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Marching for Morals: Early Struggles in the Dutch Christian Worker Movement

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This article explores three moral conflicts that lie at the heart of the history of the Christian worker movement in the second half of the nineteenth century. First, the tension between an immaterial and a material orientation dominated the question of whether to form only associations directed toward spiritual well-being or trade unions as well. Second, the relationship between workers and their employers and the relationship between socialist and Christian groups was strained by the tension between harmony and struggle as two opposite possible directions for worker organizations. Third, the choice between pragmatic unity and undistorted conviction has been relevant to the issue of cooperation between Christian and socialist workers but became even more pressing within the debate on the desirability of denominational trade unions instead of a shared nondenominational Christian organization. Underlying these three moral conflicts is the pressure exerted by the activities of worker organizations on local, national, and transnational levels. Rephrasing the history of the early Dutch Christian worker movement along the lines of these three moral debates, it becomes clear that conflict is a driving force and an inescapable ingredient of civil society.

Introduction

The Quest for Direction

As Leo XIII published *Rerum Novarum* and Dutch Protestants met at the Christian Social Congress in Amsterdam in 1891, Catholic and Protestant workers already looked back on a considerable history of mobilization. Both seminal occurrences are part of this history as attempts to influence the direction of the

Christian worker movement. This direction was all but obvious and its determination proved precarious time and time again. This article discusses the quest for direction within the pre-Second World War Christian worker movement by focusing on the three main moral dilemmas that shaped its history and highlighted the tensions: (1) between an immaterial and a material orientation, (2) between strategies based on harmony or on struggle, and (3) between pragmatic unity and religious conviction.

The case of the Dutch worker movement is instructive in several ways. In the first place, it highlights the strain Western European societies were put under following the expansion of civil society organizations into new domains such as politics and market relationships. Faced by the risk of being banned or even prosecuted, these organizations had usually served the ideal of social harmony in the first half of the nineteenth century. Governments throughout Europe gradually reduced restrictions on the activities of citizens from the middle of the century onward. It then became possible to mobilize organizations for disputed goals, which aimed at societal domains that were formerly excluded and then were directed toward a broader public.¹ The worker movement is a prime example of such mobilization, aiming at the disputed immaterial and material upheaval of the workers by self-organization of groups formerly excluded from civil society. In targeting economic relationships, it expanded the activity of civil society into the domain of the market. Even as the workers penetrated the market with their organizations, they did not reduce their goals to economic terms. As this article will demonstrate, they were marching for morals.

Second, this case demonstrates the profound ambivalence inherent to the process of civic organization. It is clear that some organizations springing from civil society—for example, violent branches of political parties or counterculture groups resorting to terrorist methods—can be detrimental to the stability of democratic societies. This dark side of civil society is regularly debated as to whether violent, antidemocratic organizations should even be regarded as part of civil society.² The more fundamental issue at stake, however, is often disregarded: The process of organization itself has a dark side. Deciding who will be organized makes exclusion a necessity. Even though many organizations do indeed strive for a good society, the nature of this ideal is contested. Civil society should therefore not be seen as an attempt to establish a universally accepted good society but as a clash of organizations with different views of a good society. The following analysis of the moral dilemmas within the Dutch Christian worker movement provides insight into the dynamics of such clashes.

Third, the history of the Dutch worker movement stresses the entangled nature of history.³ It points toward the aforementioned common traits in the development

of civil society in Western Europe, which constitute a shared background for the history of its worker movement. In the second half of the nineteenth century, local worker organizations sprang up throughout this region, weighing examples of likeminded initiatives both near and far and reworking these examples to fit its respective contexts. Regardless of these different, specific situations, the moral dilemmas discussed in this article were relevant to the whole worker movement, not just in the Netherlands. The perspective of entangled history also reminds us that the worker movement was very much a local and a transnational phenomenon until the national framework became more dominating in the wake of the nineteenth century. The tension among the local, national, and transnational levels remained relevant nonetheless, even after nationally concentrated trade unions coordinated the efforts of the worker movement.

Immaterial versus Material Orientation

The tension between an orientation toward immaterial or toward material goals was arguably the most essential moral conflict in the early Christian worker movement. The alleviation of individual misery by means of charity had always been a central element of Christian social activity. However, this charity was usually regarded as incidental and secondary to the actual goal of the immaterial, spiritual salvation. Changes in the social structure of society caused by industrialization led concerned observers to question the traditional means for relieving the effects of poverty and overburdening labor.

Around 1870, the establishment of the notion of a social question underlines the uncertainty about the adequacy of traditional approaches. In that year, a “Committee for Discussing the Social Question” dominated by influential upper-class liberals was founded in the Netherlands. Sociologist Harry Hoefnagels has pointed out that this emerging debate marked a divergence in the opinions on the preferable social order.⁴ Just as Catholic and Protestant thinkers such as Wilhelm Immanuel von Ketteler and Victor Aimé Huber in Germany had stated before him, Abraham Kuyper, in 1871, declared the social question to be a key issue for the church. Its measures directed toward individual needs were, however, insufficient. In order to effectively help those in need, society at large would have to be changed. Only if society could be reshaped according to biblical principles would the social question be resolved.⁵ Thus, Kuyper connected an immaterial orientation with the demand to structurally improve the material conditions of living for the underprivileged.

The tendency to interrelate social issues with demands for structural reforms challenged the traditional primacy of the immaterial orientation regarding such

issues. Poverty was no longer regarded simply as the consequence of personal shortcomings but was increasingly regarded as the result of structural, societal deficiencies. A telling example of this change is one of the successes of the aforementioned committee that explicitly focused on the social question. In 1872, it effectively petitioned to grant workers the right to associate not just in order to embark on mutual support or sociable activities but also to enforce a better material position *vis-à-vis* their employers. As the Dutch economy went through a period of expansion and industrialization in the 1870s, workers became more actively interested in setting up such organizations. Concrete improvements of wages and working conditions came to play a pivotal role in many of these organizations, but immaterial goals were not dismissed altogether. Worker organizations had to find a new balance between immaterial and material well-being. As the latter became a more dominant theme in the last decades of the nineteenth century, the linkage of material and immaterial goals was frequently discussed as an organizational choice between a trade union focusing on the requirements of a specific profession or a worker association emphasizing spiritual well-being.

Dutch nonsectarian and socialist groups had formed local worker organizations that concentrated on a single profession as early as the 1840s. During the 1860s, their number increased significantly, while their focus shifted from sociability to working conditions.⁶ In 1869, socialist leaders tried to concentrate these local groups into the Dutch branch of the International Workingmen's Association that they founded for this purpose. Although their attempt by and large failed, it prompted a reaction from more moderate members of the Dutch worker movement. These established a separate national association—the nonsectarian *Algemeen Nederlandsch Werkliedenverbond* (ANWV)—in the following year. Orthodox Protestant workers were also active in this association but soon became disgruntled over the liberal course it charted. As the ANWV declared itself in favor of nonsectarian schools, orthodox Protestant spokesman Klaas Kater in 1876 led his fellow believers in founding the worker association *Patrimonium*. Kater and his companions deemed the promotion of Christian principles in society and especially among workers to be vital to their organization. They did not regard the improvement of concrete working conditions to be a task for *Patrimonium*, choosing as their activities among other things lecturing, founding reading rooms, and supporting indisposed colleagues and widows.⁷

The role *Patrimonium* should play was contested among its members and sympathizers from the day of its founding. As an economic crisis mounted in the 1880s, the call for a distinct program of social reform became more urgent. Kuyper and Kater, who were both influential spokesmen in the orthodox Protestant worker movement, presented differing views on *Patrimonium*'s future. For Kuyper,

the association could not be a vehicle of worker power and interest. He believed that a nonsectarian organization was better suited for that purpose because it could represent more people and thus wage more influence. Patrimonium, on the other hand, could serve Protestant workers in strengthening their faith. Kater and some of his companions thought differently. They meant Patrimonium to have more political influence and therefore urged for the development of a political and societal agenda.⁸

The Christian Social Congress of 1891 was the result of this stalemate between those who wanted Patrimonium to concentrate on the immaterial well-being of their members and those who regarded the association fit to play a role in improving material conditions as well. At the congress, Kuyper once more stressed that structural societal reforms would be necessary to improve the position of the underprivileged.⁹ Whereas he considered his political party, the Antirevolutionaire Partij, the appropriate vehicle for establishing this claim, members of Patrimonium expected an active role for their own organization. Their view was supported by congress resolutions acknowledging the workers' right to go on strike and encouraging members of Patrimonium to form branches according to different professions within their organization. However, Patrimonium would not become a trade union in the following years. Although it did successfully include aspects of material well-being into its activities, for example, by providing families with a home, Patrimonium did not develop into the organizational representative for Protestant workers' claims on material well-being.

Because of its hesitation to speak out in favor of organizing workers to represent their material interests, historians such as Piet Hazenbosch consider the first Christian Social Congress at most to be an indirect impulse to the organization of the Dutch Protestant workers.¹⁰ Although the congress, indeed, did not encourage the formation of trade unions explicitly, it did render the idea of a separate worker organization representing only worker interests a more conceivable option. The right to strike and the encouragement of organization along the lines of profession were important steps toward this model. Although harmonious cooperation remained the norm, the material interests of the workers had become a serious issue.¹¹

The papal encyclical *Rerum Novarum* had considerably more impact on the Catholic worker movement. It explicitly attested Catholic workers' right to champion their material interests. While members of the lower clergy had already started to muster groups of Catholic laborers in the previous thirty years, they now had the full support of the papacy to not just commit to their spiritual but also to their material well-being.¹² In Germany, this stimulated the formation of separate branches for different professions. Christian-worker organizations had been in

existence since the 1860s in Germany, encouraged mainly by members of the Catholic clergy who were concerned with the workers' cause. Associations had ventured into aspects of material well-being through shared savings and credit, collective buying and selling, and even tentative attempts at claiming better working conditions and supporting strikes. Spiritual welfare had, however, remained their essential goal. The success of the socialist movement and the exhortations in *Rerum Novarum* led Christian activists to venture beyond the boundaries of the existing associations and to set up separate branches based on particular professions. These were intended to function as the equivalent to socialist trade unions. Soon after they would evolve into a trade union themselves, uniting Christian workers of similar trades across the German empire.¹³

The dualism of the larger association, which concentrated on immaterial well-being and its smaller branches based on a specific professional profile and aiming at material improvement also appeared in the Netherlands around the time *Rerum Novarum* was published. In the Netherlands a first Catholic association that consisted solely of workers had been founded in 1889 for factory employees in the textile industry in Twente.¹⁴ As had been the case in Germany, small associations of workers joining hands because of a similar profession developed side by side with general Catholic worker associations, which—like Patrimonium in the Protestant case—focused on broader, immaterial issues.¹⁵ These general associations were coordinated at the level of the Dutch dioceses, which resulted in five diocesan Catholic worker associations. In 1906, these were forged into a federation on a national level, which would continue to determine the organizational structure of the Catholic worker movement well into the twentieth century.¹⁶

Harmony versus Struggle

The increased attention to the material interests of workers pressured the relationship between employer and employees. The new interpretation of the situation of the poor as the social question that had set in around 1870 first of all challenged the traditional, privileged position of employers. Employees were no longer solely responsible for their own living conditions. These were now related to the position and actions of the employers, leading up to demands for changes in their privileged position and a more equal treatment of the workers as citizens. Naturally, employers felt threatened by this development and by the less servile stance their employees took up in its course.¹⁷

Thus, a second moral dilemma of the early Christian worker movements came to the fore: the tension between harmony and struggle. The tension between an immaterial and material orientation had coincided with the organizational choice

between general worker associations and special branches concentrating on a single profession. The tension between harmony and struggle at first had a similar effect as many Christian spokesmen favored workers and employers to jointly associate. After the workers' right to establish independent organizations, this dilemma prevailed in debates about their legitimacy and positioning.

Visions of social harmony continued to dominate the thought of many Christian leaders as the social question had appeared on the public agenda. At first, this vision materialized in efforts to organize patrons and their subordinates in common arrangements. On a national scale, such ideas were mirrored by pleas for corporatist structures to reconcile the interests of all parties concerned. In this vein, *Rerum Novarum* called for employers and employees to settle conflicts by appointing a commission of arbitration to mediate between the rights and duties of both parties. Independent worker organizations were not meant to further the interests of the workers one-sidedly but were to serve as a means to restore the balance between the parties concerned. The chaplain Alphons Ariëns, who was an active promoter of the organization of Catholic workers, stated in 1885, "I am conscious of the fact that I mean well for all classes of society. I know that in struggling for the working man I do so in the interest of the burgher too."¹⁸

Corporatist visions were not limited to Catholic circles. Kuyper, in the 1880s, advocated a "code of labor" accompanied by the installation of "chambers of labor." In Kuyper's organic view of society, labor constituted a separate and sovereign sphere, in which the government should only interfere by determining laws and—if absolutely necessary—by restoring the balance among different parties: "[The worker] has to compete with the power of the advantaged capital wagering his living person on the base of the simple contract. Are those chances even? Does this not lead many into their downfall?"¹⁹ Drawing on the English debate about "labour laws," Kuyper meant his code of labor to strengthen the rights of the workers *vis-à-vis* their employers. He looked toward the chambers of labor to encourage mutual consultation. Grounded on distinct laws and provided with an arbitral institution, the sphere of labor would be able to function autonomously.²⁰

The ideal of common organizations was gradually abandoned from the 1890s, which was to a larger extent caused by the perceived threat the socialist movement posed to the Christian workers. Whereas the question of cooperation with employers to steer clear of conflict hampered the development of Christian trade unions, other conflicts spurred the deployment of organizational initiatives. For example, the cooperation of moderate workers and citizens sympathetic to their cause with diverse religious and ideological backgrounds in the aforementioned ANWV was motivated by the activities of members of the First International

in the Low Countries. Its members considered the ANWV an alternative more appropriate in a Dutch tradition of gradual improvement and calm cooperation. The aforementioned conflict between supporters of nonreligious schools and orthodox Protestants then caused the latter to found Patrimonium in 1875.²¹

The threat of the socialist movement remained impelling. Friction between Christian and socialist workers could erupt from practical matters such as whether to hold meetings on Sundays. More fundamental tensions evolved around the ideal of social harmony. Many Catholics and Protestants felt ill at ease when involved with socialist groups, which usually emphasized class struggle as inevitable.²² Even those Catholic and Protestant individuals who considered material improvement for the working class as a significant key to solving the social question backed away from the idea of inevitable class struggle. Therefore, the socialist movement was regarded as the most important adversary of Christian workers at least from the 1880s onward.²³ Paradoxically, this refusal of many Christian workers to assume a fundamental opposition between employer and employees led to an enduring and fiercely disputed conflict with socialist worker organizations.²⁴

Formerly hampered by the ideal of harmony, the eventual coming into being of Christian trade unions was directly related to the Christian opposition to socialist organizations. Socialist organizers had met with little success in the 1860s and 1870s, but the Sociaal-Democratische Bond from 1881 onward managed to gather a respectable following during the 1880s. It quickly disintegrated, however, unsettled by increased attention to social issues among the traditional elite and by a fiery internal debate among anarchist, antiparliamentarian, and reformist factions. A breakaway group of moderate social democrats founded the Sociaal-Democratische Arbeiders Partij in 1894, which managed to establish itself as a small but active presence in national politics. The increased activity of socialist groups was also felt in the worker associations, where strikes became an ever more regular sight. The struggle between anarchist and reformist factions also took place in these organizations. After a highly anticipated strike by railway workers resulted in failure in 1903, reformist leaders got the upper hand. They established the Nationaal Verbond van Vakverenigen (NVV) in 1906 as a national federation of moderate, social-democrat trade unions.²⁵

This increasing activity of socialist organizations made Christian leaders more acutely aware of the need for alternative organizations for Christian workers. While both *Rerum Novarum* and the first Christian Social Congress had recognized the workers' right to strive for material well-being, as well as for immaterial goals, social harmony had in both instances remained the vantage point. In the instance of the Catholic workers, especially in the industrial region

of Twente, this ideal partly lost its practical meaning as employers took a harsh stance toward textile workers. Fear of socialist influence led the aforementioned Ariëns to take matters into his own hands, building up a Christian trade union, which was flanked by a separate, exclusively Catholic worker association to tend to the immaterial well-being of his flock. Because Pope Leo XIII had explicitly approved of worker organizations, Ariëns could shield the trade unions from some of the criticism by disapproving fellow believers and superiors.²⁶

Just as the first Christian Social Congress was more reluctant to endorse separate worker organizations as a means to improve material conditions for workers than was *Rerum Novarum*, the formation of trade unions among Protestants proceeded more reluctantly than among Dutch Catholics. Emblematic of this reluctance is the debate between the ministers Syb Talma and Johannes Cornelis Sikkel around the turn of the twentieth century. The first had been an active supporter of *Patrimonium* since the 1890s and had been critical of the cautious stance that the first Christian Social Congress, which he had attended, had taken on the organization of workers. Inspired by the work of the English Christian socialist John Frederick Denison Maurice and the German theologian Adolf von Harnack,²⁷ Talma pleaded for a stronger representation of the material interests of the Christian workers as the chief editor of *Patrimonium*'s periodical and as a popular orator. Talma caused a stir among Protestants as he claimed the apostolic call for a servile attitude toward patrons had been directed toward slaves, not toward the free workers of his own day. "If it were so, that the workers had been ordered by Christ's will to give up their freedom, then indeed, it were a bitter cross, but then they had to ask for power and grace to bring this sacrifice... But thank God, it is not so. The word of God does not forge chains, it undoes them."²⁸ He therewith negated the presence of a sacral element within the relationship between employer and employee, regarding it as a functional relationship based on equality rather than a hierarchical one based on the moral superiority of the employer.²⁹

At the same time, members of *Patrimonium* had continued to form specialized professional branches. There was an increasing tension between the broad and spiritual outlook of *Patrimonium* as opposed to the particular and professional orientation among these branches. Talma and some of his allies, who were staunch supporters of these branches, noted this difficulty. They regarded the foundation of a national association for these trade union-like organizations that were parallel to *Patrimonium* a suitable possibility to overcome the conflict of orientations.³⁰ To this end, the Christelijk Arbeids Secretariaat (CAS) was founded in 1900. Although Christian trade unions found considerable support from moderate workers in the wake of the failed strike by railway workers in 1903, the CAS did not manage

to establish itself more permanently. Its close connection to Patrimonium made it less attractive to those who were not members in that organization. Therefore, the double loyalty of many of its member organizations to a national association oriented toward spiritual issues and a federation concentrating on concrete worker interests made it hard to operate effectively.³¹

Even though Protestant workers had thus organized into professional associations since the 1890s, this practice led to controversy in 1903, as Sikkel, widely respected for his commitment to social issues, opposed trade unions.³² These would not restore social harmony, he argued, because they turned the supposed conflict between employers and employees into a manifest organizational structure:

The company, the private company is the place where labor first and foremost lives in a community, and from whence it spreads into broader organic relations. A worker's organization and an employer's organization, which negotiate together, are not an organic community of labor, neither is a worker's organization on its own.³³

Sikkel regarded individual companies as sovereign domains in which national organizations were not permitted to interfere. Therefore, he encouraged the employers he addressed to oppose worker organizations in their companies.³⁴

Naturally, Talma disagreed with Sikkel's dismissal of trade unions as illegitimate and polarizing institutions. He conceded that the existing organizations Sikkel had opposed could not by right call themselves branch organizations because they excluded the branch's employers. On the other hand, he pointed toward the practical impossibility of the kind of common institutions Sikkel demanded. Talma also stressed the fact that trade unions actually furthered both the material and the immaterial interests of the workers. They, therefore, at least served a goal common to all parties.³⁵ In two ensuing public debates, the antagonists proved to be less far apart than many observers had expected. Talma and his supporters were ready to regard the economic sphere as a separate domain in need of an independent juridical framework. Sikkel, on the other hand, proved willing to accept the practical need for trade unions, as long as these would hold themselves to the ideal of social harmony.³⁶

The question of whether to establish trade unions was only just decided affirmatively as the debate about which groups could cooperate in them flared up. Therewith, the focus shifted away from the dilemma of social harmony and struggle, which was connected to the fundamental question of whether trade unions were at all desirable. Instead, attention was now fixed on the balance between practical cooperation and uncompromised conviction. The search for the

balance between representing as many workers as possible and not jeopardizing their religious firmness proved to be no less precarious.

Pragmatic Unity versus Undistorted Conviction

Tension between pragmatic unity and undistorted conviction was known to the worker movement since its emergence. This tension, resulting in the question of whom to cooperate with, constitutes the third dilemma the Dutch Christian worker movement faced in the period surrounding both the publication of *Rerum Novarum* and the first Christian Social Congress. It echoes the well-known conflict between claiming power and holding fast to principles that afflict any group of civilians that takes action for their ideas. Within the worker movement, where ideological and moral positions were far from homogenous, the matter was particularly sensitive because unity was not just a practical goal but was also a contested ideal.

From the publication of the Marx-Engels *Communist Manifesto* in 1848 onward, the ideal of the unity of all workers against the other classes was central to the socialist movements' self-image. This unity based on the solidarity of the workers was projected to transcend local and national bonds. Thus, the socialist Christiaan Cornelissen argued,

The social-democratic party therefore represents the future in the worker movement and the worker movement as a whole at the same time; that is to say the workers of all branches and of all nationalities.... The trade unions do not have this role. They are to be regarded as the enormous army, the "battalions" of labor, with which the class struggle will have to be fought....³⁷

Although this ideal of international unity never materialized in the worker movement, it continued to exert strong influence on its self-imagery. The historiography of the worker movement is also colored by the difference between the ideal of unity and its practical absence. The history of the Dutch worker movement for example has been portrayed as a history of increasing unity.³⁸ In the same vein, historians have questioned the early development of the movement to find out where disunity first showed itself, even though dispersion and conflict are much more typical of the worker movement from its early beginnings onward than harmonious cooperation has ever been.³⁹

Many Christian workers treated this ideal of an internationally unified working class with reserve.⁴⁰ For Dutch Protestants, national unity sustained by Christian citizens was pivotal. As Kuyper and his supporters seceded from the

Dutch Reformed Church in 1886, they challenged this ideal of Christian national citizenship with the notion of separate moral communities within the nation.⁴¹ Dutch Protestants would remain divided between these two concepts of the relationship between the nation and Christianity for years to come. Nonetheless, Christian workers and their sympathizers acknowledged the practical advantages of cooperation among workers with religious and ideological differences, at least on a national scale.

Although the first worker organizations with national significance, the Dutch section of the First International and the ANWV, were competitors in the 1870s, the spectrum of cooperating groups within the latter has often been pointed out. This cooperation was undoubtedly facilitated by the loose character of the organization, which early on allowed it to function as a platform for a wide range of worker associations. The need to cooperate was widely felt among the initiators of the early Dutch worker movement. Thus, for example, meetings by sometimes even ideologically adverse groups were announced in the periodicals of associated organizations.⁴²

As soon as the ANWV gained a more pronounced political profile, the cooperation became much more difficult. The decision to advocate for religiously neutral public schools led to the aforementioned breakaway by orthodox Protestant workers. Scolded by former colleagues because of their intermingling of religion and worker mobilization, these founders of *Patrimonium* insisted on the need to relate their daily life to their faith.⁴³ However, their action was not unanimously applauded in their own ranks either. Around this time, Kuyper objected to the formation of a separate Protestant worker organization if it intended to further the material interests of the workers. Only the immaterial well-being of Christian workers could reasonably be looked after by separate associations. The exertion of influence to improve the material conditions was a matter of power, which should be carried out by potentially larger (and thus more powerful), nonsectarian worker federations.⁴⁴

The early success of the ANWV further waned in the 1880s as socialist groups became more radical and more independent. At the same time, the secession from the Dutch Reformed Church in 1886 led Protestant workers to question the possibility of cooperating within a common organization. Many of those who did not go along with the breakaway regarded *Patrimonium* as part of Kuyper's organizational network. Although some, such as the aforementioned minister Talma, remained active within *Patrimonium*, others proceeded to establish a separate organization—the *Christelijk Nationale Werkmansbond* (CNWB) in 1893. Only an organization less overtly attached to one of the Protestant currents would prove to be able to unite most of the Protestant workers once more.

The cooperation of Protestants among themselves was not the only question of coalition haunting the Christian worker movement. The relationship between Protestant organizations and their Catholic counterparts was even more problematic. Mobilization of Catholic workers into separate trade unions had started at the end of the 1880s and was backed up by the appeal of *Rerum Novarum* to bring Catholic workers together. In the Netherlands, the leaders of the early Catholic unions pragmatically voted to join hands with their Protestant colleagues.⁴⁵ In this spirit, the textile workers in Twente founded the interdenominational trade union *Unitas* as a federation of Catholic and Protestant unions in 1896.⁴⁶ As the opposition against socialist unions grew around the turn of the twentieth century and the notion of trade unions was evermore widely accepted among Christian workers, the idea of separate nonsectarian Christian trade unions gained solid ground in the Netherlands.⁴⁷

The development of Christian trade unions resonated with the course of the worker movement elsewhere in Europe, which was exemplified by the increasing transnational cooperation among Christian worker organizations. In 1902, Christian textile workers founded an international secretariat that resided in the Dutch city of Enschede. This secretariat was intended to strengthen the position of Christian trade unions in their respective countries by embedding them in an international network of like-minded organizations. The German Christian trade unions, for example, emphasized the nonsectarian nature of the international secretariat to position themselves against those German Catholic bishops who argued for exclusively Catholic trade unions in their dioceses. In the years to follow even more Christian trade unions from different branches established international networks. This led to the foundation of the International Federation of Christian Trade Unions in 1920 by Austrian, Belgian, Czechoslovakian, Dutch, German, French, Hungarian, Italian, Spanish, and Swiss trade unionists.⁴⁸

Transnational entanglement was also apparent in 1909 as a national federation of Christian trade unions was established in the Netherlands. The statutes of this *Christelijk Nationaal Vakverbond* were based on a translation of the statutes of the German Christian trade union.⁴⁹ However, its formation was carried out under unfavorable conditions. The Catholic bishops, who had long been wary of the cooperation between Protestant and Catholic workers, had appealed to Catholic workers to terminate such cooperation three years before the CNV was, in fact, founded. Opinions on the matter varied among the members themselves. Some of the Catholic workers heeded their bishops' call, others opted to continue the existing coalition with Protestant colleagues or even to expand it. Protestant workers were likewise divided. Whereas some pleaded to further the nonsectarian Christian federations, others disapproved of the influence of the Catholic bishops and, therefore, preferred separate sectarian organization.⁵⁰

The controversy between advocates of sectarian and nonsectarian trade unions was effectively resolved by the Catholic bishops. After expressing their wish that Catholic workers should organize in exclusively Catholic associations in 1906, they increased the pressure by declaring the membership of *Unitas* incompatible with the membership of Catholic worker associations. This declaration backfired on the bishops as the members of their flock decided against the associations and in favor of the Christian trade unions in many cases. After repeating their wish that Catholic workers should unite among themselves in 1909 and 1911 to no avail, the bishops of Utrecht and Den Bosch bluntly laid down the law: The membership of *Unitas* and its successor CNV was officially forbidden to Catholics.⁵¹ That way, although the CNV remained a nonsectarian Christian union in name, it became a Protestant organization in practice. Herman Amelink, a member of the formerly interdenominational *Unitas*, therefore concluded in 1914: “Regrettably interdenominationalism cannot be brought into practice at present. For the time being, it will remain a pious dream.”⁵² This status was underlined by the decision of the members of the CNWB to join the CNV in 1918, which was facilitated by the CNV’s lacking a relationship to any specific Protestant denomination.⁵³ Until the Second World War erupted, Dutch workers were represented by separate Catholic, Protestant, and socialist trade unions.

Conclusion

Conflict as an Inescapable Ingredient of Civil Society

Protestant and Catholic workers decided to liquidate their separate trade unions in 1941 as the German occupation tried to force a unification of all Dutch trade unions. Up until this time, they strove for the material well-being of their members, though stressing the immaterial nature of their vantage points. Both the Catholic and the Protestant trade unions were characterized by religious associations focusing solely on the spiritual welfare of the workers. In the Catholic case, the bishops had even obliged members of the Catholic trade unions to become members of Catholic worker associations to emphasize the importance of the latter. The tension between an immaterial and a material orientation remained unresolved, because trade unions and religious associations periodically contested the extent to which they could look after the spiritual needs of the workers.

The same holds true for the tension between the ideals of harmony and struggle, which had played an important role in the early history of the movement. Christian workers who had recognized the potential divergence of the interests of workers and their employers were now organized independently and at times even

carried out strikes. At the same time, their organizations claimed to present an alternative to the socialist movement's adherence to the idea of inevitable class struggle. Social harmony remained the object of their endeavors, even though it did not always prove to be attainable.

A similarly precarious balance was eventually accomplished regarding the opposition of unity and conviction. The early attempts of workers to cooperate across the boundaries of religious conviction had failed, first because of the opposition between Christian and socialist views and then because of the Catholic bishops' insistence on exclusively Catholic organizations. In the process of mobilizing the workers for their goals, the trade unions, however, had succeeded in uniting many workers with a similar ideological or religious background on a national level. The leaders of the three separate Dutch trade unions also managed to establish cautious forms of cooperation in the 1920s and 1930s. These would result in informal meetings among labor leaders even after the official termination of their activities during the German occupation. The impossibility of distinguishing a clear stance in favor of pragmatic unity or religious conviction also showed on the international level. Here, the separated Catholic and Protestant Dutch trade unionists continued to cooperate as members of the International Federation of Christian Trade Unions.

As workers could be seen marching for morals in this sketch of their history, a fourth subliminal tension could be observed. The interaction among the local, the national, and the transnational levels compelled local groups of workers to unite in larger organizations to exert power in the national arena. Examples from abroad inspired some workers to become part of the Internationale at the end of the 1860s, others to create a national alternative in the ANWV shortly afterward. The example set by their German fellow believers led Dutch Catholics and Protestants to attempt to unite in a potentially more powerful nonsectarian trade union in the 1890s, just as their German colleagues attempted to strengthen their own position *vis-à-vis* the church by forming a coalition across national borders with like-minded organizations. This case thus highlights history's entangled disposition, not just regarding the perpetual chain of perception and reaction and the influence of power structures in processes of mobilization but also concerning the interaction between different spatial units.

The route of the prewar Christian worker movement in the Netherlands was clearly shaped by the addressed moral dilemmas. The distinction of the tensions between immaterial and material goals, between struggle and harmony, and between unity and conviction can facilitate the analysis of its history. These tensions, moreover, played a pivotal role as incentives for organizational initiatives, as time and time again different interpretations of their reconciliation spurred

adversaries to deploy separate initiatives with new fervor. As the difficult balancing of the three pairs of moral opposites has shown, conflict is not only present in the frictions among different initiatives but also within the respective organizations themselves. Conflict can thus be regarded as an inescapable ingredient of civil society activities. Today, too, we should not aspire to eliminate conflicts from civil society but regard them as inspiration for new initiatives and find civilized ways to settle them.

Notes

1. See Stefan-Ludwig Hoffmann, *Civil Society: 1750–1914* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006); and Peter van Dam, *Religion and Zivilgesellschaft: Christliche Traditionen in der niederländischen und deutschen Arbeiterbewegung* (Münster: Waxmann, 2010), 39–68.
2. Cf. Dieter Gosewinkel and Sven Reichardt, eds., *Ambivalenzen der Zivilgesellschaft: Gegenbegriffe, Gewalt und Macht: WZB-Discussion Paper Nr. SP IV 2004–501* (Berlin: WZB, 2004).
3. Cf. Michael Werner and Bénédicte Zimmermann, “Beyond Comparison: Histoire Croisée and the Challenge of Reflexivity,” *History and Theory* 45 (2006): 30–50.
4. Harry Hoefnagels, *Een eeuw sociale problematiek: De Nederlandse sociale ontwikkeling van 1850 tot 1940*, 3rd ed. (Alphen aan de Rijn: Samsom, 1974), 95–97.
5. Abraham Kuyper, *De arbeiderskwestie en de kerk: Een woord over het sociale vraagstuk* (Amsterdam: H.J. van Kesteren, 1871).
6. Dennis Bos, *Waarachtige volksvrienden: De vroege socialistische beweging in Amsterdam, 1848–1894* (Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, 2001).
7. Piet Hazenbosch, *Voor het volk om Christus’ wil: Een geschiedenis van het CNV* (Hilversum: Verloren, 2009), 33–34.
8. Wouter P. Beekers and Rolf E. van der Woude, *Niet bij steen alleen: Patrimonium Amsterdam: Van sociale vereniging tot sociale onderneming 1876–2003* (Hilversum: Verloren, 2008), 41–52.
9. Abraham Kuyper, *Het sociale vraagstuk en de christelijke religie: Rede bij de opening van het sociaal congres op 9 november 1891 gehouden* (Kampen: Kok, 1990).
10. Cf. Hazenbosch, *Voor het volk*, 37–38.
11. Herman Bavinck, “Algemeene christelijk-sociale beginselen,” in *Het eerste christelijk-sociaal congres (1891). Vernieuwde uitgaaf van het proces-verbaal. Bewerkt en van aantekeningen voorzien*, ed. R. Hagoort (Aalten: De Graafschap, 1941), 59.

12. Cf. Alphons Ariëns, “De vakverenigingen. Lezing voor de RK Volksbond te Arnhem, 14 maart 1894,” in *Toespraken, brieven en artikelen van Alphons Ariëns 1887–1901*, ed. Jan Roes (Baarn: Ambo, 1982), 211–23.
13. Michael Schneider, *Die Christlichen Gewerkschaften 1894–1933* (Bonn: Neue Gesellschaft, 1982), 26–50.
14. Alphons Ariëns, “De toekomst van de onlangs opgerichte RK Arbeidersvereniging. Toespraak voor de eerste vergadering van de RK Arbeidersvereniging te Enschede, 8 december 1889,” *Toespraken, brieven en artikelen*, 17–18.
15. Alphons Ariëns, “De verhouding van de RK Arbeidersbond tot de Fabrieksarbeidersbond. Toespraak voor de RK Arbeidersvereniging te Almelo, mei 1892,” in *Toespraken, brieven en artikelen*, 146–49.
16. Jan Peet, *Katholieke arbeidersbeweging II: De KAB en het NKV in de maatschappelijke ontwikkeling van Nederland na 1945* (Baarn: Ambo, 1993), 46–49.
17. Hoefnagels, *Een eeuw sociale problematiek*, 78–84.
18. Cf. Alphons Ariëns, “De tijdgeest en de plichten der katholieken. Toespraak voor de Katholieke Kring te Amersfoort, 23 juni 1895,” in *Toespraken, brieven en artikelen*, 345. All translations from Dutch by the author.
19. Abraham Kuyper, “Een wetboek van de arbeid,” in *Architectonische critiek. Fragmenten uit de sociaal-politieke geschriften van Dr. A. Kuyper*, ed. W. F. de Gaay Fortmann (1890; repr., Amsterdam: H.J. Paris, 1956), 32.
20. H. E. S. Woldring, “De sociale kwestie—meer dan een emancipatiestrijd,” in *Abraham Kuyper: Zijn volksdeel, zijn invloed*, ed. C. Augustijn, J. H. Prins, and H. E. S. Woldring (Delft: Meinema, 1987), 131–33.
21. Rico op den Camp, “God, Vaderland en Broederband: Nationaal besef, vereniging en schoolstrijd in het ANWV,” in *De eenheid & de delen: Zuilvorming, onderwijs en natievorming in Nederland: 1850–1900*, ed. Henk te Velde and Hans Verhage (Amsterdam: Het Spinhuis, 1996), 85–97.
22. Cf. Alphons Ariëns, “Vakorganisatie en socialisme. Toespraak voor de anti-sociaal-democratische spoorwegvereniging ‘Recht en Plicht’ te Tilburg, 29 juli 1894,” in *Toespraken, brieven en artikelen*, 249–61.
23. Hazenbosch, *Voor het volk*, 34–35.
24. Cf. Alphons Ariëns, “De oprichting van de RK Twentse Fabrieksarbeidersbond. Toespraak voor de katholieke arbeiders van Enschede en Lonneker, 14 januari 1891,” in *Toespraken, brieven en artikelen*, 56–68.

25. Hans Righart, *De katholieke zuil in Europa: Het ontstaan van verzuiling onder katholieken in Oostenrijk, Zwitserland, België en Nederland* (Amsterdam: Boom, 1986), 212–14.
26. Alphons Ariëns, “Hoe sommigen over ons denken. *De Katholieke Werkman*, 17 mei 1895,” in *Toespraken, brieven en artikelen*, 334–38; see also Peet, *Katholieke arbeidersbeweging II*, 48–49.
27. Talma translated Harnack’s *Die evangelisch-soziale Aufgabe im Lichte der Geschichte der Kirche* in 1894; see A. Harnack, *De Evangelisch-sociale roeping in het licht der kerkgeschiedenis* (Vlissingen: P. G. de Vey Mestdagh, 1894).
28. Aritius Sybrandus Talma, *De vrijheid van den arbeidenden stand* (Utrecht: F. Wentzel & Co., [1902]), 13.
29. Some members of Patrimonium criticized Talma for this negation; see J. Hermans Jr., *Gezag of gelijkheid?* (Amsterdam: Herdes & Co., [1902]). See also Arno Bornebroek and Lammert de Hoop, *De rode dominee: A. S. Talma* (Amsterdam: Boom, 2010), 83–86.
30. Cf. Aritius Sybrandus Talma, “Pleidooi voor een zelfstandige protestantse vakcentrale,” in *Honderd jaar sociaal 1891–1991. Teksten uit honderd jaar sociale beweging en sociaal denken in Nederland*, ed. Jan Peet e.a. (1901; repr., The Hague: SDU, 1998), 145–49.
31. Hazenbosch, *Voor het volk*, 40–41.
32. J. van der Molen, “Sikkel, Johannes Cornelis,” *Biografisch woordenboek van het socialisme en de arbeidersbeweging in Nederland* 5 (1992): 256–60.
33. Johannes Cornelis Sikkel, *Vrijmaking van den arbeid* (Amsterdam: Höveker & Wormser, [1904]), 113.
34. Bornebroek and De Hoop, *De rode dominee*, 88.
35. “Boaz,” *Het nieuws van den dag*, October 19, 1903, 18.
36. “Christelijk-sociale conferentie,” *Algemeen Handelsblad*, January 10, 1905, 1; cf. Hazenbosch, *Voor het volk*, 41–44; Bornebroek and De Hoop, *De rode dominee*, 93.
37. Christiaan Cornelissen, “Pleidooi van een socialist voor de oprichting van ‘algemene,’ onafhankelijke vakverenigingen,” in *Honderd jaar sociaal*, 93.
38. Ernest Hueting, Frits de Jong, and Rob Neij, *Naar groter eenheid: De geschiedenis van het Nederlands Verbond van Vakverenigingen 1906–1981* (Amsterdam: Van Genneep, 1983).

39. Cf. Sjaak van der Velden, *Werknemers georganiseerd: Een geschiedenis van de vakbeweging bij het honderdjarig jubileum van de Federatie Nederlandse Vakbeweging (FNV)* (Amsterdam: Aksant, 2005), 18–49.
40. Patrick Pasture, *Histoire du syndicalisme chrétien international: La difficile recherche d'une troisième voie* (Paris: Éditions l'Harmattan, 1999), 7.
41. Annemarie Houkes, *Christelijke vaderlanders: Godsdienst, burgerschap en de Nederlandse natie 1850–1900* (Amsterdam: Wereldbibliotheek, 2009), 103–43; P. van Rooden, “Long-term Religious Developments in the Netherlands, c. 1750–2000,” in *The Decline of Christendom in Western Europe, 1750–2000*, ed. Hugh McLeod and Werner Ustorf (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 113–29.
42. Van der Velden, *Werknemers georganiseerd*, 39.
43. Hazenbosch, *Voor het volk*, 34.
44. Beekers and Van der Woude, *Niet bij steen alleen*, 42.
45. Alphons Ariëns, “De noodzaak van vakorganisatie. Toespraak voor de derde algemene vergadering van de RK Twentse Katoenbewerdersbond, Oldenzaal 28 september 1896,” in *Toespraken, brieven en artikelen*, 399–404.
46. Jan Roes, “Katholieke arbeidersbeweging in historische banen: Inleidende beschouwingen over achtergronden, fasen en aspecten,” in *Katholieke arbeidersbeweging: Studies over KAB en NKV in de economische en politieke ontwikkeling van Nederland na 1945*, ed. Jan Roes (Baarn: Ambo, 1985) 27–33.
47. Hazenbosch, *Voor het volk*, 39–40.
48. Pasture, *Histoire du syndicalisme chrétien international*, 9–12, 61–66.
49. Arno Bornebroek, “Die protestantische Arbeiterbewegung in den Niederlanden: Eine Ausnahmerecheinung?,” in *Christliche Arbeiterbewegung in Europa 1850–1950*, ed. Claudia Hiepel and Mark Ruff (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2003), 129.
50. Hazenbosch, *Voor het volk*, 44–50.
51. Roes, “Katholieke arbeidersbeweging in historische banen,” 36.
52. Herman Amelink, “De ‘moderne’ vakbeweging in protestantse kring en het verzet van Patrimonium,” in *Honderd jaar sociaal*, 224.
53. Bornebroek and De Hoop, *De rode dominee*, 99.