

Religion and the Schools: The Case of Utrecht

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The matter of religion and the schools has again surfaced in the public forum, both in Canada and the United States. Public officials, private groups, and individual parents have shown renewed interest in the place of religion in education. The decline of established religion, the erosion of personal religious involvement, and the increased ignorance of the historical role of religion have been linked to its absence in the public schools. Furthermore, some see the waning of public morality and Christian values as reciprocally related to the complete secularization of public education. All of this has sparked intense debate. Concern regarding a religiously hollow curriculum, an absence of moral guidance, and a lack of spiritual vision in public education is growing. Also on the rise is the number of parents choosing private schools, even home schooling, for their children.¹

These current concerns raise three sets of controversial questions. First, what is the meaning and purpose of education, and what role does religion play in determining that meaning and purpose? Second, who is ultimately responsible for the education of children, and what role should parents have in determining the kind of education they wish for their children? Third, should private religious schools be publicly funded?

These questions and the controversies they generate have a long history. Beginning in the early nineteenth century, debates regarding the place of religion in education became particularly intense with the emergence of public education and the common school. Both in North America and Europe common themes and issues surfaced in the debates and conflicts over education. The drive toward national unity; the acceptance of religious diversity; the struggle to establish common schools and universal education; the attempt to improve the quality of teachers, facilities, and

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¹Page Smith, *Killing the Spirit: Higher Education in America* (New York, 1990); George M. Marsden and Bradley J. Longfield, eds., *Secularization of the Academy* (New York, 1992); George Marsden, *The Soul of the American University: From Protestant Establishment to Established Unbelief* (New York, 1994); Robert N. Sollod, "The Hollow Curriculum: The Place of Religion and Spirituality in Society is Too Often Missing," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 18 Mar. 1992, A60; Christina Hoff Summers, "Teaching the Virtues," *AFA Journal* (Jan. 1992), 13–16; Eleanor Smith, "The New Moral Classroom," *Psychology Today* (May 1989), 32–36.

curricula; and the impact of Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment thinking as a challenge to Christianity, all had a formative influence on the development of education in the nineteenth century.²

The dynamics of the struggle surfaced in a unique manner in the Netherlands, most specifically in the city of Utrecht. Of interest in the Dutch example are the kinds of controversies that arose and the manner of their eventual resolution. After a century of conflict, the Netherlands had in place an educational structure which included three equally funded and equally independent school systems: public, Protestant, and Catholic.

The struggle entailed a controversy between public and private education, between a state-controlled educational system and one controlled by churches, school associations, individuals, or parents. It had to do with the legal right of individuals, groups, and associations to establish and control private schools, with the freedom to determine the kind of education they deemed important for their children. It also involved education funding and the government's attempt to improve the quality of the educational system: its pedagogical methods, its curricula, its teachers, and its facilities. The school struggle, as it came to be known, involved not only national political figures, notable citizens, and prominent church leaders, but also the ordinary people of the Netherlands.

Although the school struggle concerned the schools, it reached far beyond their parameters. It reflected the crosscurrents and tensions in Dutch society as a whole. In particular, the school controversy stirred the religious life of the people. Concerning no other issue was the fight over religious faith, identity, and tradition more pronounced, the battle more ardently waged, and the controversy more drawn out. No other single

²For a history of education in Germany, see Marjorie Lamberti, *State, Society, and the Elementary School in Imperial Germany* (New York, 1989); and idem, "State, Church, and the Politics of School Reform during the Kulturkampf," *Central European History* 19 (Mar. 1986): 63–81; Karl A. Schleunes, "Enlightenment, Reform, Reaction: The Schooling Revolution in Prussia," *Central European History* 12 (Dec. 1979): 315–42; Ernst Christian Helmreich, *Religious Education in German Schools: An Historical Approach* (Cambridge, Mass., 1959). For a history of education in France, see Joseph N. Moody, *French Education since Napoleon* (Syracuse, N.Y., 1978); Theodore Zeldin, *France, 1848–1945* (Oxford, Eng., 1977), vol. 2; Phyllis Stock-Morton, *Moral Education for a Secular Society: The Development of Morale Laïque in Nineteenth Century France* (Albany, N.Y., 1988). For a history of education in England, see Michael Sanderson, *Education, Economic Change, and Society in England, 1780–1870* (London, 1983); Anne Digby and Peter Searby, *Children, School, and Society in Nineteenth Century England* (London, 1981); James Murphy, *Church, State, and Schools in Britain, 1800–1970* (London, 1971); G. F. A. Best, "The Religious Difficulties of National Education in England, 1800–70," *Cambridge Historical Journal* 12 (1956): 155–73. For a history of education in Canada and the United States, see Frederick M. Binder, *The Age of the Common School, 1830–65* (New York, 1974); Charles Leslie Glenn, Jr., *The Myth of the Common School* (Amherst, Mass., 1988); David Tyack, "The Kingdom of God and the Common School," *Harvard Educational Review* 36 (no. 4, 1966): 447–69; Bruce Curtis, *Building the Educational State: Canada West, 1836–1871* (Barcombe, Lewes, 1988); J. Donald Wilson, Robert M. Stamp, and Louis-Philippe Audet, eds., *Canadian Education: A History* (Scarborough, Ont., 1970).

issue involved more individuals, stirred more resentment, and created more factions than the struggle to determine, control, and define the direction, philosophy, and structure of education and the educational system. According to one historian, “the school struggle was really an effort to control the soul of youth; basically it was a conflict of different views of life.”³

Those different views began to surface at the turn of the nineteenth century. With the influx of revolutionary thinking from abroad, the Dutch nation had begun to drift from its orthodox religious moorings. Further, to meet the needs of a changing nation, the Dutch state began to assume a greater role in the education of youth. A battle of conflicting views over the shaping of society soon became apparent.

At issue, in all areas where the religious factor operated, were disagreements regarding the meaning and purpose of education. Of particular concern were the deemphasis on Christian principles as the basis of education in new school laws, the removal of the Bible from the classroom, and the elimination of instruction in the Reformed Christian confessions formerly incorporated in the education of youth. Many Orthodox Reformed Protestants became alarmed by the failure to ground education in the Scriptures, as new school laws strove to enhance a religiously tolerant and unified nation. Catholics, who initially perceived these new laws as a means to greater religious freedom, eventually rejected them in the second half of the century for their liberalism. When an emerging public system incorporated only the views of liberal educators, Orthodox Reformed and Catholics alike sought the legal right to establish and attain public funding for their own schools.

In the Netherlands the school struggle occurred in almost all places, with varying degrees of intensity. The city of Utrecht presents an intriguing microhistory because virtually all the elements and characteristics of that struggle surfaced there. Its geographic centrality, religious demography, and socioeconomic and political characteristics reveal change that occurred in the nation as a whole.

Utrecht has been an important religious, cultural, and political center throughout Dutch history. The Romans established the city in the first century A.D. In the sixteenth century political control of the city changed from Catholic to Protestant hands, resulting in the official establishment of the *Hervormde Kerk* (Reformed Church) in Utrecht in 1619. *Hervorm-*

³Adriaan Goslinga, *De beschrijving van de geschiedenis van de schoolstrijd: Voordracht den 15den April gehouden op het Philologencongres te Groningen* (Amsterdam, 1925), 10–11. Karl Schleunes concludes the following regarding the centrality of schooling in Europe: “Of the revolutionary transformations that shaped the nineteenth-century European world, no one of them touched more directly the lives of the broad masses than did the development of the schooled society.” Schleunes, “Enlightenment, Reform, Reaction,” 315. According to Best, education in the English context was bound up with the interests and prospects of the nation itself, and is “a problem common to all States and societies.” Best, “The Religious Difficulties,” 160.

den were Calvinist in theological doctrine and ecclesiastical structure.⁴ Utrecht eventually had a Catholic minority and a Reformed Protestant majority. The latter included the Orthodox Reformed. Although a number of other groups (Lutheran, Mennonites, and Jews), small in number with little power and influence, also lived in Utrecht, the Orthodox Reformed in Utrecht, as well as in the nation as a whole, led the struggle to establish and acquire public funding for private Christian schools. The Catholics did not join that struggle until the latter part of the nineteenth century.⁵

The Orthodox Reformed were a small, persuasive, and not always clearly identifiable group within the *Hervormde Kerk*, the largest and most influential ecclesiastical denomination in Utrecht. They resisted the theological liberalism sweeping the *Hervormde Kerk* in the nineteenth century as well as the structural reorganization favoring a more hierarchical order. A number of Orthodox Reformed in Utrecht joined the *Reveil*, a Protestant revival movement which reached the Netherlands in the 1830s and attracted men of wealth and status. Two schisms within the *Hervormde Kerk* that took place on the national level in the nineteenth century also occurred in Utrecht. The first, the *Afscheiding* ("secession"), had its beginnings in Utrecht in October 1832. The *Afgescheidenen*, many of simple means, were isolationist, pietistic, and Reformed in doctrine. The second schism, the *Doleantie* (from the Dutch word for *mourning*), occurred in 1887 in Utrecht. The *Dolerenden*, most of middle means, affirmed the Reformed doctrines and earlier ecclesiastical structure, but were more cosmopolitan in outlook, with a dynamic and reforming spirit.⁶

In the first half of the century, a two-tiered social class structure characterized the Netherlands. The upper class typically occupied positions of authority in the churches and local, regional, and even national government. Preachers, teachers, and officers, though of lower income, were often identified with this group. The lower class consisted of the poor, the destitute, and the working class. In Utrecht and elsewhere they suffered exceptional hardships in the economic crises of the 1830s and 1840s.⁷

⁴"Kerkeraad Nederlands Hervormde Gemeente," Inventaris 1–3, Gemeente Archief Utrecht (hereafter GAU).

⁵In 1851 Reformed Protestants numbered approximately 27,500 and Catholics 18,000, out of a total population of 48,000. In 1900, Reformed Protestants numbered 53,800 and Catholics 38,000, out of a total population of 104,190. Gemeente Verslagen Utrecht, no. 3404, 1851–1900, and Kerkeraad Nederlands Hervormde Kerk: Inventaris 1834, GAU.

⁶See A. J. Rasker, *De Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk vanaf 1795: Haar geschiedenis en theologie in de negentiende en twintigste eeuw* (Kampen, 1981). The *Afgescheidenen* numbered approximately 100 in 1834 and 635 in 1900. The *Dolerenden* numbered 195 in 1893 and 5,137 in 1900. Gereformeerde Kerk, no. 939, and Gemeente Verslagen Utrecht, no. 3404, 1851–1900, GAU.

⁷See A. H. Beuger, "De sociale structuur in de stad Utrecht, 1830–58" (Doctoraalscriptie, Rijksuniversiteit Utrecht, 1977); and J. Veldman, "De armoede in Utrecht, 1815–50" (Doctoraalscriptie, Rijksuniversiteit Utrecht, 1954).

The second half of the century saw considerable improvements in the economic welfare of the people. Most significant was the rise of a middle class, which included intellectuals, officials, and the self-employed. Their educational needs, as well as those of skilled and unskilled workers, forced a reclassification of the schools to reflect the socioeconomic changes.⁸

The Netherlands came under the political influence of the French at the turn of the nineteenth century. The Patriots, a liberal, pro-French party, advocated centralized government and freedom of the press and of religion during their reign in the Batavian Republic (1798–1813). They also separated church and state. The Orthodox Reformed regarded the revolutionary principles of the Batavian Republic as ungodly. The Catholics disagreed and greeted these principles with approval, sensing in them increased religious freedom.⁹ As French power weakened in Europe, the Dutch again gained control of their own affairs. They established the Dutch monarchy by proclaiming William I sovereign prince of the Netherlands in 1813 and king in 1814. Utrecht's political leanings became conservative, Protestant, and monarchist. In this changing situation, the *Hervormde Kerk* again solidified its position, creating at the same time a rising anti-papism. Conservatives controlled the *Gemeenteraad* (town council) in the first half of the century.¹⁰

In midcentury more changes occurred. Some Orthodox Reformed banded together to form an Anti-Revolutionary group in 1851. Initially consisting only of the wealthy, it later attracted many *kleine luyden*: poor and devout Orthodox Reformed. More significant, however, was the increase of Liberals in government, both on the local and national levels. They were bolstered by Catholics. For this support, the Liberals permitted the procuring of the Bishop's Seat in Utrecht in 1853, and papal authority was again established for Catholics in the Netherlands. The Catholic-Liberal alliance broke in the early 1860s, partly due to the 1864 papal encyclical *Quanta Cura* and its *Syllabus of Errors*. When the voting franchise was increased in 1878, Liberal, Catholic, and Anti-Revolu-

⁸See J. W. van der Meulen, "Staat van de Utrechtse bedrijven in de 2e helft van de 19e eeuw" (Doctoraalscriptie, Rijksuniversiteit Utrecht, n.d.); Frida de Jonge, "Het bedrijfsleven in de stad Utrecht, 1875–1910" (Doctoraalscriptie, Rijksuniversiteit Utrecht, 1975); and J. J. Giele and G. J. Van Oenen, "De sociale structuur van de Nederlands samenleving rond 1850," *Mededelingenblad* 45 (May 1974): 2–31.

⁹See Simon Schama, *Patriots and Liberators: Revolution in the Netherlands, 1780–1813* (London, 1977); and L. J. Rogier, *Katholieke herleving: Geschiedenis van Katholiek Nederland sinds 1853* (The Hague, 1956), 10. For a history of the Patriots in Utrecht, see Albertus van Hulzen, *Utrecht in de Patriottentijd* (Zaltbommel, 1966).

¹⁰Jacqueline Joosten and Paul van Meegeren, "Politieke leven in Utrecht, 1848–58" (Doctoraalscriptie, Rijksuniversiteit Utrecht, 1984); B. van Lingem, "De instelling van het gemeentebestuur van Utrecht tot aanzien van het sociale en economische leven van 1840–70" (Doctoraalscriptie, Rijksuniversiteit Utrecht, 1965).

tionary political factions dotted not only the national, but also the Utrecht, landscape.¹¹

These changes had a formidable impact on the school struggle. In Utrecht that struggle developed in four distinct phases. The first phase, which began in 1748 and ended with the 1806 National School Law, was marked by initial reforms and the beginnings of a national educational system. The second phase, which lasted until 1848, concerned the further development of public education, and the legal right to establish private schools. The third phase, beginning with the Constitution of 1848 and lasting until 1889, concerned the expansion and secularization of public education and the increasing costs of private education. The final phase of the school struggle, initiated by the 1889 school law and concluded by the 1917 Constitution, involved the change from partial to full government subsidy for private Christian schools.

During the entire first phase two basic issues surfaced. The first concerned control of education, including the kind given in private, church-operated schools. The second concerned the religious orientation of education—specifically, should education be orthodox Christian or liberal Christian; and should the general purpose of education be to teach youth Christian doctrine, morals, and values, or train them for civil and social responsibilities, or should it do both?

Learned societies, established in the late eighteenth century in various places, including Utrecht, began to concern themselves with educational matters. Their views on pedagogy and curriculum were influenced by reformers such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi. One influential group was the Society for the General Good (*Maatschappij tot Nut van het Algemeen*), established in the Netherlands in 1784 and locally in Utrecht in 1786–87.¹² The Society believed that education should nurture children to adulthood, not to devout membership in the church. It opposed the teaching of church dogma in the schools, but not of Christianity in general. It sought to develop a more religiously tolerant attitude in a common public school.

¹¹See R. Hagoort, *Tot zegen geleid: Gedenkschrift bij het 60 jarig bestaan der Anti-Revolutionaire Kiesvereening "Nederland en Oranje" te Utrecht* (Utrecht, 1928); Herman H. van Leeuwen, "Doleantie en kleine luyden in de stad Utrecht, 1883–89" (Doctoraalscriptie, Rijksuniversiteit Utrecht, 1984); John Coleman, *The Evolution of Dutch Catholicism, 1958–1974* (Berkeley, 1978), 31–45; Herman Bakvis, *Catholic Power in the Netherlands* (Kingston, 1981), 60–64; and F. R. Kat, "De instelling van het gemeentebestuur van Utrecht tot aanzien van het sociale en economische leven van 1870–1900" (Doctoraalscriptie, Rijksuniversiteit Utrecht, 1965).

¹²W. W. Mijnhardt and A. J. Wichers, eds., *Om het algemeen volksgeluk: Twee eeuwen particulier initiatief, 1784–1984* (Edam, 1984). See also J. van Veen, "Een burger initiatief tot volksbeschatting: Het Departement Utrecht van de Maatschappij tot Nut van het Algemeen en haar activiteiten, 1786–1815" (Doctoraalscriptie, Rijksuniversiteit Utrecht, 1982).

The Society's influence in Utrecht was exerted through the local Committee of Public Education, established by the municipal government in 1795. This committee, a forerunner to the Local School Commission, assumed control of all matters dealing with education. Through the committee the local government affirmed its responsibility for the education of all youth. As in other nations, the separation taking place at this time between church and state made the state responsible for education.¹³

That responsibility was exercised through a number of school regulations, and the first of these, formulated in October 1796, affected all schools. Among other things, it demanded an interconfessional system, which was open to Christians of all persuasions. The new regulation took immediate effect in the two publicly funded schools in Utrecht.¹⁴ City authorities were unable to impose the new regulation on the two *Hervormde Kerk diakoniescholen*, schools established specifically for the poor. *Regenten*, church council trustees in charge of these schools, who were largely of Orthodox Reformed persuasion, refused to abide by the new ruling. They sought to avoid the liberal views of the Enlightenment that they saw in the nonsectarian approach to education.

Subsequent events led quickly to the emergence of two distinct educational systems: a public system fully controlled by the state; and a private system supervised by the state but administratively and financially controlled by private individuals, groups, or churches. This distinction had not clearly existed before, and it resulted in a collision between two powers: the state and the church. What developed greatly affected education at the local level. It proved to be a formidable challenge for *Hervormde Kerk* members concerned with reforms in education, particularly in regard to religious instruction.¹⁵

The first national school law, enacted in 1801, advocated teaching reforms. This new law was influenced by the Society for the General Good, non-Reformed leaders, and other organizations guided by reform

¹³A. M. van der Giezen, "De oprichting," 1935 (mimeograph) 11–26, GAU. See also Engelina Petronella de Booy, *Kweekhoven der wijsheid: Basis-en vervolgonderwijs in de steden van de provincie Utrecht van 1580 tot het begin der 19e eeuw* (Zutphen, 1980), 189–200.

¹⁴"Resolutie van het comite tot publiek onderwijs," 18 Aug. 1796, no. 966**, Stadsarchief III, GAU. There is no record of the existence of private Catholic schools at this point.

¹⁵Although a collision also occurred in Germany, the constitutional right of the Prussian churches' involvement in public education had been established by the 1794 Civil Code. This right was sustained throughout the century, even though it was periodically tested. See Lamberti, *State, Society, and the Elementary School in Imperial Germany*. In England the churches' involvement, through their respective school societies, in the education of the masses was almost assumed, if not expected. See Best, "The Religious Difficulties." A. M. van der Giezen, *De eerste fase van de schoolstrijd in Nederland, 1795–1806* (Assen, 1937), 44.

ideas. The law also made statements regarding the purpose of education. Schools administered by the state were to teach “reading, writing, and the first principles of arithmetic; this instruction shall be so organized that, through the development of the rational potentialities of the children . . . it shall form them into rational human beings, and further, will imprint in their hearts the knowledge and feeling of everything which they owe to the supreme being, to society, to their parents, to themselves, and to their fellowmen.” The Orthodox Reformed in Utrecht disagreed with this stated purpose of education, even for the public schools. They especially objected to what the new law omitted, namely, “Christian virtues, religion, and God.” What was most worrisome for the Orthodox Reformed was the potentially neutralizing intent of the law because it sought to eliminate the teaching of all doctrine which might be offensive: “any dogma which is differently understood by any church . . . must be omitted.” Contention had surfaced earlier in 1796, when this issue had set *regenten* on a collision course with the Utrecht Committee for Public Education. The situation intensified because local authorities sought increased control of schools, even church-operated *diakoniescholen*.¹⁶

The municipal authorities in Utrecht considered some of the concerns of the Orthodox Reformed when they implemented a local school ordinance. The Utrecht School Law of 1802 stated that “All appropriate opportunities shall be taken to carefully make the children conscious of the power, wisdom, and goodness of God, to spawn a reverence and thankfulness to their Creator and Redeemer, love for their parents, schoolmasters, and other benefactors, and to generate honesty, moderation, trust, and respect for themselves.” Teachers in the public schools were to give instruction in the “general concepts of the Christian religion and morality.” They were not to teach the doctrines of the *Hervormde Kerk*.¹⁷

A second national school law (1803) did much to advance a state monopoly in education. Like the 1801 school law, it gave more power to the local and national authorities. It was implemented in part to weaken forces such as the Utrecht church council, which resisted the state’s role in education. But the new law, as it turned out, had little effect on the *diakonie*-

¹⁶Francois M. C. E. Koksma, *Het karakter van het openbare lager onderwijs* (Ph.D. diss., Rijksuniversiteit Utrecht, 1888), 4–5. The Minister of Education responsible for the law was J. Hendrik van der Palm. See Aart de Groot, *Leven en arbeid van J. H. van der Palm* (Wageningen, 1960). See also Simon Schama, “Schools and Politics in the Netherlands, 1796–1814,” *Historical Journal* 13 (1970): 605. D. Langedijk, *De geschiedenis van het Protestants-Christelijk onderwijs* (Delft, 1953), 8. See also Harvey Hillson Ginsburg, “The Struggle for the Control of Primary Education in the Netherlands, 1848–1917” (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1952), 176. “Request van den Grooten Kerkeraad der Nederduitsche Gereformeerde Gemeente aan het Provinciaal Bestuur,” 1797, “Kerkeraad Nederlands Hervormde Gemeente,” GAU.

¹⁷School Ordonnantie 1802, Hoofdstuk 4, Articlen 16–17, no. 966***, Stadsarchief III, GAU.

scholen, which continued to operate much as they had in the past. Nonetheless, members of the church council, concerned with the public system, were beginning to realize that the slow disappearance of the Reformed Protestant religion in public education was a distinct possibility. That was confirmed in the 1806 school law, which began a second phase of the school struggle.¹⁸

The second phase dealt with two basic concerns. The first involved continued efforts of the Dutch government to create a nonsectarian public system, one that stressed religious tolerance and Christian virtue but not doctrine. The second dealt again with control of education, particularly the establishment of private schools. The 1806 school law stated clearly its goal for public education: "All education shall be instituted such that through the attaining of proper and useful knowledge, the intellectual abilities of children shall be developed, and that they shall be trained in all social and Christian virtues." What "all social and Christian virtues" meant was not specified, but it clearly referred to an inclusive "Christianity above denominational divisions." The law sought to "stimulate morality and religion, both based upon Divine Revelation in nature as well as in the Bible."¹⁹ In addition, the new law retained a long-standing practice: "the school day or the school week [shall] begin with a suitable psalm or hymn, and require, at least once a week, the recitation of a 'short and suitable Christian prayer'." It also permitted doctrinal instruction after school hours, a matter the state wished to leave to the churches. Secretary of State Hendrick van Stralen sent letters to all ecclesiastical groups in the Netherlands suggesting that "responsibility for the instruction of the youth in their religious beliefs rested entirely with [them]." Although many local churches favored this suggestion, the Orthodox Reformed in Utrecht did not.²⁰

The new law further mandated a list of books for all schools. Private schools were permitted to supplement their own materials, but the list did not include the Bible. Adriaan van den Ende, the educational reformer and Minister of Internal Affairs who had drafted the new law, felt the Bible, which had been used as a primary text since the eighteenth century, was too difficult to read for elementary school children. When Van den Ende was called upon by the Orthodox Reformed to defend his omission, he explained that the intent was not to keep the Bible from the public schools. The Bible was one of those books that "in specific times

¹⁸W. G. van der Hulst, *De boom groeide: Twee honderd jaar Nederlandse Hervormde Gemeente scholen te Utrecht, 1748-1948* (Utrecht, 1948), 52-53.

¹⁹"Reglement voor het lager scholen binnen de Bataafsche Republiek," 1806, Article 22, GAU; Koksmas, *Het karakter van het openbare lager onderwijs*, 11.

²⁰"Reglement 1806," Article 6, GAU; T. M. Gilhuis, *Memorietafel van het Christelijk onderwijs: De geschiedenis van de schoolstrijd* (Kampen, 1974), 38-39.

and on appropriate occasions should be read and studied.” When and how that ought to be done should be left to the discretion of the individual teacher.²¹ Van den Ende later produced an optional list of books that contained Bible stories for children. This politically astute maneuver was intended to appease the Orthodox Reformed, but they saw the removal of the Bible as a text integral to education as just one more step in removing those things they considered vital to a Reformed education. They came to realize that an erosion of Reformed Protestantism in public education had now clearly occurred, a situation that the Catholics clearly favored.

The 1806 law successfully instituted a state-controlled public school system. If the Orthodox Reformed in Utrecht had hoped for some increased freedom from the 1806 law, it did not materialize. While the law was exhaustive and brought beneficial changes, “freedom of education” was not one of them, that is, the freedom to establish private schools. Permission from local authorities was still required, a ruling that dated from 1631 in Utrecht. Its original intent was to curtail Catholic schools and regulate competition by protecting those schoolmasters who depended on the financial success of their private schools. Early in the nineteenth century the ruling favored a state-controlled public education.²²

When the Dutch sovereign William I came to the throne in 1813 after the departure of the French, the former ideas on education remained. A royal decree of that year changed little of the 1806 school law. This decree bothered Catholics, especially those in Belgium, which united with the Netherlands in 1815. They opposed a mixed public school with its Protestant bias.²³

Subsequent decrees of 1822 and 1824 tightened rather than loosened state control of education. An 1829 royal commission failed to garner sufficient support to eliminate required municipal authorization for private schools. Protestant supporters of public education feared a proliferation of Catholic schools, which they felt would impede the public system and its teachers. The national government convinced the king that “freedom of education was not in accordance with the wishes of the official (Protestant) Netherlands.”²⁴

²¹Quotation from Langedijk, *De geschiedenis van het Protestants-Christelijk onderwijs*, 15.

²²“Reglement 1806,” Article 22, GAU; De Booy, *Kweekhoven der wijsheid*, 131.

²³This not-so-subtle Protestant bias in the nonsectarian school was also a problem in the United States. See Glenn, Jr., *The Myth of the Common School*; Tyack, “The Kingdom of God and the Common School”; and Binder, *The Age of the Common School*, 57–73.

²⁴Langedijk, *De geschiedenis van het Protestants-Christelijk onderwijs*, 35. Catholics in Belgium opposed these decrees, regarding them as more Protestant interference in their schools. That interference was one more in a list that eventually led to the Belgian Secession of 1830.

The king did seek to make the schools more religiously tolerant. A royal decree of 1830, reaffirming support for the School Law of 1806, instructed local school authorities to ensure that the religious convictions of all children were not offended. A royal decree of 1842 required teachers to make available for inspection all books, songs, or writings used in the public schools. If any seemed offensive, the local school inspector was obliged to take the appropriate steps to have them removed. These measures helped eliminate the Protestant bias that many Catholics felt without sparing them from the religious views of liberal educators. As a result Catholics now too began to insist on “freedom of education”—the constitutional right to establish their own schools.²⁵

The 1842 decree did acknowledge that children should not be without religious instruction. It reiterated an 1806 stipulation that school facilities be made available before or after school for biblical or doctrinal instruction. The *Hervormde Kerk* in Utrecht had earlier established a Committee of Religious Instruction to take full advantage of this opportunity. All this appeared to please some in the *Hervormde Kerk*, who seemed quite satisfied with the public system in Utrecht. One Rev. van Hoogstraten stated that the schools “concern themselves with the Christian upbringing of children.”²⁶

The Reformed Orthodox, however, were not satisfied with separate religious instruction. Reformed teaching, some of them felt, had to pervade the entire school curriculum. Yet it was not clear that they themselves fully understood what that meant, even in regard to the *diakoniescholen*. Not infrequently, materials used in these schools were borrowed and in some cases virtually copied from the Society for the Public Good, the very organization they opposed. In 1826 the *regenten* had compiled a list of books which included some published by the Society. These books advocated a morality based on reason rather than revelation, promoted self-benefit rather than self-denial, and presented Jesus as a good model rather than a crucified and risen Savior—all of which contradicted Reformed theology.²⁷

²⁵An open letter in the Catholic paper, *De Noordbrabander*, written in 1840 by Jan Wep of Breda, called for freedom of education and worship. See Rogier, *Katholieke herleving*, 38–42. A similar situation developed in France. When the state assumed control of education and began to eliminate Catholic involvement in public schools, Catholics and their religious societies struggled for the “freedom to teach.” See Moody, *French Education since Napoleon*, 15, 19, 35, 50.

²⁶J. H. Adriani, “De diakoniescholen der Nederduitsche Hervormde Gemeente te Utrecht,” 1943 (mimeograph), GAU.

²⁷A. M. van der Giezen, “Een moment uit der onderwijskunde Ontwikkeling van de scholen der Nederduitsche Gereformeerde Gemeente te Utrecht,” Utrecht, 1935 (mimeograph) 4, 8–10, GAU. See also M. Rietveld van Wingerden, “Orthodox Protestanten en het kinderboek,” *Documentatieblad voor de Nederlandse kerkgeschiedenis van de negentiende eeuw* 25 (Nov. 1986): 32–33.

Some teachers also were not conscious of the dilemma they posed for themselves. Reinhard Husen, later a vociferous defender of Orthodox Reformed schools, was at first favorably inclined toward the Society: "The tireless zeal of the Society for the Public Good, in regard to the importance of civilization, has contributed much to the flowering of education, that will soon be praised even by strangers." Of the 1806 school law, which incorporated much of the Society's thinking, he writes: "by means of this law education and civilization are greatly advanced in the Netherlands."²⁸

Perhaps such a remark ought not be surprising. A. de Bruin argues that not much difference existed between public and private schools in the Netherlands during the 1840s. If we consider Utrecht's general orthodox religious character, this indeed may have been the case here also, regardless of official rulings on the national level. According to J. H. Adriani, it was not until 1848 that the Orthodox Reformed began to react more uniformly to the spirit guiding the public schools.²⁹

It was actually in the early 1840s that some Catholics and Orthodox Reformed sought to establish private Christian schools other than *diakoniescholen*. Up to this point they were involved only with schools classified as *armenscholen*, schools for the poor. City authorities granted a request by Catholics and an Orthodox Reformed group to establish one *burgerschool* (school for burgher children) each, a decision that the School Commission opposed. A second Orthodox Reformed group also requested permission to establish a *burgerschool*. This school was to be based specifically on principles of the Reformed faith. Local authorities decided that was not sufficient reason for a new school.³⁰

The Constitution of 1848 brought important changes, beginning the third phase of the school struggle, a phase that signalled a turning point in the struggle. Characterized by development and expansion of both public schools and private Christian schools, it initiated crucial change for education nationally and locally. For reformers and promoters of public education, the period was marked by considerable improve-

²⁸Reinhard Husen, *Schets der algemeene geschiedenis* (Amsterdam, 1851), 2: 101. Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer, national leader of the Christian school movement, had written a letter to the *Hervormde Kerk* in the Hague (*Circulaire*, Dec. 1843) warning them of the influence of the Society on public schools. See Van der Giezen, "Een moment," 13.

²⁹A. A. de Bruin, *Het ontstaan van de schoolstrijd: Onderzoek naar de wortels van de schoolstrijd in de noordelijke Nederlanden gedurende de eerste helft van de 19e eeuw: Een cultuurhistorische studie* (Barneveld, 1985), 193, n. 25; J. P. Fockema Andreae, *De stad Utrecht, haar historie en haar toekomst* (Utrecht, 1926), 42; Leendert Christiaan Sutorp, *Dr. A. W. Bronsveld: Zijn visie op een halve eeuw* (Assen, 1966), 13; Adriani, "De diakoniescholen," 23.

³⁰Letter no. 111, 28 Oct. 1842 and 10 July 1843, letter no. 108, 4 Oct. 1843, 8 Dec. 1843, letter no. 29, 11 Aug. 1847, letter no. 20, 3 Nov. 1847, no. 966*. Plaatselijke School Commissie, GAU.

ment in facilities, curriculum, and pedagogy. Catholics and Orthodox Reformed faced two issues. The first concerned the further elimination of Christianity from the public system. The earlier policy promoting religious tolerance now gave the appearance of becoming a policy promoting religious neutrality. The second concerned the increasing cost of education. The continued efforts of the government to improve the quality of education placed a great financial burden on private Christian schools. With funding only from private sources, that burden became increasingly difficult to bear.

The Constitution of 1848 finally dealt with the long-standing and controversial “freedom of education” issue, though it did not resolve it. It was incorporated as a clause in Article 194 and formulated as follows: “The giving of education is free, upon investigation of the quality and morality of the instructors and the supervision of the government, both to be regulated by law.” What “freedom of education” meant, however, was not clear. The Conservatives understood it to mean the freedom to provide private education—freedom for a teacher to establish a private school, but only if local authorities deemed one necessary. Catholics argued that “freedom of education” was an individual right—the freedom of an individual or individuals to establish private schools. The Liberals, like the Conservatives, understood “freedom of education” to mean the freedom of teachers to give education but not the right of parents to determine the kind of education they wished for their children.³¹

Among the Orthodox Reformed two views surfaced. One was represented by Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer, national leader of the Anti-Revolutionary party. He felt that the separation of church and state restricted state responsibility to insuring the quality of instructors. “Freedom of education” ought to mean freedom to establish private schools. But Groen van Prinsterer also advocated only one system for the Netherlands: a confessionally divided public system of Protestant, Catholic, and “public” sectors. Here he was supported by many in the *Hervormde Kerk*. The other view was represented by Johannes van der Bruggen, Minister of Education and also a member of the Anti-Revolutionary party. He argued that the right to provide education belonged to parents, not to the state. He insisted that “freedom of education” meant freedom to establish private Christian schools. These schools, he felt, ought to be operated not by churches, but by associations comprised of interested individuals and parents.³²

³¹Langedijk, *De geschiedenis*, 76–77; P. Oosterlee, *Geschiedenis van het Christelijk onderwijs* (Haarlem, 1929), 91–96.

³²J. Brouwer, *Het binnenste Naar buiten: Beginselen en activiteiten van Mr. J. J. L. van der Bruggen* (Zutphen, 1981), 89–109.

In Utrecht the “freedom of education” clause provided some opportunities for new private schools. However, though the local school commission was under pressure, it did not automatically grant all requests. Financial feasibility of new schools remained a concern, as did competition for existing ones. A second request to establish a *burgerschool*, made by the same Orthodox Reformed group that had been denied permission in 1847, was again rejected, in spite of its appeal to “freedom of education.” The School Commission, in its reply to the request, pointed to the availability of religious instruction in the existing public schools. City officials, however, saw it differently and granted the request. This action opened the door for Catholics and Orthodox Reformed to establish their own schools freely.³³

With the 1848 Constitution firmly in place, the need for a new national school law became clear. It was finally formulated in 1857, and it redirected public education. The law stipulated that all children were to receive a quality education. It was to provide a regulated and standardized system, something not deemed possible with independently organized private schools. It also intended to increase the number of public schools to meet the demands of an increasing population.³⁴

Only one new public school was built in Utrecht between the years 1860 and 1875, though, in spite of a population increase of more than twelve thousand people. The building of new schools was the responsibility of the local community, which may explain the lack of new schools. The national and provincial governments would, if the need existed, offer assistance. But it was well known that Utrecht had the means and hence was expected to finance its own schools. City authorities felt that tuition fees, not taxes, should finance public education.³⁵

The new law reiterated the familiar purpose of education, particularly regarding the teaching of Christian and social virtues. The continued use of the word *Christian* in the law did not impress the Orthodox Reformed because they feared that the public system would soon advocate a religious neutrality.³⁶

Teachers in the public schools in Utrecht appeared to abide by the dictates of the 1857 school law. They taught “social and Christian virtues,”

³³The School Commission’s argument was based on Article 23, *Koninklijke Besluit*, 1842, no. 61. Letter no. 73, 4 Oct. 1848, letter no. 77, 10 Oct. 1848, letter no. 19, 5 June 1850, letter no. 26, 12 June 1850, letter no. 27, 23 July 1850, letter no. 43, 12 Dec. 1850, no. 966**, Plaatselijke School Commissie, GAU. Regarding approval of the request, see letter no. 45, 31 Dec. 1850. See also letter no. 86, “H. A. R. Vosmaer aan Groen,” 25 Aug. 1850, in Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer, *Briefwisseling* (s’Gravenshage, 1964), 3: 58.

³⁴Langedijk, *De geschiedenis*, 110.

³⁵Karin Loggen, “Schoolstrijd en volksonderwijs in Utrecht, 1870–1890” (Doctoraalscriptie, Rijksuniversiteit Utrecht, 1982), 14–18.

³⁶Pieter Arie Diepenhorst, *Onze strijd in de Staten-Generaal* (Amsterdam, 1927), 1: 248.

seeing themselves as instrumental in the moral formation of children. One principal, P. A. J. Nepveu, remarked in an annual school report that “a good Christian is a good citizen, and the instructor who portrays Christ as a model and who is himself a Christian will form good Christians.” Teachers further emphasized the natural goodness of the child and the importance of regard for one’s neighbor.³⁷

The Orthodox Reformed, however, wanted something more than a generalized Christianity. Certain parents registered their disappointment directly with the teachers by asserting that morals and values not specifically founded on any particular religious confession would remain only vague and confusing. The *Hervormde Kerk* had registered the same concern. In a letter to the king, it had argued that the removal of the Bible from public schools would threaten the stability of the existing order.³⁸

The religious instruction that was permitted after hours in the schools, along with the instructors who gave it, began to create problems. Neither received enthusiastic approval from principals or teachers. Some became increasingly dissatisfied with its orthodox nature, especially elements offensive to Catholics and Jews, a sensitive issue with the Netherlands Teachers Society and the Society for the Public Good. Further, the scheduling of the instruction elicited little interest from the children, who were generally tired or hungry when it was time for their lessons. Enthusiasm for religious instruction waned, and the late 1860s to early 1880s proved to be a difficult period for maintaining or improving this instruction. It declined in some public schools, was nonexistent in others, and caused confusion in yet others.³⁹

Sensing that their struggle to retain a Christian public school system was over, both Catholics and Orthodox Reformed took more steps to organize their own schools. In the ensuing two decades teachers, parents, and interested individuals formed a variety of societies and associations to promote Christian schools and Christian education. This burst of activity dramatically changed the school situation in Utrecht. In 1875, 55 percent of students attended Protestant schools, 11 percent attended Catholic schools, and 2 percent attended other private schools. Only 32 percent attend-

³⁷Notulen: Burgemeester en Wethouders: Lageronderwijs, 1861, Report 35c, no. 966*, GAU. One can still see here the influence of the Society for the Public Good. Utrecht Rijksuniversiteit professor C. W. Opzoomer, member and ardent supporter, stated that “what the Society contributes to education is what it spares from prison.” “Maatschappij tot Nut van het Algemeen,” Inventaris 33, “Volksalmanak ‘Nut’,” 1861, 98, GAU. That “contribution” was based on its primary goal: “To improve the general welfare of the people, according to the principles of the Christian religion.” Huishoudelijk Reglement, Article 1, 1854, Inventaris 33, GAU.

³⁸“Adres van diakenen Hervormde gemeente aan den Koning tegen de wet op de onderwijs,” 4 Aug. 1857, no. 6084, GAU.

³⁹Report of Th. Enderlee, no. 966a, 1863, Report 24a. Notulen Commissie van Godsdiens Onderwijs, 18 Jan. and 4 Mar. 1867, 12 Jan. 1877, 24 Feb. 1879, no. 626, GAU.

ed public schools. Private Christian schools far outnumbered their public school counterparts.⁴⁰

In a move to compete with this increasing number of private Christian schools and children attending them, in Utrecht and elsewhere, the government made a provision in a new school law in 1878 to reinstate religious instruction during school hours. Implementation was left to local authorities. In Utrecht it again fell to the *Hervormde Kerk*.⁴¹ The 1878 school law also initiated another major change. It granted the first government subsidy (30 percent) to local communities for the costs of new public schools. Utrecht took full advantage of this offer. A rapidly increasing population, especially of the middle class, increased demands for new facilities. In the following decade the number of public schools in the city increased considerably. This government subsidy placed private Christian schools at a considerable disadvantage. Nonetheless, Catholics and Orthodox Reformed, firmly convinced of the need for their schools, formed more associations and built more schools. That they were not to be deterred became evident as major changes began to occur on the political level.⁴²

In 1887 the Constitution was revised to extend the voting franchise to more people, something long sought by the Liberals. That achievement also hastened the demise of the Liberals. Many, gaining the right to vote, supported the Anti-Revolutionary and Catholic political parties, both of which regarded the current educational policies as unjust. The Anti-Revolutionary party in particular had long sought to change them, but now it needed the support of Catholics. They joined forces to form a coalition government in 1888. A year later they had a new school law. It began the last phase of the school struggle, one that was largely political and fought on the national level.

The 1889 school law went further than any previous one in raising the quality of public education. In Utrecht this translated, among other things, into a marked increase in the number of public schools, improved facilities, teacher certification, and organization. The coalition government also achieved a minor victory. The new law allowed the government to subsidize private Christian schools and signalled the beginning of the end of a public school monopoly.

⁴⁰Marianne J. A. Stijnman, "De Katholieken en hun emancipatie: Roomse Katholieke scholen te Utrecht in de 19e eeuw" (Doctoraalscriptie, Rijksuniversiteit Utrecht, 1984); Loggen, "Schoolstrijd en Volksonderwijs in Utrecht, 1870-90"; nos. 10-12, Archief Diakoniescholen der Nederduitsche Hervormde Kerk te Utrecht, GAU; no. 702, Notulen Hulpvereniging Utrecht van de Vereniging voor Christelijk Nationaal Schoolonderwijs, GAU; "Marnix-Stichting," Utrecht, n.d. (mimeograph), GAU; no. 966**, Plaatselijke School Commissie, 1857-75, GAU; and Verslagen van het lager onderwijs in de Gemeente Utrecht, 1875, GAU.

⁴¹Article 22, 1878 School Law. Langedijk, *De geschiedenis*, 234. By 1888, however, religious instruction was given in only six of the thirteen public schools. Letter from Committee to Kerkeraad, 17 Oct. 1888, no. 626, GAU.

Though small, the subsidy was a much-welcomed source of funding for private Christian schools, particularly since the new law also required improved facilities and smaller class sizes. While the subsidy eased the situation somewhat, a new development increased the financial burden of some private Christian schools. That development was the *Doleantie*, the ecclesiastical schism of 1886. It resulted in the formation of three distinct Reformed denominations in Utrecht: the *Hervormde Kerk* (the large Reformed Church), the *Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerk* (originating from the 1834 *Afscheiding*), and the *Gereformeerde Kerk* (formed in 1892 from the *Doleantie*). Each of these groups contained Orthodox Reformed, and the hostility generated on the ecclesiastical level by this schism quickly filtered down to the schools.

Teachers and students who joined with the *Doleantie* were dismissed or expelled from the *Hervormde Kerk diakoniescholen*. These schools were now restricted to children from that church. Because the public school was not an option for their children, *Doleantie* members resolved to establish their own schools. These schools even attracted some children from the public school.⁴³

Interestingly enough, and in spite of some often harsh and bitter disputes among the Reformed churches, a small number of Orthodox Reformed from all three groups were able to rise above their theological differences when it came to Christian education. They joined forces in 1887 to form a private Christian school and an association to support it.⁴⁴

The battles fought on the ecclesiastical level in Utrecht created lines of demarcation within the Protestant Christian school movement in the last decade of the nineteenth century. These lines were defined ecclesiastically and confessionally and resulted in a distinction between a Christian education and a Reformed Christian education. Those who supported Christian education were Orthodox members from the *Hervormde Kerk*. Unhappy with the public school, they supported Christian education, but one less doctrinally and confessionally oriented. They sent their children to the *burgerscholen* and *diakoniescholen* of the *Hervormde Kerk*. Those who supported a Reformed Christian education were Orthodox Reformed members who had left the *Hervormde Kerk*. The schools they established adhered to the confessions of the Reformed faith, as traditionally defined.⁴⁵

Political struggles of past decades had given these various Reformed groups the right to establish their own schools, schools that came to fall

⁴²Verslagen van het lager onderwijs, 1878–88, GAU.

⁴³Diakoniescholen, nos. 14–15, and *Utrechtse Kerkbode*, 14 and 28 Apr. 1888, GAU.

⁴⁴*De Oranjevaan*, 1 and 22 Oct. and 26 Nov. 1887, GAU.

under the broader heading of Protestant Christian schools. Now one last struggle remained—full public funding for these schools and those operated by Catholics.⁴⁶

With the cooperative efforts of the Anti-Revolutionary and Catholic political parties, subsidies to private schools steadily increased. A major victory was achieved with the 1917 Constitution, which capped the century-long struggle. It granted equal funding for both public schools and private Christian schools throughout the Netherlands. This ended decisively a public school monopoly and resulted in three equally funded and equally independent school systems. For all intents and purposes that marked the end of the school struggle.

Throughout the nineteenth century Catholics and Orthodox Reformed in Utrecht and elsewhere frequently disagreed strongly with the educational policies of local and national governments. These policies received support from Liberal and Conservative political parties. Orthodox Reformed, as well as Catholics, though not opposed in principle to improving the quality of education, did oppose a public school monopoly. Mostly they opposed a system that promoted an educational perspective different from their own.

An educational perspective, they argued, ultimately had to be founded upon the religious convictions of a people. A public school that acknowledged the importance of morals and values but failed to ground them in any particular religious confession or tradition could only remain vague and confusing. They further argued that a religiously neutral education was impossible.

Both the Anti-Revolutionary and Catholic political parties came to understand these issues as crucial. Concern for the “soul of the youth” took precedence over concern for a unified nation or economic prosperity. Their respective supporters, drawn largely from the lower and middle classes, gave them political clout and eventually political power. Their efforts resulted in the freedom to determine the kind of education they wished for their children, to establish their own schools, and to receive public funding for them.

Today secularism has greatly eroded Christian schools in the Netherlands. Pressure to change the current system is felt intensely, especially by those who consider it financially extravagant. Similar pressure is being felt elsewhere, for example in the province of Newfoundland, where denom-

⁴⁵Diakoniescholen, nos. 15–16, and Archief “De Gereformeerde School,” GAU.

⁴⁶In 1900 compulsory education was implemented in the Netherlands. That same year out of 15,605 students and fifty-five schools in Utrecht, 49 percent attended the twenty-three public schools, 28 percent attended the thirteen Protestant schools, and 22 percent attended the fourteen Catholic schools. Gemeente Verslagen Utrecht, no. 3404, 1875–1900, GAU.

inational schooling is a right embedded in the province's constitution. Yet support for the current systems is still strong and widespread.⁴⁷

In various other states, provinces, even countries, increasing numbers of people are also beginning to believe strongly that religion is and should remain integral to education. For groups who seek to establish schools where religion is integrated into the curriculum the right to public funding becomes important. In the United Kingdom, for example, Muslims are requesting a share of educational tax dollars. Christian day school advocates in the United States continue to lobby governments for tuition tax credits or vouchers. Multifaith groups—Jewish, Muslim, Sikh, Christian—in the province of Ontario, concerned about the absence of teaching about religion in the public schools, are now seeking public funding for their own schools. Voices of aboriginal peoples are also being raised.⁴⁸

A public system of education may never meet the needs of everyone. History teaches us that a common school does not readily accommodate religious minorities. The Utrecht situation is a clear example. It also reveals that alternatives are possible.

⁴⁷Marjanne de Kwaasteniet, *Denomination and Primary Education in the Netherlands, 1870–1984* (Amsterdam, 1990); William A. McKim, ed., *The Vexed Question: Denominational Education in a Secular Age* (St. John's, Newfoundland, 1988).

⁴⁸Margaret D. Tannenbaum, "Education Vouchers and First Amendment Rights," *Religion and Public Education* 17 (no. 3, 1990): 367–79; F. Clark Power and Daniel K. Lapsley, eds., *The Challenge of Pluralism: Education, Politics, and Values* (Notre Dame, Ind., 1992); Carol Locust, "Wounding the Spirit: Discrimination and Traditional American Indian Belief Systems," *Harvard Educational Review* 58 (Aug. 1988): 315–30.