaatschap voor de Correspondentie met Buitenlandse Kerken*, dated 26<sup>th</sup> May [archive of the G.K. in Brussels]; *Acta G.S. GKN* (Middelburg 1933), art. 211.

<sup>462</sup> The BEZ was founded in 1919 by the American evangelist couple R. and E. Norton. See: *De Kruisbanier* XVI.34 (1<sup>st</sup> September 1960), 1-2; XVI.35 (10<sup>th</sup> September 1960), 1-3; XVI.36 (17<sup>th</sup> September 1960), 1-2; XVI.37 (24<sup>th</sup> September 1960), 1-2. Methodist congregations came into being in Belgium around 1920 (some sources say 1919, others 1921/1922).

<sup>463</sup> As the preceding chapter has indicated, the BEZ was even opposed Protestant schools in the 1930s!

<sup>464</sup> *B.O.P.* XX.4 (April 1940), 3.

<sup>465</sup> G. Asaert, *1585. De val van Antwerpen en de uittocht van Vlamingen en Brabanders* (Tielt 2004), 33.

<sup>466</sup> Pichal, *De geschiedenis van het protestantisme in Vlaanderen*, 19-28.

<sup>467</sup> Probably around 1950, Rev. B.W. Ganzevoort wrote a booklet about the life of De Brès, titled «*Uit het leven van Guido de Brès*» (n.pl. n.y.). It was reissued as the fourth edition of the forty-seventh volume of «*De Open Poort*» (April 1967).

publics' in, among other cities, Brussels, Antwerp, Mechlin and Ghent.<sup>468</sup> It was only due to the Spanish seizure of Antwerp, in 1585, and a violently enforced Roman Catholic Counter-Reformation that Belgian Protestantism had to go underground in the seventeenth century and was nearly eradicated in the 1700s.<sup>469</sup> When they referred to their endeavour to reach *all* Flemings with their message, the «gereformeerden» wrote, consequently, about the *return* of the Reformed faith; they wanted to bring the Bible *back* to Flanders and to *revitalise* Protestantism in Belgium. Since, after the fall of Antwerp, 'Rome' had imprinted the inhabitants of the South that 'Flemish' and 'Catholic' were synonyms and still kept its flock in the dark about the appeal the Reformation had had in sixteenth-century Flanders, the majority of Flemings was unaware of the Protestant 'intermezzo' in the history of the Southern Netherlands. The purpose of the church-historical articles in magazines as «*De Open Poort*» was, therefore, twofold: on the one hand, they tried to indicate that it was anything but self-evident that Catholicism was the dominant religion in Belgium – in 1959, the Dutch edition of «*De Open Poort*» even said that the popularisation of reformational history should be a number one priority in the GKB's evangelistic work<sup>470</sup> –, and on the other hand, they provided the Neo-Calvinists with apologetic and self-justifying arguments against the Catholic allegation that Protestantism was something 'foreign' and fitted in badly with the Flemish/Belgian national character. Due to the Church of Rome, the Reformation, of which the «gereformeerden» were, in their own opinion, the true heirs, had become a forgotten page in the history of Belgium in the centuries after the Reformation. By glorifying Flanders' Protestant *entr'acte* and writing about the atrocities of the intolerant Inquisition, the «gereformeerden» attempted to save the Reformation from oblivion and to dispute the claim that Protestantism was merely an 'import item' from Holland.

Rather, the opposite was true: as regards Protestantism, Holland was indebted to Belgium. From the end of the sixteenth century onwards, Protestant Walloons, Flemings and Brabanters fled *en masse* to the Northern Netherlands: around 1620, the number of inhabitants of South Netherlandish descent was as high as 33.4% in Amsterdam, 40.1% in Rotterdam, 51.0% in Harlem, 62.5% in Middelburg and even 67.0% in Leyden.<sup>471</sup> It is not an overstatement to call this influx from South to North a 'brain drain': leading southern artisans, bankers, merchants, magistrates, belletrists, philo-

<sup>468</sup> For the three first-mentioned cities, see: G. Marnef, 'Brabants calvinisme in opmars. De weg naar de calvinistische republieken te Antwerpen, Brussel en Mechelen, 1577-1580', *Bijdragen tot de geschiedenis LXX* (1987), 7-21; for Ghent, see: A. Despretz, 'De instauratie der Gentse Calvinistische Republiek (1577-1579)', *Handelingen der Maatschappij voor Geschiedenis en Oudheidkunde te Gent XVII* (1963), 117-229.

<sup>469</sup> Liagre, *Anders geloven*, 67.

<sup>470</sup> "[H]et lijkt mij een eerste opdracht: Laat hier horen, dat het Protestantisme geen import is, maar dat het hier tijdens en na de Hervorming in Vlaanderen van grote betekenis is geweest voor het Noorden. Meer nog, tracht hun te bewijzen, dat wij de voortzetting zijn van de kerk der eerste apostelen." See: *N.O.P. XXXIX.5* (May 1959), 2-3, there 2.

<sup>471</sup> P. Van Hauwermeiren and F. Bosteels-Simonis, *Waar Nederlands de voertaal is. Nederland- en Vlaanderenkunde* (Lier 1990), 39.

sophers and artists – occupational groups on which Calvinism exerted great attraction –, settled in the urban areas of Holland. Thanks to these immigrants, Rev. Winter stated in the April 1940 and April 1941 issues of «*De Open Poort*»<sup>472</sup> – an assertion that had been made several times before<sup>473</sup> and would be repeated many times thereafter<sup>474</sup> –, the seventeenth century had been Holland's 'Golden Age'. Moreover, the contribution of southerners had been of overriding importance to the development of Dutch Calvinism and the dominant theological line of thought within the Dutch Reformed Church.<sup>475</sup> In the 1610s, of all Protestant preachers who were active in the Dutch Republic, approximately three hundred sermonisers were Flemings by birth.<sup>476</sup> In addition, both in Anabaptist and Calvinist circles, these ministers were renowned for their orthodoxy and were generally more dogmatic than their Dutch brethren: ““Zuid-Nederland” stond voor streng gelovig, strenger dan in het noorden gangbaar was. (...) Ook bij de calvinisten zou het onderscheid tussen zuid-Nederlandse *hardliners* en inheemse, Hollandse gematigden nog lang voortleven.”<sup>477</sup> It is significant to note here that Franciscus Gomarus (1563-1641), who played a prominent role in the theological quarrels between the so-called Remonstrants (or 'Arminians') and Counter-Remonstrants ('Gomarists') that would prove to be the most important dogmatic dispute in the history of Dutch Calvinism<sup>478</sup>, and, after the Remonstrants had been expelled from the Dutch Reformed Church at the Synod of Dordrecht (1618-1619), resulted in the formulation of the Canons of Dort (one of the Three Forms of Unity), was born in Bruges.<sup>479</sup> What is more, several Flemish-born theologians contributed to the Dutch Authorised Version («*Statenvertaling*»), as a result of which many expressions that modern-day Flemings regard as 'typically' Hollandic, are, in fact, of Southern Netherlandish origin.<sup>480</sup> All these facts were called to mind in GKB-related periodicals, to show that Protestantism was not imported from but rather *exported to* Holland.

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<sup>472</sup> B.O.P. XX.4 (April 1940), 3; XXI.4 (April 1941), 2.

<sup>473</sup> See, for example: *De Torenwachter* IX.5 (May-June 1936), 2 [erroneously, this edition was distributed as the *fourth* issue of the ninth volume]; B.O.P. XVII.5 (May 1937), 1.

<sup>474</sup> See, for example: *Ibid.* XXVI.5 (May 1946), 2-3; *De Kruisbanier* XIII.3 (19<sup>th</sup> January 1957), 1-2. In 1952, this last magazine devoted a four-part serial, written by Rev. Van Puyvelde, to the history of the Reformation in Flanders. See: *Ibid.* VIII.25 (21<sup>st</sup> June 1952), 1-2; VIII.26 (28<sup>th</sup> June 1952), 2-3; VIII.27 (5<sup>th</sup> July 1952), 1-2; VIII.28 (12<sup>th</sup> July 1952), 1-2.

<sup>475</sup> The Dutch Reformed Church was officially called «‘Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk’» and would be renamed «‘Nederlands(ch)e Hervormde Kerk’» in 1816. After the «Doleantie», the Kuyperians named their denomination «‘Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerken (dolerende)’» – a reference to the old name of the Dutch Reformed Church – to enforce their claim that they – and *not* the «hervormden» – were the true heirs of the Reformation.

<sup>476</sup> J.G.C.A. Briels, *De Zuid-Nederlandse immigratie, 1572-1630* (Harlem 1978), 28.

<sup>477</sup> Van Eijnatten and Van Lieburg, *Nederlandse religiegeschiedenis*, 164.

<sup>478</sup> Arminians and Gomarists had dissimilar views on the Calvinist doctrine of foreordination. Whereas the latter said that man had absolutely no influence on his (preordained) fate, the former accentuated the free will of man to accept or decline the offer of salvation God had given mankind in Jesus Christ.

<sup>479</sup> P.J. Blok, *Geschiedenis van het Nederlandsche volk* II (Groningen [1896/1899] 1924), 434.

<sup>480</sup> B.O.P. XVII.8 (August 1937), 4; *Vlaams Kerkblad* X.12 (April 1964), 337.

Because of this ‘Flemish’ input in the early history of Dutch Calvinism, «gereformeerden» in Holland saw it as a ‘debt of honour’ («ereschuld»)<sup>481</sup> to the Flemish people to preach them the biblical truths – which ‘Rome’ denied them – and to the small Neo-Calvinist communities in Belgium to treat the «gereformeerde kerken» with special care. According to the general synod, the financial and advisory assistance to the GKB should therefore be a task of all (Dutch) churches *together* and not, as was customary in the «Gereformeerde Kerken», of the «classis» (i.c. Dordrecht) or the «particuliere synode» (i.c. South Holland-South) to which the churches concerned belonged – after all, the situation in Belgium was said to bear more resemblance to ‘mission fields’ as the East Indies and Argentina than to whichever «classis» in the Netherlands:<sup>482</sup> “deregeling vanden arbeid der evangelisatie in België dient uit te gaan van de gezamenlijke kerken in Nederland. (...) [D]e Noord-Nederlandse kerken [hebben] in zekeren zin een *eereschuld* aan de Zuidelijke Nederlanden met het oog op het feit, dat in de 16<sup>e</sup> eeuw de actie tot reformatie onzer kerken grootendeels van het tegenwoordige België is uitgegaan.”<sup>483</sup> As a result, the general synod of 1927 created a specific deputation – the already mentioned «deputaatschap voor de Evangelisatie in België» – and requested all local «gereformeerde kerken» to make annual collections for the benefit of this «deputaatschap»<sup>484</sup> – and thus, indirectly, of the GKB –, analogous to the yearly offertories for the missionary activities overseas. The churches in Holland, feeling they had a ‘debt of honour’ towards Flanders, answered this call *en masse*; the Dutch «gereformeerden» were very willing to open their purses for their fellow church members in Belgium. Collections and individual donations were made for the «deputaatschap» (the GKB collectively), for the «gereformeerde kerken» separately, for the ‘schools with the Bible’ and for the evangelistic magazines: the ‘debt of honour’ was, so to speak, ‘paid off’ in hard cash.

And that was badly needed indeed, for the small Belgian churches were, in spite of all the sacrifices they made themselves, not able to keep afloat. In 1947, one member of the «deputaatschap voor Hulpbehoevende Kerken» – another ‘subdivision’ of the general synod that supported the GKB through the «deputaatschap voor de Evangelisatie in België» – even questioned whether it was ‘healthy’ that the «gereformeerde kerken» in Belgium were financed, for the most part, with financial aid from Holland. Another person involved – a member of the last-mentioned «deputaatschap» – was

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<sup>481</sup> *Omzendbrief van de gereformeerde kerk te Antwerpen aan alle kerkenraden en classes binnen het verband der Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland*, undated (probably ± 1906) [archive of the G.K. in Brussels]; G.K.B. II.45 (7<sup>th</sup> January 1906), 4; *Ibid.* II.51 (1<sup>st</sup> April 1906), 2-3, there 3; *Acta G.S. GKN* (Groningen 1927), art. 240 and addenda CXXXIII and CXXXIV; *De Kruisbanier* XVIII.22 (2<sup>nd</sup> June 1962), 1-2, there 2; De Raaf, *Een open poort*, 151.

<sup>482</sup> In 1927, Rev. W.L. Milo, parson of the «gereformeerde kerk» in Almelo and member of a commission that reflected on the situation of the GKB, said: “België [kan] toch allerminst tot Zuid-Holland (zuidelijk gedeelte) gerekend (...) worden op dezelfde wijze, als bepaalde gedeelten van Groningen, Drenthe, enz. waar de evangelisatie-arbeid noodig is tot deze provinciën, maar dat veeleer België op heel Nederland is aangewezen.” Cited in: De Raaf, *Een open poort*, 60.

<sup>483</sup> *Acta G.S. GKN* (Groningen 1927), art. 240 and addenda CXXXIII and CXXXIV.

<sup>484</sup> De Raaf, *Een open poort*, 153.

of the opinion that the GKB asked for extra money way too often and implied they should adjust their demands to become less dependent on Holland.<sup>485</sup> To the frustration of this deputy, most members of the GKB saw the support from the churches in the Netherlands to fill financial gaps and balance the books as something evident, and based the pattern of spending of their churches on this aid. According to him, something had to be done about this. If the «gereformeerden» in Belgium did not want to lower their expenses, they should raise their own contribution to the church. In the «Gereformeerde Kerken», members were expected to make an annual donation to the church, next to the weekly collections during Sunday services – called «vaste vrijwillige bijdrage» –, which should be in line with the member’s income and life situation. The «deputaten» frequently complained that, on the whole, members of the «gereformeerde kerken» in Belgium donated less than members of an average «gereformeerde kerk» in the Netherlands.<sup>486</sup> Even some GKB consistories had to admit this: in 1953, 1954, 1957, 1965 and 1971<sup>487</sup>, for example, the monthly bulletin of the church in Ghent addressed the issue of the ‘fixed voluntary contribution’ and tried to convince its readers of the necessity of this annual donation. By explicitly mentioning that some new *Dutch* members had immediately transferred their contribution to the account of the church, it suggested that the *Flemish*(-born) members were less familiar with the custom to make such yearly endowments<sup>488</sup> – probably because the majority of them were converts from Catholicism and the «vaste vrijwillige bijdrage» did not exist in the Roman Catholic Church.<sup>489</sup>

Since the Belgian churches were, in addition, simply too small to support themselves, provide for their clergymen – until the end of the 1960s, the «Gereformeerde Kerken» were principally opposed to any form of state aid<sup>490</sup> – and bear the full costs of an extensive evangelisation programme

<sup>485</sup> “In Brussel schijnen ze maar te denken dat wij over een onuitputtelijke kas hebben te beschikken en dat ze maar raak kunnen vragen. Ze moeten maar eens goed in de zorgen zitten en mee helpen om de zaak sluitend te maken. Dat deden ze tot dusver niet. Ze geven maar uit en vragen ons maar te betalen.” Cited in: De Raaf, *Een open poort*, 158.

<sup>486</sup> *Ibid.*, 159.

<sup>487</sup> *Mededelingenblad van de gereformeerde kerk te Gent* VII.1 (January 1953), 1; VIII.6 (June 1954), 1-2; XI.4 (April 1957), 3; XIX.4 (April 1965), 2; XXV.11 (November 1971), 3.

<sup>488</sup> *Ibid.* XXV.11 (November 1971), 3.

<sup>489</sup> This is all the more likely, since the practice of the ‘fixed voluntary contribution’ did not exist in the «gereformeerde kerken» of Boechout and Denderleeuw, where nearly all members were Flemish and ex-Roman Catholics, either! See: *Rapport van de gehouden kerkvisitatie over de periode 23 november 1967 – 7 november 1977 van de classis België van de Gereformeerde Kerken*, dated 30<sup>th</sup> January 1978 [archive of the G.K. in Boechout].

<sup>490</sup> This principal objection to state aid was first discussed in the late 1950s, when some ministers – partially motivated by financial reasons – wanted the GKB to become officially recognised by the Belgian state. See: *Kringnotulen*, dated 16<sup>th</sup> March 1959 [archive of the G.K. in Boechout]. After all six «gereformeerde kerken» and the general synod had reached a consensus on that matter, the GKB made a request for state recognition – which was a prerequisite to obtain governmental subsidy – in 1967. See: *Rapport inzake overheidserkenning, uitgebracht aan de Gereformeerde Kerken in België*, dated May 1966 [archive of the G.K. in Boechout]; *Oordeel over het rapport-Overheidserkenning, uitgebracht aan de Gereformeerde Kerken in België*, dated 31<sup>st</sup> January 1967 [archive of the G.K. in Boechout]; *Kringnotulen*, dated 20<sup>th</sup> April 1967 [archive of the G.K. in Boechout]; *Acta G.S. GKN* (Amsterdam 1967/1968), art. 97. However, since the «Protestants-Evangelische Kerk van België» (the former «Bond van Kerken») was the only denomination the state recognised as the official representative of Belgian Protestantism, the PEKB had to fulfil the role of intermediate in the appli-

–in the 1960s, there were three (!) additional full-time ministers (two for ‘regular’ evangelism activities, one for Judeo-Christian relations), next to the six parsons of the local churches and a couple of evangelists<sup>491</sup> –, they simply had no choice but to make an appeal to the munificence of their brethren in the Netherlands. To this end, the «*De Open Poort*» was split up into a Belgian edition – which was used in the evangelism work of the GKB and contained meditations, dogmatic articles and anti-Catholic statements – and a separate version for supporters in Holland – whose content was totally different from the ‘regular’, Belgian edition –, in the mid-1940s (probably 1942).<sup>492</sup> The main aim of this last version seems to have been to urge the Dutch «gereformeerden» not to forget their indigent brothers and sisters in Belgium, and, as a result, to incite them to offer generously. Looking back on the sixty-five year history of «*De Open Poort*», Rev. W.O.R. Willems, a former teacher of the ‘school with the Bible’ in Boechout and the then minister of the VPKB congregation in Vilvoorde, even called the Dutch edition – which no longer existed at that time – a “bedelbrief” (‘begging-letter’), for the continued existence of «*De Open Poort*» was totally dependent on the revenues the Dutch version yielded.<sup>493</sup> As becomes clear from the subtitle of this GKB periodical<sup>494</sup>, every subscription to the Holland-oriented edition made it possible to give away a copy of the Belgian version for free, at least until the beginning of the 1970s. The Dutch edition did not only bear the costs of its Flemish sister magazine, but was also used to collect money for numerous other activities and purposes. When money was needed to enable one of the churches to buy a (new) church organ, to keep its parsonage in good repair, to purchase new equipment, to expand its church building or to build a new one, or to guarantee the viability of the local ‘school with the Bible’, an (urgent) appeal was made in the Dutch version of «*De Open Poort*» – and with success: the lists of received donations and collections, which was published, just as in the

cation procedure. See: De Raaf, *Een open poort*, 113-117. These contacts between the PEKB and the GKB laid the foundation of the merger talks that resulted in the establishment of the VPKB in 1979. See: *Kringnotulen*, dated 11<sup>th</sup> June 1968 [archive of the G.K. in Boechout]; *N.O.P.* XLVIII.7-8 (July-August 1968), 2; *Ibid.* XLVIII.11 (November 1968), 2-3; *Rapport van de ‘kommissie kontakt andere kerken’*, dated 4<sup>th</sup> September 1969 [archive of the G.K. in Boechout].

<sup>491</sup> During the existence of the GKB (1894-1978), the following servants of the Gospel were in charge of evangelisation: Rev. A. Lauwers (1920-1941; he combined this with the pastoral care of the «gereformeerden» in Denderleeuw), Rev. B.W. Ganzevoort (1946-1969; he had been parson of the «gereformeerde kerk» in Ghent between 1929 and 1946), Rev. W.H. Zuidema (1962-1975; responsible for Judeo-Christian relations), Rev. B.C. Carp (1963-1966; he became parson of the «zendingskerk» in Antwerp afterwards), Rev. H. Eikelboom (1968-1976) and Rev. Th. Weerstra (in 1978 and subsequently in the VPKB). The years between brackets refer to the years in which these preachers were active as evangelism ministers.

<sup>492</sup> The sources studied do not say in which year the first Dutch issue was published, though De Raaf suggests it was 1942. See: De Raaf, *Een open poort*, 195. Another source makes mention of one copy from 1942. See: *Overzicht Open Poort*, undated (probably early 1980s) [archive of the F.P.G. in Brussels]. Copies from the 1940s and early 1950s that have been preserved, are very rare.

<sup>493</sup> “Wij kunnen ons niet van de indruk ontdoen, dat de nederlandse editie, naast het geven van informatie, vroeger voor alles dienst deed als bedelbrief. (...) Door de jaren heen heeft het hele Open Poort-werk zich juist en slechts van daaruit staande gehouden. (...) Wel geeft het te denken dat de inkomsten vanuit België slechts de redactiekosten dekken, en dat de nederlandse bijdragen goed zijn voor de druk- en portokosten.” See: *B.O.P.* LXV.10 (October 1985), 7.

<sup>494</sup> The subtitle was: ‘Nederlandse editie tot steun van de evangelisatie van de Gereformeerde Kerken in België. Elk Nederlands steunabonnement geeft één abonnement voor Vlaanderen vrij.’

«*De Torenwachter*», on the last page of every issue, show that the «gereformeerden» in Holland did not keep their hands on the purse-strings. To take just one example: between the 19<sup>th</sup> of October and the 19<sup>th</sup> of November 1960, the monthly received money for thirteen (!) different ends – among other things for the congregation in Hoboken (an ‘annex’ to the «gereformeerde kerk» in Antwerp) and the schools in Boechout, Denderleeuw, Ghent and Mechlin – and managed to collect more than fifteen hundred guilders.<sup>495</sup> True, this month was perhaps an outlier – one contributor donated nine hundred guilders at once –, but donations kept pouring in throughout the year; most people donated only a small amount of money – gifts of more than twenty-five or fifty guilders were exceptional, not to mention endowments as high as the one mentioned before –, but this continuous flow of little contributions added up to one considerable sum of money in the end. By the way, as the legend goes, the Free University in Amsterdam, the ‘showpiece’ of Neo-Calvinism, had also been built with nickels and dimes!<sup>496</sup>

Through the Dutch edition of «*De Open Poort*», the GKB raked in thousands of guilders on top of the money they received from the «deputaatschap voor de Evangelisatie in België». In the 1970s, when the GKN went through a process of transformation, the interest of Dutch «gereformeerden» for the (evangelism) work in Belgium faded dramatically, as a result of which the distribution of a separate Holland-oriented version of «*De Open Poort*» even had to be stopped as of January 1<sup>st</sup>, 1971.<sup>497</sup> Before this decade, however, when the Dutch Neo-Calvinist church life was still growing and flourishing, «gereformeerden» in Holland cherished the little churches abroad; in the words of the GKB-related periodicals, they wanted to give Belgium back what ‘Belgium’ had given their ancestors in the sixteenth century: the pure Word of Scripture. Without the influx of ‘Flemish’ preachers into the Northern Netherlands, the «gereformeerde» J. Terpstra, former Dutch minister of Education and former secretary of the «Unie ‘Een School met den Bijbel’», said at a VPCO meeting in 1936, Calvinism would never have grown into the dominant religion of Holland: “nog sterker is die band met u voor den Calvinist uit het Noorden. Door uwe predikers hebben wij het Calvinisme ontvangen en is bij ons in de XVI<sup>e</sup> eeuw de Reformatie gered.”<sup>498</sup> The ‘re-Christianisation’ of Flanders to which the Neo-Calvinists aimed was therefore, in essence, a ‘re-*Calvinisation*’.

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<sup>495</sup> N.O.P. XL.12 (December 1960), 4.

<sup>496</sup> The so-called ‘VU-busje’ (‘VU collecting-box’) is legendary: in many Reformed households, cents, nickels and dimes were saved up in this green-coloured box with the image of Abraham Kuyper on it, which was emptied several times a year, for the benefit of the Free University in Amsterdam. See: J. de Bruijn, *Helpende handen. VU-plan en Vrouwen VU-hulp in de jaren 1932-1997* (Zoetermeer 1999); *De Volkskrant*, 29<sup>th</sup> October 1999.

<sup>497</sup> De Raaf, *Een open poort*, 223.

<sup>498</sup> *De Torenwachter* IX.5 (May-June 1936), 2. [Erroneously, this edition was distributed as the fourth issue of the ninth volume.]

### **3. FROM SECESSION TO RECONCILIATION: THE RELATIONS OF THE G.K.B. MEMBERS WITH OTHER BELGIAN PROTESTANTS AND THE DUTCH MOTHER CHURCH**

#### **1. Self-image and attitude towards other denominations before 1945**

As the preceding chapter has indicated, magazines like the «*Gereformeerde Kerkbode voor België*» and «*De Open Poort*» have regularly published articles about the history of the Reformation (in Belgium). But have they paid attention to the genesis of the «*Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland*» or the «*Gereformeerde Kerken in België*» as well? Neo-Calvinist periodicals in Holland wrote about the «*Afscheiding*», the «*Doleantie*», the «*Vereniging*» and illustrious leaders as Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavinck very often, and books on these historical events and figures were in great demand. On the whole, the *GKB*-related journals devoted considerably less attention to the history of their own denomination, though the frequency with which they wrote about it, changed as time went on and correlated with the broader (theological) alterations within the «*Gereformeerde Kerken*». In the first decades after the establishment of the church in Brussels (and, five years later, in Antwerp), the coming into existence of the *GKB* was considered to be in line with the Reformation and with the two Reformed secession movements in the Netherlands (the «*Afscheiding*» and the «*Doleantie*»), especially with the latter. In this period, the «*gereformeerden*» referred to the history of these events oftentimes, primarily for apologetic and self-justifying reasons; after all, they had to explain *why* it was necessary to found new churches, next to the already existing Dutch-speaking congregations of the «*Bond van Kerken*» and the «*Belgische Christelijke Zendingskerk*». Parallels were seen between these two denominations and the «*Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk*», from which the «*gereformeerden*» in Holland had separated: the «*Bond*» was depicted as a hotbed of liberal theology and the BCZK, notwithstanding its orthodox appearance, had a centralised constitution that conflicted with the «*Dordtse Kerkorde*» (the rules governing church life that had been determined by the synod of Dort in 1618/1619 and were in use in the *GKN*). After the «*gereformeerde*» synod of 1893, for example, had been sceptical to the idea of creating a «*gereformeerde kerk*» in the Belgian capital, the Brussels Neo-Calvinists, assisted by none other than Abraham Kuyper<sup>499</sup>, (re)stated to the next general synod, which was held in 1896, why a ‘true’ Calvinist could/should not attend church in the «*Bond*» or the BCZK: inspired by the «*Vereniging*» of 1892, Kuyperian-minded Protestants in Brussels realised that it was sinful to stay in a church community wherein liberal theology was tolerated – i.e. the «*Nederlandse*

<sup>499</sup> The exchange of letters between Kuyper and A.G. van Deth, the ‘leader’ of the «*gereformeerden*» in Brussels, are preserved in the archive of the (former) «*gereformeerde kerk*» in Brussels. See also: De Raaf, ‘De instituering van de Gereformeerde Kerk van Brussel (1891-1896)’, 69-96; *Guido de Brès-kerk van Brussel*, 17-39; *Een open poort*, 17-18.

evangelische hervormde kerk», which was a member church of the «Bond van Kerken»—and that it was absolutely no alternative to join a denomination with a ‘hierarchical’ and ‘collegialistic’ structure—i.e. the BCZK.<sup>500</sup> The 1896 synod agreed and implied it was pleased that the «Doleantie» did not halt at the Dutch border and began to take root in Belgium as well.

In addition, there was another reason why the GKB regularly made references to the «Afscheiding» and the «Doleantie» in their formative years: by doing so, they could not only point out alleged similarities between Dutch and Belgian Protestantism—and, consequently, legitimise their existence—, but also accentuate their strong ties with Holland and the GKN.<sup>501</sup> This explains why the GKB paid more attention to the history of the «Gereformeerde Kerken» in the decades before the Second World War than thereafter—as has been said before, they wanted to *loosen* these bonds in the post-War period. In the first half of the twentieth century, however, the link with (the churches in) the Netherlands was regarded as an indispensable element of Neo-Calvinist church life in Belgium. In fact, the «Gereformeerde Kerken in België» were not only seen as ‘Dutch immigrant churches’ by others, but also by the GKB members themselves! Particularly the «*Gereformeerde Kerkbode voor België*» gave proof of this ‘sense of Dutchness’ that characterised the then existing churches in Brussels and Antwerp. When the Reformed monthly talked about ‘the motherland’, it referred to *Holland*—to mention just one of the many indications which show that the members of the GKB—at least the ones who wrote in the «*Kerkbode*»—felt more connected with Holland than with Belgium. The name «*Gereformeerde Kerkbode voor België*» (‘Neo-Calvinist Church Messenger for Belgium’) was even a bit misleading, since the magazine was rather a Church Messenger for *Dutch* Neo-Calvinists in Belgium. Consider, for example, the following significant exclamation in the September 25<sup>th</sup>, 1910 edition of the periodical: after the Belgian royal family had brought a visit to its Dutch counterpart, the «*Kerkbode*» paid tribute to queen Wilhelmina by wishing her long life (“leve onze Koningin!”)—an acclamation that was supplemented, almost certainly just before the issue went to press, with a salute to

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<sup>500</sup> “[De broeders en zusters in Brusse] leefden mede in Uwen strijd, zij deelden in Uw lijden, zij hebben zich ook innig met U verheugd in allen zegen, dien de Heere U schonk, vooral in de ten jare 1892 tot stand gekomen vereeniging van de twee grootste Gereformeerde kerkengroepen van ons Vaderland. Door Uw getuigenis werden wij (...) geprikkeld om met eene kerkgemeenschap, die in strijd was met de ordinantiën des Woords – de officiele Protest. Kerk van België – en die sommigen onzer te vergeefs vermaanden tot het bewandelen van betere paden, te breken en voor ons en onze kinderen te zoeken eene Gereformeerde kerkgemeenschap als de Heere onder U in deze eeuw zoo heerlijk deed opbloeien. (...) Wel is ons bekend, dat de Belgische Zendingskerk (...) zich in België als Gereformeerde gemeenschap aanbiedt, doch tegen de aansluiting bij deze kerk bestaat bij ons ernstig bezwaar. Inrichting en bestuur dier Kerk toch zijn naar onze innige overtuiging kwalijk overeen te brengen met den eisch des Woords, gelijk die beleden wordt in de drie Formulieren van Enigheid (...). Zoo konden wij dan ook bij de Belgische Zendingskerk ons niet voegen en werd ons de nood opgelegd om zelve tot zuiverder openbaring van het Lichaam onzes Heeren in onze stad de hand aan den ploeg te slaan.” See: *Brief van de kerkenraad van de gereformeerde kerk van Brussel aan de generale synode van de Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland*, dated 13<sup>th</sup> May 1896 [archive of the G.K. in Brussels].

<sup>501</sup> See, for example: the first sentence in the note above.

king Albert in a footnote!<sup>502</sup> The editor-in-chief probably realised that it would be somewhat peculiar to pay tribute only to the Dutch queen and not to the Belgian monarch in a periodical that claimed to be, according to its title, intended for *Belgium*.

The involvement of the GKB with their sister churches in the Netherlands became apparent from the subjects upon which the «*Gereformeerde Kerkbode voor België*» expatiated, such as the quarrels over the proposition to amalgamate the theological faculty of the Free University in Amsterdam and the Theological Seminary in Kampen – an issue which caused commotion within the GKN to such an extent that some even feared for a schism (!)<sup>503</sup> –, the «Anti-Revolutionaire Partij», the missionary work of the GKN in the Dutch East Indies, ordinances of the general synod and jubilees of GKN-related organisations and eminent Neo-Calvinist theologians. As regards this last subject matter: the «*Gereformeerde Kerkbode*» kept close track of the public and personal life of Abraham Kuyper in particular – which should not come as a surprise, for the GKB owed their existence to the leader of the «Doleantie»; after all, because of *his* intervention, the synod of 1896 had decided to reverse the decision of its predecessor and pushed the initial hesitation to church planting in Belgium aside. Furthermore, when Kuyper was in Brussels – which happened regularly, as he loved to sojourn in the Belgian state capital<sup>504</sup> –, he always paid a visit to his friend A.G. van Deth and sometimes even stopped the night at the Van Deth's. H.S.S. Kuyper, the oldest daughter of the Reformed theologian, was a welcome guest in Brussels as well: in 1912 and again 1913, she was invited by the «*jongelingsvereniging*» of the local «*gereformeerde kerk*» to hold a lecture on a historical, cultural or religious topic.<sup>505</sup> And H.H. Kuyper, the oldest son of «‘Abraham de Geweldige’» ('Abraham the Great') who, in his capacity of advisor to the general synod, played an influential role in the GKN in the period between the two World Wars, took an active part in the establishing of the «*deputaatschap voor de Evangelisatie in België*».<sup>506</sup> The little Neo-Calvinist communities in Belgium were thus in favour with the Kuy-

<sup>502</sup> G.K.B. VII.168 (25<sup>th</sup> September 1910), 3.

<sup>503</sup> Endedijk, *De Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland* I, 98.

<sup>504</sup> J.C. Rullmann, *Abraham Kuyper. Een levensschets* (Kampen 1928), 210; De Raaf, ‘De instituering van de Gereformeerde Kerk van Brussel (1891-1896)’, 71. One of Kuyper’s trips to Brussels was, however, not so pleasant. In 1911, Kuyper, being infirm, paid a visit to a Belgian naturopath, who advised him to do gymnastics in the nude with the windows open. Kuyper followed this advice, but during one of his exercises, the curtains in front of the window of his room in the Brussels *Hôtel Métropole* got blown up by a gust of wind. As a consequence, all who walked past this window could see him without his clothes on! See: K.R. Henstra and M. Eversen, *Duivelbanners en wonderdokters in de Wouden* (Leeuwarden 2007), 27. [The «*Utrechtsch Nieuwsblad*» (September 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1911 edition) said that Kuyper had told «*De Nieuwe Courant*» that the advice to gym undressed came from a naturopath in *Dresden*, not in Brussels.] Some said that the alarmed gendarmerie even felt compelled to arrest him temporarily and question several bystanders, though Kuyper himself denied this. See: *Utrechtsch Nieuwsblad*, 22<sup>nd</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> September 1911. Of course, this unfortunate incident was grist to the mill of the secular press in Holland. Especially the sensational tabloid «*Het Leven. Geillustreerd*» gloated over Kuyper’s alleged apprehension and devoted itself almost entirely to the occurrence in Brussels.

<sup>505</sup> G.K.B. VIII.208 (31<sup>st</sup> March 1912), 4; X.236 (4<sup>th</sup> May 1913), 3; X.237 (18<sup>th</sup> May 1913), 1-2. In 1913, Henriëtte Kuyper published a book on the Flemish people and culture, titled «*In het land van Guido Gezelles*», which received critical acclaim in both Holland and Dutch-speaking Belgium.

<sup>506</sup> De Raaf, *Een open poort*, 41-58.

pers, for which the editors of the «*Gereformeerde Kerkbode voor België*» were very thankful. As token of appreciation, they went, as a figure of speech, through fire and water for Abraham Kuyper. For example, when a certain «‘Timotheüs’» accused Kuyper in the Reformed periodical «*De Wachter*» – edited by Rev. T. Bos, who was one of Kuyper’s greatest critics within the GKN<sup>507</sup> –, of putting forward ‘unbiblical’ theories, Rev. V. Hepp, one of the editors-in-chief of the «*Kerkbode*», wrote a four-part serial in which he conscientiously refuted all accusations and blamed «*De Wachter*» for printing the discourteous letter to the editor of «‘Timotheüs’». <sup>508</sup> Six years earlier, Rev. Hepp, the then parson of the «gereformeerde kerk» in Antwerp, had already showed himself to be a confirmed Kuyperian and sung the praises of Kuyper in a ‘hagiographical’ laudation in which he, stating to speak on behalf of the GKB as a whole, stressed that the churches in Belgium owed a large debt of gratitude to the ‘father’ of Neo-Calvinism:

“Rechtstreeksch is zijn invloed (...) op de Belgische Calvinisten. Zij maken op hem met hun Nederlandse broederen gelijkelijk aanspraak. (...) Aan hem danken wij het ook, dat het Gereformeerd bewustzijn in België weer tot aanvankelijke opwaking kwam. Want hoezeer er onder ons ook zonen der Afscheiding zijn, zoo is het toch middelijkerwijze de actie van Dr. K. geweest, die de Gereformeerde kerken hier te lande uit hun eeuwenoude asch deed herrijzen. (...) Laat echter niemand met minachting op het hoopke, dat hier met Dr. K. eens geestes is, neerzien. Bestond de bende van Gideon niet uit driehonderd man? Ongeveer driehonderd in getal zijn in België de Gereformeerden ook. Genoeg dus om de Midianieten van den tegenwoordigen tijd te verslaan, zoo de Heere er ons toe gebruiken wil.”<sup>509</sup>

Rev. Hepp made it perfectly clear: the coming into existence of the GKB would have been unthinkable if Kuyper and his sympathisers had not left the «Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk» during the «Doleantie» in 1886 and if likeminded orthodox Calvinists in Belgium had not followed their example.

Within the «Gereformeerde Kerken», in which, especially in the first decades after 1892, two ‘groups’ could be discerned – congregations and church members with roots in the old «Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerk» (called «‘oud-A’») and those with roots in the «Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerken(dolerende)» («‘oud-B’») –, the churches in Brussels and Antwerp thus evidently belonged to «‘oud-B’». <sup>510</sup> Perhaps, as Rev. Hepp admitted in the quote above, the ecclesiastical descent of some

<sup>507</sup> H. Langeveld, *Hendrikus Colijn, 1869-1955 I. Dit leven van krachtig handelen, 1869-1933* (Amsterdam 1998), 79.

<sup>508</sup> G.K.B. IX.229 (26<sup>th</sup> January 1913), 3; IX.230 (9<sup>th</sup> February 1913), 3; IX.231 (23<sup>rd</sup> February 1913), 4; IX.232 (9<sup>th</sup> March 1913), 2-3.

<sup>509</sup> G.K.B. IV.93 (10<sup>th</sup> November 1907), 2-3, there 3.

<sup>510</sup> The letters ‘A’ and ‘B’ originally referred to the oldest «gereformeerde kerk» in the hundred eight municipalities in which there were two separate congregations that both belonged to the «Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland» after the amalgamation of the «Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerk» and the «Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerken (dolerende)» in 1892. In just two of these towns – Dieren and Grijpskerke –, the «dolerende» church was older than the «christelijk-gereformeerde» congregation. In four cities – Dordrecht, Harlem, Leyden and Middelburg –, there were even three GKN parishes: two that previously belonged to the CGK and one with roots in the «Doleantie». There, the latter received the letter ‘C’. In one town – Zierikzee –, there were two former CGK congregations but no «dolerende» church. Since

members of the GKB could be traced back to the pietistic «Afscheiding», but on the whole, the Neo-Calvinist congregations in Flanders were imbued with the dogmatic, cerebral and activist mentality of the «Doleantie». Particularly the meditations and articles in the «*Gereformeerde Kerkbode voor België*» ‘breathed’ a Kuyprian spirit and radiated the combativeness that was typical of «‘oud-B’», as they were theologically completely in line with the ideas of Abraham Kuyper, felt very involved with the Free University, propagated the creation of separate Reformed organisations (even in Belgium) and hammered on a strict compliance with the «Dordtse Kerkorde». It is significant to note here that the first parsons of the «gereformeerde kerken» in Brussels – Rev. J.H.M.G. Wolf (1898-1907), Rev. Chr. Warner (1909-1919) and Rev. D.J. Couvée (1924-1927) – and in Antwerp – Rev. P.N. Kruyswijk (1901-1902), Rev. V. Hepp (1904-1914) and Rev. A.G. Barkey Wolf (1924-1926; a son of Rev. J.H.M.G. Wolf<sup>511</sup>) – all stood in the tradition of «‘oud-B’» and had received their theological training at the Free University in Amsterdam (the intellectual centre of «‘oud-B’»), not at the Theological Seminary in Kampen (affiliated to «‘oud-A’»).<sup>512</sup> The first minister who had studied at this latter institution – Rev. B.W. Ganzevoort – joined the corps of GKB parsons as late as 1929. As regards the two ‘wings’ within the GKN, it was beyond doubt with which of these sides the churches in Belgium sympathised.

Even outsiders regarded the «Gereformeerde Kerken in Belgium» as archetypical exponents of the «Doleantie». In 1896, for example, Rev. Th.A. Eggenstein, the preacher of the «zendingskerk» in Antwerp who would cross swords with Abraham Kuyper two years later in «*De Heraut*»<sup>513</sup>, expressed his dissatisfaction with “de woelingen der *dolerenden* onder onze leden” (‘the rioting of the «dolerenden» amongst our members’). He had already observed in 1894 that some (orthodox) Protestants visited Sunday services in “een zogezegde *dolerende* gemeente” (‘a so-called «dolerende» congregation’) and kept complaining about the persistent attempts of the «dolerenden» to sneakily detach members of his own church in the following years.<sup>514</sup> Although these ‘schismatics’ called themselves «‘gereformeerden’», Rev. Eggenstein explicitly used the term «‘dolerenden’», since not all

the letter ‘A’ nearly always referred to a former «christelijk-gereformeerde» church and the letter ‘B’ to a former «dolerende» church, the letter ‘A’ was used in the GKN to refer to all congregations and church members with roots in the old «Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerk» and the letter ‘B’ to those with roots in the «Doleantie». See: *Acta G.S. GKN* (Amsterdam 1892), addendum C; C. van den Broeke, *Een geschiedenis van de classis. Classicale typen tussen idee en werkelijkheid (1517-2004)* (Kampen 2005), 241.

<sup>511</sup> M. de Goede, ‘Barkey Wolf, Aert Gerard’, in: C. Houtman et.al. eds., *Biografisch lexicon voor de geschiedenis van het Nederlandse protestantisme VI* (Kampen 2006), 22-24, there 22-23.

<sup>512</sup> The years between brackets refer to the years in which these ministers stood in the pulpit of the «gereformeerde kerk» in Brussels or Antwerp. Rev. J.H.M.G. Wolf had been directly involved in the «Doleantie»: several of his sermons were published in the third and fourth (last) volume of «*Uit de diepte*», a collection of preachments of ministers who went along with the «Doleantie» in 1886 or subsequent years. See: *Uit de diepte. Leerredenen door de predikanten der Nederduitsche Gereformeerde Kerken (dolereende)* III. 1888-1889 (Amsterdam 1889), 481-496; *Ibid.* IV. 1889-1890 (Amsterdam 1890), 165-180, 549-564 and 789-804.

<sup>513</sup> See: note 451.

<sup>514</sup> All these quotes are derived from: De Raaf, *Bewaar het pand*, 206-207.

(Dutch) members of the GKN who resided in or moved to Antwerp, supported their initiative to found a new church; at the end of the 1890s, when, as Rev. Eggenstein noticed, some Calvinists strived for the establishment of a local «gereformeerde kerk» – which was instituted on January 8<sup>th</sup>, 1899<sup>515</sup> –, several «gereformeerde» Dutchmen with «afgescheiden» roots still joined the local congregation of the BCZK!<sup>516</sup> Apparently, only those with Kuyperian sympathies had prohibitive objections to the «Zendingskerk». Rev. Eggenstein was not the only one who saw that the founding of separate «gereformeerde kerken» in Flanders, next to the «Bond van Kerken» and the BCZK, was solely initiated by «‘oud-B’»: in 1905, Rev. Wolf devoted a small article to the usage of the word «‘dolerend’» in the «*Gereformeerde Kerkbode voor België*» – a term with which he was not very pleased, because it was primarily used, so he stated, in a pejorative way – and said that a German brochure on Protestantism in Belgium called the «gereformeerde kerken» in Brussels and Antwerp “*dolleerende [sic] Gemeinden.*” In addition, Walloon Protestants, the minister continued, described the GKB as “*églises doléantes.*”<sup>517</sup> Nearly twenty years later, Rev. J.J.H. Visch, parson of the «evangelisch-hervormde kerk» in Ghent, made mention of a direct line from the «Doleantie» to the GKB as well; in a letter to the «gereformeerde kerk» of Brussels, which, in the absence of a church of their own<sup>518</sup>, took care of the «gereformeerden» in Ghent, he echoed Rev. Eggenstein by accusing the leader of the local Neo-Calvinist faction of ‘transporting’ the secessionist movement of 1886 to Belgium, without taking account of the differences between Dutch and Belgian Protestantism: “we (...) [hebben] recht te veronderstellen dat het beginsel der Reformatie van 1886-1892 nog van volle kracht is in de Gereformeerde kerken. (...) Hij is in de consequent voortgezette lijn van ’86.”<sup>519</sup> Moreover, Rev. Visch cried out against the fact that the Ghent «gereformeerden» tried to persuade members of ‘his’ «evangelisch-hervormde kerk» to join them and urged them to leave his parishioners alone.<sup>520</sup> Bursting with self-confidence, the «gereformeerden» did not answer Rev. Visch’s call and continued to approach members of other Protestant denominations – there was a «zendingskerk» in Ghent as well – with the appeal to support them.

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<sup>515</sup> *Honderdvijftig jaar gemeenten en predikanten*, 16.

<sup>516</sup> “Als er bij de Kerkcommissie [van de Antwerpse Zendingskerk] dan nog attestaties binnenkomen van leden van gereformeerde A-kerken, vraagt Ds. Eggenstein haar wat daarmee te doen. De algemene konklusie is kort en bondig: als leden aannemen!” See: De Raaf, *Bewaar het pand*, 206-207.

<sup>517</sup> G.K.B. I.19 (8<sup>th</sup> January 1905), 1-2, there 2.

<sup>518</sup> The «gereformeerde kerk» in Ghent was founded on December 10<sup>th</sup>, 1926, more than two years after this letter of Rev. Visch. Before this date, however, Kuyperian-minded Protestants in Ghent already held services of their own and were registered as members of the «gereformeerde kerk» in Brussels.

<sup>519</sup> *Brief van ds. J.J.H. Visch aan de kerkenraad van de gereformeerde kerk te Brussel (waarschijnlijk gericht aan ds. D.J. Couvée)*, dated 7<sup>th</sup> November 1924 [archive of the G.K. in Brussels].

<sup>520</sup> See: the note above and *Brief van ds. J.J.H. Visch aan de kerkenraad van de gereformeerde kerk te Brussel*, dated 16<sup>th</sup> October 1924 [archive of the G.K. in Brussels].

Self-confidence also found expression in the brochure «*Waarom Gereformeerd? Een kerkelijke verantwoording*», which was written by Rev. B.W. Ganzevoort somewhere in the 1930s. Originally published as a serial in the «*Maandblad ten dienste van de Gereformeerde Kerken in België*», this booklet pursued the characteristic features of the «Gereformeerde Kerken», in opposition to other reformational church groups, in greater depth and wanted to convince others of the uniqueness of these features – not because, Rev. Ganzevoort accentuated, ‘being Reformed’ was a quality in itself, but because «‘gereformeerd’» was synonym to ‘biblically solid’.<sup>521</sup> Remarkably enough, the Reverend did not elaborate on doctrinal or liturgical differences between the «Gereformeerde Kerken» and other denominations – he did not mention a single word about (Neo-)Calvinist dogmatics or the tolerance of the «Bond van Kerken» and the BCZK towards liberal theology –, but focused entirely on the foundation of the Reformed church life. Whereas the rules governing church life on which the GKN / GKB were based – the «Dordtse Kerkorde», the Three Forms of Unity and the ‘Reformed principles’ («de gereformeerde beginselen») –, were in perfect harmony with the Bible, Rev. Ganzevoort argued, non-Calvinist churches were founded on principles that conflicted with Scripture and other Calvinist denominations – though he did not name names, it was abundantly clear that he referred to the «Bond van Kerken», the BCZK and the «Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk» – did not apply the so-called ‘presbyterial-synodical’ organisational principles correctly. It was because of this reason that the GKN / GKB constantly hammered on strict compliance with the «Dordtse Kerkorde» and the Three Forms of Unity. To enforce his argument, Rev. Ganzevoort used the «Belgische Evangelische Zending» – not the «Belgische Christelijke Zendingskerk» (!), which would have been more obvious<sup>522</sup> – as an example: the BEZ championed, just like the «Gereformeerde Kerken», an orthodox view of the Bible – even though it rejected, contrary to (Neo-)Calvinism, infant baptism –, but its ‘congregationalist’ and ‘independentist’ structure<sup>523</sup> was, from Reformed point of view, out of line with Scriptural ordinances.<sup>524</sup>

<sup>521</sup> “Natuurlijk moeten we tot niet-Gereformeerde mensen niet zeggen: ‘het is Gereformeerd, en daarom moet ge het gelooven’, want niet in ons ligt de maatstaf: maar we moeten tonen, wat de Schrift ons leert, en zoo trachten anderen te overtuigen.” See: B.W. Ganzevoort, *Waarom Gereformeerd? Een kerelijke verantwoording* (n.pl. n.y.), 5-6.

<sup>522</sup> After all, the BCZK had more in common with the «Gereformeerde Kerken» – the BCZK and GKN / GKB stood in the Calvinist tradition, whereas the BEZ was Baptist-oriented – and accepted the *Confessio Belgica* as its confession of faith. But in spite of this, it had, according to the «gereformeerden», a centralist structure that conflicted with the presbyterial-synodical principles of Calvinism. If Rev. Ganzevoort had used the BCZK as example, his argument would have had more cogency, all the more, since the «gereformeerden» broke off all bonds with the «Zendingskerk» in the 1930s, the decade in which he wrote this brochure.

<sup>523</sup> The main difference between congregationalism / independentism and the presbyterial-synodical regulation system is that the former does not have national («generale synoden»), provincial («particuliere synoden») or regional («classes») church councils. Both systems accentuate the autonomy of the local congregation, but in the presbyterial-synodical set of rules governing church life, the church councils have the final word when conflicts within a church or between churches arise or when a local congregation is not capable of solving problems on its own. See: A.H. Santing-Wubs, *Kerken in geding. De burgerlijke rechter en kerelijke geschillen* (The Hague 2002), 61-65.

<sup>524</sup> Ganzevoort, *Waarom Gereformeerd?*, 6-7.

Since the presbyterian-synodical principles of Calvinism were the only rules governing church life that had a solid biblical base, and the GKN / GKB were the only churches that lived up to these principles, Rev. Ganzevoort implied that all who wanted to take the Word of God seriously should join the «Gereformeerde Kerken» – even though the «gereformeerden» admitted that there were also orthodox preachers active in other denominations. Some congregations outside the «Gereformeerde Kerken», they acknowledged, were ‘blessed’ with God-fearing and orthodox parsons, but if the church life of these congregations or the denomination to which these belonged, was founded on ‘unsound’ principles – of course, in the opinion of the «gereformeerden», this was the case with *all* churches but their own –, ‘true believers’ ought to leave them nonetheless. An article in the 1922 volume of the «*Gereformeerd Theologisch Tijdschrift*» provided a good example of this deeply rooted conviction. Not all orthodox Calvinists, one editor of this magazine explicated, had decided to leave the «Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk» during the «Afscheiding» or the «Doleantie», because they were among the audience of orthodox clergymen, and, consequently, did not see the necessity to join the secessionist movements. However, by staying in a denomination – the NHK – that tolerated liberal theology and rejected the «Dordtse Kerkorde» and the Three Forms of Unity, they were disobedient to God all the same. It was the plight of the «gereformeerden», he concluded, to admonish them for their insubordination.<sup>525</sup> Rev. Ganzevoort totally agreed: “[w]e dienen elkander niet door de waarheid Gods te verzwijgen, maar door haar te belijden. Want alleen zoo komen we met elkander verder. (...) Wil men dan naar ons niet hooren, dan is dat hun zaak; men mag ons daarvoor niet verantwoordelijk stellen. Op ons blijft de roeping, de waarheid te belijden en daardoor ook anderen te dienen.”<sup>526</sup> The organisation of the Church was, compared to dogmatics, liturgics and pastoral care, not something of minor importance; on the contrary, if the Church’s foundation deviated from the regulations Scripture gave, Christ would not receive the honour He deserved.<sup>527</sup> To put it biblically: the root had to be in order, in order to bear fruit.

It was not a coincidence that the article in the «*Gereformeerd Theologisch Tijdschrift*», paraphrased above, and Rev. Ganzevoort’s brochure were published in the interbellum period. The

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<sup>525</sup> J. Veenhof, ‘Het GTT ging een eeuw lang mee – hoofdmomenten uit een geschiedenis van honderd jaar theologieren’, in: W. Stoker and H.C. van der Sar eds., *Theologie op de drempel van 2000. Terugblik op 100 jaar Gereformeerd Theologisch Tijdschrift* (Kampen 1999), 9-58, there 30.

<sup>526</sup> Ganzevoort, *Waarom Gereformeerd?*, 4-5.

<sup>527</sup> “De praktijk bevestigt telkens weer de waarheid van Gods Woord. Zoekt ieder zich aan de goede orde te houden naar Gods Woord, dan loopt het leven vlot en vaardig. (...) [I]s er wel de band des geloofs aan den Zaligmaker, maar hecht men weinig aan de organisatie van de Kerk naar de Schrift, dan kan het leven zich een tijdlang schijnbaar naar wensch ontwikkelen, maar zie, soms geheel onverwacht doen zich moeilijkheden voor, waarvoor de oplossing niet in den gezonden weg wordt gezocht en het gaat van kwaad tot erger. Zooals het voor ons allen onverantwoordelijk is en dus ook zondig, de zorg voor ons lichamelijk leven te verwaarlozen, zoo is het ook voor de gelovigen, en voor de voorgangers allermeest, onverantwoordelijk en dus ook zondig,wanneer zij zich aan een goede inrichting van het kerkelijk leven naar Gods Woord niet genoeg laten gelegen liggen.” See: *Ibid.*, 13-14.

1920s and 1930s were ‘golden years’ for the «gereformeerden» in Holland; their influence on society as a whole was greater than their numbers – eight to ten percent of the Dutch population belonged to the GKN<sup>528</sup> – might suggest.<sup>529</sup> in the ecclesiastical sphere, their churches were leading and had, in international Calvinism, even more prestige than the «Hervormde Kerk», which was more than four times as big as the GKN; in politics, their «Anti-Revolutionaire Partij» was represented in all interbellum coalition governments and its leader Hendrikus Colijn was prime minister of no less than five cabinets – a record still unbroken today<sup>530</sup> –; and in civil society, the GKN-related associations flourished and formed a tightly-knit organisational network (a «zuil»). Their emancipation, their endeavour to break through the liberal dominance in the Church as well as the political arena and to raise their voice as a distinct group in all segments of society, was fully realised.<sup>531</sup> Whereas the «gereformeerden» had been a ‘backward’ community, looked down upon by the liberal-«hervormde» elite, prior to the interbellum, they could now no longer be ignored: “het Gereformeerde volk [was] geworden een groote, gevestigde en erkende volksgroep, die aanzien en macht genoot en van verdrukking niet meer spreken kon.”<sup>532</sup> As a consequence, the ideal to ‘re-Christianise’ society faded somewhat into the background – although it was still cherished as the ultimate aim for which the «gereformeerden» strived and Neo-Calvinist opinion leaders urged their following not to rest on their laurels – and was replaced by the more conservative objective to preserve what had already been achieved.<sup>533</sup> At this time, when the emancipation was completed and protection of the attained socio-political position became (the new) priority number one, the «gereformeerden» radiated self-confidence. They had already been self-assured before the First World War, the sociologist J. Hendriks said in retro-

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<sup>528</sup> H. Knippenberg, *De religieuze kaart van Nederland. Omvang en geografische spreiding van de godsdienstige gezindten vanaf de Reformatie tot heden* (Assen 1992), 98.

<sup>529</sup> C. Augustijn, *Kerk in Nederland 1945-1984* (Delft 1984), 12.

<sup>530</sup> Colijn was prime minister from August 4<sup>th</sup>, 1925 to March 8<sup>th</sup>, 1926 – in a coalition government of the «Rooms-Katholieke Staatspartij» (RKSP), the «Anti-Revolutionaire Partij» (ARP) and the «Christelijk-Historische Unie» (CHU) –, from May 26<sup>th</sup>, 1933 to July 31<sup>st</sup>, 1935 – in a cabinet which consisted of the RKSP, the ARP, the CHU, the «Liberale Staatspartij» (LSP) and the «Vrijzinnig-Democratische Bond» (VDB) –, from July 31<sup>st</sup>, 1935 to June 24<sup>th</sup>, 1937 – a continuation of the preceding cabinet –, from June 24<sup>th</sup>, 1937 to July 25<sup>th</sup>, 1939 – in a government with the RKSP, the ARP and the CHU – and between July 25<sup>th</sup>, 1939 and August 10<sup>th</sup>, 1939 – a coalition of the ARP, the CHU and the LSP; the cabinet with the shortest term in office in Dutch parliamentary history. For a detailed account of Colijn’s political career, see: G. Puchinger, *Colijn en het einde van de coalitie. De geschiedenis van de kabinetformaties I. 1918-1924* (Kampen 1969); II. 1925-1929 (Kampen 1980); III. 1933-1939 (Leyden 1993).

<sup>531</sup> P.H.J.M. Derkx, *H.J. Pos, 1898-1955: Objectief en partijdig. Biografie van een filosoof en humanist* (Hilversum 1994), 51; C. de Gast, *Afscheiding en Doleantie in het Land van Heusden en Altena. Spanningen tussen gereformeerden en samenleving in de negentiende eeuw* (Tilburg 1989), 401; Stoop, “Om het volvoeren van een christelijke staatkunde”, 9; Hendriks, *De emancipatie van de Gereformeerden*, 218.

<sup>532</sup> J. Diepersloot and E.L. Smelik, *Plaats en koers der Gereformeerde Kerken in Hersteld Verband* (Baarn 1937), 13. In 1924, Rev. Hepp phrased it as follows: “Werd er vroeger nog maar half met ons gerekend, werden leden onzer kerken dikwerf door hooghartige liberalen niet voor vol gehouden en zag men ons het liefst als amechtigen aan, thans heeft ons kerkbeeld een ander voorkomen verkregen. Steeds meerdere van haar leden werden geroepen tot de hoogste ambten in staat en maatschappij. In welvaren zijn wij zienderogen vooruit gegaan.” Cited in: Van Kaam, *Parade der mannenbroeders*, 83.

<sup>533</sup> Hendriks, *De emancipatie van de Gereformeerden*, 219.

spective, but their self-image became even *more* positive in the interbellum period. According to some, even within the GKN themselves, the Neo-Calvinist self-confidence was carried too far and lead to ‘conceitedness’, ‘complacency’ or ‘triumphalism’.<sup>534</sup> It is true that the «gereformeerden», who saw the florescence of their church life as a blessing from God, presented themselves to the outside world with a certain ‘pride’ in the 1920s and 1930s – which found concrete expression in, among other things, the phrase “wij gereformeerden” (‘we Neo-Calvinists’)<sup>535</sup> and their church buildings:<sup>536</sup> a lot of old chapels, which had been built in the middle of the nineteenth century or the first years after the «Doleantie» and had become too small to seat all church goers, were substituted by new architectural *tours de force* that reflected the increased wealth and standing of the orthodox Reformed community. Particularly the so-called ‘rationalistic’ and ‘expressionistic’ designs of master builders E. Reitsma, B.W. Plooij, B.T. Boeyinga and Tj. Kuipers marked the definitive emancipation of the Neo-Calvinist «‘kleine luyden’».

The new building of the «gereformeerde kerk» in Brussels, which was designed by the last-mentioned architect<sup>537</sup> and was officially brought into use on February 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1928<sup>538</sup>, was one of these interbellum churches. Compared to the old place of prayer at 5 Nieuwe Graanmarkt (a house-turned-church), the newly constructed building at 33-35 Léon Lepagestraat was a tremendous improvement – it even had a flèche – and made the «gereformeerden» more visible in Brussels society. The symbolic value of this moving from the Nieuwe Graanmarkt to the Lepagestraat should not be underestimated: the *mere fact* that the «gereformeerden» were able to build a new church, was a powerful and visible sign to the outside world that the Neo-Calvinist community in the Belgian state capital prospered. Moreover, having a building that looked like a church from the outside, the church council thought, would refute the opinion of those who saw the «gereformeerden» as a ‘sect’.<sup>539</sup> This same argument would later be repeated by the consistory of the «gereformeerde kerk» in Ghent, when the local «zendingskerk», which suffered severely by waning interest, inquired in 1952 whether the «gereformeerden» were interested in taking over its church building at the Rabot (a well-known square). Since the Neo-Calvinists in Ghent held Sunday services in a former shop, the parson, elders and deacons said that, from an evangelistic point of view, the offer of the BCZK should be taken into serious consider-

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<sup>534</sup> Hendriks, *De emancipatie van de Gereformeerden*, 218.

<sup>535</sup> Impeta, *Kaart van kerkelijk Nederland*, 109.

<sup>536</sup> K.W. de Jong, “‘Niet meer achteraf, (...) maar in de hoofdstraat’. De ontwikkeling van het Gereformeerde kerkgebouw tot aan de Vrijmaking van 1944”, in: H.C. Endedijk and J. Vree eds., “*Niet een handvol, maar een land vol*”. *Twee eeuwen protestantse kerkbouw in Nederland* (Zoetermeer 2002), 172-205.

<sup>537</sup> The new building of the «gereformeerde kerk» in Brussels, located at 33-35 Léon Lepagestraat, turned out to be the last church that Tj. Kuipers designed.

<sup>538</sup> De Raaf, *Guido de Brès-kerk van Brussel*, 47; *Bouwen door de eeuwen heen in Brussel. Stad Brussel – Binnenstad* (Liège 1983), 343-344.

<sup>539</sup> De Raaf, *Guido de Brès-kerk van Brussel*, 46.

ration; a genuine church could take away potential hesitation of non-Protestants to attend a service: “[h]et zegt toch iets in het Evangelisatie-werk, dat we deze mensen weer een kerk kunnen binnenleiden.”<sup>540</sup> On May 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1958, when the «zendingskerk» in Ghent was permanently dissolved, the «gereformeerden» moved to the Rabot indeed.<sup>541</sup> K. Sluys also stressed the importance of having a building that looked like a church, when he asked his brethren in Holland to donate money for the Reformed congregation in Boechout at the beginning of the 1960s: “samenkomsten in een school, of in een zaaltje achteraf, herinner[en] (...) teveel aan de een of andere sekte (...). Zou de evangelieprediking plaats vinden in een *echte kerk*, die iedereen kan zien, zo zou dat de innerlijke weerstand bij vele wegnemen en het reformatorisch getuigenis juist die uiterlijke kracht geven die het inwendig bezit.”<sup>542</sup> Yet, having the ambition to (re)build a genuine church was one thing, putting this aspiration into effect was another. The «gereformeerde kerken» in Belgium, being indigent already, therefore had to make a strong appeal to the generosity of their sister churches in the Netherlands. In Brussels, for example, special fund-raising letters were send to all consistories of GKN congregations in order to bring the initiative to construct a new church building to their attention. None other than Hendrikus Colijn, the leader of the Dutch «Anti-Revolutionaire Partij», linked his name to the first of these circulars, and architect Kuipers was even willing to work without making any profit.<sup>543</sup> GKN-related magazines in Holland emphasised the necessity of supporting the «gereformeerden» in Brussels: a representative building would accentuate the presence of the Neo-Calvinist community in the centre of the Belgian capital. Or, as the church council in Brussels put it: “het oog wil ook wat” (‘appearances also count’).<sup>544</sup>

In the interbellum, the intensified self-assurance and social well-being of the Dutch «gereformeerden» did not only find expression in the construction of a new church building in Brussels, but also resulted in a strengthened isolation – more than in any other period, the old adage ‘our isolation is our strength’ was considered of paramount importance. The dominant mentality in the GKN was, so to speak, ‘transported’ to the GKB by the Dutch ministers and church members, precisely because the (financial, emotional and religious) bonds of the GKB with Holland were very strong in this period. Since, as a consequence of the achieved emancipation, the GKN became more and more introvert<sup>545</sup> and, because of an increased estrangement of the GKN from other Protestant denominations<sup>546</sup>, high-

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<sup>540</sup> *Mededelingenblad van de gereformeerde kerk te Gent* V.7 (July 1951), 1.

<sup>541</sup> “Voor onze taak naar buiten is het van groot belang een bekend en representatief kerkgebouw te hebben.” See: *Ibid.* XII.3 (March 1958), 1. See also: *Ibid.* XII.4 (April 1958), 2; XII.6 (June 1958), 2.

<sup>542</sup> *De Roepstem. Evangeliebrief van de Protestantse Kerk van Boechout* 162 (10<sup>th</sup> June 1961), 1-3, there 2.

<sup>543</sup> De Raaf, *Guido de Brès-kerk van Brussel*, 46.

<sup>544</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>545</sup> Hendriks, *De emancipatie van de Gereformeerden*, 223.

<sup>546</sup> In the 1900s, 1910s, 1920s and 1930s, the GKN appealed several times to the «Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerk» and the «Gereformeerde Gemeenten» in order to do something about the ecclesiastical dissension within the so-called

lighted their ‘otherness’, the GKB began to distance themselves from the rest of (Belgian) Protestantism to an increasing degree as well. It was not a coincidence that the «gereformeerden» in Antwerp and Ghent strived for the founding of a (Neo-)Calvinist instead of an interdenominational ‘school with the Bible’ in the 1920s and 1930s, and that the GKB urged the general synod to break off the still existing (formal) relationship with the BCZK in the same period. Thus, also in Belgium, the «Gereformeerde Kerken» undeniably tried to mark off their own community from the other Protestant church groups in the interbellum. In doing so, the «gereformeerden» in Flanders gave, just as their church members in Holland, proof of a certain ‘triumphalism’ too. Differences with other reformational churches, particularly with those denominations that bore the most resemblance to the «Gereformeerde Kerken» – in Holland: the «Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk» and the «Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerk»; in Belgium: the «Belgische Christelijke Zendingskerk» –, were magnified and raised as barriers to co-exist peacefully. In the Netherlands, the alienation between the GKN and the NHK reached a peak in the interbellum – it is, for example, significant that the «hervormden» accused the «gereformeerden» of linking the «Nederlandsche Christelijke Radio-Vereeniging» (founded in 1924<sup>547</sup>) exclusively to the GKN, and tried, without avail, to found a radio broadcasting company of their own, the «‘Nederlandsch Hervormde Radio-Omroep’»<sup>548</sup> –, and, according to historians G. Harinck and L.G.M. Winkeler, the GKN repeatedly denied the CGK the right to exist in the interwar period.<sup>549</sup> In Belgium, the GKB adopted a similar attitude towards the BCZK. Although the formal relations between the «Gereformeerde Kerken» and the «Zendingskerk» were preserved after the founding of Neo-Calvinist

«‘gereformeerde gezinde’», with the ultimate goal to merge into one *undived* orthodox Calvinist denomination. The CGK and the GG would, however, not hear of it and resolutely rejected the requests of the GKN. See: Post, *Gereformeerd zijn en blijven een wankel evenwicht?!*, 124-127; *Acta G.S. GKN* (Arnhem 1902), artt. 43 and 206; (Utrecht 1905), addenda XXXVIII, XXXVIIIa, XXXVIIIb; (Amsterdam 1908), addenda XIX, XIXa, XIXb; (Zwolle 1911), addendum V; (The Hague 1914), addendum X; (Middelburg 1933), addendum XLI; (Amsterdam 1936), addendum XIV; (Sneek 1938/1939), addenda VIIIa, VIIIb, VIIIc, VIIId. The coming into existence of the «Staatkundig Gereformeerde Partij», which presented itself as a competitor to the «Anti-Revolutionaire Partij», expressed an unfavourable opinion on the ARP and the GKN, was affiliated to the GG and exerted attraction on members of the CGK and the «Gereformeerde Bond in de Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk» (who sympathised, for the most part, with the ARP), also lead to strained relations. See: W. Fieret, ‘De verhouding tussen de ARP en de SGP tijdens het interbellum’, in: G. Harinck, R. Kuiper and P. Bak eds., *De Antirevolutionaire Partij 1829-1980* (Hilversum 2001), 157-170. As a result of this ecclesiastical and political agitation among orthodox Calvinists, the «gereformeerden» more and more began to accentuate their own identity (in opposition to the CGK, GG and «Gereformeerde Bond») and some even said that, contrary to Kuyper’s doctrine of the ‘pluriformity of the Church’ – which stated that the «Gereformeerde Kerken» were the most ‘pure’ Churches of Christ, albeit not the *only* Churches of Christ –, no salvation could be attained outside the GKN. See: Hendriks, *De emancipatie van de Gereformeerden*, 224.

<sup>547</sup> Y.H. van der Goot, ‘Nederlandse Christelijke Radio-Vereniging’, in: G. Harinck et.al. eds., *Christelijke Encyclopedie II* (Kampen 2005), 1270-1271, there 1270.

<sup>548</sup> Y.H. van der Goot, ‘Media’, in: *Ibid.*, 1171-1173, there 1172.

<sup>549</sup> G. Harinck and L.G.M. Winkeler, ‘De twintigste eeuw’, in: H.J. Selderhuis ed., *Handboek Nederlandse kerkgeschiedenis* (Kampen 2006), 723-912, there 752. Harinck and Winkeler do not mention, however, that the «Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerk» denied the GKN the right to exist as well! In response to the request of the GKN to talk about reconciliation, the CGK said that GKN should drop Kuyperian theology (especially the doctrine of presumptive regeneration), confess their guilt concerning the dissension in (Dutch) orthodox Calvinism and join the CGK. See: Post, *Gereformeerd zijn en blijven een wankel evenwicht?!*, 184-186, 193-194 and 195-199.

churches in Antwerp and Brussels, the GKB raised prohibitive objections to continuation of the correspondence of the general synod with the BCZK<sup>550</sup> in the interbellum, since it would restrain the BCZK from ‘turning back’ to God’s ordinances – i.e. from becoming identical to the GKB – and undermine the right to exist of separate «gereformeerde kerken» in Flanders.<sup>551</sup> There was no specific reason why the GKB came up with these objections in the 1920s and 1930s and why they had not already put them forward one or two decades earlier. It turns out that the GKB were severely influenced by the increased rigidity and introversion within the GKN. Now, after several decades, a Neo-Calvinist church life had come into being in Belgium, the demarcation lines with kindred groups had – just as in Holland – to be sharpened: to keep the own community ‘sound in the faith’ and ‘uncontaminated’, it was necessary to maintain a well-defined distance from other Protestant denominations. The «gereformeerden» only abandoned their self-chosen isolation, when they experienced that they simply could not do without the support of these other church groups – e.g. in the field of primary education.

## 2. Self-image and attitude towards other denominations after 1945

In brief, the self-image of the «gereformeerden», which had already been positive before the inter-war period, turned into self-satisfaction and resulted in an intensified isolation. But after the Second World War, this began to change radically, which had significant consequences for their attitude towards the «Bond van Kerken», the BCZK, the Methodist Church and the BEZ and was best reflected in the way they looked to their own history. Whereas the Neo-Calvinists had previously been jubilant about the coming into existence of «gereformeerde kerken» in Flanders – the founding of churches in Brussels, Antwerp, Ghent and Mechlin was described as ‘a new Reformation’ and their bonds with the GKN were deemed ‘indispensable’ for the preservation of orthodox Calvinism south of the Moerdijk –, «gereformeerden» in Belgium were now considerably less exuberant when they wrote about their affiliation with the GKN. In later years, some even *relativised* the strong ties with the GKN and Holland. For example, the «*Vlaams Kerkblad*», edited by K. Sluys – who sympathised with the most orthodox faction within the «Gereformeerde Kerken»<sup>552</sup> and set himself up as champion of Pro-

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<sup>550</sup> See: note 451.

<sup>551</sup> “Tot een eigen Gereformeerde kerkelijk leven is het hier gekomen, omdat beseft werd, dat het Woord in de Z.Kerk niet tot zijn recht kwam; en hiermee laat zich de correspondentie niet rijmen. Het bezwaar wordt ook praktisch gevoeld, ten aanzien van de Vlaamsche gemeenten, n.l., daar men in de handhaving onzerzijds van de correspondentie een argument heeft een eigen leven te leiden naast onze kerken: de Geref. Kerken zelf erkennen hen als Gereformeerd en de B.Z.-Kerk bestond hier eerder dan de Geref. Kerken. Handhaving der correspondentie verzwakt daardoor – voor zooveel het aan ons ligt – bij hen den drang tot reformatie naar Gods Woord.” See: *Brief van de gereformeerde kerken van Antwerpen, Brussel en Gent aan de deputaten voor de Correspondentie met Buitenlandse Kerken*, dated 26<sup>th</sup> May 1932 [archive of the G.K. in Brussels].

<sup>552</sup> In 1953, Sluys wrote a polemical booklet against the decision of the general synod to assign female church members the right to vote in the elections of elders and deacons. See: K. Sluys, *Het vrouwekiesrecht in de kerk. Een eerste stap naar het modernisme* (Boechout 1953).

testant orthodoxy –, more or less said in 1961 that the ecclesiastical fragmentation within Protestantism was a ‘relic’ from the past – which suggested that the *reasons* why Protestantism was so fragmented were less relevant for the present day, all the more since Sluys did *not* dilate on the doctrinal differences between the «Gereformeerde Kerken» and other (Calvinist) churches and called these dissimilarities ‘nuances’ –, and stretched the meaning of the term «‘gereformeerd’» by stating that the majority of churches in Belgium could be characterised as «‘gereformeerd’» – which was a striking break with the past, for members of the GKN/GKB had always claimed the term «‘gereformeerd’» exclusively for themselves!<sup>553</sup> A year later, the «*Vlaams Kerkblad*» wrote that the coming into being of the «Gereformeerde Kerken in België» was based on a mere coincidence: some ‘Reformed-by-birth’ (“gereformeerden-van-huis-uit”) – who were all Dutch, since there were no Flemish ‘Reformed-by-birth’ – had not felt at ease in the then existing churches and decided to found congregations that resembled the («gereformeerde») churches in their mother country.<sup>554</sup> Compared to the old, frequently repeated characterisations of the (founding of the) GKB as ‘a new Reformation’ or ‘a God-led return to the sound faith’, this statement and the one paraphrased before sounded quite relativistic: not a single word was said about principal doctrinal dissatisfaction with the «Bond van Kerken» or the BCZK. This did not mean that Sluys, the editor of the «*Vlaams Kerkblad*», was a relativist as regards dogmatics – quite the contrary, he made a firm stand for orthodox Calvinism – but, he implied in his periodical, being ‘Reformed’ was not restricted to membership of the «Gereformeerde Kerken»; one could be «gereformeerd» in another denomination than the GKN/GKB as well. As long as the preaching was ‘Scriptural’ – in accordance with reformational orthodoxy –, it did not matter to which denomination one belonged.<sup>555</sup> In former days, the «gereformeerden» had contended – for example in the brochure «*Waarom Gereformeerd?*» of Rev. Ganzevoort – that belonging to a church with orthodox preachers was not enough and that it mattered indeed whether the church life was founded on a strict compliance with the «Dordtse Kerkorde» and the Three Forms of Unity.

The «*Vlaams Kerkblad*» was not alone in its relativisation of the embedment of the GKB within the «Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland». In the minutes of the consistory of the «gereformeerde kerk» in Denderleeuw, dated 23<sup>rd</sup> May 1975, for instance, the bonds with the GKN were called “toeval-

<sup>553</sup> “Al deze kerken zijn dus in feite ‘ge-re-formeerde’ kerken. In België zijn nagenoeg alle protestantse kerken ‘gereformeerd’ al zijn er vaak *nuanceringen* in de belevening en kerkvorm, die een historische oorsprong hebben. Een ge-re-formeerde kerk is dus een gewone protestantse kerk. Een protestants-evangelische, een hervormde, een belgisch-christelijke zendingskerk o.a., is dus in feite een gewone ge-re-formeerde kerk. De hoofdzaak is dat al deze kerken gemeenten zijn van christenen die wensten terug te keren naar het geloof van de eerste christelijke kerk zoals we dat in de Heilige Schrift gepredikt vinden.” See: *Vlaams Kerkblad* VII.9 (January 1961), 273-275, there 274.

<sup>554</sup> “Mogelijk zouden er in Vlaanderen nooit geen [sic] gereformeerde kerken ontstaan zijn wanneer er op dat moment een kerkelijk dak was geweest waaronder de gereformeerden-van-huis-uit zich op hun gemak zouden hebben gevuld.” See: *Ibid.* VIII.10 (February 1962), 190-194, there 192.

<sup>555</sup> *Ibid.*, 192-193.

lig” (‘coincidental’) and “kunstmatig” (‘artificial’).<sup>556</sup> the church was part of the GKN, simply because it had come into existence as an ‘annex’ to the «gereformeerde kerk» in Brussels, which happened to belong to this Dutch denomination. Moreover, since, with the exception of the Reverends – who were, in the case of Denderleeuw, all Dutchmen apart from Rev. Lauwers –, (nearly) all members were (native) Flemings<sup>557</sup> and the congregation was just ‘partially’ «gereformeerd» (!)<sup>558</sup> – Protestants with a Baptist background went to church in the «gereformeerde kerk» as well; Denderleeuw therefore presented itself as «‘evangelische kerk’»<sup>559</sup> (just as the church in Boechout<sup>560</sup>) –, there was no emotional attachment to the GKN. Although it would be financially disadvantageous, the formal, ecclesiastical ties with Holland were, according to the consistory in Denderleeuw, certainly not requisite. Four years earlier, Rev. Eikelboom, the editor-in-chief of the Belgian edition of «*De Open Poort*» had already pointed out the relativity of the bonds with the GKN and ‘demythologised’ the genesis of the church in Brussels: its founders claimed that they had objections against the «Nederlandse evangelische hervormde kerk» and the local «zendingskerk» and saw the establishment of a new church as the beginning of an endeavour to ‘re-Christianise’ Belgium, but, Rev. Eikelboom implied, the church in the Belgian capital – the first of the «gereformeerde kerken» in Flanders – had only come into being because Abraham Kuyper wanted to attend church in a «gereformeerde kerk» when he was in Brussels!<sup>561</sup> Evidently, the ‘pride’ of belonging to the «Gereformeerde Kerken» and the accentuation of the ‘otherness’ and own identity in opposition to the other Protestant denominations in Belgium had dwindled significantly.

Particularly the relation with the «Belgische Christelijke Zendingskerk» changed fundamentally as a result of this weakened self-image. Whereas the GKB had asked the general synod in the 1920s and early 1930s to break off all contacts with the BCZK, these same churches requested the highest church council of the GKN to *restore* the correspondence with this denomination in the late 1940s!<sup>562</sup> During a joint meeting of the «gereformeerde kerken» of Antwerp, Brussels, Ghent and Mechlin – the churches in Boechout and Denderleeuw were not yet instituted –, which was held on April 1<sup>st</sup>, 1949, the preachers, elders and deacons present even expressed the hope that the GKB and the four Dutch-speaking congregations of the BCZK – which were located in the three first-mentioned cities and Os-

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<sup>556</sup> *Kerkenraadsnotulen G.K. Denderleeuw*, dated 23<sup>rd</sup> May 1975 [archive of the G.K. in Denderleeuw].

<sup>557</sup> In 1956, Rev. G.R. Visser, one of the editors of the Dutch version of «*De Open Poort*», said that *all* members were Flemings, except Rev. Hegger and his family. See: *N.O.P.* XXXVI.6 (June 1956), 2.

<sup>558</sup> *Kerkenraadsnotulen G.K. Denderleeuw*, dated 4<sup>th</sup> April 1975 [archive of the G.K. in Denderleeuw].

<sup>559</sup> See, for example: *N.O.P.* XLVIII.9 (September 1968), 4; *B.O.P.* LI.6 (June 1971), 15-16.

<sup>560</sup> See, for example: *Vlaams Kerkblad* VIII.10 (February 1962), 190-194, there 192; *N.O.P.* XLVII.5 (May 1967), 4; *Ibid.* XLVIII.9 (September 1968), 4.

<sup>561</sup> *B.O.P.* LI.6 (June 1971), 11-14, there 13.

<sup>562</sup> *Acta G.S. GKN* (The Hague 1949), addendum CIV.

tend – would amalgamate in the near future.<sup>563</sup> Although the date of the gathering might give reason to doubt whether the GKB were serious, the intention to strengthen the bonds with the BCZK was certainly not an April Fools’ joke: on April 11<sup>th</sup>, the consistories of the «gereformeerde kerk» and «zendingskerk» in Antwerp came together to discuss the possibilities of working towards a fusion<sup>564</sup>, and one day later, a similar meeting was organised in Brussels.<sup>565</sup> Because the church councils of the four BCZK congregations seemed to be favourably disposed towards the idea of a close alliance and (in due course) a union, the GKB brought the suggestion to the attention of the general synod.<sup>566</sup> Yet, the highest church council of the GKN raised confessional objections to a unification of the six «gereformeerde kerken» and four «zendingskerken»<sup>567</sup>, while the (Walloon-dominated) synodical council of the «Zendingskerk» and the church members of the four BCZK congregations themselves were also less sympathetic towards the proposal: some members of the consistory of the Antwerp «zendingskerk», which was not as unanimous as the «gereformeerde kerk» thought on the basis of the meeting of the 11<sup>th</sup> of April, even called it “zonderling” (‘peculiar’) that the GKB had broken off all ties in the early 1930s and sought a rapprochement with the BCZK just sixteen years later.<sup>568</sup>

Both the general synod of the «Gereformeerde Kerken» and the synodical council of the BCZK were, however, willing to re-establish the old bond of correspondence and made it clear that they were not opposed to initiatives of local churches to create forms of cooperation. The idea of an amalgamation was, nonetheless, not totally pushed aside: in 1958, 1961, 1966 and 1969, the «zendingskerk» and «gereformeerde kerk» in Antwerp assembled to resume the discussion about an amalgamation, albeit again without taking concrete steps in that direction.<sup>569</sup> Meanwhile, the number of Flemish BCZK congregations had diminished: the «zendingskerk» in Brussels had fallen apart and the parish in Ghent had been, due to waning interest, closed by order of the synodical council, after which its church building was sold to the «gereformeerden» and the remaining parishioners became members of the local «gereformeerde kerk».<sup>570</sup> Being the only Dutch-speaking congregations left in an otherwise comple-

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<sup>563</sup> *Notulen van de gemeenschappelijke vergadering van de kerkenraden der Gereformeerde Kerken in België*, dated 1<sup>st</sup> April 1949 [archive of the G.K. in Brussels].

<sup>564</sup> De Raaf, *Bewaar het pand*, 213.

<sup>565</sup> *Notulen van de gemeenschappelijke vergadering van de kerkenraden van de gereformeerde kerk en zendingskerk in Brussel*, dated 12<sup>th</sup> April 1949 [archive of the G.K. in Brussels].

<sup>566</sup> *Brief van de gereformeerde kerken in België aan de generale synode van de Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland*, dated June 1949 [archive of the G.K. in Brussels].

<sup>567</sup> De Raaf, *Bewaar het pand*, 217.

<sup>568</sup> *Ibid.*, 215.

<sup>569</sup> After 1978, when the «Verenigde Protestantse Kerk in België» came into being, the former «zendingskerk» and «gerefommerde kerk» in Antwerp would continue to exist as separate congregations.

<sup>570</sup> The closing of the Flemish «zendingskerk» in Brussels is wrapped in mystery. In 1949, the GKB said there were Dutch-speaking BCZK congregations in Antwerp, Ostend, Ghent and Brussels. The «zendingskerk» in Ghent was closed in 1958 – see: *Mededelingenblad van de gereformeerde kerk te Gent XII.3* (March 1958), 1-2 – and the one in Brussels had apparently been closed in the mid-1950s, since the «kringnotulen» of January 12<sup>th</sup>, 1959 only make mention of the BCZK churches in Antwerp and Ostend. Remarkably enough, *none* of the sources studied gives any further information

tely French-speaking denomination – in the mid-1960s, there were forty-six Walloon churches on a total of forty-eight BCZK parishes<sup>571</sup> –, the «zendingskerken» in Antwerp and Ostend continued to seek contact with the GKB<sup>572</sup> and put forward the idea of forming a separate «classis» with the six «gereformeerde kerken». <sup>573</sup> Because the GKN demurred to this plan – the «zendingskerken» in Antwerp and Ostend wanted to remain member churches of the BCZK and cooperate in a «classis» of another denomination (i.c. the GKN) at the same time, which was, in view of the rules governing church life that were in use in the «Gereformeerde Kerken», simply impossible –, the suggestion was dropped, but the «zendingskerken» were accepted as guest members of the «kring»<sup>574</sup>, the subdivision of the «classis» Dordrecht in which the Flemish «gereformeerde kerken» periodically met each other. In spite of the failed attempts to accomplish an actual (institutional) merger, the mutual contacts between the GKB and the (Dutch-speaking branch of the) BCZK were, in general, cordial and fraternal. In Antwerp, tangible results of this overture were the summoning of joint meetings, the arrangement of communal Sunday services and the publication of a joint church bulletin, called «*Band*», in 1967.

Five years later, the «protestantse kerk» in Antwerp, a member church of the «Protestantse Kerk van België» (PKB) – which had come into being in 1969 as an amalgamation of the Belgian Methodist Church and the «Protestants-Evangelische Kerk van België» (the successor to the old «Bond van Kerken»)<sup>575</sup> –, discontinued the publication of its own newsletter («*Van het kerkplein*») and began to contribute to «*Band*» as well. The difference in time between the creation of «*Band*» as an interdenominational initiative of the Antwerp BCZK church and the «gereformeerde kerk» – which was called «‘Hervormde Kerk van België’» (HKB) since 1969<sup>576</sup> – and the joining of the local PKB con-

on the exact closing date of the «zendingskerk» in Brussels. However, the minutes of the consistory of the «gereformeerde kerk» in the Belgian capital, dated May 31<sup>st</sup>, 1954, say that a certain Rev. D. Hartkamp, who seems to have been the parson of the local «zendingskerk», had the intention of joining the «gereformeerde kerk». See: *Kerkenraadsnotulen G.K. Brussel*, dated 31<sup>st</sup> May 1954 [archive of the G.K. in Brussels]. A letter of the synodical council of the BCZK, dated January 20<sup>th</sup>, 1955, confirms that Rev. Hartkamp had been “arbeider” (“minister”? ) of the Flemish «zendingskerk» in Brussels-Laken until 1954, when he and evangelist O. de Roos (who worked in Ghent) were fired because they were involved in ‘schismatic activities’. After their discharge, Rev. Hartkamp and De Roos founded two independent churches indeed. See: *Brief van de synodale raad van de Belgische Christelijke Zendingskerk aan de gereformeerde kerk van Brussel*, dated 20<sup>th</sup> January 1955 [archive of the G.K. in Brussels]. More than likely, the turmoil that this schism caused has been the deathblow to the «zendingskerk» in Brussels. The congregation of O. de Roos in Ghent was called «‘Wijngaard des Heren’». See: *Kerkenraadsnotulen G.K. Brussel*, dated 7<sup>th</sup> February 1955 [archive of the G.K. in Brussels].

<sup>571</sup> N.O.P. XLVII.6 (June 1967), 2.

<sup>572</sup> Already in 1959, the synodical council of the BCZK admitted that its (two remaining) congregations in Flanders occupied an isolated position in the «Zendingskerk» and implied that a close collaboration with the GKB was essential for the continued existence of the churches in Antwerp and Ostend. See: *Kringnotulen*, dated 16<sup>th</sup> November 1959 [archive of the G.K. in Boechout].

<sup>573</sup> N.O.P. XLVIII.7-8 (July-August 1968), 4.

<sup>574</sup> Being accepted as *guest* members of the «kring» meant that the «zendingskerken» were allowed to take part in conversations, but *not* to take part in deciding.

<sup>575</sup> *Kopie van een artikel uit ‘De Stem’*, dated 7<sup>th</sup> December 1968 [archive of the G.K. in Brussels].

<sup>576</sup> The «Belgische Christelijke Zendingskerk» decided to change its name into «‘Église Réformée de Belgique’» in 1969, in order to have a more ‘indigenous’ and more ‘Calvinist’ name. To avoid confusion with the «Gereformeerde Kerken in België», it was translated into Dutch as «‘Hervormde Kerk van België’». See: *N.O.P. XLIX.10* (October 1969),

gregation was exemplary for the internal relationships within Belgian Protestantism in general. Whereas the GKB felt a certain kinship with the BCZK in the years after the Second World War – which was, according to the GKB, a result of the theological ‘swing’ to the right the «*Zendingskerk*» had made in the 1930s and 1940s<sup>577</sup>, and, although they did not mention this, of the fact that they themselves had become less introvert and more susceptible to forms of interchurch cooperation in the late 1940s and 1950s –, they approached the «*Protestantse Kerk van België*» with more reticence. The old «*Bond van Kerken*» was reputed to be theologically ‘liberal’ and was known, due to its status as the only denomination the government recognised as representative of Belgian Protestantism, as the ‘State Church’ – which was not a compliment – in Neo-Calvinist circles, as a result of which the GKB ‘played a waiting game’, as the English expression goes, towards the PKB and its predecessors. In interchurch projects in which more than two denominations were involved – «*De Kruisbanier*» was a good example – the contribution of more orthodox church groups, like the BCZK and the «*Belgische Evangelische Zending*», the GKB argued, compensated for the ‘latitudinarianism’ of the «*Protestantse Kerk*», but in one-to-one relations with the PKB, the «*gereformeerden*» were on the alert. In Brussels, for instance, the relationship between the «*Nederlandse evangelische hervormde kerk*» and the «*gereformeerde kerk*» was called a “liefde-haat verhouding” (‘love-hate relationship’) and cooled considerably in the 1960s, when the latter decided, after several exchanges of thoughts, not to comply with the request of the former to jointly build a new church.<sup>578</sup> And although some *Dutch* (!) members of the «*gereformeerde kerk*» insisted on a full amalgamation with the «*Nederlandse evangelische hervormde kerk*», the majority of the «*gereformeerden*» in Brussels remained sceptical.<sup>579</sup> It was not until 1995, sixteen years after the national conjunction of the PKB, HKB and GKB into the VPKB, that the «*gereformeerde kerk*» in Brussels moved to the new church building of the NEHK and that both church communities fused together into one congregation.<sup>580</sup>

2-3. The GKB were, nonetheless, not very pleased with this name change of the BCZK; they would like to reserve the name «‘Hervormde Kerk van België’» for a potential ‘United Protestant Church’, if such a church would ever come into existence (a united church *would* come into being in 1978, adopting the name «‘Verenigde Protestantse Kerk in België’»). See: *Kerkenraadsnotulen G.K. Brussel*, dated 8<sup>th</sup> May 1967 [archive of the G.K. in Brussels]. An additional complication was that local congregations of the «*Bond van Kerken*» / «*Protestants-Evangelische Kerk van België*» / «*Protestantse Kerk van België*» were usually called «‘hervormde kerken’» (*cf.* the «*Nederlandse evangelische hervormde kerk*» in Brussels, which belonged to the «*Bond van Kerken*»/P(E)KB). See: *De Kruisbanier XXV.16* (19<sup>th</sup> July 1969), 8.

<sup>577</sup> “Nu mogen we met blijdschap opmerken, dat, sinds de correspondentie met de B.C.Z.K. werd verbroken, in die Kerk zicheen kentering ten goede heeft voorgedaan. (...) [D]e laatste jaren zijn daar veel nieuwe, jongere predikanten gekomen van positieve richting en mag worden gezegd, dat het modernisme een overwonnen standpunt is.” See: *Brief van de gereformeerde kerken in België aan de generale synode van de Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland*, dated June 1949 [archive of the G.K. in Brussels].

<sup>578</sup> Liagre, *Anders geloven*, 268-269.

<sup>579</sup> *Brief van de secretaris van de commissie van beheer van de (voormalige) gereformeerde kerk van Brussel aan de kerkenraad van de (voormalige) gereformeerde kerk ter plaatse*, dated 7<sup>th</sup> December 1979 [archive of the G.K. in Brussels].

<sup>580</sup> Liagre, *Anders geloven*, 325-326. The old «*gereformeerde kerk*» was sold to the local Russian-orthodox church.

However, after 1968, the relations with the PKB improved, on the national level at least, significantly: because the six «gereformeerde kerken» wanted to apply for state recognition – which would yield them some pecuniary profit: churches that were officially recognised by the government had the right to state salary for their ministers, were exempted from some civil taxes and had a claim to financial aid from the local authorities in case they were in debt<sup>581</sup> – and the (synod of the) PKB was recognised by the government as the sole representative of Belgian Protestantism, the «kring» needed to establish official contacts with the «Protestantse Kerk».<sup>582</sup> The synod of the PKB greeted the decision of the Flemish «gereformeerde kerken» to ask its intermediation in their application for state recognition with enthusiasm and grasped the opportunity to enter into close consultation with the GKB about far-reaching forms of cooperation.<sup>583</sup> The overtures that stemmed from these contacts made themselves felt on the local level. In Brussels, where the rapprochement had reached an impasse as a result of the refusal of the «gereformeerden» to move into a communal church building, new attempts were made to set up mutual activities and ecumenical projects.<sup>584</sup> The «*Protestantse Kerkbode*», the bulletin of the «Nederlandse evangelische hervormde kerk», provides clear evidence of this: in December 1973, for example, a combined song service was organised in the «gereformeerde kerk»<sup>585</sup> and in the summer of 1978, the parson of the last-mentioned church conducted a service in the NEHK.<sup>586</sup>

Notwithstanding these efforts, the reconciliation of both churches in Brussels progressed only slowly, though *confessional* reasons seem not to have been at the bottom of this complicated rapprochement.<sup>587</sup> Yet, in other towns, «gereformeerden» still had theological difficulties with the local «protestantse kerk», even just before the definitive foundation of the VPKB: in 1971, the church of Boechout urged the «kring» not to continue the conversations about ecclesiastical unification with the PKB, because it had serious objections to the latter's multiform character<sup>588</sup>; in 1973, some persons present at an extraordinary meeting of the «kring» concluded with disappointment that liberal theo-

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<sup>581</sup> *Rapport inzake overheidserkenning, uitgebracht aan de Gereformeerde Kerken in België*, dated May 1966 [archive of the G.K. in Boechout], addendum C.

<sup>582</sup> See: note 490.

<sup>583</sup> *Rapport van de 'kommissie kontakt andere kerken', uitgebracht aan de kring België der Gereformeerde Kerken*, dated 4<sup>th</sup> September 1969 [archive of the G.K. in Boechout].

<sup>584</sup> Liagre, *Anders geloven*, 313.

<sup>585</sup> *De Protestantse Kerkbode* LXV.8 (December 1973), 2.

<sup>586</sup> *Ibid.* LXX.3-4 (July-August 1978), 2.

<sup>587</sup> According to De Raaf, the «gereformeerde kerk» in Brussels was less keen on a fusion with the «Nederlandse evangelische hervormde kerk», because the latter had a more 'Dutch' character (it presented itself as a distinct *Dutch* congregation), a different social composition (De Raaf suggested that the NEHK was more a 'diplomat church') and a different position within Belgian Protestantism (as member church of the 'State Church' / PKB, the NEHK fulfilled a central role in the Dutch-speaking Protestant community in Brussels). He did not say a single word about (possible) theological / confessional differences. See: *Brief van de secretaris van de commissie van beheer van de (voormalige) gereformeerde kerk van Brussel aan de kerkenraad van de (voormalige) gereformeerde kerk ter plaatse*, dated 7<sup>th</sup> December 1979 [archive of the G.K. in Brussels].

<sup>588</sup> *Brief van de kerkenraad van de gereformeerde kerk van Boechout aan de kring België der Gereformeerde Kerken*, dated 5<sup>th</sup> June 1971 [archive of the G.K. in Boechout].

logy had a legitimate place within the «Protestantse Kerk»<sup>589</sup> and in 1978, the church in Mechlin assented to the amalgamation with the PKB and HKB, but was very dissatisfied with the attitude of the «protestantse kerk» towards the local ‘school with the Bible’.<sup>590</sup> However, none of the «gereformeerde kerken» was opposed to the creation of a new ‘United Protestant Church’ as such: perhaps they disagreed about the pace in which such a Church should come into existence or the theological orientation of the VPKB-to-be, but the ultimate aim of fusing together with the PKB and HKB was not under discussion, at least not after the talks with these denominations came in an advanced phase in the mid-1970s.<sup>591</sup> At that time, even the most ‘sceptic’ church – the «gereformeerde kerk» in Boechout – did not question the desirability of establishing a church union any longer. The differences between the GKB and the PKB, which were, as the abovementioned examples show, certainly not suppressed, were, apparently, no longer seen as reasons to remain separate church institutions; in 1973, «gereformeerden» who resided in Belgium but did not live in the proximity of one of the six GKB churches were even advised to become a member of the nearest Protestant congregation, regardless of the denomination to which this church belonged!<sup>592</sup> Twenty, or even fifteen years ago, it would have been unthinkable that the «Gereformeerde Kerken» recommended their own members to join congregations which were part of a bond of churches that tolerated liberal theological points of view and was not exclusively founded on a Calvinist confession of faith.

### 3. Theological reforms

In the mid-1970s, the deliberations between the GKB, HKB and PKB went off well – especially in comparison to the seemingly endless rapprochement process between the Dutch «Gereformeerde Kerken» and the «Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk», which started around the same time –; there was a solid base on which the three Belgian church groups could build: since the GKB and the then BCZK had already established formal relations in the 1950s, the then PEKB and BCZK had been talking about

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<sup>589</sup> *Notulen van de onder auspiciën van de kring België gehouden vergadering van de vertegenwoordigers van de Gereformeerde Kerken naar de contactcommissie en werkgroepen inzake de eenheidsbesprekingen GKB-HKB-PKB, alsmede de predikanten*, dated 15<sup>th</sup> December 1973 [archive of the G.K. in Boechout].

<sup>590</sup> *Stemmotivering gereformeerde kerk van Mechelen*, dated 3<sup>rd</sup> June 1978 [archive of the G.K. in Boechout].

<sup>591</sup> Around 1970, the «gereformeerde kerk» of Boechout was unfavourably disposed towards the idea of an amalgamation. The church council doubted whether the church members of all six «gereformeerde kerken» felt the need to fuse together with the PEKB / PKB and BCZK / HKB. See: *Brief van de kerkenraad van de gereformeerde kerk van Boechout aan de kring België der Gereformeerde Kerken*, dated 22<sup>nd</sup> March 1971 [archive of the G.K. in Boechout]. Its secretary wrote to the «kring» that the church in Boechout found it hard to avoid the impression that the amalgamation was pushed through by a small minority – see: *Brief van de kerkenraad van de gereformeerde kerk van Boechout aan de kring België der Gereformeerde Kerken*, dated 5<sup>th</sup> June 1971 [archive of the G.K. in Boechout] –, to the anger of the other churches. See: *Kringnotulen*, dated 10<sup>th</sup> June 1971 [archive of the G.K. in Boechout]. In the following years, Boechout would remain sceptical, but accepted the unification process anyhow.

<sup>592</sup> *Ontwerp-agendum voor de vergadering van de kring België der Gereformeerde Kerken, te houden op 8 februari 1973*, dated 22<sup>nd</sup> January 1973 [archive of the G.K. in Boechout].

reconciliation as well since the 1960s<sup>593</sup> and the GKB and PEKB had formalised their contacts as a result of the former's application for state recognition, these three separate 'bilateral' talks were all combined into one 'trilateral' consultation. The denominations grew towards each other to an increasing degree, not in the least because of the merger discussions themselves. Determined to constitute an undivided Protestant Church in Belgium, the three church groups involved made concessions that were considered to be beyond the bounds of the possible just several years earlier: for the sake of the VPKB-to-be, the «Hervormde Kerk van België» was willing to drop its principal disapproval of applying for state recognition<sup>594</sup> – whereas the then BCZK had confirmed its objections in 1968 (!)<sup>595</sup> –, and the GKB even began to contribute to «*De Stem*», the periodical of the Dutch-speaking congregations of the PKB, in 1975.<sup>596</sup> After various failed attempts to regenerate the old «*Gereformeerde Kerkbode voor België*» and the «*Maandblad ten dienste van de Gereformeerde Kerken in België*»<sup>597</sup>, the GKB were glad to have an opinion and information bulletin once again – such a magazine was seen as an indispensable tool to inform their members and the «gereformeerden» in the Netherlands about developments and current affairs in Belgian Protestantism at large and the GKB in particular<sup>598</sup> –, but contributing to «*De Stem*» was not as obvious as it might seem: the PKB bulletin was, from a theological and ethical point of view, much more and much earlier inclined to take a 'progressive' or 'liberal' position, in accordance with the pluriform character of the «Protestantse Kerk van België» and its predecessors in title.

In 1960, for example, «*De Stem*», which was called «*Christelijk Volksblad – Evangeliebode voor Nederland en Vlaams-België*» at the time, said there was absolutely no conflict between the biblical Creation narrative and the 'Darwinian' explanation of the origin of the earth and the universe that was dominant in the natural sciences.<sup>599</sup> In (parts of) the old «*Bond van Kerken*» – one must keep in mind that not *all* congregations that belonged to this denomination were 'liberal', even though the GKB had said in the first half of the twentieth century, in order to justify their own existence and presence in Belgium, that the entire «*Bond*» was a hotbed of liberalism – such a comment had been com-

<sup>593</sup> N.O.P. XLIX.10 (October 1969), 2-3, there 3. The first initiatives to bring the then «*Bond van Kerken*» and BCZK closer together even dated back to 1931. See: J. Dhooghe, 'Het Belgisch protestantisme', in: K.M.Th. Dobbelaere et al. eds., *België en zijn goden. Kerken, religieuze groeperingen en lekenbewegingen* (Leuven 1985), 341-364, there 353.

<sup>594</sup> *Voorstel voor een overeenkomst tussen de Hervormde Kerk van België en de Protestantse Kerk van België*, undated [1972] [archive of the G.K. in Boechout]; *Band VI.13* (27<sup>th</sup> June 1973), 8-9; De Raaf, *Bewaar het pand*, 240-241.

<sup>595</sup> *De Kruisbanier* XXIV.4 (5<sup>th</sup> March 1968), 2; *Ibid. XXIV.19* (3<sup>rd</sup> August 1968), 8; N.O.P. XLVIII.7-8 (July-August 1968), 3; *Ibid. XLVIII.11* (November 1968), 2-3, there 3.

<sup>596</sup> *Band VII.16* (18<sup>th</sup> September 1974), 5-6; De Raaf, *Een open poort*, 226.

<sup>597</sup> The suggestion to republish a joint church bulletin has been discussed several times in the «kring». See, for example: *Kort verslag van de vergadering van stichting 'De Open Poort'*, dated 23<sup>rd</sup> April 1963 [archive of the G.K. in Boechout]; *Kringnotulen*, dated 14<sup>th</sup> October 1963 [archive of the G.K. in Boechout]; *Ibid.*, dated 17<sup>th</sup> April 1969 [archive of the G.K. in Boechout].

<sup>598</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>599</sup> *Christelijk Volksblad* LXXXIX.14 (13<sup>th</sup> February 1960), 3.

mon for years or even for decades, but in the «Gereformeerde Kerken», it was anything but generally accepted: in Neo-Calvinist circles, the historicity of the first chapters of Genesis had just been brought under discussion in the late 1950s with the carefully-worded statement of the Reformed biologist J. Lever<sup>600</sup> and the well-known theologians G.C. Berkouwer<sup>601</sup> and N.H. Ridderbos<sup>602</sup> that the main aim of the Creation narrative is not to tell *how* the earth is created, but to reveal *that* there is a God Who created earth. After the 1926 general synod of Assen, when the GKN explicitly condemned a metaphorical interpretation of the second and third chapters of Genesis<sup>603</sup> – the ‘talking snake’ that had seduced Eva to evil had been a “zintuiglijk waarneembare werkelijkheid” (‘a historical fact’)<sup>604</sup> –, no room was left for a less literal reading of the first book of the Bible.<sup>605</sup> Lever, Berkouwer and Ridderbos were the first «gereformeerde» academics to publicly argue in favour of a critical reconsideration of the ‘verdict’ of Assen and although the general synod of 1967/1968 revoked the dogmatic pronouncements of 1926, a less literal exegesis of Genesis did not receive general approval in the «Gereformeerde Kerken» all of a sudden – neither in Holland nor in Belgium.

A year before «De Stem» wrote about the compatibility of Christianity and Darwinianism, K. Sluys, for example, brushed the theory of evolution aside as ‘unbiblical’<sup>606</sup> and asserted that the Creation narrative was not a fictional story.<sup>607</sup> Already in 1954, he had said that, if the results of (natural) scientific research conflicted with the Bible, science was wrong<sup>608</sup> and he would repeat his condemnation of anti-Creationist theories several times thereafter – for instance in 1960, when he implied that Adam had lived six thousand years ago<sup>609</sup>, or in 1963, when the «Vlaams Kerkblad» published an article written by Rev. L. Floor, minister in the Dutch «Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken», in

<sup>600</sup> J. Lever, *Het creationisme. Rede, uitgesproken bij de aanvaarding van het ambt van hoogleraar aan de Vrije Universiteit te Amsterdam op 22 september 1952* (Wageningen 1952); *Creatie en evolutie* (Wageningen 1956).

<sup>601</sup> Van Keulen, *Bijbel en dogmatiek*, 457.

<sup>602</sup> N.H. Ridderbos, *Beschouwingen over Genesis I. Referaat voor de zevenendertigste wetenschappelijke samenkomst aan de Vrije Universiteit te Amsterdam op 7 juli 1954* (Amsterdam 1954).

<sup>603</sup> Contrary to what most people think, the general synod of 1926 did not pronounce upon the *first* chapter of Genesis (the Creation narrative itself). See: *Nederlands Dagblad*, 6<sup>th</sup> July 2009. Nevertheless, because of the synod of 1926, it became practically impossible to question the historicity of this first chapter as well.

<sup>604</sup> *Acta buitengewone G.S. GKN* (Assen 1926), art. 149.

<sup>605</sup> It is significant to note here that the decisions of the general synod of 1926 created a stir in the «gereformeerde kerk» of Brussels. Rev. Lauwers, who was the evangelism pastor of Brussels, said that there should be room in the «Gereformeerde Kerken» to interpret Genesis 2 and 3 in a less literal way and doubted whether the ‘snake’ in the Garden of Eden had been a snake in the verbatim sense of the word. The church council of Brussels, with Rev. Couvée in front, insisted on the dismissal of Rev. Lauwers, but he refused to resign. After much turmoil and an intermediation of the «classis» Dordrecht, Rev. Couvée left Brussels and Rev. Lauwers could stay. See: De Raaf, *Een open poort*, 49–56. Some churchgoers had trouble with the decisions of the general synod as well. In the archive of the «gereformeerde kerk» in Brussels, several letters from conscience-stricken persons have been preserved. One of them even called the decision makers of 1926 “synodale pausen” (‘synodical popes’)! See also: De Raaf, *Guido de Brès-kerk van Brussel*, 80–81; De Jong, *Ordening van dienst*, 87, note 9.

<sup>606</sup> *Vlaams Kerkblad* V.9 (January 1959), 265–270.

<sup>607</sup> *Ibid.* V.10 (February 1959), 298–303.

<sup>608</sup> *Ibid.* I.6 (October 1954), 167.

<sup>609</sup> *Ibid.* VI.10 (February 1960), 314–315.

which Reformed scientists like Lever were accused of stripping the Bible of its trustworthiness.<sup>610</sup> For Sluys, a strong underlying principle to reject metaphorical or symbolic ways of explaining the Creation narrative was the theory of the ‘slippery slope’; he feared that, if Genesis would no longer be read as a reliable historical account, the credibility of Scripture as a whole would come into question. In an open letter to Rev. J. Overdulve, a clergyman in the «Belgische Evangelische Zending» who Sluys – according to Rev. Overdulve<sup>611</sup> – wrongly accused of interpreting the first book of the Bible figuratively<sup>612</sup>, the editor-in-chief of the «Vlaams Kerkblad» made this very clear:

“Het interesseert u niet meer of alles *letterlijk* gebeurd is zoals het daar in Genesis staat. (...) Hebt u zich gerealiseerd dat uit de school die u geleerd heeft om het Oude Testament niet *letterlijk* te nemen, *ook* de mannen voortkomen die het *Nieuwe* Testament niet *letterlijk* nemen? (...) Meent u waarlijk dat de mens van wetenschap die de sprekende slang niet kan accepteren, wèl bereid is aan te nemen dat een morsdode Jezus drie dagen later uit Zijn graf is verrezen? (...) [U zult] maar een halve bijbel overhouden. En uw kinderen en kleinkinderen zullen heter *zonder* doen. (...) Al de nazaten van degenen die een eeuw geleden soortgelijke gedachten aanhingen als welke u nu verkondigt, kunt u thans terugvinden in het kamp der volstrekt ongelovigen.”<sup>613</sup>

The fear of ending up on the ‘slippery slope’ was not only inspired by a changed/changing interpretation of Genesis; other long-established theological views came under review as well. As early as 1953, one year after the general synod of the GKN had decided to grant female church members the right to vote in parochial church council elections – the right to be *elected* would be granted to women in 1969<sup>614</sup> –, Sluys had written a booklet in which he warned that the ‘enfranchisement’ of female «ge-reformeerd» would be the first step towards a complete acceptance of liberal theology.<sup>615</sup> And when a certain ‘Rev. S. in T.’<sup>616</sup>, a minister in a Dutch «gereformeerde kerk», chided the «Vlaams

<sup>610</sup> Vlaams Kerkblad X.7 (November 1963), 189-193.

<sup>611</sup> Ibid. XII.1 (May 1965), 14-16.

<sup>612</sup> It was not very likely that Rev. Overdulve, a minister in the orthodox «Belgische Evangelische Zending», preached that Genesis was a *metaphorical* narrative, since the BEZ would set itself up as a militant defender of Creationism in the late 1960s and 1970s, during the rise of evangelicalism. The BEZ and «De Kruisbanier» (which became the sounding board of the BEZ and evangelicalism in the 1970s, at the expense of the denominations that merged into the VPKB) would, for example, frequently express their sympathy for the Dutch «Evangelische Omroep». See: *De Kruisbanier* XXIII.25 (14<sup>th</sup> September 1967), 8; XXIV.31 (28<sup>th</sup> December 1968), 8; XXV.2 (15<sup>th</sup> February 1969), 5; XXVII.22 (25<sup>th</sup> August 1971); XXVIII.26 (20<sup>th</sup> July 1972), 4-5; XXXII.3 (7<sup>th</sup> February 1976), 3; XXXIII.33 (27<sup>th</sup> October 1977), 2.

<sup>613</sup> Vlaams Kerkblad XI.11 (March 1965), 284-293, there 284-292.

<sup>614</sup> L.A. Werkman, ‘Op eigen wijze? De geschiedenis van de vrouw in het ambt’, *Jaarboek voor de geschiedenis van het Nederlands protestantisme* V (1997), 254-273, there 258.

<sup>615</sup> See also: note 552.

<sup>616</sup> More than likely, Sluys referred to Rev. J. Spoelstra, who was parson of the «gereformeerde kerk» in Tilburg between 1957 and 1963. Just as the church in Boechout, the «gereformeerde kerk» in Tilburg was located in a predominantly Roman Catholic environment, so Rev. Spoelstra knew what he was talking about. With Rev. A.T. Besselaar, minister of the «gereformeerde kerk» in Eindhoven, he was sent to the Second Vatican Council as Protestant correspondent of the progressive Catholic magazine «De Nieuwe Linie» – see: G.J. van den Boomen, *Een kat heeft negen levens. Negen-tien jaren “De Nieuwe Linie”* (Aalsmeer 1988), 39 – and wrote two books about the Council and the relations between

*Kerkblad*» in December 1961 for its vehement anti-Catholic statements and ‘biased’ reaction to the Second Vatican Council, Sluys was unpleasantly surprised to note that there were «*gereformeerde*» clergymen who did not take an antithetical attitude towards ‘Rome’.<sup>617</sup> Rev. Ganzevoort looked upon the developments in Reformed theology with sorrow too. In 1968, almost at the end of his forty-year tenure of service in the GKB, he wrote a burning protest, or, as he himself called it, a “gewetenskreet” (‘a cry of conscience’)<sup>618</sup>, against the theological changes in the *mainline* Protestant denominations – titled «‘*De Bijbel in het geding*’» –, which was published as a serial in «*De Kruisbanier*» from December 1968 onwards.<sup>619</sup> A separate chapter was dedicated to the metaphorical interpretation of the six-day Creation scheme that gained ever more influence in the «*Gereformeerde Kerken*». On the basis of the indications the Bible gives with reference to the exact duration of the six Creation ‘days’ and on the basis of the laws of nature – he explicitly negated the counter-argument that, due to the sphericity of the earth, ‘nights’ and ‘days’ at the equator are not the same as ‘nights’ and ‘days’ in the polar regions (‘arctic night’ was just a way of expression)<sup>620</sup> –, Rev. Ganzevoort rejected a symbolic exegesis: the only possible conclusion was “dat de vaste orde van de tijd er geweest is van het begin af aan, dat die orde van het begin af geweest is zoals wij die nu nog kennen, en dat de dagen van Genesis 1 dagen zijn geweest van dezelfde duur, die wij nu kennen.”<sup>621</sup> In 1971, «*De Kruisbanier*» copied, in addition, an article of the Dutch Protestant daily «*Dordts Dagblad*», in which Rev. Couvée, the old minister of the «*gereformeerde kerk*» in Brussels (!), made a vigorous stand against the ‘dogma of evolution’, in accordance with Rev. Ganzevoort, as well.<sup>622</sup>

These convictions contrasted sharply with the biblical considerations (meditations) which Rev. P. Fagel wrote in «*De Protestantse Kerkbode*», the newsletter of the «Nederlandse evangelische hervormde kerk» in Brussels, in the 1960s. The parson of the NEHK unequivocally indicated that he incorporated ‘millions of years of evolution’ in his preaching<sup>623</sup>, that he believed in a Creator, albeit in a less ‘naïve’ way than Sunday school had taught him<sup>624</sup>, and that he denounced the decision of the GKN synod of 1926, by saying that he did not believe that mankind descended from two people (Adam

Catholicism and Protestantism, viz.: *Het concilie. Een voorlopige balans* (Utrecht 1963) and *Rome en de Reformatie. Een poging tot eerlijk gesprek* (Kampen 1963).

<sup>617</sup> *Vlaams Kerkblad* VIII.8 (December 1961), 159-162.

<sup>618</sup> *De Kruisbanier* XXVI.3 (21<sup>st</sup> February 1970), 3. The editor-in-chief of «*De Kruisbanier*» commended Rev. B.W. Ganzevoort for his unremitting devotion to the upholding of the biblical ‘fundamental truths’: “[d]e initialen B.W.G. vereenzelvigen zich met een levenslange strijd tegen de aantasting van Gods Woord.”

<sup>619</sup> The first article in this serial was published in «*De Kruisbanier*» of December 7<sup>th</sup>, 1968 (volume XXIV, issue 29).

<sup>620</sup> B.W. Ganzevoort, *De Bijbel in het geding* (Kampen 1968), 87-88.

<sup>621</sup> *Ibid.*, 86.

<sup>622</sup> *De Kruisbanier* XXVII.15 (5<sup>th</sup> June 1971), 6. Rev. Couvée published a brochure – called «‘*Màg het? Tegen het evolutionidogma*’» –, with which he tried to halt the influence of evolutionism on the biology curriculum taught by Christian schools.

<sup>623</sup> *De Protestantse Kerkbode* LIII.1 (May 1961), 1.

<sup>624</sup> *Ibid.* LIII.3 (July 1961), 1. [Erroneously, this edition was distributed as the second issue of the fifty-third volume.]

and Eve) who had lived in a primeval paradise, and by claiming that the majority of ministers in the «Gereformeerde Kerken» saw Genesis, just like him, as a ‘myth’ nowadays.<sup>625</sup> This last commentary was the immediate cause for three «gereformeerde» ministers in the «classis» Dordrecht – Rev. M.J. Arntzen, the parson of the «gereformeerde kerk» in ‘s-Gravendeel who would leave the GKN and join the «Gereformeerde Kerken (vrijgemaakt, buiten verband)»<sup>626</sup> (a denomination that had come into being in 1967 as a secession of the «Gereformeerde Kerken (vrijgemaakt)», which had, in turn, seceded from the GKN in 1944, after a conflict on the Kuyperian doctrine of presumptive regeneration and the authority of the general synod<sup>627</sup>) in 1971, among other reasons because of the “oecumenische ontwikkeling bij de Belgische Gereformeerde Kerken” (‘the ecumenical movement within the GKB’)<sup>628</sup> (which belonged to the same «classis» as the church in ‘s-Gravendeel); Rev. P.L. Smilde<sup>629</sup>,

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<sup>625</sup> *De Protestantse Kerkbode* LVI.10 (February 1965), 1.

<sup>626</sup> The «Gereformeerde Kerken (vrijgemaakt, buiten verband)» were renamed «‘Nederlands Gereformeerde Kerken’» in 1979.

<sup>627</sup> Contrary to the quarrels in the time of the general synod of 1926, which lead to the founding of the «Gereformeerde Kerken in Hersteld Verband» and caused a stir in the «gereformeerde kerk» of Brussels, the second schism in the «Gereformeerde Kerken» – the so-called «‘Vrijmaking’» –, which took place in 1944 and resulted in the creation of the «Gereformeerde Kerken (vrijgemaakt)», passed over the GKB almost completely. *Almost*, for Rev. B.W. Ganzevoort, who was parson of the «gereformeerde kerk» in Ghent at that time, found it hard to accept the decisions of the general synod concerning the doctrine of presumptive regeneration and even sent an appeal to the highest church council in the GKN. His grievances were practically identical to the complaints of those who would secede from the «Gereformeerde Kerken» in 1944 and subsequent years. See: B.W. Ganzevoort, *Aan de Generale Synode van de Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland* (Ghent 1944); *Acta G.S. GKN* (Utrecht 1943-1945), artt. 425, 554 and addendum LXXXIV. The annual report of the church in Ghent, dated 1945, makes a brief remark of Rev. Ganzevoort’s protest as well. However, Rev. Ganzevoort did *not* leave the «Gereformeerde Kerken», perhaps because he did not want the GKB to break in half as well or because the answer of the «deputaatschap voor Zwarigheden» – see: the addendum in the *Acta* mentioned above – took away his grievances. (This last possibility seems rather unlikely, since Rev. Ganzevoort would write an article on the subject of regeneration in «*De Kruisbanier*» in 1953, in which he, without saying it in so many words, subtly distanced himself from some aspects of the synodical pronouncements. See: *De Kruisbanier* IX.16 (18<sup>th</sup> April 1953), 2-3.) Nonetheless, it was assumed that the members of the Flemish «gereformeerde kerken» were informed about the «Vrijmaking». In 1945/1946, for example, a circular was sent by the foundation «‘De Open Poort’» (probably to the consistories of «gereformeerde kerken» in Holland or the subscribers to «*De Open Poort*»), in which the hope was expressed that the schism in the GKN would not have any consequences for (the evangelism activities in) the GKB. See: *Rondschrijven van de Gereformeerde Kerken in België omtrent haar evangelisatie-werk*, undated [archive of the F.P.G. in Brussel]. In addition, collections were made in the GKB in aid of churches in the Netherlands that had split in two as a result of the «Vrijmaking» and brief remarks were written in some local church bulletins about the (futile) efforts of the GKN to undo the schism. See: *Mededelingenblad van de gereformeerde kerk te Antwerpen* 228 (10<sup>th</sup> June 1948), 1; 235 (1<sup>st</sup> October 1948), 1; 256 (29<sup>th</sup> July 1949), 1; 259 (15<sup>th</sup> September 1949), 2; *Mededelingenblad van de gereformeerde kerk te Gent* IV.10 (October 1950), 1; VII.5 (May 1953), 1; VIII.11 (November 1954), 1. Currently, there is a «gereformeerde kerk (vrijgemaakt)» in Ghent – next to a church in Curaçao, the only «gereformeerde kerk (vrijgemaakt)» outside of Holland –, but this congregation has no relation whatsoever to the «Vrijmaking» of 1944. It was created in 1980, partially by troubled members of the local «gereformeerde kerk» (!) who did not agree with the founding of the VPKB, and officially instituted in 2009. See: *Reformatorisch Dagblad*, 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2009. See also: *De Kruisbanier* XXXIII.1 (5<sup>th</sup> January 1977), 8; XXXIII.12 (2<sup>nd</sup> April 1977), 5, 8; XXXIV.5 (25<sup>th</sup> February 1978), 2.

<sup>628</sup> *De Kruisbanier* XXVII.4 (17<sup>th</sup> February 1971), 7. Rev. Arntzen probably referred to the increased forbearance towards the Roman Catholic Church and the desire of the GKB to become less dependent on Holland and to merge with the PKB and HKB. For a detailed account of Rev. Arntzen’s reasons to leave the «Gereformeerde Kerken», see: M.J. Arntzen, *Een gewetenszaak* (Amsterdam 1971); *Een ernstig woord aan mijn geloofsgenoten, achtergebleven in de Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland, zowel te 's-Gravendeel als elders in het land* ('s-Gravendeel 1971); *Afscheidsprek bij de uit-treding uit het ambt in de Geref. Kerken in Nederland, uitgesproken op 17 januari 1971 in de gereformeerde kerk te 's-Gravendeel* (n.pl. 1971).

<sup>629</sup> Erroneously, Rev. Smilde was misspelled as ‘P.L. Smile’.

the then parson of the «gereformeerde kerk» in Zwijndrecht-Groote Lindt; and Rev. B.W. Ganzevoort (!) – to publish a report, at the request of the «classis», concerning the Divine inspiration and historical infallibility of the Bible in general and the first three chapters of Genesis in particular. According to this triumvirate, Scripture clearly proves that the passages dealing with the Creation of heaven and earth and the Fall of man are “een betrouwbaar, gezaghebbend verhaal”<sup>630</sup>, a factual and historically accurate account of the beginning of (human) life and the origin of sinfulness. Contrary to the «Nederlands-hervormde» Rev. Fagel, who enunciated that the natural sciences ‘compelled’ all Christians to ‘rethink’ their faith and that ‘not a single theologian’ could say ‘anything sensible’ without taking evolution and the expanding of the universe into account<sup>631</sup>, these three «gereformeerde» ministers rejected the idea that science should dictate how Christians ought to read the Bible. In a denomination that wants to call itself «‘gereformeerd’», they affirmed, higher criticism of the Bible – a less literal way of interpreting Genesis was a result of the historical-critical method of studying Scripture –, should not be tolerated.

The discussion about a (re-)interpretation of the opening chapters of the Bible was an emotive subject, especially in the «Gereformeerde Kerken», where, with the schism of 1926 and 1944 in mind, a certain fear of strict regulations regarding doctrinal disagreements had made the general synod wary of taking disciplinary measures against ‘dissident’ points of view or statements that conflicted with the orthodox teachings of Neo-Calvinism.<sup>632</sup> To the relief of some and the disappointment of others, the churches became, accordingly, more susceptible to less traditional ways of being Reformed, which had severe consequences for the further development of the «Gereformeerde Kerken» and resulted, ultimately, in the institutional dismantlement of the GKB in 1978 and the GKN in 2004. The examples paraphrased above are neither intended to hold those responsible who interpreted the ‘days’ in Genesis 1 as twenty-four hour periods or those who, contrariwise, considered them to be a metaphor, nor to show that a literal reading of Genesis was supported by *all* members of the GKB – in the 1960s and 1970s, many verbal disputes were fought between advocates of (dogmatic) changes and

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<sup>630</sup> *Rapport over een Schriftuurlijke interpretatie van de Bijbel, inzonderheid van Genesis 1-3, geschreven door een commissie bestaande uit dr. M.J. Arntzen, ds. B.W. Ganzevoort en ds. P.L. Smile [sic], uitgebracht aan de kerkenraad van de gereformeerde kerken in de classis Dordrecht*, dated 22<sup>nd</sup> February 1965 [archive of the G.K. in Boechout].

<sup>631</sup> “De β-wetenschappen verplichten ons christenen ons geloof opnieuw door te denken, en wel uitgaande van een universum dat geen ‘ding’ is, maar ‘beweging’. Wij moeten (...) er (...) moedig aan werken in de vaste overtuiging dat elke ontdekking van de wetenschap ons dichter bij God brengt. (...) Mijns inziens kan geen theoloog in deze tijd nog iets stekhoudends zeggen, als hij evolutie en dynamisch wereldbeeld ignoreert.” See: *De Protestantse Kerkbode* LVI.10 (February 1965), 1.

<sup>632</sup> D.Th. Kuiper, ‘Historisch-sociologische schets van de ontwikkeling der Gereformeerde Kerken’, in: J. van der Zouwen ed., *De veranderingen in de Gereformeerde Kerk. Onderzoek naar de opvattingen van kerkleden over normen en taken van de kerk* (Kampen 1972), 10-33, there 30.

concerned «gereformeerden» (for example in the «classis» Dordrecht<sup>633</sup>), though the increasing polarisation between these factions passed over the GKB to a large extent<sup>634</sup> –, but rather to indicate that a metaphorical interpretation of the biblical Creation narrative (which became dominant in the GKN in the 1970s) was not accepted by all «gereformeerden» just like that. Moreover, the controversy over Genesis may serve as an illustrative example of the coming into existence of ‘discomposure’ in the «Gereformeerde Kerken» in general, because those who defended a verbatim reading of the first book of the Bible were, in general, also the ones who disapproved of new views with regard to other orthodox dogmas – e.g. the Lord’s Supper, the covenant or redemption – and the minimising of differences between churches for the benefit of ecumenicity:<sup>635</sup> «De Kruisbanier» – whose editor-in-chief condemned the growing liberal tendencies within the «Gereformeerde Kerken», as a result of which the contribution of GKB ministers to this magazine (which had been considerable from the late 1940s until the middle of the 1960s) rapidly diminished in the 1970s, with the notable exception of Rev. G.M.A. Hendriksen, the parson of the church in Denderleeuw –, and the «Vlaams Kerkblad», for instance, were not only opposed to an allegorical exegesis of Genesis, but also to liberal interpretations of Chris-

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<sup>633</sup> *Notulen van de vergadering van de classis Dordrecht der Gereformeerde Kerken*, dated 6<sup>th</sup> November 1969 [archive of the G.K. in Boechout].

<sup>634</sup> Yet, this does not mean that the GKB remained free from the developments in Reformed theology; the increased multiformity within the «Gereformeerde Kerken» manifested itself in Belgium indeed. In Ghent, the church bulletin of April 1968 made mention of members who were worried about the course of events and said there were fundamental differences of opinion within the local «gereformeerde» community. See: *Mededelingenblad van de gereformeerde kerk te Gent* XXII.4 (April 1968), 5. In a letter to the secretary of the «kring», the secretary of the church council in Boechout feared that the ‘agitation’ of some members of the «gereformeerde kerk» would increase if the «kring» would push the amalgamation with the PKB and HKB through too quickly. See: *Kort verslag van de besprekking tussen de kerkenraad van de gereformeerde kerk van Boechout en een delegatie van de kring België inzake de bezwaren van Boechout tegen de voorgestelde “officiële besprekingen” inzake een mogelijke eenwording van de Hervormde Kerk van België, de Protestantse Kerk van België en de Gereformeerde Kerken in België*, dated 5<sup>th</sup> July 1971 [archive of the G.K. in Boechout]; *Brief van de kerkenraad van de gereformeerde kerk van Boechout aan de kring België der Gereformeerde Kerken*, dated 25<sup>th</sup> August 1971 [archive of the G.K. in Boechout]. In Brussels, the secretary of the church council thought it would be wise to inform the «gereformeerden» in the Belgian capital about a letter that an orthodox pressure group within the «Gereformeerde Kerken» had sent to all consistories and in which liberal theological tendencies were vehemently rejected. Although the rest of the church council did not agree with the secretary – one deacon remarked that the churches in Belgium were still unaffected by polarisation and that it would be senseless to stir up a conflict within the congregation –, the secretary published an article in the local church bulletin with reference to the letter. See: *Kerkenraadsnotulen G.K. Brussel*, dated 30<sup>th</sup> September 1974; *Ibid.*, dated 21<sup>st</sup> October 1974 [archive of the G.K. in Brussels]; *Mededelingenblad van de gereformeerde kerk te Brussel (Kerkbrief)* X.11 (November 1974), 11-13 [archive of the G.K. in Brussels]. The minutes of the church council in Denderleeuw indicate that Rev. Hendriksen sympathised with the group of ‘conscience-stricken’ ministers within the «Gereformeerde Kerken» and declared himself openly against liberal theological tendencies. See: *Kerkenraadsnotulen G.K. Denderleeuw*, dated 25<sup>th</sup> February 1973; *Ibid.*, dated 1<sup>st</sup> February 1974; *Ibid.*, dated 27<sup>th</sup> September 1974; *Ibid.*, dated 8<sup>th</sup> November 1974 [archive of the G.K. in Denderleeuw].

<sup>635</sup> According to the «Reformatorsch Dagblad», the church in Boechout was opposed to the attempts of the «Gereformeerde Kerken» to join the World Council of Churches (WCC) in the late 1960s. The «Gereformeerde Kerken» had always been unfavourably disposed towards the WCC (founded in 1948), because they saw it as a ‘liberal’ organisation and already participated in an orthodox Calvinist ecumenical association – the «Gereformeerde Oecumenische Synode»/Reformed Ecumenical Synod –, which they had created themselves in 1946. See: Post, *Gereformeerd zijn en blijven, een wankel evenwicht?!*, 221. The general synod, however, adopted a different attitude towards the World Council in the 1960s, as a result of which the GKN joined the WCC in 1971. Apparently, judging by the article in the «Reformatorsch Dagblad», the «gereformeerde kerk» in Boechout vehemently repudiated this decision and sent a letter of protest to kindred Reformed churches worldwide (probably member churches of the Reformed Ecumenical Synod). See: *De Kruisbanier* XXXI.22 (31<sup>st</sup> May 1975), 2-3, there 2.

tian ethics and to far-reaching ecclesiastical multiformity. The first-mentioned magazine even expressed its approval of articles from the Dutch «*Reformatorisch Dagblad*» in which the history of the GKB was depicted as a success story—they were characterised as “een ruggegraat van alles wat in Vlaanderen rechtzinnig was” (‘the backbone of orthodoxy in Flanders’)<sup>636</sup>—that had turned into a tragedy in the 1960s, due to uncritical ecumenism and the bartering away of their original (orthodox Calvinist) identity.<sup>637</sup> In the opinion of «*De Kruisbanier*», the striving for ecclesiastical rapprochement was not a bad thing in itself, but Church unity should never be pursued at the expense of truth. And truth, so the periodical claimed, was evidently at stake in the ecumenical movement that became ever more influential in the «*Gereformeerde Kerken*».

So far, most attention has been paid to orthodox points of view and condemnatory reactions to the theological changes and the growing tolerance towards beliefs that conflicted with the Three Forms of Unity and accepted (Neo-)Calvinist views in Reformed circles. But, from the late 1960s onwards, other voices could be heard in the GKB as well. In the joint church bulletin of the «protestantse kerk», «gereformeerde kerk» and «zendingskerk» of Antwerp, for instance, the editor-in-chief (who was a Dutchman and a member of the local GKB congregation) said in 1972 he was thankful that some «gereformeerde» theologians, among whom Tj. Baarda (who was reputed to be ‘liberal’, according to Reformed standards), finally had the courage to express what the majority of «gereformeerden» already silently thought for many years! In addition, he chided Rev. Hegger, the old parson of Denderleeuw (!), for bombarding the general synod with a continual flow of petitions against the teachings of men like Baarda, with which he single-handedly delayed the continuation of synodical meetings.<sup>638</sup> In the same year, the general editor relativised the importance of confessional documents—whereas the «gereformeerden» had always put an emphasis on a strict compliance with the Three Forms of Unity<sup>639</sup>—and denounced the actions of ‘agitated’ «gereformeerden», who did not act, with their personal attacks against fellow church members with whom they disagreed, in accordance with the biblical call for benignity, once again.<sup>640</sup> Two years later, the church bulletin wrote that the well-known book «*Zonder geloof vaart niemand wel*» of the progressive «gereformeerde» theologian H.M. Kuitert<sup>641</sup>—orthodox Calvinists were horrified just by reading his name—, would be used in an ecumenical discussion group.<sup>642</sup> Although it was implied in 1975 that some church members felt

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<sup>636</sup> *De Kruisbanier* XXXI.22 (31<sup>st</sup> May 1975), 2-3, there 2.

<sup>637</sup> *Ibid.* XXXI.37 (25<sup>th</sup> September 1975), 2.

<sup>638</sup> *Band* V.2 (1<sup>st</sup> February 1972), 5-6.

<sup>639</sup> *Ibid.* V.8 (25<sup>th</sup> April 1972), 15-16, there 16.

<sup>640</sup> *Ibid.* V.21 (29<sup>th</sup> November 1972), 3-5, there 4.

<sup>641</sup> This book contains Kuitert’s famous statement that ‘all statements about above come from below, even the statement that something comes from above’. See: H.M. Kuitert, *Zonder geloof vaart niemand wel. Een plaatsbepaling van christendom en kerk* (Baarn 1974), 28.

<sup>642</sup> *Band* VII.11 (29<sup>th</sup> May 1974), 5-6.

rather ‘ill at ease’ with the changes in the «Gereformeerde Kerken»<sup>643</sup> – one active member even decided to leave the «gereformeerde kerk» and to join the local «christelijke gereformeerde kerk» in 1976<sup>644</sup> –, an absolute majority within the church in Antwerp had no difficulty whatsoever to open the Lord’s Supper for children in 1978<sup>645</sup> – in fact: the church council had made an appeal on that subject to the general synod already in 1972.<sup>646</sup> Judging by its newsletter, the «gereformeerde kerk» in Antwerp was thus quite susceptible to theological and liturgical alterations.

The articles in «*De Stem*» that were written by «gereformeerden» displayed a similar change-minded mentality. In 1975, the attitude of the leaders of ‘troubled’ GKN members was severely criticised: these men were said to approach their ‘progressive’ opponents aggressively, to avoid the dialogue, to entrench themselves into shrinking isolated factions, to be out after a schism and to act out of fear for losing alleged certainties.<sup>647</sup> Although this particular article was a column of the – by then former – general editor of the Antwerp interdenominational church bulletin, mentioned in the paragraph above, the circumstance that it was published without a critical comment or without a response of those who were denounced, was meaningful. Several months later, Rev. G. Mulder, servant of the Gospel in the «gereformeerde kerk» of Antwerp, gave a sympathetic consideration to the ‘unorthodox’ theology of H.M. Kuitert, who, in the words of the Reverend, tried to reach out to non-practising or churchless people who had become alienated from the Church and the Christian religion, al-

<sup>643</sup> Band VIII.6 (30<sup>th</sup> April 1975), 11.

<sup>644</sup> *Ibid.* IX.4 (24<sup>th</sup> March 1976), 7. The «christelijke gereformeerde kerk» in Antwerp was officially instituted in 1974 as an ‘annex’ to the church in Eindhoven. See: *De Kruisbanier* XXX.29 (13<sup>th</sup> September 1974), 4. Already in 1956, the CGK had explored the possibility of setting up evangelism activities in Belgium. See: *Ibid.* XII.36 (22<sup>nd</sup> September 1956), 3. The issue was put forward again in 1968, after which the general synod of the CGK decided to start evangelising in the vicinity of Antwerp. See: *Ibid.* XXIV.23 (13<sup>th</sup> October 1968), 2. The first Sunday service of the CGK-to-be was held in Borgerhout in 1972. See: *Ibid.* XXVIII.8 (2<sup>nd</sup> March 1972), 2. In 1978, the CGK also founded a congregation in Ghent. See: *Ibid.* XXXIV.16 (20<sup>th</sup> June 1978), 4; *Reformatorsch Dagblad*, 10<sup>th</sup> November 2000; *Ibid.*, 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2008. For a detailed history of the «christelijke gereformeerde kerk» in Antwerp, see: L. Strengolt, “*Antwerpen arm o’ de solate stede*”. *Uit de geschiedenis van een wereldstad* (Antwerp-Deurne 1985). For a detailed history of the «christelijke gereformeerde kerk» in Ghent, see: H. Bor, *Werp uw brood uit op het water. Herdenkingsbundel bij het 25-jarig bestaan van de Evangelisatiepost Rehobôth in Gent (België)* (Dordrecht 2003); H. Bor, *Ga uit in de wegen en heggen. Ervaringen van een evangelist* (Houten 2008). The «Gereformeerde Gemeenten (in Nederland en Noord-Amerika)», another Dutch Reformed denomination, have a congregation in Merksem (near Antwerp), which was (probably) established in 1959, for, according to the information of the GG, the first evangelist arrived in Belgium in this year. See: *Kerkelijk jaарboek Gereformeerde Gemeenten* (Woerden 2005), 211. «*De Kruisbanier*» of October 4<sup>th</sup>, 1966, (p. 8) says that this congregation was founded in 1962, but already in 1959, the «kring» Brussels of the «Gereformeerde Kerken» made mention of the presence of the GG in Merksem – see: *Kringnotulen*, dated 14<sup>th</sup> May 1959 [archive of the G.K. in Boechout] –, with which the GKB were not very pleased, since Protestantism in Flanders was already very fragmented. See: *N.O.P.* XLI.3 (March 1961), 2. Next to the «Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland», the «Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken», the «Gereformeerde Gemeenten» and the «Gereformeerde Kerken (vrijgemaakt)» – see: note 627 – have thus founded churches in Belgium as well. The «gereformeerde kerk (vrijgemaakt)» in Ghent, the «christelijke gereformeerde kerken» in Antwerp-Deurne and Ghent, and the «gereformeerde gemeente» in Antwerp-Merksem cooperate in the «‘Gereformeerde Overleg Vlaanderen’», together with three independent churches in Ghent, Eeklo and Tongeren, and collaborate with the evangelical denominations (e.g. the «Belgische Evangelische Zending») in the so-called «‘Federale Synode van Protestantse en Evangelische Kerken in België’».

<sup>645</sup> *Band* XI.3 (no date [March 1978]), 11-12.

<sup>646</sup> *Ibid.* V.9 (10<sup>th</sup> May 1972), 5-6.

<sup>647</sup> *De Stem* CIV.22 (29<sup>th</sup> November 1975), 4.

beit in a less conventional way or with a less ‘preachy’ tone.<sup>648</sup> Here again, the mere fact that Kuitert was not showered with criticism, said it all. In the 1970s, the name of Kuitert functioned like some sort of ‘shibboleth’ in the «Gereformeerde Kerken»: those who were advocates of theological and liturgical reforms, claimed him as their spokesman, whereas those who were opposed to drastic changes, harboured a deep resentment against him. Together with several other theologians, Kuitert symbolised the crumbling away of Kuyperian/Neo-Calvinist orthodoxy and the increased polarisation within the «Gereformeerde Kerken».

One of these other theologians was H. Wiersinga, the former minister of the «gereformeerde kerk» in Ghent, who obtained his doctorate with a controversial dissertation on the doctrine of atonement in 1971.<sup>649</sup> In his PhD thesis, Wiersinga defended the highly original view that the resurrection of Christ is not, as it is seen in traditional Calvinism, the *completion* of man’s reconciliation with God – a point of view called ‘verzoening-door-voldoening’ (the satisfaction theory of atonement), which teaches that Christ has taken the sins of the elect upon Himself on the Cross of Golgotha, by which He ‘paid off’ the ‘debt’ (a consequence of Adam’s fall) of those whom God has chosen –, but rather the *beginning of* or a *call for* the effectuation of a reconciliation in which the whole world can share; it is not possible to bring about a real ‘vertical’ atonement (with God), if there is no ‘horizontal’ solidarity among men. In this view, the focus of Christ’s atonement is not on the inheritance of grace of the *individual* sinner – contrary to the (orthodox Calvinist) thought that Christ’s death on the Cross had been ordained by God as a blood sacrifice –, but on the pursuit of spiritual *and* material welfare for mankind as a *collective*.<sup>650</sup> Wiersinga’s pioneering work caused commotion in the «Gereformeerde Kerken» and lead to a storm of protest in the more orthodox segments of the GKN – Rev. Hegger,

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<sup>648</sup> De Stem CV.8 (30<sup>th</sup> April 1976), 4-5.

<sup>649</sup> H. Wiersinga, *De verzoening in de theologische diskussie* (Kampen 1971).

<sup>650</sup> As regards the subject of atonement, there are no indications that Rev. Wiersinga already had objections to the orthodox Calvinist point of view during his tenure of service in the «gereformeerde kerk» of Ghent. In 1959, for example, he wrote an article in the «*De Open Poort*», in which he literally said, completely in accordance with the satisfaction theory of atonement, that Christ carried away the sins of the faithful on the Cross: “[w]ij bidden ‘Vergeef ons onze schulden’, omdat Jezus de schulden wegdroeg aan het kruis.” See: *B.O.P.* XXXIX.2 (February 1959), 3-4, there 3. According to the book «*Nieuw Babylon in aanbouw*», written by the historian J.C. Kennedy, Rev. Wiersinga began to question the satisfaction theory of atonement when he was parson of the «gereformeerde kerk» on the isle of Curaçao, the congregation which he served *after* his period in Ghent. See: J.C. Kennedy, *Nieuw Babylon in aanbouw. Nederland in de jaren zestig* (Amsterdam and Meppel 1995), 112. Yet, in an autobiographical piece of writing, published in 1992, Rev. Wiersinga admitted that he already had serious difficulties with some traditional Christian doctrines and the Heidelberg Catechism (the ‘Sundays’ 4, 5, 6, 16 and 23 deal with atonement) during his student days. See: H. Wiersinga, *Geloven bij daglicht. Verlies en toekomst van een traditie* (Baarn 1992), 15. Even though Rev. Wiersinga kept his doubts for himself when he was minister of the «gereformeerde kerk» of Ghent, the sources studied do indicate that he was a champion of ecumenical contacts and liturgical reforms at that time, to the dissatisfaction of some delegates to the «kring» Brussels. See, for example: *Missive aangaande het voorstel-Wiersinga tot verandering van de liturgie, gericht aan de raden van de Gereformeerde Kerken van de Kring Brussel*, dated 22<sup>nd</sup> May 1956 [archive of the G.K. in Boechout]; *Kringnotulen*, dated 12<sup>th</sup> October 1959 [archive of the G.K. in Boechout]. See also: H. Wiersinga, ‘De jaren zestig. De Gereformeerde Kerk van Curaçao en de Antilliaanse oecumene’, 58.

who had been a colleague of Rev. Wiersinga during his period in Belgium<sup>651</sup>, was one of his fiercest critics<sup>652</sup> –, but, notwithstanding the fact that the 1975 / 1976 general synod of Maastricht dissociated itself from his alternative interpretation of atonement<sup>653</sup>, it received support as well – not only in the Netherlands. «*De Stem*» said it was glad to note that the general synod, in spite of its distancing, showed that it was not immune to theological reforms and that it did not reject new visions beforehand: after all, according to the president of the highest church council, whom «*De Stem*» quoted with approval, the time which was spent on the ‘Wiersinga controversy’ proved that the «Gereformeerde Kerken» were willing to listen to dissident views.<sup>654</sup> One member of the «gereformeerde kerk» in Brussels even thought that this did not go far enough: he was disappointed with the ultimate synodical rejection of Wiersinga’s theory of atonement and said that the freedom of conscience, a central idea of the Reformation, was at stake: “[m]ijn bezwaar is: dat de synode dr. H. Wiersinga voorzichtig wil dwingen, om tijdens deze zittingsperiode, zijn confessionele en theologische positiekeuze te herzien. (...) [D]e ‘vrijheid’ van het geweten [is] ernstig in het geding.”<sup>655</sup> The developments in the GKN thus found their way to the GKB as well.

The first chapter has already pointed out the radical ‘U-turn’ in the theological orientation of the «*De Open Poort*» in the late 1960s. With the withdrawal of Rev. Ganzevoort and the appointment of Rev. Eikelboom as general editor, the magazine turned from an identifiable orthodox Reformed and doctrinal evangelistic periodical into an ecumenical, non-dogmatic and change-minded ‘discussion paper’, whose aim was to stimulate debate and seek the dialogue with non-Protestants.<sup>656</sup> Meditations and articles in which the fundamental antithesis with ‘Rome’ and the indispensability of repentance and conversion were accentuated, gave way to editorials that treated the Christian faith as a spiritual quest instead of a fixed system of belief<sup>657</sup>, dealt with social injustice and tended to side with

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<sup>651</sup> In 1957 and 1958, Rev. Wiersinga and Rev. Hegger were both editors of the Belgian edition of «*De Open Poort*», together with Rev. Ganzevoort.

<sup>652</sup> *Trouw*, 16<sup>th</sup> March 2002.

<sup>653</sup> *Acta G.S. GKN* (Maastricht 1975/1976), art. 189.

<sup>654</sup> *De Stem* CIV.12 (14<sup>th</sup> June 1975), 3.

<sup>655</sup> *Brief van een bezorgd gemeentelid aan de kerkenraad van de gereformeerde kerk van Brussel*, dated 6<sup>th</sup> January 1975 [archive of the G.K. in Brussels].

<sup>656</sup> From 1970 onwards, «*De Open Poort*» presented itself as follows: “Dit is een gebruiksblad. Het is niet bestemd om na lezing – of eventueel nog daarvoor – te worden weggegooid. Integendeel: u moet er met elkaar over praten. Vorm gesprekskringen, beleg discussieavonden. Benut de kerkdienst. Betrek iedereen erbij. Kerkelijk of buitenkerkelijk. Doe iets.” See: *B.O.P. L.3* (March 1970), 12. In 1971, editor-in-chief Rev. Eikelboom gave account of the magazine’s new course: “U zult intussen begrepen hebben waar het ons om gaat. Niet om een tegenstelling tussen protestanten en katholieken te forceren. Die is er geweest, maar die gaat voorbij. (...) Het gaat er nog niet zozeer om dat rooms-katholieken kennis kunnen nemen van protestantse overtuigingen om in het grote gesprek van de oecumene mee te kunnen doen. Het gaat er tenslotte om dat wij als kerkelijken en buitenkerkelijken samen opnieuw op zoek gaan naar de werkelijkheid van Jezus de Messias.” See: *Ibid. LI.1* (February 1971), 0-1, there 0.

<sup>657</sup> “Velen van ons hebben vroeger geleerd dat geloven een ‘stellig weten’ was, een brok onaantastbare, van boven af gegarandeerde kennis, die je desnoods met de paplepel kon worden ingegoten. (...) Vandaag is dat anders. (...) Dat is bepaald niet dat stellige weten, dat ons op school (...) werd ingepompt.” See: *Ibid. XLIX.6* (June 1969), 17-18.

left-wing politics. This development was not typical of the «*De Open Poort*»: in the «Gereformeerde Kerken» as a whole, long-established traditions and points of view came under review, resulting in the final decomposition of Kuyperian Neo-Calvinism. Leading Reformed theologians – in particular those who were affiliated to the «Vrije Universiteit» in Amsterdam –, replaced the Neo-Calvinist emphasis on a strict compliance with the Three Forms of Unity with a style of sermonising which can be best described as ‘preaching of the Kingdom’. As a result of the rapidly increasing susceptibility to theological novelties after the schism of 1944 (the «*Vrijmaking*») and the swift societal changes in the 1950s and 1960s, they became convinced that Neo-Calvinism and the ‘Reformed principles’ («*de gereformeerde beginselen*») which Kuyper (and Herman Bavinck) had formulated around the turn of the century, were products of their age, and that a foreshadowing of the coming Kingdom of God – a world in which there will be no famine, no poverty, no war and no inequality, about which Christ had prophesied in the Sermon on the Mount –, could be realised on earth. By referring to the brokenness of Creation (a consequence of Adam’s fall) and the maldistribution of power, resources and scopes to develop that cohered with this brokenness, or by hiding behind an immutable ‘antithesis’, these theologians declared, the Church had lost sight of the stresses of the time and buttressed the established order. Whereas the «Gereformeerde Kerken» had been ‘antirevolutionary’, hammering on the deference to ‘God’s ordinances’, «*De Open Poort*» said, for instance, that they should not reject a revolution in advance, if it would improve the existing, economical and/or political situation:

“[Z]onder meer een revolutie afkeuren en zelfs bestrijden, omdat de ‘orde’ er door aangetast wordt, is – naar wij menen – on-Christelijk. (...) Zolang de verwachting van een nieuwe hemel en nieuwe aarde nog niet is vervuld, kan je nog geen genoegen nemen met enige gevestigde toestand (...); per definitie is de status quo niet goed (...). Het doorbreken van structuren, gewoonten en gangbare opvattingen (...) is in overeenstemming met de traditionele bekering (...); individuele bekering komt nergens uit als de structuren er niet bij doorbroken en vernieuwd worden. Tenslotte (...): de *opstanding* van Jezus, die indruist tegen gangbare en voorstelbare opvattingen, is ook iets *opstandig*, iets revolutionair.”<sup>658</sup>

Of course, this shift in focus had severe consequences for the content of preaching: the emphasis was no longer on the demands that God made on those who were (assumed) to be included in the covenant – all who were baptised and kept His commandments, could lay claim to the covenant promise (salvation through Christ) –, but on the pursuit of social justice; or, to put it differently, rather than highlighting the salvation of the individual, the stress was laid on the ‘redemption’ of the world at large. The word ‘conversion’ («‘bekering’»), for example, was given a whole new meaning. While the «*De Open Poort*» had previously used the term to urge people to lead a life in accordance with the Word of God, it was now used as a synonym for social change and breaking through ‘structures’ that blocked

<sup>658</sup> B.O.P. LI.3 (March 1971), 7-9, there 9.

the destruction of inequality and injustice. The quotation cited above may serve as an illustrative example of this new interpretation of the biblical expression, as well as the following citation of Rev. Eikelboom, published in «*De Open Poort*» of March 1975: “[a]lleen een grondige omkering van de bestaande orde kan onze maatschappij nog redden. Het kwaad zit verborgen in ongrijpbare en *onbekendijke* structuren. Die moeten dus met wortel en tak worden uitgeroeid. De structuren van de oude wereld zijn niet meer in staat om nieuwe ontwikkelingen op te vangen.”<sup>659</sup> According to «gereformeerden» who were less favourably disposed towards ‘progressive’ exegeses, this was nothing less than the preaching of revolution!

The transformation of «*De Open Poort*» is exemplary for the changes that took place in the «Gereformeerde Kerken» in the late 1960s and 1970s. At the theological faculty of the «Vrije Universiteit» in Amsterdam and the «Theologische Hogeschool» in Kampen, historical-critical methods of studying Scripture were no longer rejected beforehand.<sup>660</sup> Moreover, with the theological reforms that took place at these two institutions, typical Neo-Calvinist doctrines as the ‘antithesis’, ‘common grace’, ‘sphere sovereignty’ and the distinction between the Church as ‘institute’ and ‘organism’ lost their significance, as a result of which the network of interconnected Neo-Calvinist organisations (the Reformed «zuil») lost its theological legitimation and rapidly disintegrated.<sup>661</sup> Additionally, whereas the «gereformeerden» had always taken a firm stand against Catholic theology<sup>662</sup>, notwithstanding the cooperation of their «Anti-Revolutionaire Partij» with the political party of the Roman Catholics in Dutch politics<sup>663</sup>, leading theologians like Berkouwer began to revise the traditional condemnation of ‘Rome’, due to the changes within Reformed theology itself and due to the outcomes of the Second Vatican Council, which influenced the Catholic Church in Holland more than in Bel-

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<sup>659</sup> B.O.P. LV.3 (March 1975), 13-16, there 15.

<sup>660</sup> Already in 1881, Abraham Kuyper had said that historical-critical methods of studying Scripture had a devastating effect on people’s faith in God and the trustworthiness of the Bible. See: A. Kuyper, *De hedendaagsche Schriftcritiek in haar bedenkelijke strekking voor de gemeente des levenden Gods* (Amsterdam 1881). This lecture would be normative for all biblical study in the «Gereformeerde Kerken» for the following decades.

<sup>661</sup> Dekker, *De stille revolutie*, 166-169.

<sup>662</sup> In 1911, for example, Herman Bavinck, who was, at that time, the most influential theologian in the GKN after Kuyper, called the Catholic system of thought “Roomsche dwalingen” (“Roman deviations”). See: H. Bavinck, *Modernisme en orthodoxie. Rede gehouden bij de overdracht van het Rectoraat aan de Vrije Universiteit op 20 October 1911* (Kampen 1911), 17. Twenty years before, Kuyper had urged the «gereformeerden» never to call the Roman Catholic Church simply ‘Catholic Church’, but consistently use the term “Roomsche Kerk” (“Roman Church”) or ‘Church of Rome’, for ‘Catholic’ meant ‘universal’ and, from a Reformed point of view, the Church of Rome did not coincide with the Universal Church of Christ. In the same article, he called the Roman Catholic Mass an ‘evil’. See: *De Heraut* 716 (13<sup>th</sup> September 1891), 1.

<sup>663</sup> As a consequence, Neo-Calvinism made a strict division between the political collaboration of the ARP with the RKSP on the one hand, and the irreconcilable theological differences between the «Gereformeerde Kerken» and the Roman Catholic Church on the other hand: the doctrine of ‘sphere sovereignty’ saw State and Church as two separate life spheres (which meant that cooperation in the political arena did not automatically imply rapprochement in the ecclesiastical domain), whereas the ‘antithesis’ stated that orthodox Christians – whether they were Catholic or Protestant – should collaborate to protect themselves against the harmful influences of liberalism and socialism.

gium.<sup>664</sup> The articles in «*De Open Poort*» reflected these developments. As regards ‘Rome’, the magazine began to advocate ecumenism instead of interminable quarreling with the Roman Catholic Church and depicted the Mass no longer as an idolatrous practice – it even encouraged intercommunication between Catholics and Protestants.<sup>665</sup> And with reference to the acceptance of historical-critical methodology, the periodical straightforwardly implied that the first chapters of Genesis should not be read as a historical account or a biology textbook and that theologians should not curtail the freedom of natural scientists – as the GKN had done in 1926 – to challenge the biblical Creation narrative. Theology and science, the general editor of «*De Open Poort*» accentuated, were two different fields of study with different objectives: it was up to the latter to find explanations for the ‘genesis’ of the world.<sup>666</sup> The strict division between these two disciplines was a total denial of the old Neo-Calvinist endeavour to practise science on the basis of the ‘Reformed principles’, or, as it was called in Dutch, «het beoefenen van wetenschap op gereformeerde grondslag»<sup>667</sup>, an ideal to which the «Vrije Universiteit» in Amsterdam gave shape.

The new theological trails which «*De Open Poort*» blazed were, however, not greeted with applause by all its readers; the edition of October 1970 was even entirely devoted to a letter of an old subscriber – a former member of the «gereformeerde kerk» in Antwerp, who currently went to church in the «hervormde kerk» («zendingskerk») in Ostend –, in which the new ecumenical approach to ‘Rome’ was delineated as a renouncement of the ideal of Rev. Lauwers, the ‘founder’ of the church in Denderleeuw and first editor-in-chief of «*De Open Poort*», and Rev. Van Puyvelde, who had been one of the moving spirits behind church planting in Boechout, to bring Roman Catholics into contact with the pure of Word of Scripture: “[i]k heb die oude vergrijsde strijders nog gekend, die alles over hadden voor het ware geloof zoals wij leren uit de Bijbel (...), die zeker in gesprekken met R.K. (...) de verderfelijke R.K. leer aan de kaak stelden. (...) Als predikant van een Ref. Kerk zult u dit met mij moeten beamen! Ware het zo niet, (...) waarom was het dan nodig dat ik als R.K. overgegaan ben naar een Ref. Kerk?”<sup>668</sup> Under the veil of ecumenism, this malcontented reader concluded, fundamental differences were disguised and the biblical Truth was stretched. It is interesting to note that the edi-

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<sup>664</sup> The «gereformeerden» have experienced this themselves: “de interne sfeerverandering is in het Belgische rooms-katholicisme nog lang niet zover als in Nederland.” See: *N.O.P.* XLVIII.1 (January 1968), 1.

<sup>665</sup> *B.O.P.* XLIX.6 (June 1969), 3-5.

<sup>666</sup> The January-February 1974 edition of «*De Open Poort*» opened as follows: “In deze ‘Open Poort’ vindt u een aantal artikelen over de schepping. (...) Het gaat niet maar om een serie nogal theoretische verhandelingen over de oorsprong van de wereld. Dat kunnen de theologen beter aan de biologen en andere natuurwetenschappers overlaten. (...) [I]n de Schrift gaat het niet in de eerste plaats over de vraag ‘waar alles vandaan komt?’. De bijbelse scheppingsverhalen zijn ook niet geschreven om de moderne natuurwetenschappen al bij voorbaat een steeds meer beknelend keurslijf aan te meten.” See: *B.O.P.* LIV.1-2 (January-February 1974), 0-1, there 0.

<sup>667</sup> For a detailed account of the Neo-Calvinist ideal to practise science on the basis of the ‘Reformed principles’, see: Van Deursen, *Een hoeksteen in het verzuild bestel* (note 28).

<sup>668</sup> *B.O.P.* LV.10 (October 1970), 3-6, there 3.

tors of «*De Open Poort*» did not give a unanimous response. Whereas Rev. Eikelboom said that Protestants should encourage the recent, post-Vatican developments within the Church of Rome and decided, as general editor, to let two Roman Catholics respond to the letter paraphrased above – which was, of course, a strong statement in favour of interconfessional rapprochement<sup>669</sup>, Rev. Hendrikssen, a former Catholic priest himself, expressed that he shared the worries of the letter writer and that he had difficulty with the ecumenical trend to obscure dogmatic discordances as well – which the minutes of the «gereformeerde kerk» in Denderleeuw affirm<sup>670</sup> –, even though he questioned whether the traditional polemical attitude towards ‘Rome’ was effective and stressed that he did not want to avoid the dialogue with Catholics.<sup>671</sup> These examples all clearly prove that, following the GKN, the GKB had become tolerant towards the existence of divergent theological views within their walls as well.

#### **4. The definitive integration of the GKB into Belgian Protestantism**

Yet, in spite of their different appreciation of the fundamental alterations in Reformed theology, members of the GKB who were open to change («vernieuwers») and those who were worried about the crumbling of old certainties («verontrusten») had one crucial characteristic in common: both groups wanted the Belgian «gereformeerde kerken» to become less dependent on Holland. In the 1950s and 1960s, as has been said earlier, the GKB began to perceive their strong ties with the GKN more and more as a hindrance to fulfil their evangelistic and apostolic mission to the full: Belgians, especially Flemings<sup>672</sup>, saw the GKB and even Protestantism in general as something ‘Dutch’, which, according to the «ge-reformeerd» in Belgium, discouraged potential new members of joining them<sup>673</sup>, and Dutchmen were still overrepresented in ecclesiastical offices – in the 1960s, *all* ministers had Dutch nationality –, whereas the GKB wanted to become more ‘indigenous’, to be able to contribute to society at large.<sup>674</sup> By acceding to several interdenominational organisations (listed in the last section of the first

<sup>669</sup> For the response of Rev. Eikelboom, see: *B.O.P.*, 14-17. For the replication of the two Catholics, see: *Ibid.*, 7-8 and 21-23.

<sup>670</sup> See: note 634.

<sup>671</sup> *B.O.P.* LV.10 (October 1970), 9-11.

<sup>672</sup> In 1972, 227 out of a total of 340 Protestant churches were located in the French-speaking part of Belgium. Of these 227 Walloon churches, 111 (!) were located in the province of Hainaut. See: *Jaarboek voor de Protestantse Kerken in België* 1972 (Antwerp-Berchem 1972), 157. Apparently, the «Jaarboek» classified the Dutch-speaking churches in Brussels among the Protestant congregations in Flemish Brabant and the French-speaking churches in the Belgian capital among the communities in Walloon Brabant – because there was no separate list with churches in Brussels and the GKB were said to have one church in Flemish Brabant. The «gereformeerde» congregation in Hoboken was listed as a church as well (which it was not). See also: *N.O.P.* XLIX.10 (October 1969), 2-3, there 3.

<sup>673</sup> *Ibid.* XLVII.5 (May 1967), 1-2, there 1; *Ibid.* XLVIII.12 (December 1968), 2-3; *Kringnotulen*, dated 28<sup>th</sup> March 1968 and 6<sup>th</sup> April 1968 [archive of the G.K. in Boechout]; *Stemmotivering gereformeerde kerk van Mechelen*, dated 3<sup>rd</sup> June 1978 [archive of the G.K. in Boechout].

<sup>674</sup> *Advies Kring België der Gereformeerde Kerken ten aanzien van de verhouding tot de Theologische Faculteit te Brussel*, undated (probably 1967/1968) [archive of the G.K. in Boechout].

chapter), they had abandoned their self-chosen isolation and had become fused with the rest of Belgian Protestantism to an increasing extent. That is why the Flemish «gereformeerde kerken» requested the general synod whether they could replace collections for specific *Dutch* purposes (like those for the benefit of the theological faculty of the «Vrije Universiteit» and the «Theologische Hogeschool») with offertories for *Belgian* ends (the «Faculteit voor Protestantse Godgeleerdheid» in Brussels, for example).<sup>675</sup> Moreover, the GKN pursued a rather centralist policy with regard to the churches in Belgium – the «deputaatschap voor de Evangelisatie in België» treated the GKB as a uniform entity –, while the GKB were far from homogeneous; each church had its own ‘profile’ and the churches as a whole no longer consisted for the most part of Dutch members.<sup>676</sup>

Although the churches in Antwerp, Brussels, Ghent and Mechlin had a significant amount of Belgian members as well<sup>677</sup>, it was primarily due to the «gereformeerde kerken» in Boechout and Denderleeuw that the number of Belgian GKB members more or less equalled the number of Dutchmen around 1960 and even topped it in the 1970s; in the two last-mentioned towns, nearly all «gereformeerden» were native-born Belgians.<sup>678</sup> As a consequence of this declining numerical preponderance of Hollanders, and as the memory of the first years of the GKB’s existence weakened, the (emotional) bonds with Holland and GKN diminished too. Of course, this was particularly true for the «gereformeerde kerken» in Boechout and Denderleeuw: there, the attachment to the Dutch ‘umbrella-denomination’ (the GKN) was already seen as an ‘incidental’ rather than an ‘indispensable’ circumstance – after all, whereas the congregations in Antwerp, Brussels, Ghent and Mechlin had come into existence as ‘immigrant churches’, reacting against the perceived latitudinarianism in the existing local Protestant churches (in imitation of the «gereformeerde kerken» in the Netherlands), the churches in Boechout and Denderleeuw had come into being solely as a result of evangelism activities<sup>679</sup>, undertaken by the «gereformeerde kerk» in Brussels and a committee headed by K. Sluys, respectively –, a sentiment which even increased in the late 1960s, because of the theological reorientation within the «Gereformeerde Kerken». It was not a coincidence that the church council in Denderleeuw said that its affiliation to the GKN was ‘artificial’<sup>680</sup> during a meeting in which the consistory adres-

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<sup>675</sup> See, for example: *Mededelingenblad van de gereformeerde kerk te Antwerpen* 285 (28<sup>th</sup> September 1950), 2; *Ibid.* 290 (8<sup>th</sup> December 1950), 1; *Ibid.* 291 (21<sup>st</sup> December 1950), 1; *Notulen van de vergadering van de classis Dordrecht der Gereformeerde Kerken*, dated 4<sup>th</sup> February 1971 [archive of the G.K. in Boechout]; *Brief van de secretaris van de kring België der Gereformeerde Kerken aan de kerkenraden, predikanten en commissie van beheer van de Gereformeerde Kerken in België*, dated 5<sup>th</sup> April 1971 [archive of the G.K. in Boechout].

<sup>676</sup> N.O.P. XXXII.1 (January 1952), 4; *Ibid.* XLVI.10 (October 1966), 3; *Tussentijds rapport van de deputaten voor de zaken van de Belgische kerken aan de generale synode van Haarlem, 1973/74*, dated 18<sup>th</sup> June 1974 [archive of the G.K. in Boechout].

<sup>677</sup> See, for example: *Mededelingenblad van de gereformeerde kerk te Gent* X.7 (April 1956), 3.

<sup>678</sup> See, for example: N.O.P. XLVII.5 (May 1967), 4.

<sup>679</sup> Beukenhorst et.al., *Met z’n drieën op stap*, III [archive of the G.K. in Boechout].

<sup>680</sup> See: note 56.

sed the issue of looking for a successor to Rev. Hendriksen<sup>681</sup>, who was described by «*De Kruisbaniер*» as Rev. Hegger's (!) “geesteskind” ('brainchild').<sup>682</sup> Due to, as it had put forward a year earlier, the “verontrustende aspecten van de theologische onzekerheid” ('alarming consequences of the current theological confusion')<sup>683</sup> and the “vrijzinnige theologische stromingen die binnen de Gereformeerde kerken van België en Nederland bestaan” ('liberal theological tendencies within the GKN and GKB')<sup>684</sup>, the elders and deacons accentuated that it was all the same for them whether the new parson was «gereformeerd», as long as he was orthodox – they even explored the possibility of calling an orthodox «Nederlands-hervormde» minister<sup>685</sup> (to the displeasure of the «deputaatschap»<sup>686</sup>). In Boechout, the theological developments within the «Gereformeerde Kerken» were looked at with Argus' eyes as well.<sup>687</sup>

The two congregations in the Flemish countryside became estranged not only from the supralocal Dutch church institute, but also, to a lesser extent, from their sister churches in Belgium. This was connected to the unique position which they occupied in the GKN / GKB as well as in local society. Since they consisted almost entirely of Flemings, the developments that took place within the GKN reached the «gereformeerde kerken» in Boechout and Denderleeuw considerably later than the churches in the four cities. Due to the presence of a Dutch ‘colony’, as it was called, in the churches of Antwerp, Brussels, Ghent and Mechlin – which was still substantial –, the variation in the number of church members was much higher and the relations with the GKN were much closer, as a result of which the changes within the «gereformeerde» community in Holland were, so to speak, ‘brought in’ by these Dutch members. Churches were more susceptible to progressive theological tendencies when the ‘Hollandic’ element was more dominant than the Flemish. In Boechout and Denderleeuw, nearly all members of the local «gereformeerde kerk» were, moreover, not only native-born Belgians, but also converts from Catholicism<sup>688</sup> – in the last-mentioned town, even the ministers (Rev. Lauwers, Rev. Hegger and Rev. Hendriksen) were former Catholics – which had important consequences for the theological orientation of these churches: the consistory in Boechout said that the majority of converts were still in a process of ‘acclimatising’ with Protestant customs and beliefs and that radical

<sup>681</sup> *Kerkenraadsnotulen G.K. Denderleeuw*, dated 23<sup>rd</sup> May 1975 [archive of the G.K. in Denderleeuw].

<sup>682</sup> *De Kruisbaniер* XXV.16 (19<sup>th</sup> July 1969), 2.

<sup>683</sup> *Kerkenraadsnotulen G.K. Denderleeuw*, dated 1<sup>st</sup> February 1974 [archive of the G.K. in Denderleeuw].

<sup>684</sup> *Ibid.*, dated 27<sup>th</sup> September 1974 [archive of the G.K. in Denderleeuw].

<sup>685</sup> *Kerkenraadsnotulen G.K. Denderleeuw*, dated 9<sup>th</sup> February 1975 [archive of the G.K. in Denderleeuw].

<sup>686</sup> *Ibid.*, dated 4<sup>th</sup> April 1975; *Ibid.*, dated 23<sup>rd</sup> May 1975 [archive of the G.K. in Denderleeuw].

<sup>687</sup> K. Sluys, the ‘founding father’ of the «gereformeerde kerk» in Boechout, had been, for example, unfavourably disposed towards the decision of the general synod to grant female church members the right to vote in parochial church council elections. See: note 552. Moreover, the church in Boechout was vehemently opposed to the entry of the «Gereformeerde Kerken» into the World Council of Churches. See: note 635.

<sup>688</sup> For Boechout, see: *Vlaams Kerkblad* VI.5 (September 1959), 145; VII.12 (April 1961), 359-374, there 361; XI.1 (May 1964), 24; *De Roepstem. Evangeliebrief van de Protestantse Kerk van Boechout* 162 (10<sup>th</sup> June 1961), 1-3, there 1. For Denderleeuw, see: *N.O.P.* XLVIII.12 (December 1968), 1-2, there 1.

changes were therefore not welcomed<sup>689</sup>, while the church council in Denderleeuw was convinced that an ‘uncomplicated’ Evangelical faith<sup>690</sup> and an orthodox preaching had a positive effect on the internal development and external expansion of the congregation.<sup>691</sup> In addition, for the former Catholics, joining a Protestant church had meant isolation from the rest of the village community<sup>692</sup> and these old wounds were still smarting. Accordingly, they were rather hesitant to seek rapprochement with the local Catholic parish, all the more since the reforms of the Second Vatican Council met with less response in the countryside than in the urban areas.<sup>693</sup> Whereas, for instance, the churches in Ghent and Brussels had sought contact with the neighbouring Catholic community already in the mid-1960s<sup>694</sup>, formal ecumenical contacts between the «gereformeerde» consistory and the Roman Catholic priest did not exist in Boechout and Denderleeuw before the mid-1970s.<sup>695</sup> Next to that, the congregations in these two towns were, initially, not very enthusiastic about the plan to amalgamate the GKB with the PKB and HKB.<sup>696</sup> Both saw a direct link between the theological changes within the «Gereformeerde Kerken» and the pursuit of an ecclesiastical unification; they feared that a United Protestant Church would be a free-floating, latitudinarian institution without a clear confessional profile, or, as the church in Denderleeuw put it: “de kerkeraad [heeft] de indruk dat zowel van Gereformeerde als niet-Gereformeerde zijde geprobeerd wordt door frequente preekruilbeurten een feitelijke situatie te scheppen als voorbereiding op een veralgemening van de horizontalistische theologie.”<sup>697</sup> Although the consistory in Boechout acknowledged that the situation in Antwerp, Brussels and Ghent – it did not mention Mechlin –, where the «gereformeerde kerk» was not the only Protestant church, might give rea-

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<sup>689</sup> *Kort verslag van de besprekking tussen de kerkenraad van de gereformeerde kerk van Boechout en een delegatie van de kring België inzake de bezwaren van Boechout tegen de voorgestelde “officiële besprekingen” inzake een mogelijke eenwording van de Hervormde Kerk van België, de Protestantse Kerk van België en de Gereformeerde Kerken in België*, dated 5<sup>th</sup> July 1971 [archive of the G.K. in Boechout].

<sup>690</sup> *Kerkenraadsnotulen G.K. Denderleeuw*, dated 27<sup>th</sup> September 1974 [archive of the G.K. in Denderleeuw].

<sup>691</sup> *Kerkvisitatie G.K. Denderleeuw*, dated 10<sup>th</sup> May 1975 [archive of the G.K. in Denderleeuw].

<sup>692</sup> For a detailed account of the troublesome relationship with the Roman Catholic Church, see: Van Adinkerke, *De tempel*; Sluys, *Het wonder van Boechout*. One must, however, keep in mind that these books were written by members of the local «gereformeerde kerken» – a Catholic would have written a completely different book.

<sup>693</sup> N.O.P. L.3 (March 1970), 3-4, there 3.

<sup>694</sup> *Kringnotulen*, dated 5<sup>th</sup> September 1967 [archive of the G.K. in Brussels]. These same «kringnotulen» even say that the «gereformeerde kerk» in Mechlin had a better relationship with the Roman Catholic parish than with the local «protestants-evangelische kerk»!

<sup>695</sup> The «kringnotulen» of November 9<sup>th</sup>, 1972, indicate that the «gereformeerde kerk» in Denderleeuw and the local Catholic congregation had had a first conversation. See: *Kringnotulen*, dated 9<sup>th</sup> November 1972 [archive of the G.K. in Boechout]. In Boechout, there were contacts with the local Catholic parish in the mid-1970s as well. See, for example: *Band VII.21* (27<sup>th</sup> November 1974), 10.

<sup>696</sup> In 1978, a report on the situation of the «gereformeerde kerken» in Belgium noticed that the churches in Boechout and Denderleeuw were still troubled by the oncoming founding of the VPKB: “Met name in Boechout leven nog veel vragen rond de Eenheidsbesprekingen (...). In Denderleeuw nauwelijks aandacht voor de plannen voor een nieuwe verenigde kerk.” See: *Rapport van de gehouden kerkvisitatie over de periode 23 november 1967 – 7 november 1977 van de classis België van de Gereformeerde Kerken*, dated 30<sup>th</sup> January 1978 [archive of the G.K. in Boechout]. See also: *Antwoord van de kerkenraad van Denderleeuw op de ‘kanselboodschap’ van de Contactcommissie GKB-HKB-PKB*, no date [it is attached to the «kerkenraadsnotulen» of November 8<sup>th</sup>, 1974] [archive of the G.K. in Denderleeuw].

<sup>697</sup> *Kerkenraadsnotulen G.K. Denderleeuw*, dated 8<sup>th</sup> November 1974 [archive of the G.K. in Denderleeuw].

son to discuss the possibility of an amalgamation, it did not see the necessity for the church in Boechout to contribute to these discussions and questioned whether the church *members* supported the idea of a total institutional fusion.<sup>698</sup> Boechout and Denderleeuw emphasised that they were not opposed to more forms of cooperation with other Protestant denominations<sup>699</sup>, but strongly advised their sister churches against a full coalescence.<sup>700</sup>

Yet, when the rapprochement process progressed, all Belgian «gereformeerde kerken» – including those in Boechout and Denderleeuw – assented to the amalgamation with the «Protestantse Kerk van België» and the «Hervormde Kerk van België» nonetheless. Since the GKN were no longer as orthodox as they used to be and since their emotional bonds with Holland and the GKN were already rather ‘artificial’, perhaps the two GKB congregations in the Flemish countryside thought that it would be better, especially from an evangelistic point of view, to contribute to the further development of the United Protestant Church<sup>701</sup> – albeit under the express condition that the confessional autonomy of the local church would be left intact in the VPKB.<sup>702</sup> What is more, the call for more self-rule of the GKB was given due recognition by the general synod of the GKN from the mid-1960s onwards to an increasing degree – it acknowledged that the GKB had a mission to fulfil in *Belgium* and that this mission could only be fulfilled when the GKB were fully integrated in *Belgian Protestantism*<sup>703</sup> –; the highest church council even *stimulated* the «gereformeerde kerken» in Belgium to become less reliant on Holland. After the Second World War, it was synodical policy of the GKN to grant their churches abroad<sup>704</sup> full independence, respectively in the Dutch East Indies in 1948 – the self-reliance of

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<sup>698</sup> *Brief van de kerkenraad van de gereformeerde kerk van Boechout aan de kring België der Gereformeerde Kerken*, dated 25<sup>th</sup> August 1971 [archive of the G.K. in Boechout].

<sup>699</sup> For Boechout, see: *Ibid.* For Denderleeuw, see: *Brief van de kerkenraad van de gereformeerde kerk van Denderleeuw aan de kring België der Gereformeerde Kerken*, dated 30<sup>th</sup> June 1971 [archive of the G.K. in Denderleeuw].

<sup>700</sup> This did not mean that there was no opposition to the amalgamation outside Boechout and Denderleeuw. In Ghent, for example, the rapprochement between the «gereformeerde kerk» and the local congregation of the PKB passed off anything but smoothly, because the latter was not very willing to assist the former in its request for state recognition. See: *Notulen van de vergadering van de classis België der Gereformeerde Kerken*, dated 10<sup>th</sup> September 1977; *Ibid.*, dated 7<sup>th</sup> September 1978 [archive of the G.K. in Boechout]; De Raaf, *Een open poort*, 117-119. The founding of the «gereformeerde kerk (vrijgemaakt)» – see: note 627 – was even, to a great extent, a direct result of the coming into being of the VPKB.

<sup>701</sup> The minutes of the «classis» Belgium do suggest this. In 1977, the church in Boechout said that it still had some difficulty with the amalgamation, but that it wanted to contribute to the “diepere dogmatische fundering” (‘spiritual deepening’) of the United Church. The congregation in Denderleeuw expressed itself in similar terms: “Hoe eerder wij één kerk hebben, hoe eerder wij ons méér kunnen inzetten voor een verdieping van het geestelijk leven van onze gemeenten.” See: *Notulen van de vergadering van de classis België der Gereformeerde Kerken*, dated 10<sup>th</sup> September 1977 [archive of the G.K. in Boechout].

<sup>702</sup> For Boechout, see: *Stemmotivering gereformeerde kerk van Boechout*, undated [1978] [archive of the G.K. in Boechout]. For Denderleeuw, see: *Afschrift van de gereformeerde kerk van Denderleeuw*, dated 16<sup>th</sup> September 1975 [archive of the G.K. in Denderleeuw].

<sup>703</sup> De Raaf, *Een open poort*, 123-124.

<sup>704</sup> The «gereformeerde kerken» outside the Netherlands are listed in note 450. The church in Curaçao merged together with the local «verenigde protestantse gemeente», from which it had seceded in 1930, in 1984. See: D.J. van Dijk, ‘Het laatste bedrijf. De integratie komt tot stand’, in: O.B. Linker and G. Vrieze eds., *Op Mundo Nobo valt een orgel stil. Meer dan een halve eeuw gereformeerde kerkelijk leven op Curaçao* (Curaçao 1984), 86-105. The church in London was clo-

these churches was a consequence of the broken contacts with Holland between 1940 and 1945 and the forthcoming self-governance of Indonesia<sup>705</sup> –, in Argentina and Brazil in 1962 – the «gereformeerde kerken» in South America were split up into the «Iglesias Reformadas en la Argentina» and the «Igreja Evangélica Reformada do Brasil»<sup>706</sup> – and in the French towns of Châtillon-Coligny in 1973 and Sens in 1977 – these two congregations were incorporated into the «Église Réformée de France»<sup>707</sup>; the «gereformeerde kerk» in Paris did not want to become independent.<sup>708</sup> Although the GKN had been, due to the worrisome financial position of the GKB, their small number of members, the variation in the corps of ministers and the fact that the deviant situation of the GKB could not be compared with the situation of whichever Dutch «classis»<sup>709</sup>, a bit sceptic towards the idea of granting the churches in Belgium the status of a «classis» at first – as a concession, the GKB were given the status of a «kring» in 1950 (a meeting platform which did not exist in the «Dordtse Kerkorde» and was created solely for the GKB) –, the general synod came to realise that such a status was an absolute prerequisite for the «gereformeerde kerken» in Belgium to become completely fused with the rest of Belgian Protestantism. In 1974, more than sixteen years after the matter was discussed for the first time<sup>710</sup>, the separate «‘classis België’» was finally established. From the very beginning, its princi-

sed in 1979. See: Barritt, Van Beek and De Raaf, *Inventarissen*, 11. The congregation in Paramaribo was still a member church of the GKN in 1986, though it is uncertain whether this church became independent in the following years or whether it was closed – in any case, there is currently no church of the «Protestantse Kerk in Nederland» (the denomination into which the GKN merged in 2004) in Paramaribo. See: J. Helderman, ‘Twee kerken in het Caraïbisch gebied. Het ‘Verre Westen’ van een classis...’, in: *Anderhalve eeuw gereformeerden in stad en land XII. Buitenlandse kerken* (Kampen 1986), 23-24, there 24. The semi-independent «evangelisch-altreformierte kirchen» in Germany remained associated with the «Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland» until the GKN merged into the PKN in 2004. At present, they are loosely affiliated with the PKN.

<sup>705</sup> J.J. Oranje, ‘De Gereformeerde Kerken in Indonesië 1945-1962’, in: *Anderhalve eeuw gereformeerden in stad en land XII. Buitenlandse kerken* (Kampen 1986), 32-33, there 32. These churches for Dutch «gereformeerden» in the East Indies should not be confused with the «gereformeerde» missionary posts for indigenous peoples on the isles of Sumba and Java. The latter had proclaimed their independence from the GKN already in 1947. See: Th. van den End, *Gereformeerde zending op Sumba 1859-1972. Een bronnenpublicatie* (Alphen aan den Rijn 1987); J.G. Luinstra, ‘Oorlog en zelfstandigwording: de periode 1942-1947’, in: W.B. van Halsema et.al., *De zending voorbij. Terugblik op de relatie tussen de Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland en de Christelijke Kerk van Sumba 1942-1992* (Kampen 1995), 35-60; D.C. Mulder, ‘Hoofdmomenten uit de geschiedenis van de Gereformeerde zending na 1945’, in: P.N. Holtrop et.al., *ZGKN100. Een bundel opstellen over de Zending van de Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland ter gelegenheid van de honderdjarige herdenking van de Synode van Middelburg 1896* (Kampen 1996), 107-125.

<sup>706</sup> J. Plomp, ‘Argentinië’, in: A.P. Crom et.al. eds., *Anderhalve eeuw gereformeerden in stad en land XII. Buitenlandse kerken* (Kampen 1986), 24-25, there 25. For a detailed history of the «gereformeerde kerken» in Argentina and Brazil, see: J.A.C. Rullmann, *Een geslaagde mislukking. Geschiedenis van de Gereformeerden in Argentinië* (Baarn [1971] 1977); *De Gereformeerde zending in Argentinië* (n.pl. n.y.); *De Gereformeerde zending in Brazilië* (n.pl. n.y.).

<sup>707</sup> For Châtillon-Coligny, see: *Honderdvijftig jaar gemeenten en predikanten*, 37. For Sens, see: *Ibid.*, 156.

<sup>708</sup> For a detailed history of the «gereformeerde kerk» in Paris, see: *In Parijs kan het. Eén Heere, één geloof, één doop* (Paris 1950); M. Bos-Wolff and J. Badinier-Quaak, *Dat wonderlijke kerkje daar in Parijs zit Abraham. Vijftig jaar Église Réformée Néerlandaise te Parijs, 1948-1998* (Sceaux 1998). Currently, this church is part of the «Protestantse Kerk in Nederland».

<sup>709</sup> *Rapport van de commissie tot advies over eventuele meerdere vrijheid van handelen voor de Belgische kerken, uitgebracht aan de classicale vergadering Dordrecht*, dated 1<sup>st</sup> February 1968 [archive of the G.K. in Boechout].

<sup>710</sup> *Vorming van een classis Brussel. Rapport opgesteld naar aanleiding van het door de generale synode van Dordrecht 1971/1972 terzake genomen besluit, dienende als basis voor het gesprek binnen de Kring België, met deputaten voor*

pal task was to prepare the forthcoming merger with the HKB and PKB<sup>711</sup>, which would come into effect on January 1<sup>st</sup>, 1979. On that date, the «gereformeerde» ‘city on a hill’ coalesced with two neighbouring ‘cities’ into the ‘amalgamated municipality’ called ‘VPKB’. After nearly eighty-five years, the «Gereformeerde Kerken in België» were no longer.

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*Zaken van de Belgische Kerken en de classis Dordrecht*, dated September 1972 [archive of the G.K. in Boechout]; De Raaf, *Een open poort*, 108.

<sup>711</sup> *De Kruisbanier* XXX.1 (10<sup>th</sup> January 1974), 2.

## CONCLUSION

The Neo-Calvinist church life in Belgium, which came into being, thanks to none other than Abraham Kuyper, with the founding of the «gereformeerde kerk» in Brussels in 1894, and ended with the merging of the GKB into the VPKB on January 1<sup>st</sup>, 1979, can best be characterised as a history of two major ambiguities. The first of these was the endeavour of the «gereformeerden» to be both a ‘Gideon’s band’ and a ‘city upon a hill’ simultaneously: the ‘Gideon’s band’ symbolised the militancy and proselytism of a cultural and religious minority that was convinced to be on a (God-given) mission to dispel ‘paganism’ and spread the ‘light’ of the Gospel in an area shrouded in spiritual ‘darkness’, whereas the ‘city upon a hill’ implied, metaphorically speaking, an accentuation of the ‘otherness’ of the own group compared to the rest of society and hence a self-chosen isolation – a city that is set on top of a hill represents a certain inaccessibility and reclusiveness (after all, there is a contrast, an ‘antithesis’ so to speak, between the city located *high* up on the hill and the rest of the world situated in the *low-lying vale*). What was at stake here was, in essence, the fundamental choice between opening the church doors towards the world, by participating and trying to exert influence in it, or keeping the doors timorously closed, by remaining an isolated Dutch immigrant community with no intention whatsoever to root firmly in Belgian society or, at least, in Belgian Protestantism. In GKB-related magazines (particularly in the «*Gereformeerde Kerkbode voor België*»), leading men unequivocally rejected this last option and proclaimed that the «gereformeerden» should strive to realise a ‘re-Christianisation’ of Belgian society;<sup>712</sup> Rev. V. Hepp, the then parson of the «gereformeerde kerk» in Antwerp, even said that the GKB members carried “een levensbeginsel” (‘a principle of life’)<sup>713</sup>, by which he meant Neo-Calvinism and the Neo-Calvinist way of being, that needed to penetrate into all spheres of the civil order. For «mannenbroeders» like Rev. Hepp, the Old Testament judge Gideon was the ultimate source of inspiration:<sup>714</sup> in biblical times, Gideon had also been faced with a humanly impossible mission, but had succeeded anyway as God was on his side. The analogy was rather obvious, because of the diminutiveness and reclusive character of the «gereformeerde» community in Belgium in the first years of its existence: all GKB congregations together had no more than three to seven hundred members prior to the 1950s<sup>715</sup> – the membership figures fluctuated strongly –, of whom the majority were Dutch – the number of Flemings slightly increased from the 1920s onwards, when evangelisation activities started in Denderleeuw –, giving them the appearance of be-

<sup>712</sup> In 1907 and 1908, the «*Gereformeerde Kerkbode voor België*» even devoted twenty-eight (!) articles to the subject of «Calvinistische Actie» ('Calvinist Action').

<sup>713</sup> See: note 449.

<sup>714</sup> See: note 509.

<sup>715</sup> De Raaf, *Een open poort*, 240-241.

ing Dutch ‘colonies’ («‘koloniekerken’») or ‘immigrant enclaves’ («‘immigrantenkerken’»).<sup>716</sup> As this thesis has showed, Rev. Hepp’s allusion to a ‘re-Christianisation’ of Belgium was not just ‘empty talk’ and would be repeated by himself and others – such as K. Sluys in the 1950s – several times thereafter: particularly in the period before the Second World War (but still in the 1950), GKB-related periodicals recurrently incited the «gereformeerden» to bring about a ‘revival’ or, at any rate, *cherish* this ideal as their ultimate objective.

The prefix ‘re’ in ‘re-Christianisation’ was of vital importance: in their articles, leading men like Rev. Hepp, Rev. Ganzevoort, Rev. Winter and evangelist-businessman Sluys emphasised that their mission was to bring the Bible *back* to Flanders, to *revitalise* Belgian Protestantism and to *revive* the days of the Reformation. These formulations were directed against the Roman Catholic claim that Protestantism was merely an ‘import item’ from Holland, conflicting with the religious mentality of Belgians, and that it would always be a religion of Dutchmen residing in Belgium. By writing frequently about the history of the sixteenth-century Reformation in the Flemish and Walloon regions, the editors of GKB-affiliated weeklies, fortnightlies and monthlies refuted this assertion and showed that Lutheranism, Anabaptism and Calvinism had had a sizeable following in current-day Belgium before the reconquering of Antwerp by Spanish Counter-Reformational forces. What is more, they were convinced that the «gereformeerden» embodied the ‘true’ national character – in Dutch, the peculiar word «‘grondtoon’» was used – of the Belgian people. The Southern Netherlands had once been predominantly Calvinist, they contended, but, to put it biblically, the ‘candlestick’ had moved up to the North, where the Reformed Church came to flourish and material and spiritual well-being began to dawn. Without the influx of Protestant refugees from Flanders and Brabant, the Dutch Golden Age would have never been ‘golden’ at all. If Belgium would (re-)embrace the Reformed creed, it would witness economic and spiritual prosperity as well. Statistics on the percentage of illiterates in ‘Catholic’ countries (among which Belgium) and ‘Protestant’ nations (including the Netherlands) were presented to enforce this assertion.<sup>717</sup> Because ‘Rome’ kept its flock ‘ignorant’ of the Calvinist *intermezzo* in Flemish history, the «gereformeerden» had the feeling to be a vanguard, chosen to remind the Flemings that Protestantism was anything but ‘foreign’ or ‘hostile’ to their national character and to bring the ‘candlestick’ back to the South.

Although the Neo-Calvinists in Belgium can, contrary to their fellow churchmen in Holland, hardly be called an ‘emancipation movement’ – Flemings who joined them were shunned by the Ro-

<sup>716</sup> *Enkele opmerkingen ten aanzien van de situatie in en rond de Gereformeerde Kerken in België*, dated July 1966 [archive of the G.K. in Boechout]; *Kladversie van een brochure over de Gereformeerde Kerken in België*, undated (probably 1971) [archive of the F.P.G. in Brussels]; *Tussentijds rapport van de deputaten voor de zaken van de Belgische kerken aan de generale synode van Haarlem, 1973/74*, dated 18<sup>th</sup> June 1974 [archive of the G.K. in Boechout]; *De Stem CIV.1* (11<sup>th</sup> January 1975), 3-5, there 4.

<sup>717</sup> *B.O.P. XXXII.19* (November 1952), 2; *XXXVII.14* (September 1957), 4.

man Catholic community –, they have nevertheless adopted the rhetoric, mentality and way of thinking that were typical of the emancipatory aspect of the Neo-Calvinist movement in Holland (which aspect has been described by Hendriks, Kuiper and Post in particular).<sup>718</sup> By taking over such expressions as ‘re-Christianisation’ (‘herkerstening’)<sup>719</sup> and ‘the implanting of a new principle of life’ (‘de inplanting van een nieuw levensbeginsel’ – which referred to Kuyper’s interpretation of regeneration as an ‘inborn’ ‘seed’ that the elect carried within them from their birth on and that would come in full ‘bloom’ as they advanced in years)<sup>720</sup>, as well as the idea to represent ‘the true national character’ of – in this case – Flanders (‘de grondtoon van ons volkskarakter’)<sup>721</sup> and to be a chosen ‘vanguard’,<sup>722</sup> assigned to make the will of God known to people who wandered in ‘darkness’, the «gereformeerden» explicitly *assumed* the same role as their Dutch brethren. While the Neo-Calvinists in Holland wanted to liberate society (and themselves) from the ‘yoke’ of liberalism, the «gereformeerden» in *Belgium* were striving to free society from the ‘yoke’ of Roman Catholicism. Perhaps their main enemy had a different name, but their ultimate objective (literally to *re-form* the civil order along Neo-Calvinist lines) was still the same. Moreover, the «gereformeerden» in Holland justified their attempt to ‘re-Christianise’ society with a reference to the sixteenth century as well.<sup>723</sup> Between 1572 and 1650, the Reformed Church had been a paragon of orthodoxy, but afterwards, it had fallen into decay, reaching rock bottom in 1816, when the hierarchic, latitudinarian «Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk» was constituted on the foundations of the old Reformed Church. Yet, the ‘true’ Calvinists – the «afgescheidenen» and «dolerenden» – ‘awakened’ and brought Protestant orthodoxy to new prosperity. Belgian history could be interpreted likewise: after the fall of Antwerp (and the nearly total extermination of Protestantism), the Southern Netherlands slipped further into misery. Although Protestantism in Belgium experienced a promising renascence in the nineteenth century, with the founding of the «Bond van Kerken» and the creation of the «Belgische Christelijke Zendingskerk», these two denominations failed to revitalise Belgium’s Calvinist heritage. The «gereformeerden», who came to the fore in the 1890s, just took up the cause that the already existing Protestant church groups left behind. This last argument was not only used to defend the striving for a ‘re-Christianisation’, but also to legitimise the coming into existence of separate «gereformeerde kerken» as such: the «Bond

<sup>718</sup> See: the introduction of this thesis.

<sup>719</sup> Hendriks, *De emancipatie van de Gereformeerden*, 212; Post, *Gereformeerd zijn en blijven, een wankel evenwicht?!*, 101; Kuiper, *Tussen observatie en participatie*, 112.

<sup>720</sup> A. van Egmond, ‘Als in een donkere spiegel – honderd jaar gereformeerde dogmatiek in het GTT’, in: W. Stoker and H.C. van der Sar eds., *Theologie op de drempel van 2000. Terugblik op 100 jaar Gereformeerd Theologisch Tijdschrift* (Kampen 1999), 163–178, there 167.

<sup>721</sup> A. Kuyper, *Ons Program* (Amsterdam 1879), 1.

<sup>722</sup> F.A. Groot, ‘Gewapende vrede. Ontwikkelingen op levensbeschouwelijk gebied’, in: Th.A.H. de Nijs and E. Beukers eds., *Geschiedenis van Holland IIIb. 1795 tot 2000* (Hilversum 2003), 485–546, there 500.

<sup>723</sup> *Nederlands Dagblad*, 19<sup>th</sup> May 2006.

van Kerken», the Neo-Calvinists asserted, resembled the «Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk» in its tolerance towards liberal theological views and the BCZK had an hierarchic structure similar to the NHK. They simply projected the factional struggle within Dutch Calvinism on Protestantism in Belgium.

Against the ‘feeble’ and ‘half-hearted’ «Bond van Kerken» and «Zendingkerk», the «gereformeerden» positioned themselves as orthodox and activist counterpart. In their endeavour to bring the pure Word of Scripture ‘back’ to Flanders, these were exactly the two characteristics needed: the ‘biblical truths’ and the ‘Reformed principles’ should not be denied to the Flemings – liberal theology extenuated the depravity of mankind, but, according to the «gereformeerden», a ‘sin’ should be called a sin, whether people wanted to hear it or not – and should be spread in all segments of society. To realise this, organisations had to be created that could voice and give shape to the (orthodox) Protestant world view and philosophy of life. The founding of Protestant-based institutions for lower education, after the example of the ‘schools with the Bible’ in Holland, was given top priority, since these were seen as ‘nurseries’ that would fit a coming generation of Belgian Protestants out for their task in society; the future of Protestantism in Belgium was said to be dependent on the establishing and preserving of ‘schools with the Bible’.<sup>724</sup> The «gereformeerden» did not let the grass grow under their feet indeed: almost immediately after the formation of Neo-Calvinist communities in Brussels, Antwerp, Ghent, Mechlin, Denderleeuw and Boechout, such schools were built and often accommodated in the local «gereformeerde kerk» the first years of their existence. True, members of other Protestant denominations were also involved with the founding of confessional-based school societies, but the «gereformeerden» clearly played the first fiddle: apart from the causal connection between the coming into being of Neo-Calvinist church life in the aforementioned six municipalities and the establishing of a school several years later, the «gereformeerden» were the *only* Protestant community in Belgium who could send their children to a Christian school in *all* of the cities where their churches were located. Moreover, they dominated the «‘Vereeniging voor Vlaamsch Protestantsch-Christelijk Onderwijs’», the coordinating body in which the handful of ‘schools with the Bible’ in Belgium – these were all located in Flanders, which is another indication that the «gereformeerden» acted as pioneers (after all, there were no «gereformeerde kerken» in Wallonia) – were united and that was in constant debt, because, aside from the «gereformeerden», Belgian Protestants did not unanimously supported the principle to found confessional-based schools. In the association’s periodical «*De Torenwachter*», VPCO representatives, of whom many were Neo-Calvinist, therefore ceaselessly incited Protestant parents to support the schools, for these had promised, during the baptism of their infant(s), to give their child(ren) a Christian upbringing.

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<sup>724</sup> *De Torenwachter* IV.2 (July 1930), 2-3, there 3; VI.3 (November 1932), 3.

In addition, the VPCO used the argument that ‘schools with the Bible’ had an important evangelistic aspect: they could bring children from secular and Roman Catholic milieus into contact with the (Protestant interpretation of the) Gospel. Its ambition was to reach all Flemish children with the Glad Tidings of Jesus Christ: “[v]olkomen veilig kunnen zij, die nog aarzelen mochten, hunne kinderen toevertrouwen aan iedere school, die geboren wordt uit den nood van ‘de ziel van ons kind’ en dan volkomen natuurlijk voortkomt uit de ziel des volks. Onze beweging moet daarom een volksbeweging worden, waartoe allen moeten medewerken, die het met de Christelijke school voor het volkskind ernstig meenen.”<sup>725</sup> In the *church* life of the «gereformeerden», evangelism was also a central element—in Belgium even more than in the Netherlands. The specific circumstances in the first-mentioned country, which differed considerably from the situation in Holland (a nation stamped by Calvinism), were responsible for this: because of the cultural, religious and even political predominance of Roman Catholicism, Flanders was seen as a territory studded with “fields that (...) [were] white already unto harvest”<sup>726</sup> (a well-known metaphor, derived from John 4:35, to denote areas yet to be christianised), the «gereformeerde kerken» were depicted as ‘mission stations’,<sup>727</sup> and the ‘schools with the Bible’ were labelled “bruggehoofden voor het Evangelie in [dit] Zendingsgebied” (‘bridge-heads for the Gospel in this mission field’).<sup>728</sup> Furthermore, by devoting much attention to evangelism, the GKB could refute the allegation that they were merely Dutch ‘enclaves’ with no connection to Flanders and strengthen their right to exist as a separate denomination: since the BCZK had only four—later two—congregations in the Dutch-speaking part of Belgium and was therefore primarily oriented towards Wallonia, since the «Bond van Kerken» was rather hesitant to evangelise on a large scale and out in the open<sup>729</sup>, and since other denominations that *did* actively evangelise in Flanders (such as the «Belgische Evangelische Zending» and the Methodists) were, from Neo-Calvinist viewpoint, not sound in doctrine, the GKB were one of the biggest distributors of religious tracts and one of the most active practitioners of open-air evangelism in Flemish Belgium.

Other Protestants were not always pleased with the antithetical and doctrinal character of the evangelisation activities of the «gereformeerden»: in 1956, a fierce polemic was fought out in «*De Kruisbanier*» between leading men of the GKB (Rev. Hegger and the evangelists Jonkers and Sluys in particular), who were convinced that a straightforward approach was the best way to evangelise—

<sup>725</sup> *De Torenwachter* VII.2 (September 1933), 1-2, there 2.

<sup>726</sup> John 4:35. *King James Version of the Bible*. The metaphor was used by K. Sluys in the Dutch edition of «*De Open Poort*» of December 1953: “Men spreekt vaak van witte velden, wanneer het over Zending en Evangelisatie gaat, en het is bijna tot een cliché geworden, waarvan niemand de werkelijke betekenis voelt. In Boechout hebben echter deze woorden van Jezus een werkelijke betekenis, en een ieder die hier staat, weet dater in Vlaanderen waarlijk witte velden zijn.” See: *B.O.P.* XXXIII.12 (December 1953), 1.

<sup>727</sup> See: note 459.

<sup>728</sup> *Mededelingenblad van de gereformeerde kerk te Gent* IX.8 (May 1955), 4.

<sup>729</sup> Dhooghe, ‘Het Belgisch protestantisme’, 351.

as has been said before, they thought that a ‘sin’ should simply be called a sin –, on the one hand, and a group of members and ministers of other denominations, who said that evangelisation should be a dialogue rather than a fire-and-brimstone sermon, on the other hand, that dragged on for nearly six months.<sup>730</sup> It was not a coincidence that Rev. Hegger, a former cleric, was involved in this dispute: no less than *four* priests-turned-parsons have stood in the pulpit and/or evangelised in the service of the GKB during the nearly eighty-five year history of Neo-Calvinist church life in Belgium, which was, in view of the «Gereformeerde Kerken» as a whole, a relatively high number (one must keep in mind that it was rather exceptional when a priest went over to the «Gereformeerde Kerken» and, after the necessary theological training in Amsterdam or Kampen, became an ordained Reformed minister). Flanders was seen as the perfect working environment for ex-clerics, because these were said to know the Roman Catholic way of thinking and way of life better than Dutch «mannenbroeders» who had learned the principles and anything but ‘Roman’ attitude to life of orthodox Calvinism on their mother’s knee. It is, in this respect, also significant to note that the special church commission that was created by the general synod of the GKN in 1927 to advise, assist and financially support the Flemish «gereformeerde kerken» was called «‘deputaatschap voor de *Evangelisatie* in België’», which was a rather misleading designation, since it did much more than aiding the GKB with their evangelism activities. But it clearly underlined that the «Gereformeerde Kerken in België» had by no means the intention to remain Dutch immigrant churches (as was the case with the Reformed communities in North America) forever.

And yet, even though the city upon the hill – the Church, the «*Gereformeerde*» Church – and the ‘schools with the Bible’ should not be inward-looking ‘enclaves’, isolated from the rest of society, the Neo-Calvinist community undeniably had reclusive, protectionist and even isolationist traits. The «*gereformeerden*» wanted to make absolutely sure that their own identity and convictions would not be affected by unwanted influences from the outside and that the Three Forms of Unity, the confessional documents on which their church life was based, were accepted by all church members as the only touchstones of ‘true’ orthodoxy. For that reason, the «Gereformeerde Kerken», in Holland at least, were even sceptical to set up large-scale evangelism activities in the first years of their existence, for they feared that this would bring an emotional albeit doctrinally unsound form of spirituality into the church: “[m]en vreesde dat door [evangelisatie]arbeid en door eventuele ‘resultaten’ aan de beginselvastheid binnen de kerken getornd zou kunnen worden en dat vooral methodistisch-piëtistische invloeden gemakkelijk via het evangelisatiewerk konden binnensluipen en zodoende de

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<sup>730</sup> The polemic started with an article of K. Sluys in the February 11<sup>th</sup>, 1956 edition of «*De Kruisbanier*» (which was a response to an article about evangelism Rev. J. Overdulve had written in the issue of the preceding week), and ended in the edition of June 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1956, with the announcement that a special ‘Tract Commission’ was founded (which was never heard of afterwards).

kracht van het gereformeerde belijden aantasten.”<sup>731</sup> Hence, the «gereformeerden» not only strived for the founding of ‘schools with the Bible’ for evangelistic purposes, but also (and foremost) to protect their own children from opinions that were seen as malevolent and sacrilegious. It was absolutely out of the question that they would sent their kids to public schools: the one time, Neo-Calvinists emphasised that the state education system was not free from Roman Catholic influences, the other time, they portrayed state schools as hotbeds of unbelief and social criticism: “[d]it is het groote gevaar van de openbare school,” Rev. Meijnen, the parson of the «gereformeerde kerk» in Dordrecht, lectured at a VPCO meeting in 1932, “dat de verderfelijke invloeden vaak niet komen in den vorm van het lompe communisme, maar in den beredeneerden vorm van het socialisme.”<sup>732</sup> Life at school should be completely in line with church life and family life: children who were raised «gereformeerd» and who attend «gereformeerde kerken» should receive education based on Neo-Calvinist principles. In Brussels, Antwerp and Ghent, members of the GKB carried this through to such an extent, that they decided to strive for the creation of schools of their own, instead of contenting themselves with broad-based Protestant education. But keeping «*gereformeerde*» schools viable simply proved to be impossible.

Before the Second World War, the relations with other Protestant churches were rather cool (though not explicitly antagonistic), which was, given the genesis of the GKB as orthodox and sound counterpart of the «Bond van Kerken» and the «Belgische Christelijke Zendingskerk» – these denominations had been weighed and found wanting –, not very surprising. The GKB accentuated that they wanted to be firm of principle («‘beginselvast’» as it is called in Dutch); it was this allegiance to the ‘Reformed principles’ that underlay their striving for the establishing of ‘schools with the Bible’ and creation of other confessional-based institutions: “[d]eze beginselvastheid brengt met zich mee een verlangen te kunnen beschikken over eigen instellingen. Zo is er in iedere plaats in België waar een Gereformeerde Kerk is gevestigd, ook een protestantse lagere school.”<sup>733</sup> Yet, other Protestants were less convinced of the necessity to organise themselves *as Protestants* in all spheres of civil society. In consequence, the founding of a Protestant daily (after the example of Abraham Kuyper’s «*De Standaard*»), a Protestant political party (in imitation of the «Anti-Revolutionaire Partij») or a «‘Belgische Christelijke Radio-Vereniging’» (a Belgian equivalent to the Dutch NCRV), to name just a few of the initiatives that have been put forward in GKB-related periodicals, has never been put into effect. Admittedly, there were some Protestant-based societal institutions, like the Belgian Society for Protestant Missions in the Congo and the Faculty of Protestant Theology in Brussels – with which the

<sup>731</sup> Endedijk, *De Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland* I, 151.

<sup>732</sup> *De Torenwachter* VI.3 (November 1932), 1.

<sup>733</sup> Beukenhorst et.al., *Met z’n drieeën op stap*, III [archive of the G.K. in Boechout].

«gereformeerden» were, because of their orientation towards the GKN and Holland, initially not involved –, but these were all *strictly church-related* – which was exactly the reason *why* the «gereformeerden» had kept aloof from these at first, because they had no need for this type of organisations (their ministers were trained at the VU or in Kampen and they contributed to the missionary work of the GKN in Indonesia and South America). From the late 1960s onwards, due to changed / changing opinions, the absolute necessity of having all kinds of social institutions of their own began to be questioned in «gereformeerde» circles as well: in the foregoing decade, the GKB had joined the already existing interdenominational institutions, such as those mentioned in the preceding sentence, and dropped their ideal of organisational formation on a confessional basis. In these years, the old adage ‘our isolation is our strength’ was definitively pushed aside. A distinct Protestant «zuil» has therefore never come into being, but if it had been up to the «gereformeerden» prior to the mid-1960s, such a network of interrelated Protestant-based organisations would have certainly been created.

Next to the ambiguity expounded above – the endeavour to be both a ‘Gideon’s band’ and a ‘city upon a hill’, or, to put it less metaphorically, the tension between ‘openness’ and ‘isolation’ –, there was a second ambiguity that deeply influenced the course of development of Neo-Calvinist church life in Flanders: the complexity of being embedded in a *Dutch* denomination – the GKB were an integral part of the GKN – but located on *Belgian* soil. The GKB’s orientation towards Holland was something ‘innate’: it is even legitimate to ask the question whether separate «gereformeerde kerken» in Belgium would have come into being at all if the «Doleantie» would not have taken place and if Abraham Kuyper would not have personally supported the ‘secession’ of the group around the Dutch tradesman A.G. van Deth in Brussels. In the «*Gereformeerde Kerkbode voor België*», a magazine (modelled on Kuyper’s church weekly «*De Heraut*») whose influence on the build-up of Neo-Calvinist church life in Flanders can not be underestimated, Rev. Hepp, a convinced Kuyperian, realised this: he explicitly stated that the Flemish «gereformeerde kerken» were greatly indebted to Kuyper and his «Doleantie» movement.<sup>734</sup> Those from whom the «gereformeerden» in Belgium had ‘seceded’ – members of local congregations of the «Bond van Kerken» and the «Belgische Christelijke Zendingskerk» – saw it likewise: they called them «‘dolerenden’»<sup>735</sup> and their churches «‘églises doléantiques’».<sup>736</sup> And, as has been said already, Roman Catholics looked upon the «gereformeerde kerken» as the umpteenth Protestant ‘import item’ from abroad. Although the GKB tried to deny this last claim, they felt a deep spiritual connection to the GKN and considered their embedment within the «*Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland*», at least until the beginning of the 1950s, to be indispen-

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<sup>734</sup> See: note 509.

<sup>735</sup> See: note 514.

<sup>736</sup> See: note 517.

sable: Holland had the necessary expertise and financial means to support the little GKB communities. Besides, the Dutch «gereformeerden» saw it as a ‘debt of honour’ to bring orthodox Calvinism ‘back’ to Flanders.

Consequently, developments within *Dutch* Protestantism—with the notable exceptions of the schism within the GKN in 1926 (which *did* lead to some turmoil in the «gereformeerde kerk» of Brussels<sup>737</sup>) and in 1944 (the so-called «‘Vrijmaking’», which seems to have exerted a certain attraction on Rev. Ganzevoort, who was parson in Ghent at the time<sup>738</sup>)—have left their marks on the history of Neo-Calvinist church life in Belgium: “[h]et valt te begrijpen, dat de aansluiting bij een Nederlands kerkverband, de Nederlandse predikanten die haard dienden en de grote financiële steun vanuit Nederland een zwaar Nederlands stempel op de zes kerken drukten. Zij leefden wat geïsoleerd en vormden een soort Hollandse enclave in het protestantse leven in België.”<sup>739</sup> Until well into the 1920s, the then existing GKB congregations could best be characterised as archetypical «Doleantiekerken»—with the activist mentality and the constant fencing with the ‘Reformed principles’ that were both typical of «‘oud-B’»—, which found clear expression in the «*Gereformeerde Kerkbode voor België*»: the magazine incited its readers to (re)claim every inch of Belgian society in the name of Christ the King<sup>740</sup> and stroke an orthodox Kuyperian tone. In the interwar period, the spirit of ‘triumphalism’ that took possession of the GKN reflected on the GKB: it is not a coincidence that precisely in these years, the «gereformeerden» in Belgium radically severed all the remaining bonds with the «*Zendingskerk*» and strived for the fouding of schools on Neo-Calvinist principles instead of on an interdenominational basis. The successes the «gereformeerden» achieved in Dutch society—their social emancipation was fully realised, which was symbolically crowned with Hendrikus Colijn’s long-term premiership—, lead to an increased introversion and isolation. This process of intensified reclusiveness did not pass over the GKB, because of their strong ties with the GKN. Their orientation towards the Dutch Neo-Calvinist church life even lead Rev. D.C. van Lonkhuijzen, the then minister of the «gereformeerde kerk» in Mechlin, to conclude with amazement that the *Belgian* members of the GKB began to adopt *Dutch* cultural habits, whereas, he implied, it should be the other way around. However, if the «gereformeerden» would really want to get a foothold in Belgian Protestantism and Belgian society, a distinct *Flemish* way of being Reformed—Rev. Van Lonkhuijzen did not tell *how* this should be put into effect—had to come into being.<sup>741</sup>

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<sup>737</sup> See: note 605.

<sup>738</sup> See: note 627.

<sup>739</sup> *De Stem* CIV.1 (11<sup>th</sup> January 1975), 3-5, there 4.

<sup>740</sup> This formulation is a reference to Kuyper’s famous phrase: “There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, Who is sovereign over *all*, does not cry: ‘Mine!’”. See: note 84.

<sup>741</sup> See: notes 412 and 413.

From the late 1940s onwards, the bonds with the Netherlands gradually loosened indeed. As a result of the shock the Second World War and the schism of 1944 brought about in Neo-Calvinist circles, the atmosphere within the «Gereformeerde Kerken» changed dramatically and leading men began to reconsider the position of the GKN in Dutch society and Dutch Protestantism. The trauma the «Vrijmaking» caused – approximately ten percent of all «gereformeerden» seceded from the GKN – was immense. After 1944, the pre-War ‘complacency’ and optimism about the future of Neo-Calvinist church life turned into a general opinion that was more susceptible to change and the widely shared sentiment that a potential new schism – the split-up of 1944 was the second one in just eighteen years time – should be avoided at any cost: the «Vrijmaking» ‘had niet alleen flinke deuken toegebracht aan het gereformeerde autoriteitsgeloof en het gereformeerde vooruitgangsgeloof, maar had ook van de weeromstuit geleid tot een geest van grotere tolerantie, de wens om ‘elkaar vast te houden’.’<sup>742</sup> Consequently, the GKN decided to break out of their self-chosen isolation and began to actively seek contact with other orthodox Calvinist denominations in Holland – resulting in the founding of the «Contactorgaan Gereformeerde Gezindte» – and abroad – leading to the creation of the «Gereformeerde Oecumenische Synode». In Belgium, the «gereformeerden» sought reconciliation with those Protestants with whom they had the most in common as well: less than two decades after they had broken off all contacts with the BCZK, the GKB restored relations and even suggested the possibility of a merger with the Dutch-speaking churches of the «Zendingskerk».

Moreover, after the Second World War, the idea that the GKB should have more autonomy and needed to be better integrated into Belgian Protestantism to have any real influence began to take root both in Holland and in Flanders. Their close relationship with the GKN and the image of being Dutch ‘enclaves’ that still clung to them, were seen by the Flemish «gereformeerde kerken», especially from an evangelistic point of view, more and more as an impediment. For that reason, a special meeting platform – which was initially called «‘kring Brussel’» and since 1967 «‘kring België’» – was created in 1950 and the GKB began to participate in inter-Protestant initiatives to an increasing degree. Theological reforms, such as a less literal interpretation of Genesis and a doctrinal devaluation of the Three Forms of Unity, were also responsible for a changed/changing spiritual climate: particularly in the churches in which the ‘Dutch’ element was more dominant than the Flemish (which was the case in the four urban churches), the old allegiance to the ‘Reformed principles’ and Neo-Calvinist exclusivity made way to religious multiformity and a rising call for ecclesiastical unification. Boechout and Denderleeuw, where nearly all «gereformeerden» were native-born Belgians, retained a more traditional character and were therefore less favourably disposed towards progressive theological

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<sup>742</sup> Kuiper, ‘Historisch-sociologische schets van de ontwikkeling der Gereformeerde Kerken’, 30.

tendencies and the creation of a United Protestant Church (which were seen as two sides of the same coin). Yet, notwithstanding the (initial) scepticism of the consistories in these two rural communities, all six GKB congregations agreed to amalgamate with the «Protestantse Kerk van België» (a distant descendant of the «Bond van Kerken») and the «Hervormde Kerk van België» (the old BCZK) into the «Verenigde Protestantse Kerk in België» – which was established in 1979, more than twenty-five years before the GKN would fuse together with the «Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk» and the Dutch «Evangelisch-Lutherse Kerk» into the «Protestantse Kerk in Nederland». <sup>743</sup>

With this momentous event, the history of the GKB as a separate denomination came to an end. It is rather paradoxical that the Neo-Calvinist church life in Belgium had come into being as a result of a schism within *Dutch* Calvinism (the «Doleantie»), which was completely unrelated to the situation in Belgian Protestantism, and that the ultimate dissolving of the «Gereformeerde Kerken in België» – the merging of the GKB into the VPKB – was most enthusiastically applauded by *Dutch* church members.<sup>744</sup> Something similar can be said in relation to other issues as well, for example as regards politics: after the mid-1960s, *Dutch* «gereformeerden» brought politics into the pulpit, but beforehand, it had also been *Dutchmen* who had said that the Church should not interfere in (party) politics and who had therefore felt the want of a Belgian equivalent to the ARP. One may even question whether a *Flemish* GKB member would have regretted the lack of a Protestant political party at all, if periodicals like the «*Gereformeerde Kerkbode voor België*» and «*De Open Poort*» would not have addressed the issue: the ministers – all but three<sup>745</sup> – and other leading men within the GKB all had the Dutch nationality and since the ministers were also the editors of the GKB-related magazines, the «Gereformeerde Kerken in België» spoke with a *Dutch* voice, voiced *Dutch* opinions and were focused on the *Dutch* church life. Regularly, the situation in Dutch Calvinism was simply projected on Belgian Protestantism – remember how the first GKB congregation had come into being (!) –, which had, of course, profound consequences for the way the «gereformeerden» in Belgium have acted and thought. In fact, the two ambiguities set forth above can be reduced to one major paradox: although the GKB initially had the ambition to ‘re-Christianise’ Flanders and considered their embedment within the GKN to be indispensable for the realisation of this mission, they had to loosen their bonds with Holland and merge with the two denominations from which they had ‘seceded’ into a hybrid amalgam (the VPKB) that was not exclusively based on the Three Forms of Unity and not structured in accordance with the «Dordtse Kerkorde», to be able to answer their apostolic calling in Belgium to the full.

<sup>743</sup> For a detailed account of the genesis of the «Protestantse Kerk in Nederland», see: B. Wallet, *Samen op Weg naar de Protestantse Kerk in Nederland. Het verhaal achter de vereniging* (Zoetermeer 2005).

<sup>744</sup> *Brief van de secretaris van de commissie van beheer van de (voormalige) gereformeerde kerk van Brussel aan de kerkenraad van de (voormalige) gereformeerde kerk ter plaatse*, dated 7<sup>th</sup> December 1979 [archive of the G.K. in Brussel]. See also: note 579.

<sup>745</sup> See: note 403.

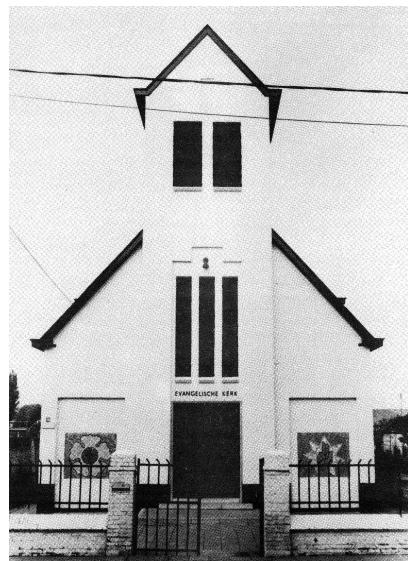
To obtain a firm footing on Belgian soil, the *Dutch* city, located upon the *Flemish* hill, had to be (come) Flemish as well.

# **APPENDICES**

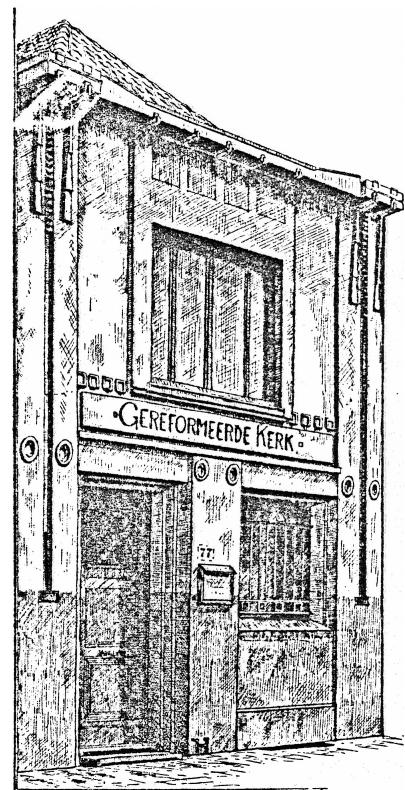
## A. THE «GEREFORMEERDE KERKEN IN BELGIË»



Brussels



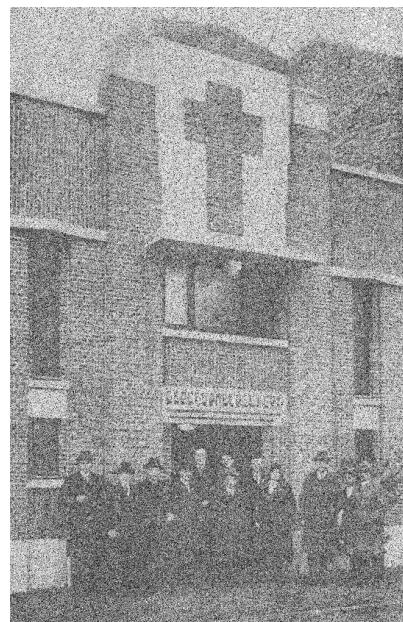
Denderleeuw



Antwerp



Ghent



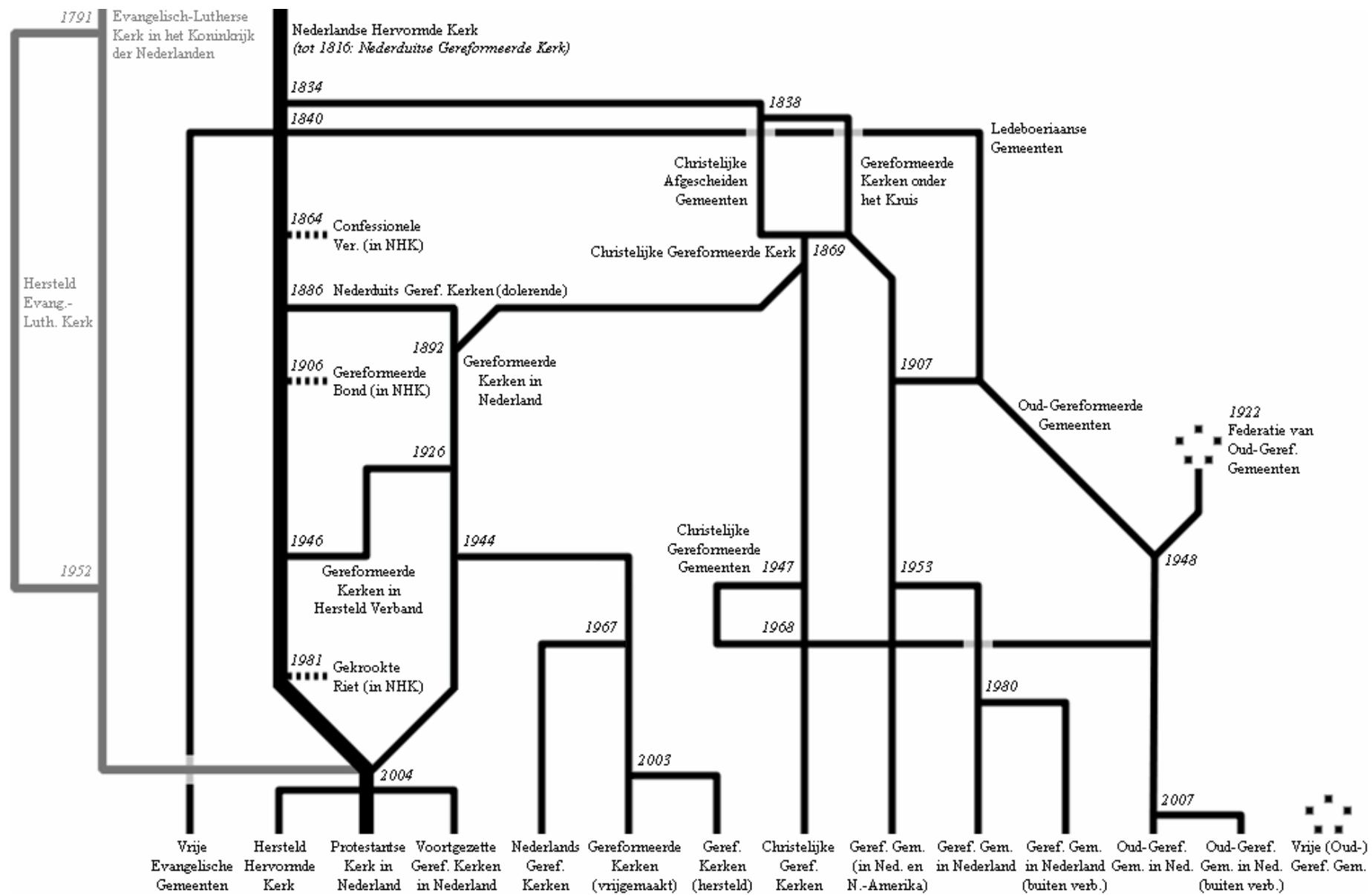
Mechlin



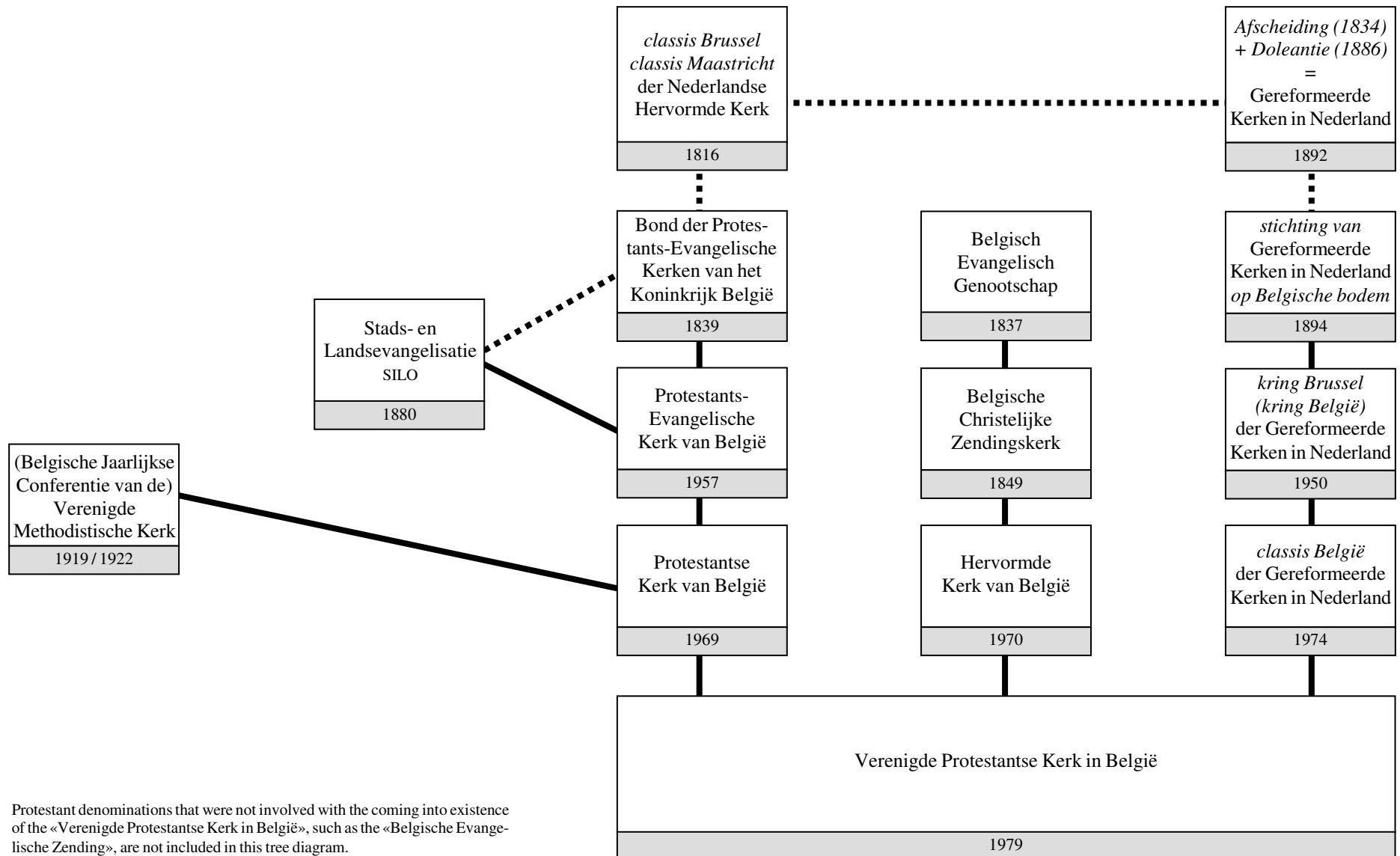
Boechout

The churches in Brussels, Antwerp and Ghent were initially situated on a different location, but these older locations are not depicted here.

## B. TREE DIAGRAM OF CALVINIST DENOMINATIONS IN THE NETHERLANDS



## C. TREE DIAGRAM OF PROTESTANT DENOMINATIONS IN BELGIUM



Protestant denominations that were not involved with the coming into existence of the «Verenigde Protestantse Kerk in België», such as the «Belgische Evangelische Zending», are not included in this tree diagram.

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- The archival sources are not listed separately in this bibliography.
- Only the sources mentioned in the footnotes are listed in this bibliography.
- All sources are listed alphabetically.

## Visited archives and libraries



- |  |   |
|--|---|
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- |                             |                            |                               |                                  |
|-----------------------------|----------------------------|-------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| • 1892<br><i>Amsterdam</i>  | • 1908<br><i>Amsterdam</i> | • 1933<br><i>Middelburg</i>   | • 1949<br><i>The Hague</i>       |
| • 1893<br><i>Dordrecht</i>  | • 1911<br><i>Zwolle</i>    | • 1936<br><i>Amsterdam</i>    | • 1967-1968<br><i>Amsterdam</i>  |
| • 1896<br><i>Middelburg</i> | • 1914<br><i>The Hague</i> | • 1938-1939<br><i>Sneek</i>   | • 1969-1970<br><i>Sneek</i>      |
| • 1902<br><i>Arnhem</i>     | • 1926<br><i>Assen</i>     | • 1943-1945<br><i>Utrecht</i> | • 1975-1976<br><i>Maastricht</i> |
| • 1905<br><i>Utrecht</i>    | • 1927<br><i>Groningen</i> | • 1946<br><i>Zwolle</i>       | • 1977-1979<br><i>Zwolle</i>     |

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