

Who Suffered From the Crisis of Historicism? A Dutch Example

(published in *History and Theory*, 2010)

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Was the crisis of historicism an exclusively German affair? Or was it a “narrowly academic crisis,” as is sometimes assumed? Answering both questions in the negative, this paper argues that crises of historicism affected not merely intellectual elites, but even working-class people, not only in Germany, but also in the Netherlands. With an elaborated case-study, the article shows that Dutch “Neo-Calvinist” Protestants from the 1930 onwards experienced their own crisis of historicism. For a variety of reasons, this religious subgroup came to experience a collapse of its “historicist” worldview. Following recent German scholarship, the paper argues that this historicism was not a matter of Rankean historical methods, but of “historical identifications,” or modes of identity formation in which historical narratives played crucial roles. Based on this Dutch case-study, then, the article develops two arguments. In a quantitative mode, it argues that more and different people suffered from the crisis of historicism than is usually assumed. In addition, it offers a qualitative argument: that the crisis was located especially among groups that derived their identity from “historical identifications.” Those who suffered most from the crisis of historicism were those who understood themselves as embedded in narratives that connected past, present, and future in such a way as to offer identity in historical terms.

Key words: historicism, crisis of historicism, Germany, the Netherlands, Neo-Calvinism, Abraham Kuyper, Herman Dooyeweerd

Few of the dark-suited labor-men who had gathered for the Thursday evening lecture hosted by their labor organization would ever have heard of Leopold von Ranke,

Ernst Troeltsch, or Friedrich Meinecke.¹ Few of them would have known how, in the 1920 and '30s, intellectuals all over Europe had come to dispute the virtues and vices of what was called *Historismus*. Although their two-weekly meetings in The Hague did, as a rule, not avoid difficult topics – the evenings were after all supposed to stimulate the cultural and religious edification of the working-classes – most speakers invited to these occasions addressed concerns that were close to the hearts of their audience or prompted by the news of the day.² Thus, in previous weeks, topics such as “Youth and Unemployment,” the National-Socialist Movement, and “Möttlingen” (a much-discussed religious revival movement) had been addressed.³ But on Thursday, November 26, 1936, great numbers of working-men came and listened to a lecture on historicism. Over the course of the evening, they were exposed to the “historicist” philosophies of Oswald Spengler and José Ortega y Gasset, to some rather abstract reflections on different ways in which “history” could be conceptualized, as well as to what the speaker called the potentially “Fascist” and “National Socialist” implications of historicist thought. According to a newspaper report, the large number of attendees engaged in “a lively discussion” afterwards.⁴ It seems that, for some reason, these working-class men in The Hague, or the organization to which they belonged, took an interest in one of the most abstract issues of early twentieth-century Western thought: the position of human existence vis-à-vis the stream of historical becoming. How is that to be explained? Why did a laborers’ organization care to think about historicism?⁵

¹ Drafts of this paper were presented to the European Social Science History Conference in Lisbon (February 2008) and the Institute of European History in Mainz (March 2009). I would like to thank Richard T. Vann for his suggestions and encouragement. Funding was generously provided by the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research (NWO).

² See, for example, the 1929/1930 season program reproduced in W. Heijns, “De ontwikkelings-avonden en de jeugdarbeid,” in *Gedenkboek van de Afdeling Den Haag van Patrimonium: 1 maart 1880-1930*, ed. K. Dijk, J. Hollander, and W. Heijns (s. l.: s. n., [1930]), 101-109, there 104-106.

³ *Het Vaderland* (October 3, November 3, November 12, 1936).

⁴ *Het Vaderland* (November 28, 1936). Unless otherwise noted, all translations are mine.

⁵ A brief report in *De Standaard* (November 28, 1936) reveals that the lecture was co-sponsored by two local chapters of a Calvinist student organization. This organization was the *Societas Studiosorum Reformatorum*, founded in 1886 in a Protestant response to what the founders had perceived as an increasing secularization of the academic atmosphere at Dutch universities. Another co-organizer was a local group of philosophically interested Protestants, associated in the *Vereeniging voor Calvinistische Wijsbegeerte* (Association for Calvinistic Philosophy). In practice, if not in theory, this small-scale society, founded just one year before, devoted itself entirely to the study and promotion of the “Calvinistic philosophy” that the speaker featured in The Hague, Herman Dooyeweerd, together with his colleague and brother-in-law, Dik Vollenhoven, developed at the Free University in Amsterdam. (More on the Protestant milieu in which these organizations had emerged will appear later in this paper.) Although the labor organization on this occasion thus joined forces with non-working-class bodies, the historicism lecture was part of its regular program, delivered in its own building, and

Some decades ago, historians would have had a hard time answering this question, if only because the gathering in The Hague, occurring at great distance from the German universities in which the interwar debates over historicism were believed to take place, did not fit into existing interpretations of historicism and its crises. Despite the many methodological and philosophical aspects that have been distinguished in it, and despite the perplexing variety of definitions that have been proposed,⁶ *Historismus* was usually seen as an intellectual tradition represented by such great figures as Johann Gottfried Herder, Wilhelm von Humboldt, and Leopold von Ranke. In turn, the debates lumped together under the heading “crisis of historicism,” were usually also portrayed as intellectual exchanges between some high-profile historians and philosophers in Germany: Wilhelm Dilthey, Wilhelm Windelband, Heinrich Rickert, Ernst Troeltsch, and Friedrich Meinecke, among others. Non-German working-class men were clearly not on the radar.⁷

In one important respect, recent scholarship has challenged this exclusive focus on historians and philosophers by demonstrating that, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, *Historismusdebatte* occurred in a variety of scholarly disciplines. Attempts have been made to trace these debates over historicism and “historical relativism” across the humanities (history, philosophy, theology) and in domains as diverse as law, literature, architecture, and music.⁸ A recent study even relates the crisis of historicism to a “crisis of reality” proclaimed by scientists who worried about Albert Einstein’s theory of relativity.⁹ However, in spite of this

presumably chiefly attended by its own members. Therefore, without downplaying the roles played by the co-sponsoring parties (roles that are hard to specify in the absence of relevant archives), I think it is justified to focus in this paper on the reasons the labor organization may have had for introducing their members to the problems of historicism.

⁶ Georg G. Iggers, “Historicism: The History and Meaning of the Term,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 56 (1995), 129-152, and the literature mentioned there.

⁷ Georg G. Iggers, *The German Conception of History: The National Tradition of Historical Thought From Herder to the Present* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1968); Friedrich Jaeger and Jörn Rüsen, *Geschichte des Historismus: Eine Einführung* (München: C. H. Beck, 1992).

⁸ See, among many other studies, “*Geschichte allein ist zeitgemäss*”: *Historismus in Deutschland*, ed. Michael Brix and Monika Steinhauser (Lahn Giessen: Anabas-Verlag Kämpf, 1978); Annette Wittkau, *Historismus: Zur Geschichte des Begriffs und des Problems* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1992); Michael Murrmann-Kahl, *Die entzauberte Heilsgeschichte: Der Historismus erobert die Theologie, 1880-1920* (Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1992); *Die Historismusdebatte in der Weimarer Republik*, ed. Wolfgang Bialas and Gérard Raulet (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1996); *Historismus in den Kulturwissenschaften*, ed. Karl-Egon Lönne (Tübingen; Basel: A. Francke, 2003); Anne Heinig, *Die Krise des Historismus in der deutschen Sakraldekoration im späten 19. Jahrhundert* (Regensburg: Schnell & Steiner, 2004).

⁹ Otto Gerhard Oexle, “Krise des Historismus, Krise der Wirklichkeit: Eine Problemgeschichte der Moderne,” in *Krise des Historismus, Krise der Wirklichkeit: Wissenschaft, Kunst und Literatur 1880-1932*, ed. Otto Gerhard Oexle (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2007), esp. 14.

enlarged scope of inquiry, for many scholars interested in the crisis of historicism, the academic elite remained, and in many cases still remains, the almost exclusive object of study. Charles Bambach, for example, sees the quarrels over historicism in the decades around 1900 as attempts to reconcile historicism's "romantic-hermeneutic roots in the classical humanities" with its "enlightened aims of scientifically objective truth." Accordingly, for him, the crisis of historicism was nothing but a "narrowly academic crisis."¹⁰ Otto Gerhard Oexle's volume, *Krise des Historismus, Krise der Wirklichkeit*, though covering a broad variety of scholarly disciplines and artistic practices, likewise makes few attempts to challenge the monopoly of elite perspectives in current scholarship. Even David Myers, who begins his study of German-Jewish (anti)historicism with examples borrowed from local synagogues and newspapers, devotes most of his chapters to major intellectuals: Hermann Cohen, Franz Rosenzweig, and Leo Strauss.¹¹

From such an intellectual elite point of view, the gathering in The Hague (still) appears of minor importance. At best, it may be seen as a charming case of dissemination or popularization, in which a presumably largely ignorant audience was informed about a "crisis" haunting the German professorate. Whether this audience experienced their own crisis of historicism, or found something in their own life-world that led them to organize an evening on historicism, is a question that can hardly be asked as long as the crisis of historicism is located in the abstract realm of neo-Kantian epistemology. Whether "ordinary people" such as the working-men in The Hague, on that November evening in 1936, had their own reasons for fearing "historical relativism" is a question that cannot be properly addressed as long as we consider the crisis of historicism a "narrowly academic crisis." It is time, therefore, to raise the question who (which groups of people) suffered from the crisis of historicism. It is time to inquire whether the groups of people involved in this crisis were not far more diverse, in terms of profession, social class, religion, and nationality, than current scholarship suggests.¹²

¹⁰ Charles R. Bambach, *Heidegger, Dilthey, and the Crisis of Historicism* (Ithaca, NY; London: Cornell University Press, 1995), 42 n. 53, 185.

¹¹ David N. Myers, *Resisting History: Historicism and its Discontents in German-Jewish Thought* (Princeton, NJ; Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2003).

¹² In a different form, this question has been raised by Allan Megill, "Why was There a Crisis of Historicism?," *History and Theory* 36 (1997), 416-429. My answer, however, substantially differs from his, primarily because Megill and I do not agree on what counts as "crisis of historicism." As I will argue below, the crisis of historicism can best be understood as a shattering of nineteenth-century conceptions of historical identity, experienced by various groups at various moments, but most likely

When I argue, on the following pages, that the working-men in The Hague offer a striking illustration of how the crisis of historicism could affect non-German, non-academic audiences, I try to make two points. The first point is quantitative: I argue that more and different people suffered from the crisis of historicism than is usually assumed. The second one is qualitative: I argue that the crisis was located especially among groups that derived their identity from “historical identifications” or historical narratives. Those who suffered most from the crisis of historicism were those who understood themselves as embedded in narratives that connected past, present, and future in such a way as to offer identity in historical terms.

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In order to substantiate these claims, let me first recall how, in the past twenty-five years, historians have increasingly come to see historicism, not merely as a short-hand for a Rankean-inspired sort of academic historical studies – famous for its critical methods, its context-sensitive hermeneutics, and its dominant interest in institutional agents such as church and state – but also as a mode of historical thought, or a form of historical consciousness, that permeated nineteenth-century middle-class societies. Kurt Nowak, for example, attributes the overwhelming success of historicism, in and outside the university, to its ability to explain a world witnessing rapid change and accelerating complexity more convincingly than any other worldview available to educated citizens in the mid-nineteenth century. According to Nowak, historicism offered a *historische Weltorientierung* or a worldview in which not Enlightenment reason or natural law but history served a primary mode of orientation in the world. Ideal-typically, this worldview perceived reality through the prisms of *Individualität* (individuality), on the one hand, and *Kontinuität* (continuity), *Entwicklung*

not often before the dramatic events of World War I. This argument is in line with the scholarship discussed in section I of this paper. Megill, however, creates a different “crisis of historicism” when he employs the term to refer to Protestant theologians, back in the 1830s, who tried to defend their religious faith vis-à-vis historicist readings of the Bible. “There are good reasons, I contend, for seeing this crisis [of historicism] as surfacing not in the 1880s in philosophy but in the 1830s in theology – and especially in Protestant theology and Biblical scholarship” (420). Although the problems occasioned in the 1830s by David Friedrich Strauss’s *Leben-Jesu-Forschung* were not entirely unrelated to the concerns that I define as central to the crisis of historicism, Megill’s version of the crisis is too different from mine to allow direct comparison.

(development), or *Fortschritt* (progress), on the other.¹³ Individuality – the idea that every person, nation, or epoch is unique – allowed for experiences of change and otherness. It recognized the distinctiveness of each (historical) phenomenon and acknowledged that the past is different from the present. If this alone could easily result in atomistic conceptions of reality, the notion of *Entwicklung* prevented this by integrating past and present in a process of development, in a movement of organic growth, or in a progressive realization of certain characteristic ideas (*Ideen*).¹⁴ Historicism, in all its different variations, assumed, not simply that the present was a product of the past, but, more specifically, that the present was a stage in a process of evolution in which the spirit (*Geist*) characteristic of a particular people or nation came to realize itself. Not all historicists, of course, were as confident in tracing this self-realization of the spirit as was G. W. F. Hegel, in his grandiose philosophy of history. But even Hegel’s sharpest critics, such as Ranke, shared the idea that history was essentially a process constituted by the organic unfolding of ideas over time.¹⁵ Historicism thus offered a worldview that embedded experiences of change in a narrative of progressive development.

If Nowak hints in passing at the religious underpinnings of this historicist worldview,¹⁶ Wolfgang Hardtwig even argues that historicism was a religion of history (*Geschichtsreligion*). In order to subsume Karl Marx’s alternative under this heading, too, Hardtwig defines religion in a broad sociological sense, as a discourse dealing with whatever counts as “absolute” for groups of human beings.¹⁷ But in so far as historicism is concerned, represented in Hardtwig’s study by figures such as Ranke, Droysen, and Meinecke, a more specific definition of religion would have

¹³ Kurt Nowak, “Die ‘antihistoristische Revolution’: Symptome und Folgen der Krise historischer Weltorientierung nach dem Ersten Weltkrieg in Deutschland,” in *Umstrittene Moderne: Die Zukunft der Neuzeit im Urteil der Epoche Ernst Troeltschs*, ed. Horst Renz and Friedrich Wilhelm Graf (Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1987), 133-171, esp. 138. Individuality and development were, of course, also key words in Friedrich Meinecke’s definition of historicism, such as proposed in *Die Entstehung des Historismus*, ed. Carl Hinrichs (München: Oldenbourg, 1959), 2. For the specific connotations of “development” and “progress” in historicist contexts, see Wolfgang Wieland, “Entwicklung, Evolution,” in *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe: Historisches Lexikon zur politisch-sozialen Sprache in Deutschland*, ed. Otto Brunner, Werner Conze, and Reinhart Koselleck, 8 vols. (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1972-1997), 2:199-228, esp. 213-220 and, in the same volume, Reinhart Koselleck, “Fortschritt,” 351-423, esp. 407-415.

¹⁴ Nowak, “Antihistoristische Revolution,” 161.

¹⁵ Wolfgang Hardtwig, “Die Geschichtserfahrung der Moderne und die Ästhetisierung der Darstellung: Leopold von Ranke,” in Hardtwig, *Hochkultur des bürgerlichen Zeitalters* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2005), 35-50.

¹⁶ Nowak, “Antihistoristische Revolution,” 151, 161.

¹⁷ Wolfgang Hardtwig, “Geschichtsreligion, Wissenschaft als Arbeit, Objektivität: Der Historismus in neuer Sicht,” in Hardtwig, *Hochkultur*, 52.

been possible. For what Hardtwig distills from Ranke, Droysen, and Meinecke is nothing but a series of variations on the Christian doctrine of divine providence. Through the lenses of German Idealist philosophy, these historicists recognized God's guidance and blessings, not only in the powers of nation-building and technological progress, but in every historical event. In a truly panentheistic mode – not to be confused with pantheism – they acknowledged God's transcendence over the world of human affairs (*über aller Erscheinung*), but simultaneously asserted that history participates in the divine, that the self-realizing ideas which are the historian's objects of study have both natural and supernatural dimensions, and that God can therefore be said to manifest himself in all of history (*in aller Erscheinung*).¹⁸ One conclusion to be drawn from this is that historical studies, in their historicist manifestations, were anything but metaphysically neutral: they articulated and presupposed deeply-rooted religious beliefs. But another, more important for my purposes, is that the values transmitted through these religious-historical modes of thought aspired to a "religious, that is, absolute" status.¹⁹ For if history was the story of self-realizing freedom, and if this story was providentially directed, then a battle for freedom (in political, religious, or economic contexts) was apparently not only justified by history, but also in accordance with God's will. Likewise, if history could accurately be "emplotted" as a story in which nations gradually came to an actualization of who they essentially were, then political attempts at nation-building, such as made throughout Europe, could be applauded as sanctioned by history and providence alike. Indeed, Hardtwig acknowledges that this *historistische Geschichts- und Bildungsreligion* (historicist religion of history and education) was not identical to the disciplinary practices that

¹⁸ Hardtwig, "Geschichtsreligion," 53 (quoting from Ranke's *Deutsche Geschichte im Zeitalter der Reformation*). "Panentheism" is classically understood to mean that the human participates in the divine, without the divine being limited to the human: God is simultaneously immanent and transcendent. Other scholars confusingly speak about "pantheist" tendencies in historicist thought. For example, in the time-span between, roughly, 1815 and 1840, John Edward Toews observes a "transformation of the shape of religious belief from a predominantly 'pantheistic' form of faith in the immanent workings of divine purpose within the patterns of historical evolution to a predominantly 'personalistic' belief in a transcendent divinity, a belief that could function as the source of historical actions that might intervene in the immanent development of the ethno-cultural subject, or 'idea,' and change its historical trajectory." John Edward Toews, *Becoming Historical: Cultural Reformation and Public Memory in Early Nineteenth-Century Berlin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), xix-xx. Apart from that "pantheism" (with its *denial* that the divine transcends the human: God is only immanent) is a less appropriate designation for early historicists such as Johann Gottfried Herder and Wilhelm von Humboldt, none of whom would have dared to deny God's transcendence, Toews's "complex shift from immanent to transcendent models of religious and philosophical faith" (xx) may well be reformulated in terms of changing emphasizes within a basically panentheistic historicist worldview.

¹⁹ Hardtwig, "Geschichtsreligion," 57.

historians such as Jörn Rüsen have associated with historicism. But in a society that valued higher learning and in an academic climate that (still) defined itself in terms of *Bildung* rather than *Forschung*, academic historical studies and broader streams of historical consciousness frequently overlapped and reinforced each other. This explains why even academic historiography contributed to the historicist religion of history.²⁰

That historicism not only fascinated an intellectual elite, but was appropriated by educated middle classes throughout at least the German Empire has been argued for by Friedrich Jaeger. Because of its ability to connect past and present in a narrative of developmental progress, historicism, in Jaeger's analysis, offered "all-encompassing perceptions of meaning and continuity in human ways of life through the medium of a historical consciousness" and, by consequence, "a specifically historical justification" of what counted as valid moral standards.²¹ Quoting Karl Mannheim's famous description of historicism – "an intellectual force of extraordinary significance; it is the real agent of our world-view, a principle which not only organizes like an invisible hand, the whole of the work of the human sciences but also permeates everyday life"²² – Jaeger explains that historicism in this sense served as a system of meaning, a mode of interpreting the world, which enabled people in times of rapid change to see a relation between where they came from and where they were going. In a context of modernization and historicization,²³ historicism's genealogical thought-structure offered the educated middle classes a means for maintaining continuity with the past while sustaining their hopes for stable and steady societal progress in the future. In Jaeger's own words:

²⁰ Hardtwig, "Geschichtsreligion," 73. For Rüsen's conceptualization of historicism as a disciplinary matrix, see, e. g., Jörn Rüsen, *Konfigurationen des Historismus: Studien zur deutschen Wissenschaftskultur* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1993). However, following Hardtwig, Rüsen also calls historicism the "last religion of the educated." See his "Historische Methode und religiöser Sinn: Vorüberlegungen zu einer Dialektik der Rationalisierung des historischen Denkens in der Moderne," in *Geschichtsdiskurs II: Anfänge modernen historischen Denkens*, ed. Wolfgang Küttler, Jörn Rüsen, and Ernst Schulin (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1994), 344-377, esp. 365-367.

²¹ Friedrich Jaeger, "Theorietypen der Krise des Historismus," in Bialas and Raulet, *Historismusdebatte*, 52-70, esp. 52. Cf. Jaeger's book-length study, *Bürgerliche Modernisierungskrise und historische Sinnbildung: Kulturgeschichte bei Droysen, Burckhardt und Max Weber* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1994).

²² Karl Mannheim, "Historicism," in *Essays on the Sociology of Knowledge*, ed. Paul Kecskemeti (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1952), 84-133, there 84.

²³ An interesting definition of "modernization" in terms of "historicization" (a growing distance to the past and an increasing awareness of the transitory nature of the present) has been suggested in Gustavo Benavides, "Modernity," in *Critical Terms for Religious Study*, ed. Mark C. Taylor (Chicago, IL; London: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 186-204.

Historicism was part and parcel of a middle-class [*bürgerlichen*] society that greatly affected modern ways of life – economically, socially, politically, as well as culturally. With its empathic historicization of how human beings related to the world and to themselves, historicism, from the second half of the nineteenth century onward, represented a mood of life and experience of reality shared by wide middle class strata. The cultural prestige of its classical representatives cannot be explained otherwise.²⁴

Although the “cultural prestige” of Ranke and his likes is perhaps a weak proof of Jaeger’s contention that historicism was absorbed by German middle classes (I will return to that shortly), the main argument is clear. For Germans citizens under historicist influence, identity took a historical form. What Germany “essentially” was depended on where the country came from (how the national idea had unfolded itself over time) and, by implication, on where it was going to (the goal in which the process of unfolding was supposed to culminate). German citizens were thus brought to see themselves as embedded in a historical trajectory. Consequently, understanding personal or collective identity required an act of historical writing. Identity could not be better expressed than through a historical narrative that connected past and present into a process of progressive development.

In his study of historicism in 1840s Berlin, John Edward Toews calls this the “historical principle,” “the implications of which resonated far beyond the squabbles between members of the Hegelian School and the Historical School” epitomized by Ranke. The historical principle was the belief that individuals and collectivities could best conceive of themselves in historical terms. It was an attempt “to redefine membership in various communities – religious, ethnic, ethical, and political – as historical identifications, that is, in terms of the subjective identification of individuals with a shared past or public memory.”²⁵ This principle not only characterized the “narrowly defined academic historicism” that generations of historians have learned to associate with Ranke,²⁶ but also more broadly inculcated itself into the “culture of historicism” that is the subject of Toews’s book: a culture shared by Ranke, the

²⁴ Jaeger, “Theorietypen,” 54.

²⁵ Toews, *Becoming Historical*, xv.

²⁶ Toews, *Becoming Historical*, xvi.

historian, F. W. J. Schelling, the philosopher, Karl Friedrich Schinkel, the architect, and a host of other “cultural reformers” in 1840s Berlin, including Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy, the composer, and Jacob Grimm, the folklorist. It was their shared conviction that identity was historically constituted, “that human existence [was] essentially historical and that questions about personal, communal, and religious identity must be addressed within this ontological framework.”²⁷ Thus, like Nowak, Hardtwig, and Jaeger, Toews sees historicism in its mid-nineteenth-century incarnation less as an exclusively scholarly project than as a worldview or a means for thinking about “historical agency,” “identity construction,” and “ethical choice” that circulated both in and, to some extent, outside the academia.²⁸

What makes *Becoming Historical* a truly ground-breaking study, though, is that the author traces a close relation between historicism’s “historical principle,” on the one hand, and the overwhelming nineteenth-century interest in so-called “cultural memory,” on the other.²⁹ As long as historicism is seen as a scholarly hermeneutics best represented by Ranke’s critical historical scholarship, historicism and cultural (or social) memory may seem different to the point of being contradictory. Indeed, in France, a sharp contrast between “spontaneous” memory and “critical” history has informed much of Pierre Nora’s epoch-making *lieux de mémoire* project.³⁰ But if historicism was “more than a form of historiography” and more than a means for interpreting historical sources, it may turn out that (in practice, if not in theory) its historical principle was shared by many of those nineteenth-century politicians and church leaders who eagerly tried to orchestrate a cultural memory for their respective communities. Whatever the stories these “memory managers” told about the past (idealization of the Middle Ages, glorification of the Reformation, identification with the Enlightenment) or the means through which they expressed these narratives (regional museums, ritual processions, statues for national heroes), their “invented traditions” usually shared the same aspiration that Toews defines as central to the

²⁷ Toews, *Becoming Historical*, xvii.

²⁸ Toews, *Becoming Historical*, xxi. Like many others scholars, Toews introduces typological distinctions in order not to equate historicism with only one of its manifestations. Thus, in analogy to his differentiation between “pantheism” and “personalism” (see above, footnote 18), Toews argues (xix-xxi) that historicism in 1840s Berlin was different, in terms of its religious presuppositions and conceptions of human agency, from Romantic historicism such as studied in James Chandler, *England in 1819: The Politics of Literary Culture and the Case of Romantic Historicism* (Chicago, IL; London: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

²⁹ Toews, *Becoming Historical*, xxi.

³⁰ Pierre Nora, “Entre mémoire et histoire: la problématique des lieux,” in *Les lieux de mémoire*, ed. Pierre Nora, 7 vols. (Paris: Gallimard, 1984-1992), 1:xv-xlii.

historical principle: “to live human existence in the form of historical selfhood.” Cultural memory made visible and tangible what the historical principle said in the abstract: that “human existence” was “historical existence.”³¹ The kings, queens, and battles commemorated throughout the nineteenth century therefore indicate something important about the conceptions of historical identity popularized in this period. Figures from the past were not commemorated for their “intrinsic value” (if that means anything at all), but because they were supposed to represent the origins from which the present had emerged, or a certain stage in the historical process that had brought forth the nineteenth-century nation-state or church denomination to which the commemorators belonged. In a sense, therefore, these ancient kings, queens, and battles inhabited the very same stories in which the commemorating communities positioned themselves. Past and present belonged to the same tradition. The flourishing of cultural memory industries in nineteenth-century Europe can thus be seen as another argument for the wide acceptance of historicism, or the historical principle, outside academic lecture halls.

However, the best argument for the middle-class support that historicism received was the crisis of historicism that haunted Europe from the early decades of the twentieth century onward. For the scholars just cited, this crisis was, before all other things, a collapse of the nineteenth-century historical principle. It was a growing inability to define identity in historical terms. Hardtwig calls it a “crisis of the historicist religion of history,” caused, among other things, by experiences of break and rupture during the First World War.³² Nowak speaks about a “destruction of the awareness of historical continuity,” which resulted in such a “considerable loss of orientation” among the educated middle classes that it became a “central problem” for German society during the Weimar Republic.³³ Jaeger, in turn, sees the crisis as a “break in the historical self-experience of middle-class society” and a “crisis in motivation, values, and meaning,” which contributed to and was part of what he calls a larger “modernization crisis” in the interwar period.³⁴ For people who had learned to see themselves in historical terms, who had positioned themselves in genealogical

³¹ Toews, *Becoming Historical*, xvi.

³² Hardtwig, “Geschichtsreligion,” 59. Cf. Thomas Albert Howard, *Religion and the Rise of Historicism: W. M. L. De Wette, Jacob Burckhardt, and the Theological Origins of Nineteenth-Century Historical Consciousness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 14: “the crisis of historicism stemmed from and found its center of gravity in explicitly theological problems.”

³³ Nowak, “Antihistoristische Revolution,” 135, 167.

³⁴ Jaeger, “Theorietypen,” 54, 52.

narratives, who had defined themselves as heirs to traditions that they had hoped to develop further in the future, the awareness that history could be dramatically different than expected not only destroyed certain versions of their past, but also challenged their “historical identity.” When, in contexts of sudden change and unexpected upheaval, historical development turned out less steady and progressive than historicism had assumed, an entire *Weltanschauung* was put on trial. Thus, for all three authors (Toews’s study does not reach beyond the mid-nineteenth century), the crisis of historicism was not a philosophical puzzle in the realm of neo-Kantian epistemology, but the shattering of a thought-structure widely shared among the German middle-classes.

Two things must be noted here. The first is that, for Nowak, Hardtwig, and Jaeger, the expression “crisis of historicism,” such as coined by Troeltsch and popularized by Karl Heussi,³⁵ should not primarily be understood as a *genitivus obiectivus*, that is, as a crisis caused *by* historicism (for example, a crisis in religious certainty caused by a historicist reading of holy texts),³⁶ but as a *genitivus subiectivus*, which is to say, a crisis *for* historicism, or a crisis that affected the historical principle that had been central to the historicist worldview.³⁷ Obviously, in the interwar period, “essentially contested concepts” such as historicism were used in far more different and even contradictory senses than to allow easy generalizations of the sort that, for Troeltsch *cum suis*, the problem was not too much, but too little historicism.³⁸ In one way, however, this is how the authors just cited reconstruct the crisis of historicism: as an outburst of uncertainty caused, primarily, by the declining plausibility of a

³⁵ Ernst Troeltsch, “Die Krisis des Historismus,” *Die neue Rundschau* 1 (1922), 572-590; Karl Heussi, *Die Krisis des Historismus* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1932). Although the literature explaining the different meanings of “crisis of historicism” in Troeltsch and Heussi is vast, helpful synopses are provided in Wittkau, *Historismus*, 147-160, 185-189; Reinhard Laube, *Karl Mannheim und die Krise des Historismus: Historismus als wissenssoziologischer Perspektivismus* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2004), esp. 215-232; and Ulrich Kittstein, “Mit Geschichte will man etwas”: *Historisches Erzählen in der Weimarer Republik und im Exil (1918-1945)* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2006), 75-83.

³⁶ This is how Megill, “Why Was There a Crisis,” understands the term (see above, footnote 12).

³⁷ I discuss this distinction between *genitivus obiectivus* and *genitivus subiectivus* at much greater length in Herman Paul, “A Collapse of Trust: Reconceptualizing the Crisis of Historicism,” *Journal of the Philosophy of History* 2 (2008), 63-82. On the trope of “crisis” in the Weimar Republic, see Laube, *Karl Mannheim*, 40-58; Oexle, “Krise des Historismus”; and, more broadly, Reinhart Koselleck, “Krise,” in Brunner, Conze, and Koselleck, *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, 3:617-650.

³⁸ Elías Palti’s suggestion that “historicism” is better treated as a discourse than as a set of ideas would be a good starting-point for a study on how early twentieth-century generations perceived the crisis of historicism. Although this paper takes another, more conceptual route, I do not doubt that such a study of discourse (what sort of meanings did people attribute to the word “historicism”?) would be a great help in answering the question where to locate the crisis of historicism. See Elías J. Palti, “Historicism as an Idea and as a Language,” *History and Theory* 44 (2005), 431-440.

historicist worldview. Not the rise, but the decline of a historicist ability to connect past and present in a narrative of organic development caused the problems that kept Troeltsch awake at night.

A second observation is that the literature surveyed in this section (with the exception of Toews's *Becoming Historical*) are exercises in ideal-typical modeling more than empirical studies of historicism in middle-class circles. Yet, the question who suffered from the crisis of historicism cannot be answered at this ideal-typical level alone. Once the crisis of historicism is conceptually defined, as the literature reviewed so helpfully does, the question emerges where this crisis happened, which people were affected by it, and what these people actually lost or feared to lose. Did only German middle classes suffer from the crisis of historicism, or can this crisis, as defined in this section, also be located among non-German, non-middle-class groups?

- II -

The Dutch Working-Men's Union Patrimonium in The Hague offers a striking case in point. Their organization was one of the flagships of a religious movement that the 1870s had seen emerge. Unsatisfied with theological modernism, as propagated since the 1850s,³⁹ growing numbers of Protestant believers had felt attracted by what had looked like an orthodox Reformed revival, led by pastor and politician Abraham Kuyper.⁴⁰ The founder of a newspaper, a political party, a university, and a church denomination, Kuyper himself had gone to considerable lengths to develop an alternative for what the "modernist" climate that, in Kuyper's assessment, had caused the Dutch Reformed Church and its theology professors to leave the solid path of Calvinist orthodoxy. A former pupil of perhaps the greatest modernist theologian in the Netherlands, Johannes Henricus Scholten, Kuyper had known well that a "return" to the pre-modern theologies of John Calvin or the Synod of Dordt (1618-1619), such

³⁹ "Theological modernism" refers to the positivistic theology developed at Leiden University by Johannes Henricus Scholten, Cornelis Willem Opzoomer, and Abraham Kuenen. For their attempts to reach the masses, see Mirjam Fokeline Buitenwerf-van der Molen, *God van vooruitgang: de popularisering van het modern-theologische gedachtegoed in Nederland, 1857-1880* (Hilversum: Verloren, 2007).

⁴⁰ The standard biography is Jeroen Koch, *Abraham Kuyper: een biografie* (Amsterdam: Boom, 2006). Kuyper's early years are carefully studied in J. Vree, *Kuyper in de kiem: de precalvinistische periode van Abraham Kuyper, 1848-1874* (Hilversum: Verloren, 2006). Two important English-language publications are Peter Heslam, *Creating a Christian Worldview: Abraham Kuyper's Lectures on Calvinism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998) and *Kuyper Reconsidered: Aspects of His Life and Work*, ed. Cornelis van der Kooi and Jan de Bruijn (Amsterdam: VU University Press, 1999).

as advocated by groups of Dutch Pietists, was unfeasible. He had therefore devoted his intellectual powers to what one might call a reformulation of Calvinist thought in nineteenth-century terms. Characteristically, the result had been less of an exercise in Christian dogmatics than an attempt to devise a Calvinist worldview that was as “systematic” and “all-encompassing” as its perceived Modernist opponent. In Kuyper’s militant words:

If the battle is to be fought with honour and with a hope of victory, then *principle* must be arrayed against *principle*; then it must be felt that in Modernism the vast energy of an all-embracing *life-system* assails us, then also it must be understood that we have to take our stand in a life-system of equally comprehensive and far-reaching power.⁴¹

With a historical vision as bold as his political ambition, Kuyper had explained that this “life-system” was “not to be invented nor formulated by ourselves, but is to be taken and applied as it presents itself in history.”⁴² A rich tradition known as Calvinism – understood not as a theological term or marker of denominational identity, but as a set of more or less elaborated ideas about God, human beings, and the natural world – was awaiting further development. Though “rooted in the past,” this tradition could “strengthen us in the present” and “fill us with confidence for the future,” because, first of all, it was not invented by humans, but given by God. “We face here no product of a clever intellectualism, but the fruit of a work of God in the heart, or, if you like, an inspiration of history.”⁴³ The “or” is striking: for Kuyper, as for many of his contemporaries, God’s blessings could, indeed, primarily (though not exclusively) be recognized in the progressive “development” of nations or cultures. Secondly, Kuyper’s “national mythopoetic Christian-historical imagination”⁴⁴ had projected this worldview backward from the days of Calvin into biblical times:

⁴¹ A. Kuyper, *Calvinism: Six Stone-Lectures* (Amsterdam; Pretoria: Höveker & Wormser, [1899]), 4. These Stone Lectures are extensively analyzed in Heslam, *Creating a Christian Worldview*; and Arie L. Molendijk, “Neo-Calvinist Culture Protestantism: Abraham Kuyper’s *Stone Lectures*,” *Church History and Religious Culture* 88 (2008), 235-250. On the metaphors of “system” and “systematic” in post-1848 Europe, see Auke van der Woud, *Een nieuwe wereld: het ontstaan van het moderne Nederland* (Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, 2006), 11-15.

⁴² Kuyper, *Calvinism*, 4.

⁴³ Kuyper, *Calvinism*, 16, 22.

⁴⁴ John Bolt, *A Free Church, a Holy Nation: Abraham Kuyper’s American Public Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2001), 6.

In its deepest logic Calvinism had already been apprehended by Augustine; had, long before Augustine, been proclaimed to the City of the seven hills by the Apostle in his Epistle to the Romans; and from Paul goes back to Israel and its prophets, yea to the tents of the patriarchs.⁴⁵

From the days of Calvin onward, so Kuyper had asserted, the tradition had spread through Europe, helped create the conditions for the rise of modern scholarship and politics, and transformed entire countries into God-fearing cultures, as illustrated by Puritan England and the Dutch Republic in its Golden Age.⁴⁶ If nineteenth-century Dutch Protestants wanted to regain their strength, they had to exploit this historical resource, not by imitating Augustine or Calvin, but by further developing their “ideas” or “principles.” They had to inscribe themselves in an (invented) tradition and apply the “Calvinist principles” that this tradition had brought to fruition to the social, political, and economic issues of the day.⁴⁷

Along these lines, Kuyper had argued for democratic practices based on what he saw as Calvinism’s centuries-long struggle to realize “principles” such as human equality before God. Likewise, he had advocated church-state separation based on Calvinism’s inherent tendency to support societal differentiation (or “sphere sovereignty,” as his own phrase had it).⁴⁸ Calvin, admittedly, had never dreamed of church-state separation, but what had counted, for Kuyper, were the principles that Calvinists, throughout the ages, had progressively come to realize. Likewise, Kuyper had tried to specify, in weekly newspaper articles read by growing numbers of

⁴⁵ Kuyper, *Calvinism*, 35.

⁴⁶ Kuyper, *Calvinism*, 43-45. See also A. Kuyper, *Het calvinisme: oorsprong en waarborg onzer constitutioneele vrijheden: een Nederlandsche gedachte* (Amsterdam: B. van der Land, 1874); published in English as “Calvinism: The Origin and Safeguard of Our Constitutional Liberties,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 52 (1895), 385-410, 646-675. In a qualified sense, parts of this narrative anticipated the elective affinities between Calvinism and capitalism elaborated by Max Weber and Ernst Troeltsch. In his social ethics book, Troeltsch cited Kuyper approvingly: *Die Soziallehren der christlichen Kirchen und Gruppen*, 3rd ed. (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1923), 731. Troeltsch added, though, that the distance between the sixteenth-century Calvin and the nineteenth-century Kuyper was larger than the latter suggested (769). This issue is further explored in Herman Paul and Johan de Niet, “Issus de Calvin: Collective Memories of John Calvin in Dutch Neo-Calvinism,” in *Sober, Strict, and Scriptural: Collective Memories of John Calvin, 1800-2000*, ed. Johan de Niet, Herman Paul, and Bart Wallet (Leiden; Boston, MA: Brill, 2009), 67-95.

⁴⁷ For a fuller treatment of this logic, see Herman Paul, “Gereformeerde beginselen,” in *Het gereformeerde geheugen: protestantse herinneringsculturen in Nederland, 1850-2000*, ed. George Harinck, Herman Paul, and Bart Wallet (Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, 2009), 293-305.

⁴⁸ Kuyper, *Calvinism*, 25-28, 115, 135-138.

Protestant households, what “Calvinist principles” had to say about such new emerging issues as birth control, cowpox vaccination, homeopathy, and home insurance.⁴⁹ This desire to explicate how one could consistently be a Calvinist in a differentiating society – or how one could obey God’s commandment in each “sphere of life,” as Kuyper had put it – had increasingly also come to characterize the hundreds of Protestant organizations (varying from schools and local youth organizations to electors’ associations and anti-alcohol clubs) that had either been founded or Kuyper’s influence or become attracted to his vision. These organizations had contributed much to what would later become known as the “pillarization” of Dutch society: a mode of “peaceful though unfriendly co-existence” in which the public participation of large numbers of Socialist, Liberal, Catholic, and Calvinist citizens was largely mediated through confessionally-based parties, periodicals, schools, and labor-unions.⁵⁰ Most important for my purpose, though, is that these organizations had greatly stimulated a kind of Kuyperian worldview-thinking that challenged people to think and act as “Calvinists,” that is, as heirs to an impressive Calvinist tradition.

Founded in 1876 the Working-Men’s Union Patrimonium had not immediately come under Kuyperian influence. Afraid of Socialist or “Communist” influences among Protestant workers, the organization had started as a pressure group addressing “the social question” and advocating for improved labor conditions. What had initially distinguished Patrimonium, apart from its explicit Protestant character, was its audience and goal. Membership had been open to both employers and employees, who had been supposed not to fight each other, but to reach agreement on labor issues by the light of “God’s Word and the traditions of our people.”⁵¹ This had been a veiled way of saying that labor and capital could find each other only if both recognized that the power they enjoyed had been instituted by God for the benefit of

⁴⁹ A. Kuyper, *De gemeene gratie*, 3 vols. (Amsterdam; Pretoria: Höveker & Wormser, 1902-1904). Another example of this genre is W. Geesink, *Van ‘s Heeren ordinantiën*, 2 vols. (Amsterdam: Kirchner, 1907-1908).

⁵⁰ Hugh McLeod, *Religion and the People of Western Europe, 1789-1989* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 19. The most definitive study so far of Dutch pillarization is *De verzuiling voorbij: godsdienst, stand en natie in de lange negentiende eeuw*, ed. J. C. H. Blom and J. Talsma (Amsterdam: Het Spinhuis, 2000). See also Arie L. Molendijk, “Verzuiling,” in Harinck, Paul, and Wallet, *Het gereformeerde geheugen*, 375-383.

⁵¹ “Statuten,” *Jaarboekje van het Nederlandsch Werkliedenverbond Patrimonium voor 1897* (Amsterdam: W. Kirchner, s. a.), 65-68, there 65.

all, so that they ought neither to exploit their power nor rebel against the divinely instituted order of things. As an initial statement had phrased it:

It is the solemn duty of working-men holding onto God and His Word to unite and to establish a laborers' movement, which, in obedience to God and the government, stands up for the common interests; which does not estrange the higher and the lower classes in society, or position them as enemies against each other, but, to the contrary, tries to strengthen and tighten the bonds that hold the societal classes together; which does not alienate the working man from family and church, but tightens the family bond [and] intensifies and strengthens the religious sense; which aims for peace with all; and which, with and by all this, searches its foundation and strength, its glory and crown, in Him who has assured: "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth."⁵²

Although the founding committee had included a wealthy beer brewer,⁵³ few Dutch employers had ever applied for membership. In 1890, non-working-class membership had been estimated on "certainly less than 8 per cent."⁵⁴ The organization had primarily attracted schooled workers from Protestant background who had combined a hope for better working conditions with an abhorrence for Socialism and other "ungodly" powers. Among other things, Patrimonium had helped improve their living standards by building proper single-family houses.⁵⁵ Equally important, though, had been the moral and religious education of these workers and their families. Through evening classes and periodicals, the members – no less than 12,471, divided

⁵² S. R. D. [pseudonym of W. C. Beeremans, K. Kater, and J. Witmond], *Patrimonium (vaderlijk erfdeel): eene nieuwe beweging onder onze werklieden* (Amsterdam: J. Clausen, [1876]), 12-13, quoting Matthew 28,18 (here in the King James translation). Another favorite Bible text was Proverbs 22,2: "The rich and poor meet together: the Lord is the maker of them all."

⁵³ G. J. Schutte, "Voorlopers: Willem Hovy," in [G. J. Schutte *et al.*], *Voorlopers en dwarsliggers* (Amsterdam; Utrecht: Stichting Beheer IISG; CNV, 1998), 42-44.

⁵⁴ J. Witmond, "Negende jaarvergadering van het Nederlandsch Werkliedenverbond Patrimonium," *Jaarboekje van het Nederlandsch Werkliedenverbond Patrimonium voor 1890* (Amsterdam: Höveker & Zoon, s. a.), 74-82, there 74.

⁵⁵ For the Amsterdam chapter, these activities have been described in a recent study that also offers the most up to date historical account of Patrimonium's early years: Wouter P. Beekers and Rolf E. van der Woude, *Niet bij steen alleen: de woningstichting Patrimonium Amsterdam, 1876-2003: van sociale vereniging tot sociale onderneming* (Hilversum: Verloren, 2008). For Patrimonium's house-building program in The Hague, see J. Kuit, "Coöp[eratie] Woningbouwveren[iging] 'Luctor et Emergo,'" in Dijk, Hollander, and Heijns, *Gedenkboek*, 53-55; and C. Wildenberg, "Woningstichting 'Patrimonium,'" in Dijk, Hollander, and Heijns, *Gedenkboek*, 56-65.

over 207 chapters, in the count of January 1, 1936⁵⁶ – had been taught that Socialism was a wolf in sheep’s clothing and one of those powers (which also included the Roman Catholic Church) that rebelled against “God’s Word and the traditions of our people.”

Let *Patrimonium* not only be anti-revolutionary, and therefore anti-Socialist, but also anti-Ultramontanist, especially in these days, when Rome offers us her help in combating extreme Socialism and Liberalism, while, at the same time, her desecrating hand tears the most beautiful page from our history and insults our God-given heroes. *Patrimonium* has been founded to be a wall against all that contradicts our traditions.⁵⁷

Both in employing this “anti-revolutionary” language and in idealizing the nation’s “historic” Protestant character – to the point of offering its members’ children a course in the “history of the fatherland”⁵⁸ – *Patrimonium* had shown its indebtedness to Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer, an influential Dutch Protestant whose widely read books had combined a providential interpretation of Dutch history with a condemnation of the “revolutionary spirit” ravaging Europe under the banners of Socialism and Liberalism. Especially his *Unbelief and Revolution* (*Ongeloof en revolutie*, 1847) had taught entire generations of Dutch Protestants to see the history of Europe as a field of battle between “belief” and “unbelief,” or between true Protestant faith and “the revolutionary spirit” that had not only caused the French Revolution and its aftermaths (including the secession of Belgium in 1830), but also inspired the nineteenth-century projects of Liberalism, Democracy, and Socialism. With the Dutch Republic’s “Golden Age” and the Jacobin Terror in France as his prime examples, Groen had argued, in an almost Biblical manner, that history shows true faith to be rewarded with divine blessing, whereas “unbelief” and “Revolution” leave humankind to the bitter fruits of sin. Although this “anti-revolutionary” position had not necessarily been conservative, it had shown a great respect for what God had done in the history of the Netherlands – which was the subject of Groen’s other

⁵⁶ W. J. Bossenbroek, “Verslag der werkzaamheden over het tijdvak van 1 januari 1935 tot 31 december 1936,” *Patrimonium* 51 no. 12 (1937).

⁵⁷ “Zesde jaarvergadering van het Nederlandsch Werkliedenverbond *Patrimonium*,” *Jaarboekje van het Nederlandsch Werkliedenverbond Patrimonium voor 1887* (Amsterdam: Höveker & Zoon, s. a.), 61-107, there 63.

⁵⁸ “Statuten,” 65.

classic volume, the *Handbook for the History of the Fatherland* (Handboek der geschiedenis van het vaderland, 1841-1846).⁵⁹ Not coincidentally, this “master work” had been the first book after the Bible that Patrimonium had included in its library.⁶⁰ In its condemnation of “all that contradicts our traditions,” the workers organization had heavily relied on Groen’s religious logic. Even their very name, Patrimonium (“paternal heritage”), referred to an idealized version of the Dutch Republic, such as found in Groen’s *Handbook*, as did their poems and songs performed at special occasions.⁶¹

Patrimonium, Patrimonium, / that is our motto, that is our motto, / that, that is the choice of us all. / Heritage that God has given us, / source of earthly and heavenly life, / thou art our strength, thou art our strength, / and in thou our power lies.

Patrimonium, Patrimonium, / with that we are one, with that we are one, / in joy and in weeping. / Noble dynasty of Orange, / once so strong in the struggle with Spain, / we are faithful to you, we are faithful to you, / whatever will change.

*Patrimonium, Patrimonium, / precious pledge, precious pledge, / free of any slavish bond, / God with the Netherlands and Orange, / once united in the struggle with Spain, / in you lies the ground, in you lies the ground / of the strength of our Union.*⁶²

If such songs showed that Patrimonium’s founding generation had not exaggerated in calling themselves the “spiritual sons of the late Groen van

⁵⁹ Although Groen’s *Handboek der geschiedenis van het vaderland*, 5 vols. (Leiden: S. and J. Luchtman, 1841-1846) has not been translated into English, an abridged translation of his *Ongeloof en revolutie: eene reeks van historische voorlezingen* (Leiden: S. and J. Luchtman, 1847) has appeared in Arie Johannes van Dijk, *Groen van Prinsterer’s Lectures on “Unbelief and Revolution”* (Jordan Station, ON: Wedge Publishing Foundation, 1989).

⁶⁰ S. R. D., *Patrimonium*, 19-20; *Verslag der eerste jaarvergadering van het Nederlandsch Werkliedenverbond Patrimonium* (s. l.: s. n., [1878]), 29.

⁶¹ For religious uses of the term “heritage” in this period, see Willem Frijhoff, “Hemels erfgoed: een reflectie,” in *Erfgoed: de geschiedenis van een begrip*, ed. Frans Grijzenhout (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2007), 45-56.

⁶² “Liederen,” *Jaarboekje van het Nederlandsch Werkliedenverbond Patrimonium voor 1897*, 127-130, there 127-128. For another poem written along these lines, see *Verslag der eerste jaarvergadering*, 20-28.

Prinsterer,”⁶³ the association’s hymnal repertoire had increasingly also come to exhibit Kuyperian influences. Especially after Groen’s death, in 1876, Kuyper had emerged as a second source of inspiration. For example, a song performed in Kuyper’s presence, in 1884, had positioned Patrimonium in a historical narrative reaching back to the sixteenth-century rebels against the Spanish regime in the Low Countries known as “beggars” (*geuzen*), with whom Kuyper had strongly identified:

The paternal heritage! It’s blood in our veins; / the heritage of courage and manly strength, / the heritage of our fathers’ godliness and virtuousness / the heritage of allegiance to the beggars’ line [*Geuzengeslacht*].

To watch, to fight, to live for this, / to stand as a steady rock for this, / to give, if God wants, one’s life for this, / this is the divine calling of the descendants.⁶⁴

Initially, Kuyper’s leadership had not gone uncontested. In 1894/95, for example, the Patrimonium chapter in The Hague had split during a conflict over Kuyper’s church denomination. But since this quarrel had only resulted in a parting of the critics, a more devoted Kuyperian membership had remained.⁶⁵ By the early twentieth century, a majority of Patrimonium’s members in The Hague had belonged to Kuyper’s Reformed Churches (*Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland*). They had made “Abraham the Great” a honorary member and listed his publications on the first page of their library catalogue. Many of them had attended Kuyper’s funeral, in 1920. In 1930, his address delivered at the Christian Social Congress, in 1891, had still been recommended to all members.⁶⁶ Although, presumably, not all of these members had

⁶³ “Zesde jaarvergadering van het Nederlandsch Werkliedenverbond Patrimonium,” *Jaarboekje van het Nederlandsch Werkliedenverbond Patrimonium voor 1887*, 61-107, there 63.

⁶⁴ R. Hagoort, *Patrimonium (vaderlijk erfdeel): gedenkboek bij het gouden jubileum* (s. l.: Nederlandsch Werkliedenverbond Patrimonium, 1927), 261. Not coincidentally, Kuyper’s newspaper, *De Standaard*, had first appeared on April 1, 1872, at the three-hundredth anniversary of the beggars’ storming of Den Briel. See Frans Groot, “De strijd rond Alva’s bril: papen en geuzen bij de herdenking van de inname van Den Briel, 1572-1872,” *Bijdragen en Mededelingen betreffende de Geschiedenis der Nederlanden* 110 (1995), 161-181.

⁶⁵ A. Platteel P. Jzn., “Herinneringen,” in Dijk, Hollander, and Heijns, *Gedenkboek*, 38-42; R. Hagoort, *Het beginsel behouden: gedenkboek van het Nederlandsch Werkliedenverbond Patrimonium over de jaren 1891-1927* (s.l.: Nederlandsch Werkliedenverbond Patrimonium, 1934), 170-174.

⁶⁶ W. Heijns, “Onze volksbibliotheek,” in Dijk, Hollander, and Heijns, *Gedenkboek*, 66-71, there 66; J. Treep, “Historisch overzicht: 1 maart 1880-28 februari 1930,” in Dijk, Hollander, and Heijns, *Gedenkboek*, 14-32, there 23; “Welke woorden van Dr. A. Kuyper hadden ook in Den Haag zoo

been equally interested in Kuyper, the association's official program and policy, such as explained in its periodical, *Patrimonium*, had increasingly become "Neo-Calvinist," or Kuyper-inspired.⁶⁷ In 1927, the title of its commemorative volume, *Het beginsel behouden* (The Principle Preserved), had aptly articulated how *Patrimonium* had come to position itself within Kuyper's historical narrative. Also, on a more practical level, *Patrimonium*, like Kuyper, favored the institutional expression of Christian identity, to the point of facilitating a Christian Union of Cigar Makers and a Christian Labor Union of Carpenters. Its Kuyperianism was most publicly visible, perhaps, during the dramatic days of the 1903 railway strike, when the union sided with Kuyper, by then prime-minister, in condemning the strike as incompatible with Calvinism's historical principles.⁶⁸

Although (for reasons that will soon become apparent) *Patrimonium* may not have wished to be associated with *Historismus*, this language of historical principles, the notion of Calvinist ideas unfolding themselves organically through history, the historical narrative of "Calvinism," and the oft-repeated identification with a "paternal heritage" all testify to the historicist nature of the organization's self-understanding. If the "historical principle" ("the subjective identification of individuals with a shared past or public memory") was a defining feature of historicism, as we saw above, then not only Groen and Kuyper, but also *Patrimonium* had drunk deeply from historicist wells.⁶⁹ Indeed, although the historical methods for which we tend to remember Ranke's generation not exactly characterize *Patrimonium*'s output, historicism in the broader sense of a historical culture fascinated by origins, organic development, and steady progress had been crucial to the workers' association. Its self-understanding in terms of "heritage" and "principles" had expressed a historicist sense of belonging, just as Groen's "traditions" and Kuyper's "Calvinism" had offered historicist accounts of identity. Following Groen and Kuyper, *Patrimonium* had even contributed to a

grooten invloed op de ontwikkeling van *Patrimonium*?", in Dijk, Hollander, and Heijns, *Gedenkboek*, 33-34, there 33. Kuyper's 1891 address was published as *Het sociale vraagstuk en de christelijke religie: rede ter opening van het Sociaal Congres op 9 november 1891* (Amsterdam: J. A. Wormser, 1891) and appeared in English as *The Problem of Poverty*, ed. James W. Skillen (Washington, DC; Grand Rapids, MI: Center for Public Justice; Baker Book House, 1991).

⁶⁷ Neo-Calvinism is the name by which, in the late 1890s, the world according to Kuyper had become known. The term first emerged in Anne Anema, *Calvinisme en rechtswetenschap: een studie* (Amsterdam: Kirchner, 1897), xvi.

⁶⁸ Hagoort, *Het beginsel behouden*, 269, 348.

⁶⁹ The question whether Groen can be called a historicist is carefully considered in W.G.F. van Vliet, *Groen van Prinsterers historische benadering van de politiek* (Hilversum 2008), 30-81. Van Vliet's answer could have been less ambiguous if Van Vliet had identified historicism, not with "historical relativism," but with the "historical principle" or the "historical identifications" discussed in section I.

historicist “religion of history,” in Hardtwig’s sense of the word, by identifying divine grace as the final cause of Calvinism’s historical significance. So, here, at great distances from Berlin and Leipzig, historicist thought had been appropriated, not among academics, but in a labor organization concerned about the “traditions of our people.”

- III -

However, by the time of the lecture in The Hague, in November 1936, other concerns had emerged. Kuyper had died and his aura had begun to wane, especially among Reformed intellectuals (professors, journalists, and other opinion leaders) who had started their career after the Great War. Although many Patrimonium members, in their churches or in the Sunday Schools attended by their children, would likely not have noticed any decline in the popularity of Kuyper’s historical narrative, words like “uncertainty” and “crisis” emerged in the Neo-Calvinist press. Some older academics, such as Valentijn Hepp and Kuyper’s oldest son, Herman H. Kuyper, established themselves as guardians of a Kuyperian orthodoxy and warned against the dissent of a younger generation. Significantly, a good number of such disagreements centered on matters of history. Older professors blamed their younger colleagues for giving up the “historical continuity” with Groen and Kuyper. “The reformation, which has to continue, ought *not to disengage itself from the past*, but must be continued on historical ground.”⁷⁰ On the General Synod of the Reformed Churches, in 1936, Herman H. Kuyper complained emotionally that certain young pastors “disparage ‘historicism’ and deny the guidance of the Holy Spirit and what the church of all ages has confessed. And this is done by beardless boys! It is the spirit of revolution, aiming to overturn everything.”⁷¹ In turn, the accused responded with arguments heard all over Europe at that time, such as that history did not necessarily obey the law of organic development and that the world had recently changed so drastically, that nineteenth-century modes of organic historical thought now appeared as surprisingly dated.⁷²

⁷⁰ Cited in K[laas] S[childer], “Persschouw,” *De Reformatie* 16 (1936), 402.

⁷¹ Cited in “Generale Synode der Gereformeerde Kerken,” *De Reformatie* 16 (1936), 433.

⁷² George Harinck, “Op losse schroeven: gereformeerden en de moderniteit,” in *Moderniteit: modernisme en massacultuur in Nederland 1914-1940*, ed. Madelon de Keizer and Sophie Tates (Zutphen: Walburg Pers, 2004), esp. 342-346.

The philosophy professor who addressed the working-men audience in The Hague, 42-year old Herman Dooyeweerd, was one of these “younger” Reformed intellectuals.⁷³ Having started his career at the Kuyper Center in The Hague (a political think-tank, in today’s vocabulary), Dooyeweerd was thoroughly at home in Neo-Calvinist thought. Following Kuyper, he also extensively employed the language of “Calvinist principles.” However, as a systematic thinker with a special interest in the philosophy of law, he preferred to define these principles more precisely, and less historically, than Kuyper in his grand narratives had done. More specifically, he wanted to sort out the truly “Calvinistic” elements in Kuyper from “the scholastic-Aristotelian metaphysics or the Hegelian dialectics or the humanistic epistemology that have left strong residues in his thought.” In other words, Dooyeweerd’s aim, as he himself explained it, was to further develop Neo-Calvinism – “a *continuation* and not a *bending away* of Kuyper’s basic conception” – by liberating it from its scholastic, Kantian, and Hegelian dimensions.⁷⁴ As we shall see in a moment, this was one reason, among others, why Dooyeweerd launched a spirited crusade against historicism.

In his grand-scale *Philosophy of the Cosmogenic Idea* (*De wijsbegeerte der wetsidee*), published in three volumes in 1935-36, Dooyeweerd, like many of his contemporaries, had identified “historicism” with irrationalism, relativism, and nihilism. For Dooyeweerd, *Historismus* belonged to the category of modern “isms” (naturalism, biologism, psychologism, and so forth), all of which overemphasized a single aspect of reality at the cost of others. More importantly, however, historicism signaled the “relativistic” consequences of what Dooyeweerd called a dominant “humanist” tendency in modern philosophy. Preoccupied with the theme of human freedom, understood as the uniquely human capacity to create a universe of meaning over against the forces of nature, this modern humanism, in Dooyeweerd’s analysis, was unable to recognize that moral values, in order not to become arbitrary and “relative,” must be grounded in God’s creational ordinances. Accordingly, the “irrationalist historicist relativism” that Dooyeweerd encountered in Dilthey, Troeltsch, and Spengler signaled nothing less than a crisis of the entire humanist

⁷³ Dooyeweerd’s son in law, Marcel E. Verburg, has written an informative biography: *Herman Dooyeweerd: leven en werk van een Nederlands christen-wijsgeer* (Baarn: Ten Have, 1989).

⁷⁴ H. Dooyeweerd, “Wat de Wijsbegeerte der Wetsidee aan Dr Kuyper te danken heeft,” *De Reformatie* 18 (1937), 65, 64, further elaborated in “Kuyper’s wetenschapsteorie,” *Philosophia Reformata* 4 (1939), 193-232.

tradition – or, in Gerhard Masur’s formulation, an “expression of the total disorganization of the realm of values in the western world.”⁷⁵ In the *Philosophy of the Cosmomic Idea*, historicism thus appeared as the black background against which a truly Calvinist philosophy was supposed to shine brightly. Given these connotations, Dooyeweerd’s audience in The Hague may have been surprised to hear that “historicism” had also infected their own, Neo-Calvinist tradition.

According to a newspaper report, Dooyeweerd told the men gathered in Patrimonium’s community center that historicism was “the life and worldview that has given up the belief in imperishable norms and principles and holds that it is not possible for a human being to choose a position above and outside the stream of historical happening.”⁷⁶ This definition could have been given by Hepp or any other conservative Neo-Calvinist. Even the words used in this definition – “life and worldview”, “principles” – were entirely Kuyperian. Yet, the well-informed in the audience must have noted Dooyeweerd’s problems with Groen and Kuyper when the speaker emphatically dissociated himself from “the view of traditional Christian thought and Romantic philosophy from the Restoration era (Schelling c.s.) as if everything historically grown by silently-operating powers, in which human beings have no part, has to be seen as God’s guidance of history.”⁷⁷

The newspaper report does not specify how this criticism was unpacked. Dooyeweerd’s own notes (which have survived in mimeographed form) neither say much more than that this “form of *historicism*” must be “*dismissed* as a false intrusion [*inmengsel*] in Christian thought.”⁷⁸ However, in a lecture delivered four years earlier, Dooyeweerd had been more specific about his target. Groen, Kuyper, a number of professors at the Free University as well as some prominent members of Kuyper’s political party – they all had “ascribed normative meaning” to a historical process that supposedly unfolded under divine providence. Influenced by Friedrich Julius Stahl (Dooyeweerd’s *bête noire*), these Neo-Calvinists had adopted an

⁷⁵ H. Dooyeweerd, *De wijsbegeerte der wetsidee*, 3 vols. (Amsterdam: H. J. Paris, 1935-1936), 2:213, here quoted from the English version, *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought*, translated by David H. Freeman and William S. Young, 4 vols. (Philadelphia, PA: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1953-1958), 2:282. See also Dooyeweerd’s earlier writings, esp. *De beteekenis der wetsidee voor rechtswetenschap en rechtsphilosophie* (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1926), 67, 70, 102; and *De crisis der humanistische staatsleer in het licht eener calvinistische kosmologie en kennistheorie* (Amsterdam: W. ten Have, 1931), 38-39, 76-83, 125-128, 168, 186-187.

⁷⁶ *Het Vaderland* (November 28, 1936).

⁷⁷ *Het Vaderland* (November 28, 1936).

⁷⁸ H. Dooyeweerd, *Geloof en historie* ([’s-Gravenhage]: s. n., [1937]), 4.

“organological theory of historical development” and thereby “transferred a dangerous plant from foreign soil in Christian earth.” “I want to show,” Dooyeweerd had said on this earlier occasion, “how our view of history would be corrupted in root and branch through an infection with the irrational philosophy of history of German speculative idealism.”⁷⁹

Why, then, was historicism not only inadequate, but also “a false intrusion” or “a dangerous plant”? The first and most important answer is that Dooyeweerd considered the “tidal wave of historical relativism” that he associated with Dilthey and Troeltsch a logical consequence of the sort of historicism adopted by Groen and Kuyper. For Dooyeweerd, the historical relativism of a Spengler or an Ortega y Gasset was “born out of the crisis of a life and worldview whose foundations could not stand the test of the world war and whose belief in the ‘transcendence of the idea’ was undermined as one came to realize that reason is tied to historical development and *immanent* in the stream of time.”⁸⁰ In other words, although nineteenth-century historicism still “held on to *the belief in supra-temporal rational ideas*” – think of Kuyper’s Reformed principles developing themselves organically through history – it was only a matter of time before such beliefs were undermined by an increasing sensitivity to the historicity of “law, ethics, morality, language, art, et cetera.”⁸¹ In a sense, Troeltsch’s feelings of crisis were thus an inevitable consequence of his historicist inclinations. In order to avoid such a crisis, all forms of historicism had to be expelled from the Neo-Calvinist worldview.

Secondly, for Dooyeweerd, a Calvinistic philosophy able to provide assurance in times of intellectual uncertainty could not “be taken and applied as it presents itself in history,” as Kuyper had claimed. Indebted to (Christian) natural law philosophy, Dooyeweerd argued that such a Calvinistic philosophy must rather be grounded in God’s “creational ordinances.” Calvinist identity had to be derived, not from grand historicist master narratives in Kuyper’s style, but from so-called “cosmomic ideas,” or the (moral) laws inherent in the structures of God’s creation. Himself an exceptionally systematic thinker, Dooyeweerd saw it a matter of consistency to argue against everything that hindered sight of this God-given order.

⁷⁹ H. Dooyeweerd, *De zin der geschiedenis en de “leiding Gods” in de historische ontwikkeling* (s. l.: s. n., [1932]), 3, 4. On Stahl’s influence in the Netherlands, see Gerard Fafié, *Friedrich Julius Stahl: invloeden van zijn leven en werken in Nederland, 1847-1880* (Rotterdam: Bronder, 1975).

⁸⁰ H. Dooyeweerd, “De zin der geschiedenis vanuit de openbaring,” *Vox Theologica* 5 (1934), 117.

⁸¹ Dooyeweerd, *Geloof en historie*, 4.

A third, less obvious but plausible reason for Dooyeweerd's warnings might have been political. Three years after Adolf Hitler's rise to power, the assertion that historicism had given birth to Fascism and National Socialism was a not-to-be-missed warning. In the 1935 elections, the Dutch National-Socialist Movement had attracted no less than 7.94 percent of the vote.⁸² Significantly, in their attempts to gain support from people like the Patrimonium working-men, the movement's campaign leaders had presented themselves as heirs of Groen van Prinsterer in their concerns about the "traditions of our people."⁸³ In response, Patrimonium's national board had issued a long series of warnings, which not only sought to "rescue" Groen from this National Socialist appropriation, but also argued that "the Christian character of our people" – one of the dominant themes in Groen's historical writings – was irreconcilable with the "horrible pagan racial theory" of the National-Socialist Movement.⁸⁴ Consistently, Patrimonium had played out Groen, Kuyper, and the "Christian social movement" against the "spirit of revolution" that manifested itself in Nationalism Socialism.⁸⁵ Although neither the newspaper report nor Dooyeweerd's own lecture notes elaborate on this, Dooyeweerd must have been unsatisfied with Patrimonium's strategy. After all, in his analysis, both Groen and the National Socialists had tapped from historicist sources. Is it too much to speculate that Dooyeweerd emphasized the historicist "contaminations" in Groen's legacy partly also in order to challenge Patrimonium to rethink the resources it employed in its opposition to the National-Socialist Movement?

In any case, what we encounter in Patrimonium's community center, in November 1936, is a Christian intellectual concerned about a weakness of his Neo-Calvinist tradition vis-à-vis the dangerous implications of historicism. What we see is an attempt to get rid of Groen's and Kuyper's historicism in order not to succumb to crises such as experienced by Troeltsch. What we observe, in this Dutch Protestant context, is an equivalent to what Nowak calls a "crisis of historical orientation" and

⁸² A. A. de Jonge, *Het nationaal-socialisme in Nederland: voorgeschiedenis, ontstaan en ontwikkeling* (Den Haag: Kruseman, 1968), 101.

⁸³ Hermannus Reydon even dared to call Groen a "pioneer of National Socialism." Reydon, *Groen van Prinsterer: wegbereider van het nationaal-socialisme* ([Utrecht]: Nederlandsche Nationaal-Socialistische Uitgeverij, [1935]).

⁸⁴ C. Z[aagsma], "De N. S. B. en het Germaansche ras," *Patrimonium* 50 no. 8 (1936).

⁸⁵ E. g., "Een misleidende brief," *Patrimonium* 50 nos. 5, 6, and 7 (1936); "De klok teruggezet: herlevend absolutisme," *Patrimonium* 50 no. 8 (1936); "'Dienares, u ten goede': beperkt karakter van het overheidsgezag," *Patrimonium* 50 no. 9; "De theoretische revolutie: geen vrijheid, maar tyrannie," *Patrimonium* 50 no. 11 (1936).

what Hardtwig describes as a “crisis of the historicist religion of history” – at least in so far as Dooyeweerd was concerned.

But how did *Patrimonium* respond? Did those working-men, listening in The Hague to Dooyeweerd’s learned oration on historicism, share his sense of crisis? Unsurprisingly, there is a lack of sources informing us about the audience’s immediate response. However, only a few weeks after Dooyeweerd’s lecture, an interesting article appeared in *Patrimonium*, the association’s weekly magazine. On the one hand, this unsigned piece explicitly endorsed Dooyeweerd’s critique of historicism. Like Dooyeweerd, the author – probably one of *Patrimonium*’s board members – wanted to “reckon very seriously” with what had “historically developed,” but refused to accept historical developments as normative for the present, because history had to be judged in the light of the Bible. Accordingly, under explicit reference to Dooyeweerd’s *Philosophy of the Cosmogenic Idea*, he warned against “all conservative historicism” that tended to “canonize” the “unsacred history.” Yet, on the other hand, the author sought to make clear that Groen and Kuyper had not been guilty of such an adulation of the past: they had always interpreted history through Biblical lenses. Defending *Patrimonium*’s old-time heroes against their critics, while praising Dooyeweerd for his attack on historicism, the author did apparently not realize that this attack had also been aimed at the very traditions that *Patrimonium* had inherited from Groen and Kuyper.⁸⁶

There are other indications that Dooyeweerd’s warnings drew a mixed response. Articles in the association’s magazine displayed an increasing awareness of changes in society. Pieces on Kuyper not seldom reflected on how different the world had become. “Everywhere there is great degeneration. Economically, politically, especially ethically. . . . This world, in which once-Christianized nations turn away from Christ, in which all moral certainties seem to stagger, is truly the world of Romans I.”⁸⁷ Yet, adopting a Kuyperian strategy, many authors subsequently argued that, in this changed environment, Kuyper’s work had to be continued just as Kuyper had build on Calvin: with acknowledgment of temporal distance, but based on the same Calvinist principles.⁸⁸ One author even claimed that Kuyper’s “genius” had

⁸⁶ “Het christelijk leven III: Schrift en historie,” *Patrimonium* 50 no. 51 (1936).

⁸⁷ [Christiaan Smeenk,] “Nieuwe verhoudingen, oude beginselen: openingsrede,” *Patrimonium* 51 no. 17 (1937). In Romans 1, Paul paints a black picture of the “ungodliness and unrighteousness of men.”

⁸⁸ “Niet afwijken van het gebod: geen Führer-willekeur,” *Patrimonium* 50 no. 15 (1936); “Anti-individualistisch: onlogische ‘intellectueelen,’” *Patrimonium* 50 no. 22 (1936). This rhetoric was

known in advance that his followers would have to adjust his program to new circumstances.⁸⁹ In both cases, the historicist notion of organic development over time was carefully preserved. But, significantly, hymns that warmly identified with “the paternal heritage” disappeared from the organization’s repertoire.

Furthermore, although *Patrimonium*, the magazine, continued historicist strategies until well into the 1950s, few readers would have failed to notice that, especially after the Second World War, its tone became increasingly defensive. Time and again, *Patrimonium* took issue with critics, complained about a lack of loyalty, and defended Groen and Kuyper against ignorance and indifference.⁹⁰ It was explicitly noted that “thousands of us have fallen prey” to the enemies of Neo-Calvinism.⁹¹ Moreover, from the first half of the 1950s onward, articles about Kuyper and his contemporaries began to be written in a nostalgic vein. “Dear people, for the most part, we have lost that beauty!” a contributor exclaimed, in a retrospective on *Patrimonium*’s founding fathers. And again: “Can you also long for those old days? . . . It is as if I miss something.” This is what Svetlana Boym calls reflective nostalgia, or an expression of irreparable loss.⁹² Although the causes for this sense of distance were varied,⁹³ it is instructive, and ironic, to find a fulmination against “hedonism,” in a 1958 issue of *Patrimonium*, surrounded by advertisements in which attractively dressed women promote showers, kitchens, and washing machines (“Yes, the housewife is most interested in a modern, comfortably equipped kitchen”).⁹⁴ Indeed, during the 1950s, sharp frictions grew between the Neo-Calvinist worldview, with its aim to develop organically the historically-given, and the rapid changes brought by technological innovation (“What to do without vacuum cleaner, washing machine, coffee grinder, refrigerator, electric razor, sewing machine, hand mixer, or hair drier .

already employed in C[hristiaan] S[meenk], “Onze dooden,” *Jaarboekje van het Nederlandsch Werkliedenverbond “Patrimonium” voor het jaar 1917* (Arnhem: W. Swaan, s. a.), 85-93.

⁸⁹ “Dankbaar gedenken,” *Patrimonium* 51 no. 43 (1936).

⁹⁰ E. g., “Oppervlakkige praat,” *Patrimonium* 57 no. 9 (1946); “Isolement ook thans?” *Patrimonium* 57 no. 10 (1946); “Geen steekhoudende argumenten,” *Patrimonium* 57 no. 35 (1947); “In Kuypers lijn,” *Patrimonium* 59 no. 22 (1949); “De werkelijkheid zien!” *Patrimonium* 61 no. 22 (1951); “Geen verzekerd bezit,” *Patrimonium* 61 no. 23 (1951).

⁹¹ C[ornelis] J[ansen] V[erplanke], “Gereformeerde telegrafie,” *Patrimonium* 69 (1958), 193.

⁹² N[icolaas] B[aas], “Bij stukkenzak en theeblik,” *Patrimonium* 63 no. 25 (1953); “Bij stukkenzak en theeblik,” *Patrimonium* 65 (1954), 112; Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001).

⁹³ James Carleton Kennedy, “Building New Babylon: Cultural Change in the Netherlands in the 1960s” (Ph.D. thesis, University of Iowa, 1995), translated into Dutch as *Nieuw Babylon in aanbouw: Nederland in de jaren zestig* (Amsterdam; Meppel: Boom, 1995).

⁹⁴ K[laas] J[an] P[opma], “Lust en plicht,” *Patrimonium* 69 (1958), 181-182; advertisement on p. 187.

..?).⁹⁵ While many of his fellow Neo-Calvinists became enthralled about “change” and “renewal,” not only in the sphere of household technology, but also in the realms of politics and ethics, Dooyeweerd in 1959 observed that historicism, in Spengler’s or Ortega’s sense, had become “the fatal illness of our ‘dynamic’ time”:

Change is everything, certainty of principle is nothing! You live in an age that has overcome the dogmatic prejudice regarding the existence of abiding standards that are not subject to historical development. To be at home in these times you must place yourself midstream in the movement of history. To be listened to today you must be open to the spirit of the age. Above all you must be progressive, for then the future is yours. These are the surreptitious ways with which historicism enters the heart of modern man.⁹⁶

In sum, by the 1950s, Groen’s and Kuyper’s grand historical narratives, such as echoed in *Patrimonium*’s politics, publications, and songs, began to lose the capacity that had contributed so heavily to their successes in the nineteenth century. Their ability to offer a convincing form of narrative identity, or a historical identification that inspired people to conceive of themselves in historical terms, was increasingly questioned. Although Dooyeweerd arguably had other reasons for dissociating himself from Neo-Calvinist historicism than most of *Patrimonium*’s

⁹⁵ “Elektrische huishoudelijke apparaten, van vandaag en morgen,” *Patrimonium* 73 (1962), 386.

⁹⁶ H. Dooyeweerd, *Vernieuwing en bezinning: om het reformatorisch grondmotief*, ed. J. A. Oosterhoff (Zutphen: J. B. van den Brink & Co., 1959), 58, 59, here quoted (with one minor correction) from the English version: *Roots of Western Culture: Pagan, Secular, and Christian Options*, translated by John Kraay, ed. Mark Vander Vennen and Bernard Zylstra (Toronto, ON: Wedge Publishing Foundation, 1979), 61, 62. In the late 1940s and 1950s, Dooyeweerd’s fight against historicism became increasingly intense. This is best illustrated by “De vooronderstellingen van ons denken over recht en samenleving in de crisis van het moderne historisme: een critische overpeinzing naar aanleiding van mr M. W. Scheltema’s ‘Beschouwingen over de vooronderstellingen van ons denken over recht en staat,’” *Rechtsgeleerd Magazijn Themis* (1949), 193-248; “Maatstaven ter onderkenning van progressieve en reactionaire bewegingen in de historische ontwikkeling,” in *Verslag van de plechtige viering van het honderdvijftigjarig bestaan der Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie van Wetenschappen met de teksten der bij die gelegenheid gehouden redevoeringen en voordrachten* (Amsterdam: Noord-Hollandsche Uitgeversmaatschappij, 1958), 61-77; and *In the Twilight of Western Thought: Studies in the Pretended Autonomy of Philosophical Thought* (Philadelphia, PA: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1960), 62-112. A fully elaborated critique of Groen’s historicism appeared as “Het historisch element in Groen’s staatsleer,” in *Groen’s ‘Ongeloof en revolutie’: een bundel studiën*, ed. L. C. Suttorp, Z. W. Sneller, and J. Veldkamp (Wageningen: Gebr. Zomer & Keuning, 1949), 118-137. Secondary literature on Dooyeweerd’s philosophy of history includes C. T. McIntire, “Dooyeweerd’s Philosophy of History,” in *The Legacy of Herman Dooyeweerd: Reflections on Critical Philosophy in the Christian Tradition*, ed. C. T. McIntire (Lanham, MD; New York; London: University Press of America, 1985), 81-117; and Calvin Seerveld, “Dooyeweerd’s Idea of ‘Historical Development’: Christian Respect for Cultural Diversity,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 58 (1996), 41-61.

members in the 1950s, as a matter of fact, they all shared the conviction that identity could no longer be conceived of in historical terms. If this was a “crisis of historicism,” understood as a *genitivus subiectivus* (a crisis for Neo-Calvinist historicism), Dooyeweerd would probably have added that the *genitivus obiectivus* (a crisis caused by “relativistic historicism”) could serve as a flip-side description of the same reality, given the many Neo-Calvinists who tended to exchange Neo-Calvinist historicism for historicism in a modern, relativistic sense. This is an additional reason why, some twenty years after the lecture in The Hague, historicism had become a major problem for Dutch Neo-Calvinists.

- IV -

What conclusions can be drawn from this story? First of all, this article can be read as an example of the type of historiography that may emerge if we start to engage more critically than has been the case so far with the focus on *intellectual elites* in current scholarship on the crisis of historicism. If the scholarship discussed in section I already suggests that the crisis also greatly affected the German middle classes, my case-study demonstrates that even a working-class organization could experience a sense of crisis. This suggests that there are no good reasons to see historicism and its crises as confined to some specific social or cultural strata. In the case-study presented above, we saw individuals from rather diverse backgrounds (laborers, union leaders, journalists, and a university professor) interacting, although in different roles, in their attempts to get a hold on historicist thought. At this stage, it is still an open question how typical such interaction across social segments was. Nonetheless, my case-study falsifies the claim that the crisis of historicism was a “narrowly academic crisis.” For not only Dooyeweerd, the philosopher, worried about historicism; his concerns also resonated within the workers’ organization. Especially in the 1950s, when some sought to maintain a Neo-Calvinist worldview, while others (if not in theory, then at least in practice) began to abandon it, Patrimonium experienced its own crisis of historicism. This proves that even in a working-class context, it is possible to find much more than merely disseminated versions of how Troeltsch or Meinecke wrestled with historicism.

Secondly, although there is no point in denying that German intellectuals played crucial roles in identifying and conceptualizing the *Krise des Historismus*, it is

equally unwarranted to assume that the crisis, or the reflection evoked by it, was *geographically limited to Germany*. Once we acknowledge that historicism, as a mode of understanding identity in historical terms, found wide acceptance outside Germany, it comes as no surprise that such historicist master narratives, with the collective memories they employed, could lose their plausibility, and be intensively debated, also in other countries than the Weimar Republic. However, because such crises did not occur in isolation, and varied depending, among other things, the robustness of the master narratives and the availability of other sources of identity, it could well be that the crises experienced outside Germany had a different level of intensity, or different effects on the people involved, than the *Krise des Historismus* in the Weimar Republic. In the case of Dutch Neo-Calvinists, the collapse of their historicist master narrative coincided with, and contributed to, the desintegration of their “pillar” (their institutions in Dutch society) and the rapid adaptation of new forms of (theological) thought. Through these combined causes, the Neo-Calvinist world virtually ceased to exist in the late 1960s.⁹⁷ If this shows how dramatic an effect a crisis of historicism could have, it must be maintained, however, that if we apply the expression “crisis of historicism” to a variety of struggles with historicist legacies, both in and outside Germany, the relative intensity of each of those crises, and their interdependencies with other processes of identity formation, must be assessed separately in each case.

A third conclusion challenges conventional *limitations in time*. Among scholars such as Nowak, Jaeger, and Hardtwig, it is generally accepted that the crisis of historicism found its center of gravity in the interwar period. Although, indeed, a number of major works on historicism appeared in the decades after the First World War, my Dutch example suggests that such an unambiguous periodization is impossible. In fact, it seems better to conceive of the crisis of historicism as a traveling problem, which is to say, as a problem that different people encounter at different times.⁹⁸ While Dooyeweerd already in the 1930s became well aware of the challenges confronting historicist thought, it was not until the 1950s that others dissociated themselves from this legacy. In fact, in the context of Dutch Protestant thought, it is fascinating to see how “historicism” initially, in the interwar period, was a subject of reflection only for certain modernist theologians (Karel H. Roessingh)

⁹⁷ Kennedy, “Building New Babylon”; Paul, “Gereformeerde beginselen,” 302-304.

⁹⁸ I already made this point in Herman Paul, “Hayden White and the Crisis of Historicism,” in *Re-Figuring Hayden White*, ed. Frank Ankersmit, Ewa Domańska, and Hans Kellner (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009), 57.

and Neo-Calvinist philosophers such as Dooyeweerd, but came to attract attention from mainline Protestant thinkers in the 1950s and 1960s (Hendrikus Berkhof, Gerrit C. van Niftrik, Arnold A. van Ruler), was intensively studied at the Free University in the years around 1970 (Jacob Klapwijk, Meijer Smit), and was eventually, in recent years, also discovered in Pietist circles.⁹⁹ Crises of historicism occur when people lose their faith in historicist master narratives; but when, why, and to what extent such painful experiences occur, usually depends on a variety of factors.

If these three conclusions challenge some conventional demarcations of the crisis of historicism, is there, finally, any hope to find an answer to the question posed in the title of this article? Given the social, geographical, and temporal varieties that I have emphasized so far, is it possible to specify, unequivocally, which groups in particular suffered from the crisis of historicism? Although the purpose of this paper is to open a discussion more than to establish a position, it is possible to formulate a hypothetical answer. The crisis of historicism, understood as a subjective genitive, was the undermining of historicist modes of thought. In the Neo-Calvinist case, as in that of the German middle-classes studied by Nowak, Jaeger, and Toews, these modes of thought took a narrative form. It was Kuyper's "national mythopoetic Christian-historical imagination," or his talent for orchestrating collective memories, that offered Dutch Protestants such as Dooyeweerd's audience in The Hague the means for regarding themselves as heirs of an inspiring Calvinist tradition. Is it unwarranted to speculate that the more a group conceived of its identity in such historical terms, or the more explicitly a group positioned itself in such an invented tradition, the more vulnerable it was to sudden change and unanticipated situations? Although a comparison between *Historismusdebatte* among Dutch Neo-Calvinists and, for example, Neo-Thomists in Belgium would have to consider a host of political, social, cultural, and religious differences, it seems that the high degree of detail in which Kuyper's principles specified what Calvinists had to think about birth-control or home-insurance helps explain why historicism was more of a problem to Dutch Neo-Calvinists than to the Neo-Thomists around Désiré Mercier, in Leuven, whose equally grand-scale narrative about the decline and resurrection of scholastic thought in

⁹⁹ See Herman Paul, "'De historie heeft mij overmand': historiciteit als reizend probleem in het Nederlandse protestantisme," in *Strijdbaar of lijdzaam: de positie van christenen in het publieke domein*, ed. Gijsbert van den Brink and Elco van Burg (Heerenveen: Groen, 2006), 184-208.

Europe was phrased in much more abstract and general terms.¹⁰⁰ This is the qualitative argument I attempt to make: that the crisis of historicism was experienced most painfully by groups that had invested most in the master narratives of nineteenth-century historicism. Those who suffered most from the crisis of historicism were those who had most earnestly hoped to derive their identity from the past.

¹⁰⁰ Thanks to a visiting fellowship at the Catholic University of Leuven in July-August 2008, I have been able to study whether, and in what sense, historicism was perceived as a challenge or treat by Neo-Thomist thinkers associated with Leuven's Higher Institute of Philosophy. My research findings will be published shortly.