SUMMARY


The assumption that religion and modernity in the Western world are antithetical has lost ground in recent decades. The attention being paid to the public role of belief throughout present-day society has created an opportunity for a re-evaluation of the role of religion in the study of history and the social sciences. Studies in nationalism have generally only dealt marginally with the topic of religion in relation to the modern nation-state. For God, People and Country takes the recent interest in this issue as a point of departure for an analysis of the contribution to the national unification of the Netherlands made by Dutch reformed pastors during the first half of the nineteenth century.

The positive view of religion found among the bourgeoisie and the increasing participation of the clergy in these social circles from the end of the eighteenth century comprise two pivotal conditions determining the national importance of the pastor in the Netherlands. Religion was regarded as the source of civic virtue and social cohesion, thus constituting a crucial element in the quest for national prosperity. As a result, there was a positive attitude towards both pastor and Church, which in the early part of the period studied also formed an important foundation for state policy concerning the churches. Improving the level of religiosity was part of a larger pedagogical programme which, influenced by a moderate form of the Enlightenment, stressed the intellectual and moral education of each inhabitant of the Netherlands as the basis for creating the patriotic citizen. As early as the end of the eighteenth century, pastors participated in a so-called 'civilizing offensive' [beschavingsoffensief] aimed at disciplining the lower social classes and stimulating the further development of the own social class. This required that the people who took part in this offensive should hold a certain social position and level of education. This development, together with the introduction of compulsory academic education in 1816, contributed to the emergence of a socially homogenous clergy which became part of a national, enlightened citizenry. In this study, the focus is on prominent representatives of the reformed clergy. While the scope and quality of their national involvement is presumably greater than that of the average pastor, nevertheless the activities of this group appear to be representative of the reformed clergy as a whole.

The national conceptions of the country, people and culture that dominated the higher social classes and which gradually became manifest in other parts of the population are reflected in the many activities of pastors in the first half of the nineteenth century. We find these conceptions elaborated within the pastors' published sermons, as analysed in this thesis. Preachers represented the people as a unified whole that was manifest in national characteristics and the geo-
graphical unity of the country, a notion which transgressed the old regional borders. National involvement was also legitimated ecclesiastically. In some cases, patriotism was defined as a Christian duty for which the crucified Christ had set the example, and in the Church there could be ‘only one thought, which fills our soul, the thought of the Country [Vaderland].’ Preaching from the pulpit in a national, if not nationalistic tone, and the subsequent publication of the sermons, would contribute, as some pastors explicitly declared, to an increasing national solidarity of people and country. The sermon was, thus, an important oral and written medium in which the pastor operated as an agitator who politicized and popularized nationalistic notions.

This study not only deals with the sermons, but also focuses on a number of non-ecclesiastical activities. As the school inspector and educator of the people, as well as through cultural societies, the pastor contributed profoundly to the development of the lower social classes. The cultural and scholarly interests that arose within the society movement stimulated pastors to develop learned activities of philological and literary nature [letterkundige activiteiten]. Contests were held, prizes awarded, lectures given and texts published in the fields of linguistics, mythology, folkloristics, national history and archaeology. These activities were regarded as expressions of patriotism which necessarily contributed to the cultural unity of the Netherlands. Especially in the countryside, pastors benefited from a national social network which allowed them to reach a national, educated public with their research on megaliths in the province of Drenthe, for example, or popular customs in the province of Gelderland, or the history of the province of Brabant, among other topics. Thus, a ‘nationalization of the regional’ took place, a process which constituted an important contribution to the construction of national culture.

Furthermore, it is important to note that in the ecclesiastical as well as the non-ecclesiastical activities of the pastors we find an interplay between the national and the regional which was pivotal to the process of cultural unification. Thus, in the sermons we also see strategies designed to present one’s own region as part of the Country. In turn, philological and literary studies focused not only on the sources of national culture, but also strove to disseminate and strengthen a new sense of national unity.

The national commitment and effort of many pastors was connected to their theological convictions. By analysing the connections that pastors made between their notions of Church, state and nation, three main theological groups can be

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discerned. One group strove for the preservation of the reformed teachings within the Church and subsequently interpreted nation and state confessionally. These orthodox reformed \( [\text{rechtzinnig gereformeerden}] \) clergymen had strong feelings of patriotism and monarchism and became prominent in the public sphere. Given their focus on the Church and its teachings, however, they are less prominent in this study. Here the main focus is on the rationalistic-supranaturalists [in Dutch also called \( \text{oud-liberalen} \)] and the Groningen School of Theology [\( \text{Groninger Godgeleerden} \)]. These theologians supported the principal of doctrinal freedom which had been accepted by the Dutch Reformed Church, established 1816, and they acknowledged the national importance of other churches within the Netherlands. The \( \text{oud-liberalen} \) envisioned the Church as being a function of the state, suggesting that the Dutch Reformed Church also had to function as a pedagogical institution contributing to the education of useful and patriotic citizens. From the 1830s, the Groningen School of Theology stressed the importance of the Dutch Reformed Church to the nation. It would, together with the other Dutch churches and with other institutions like the school, contribute to the so-called restoration of the cultural uniqueness of the Dutch people. The differences between these latter two theological positions can partly be explained in terms of a shift of emphasis which occurred when Romanticism gained influence alongside the moderate Dutch form of the Enlightenment. According to both theological movements, however, the dissemination of national sentiment was part of the spread of faith. This also explains the close connection between the ideas expressed in ecclesiastical and non-ecclesiastical activities. It is clear that these pastors found in their theological opinions an important impetus for their commitment to nationalism.

The state contributed in a number of ways to the pastors' commitment to the nation. It stimulated contacts between the classes and regions in the Netherlands, which was an important precondition for cultural unification. Important incentives were also provided to encourage the social role of the churches. Following the 1795 revolution [\( \text{Bataafse Omwenteling} \)] and the expulsion of the stadholder, William V of Orange, the separation of Church and state was declared. Above all, this forced the disestablishment of the public, Reformed Church. Despite this, from that moment on, with the exception of the years 1798-1801, the state government strove to involve all the churches of the Netherlands in the processes of state and nation-building. Religion and revolution were shown not to be mutually exclusive.

In the tradition of his predecessors from the Batavian-French period (1795-1813), King William I of Orange (r. 1813-1840) succeeded in realizing his ideals, and only a few years after his accession succeeded in attaching the Protestant churches to the state in order to maximize their contribution to the nation-state. The national involvement of the pastors, however, cannot merely be reduced to the success of state policy. We see, indeed, how many pastors preached support for the national political cause from their pulpits and contributed to na-
tional unification in the political domain. However, the ecclesiastical legitimization of state policy was only partly the result of state interference. It was supported only insofar as it agreed with the pastors' own views.

The partial success of William I concerning the Dutch Reformed Church was also based on the trust he enjoyed as a descendant of the Prince of Orange. In addition, the King created a great deal of goodwill when he improved the financial situation of the churches. Furthermore, there was a willingness among the population to work as a whole for the restoration of national welfare. It should also be noted that ecclesiastical interest played its own important role, as the resulting close collaboration with the state made it possible for the pastors involved to realize many of their (civil) ideals in the context of the Church.

Nevertheless, the bonds between the state and the churches were disentangled. A common explanation associates this development with the accession of King William II (r. 1840-1849) and the conflicts within the churches and schools in the 1840s. However, the process of separation had already begun at the end of the 1830s when the interests of Church and state began to clash. Moreover, as a result of the turmoil within the Dutch Reformed Church it became apparent that social and ecclesiastical unity and order did not benefit from state control. The separation of Church and state, which was finally laid down in the 1848 constitution and confirmed in a law of 1853, was broadly supported. The social emancipation of Secessionists, originating in the 1834 Secession from the Dutch Reformed Church, as well as Catholics, contributed to the ending of liberal attempts to create national unity with the help of a single national Church. As the religious pluralization of the Netherlands through the process of pillarization [Verzuiling] became accepted from the mid-nineteenth century, it is these different pillars [zuilen] which would now carry the nation. However, this pillarization did not necessarily mean an end to the national involvement and influence of the pastors.

This study emphasizes the important role played by the clergy in the process of shaping the Netherlands into a cultural unity. The pastors' efforts were broadly based and geographically widespread and contributed to the construction and dissemination of a national culture which aimed at the close connection of the people and their country. The nation-state which developed as a result was an important manifestation of the process of modernization. It is not, therefore, an exaggeration to say that religion strengthened modernity and that it is more than - as modern opinion holds - a private matter. For God, People and Country shows that in imparting such a strong impetus to generating national unity, the pastor can properly be characterized as an agent of national goods, operating as a link between the regional and the national. In doing so, pastors were able to remove social and geographical barriers, and due to the broad sphere of their activities, ecclesiastical as well as non-ecclesiastical, they played a prominent role in the national unification of the Netherlands.