

UNBELIEF AND REVOLUTION

A LECTURE ON THE CLASSIC
1847 WORK BY GUILLAUME
GROEN VAN PRINSTERER

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 18

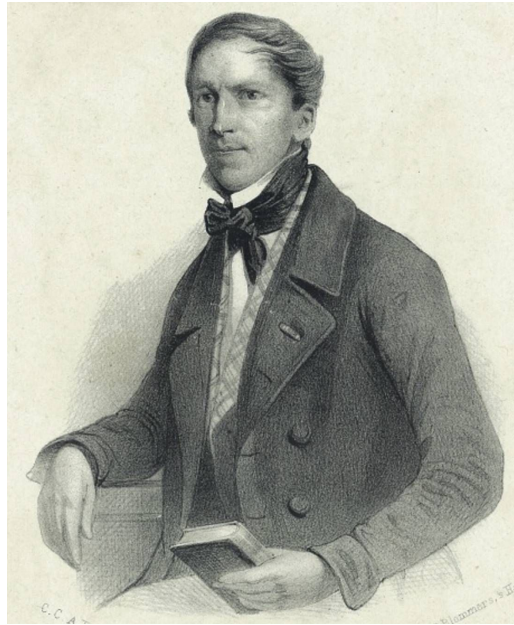
Reception at 7pm. Lecture at 7:30pm.

Conference room of Aloft hotel, Secaucus

Sponsored by

Grace Reformed Church of Jersey City

Christ and Culture, Vol. 2



Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer (1801-1876)

Outline on Lecture on Groen's 1847 work, *Unbelief and Revolution*
Rev. Samuel Perez

Download the audio of the lecture here:

<https://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=112122259414989>

- I. Ideas have consequences.
- II. Groen's early life and motivating factors to write *Ongeloof en Revolutie*
 - A. Social crises
 - B. Political crises
 - C. Personal awakening
 - D. Church in Netherlands
 - E. State education in Netherlands
 - F. Recent Dutch History
- III. Summary of Lectures I-VII: no merely human factor can adequately explain the French Revolution.
- IV. The crux of Unbelief and Revolution (Lectures VIII-X).
 - A. What is Unbelief?
 - B. What is Revolution?
- V. Revolutionary Iconoclasm
 - A. All vestiges of God erased.
 - B. The parasitic nature of sin. Bavinck: *And just as sin is dependent on the good in its origin and existence, so it is in its operation and struggle. It has power to do anything only with and by means of the powers and gifts that are God-given. Satan has therefore correctly been called the ape of God. When God builds a church, Satan adds a chapel; over against the true prophet, he raises up a false prophet; over against the Christ, he poses the Antichrist. Even a band of robbers can only exist if within its own organization it respects the rules. A liar always garbs himself or herself in the guise of truth. A sinner pursues evil under pretense of the good. Satan himself appears as an angel of light. In its operation and appearance, sin is always doomed to borrow, despite itself, from the treasury of virtue. It is subject to the unalterable fate—while striving for the destruction of all good—of working simultaneously on its own demise. It is a parasite of the good.*
- VI. Revolutionary Idolatry: Civil government and the State demand worship.
 - A. French Revolution's dependence on Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778).
 1. Groen 99-100: *Is the power of this state, the will of the People restricted? In no wise. "It is contrary to the nature of the body politic that the Sovereign should impose upon himself a law which he cannot infringe. For since he cannot regard himself as*



someone else, he is in the position of an individual entering into a contract with himself. Whence it follows that there neither is, nor can be, any fundamental law that is binding upon the body of the People, not even the Social Contract itself.” (I, vii.)

What part of his rights has the citizen retained by the social contract? Not any. The essence of that contract lies in the complete surrender of one’s rights. “The clauses of the Social Contract, when rightly understood, can be reduced to one: each associate’s absolute alienation to the community of himself and all his rights.” (I, vi.)

What is the relation between the citizen and the state? Utter subordination. “As nature gives to every man absolute command over all his members, so the Social Compact gives to the body politic absolute command over all its members.” (II, iv.)

When can the state require the life of a citizen? Whenever the state adjudges his death useful to the state. “If the Sovereign should say to the Citizen, ‘It is expedient for the State that you should die,’ then die he must, since it is on this condition alone that he will have lived till then in safety, and since his life will have been no longer merely the gift of nature but a grant, and a conditional one, from the State.” (II, v.)

A more complete absolutism is scarcely conceivable. [...] Rousseau will show you that you have the greater liberty as you are pinched the more tightly in your chains [...] you will be forced to be free.

B. The State believes in the State.

1. Rushdoony in, The Ten Fundamentals of Modern Statism: “The first duty of every state is to protect the state, not the people.”

C. End result?

VII. Revolutionary Consistency: Revolutionary practices spring from revolutionary ideas.

VIII. In a Revolutionary period, moderates lose and the intolerant win.

- A. The weakening of institutions.
- B. The Moderates
- C. Maximilien Robespierre and the Intolerant
- D. The Revolution spirals downward.

1. Francis Schaeffer and C. Everett Koop: *There is a "thinkable" and an "unthinkable" in every era. One era is quite certain intellectually and emotionally about what is acceptable. Yet another era decides that these "certainties" are unacceptable and puts another set of values into practice. On a humanistic base, people drift along from generation to generation, and the morally unthinkable becomes the thinkable as the years move on. The thinkables of the eighties and nineties will certainly include, things which most people today find unthinkable and immoral, even unimaginable and too extreme to suggest. Yet, since they do not have some overriding principle that takes them beyond relativistic thinking - when these become thinkable and acceptable in the eighties and nineties, most people will not even remember that they were unthinkable in the seventies. They will slide into each new thinkable without a jolt.*

IX. What must a Christian do?

A. Understand how this Revolution will end: Psalm 2.

B. You must stand outside the Revolution to deal with the Revolution.

1. Groen: *The consequences of the Revolution ideas cannot be combated with any success unless one places himself outside their influence, on the ground of the anti-revolutionary principles. This ground is beyond reach, however, so long as one refuses to acknowledge that the foundation of justice lies in the law and ordinances of God.*
2. Harry Van Dyke: *[Unbelief and Revolution] based its public philosophy on four pillars: convention, consent, coercion, and consensus. Convention: society, its structures and institutions, can be shaped any way men choose. Consent: authority, to be valid, must have the approval of those under it. Coercion: law and justice are decided by those who are in power. Consensus: truth is determined by the public opinion of the day. These four errors came to replace the fourfold foundation of an anti-revolutionary approach to life and society: a given order anchored in the creation; the limited but valid rights of a diversity of offices; objective standards of justice rooted in the righteousness of a holy God; and truth that is independent of human beings and ultimately derives from divine revelation.*

C. Unless every thought is taken captive to Christ, men will be further dragged into Unbelief and Revolution.

1. Groen: *Unless men’s every thought is brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ, neither knowledge, nor ingenuity, nor experience, nor a study of all the lessons taught by the horrors of the Revolution—in a word, nothing at all will prevent them from being dragged along the same path to the same abyss, from holding Reason to be an infallible criterion of divine Revelation, from passing censure on institutions based on higher than human approval, from admiring the faint glimmerings of a dim lantern or the hot flames of a hell-torch as if they were lights of heaven. Men will laud a Revolution whose blood and tears, whose inhumanity and absurdity are the very proof of the impracticability of its principle. They will hail this unholy and unwholesome revolt against nature and law as the initial triumph of ideas sacred and sublime, in the wholesale application of which alone the*



happiness of the nations is to be sought. And, as though everything were forgotten and nothing were learned, they will speak in poetic rapture of the French Revolution as of a volcano, yes, but a volcano issuing forth imperishable truths—a beacon for humanity amid the storms to be anticipated on the ocean of human errors and passions.

2. Groen: *The Scriptures contain the foundation of justice and morality, of freedom and authority for private persons as well as for nations and governments. The Bible, searched sincerely and prayerfully, is the infallible touchstone. Unconditional submission to the Word of God has always been the guarantee both of dutiful obedience and of dutiful resistance, of order and of freedom. No doctrine of prideful self-perfection or wanton libertinism can exist alongside the pronouncements of Revelation. It is written! Here is the axe that cuts off every root of revolutionary misgrowth.*

D. This is no time for hopelessness and despair.

1. Groen: *There is no reason for despondency so long as the efficacious medicine has not been tried and is still available. What can be learned from the experience of the revolutionary era? That man, without God, even with the circumstances in his favor, can do nothing but work his own destruction. Man must break out of the vicious revolutionary circle; he must turn to God whose truth alone can resist the power of the lie. Should anyone consider this momentous lesson of history to be more sentimental lament than advice for politics, he is forgetting that the power of the Gospel to effect order and freedom and prosperity has been substantiated by world history. Let him bear in mind that whatever is useful and beneficial to man is promoted by the fear of God and thwarted by the denial of God. He should bear in mind especially that the revolutionary theory was the unfolding of the germ of unbelief, and that the poisonous plant which was cultivated by apostasy from the faith will wilt and choke in the atmosphere of a revival of the faith.*

E. This is a time to hope in Christ and get to work in His kingdom.

1. Groen: *Let us all, insofar as we have put our trust in Christ, continue to be mindful of what is required of Christians. The prevailing mood in politics today is one of uncertainty and doubt, pessimism, apathy, indifference and resignation. The Christian knows a principle which gives steadiness to political thought and which, if followed, would be sufficient to restore the tottery political structures upon unshakable foundations. Nor is the Christian permitted to slacken in the defense of justice and truth just because his personal interests are not in jeopardy. Heavy are the duties which the darkness and the corruption of the times impose on those who are called the light of the world and the salt of the earth. And this sense of duty is doubled when we look also at the favorable signs of our time. After all, we are in a position today to look back upon an era that is rich in tangible proofs of the powerlessness of proud man, an era that began with high-sounding promises and ended in utter disillusionment. Also, God is unmistakably at work today as we see a return to the Gospel truth which, compared to the situation of a century ago, is like a revival of dead bones. It is true, we live in an oppressive atmosphere. Yet it is the Christian's privilege, as he observes the signs of the times, to ascend on the wings of faith to a higher sphere. Let this be our privilege. Looking to Him who gives wisdom and strength, let us be alive to the vastness of God's benefits and be mindful of the extent of our responsibility!*
2. Groen: *Let us be faithful, each in his station. If it be not given us to accomplish great things, let us remember that when the opportunity to witness to the truth is there, the greatest unfaithfulness can be committed in the smallest things. Let us not forget that if witnessing may be called a deed, the deed too is a witness. And, in view of the very small sacrifices that we have thus far been asked to make, let us ever be mindful, in order to persevere in self-denial and devotion to duty, that the kingdom of truth was extended the furthest by witnesses who had the strength, if necessary, to be martyrs in the most practical sense of the word, to be witnesses even unto death.*

F. Refute lies and articulate truths. Groen: *The refutation of the false ideas is in itself already very useful. It is no small favor to warn the traveler against taking the wrong road: the warning itself is an incentive to look for the right road.*

G. Understand that there is no easy road ahead of us, but God is with us, and God's precepts are our life.

1. Groen: *We promise you no full, quick, easy triumph. No one should engage in anti-revolutionary politics who would want to seek the welfare of his country only by a path along which the traveler finds satisfaction for his personal wishes and interests. But if instead we are driven by the love of truth and a sense of obligation, then let us take note that our days are not wanting in opportunities to perform our duty. Or is the proclamation of our principles, each in his own circle, a work of little consequence? Do you believe that the influence exerted by the writings and indeed by the conversations of the eighteenth century was of little account in preparing the Revolution? Also today the candid confession of your beliefs exerts an influence the effect of which is known only to Him who gives the increase.*
2. Groen: *Here too, with so much that is doubtful, the certainty we need is found in Holy Scripture. We know what has been foretold: many shall depart from the faith; tribulations will multiply; he who masquerades as an angel of light will be actively at work; those who are faithful to the Lord shall be sore oppressed; the days will be evil; but in the hour of deepest distress redemption will surely draw nigh, and the believers shall rise victorious when He whom they have loved and served shall consume the wicked one with the breath of His mouth, and destroy him with the brightness of His coming.*

