We place ourselves, in the autumn of the year 1823, between Leiden and Utrecht, and there we meet in the humble deckhouse of a canal boat — at the time the most common means of transport between the two cities — [the theologians Kist and Royaards], . . . matured from boys to men, in friendly togetherness. How much has changed in their lot and in their lives! How important the future is for them, and how important have they become for the future of our Fatherland! Both have been appointed professors of church history. . . . Both are inspired by high expectations and noble intentions. Deeply aware, as they are, of the heavy weight of their calling, highly pleased with the discipline of academic education commended and entrusted to them, they burn with yearning, ready to make their contributions to it, so that the oh-so-neglected study of church history will flourish again in wider circles. To this conversation, which remained unforgettable for both, the Archief voor Kerkgeschiedenis [Review of church history] owes its origin. 2

This romanticized impression 3 comes from the hand of the Utrecht church historian Bernard ter Haar (1806-80) — also known as one

1 This text is the slightly revised translation of my inaugural address at the University of Groningen in 2000. It originally appeared as a separate booklet: Arie L. Molendijk, ‘Een Hoogsibelangtijke Wetenschap’. De beoefening van de Kerkgeschiedenis in Nederland in de negentiende eeuw (Groningen: Rijksuniversiteit Groningen, 2000), 43 pp. The translation was prepared by Ms. Sylvia M. Dierks-Malleit and made possible by a grant of the Royal Dutch Academy of Sciences (Vertaalfonds KNAW/Stichting Reprorecht), for which I would like to thank both of them.


3 The contrast with Kist’s own dry description is striking; cf. N.C. Kist, ‘Ter nagedachtenis van Herman Johan Royaards, den vriend mijner jeugd en van geheel mijn leven, mijn studie-genoot en mede-uitgever van het Archief voor Kerkelijke Geschiedenis’ [In memory of Herman Johan Royaards, a friend of my youth and my whole life, my fellow-student and co-publisher of the Review of church history], Nieuw Archief voor Kerkelijke Geschiedenis, inzonderheid van Nederland 2 (1854), 401-61, here 419. The various different names of the Review are to be found in the Appendix. In the following footnotes the same short name ‘Review’ will be used. Each new name was accompanied by new numbering, which results in references such as ‘Review 2 (1859)’. 
of the many, later so maligned, nineteenth-century clergymen-poets.\(^4\)

The study of church history in the Netherlands culminated, according to Ter Haar, in the work of the two founders of the *Archief voor Kerkelijke Geschiedenis* [Review of church history] as the publication was originally known — namely Nicolaas Christiaan Kist (1793-1859) and Herman Johannes Royaards (1794-1854). Prior to that, the discipline had been in a bad way. Lectures drew few students and, in the eyes of later scholars, many church history studies were too verbose.\(^5\) By this time, however, the “love for church history studies in our own country” had been re-awakened.\(^6\) The time had now come for a work, available to a wider public, covering the history of the Christian church in the Netherlands, and indeed — in the years between 1864 and 1869 — this would ultimately materialize in a two-part work under the editorship of Ter Haar, together with several of his colleagues (professors and clergymen), the number of pages totalling more than 1200. The audience targeted, however, was not particularly broad. In his introduction, Ter Haar wrote that he saw an increased interest in national church history “not only in our higher and more sophisticated classes, but also in our more bourgeois circles”.\(^7\) It was Ter Haar’s hope that there would be a “happy union” of love for religion and love for the fatherland, an aspect that would, in consequence, certainly benefit sales of the book.

A number of themes have thus been pin-pointed, all of which are crucially important to a proper understanding of nineteenth-century church history in the Netherlands: i.e. class consciousness, the idea of a religious-moral education and edification of society (or at least parts of it), and the close link people saw between religion and patriotism. The Netherlands had a special role to play in the development

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\(^1\) G. Brom, *De dominee in onze literatuur* [The clergyman in our literature] (Nijmegen, 1924).

\(^2\) Chr. Sepp, *Proeve eener pragmatische geschiedenis der theologie in Nederland, sinds het laatst der vorige eeuw tot op onze tijd (1787-1858)* [A foretaste of a pragmatic history of theology in the Netherlands, from the last century to the present day] (Amsterdam, 1860), p. 99: the announcement of church history lectures was supplemented with the text: “aut aliis [horis] auditoribus magis commodis”; J.G. de Hoop Scheffer, “De studie der vaderlandsche kerkhistorie” [The study of national church history], *De Gids* 29 (1865), 1: 201-13, here 202-203 in particular.

\(^3\) Ibid. Ter Haar and those around him saw their work as a supplement to N. Beets, ed., *Geschiedenis der Christelijke Kerk in tafereelen* [The history of the Christian Church in tableaus], 5 vols. (Amsterdam, 1852-59).