



History of Education

Journal of the History of Education Society

ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: <https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/thed20>

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To cite this article: Merethe Roos (2021) Scottish education through Norwegian eyes: Hartvig Nissen's report from his study trip to Scotland in 1853, *History of Education*, 50:5, 719-736, DOI: [10.1080/0046760X.2021.1918270](https://doi.org/10.1080/0046760X.2021.1918270)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/0046760X.2021.1918270>



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Published online: 15 Jul 2021.



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Scottish education through Norwegian eyes: Hartvig Nissen's report from his study trip to Scotland in 1853

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ABSTRACT

The article presents and analyses the first part of Norwegian educator Hartvig Nissen's (1815–1874) comprehensive report from his study tour to Scotland in 1853. Nissen occupies an important place in Norwegian nineteenth-century educational history and in nineteenth-century history in general, and he is regarded as the main driving force behind the most important Norwegian nineteenth-century School Act, ratified in 1860. The article sheds light upon how Nissen presented the Scottish school system and the state of school and education in Scotland at the time of his visit. Nissen's report is regarded to have been of great importance for the subsequent development of the Norwegian school system. The article argues that Nissen's presentation can be related to his surroundings while in Scotland, as well as his position as an educator in his own country.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 28 April 2020
Accepted 7 March 2021

KEYWORDS

History of education;
Norway; Scotland; Hartvig
Nissen; nineteenth century

Introduction

This article examines the report by Norwegian educator and bureaucrat Hartvig Nissen (1815–1874) from his study tour of Scotland during the summer months of 1853 and sheds light on how Nissen presents the Scottish school system to his Norwegian readers. The tour was officially initiated by the Norwegian government and funded by the Norwegian Ministry of Church and Education, for which he served as an adviser; the report was the final step towards completing his duties. Nissen's aim was to inspect Scottish schools and education in order to gain insights for improving the Norwegian school system. Nissen was granted scholarship funding for his travel because he was an adviser to the Norwegian Ministry of Church. Initially, he had been assigned to go to the United States and Great Britain, but shortly before his scheduled travel, the Swedish educator Per Adam Siljeström (1815–1892) wrote an extensive report on schools and education in America based on his own school visits there. Convinced that Siljeström's book already provided sufficient information on the American school system, Nissen limited his study tour to Scotland.¹

Nissen's trip to Scotland resulted in a comprehensive report in two parts comprising nearly 500 pages. The first part consisted of an analysis of the educational system in

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¹Per Adam Siljeström, *Om undervisningsväsendet i Förenade Staterna, in Handlingar och skrifter rörande undervisningsväsenet*, issued by Per Adam Siljeström (Stockholm: P. A. Norstedt, 1884).

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Scotland, while the second part outlined suggestions for how Norwegian schools and education could be improved.² Nissen's report, which was widely distributed in Norway, received positive reviews in the Norwegian press, and the second part is deemed to have been of great importance in the subsequent development of the Norwegian school system.³ In this article, I will focus on the first part of the report and shed light upon how Nissen depicts the Scottish school system and the state of schools and education in Scotland. The educational landscape in Scotland at the time of Nissen's visit is generally characterised by complex and contentious debates, and recent scholarship has underlined that the educational system was in need of comprehensive changes.⁴ My own discussion in the following will also thematise whether Nissen's presentation can be related to his surroundings while in Scotland, or his position as an educator in his own country.

The aim of this article, then, will be to fill a gap in educational research on the nineteenth century. The study not only addresses the dearth of research on the most important educator in Norway in the nineteenth century, but also documents a significant moment in Norwegian history in which a major figure in the field of education introduced ideas from the educational situation of another country to the Norwegian public.⁵

Who was Hartvig Nissen?

For a non-Scandinavian audience, Hartvig Nissen probably requires an introduction. Nissen occupies an important place in Norwegian educational history and in nineteenth-century history in general. He was born in 1815 in Stjørdal, Central Norway, the son of pastor Peter Schjelderup Nissen and the pastor's wife, Bolette (née Musæus). As a young student, Hartvig Nissen demonstrated academic talent and received an education as a philologist, with Sanskrit as his main subject, but by 1843 his primary focus had shifted from philological research to schools and education. However, as his initial plans for a research career proved difficult, Nissen made school and education his primary focus from 1843. In March of that year, he founded the 'Latin Secondary School' for boys in the capital, Christiania; his girls' school was established in the same city six years later. Aiming, among other things, to postpone the compulsory teaching of Latin and to prioritise education in the mother tongue, Nissen's schools offered boys, and later girls, a comparable education.⁶ In addition to being a school innovator in the 1840s, Nissen

²Hartvig Nissen, *Beskrivelse over Skotlands Almueskolevæsen, tilligemed forslag til forskjellige foranstaltninger til en videre Udvikling af det norske Almueskolevæsen (En Indberetning i Anledning af en efter offentlig Foranstaltning foretagen Reise)* (Christiania: P. T. Mallings, 1854).

³Ole Vig, 'Beskrivelse over Skotlands Almueskolevæsen, af H. Nissen', in *Den norske Folkeskole: Et Maanedsskrift for Lærere og andre Opdragere*, ed. Anden Aargang (July 1853–June 1854), 342 ff. See also the presentation in the newspaper *Christiania-Posten*, January 2, 1854.

⁴See, for instance, Ryan Mallon, 'Scottish Presbyterianism and the National Education Debates, 1850–62', in *Churches and Education*, ed. Morwenna Ludlow, Charlotte Methuen and Andrew Spicer, *Studies in Church History* 55 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 363 ff.

⁵Nissen's report from Scotland is thematised in two earlier Norwegian studies. One is the two-volume biography of Hartvig Nissen, published by Einar Boyesen in 1947. See Einar Boyesen, *Hartvig Nissen, 1815–1874, og det norske skolevesens reform* (Oslo: Johan Grundt Tanum, 1947), 2: 321 ff. The other work is Birger Løvlie, *Education as a Means of Democratisation: Influence from Scotland on School Reforms in Nineteenth Century Norway* (Volda: Høgskolen i Volda/Møreforskning, 2012). Only Løvlie attempts a systematic review of Nissen's interpretation of the Scottish educational system. However, Løvlie provides a relatively limited analysis, and his work does not include any analytical information on Nissen's relationship to the religious context in Scotland.

⁶Merethe Roos, *Hartvig Nissen: Grundtvigianer, skandinav, skolemann* (Oslo: Cappelen Damm Akademisk, 2019), 72 ff.

proved to be an active writer and debater, and his books and frequent contributions to newspapers helped him gain a political position with considerable influence that extended into the 1850s. He is commonly regarded as the most important driving force behind the Rural School Act of 1860, a watershed piece of legislation in Norwegian educational history.⁷ This Act required municipalities to establish permanent schools to replace the previous ambulatory schools and to expand the content of the curriculum. Nissen also played a significant role in increasing the general level of enlightenment by establishing the Society for the Promotion of Public Enlightenment in Christiania in 1851.⁸ This society published books of general interest as well as a periodical, *Folkevennen* (1852), which featured articles aimed at increasing the level of public enlightenment. Given his efforts as an education innovator in Norway, Nissen is commonly regarded as one of the chief national strategists in a period crucial for the history of his own country.⁹ From 1814 to 1905, Norway was in a political union with Sweden, and after having been part of a double monarchy with Denmark for over 400 years, Norway in the nineteenth century was increasingly striving to develop its own national identity.

School systems in Norway and Scotland

A closer look at the school systems in Norway and Scotland, along with the history and state of both systems in Nissen's time, will provide necessary context for this discussion.

In the case of Norway, it is important to note that the country's school system was urgently in need of improvement at the time of Nissen's travel to Scotland. Since the first School Act had been adopted in Norway in 1739, the schools and the Lutheran Church had been closely linked, not least by emphasising the core activity of memorising Erik Pontoppidan's explanation of Martin Luther's catechism. Schools in Norway were free, obligatory for children from the age of seven until confirmation, and essentially state-governed. On a regional level, the bishops were responsible for overseeing teaching in the schools. On a local level, oversight was carried out by the deans and local clergy. This implied that the clergy should certify teachers as qualified for their tasks and report to the bishops whenever teachers neglected to perform their duties. Consequently, the schools were run on the basis of Pietist ideals, with a branch of government clearly formulating their ideology, goals and governance.

In the towns, schools were established for the working-class population and the poor, while in more sparsely populated areas, ambulatory schools were created. As most people in Norway lived in rural districts, education often proved to be of poor quality, and the number of school hours were limited. In the early nineteenth century, children attended school an average of four weeks per year. While 20% of the children attending ambulatory schools were able to read, only 10% of them were able to calculate. Hartvig Nissen did much to document the poor state of education in both rural areas and towns. In reports from the rural districts in the early 1850s, he documented the terrible conditions

⁷Hans Jørgen Dokka, *Fra allmueskole til folkeskole: Studier i den norske folkeskoles historie i det 19. århundre* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1967).

⁸Ole Marius Hylland, *Folkeopplysning som utopi: Tidsskriftet Folkevennen og forholdet mellom folk og elite* (Oslo: Novus forlag, 1974).

⁹Rune Slagstad, *De nasjonale strateger* (Oslo: Pax 1998).

of schoolhouses: they were often dirty, cramped and dark, with disruptions from noisy workmen and farm animals. He was also shocked by the poor levels of school attendance: even though school was mandatory, he had met teenagers who were attending school for the first time on the day of his visit.¹⁰

The practices implemented in the eighteenth century were not equal to the educational requirements of Hartvig Nissen's age; particularly great was the need for a broader range of school subjects, including geography, history and the natural sciences. Moreover, teacher education was in need of improvement and professionalisation. Most teachers in rural schools lacked formal education, often being young and talented boys appointed by the vicar after their confirmation.¹¹ Only a very few were trained through teacher seminars. Beginning in the 1840s, teachers formed teacher organisations, which became an effective means to improve the conditions for teachers.¹² Nissen was one of many who demanded improvements in the organisation of the schools, and he made a substantial contribution in this regard. In a book published one year prior to travelling to Scotland, Nissen had argued for organic unity between the different levels in schools to secure continuity in teaching and improve the level of enlightenment.¹³ He also recommended the appointment of ambulatory diocese directors who could inspect rural schools and report on their conditions to the authorities. These initiatives in the 1850s led to the adoption of the Rural School Act of 1860.

The choice of Scotland as the focus for his study of foreign school systems was a natural one for Nissen. The Scottish education system had drawn praise for its schools for over 100 years and was idealised in the nineteenth century, especially thanks to its organisation in rural areas.¹⁴ Since 1696, schools in rural Scotland had been regulated by the Act for Settling of Schools, which established schools in every parish and required landowners and ministers to provide accommodation for schools and schoolmasters and to pay the latter a proper salary. The system remained in place in Scotland until 1872, causing the Scottish church and landowners to be responsible for education in all parishes. The school traditionally formed an integral part of the church's attempt to control society, not least through the requirement that teachers belong to the church.¹⁵ The legislation, regarded as proving the centrality of education to Scottish legislative goals in the late seventeenth century, served to establish the country's school system as the 'glory of Scotland'.¹⁶

In the first half of the nineteenth century, Scotland still suffered from social and moral problems, and a high percentage of the population was unable to read and write.¹⁷ Many laid these problems at the door of an inadequate system of schools and education, and voices in the country increasingly agitated for reform. Alongside governmental efforts to

¹⁰Nissen, *Beskrivelse over Skotlands Almueskolevæsen*, 303 ff.

¹¹Gro Hagemann, *Skolefolk: Lærernes historie i Norge* (Oslo: Ad Notam Gyldendal, 1992), 11.

¹²Britt Marie Hovland, *For fedreland og broderband: Allmugeskulelærarane si møteverksemd i det nasjonale gjennombrøtet 1850–1870* (Volda: Høgskolen i Volda 1999).

¹³Hartvig Nissen, *Grundtræk af en plan for Omdannelsen af Almueskolevæsenet paa Landet* (Christiania: P. T. Mallings, 1851).

¹⁴Ewen A. Cameron, 'Education in Rural Scotland 1696–1872', in *The Edinburgh History of Education in Scotland*, ed. Robert Anderson, Mark Freeman and Lindsay Paterson (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), 153 ff.

¹⁵Callum G. Brown, *The Social History of Religion in Scotland since 1750* (London: Methuen, 1987), 98.

¹⁶Edith E. B. Thomson, *The Parliament of Scotland, 1690–1702* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1929), 144 ff.

¹⁷John Stevenson, 'Scottish Schooling in the Denominational Era', in Anderson et al., *Edinburgh History of Education in Scotland*, 137 ff.

meet these challenges, Scotland witnessed the rise of denominational schooling, which eventually precipitated fierce competition between the various churches. After the Disruption of 1843, when the Free Church of Scotland broke away from the Established Church (the Kirk), the two denominations dominated the religious landscape. It is commonly acknowledged that this development increased the fear of many that the Established Church would lose its control over parish schools in the face of an increasingly powerful group of dissenters.¹⁸ This was particularly true after 1845, when the state took over the administration of poor relief, a function previously managed by the church. The dissenting interests in Scotland were further strengthened by the establishment of the National Education Association (NEA) in 1850. This organisation proposed the establishment of a non-denominational educational system, funded and organised by the state. In the wake of the NEA, increased tensions arose among the dissenters, often connected to questions of the relationship between religion and schooling. The Scottish historian Ryan Mallon has recently pointed to complex debates on education in the nineteenth century and has argued that mid-nineteenth-century education in Scotland must be seen in the context of the shifting Presbyterian landscape.¹⁹ An example of the effects of religious change on education can be seen in the instance of Lord Melgund's bills of 1850 and 1851, the first two of seven major pieces of educational legislation introduced in Parliament between 1850 and 1862. These bills, both of which failed in the House of Commons, promoted secular education and argued that there should be no faith requirement for schoolmasters.²⁰ Donald Withrington and John Stevenson have both analysed the connection between the church and schools in nineteenth-century Scotland, illuminating the key issues underlying the discussions.²¹

To what extent is this contentious environment reflected in Hartvig Nissen's report, and to what degree does he take a stand on the religious situation in Scotland? In terms of its thoroughness, Nissen's text makes it possible to study how the author relates to the complicated ties between church and education in Scotland and how, leveraging his central position in developing schools and education in Norway, he takes Scottish schools as a starting point for his suggestions on improving Norwegian schools. According to his own writings, Nissen is also the first foreigner who systematically studied the Scottish educational system. In the preface to his book, he refers to the difficulties arising from having no predecessors in the field. While he admits that the well-known American scholar Horace Mann had presented a good deal of data on Scottish schools, he had nonetheless limited himself to some interesting and informative remarks on what he saw and heard during a relatively short visit to Scottish schools.²²

The discussion below of Nissen's report will emphasise Nissen's focus on the relation between religion and the schools in Scotland rather than the country's educational system and teaching methods. As I will point out, Nissen clearly favoured the role in the schools

¹⁸Andrew L. Drummond and James Bulloch, *The Church in Victorian Scotland, 1843–1874* (Edinburgh: St Andrew Press, 1975), 90 ff.

¹⁹Mallon, 'Scottish Presbyterianism', 363 ff.

²⁰Ibid., 373–4. See also John Stevenson, *Fulfilling a Vision: The Contribution of the Church of Scotland to School Education, 1772–1872* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2012), 29.

²¹Donald J. Withrington, 'Adrift among the Reefs of Conflicting Ideals? Education and the Free Church, 1743–1855', in *Scotland in the Age of the Disruption*, ed. Stewart J. Brown and Michael Fry (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1993), 79–97.

²²Nissen, *Beskrivelse over Skotlands Almueskolevæsen*, IV.

of Scotland's Established Church, despite his apparently strong determination to take an objective position in this regard. The following investigation will comprise two parts: first, I will present the most important characteristics of Nissen's text and analyse how he relates to the contemporary religious situation in Scotland; second, I will discuss the background of Nissen's portrait of Scottish education.

Hartvig Nissen's report from Scotland

A high level of Bildung: a good school – a strong Church

Nissen's detailed report is divided into 11 sections, along with various appendices and an extensive preface. He starts with a historical and descriptive introduction, followed by a section on parochial schools divided into the following subsections: (1) schoolhouse, lodging and farmland; (2) selection of teachers, positions and monetary conditions; and (3) management of the schools. The third section provides an overview of different groupings of public schools, while the fourth section sheds light upon the domestic conditions in Scottish public schools in general, covering the following: (1) school subjects, (2) educational material, and (3) pedagogical methods and procedures. The fifth section presents industrial and vocational schools, while the sixth features secular schools. The subsequent sections comprise a presentation of hospitals and social institutions, followed by a discussion of teaching seminars.²³ In the last section, before concluding with general remarks, Nissen gives an account of the state's intervention in the development of the school system.

Scottish society is praised thoroughly in the text for its high level of *Bildung*, and this is a feature Nissen connects to the country's sound views on religion. After only a short time in Scotland, Nissen remarks, he immediately noticed the interest in the church and education.²⁴ This was particularly notable in the large number of Sunday schools that were devoted to religious education. The Scottish level of *Bildung* could also be seen in the so-called Mechanics' Institutes, where popular lectures were held on the sciences, industry, politics and the economy.²⁵ The influence of *Bildung* was also noticeable in private life: Nissen underlines that whenever he attended any social gathering, he was privy to conversations on the church and school. These were themes discussed with interest by merchants, lawyers, teachers, professors and clergymen alike.²⁶ As a matter of course, women also took part in these conversations and made use of libraries and participated in reading societies jointly with men.

The general level of *Bildung* was also noticeable in how members of the Scottish working class voluntarily sent their children to school, even if they were obliged to pay for it.²⁷ This situation created a contrast with Nissen's own country, where school attendance had been compulsory since 1739 and was free of charge. In his opinion, voluntary participation in education, so typical of Scotland, could never be seen among his own

²³The hospitals and social institutions are George Heriot's hospitals and schools, Donaldson's hospital, and Dick's and Milne's Bequests.

²⁴Nissen, *Beskrivelse over Skotlands Almueskolevæsen*, 179–80.

²⁵Nissen's text is pedagogically presented, and he thoroughly compares what he has seen in Scotland with recognisable examples from Norway: *ibid.*, 180.

²⁶*Ibid.*, 181.

²⁷*Ibid.*, 177.

fellow citizens, and the same general level of *Bildung* was unthinkable in Norway.²⁸ Moreover, this willingness to participate in education proved that the Scottish people were convinced that enlightenment was a good thing and worthy of support. In fact, Nissen states that people's own deep understanding of the importance of schooling for human development and societal progress was a constant feature of the Scottish national character.²⁹ Correspondingly, teaching standards were remarkably high, and no other countries could boast the same level of teacher qualifications as those seen in Scottish parochial schools over the last two centuries.³⁰ As we shall see below, Nissen traced this state of things to Scotland's longstanding history of the inherent ties between school and church.

Nissen begins his introductory remarks by presenting an account of his travel to and around Scotland in a way that gives his readers an immediate impression of the thorough, empirically sound approach he will adopt throughout the report. From the outset, he informs his audience that the goal of his trip was to obtain information on the public school system in Scotland; high schools, universities and special schools were therefore beyond the scope of his research. Nevertheless, he writes, to fulfil his duty he also acquainted himself with those parts of the educational system. According to his own records, he visited as many of these institutions as time allowed in different parts of the country and in towns and rural areas. He witnessed examinations and ordinary lessons, alone or accompanied by the government's school inspector Dr Woodford. The number of qualified informants proved to be high – he spoke with at least 100 teachers and a number of priests and other men, all of whom were members of the local school committees. Additionally, he read a number of reports and other texts to better understand and interpret the Scottish school system.

During his travels around Scotland, he also seems to have engaged in an active social life. The school inspector Edward Woodford, a skilled classicist and respected citizen, accompanied him around the country for two weeks.³¹ Nissen witnessed school inspectors discussing education and methodology not only during school visits, but also at private gatherings. Among those he met, he particularly mentions John Gordon and John Cook, who were, respectively, secretary and chair of the General Assembly's educational committee in the Established Church; both men welcomed him and were generous with their time. Nissen signals his awareness of the difficulty of maintaining objectivity under the influence of his informants' opinions, but through attaining knowledge of the parties and their mutual dependency, he had been able to pass judgement on the reliability of these sources.³² Later in the text, he informs his readers about the legal framework that

²⁸Ibid.

²⁹Ibid., 186. Elsewhere, Nissen again characterises the Scottish national character in a positive way. See 66, where he underlines that 'spiritual fieriness and powerful, energetic actions have been distinctive features for the Scots from old times', while in his own time, they were characterised by a 'punctual obedience to the law'. See also 123 ff., where Nissen presents the endowment of James Dick as an example of how private individuals jointly work with the state to improve school and education in Scotland.

³⁰Ibid., 131 ff.

³¹When Edward Woodford died in 1869, it was duly noted in the British press. The obituaries underlined his career as a university teacher in the classics as well as his position as Her Majesty's Inspector of Schools in Scotland. He was also said to be an energetic businessperson and a conservative in politics. See *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, January 8, 1869. See also *Edinburgh Evening Courant*, January 7, 1868.

³²Nissen, *Beskrivelse over Skotlands Almueskolevæsen*, ii ff. This is also emphasised in the concluding part of the survey of the Scottish school system (171).

necessitates his empirical approach to understanding the Scottish educational system: as Scottish educational law does not specify general rules for which school subjects should be taught, this must be studied from life itself through personal observation as well as conversations with trustworthy sources.³³

One issue Nissen raises that also relates to the reliability of the information he received on the trip is the fact that Scottish schools are not organised under a common governing structure. Rather, they are partly private and more or less governed by local authorities but also in part by different denominations or private corporations. The competing interests and their efforts to obtain or even increase their influence on the school system potentially raise doubts about the trustworthiness of some of these sources. However, Nissen expresses confidence that, despite the polemics, the truth will always be brought to light in the end. In this regard, Nissen offers an example to thematise the difference between the Established Church and the Free Church:

Since olden times, the Established Church has had much authority over schools and schooling. It is thus natural that it seeks to preserve this authority. To that end, it reportedly seeks to place development under its leadership in an advantageous light; the more powerfully and carefully it has kept its assignment, the more right it has to keep it. On the other hand, the Free Church competes with the Established Church in attaining the palm of victory. It must continuously make new efforts, its members must eschew life and money. But in order to charm the active members of the church, so that their enthusiasm and eagerness do not decrease, but rather increase, it is important to make them understand that there is still more to be done. This same subjective interest, which could have caused a cover-up, is also forcing the presentation of everything in its insufficient light.³⁴

Hence, from the beginning, Nissen seems to cast a favourable light upon the Established Church and characterises the strategy of the Free Church as exploiting the current situation by pointing to deficiencies in the existing educational system rather than promoting the benefits of its own.

This competitive relationship between the Established Church and the Free Church is a characteristic theme in Nissen's text, even though he concedes that they have several things in common.³⁵ In the concluding part of Nissen's review of the Scottish school system, he continues to present the Free Church as a rival to the Established Church. However, this rivalry can also be regarded as beneficial in that it compels the Established Church to work harder at improving the school system. The right to manage the schools was obtained legally, in part on the basis of previous efforts:

It was obviously the aim of the Free Church to raise itself to become the established National Church. Even if there is no difference between the denominations with regard to dogmatic concerns, and there principally should be no hindrances for children from the Free Church to attend schools governed by the Established Church, which also is true even where both denominations have schools next to each other, the Free Church continues to build schools, and not only churches, but also at places where there is no lack of these. The schools became the battleground where the confrontation between the denominations was fought, and this led to their trying to outdo each other with regard

³³Ibid., 31.

³⁴Ibid., iii-iv.

³⁵The Established Church and the Free Church have the same regulations when it comes to religious education. Ibid., 31. They also agree about what is essential in public school teaching. This can be seen in the organisation of their teacher seminars as well as in the designated practice schools: *ibid.*, 47, 149 ff.

to the organisation of schools and the character of the teaching. ... This rivalry from the Free Church incites the Established Church to increase its efforts for improving public schools because it recognises the importance of its defence, removed from the law and previous achievements, for keeping its rights to prove also that it is not inferior to its younger competitor when it comes to the willingness for self-sacrifice for the sake of education.³⁶

Conversely, this rivalry is strongly connected with what Nissen sees as negative aspects of the Scottish national character. While a deep commitment to schools was a typical and positive trait of Scottish society and the Scottish people, this rivalry appeared to have roots in what he characterised as the Scottish tendency towards bias and contentiousness:

It was these qualities, which in the old days caused one clan to engage in a life-or-death fight with another. But the battle now has a higher goal and more noble forms: in the old days, the battlefields were covered with slain bodies; in our times, they are peppered with new-built churches and schools.³⁷

Nissen attributes the shift towards using these national characteristics for a good purpose – to improve schools – to providence and common sense.

Nissen does not overlook the fact that education in Scotland was in need of improvement, and the number of children who were enrolled in schools was too low in relation to the total population. The latter point appeared to be related to disadvantageous trading conditions and distress resulting from the potato blight. In parts of the country, there was also a shortage of schools. However, this problem pertained mostly to the big cities. Still, Nissen says that the children loitering in the streets were not of Scottish origin,³⁸ but were instead Irish immigrants who had arrived in Scotland during the development of the railways and settled in the country. Thus, there was no apparent contradiction between the high level of *Bildung* characterising the Scottish national character and the fact that many children in Scotland did not receive basic education.

Church history and educational development in Scotland

Nissen's favouritism towards the Established Church is already apparent in the beginning of the empirical part of the report. He starts by giving the reader a historical overview of religious life in Scotland and discussing the strong relationship between schools and the church. The first descriptive section of the text is divided into two sub-parts, starting with a presentation of the most important incidents in Scottish church history, followed by an introduction to the Scottish school system. Nissen motivates his initial presentation of the Scottish church with his statement that it is impossible to understand the conditions of the country's schools without an overview of Scottish church history. He traces Scottish Protestantism back to 1528 by alluding to, but not mentioning by name, the first Protestant martyr, Andrew Hamilton, who in that year was burned at the stake for heresy. Nissen then presents the most significant years in Scottish Protestant history,

³⁶Ibid., 183.

³⁷Ibid., 186.

³⁸Ibid., 172.

including the introductions of Presbyterianism in 1592 and 1690. Sharing with readers his familiarity with the relevant literature, the author includes footnotes in which he recommends books on the different historical periods and the topics he examines.³⁹

The year 1843 is given particular attention, and the disruption of the church is referred to as a catastrophe.⁴⁰ Even though a number of Presbyterians had already withdrawn from the church before that year and Scotland had consequently seen the establishment of different denominations, 1843 could be regarded as a watershed. In that year, 470 clergymen and a large number of congregation members left the church and established the Free Church. Nissen declares his scepticism regarding the need for this split in the church even as he admits to being impressed by the Free Church's progressive aims. The section on the churches in Scotland is summarised in the account of the organisation of the Established Church; the account covers the Kirk session, the presbytery, the synods and the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland. Nissen's perspective on the religious landscape in Scotland encompasses both a bird's-eye view and detailed knowledge about individual churches and the number of their congregations and members. For example, he notes that the Established Church had between 1200 and 1300 congregations, while congregations within other Presbyterian denominations numbered up to 1150, including at least 620 within the Free Church. There were also about 200 other Protestant churches belonging to different denominations and 50 Catholic churches in addition to the 150,000 Roman Catholic churches.

When it comes to schools and education, Nissen underlines that Scotland already had organised education before the Reformation. After the Reformation arrived in Scotland, the clergy eagerly took charge of schools and education, particularly the public schools. According to Nissen, this urge for enlightenment and education could be regarded as a typical characteristic of Protestantism:

The principle of Protestantism, the individual, independent principle of research, has already permeated the Clergy and the People, but where this Principle is alive, the closest and most necessary effect would be to take care of people's enlightenment. One could certainly say that the instinct of self-preservation of the Protestant clergy increases its eagerness in this regard.⁴¹

The clergy's attempts to establish schools continued after the Reformation, despite the lack of financial means. Local congregations paid out a substantial amount of money to raise salaries for teachers, support indigent schoolchildren, obtain schoolbooks and establish school libraries. In the seventeenth century, there had been several attempts to establish a common school in Scotland. However, it was not until 1696 that the Scottish school system was officially founded. This long history provides an explanation for the high level of *Bildung* in Scotland: there was scholarly agreement that the Scottish national character came about as a result of various circumstances in Scottish civic and religious history, with the organised school system at the forefront.⁴² In the nineteenth

³⁹On the Reformation in Scotland, Nissen refers to 'a classical work', Dr George Cook's *History of Reformation in Scotland*, 3 vols (Edinburgh: printed by George Ramsey for Peter Hill, etc., 1811). The Church constitution is best covered in Alexander Hill, *The Practice in the Several Judicatories of the Church of Scotland*, 5th ed. (Edinburgh: William Blackwood & Sons, 1851).

⁴⁰But the largest and most important withdrawal from the State Church took place in 1843, when the Scottish 'Free Church' was established. Also at this time, the patronage was the cause of the catastrophe: Nissen, *Beskrivelse over Skotlands Almueskolevæsen*, 3.

⁴¹*Ibid.*, 9.

⁴²*Ibid.*, 178.

century, there were a couple of additions to the original law, but the fundamental features remained in place. Thus, parochial schools were foundational, and in terms of their importance they proved to be a good point of departure for Nissen's presentation of the Scottish school system.

In the three parts dedicated to parochial schools, Nissen emphasises the strong connection between the schools and the Established Church, leaving the reader with the impression that the church was assuming its rightful place in relation to the nation's education. However, as Nissen indicates, its control was exercised in cooperation with the country's landowners, with clearly drawn assignments: while landowners were in charge of the logistics, the church looked after educational matters and guaranteed the quality of teachers. The landowners were responsible for supplying and maintaining the premises of the schools and providing lodgings for the teachers. According to Nissen, this responsibility was met in an admirable manner: contrary to what he had seen in his own country, the classrooms and school buildings in Scotland were characterised by fresh air and healthy conditions. In addition, the election of teachers was a matter of cooperation between the clergy and the landowners, with elections controlled and secured by the ecclesiastical authorities. After the clergy and the landowners had elected their candidates, the candidates presented themselves to the presbytery and had to pass examinations in the school subjects they would teach. Moreover, not only the candidates' knowledge and teaching abilities but also their moral character and religious opinions were subject to examination. Thus, in the end, the presbytery decided whether a candidate was qualified, and this decision took religious stance into account. The religious character of the election process was strengthened in its final stage: the candidate was obliged to sign the creed of the Established Church and verify that he was a church member.

Landowners and the clergy also shared responsibility for deciding on clergymen's salaries within a certain range (115 to 154 *speciedaler*) and according to teachers' individual efforts.⁴³ There was, according to Nissen, a general agreement that teachers' salaries should increase, but many Scottish dissenters stood in the way of such plans. The Free Church, which established schools in connection with all of its churches, threatened to resist salary increases unless the system changed and its members were included in the schools' management. These attempts to achieve political control were also underlined by a petition presented to Parliament in 1852.⁴⁴ However, as this was a topic that was still being debated in Scotland, Nissen could not predict its outcome.

Underlining the Established Church's dominance

The impression of ecclesiastical influence is reinforced in the subsequent parts of Nissen's text. In one case, Nissen describes how a clergyman who closely supervised a church also served as the representative of the presbytery. Other members of the presbytery and the General Assembly oversaw the school as well, albeit on a less frequent basis. Even though landowners were involved in the decisions on what teachers were obliged to teach, religious education remained the most important subject and was the only one included

⁴³Nissen uses the Norwegian currency, *Speciedaler*, to illustrate the actual amount of money. Elsewhere in the text, he explains that 1 guinea is equal to £1 1s., which corresponds to 4 *Speciedaler* and 90 *skilling*: *ibid.*, 16.

⁴⁴Nissen refers to the Acts of the General Assembly in 1852: *ibid.*, 18.

in the School Acts.⁴⁵ Teachers were required to regularly organise Bible readings, teach the Short Catechism and the most common psalm melodies, and instruct pupils to pray and sing a psalm every day.

The Established Church had played a decisive role in establishing and upholding other schools in Scotland as well. Even if parochial schools constituted the core of the Scottish school system, Nissen underlines that the School Act of 1803 explicitly states that its regulations could not be used for schools in the cities. The Kirk session had contributed substantially to commendable initiatives. Since 1812, sessional schools had been established in Scottish cities. The first of these was founded in Edinburgh and, according to Nissen, had distinguished itself as a starting point for an important methodological movement and as the spark that initiated a teacher seminar.⁴⁶ The total number of sessional schools in Scotland now exceeded 100. In many ways these schools were comparable to the parochial schools, but instead of being governed by the presbytery, they were locally managed under the auspices of the congregations and Kirk sessions. The Kirk session was responsible for electing teachers and providing venues and practical facilities.⁴⁷

In the provinces, the Established Church had also done much to arrange and improve the educational level. As the law only permitted one parochial school in each parish, the need for education in rural Scotland could not be fulfilled through these schools alone. The parishes were often large, and the distances within them made commuting an impossible task for the teachers. Nissen was therefore able to note that the Established Church had helped in the founding of rural private schools and in providing financial means for the poor to attend. In 1825, the General Assembly appointed a committee to ‘increase the means for promoting religious teaching in Scotland, particularly in the Highlands and on the islands’.⁴⁸ This committee decided to arrange an annual collection in the churches to achieve this purpose, with the proceeds paying salaries for teachers at 176 schools in the Highlands and Lowlands and on the islands. Many of these schools were so-called industrial schools – that is, schools particularly aimed at educating students for participation in practical aspects of life and industrial professions.⁴⁹ The establishment of these schools was not arbitrary but rather followed certain given rules, all of them underlining the primacy of the parochial schools.⁵⁰ The teacher, who was employed by the educational committee, should report twice a year on the condition of these schools, and he was also obliged to hold Sunday schools.⁵¹

⁴⁵Ibid., 30.

⁴⁶Ibid., 23.

⁴⁷The Kirk session was also responsible for supporting poor children and exempting them from the school fee. Nissen also tells us that several of the sessional schools were girls’ schools: *ibid.*, 24.

⁴⁸This came to be called The General Assembly’s Educational Committee.

⁴⁹The Industrial Schools aimed at providing useful education in practical and theoretical matters, such as sewing and knitting (in girls’ schools) or cultivation of fields (in the Highlands). The educational committee reported to the General Assembly on the Industrial Schools in 1852. This report is reprinted in its entirety in Nissen’s report. Nissen justifies this reprint as increasing the committee’s understanding of what education should be: Nissen, *Beskrivelse over Skotlands Almueskolevæsen*, 88–97.

⁵⁰No private school was allowed to be established in a parish unless the parish had a parochial school that was equipped in accordance with the law. Neither was a private school allowed in proximity to parochial schools. This measure was designed to avoid decreasing the number of parochial school applicants or harming teachers’ interests: *ibid.*, 26.

⁵¹In a footnote, Nissen explains that Sunday schools are common in Scotland, and that they provide religious teaching only. He notes that in 1851, there were only about 1100 Sunday schools connected to the Established Church. However, as he argues, the members of other denominations demonstrated even more eagerness in their bid to spread religious knowledge among the population: *ibid.*

The last group of schools Nissen connects with the Established Church comprises those originating from educational societies. Nissen informs readers that two societies were dedicated to promoting education in Scotland: the Society for Propagating Christian Knowledge and the Gaelic School Society, both of which were closely connected to the Established Church. The Society for Propagating Christian Knowledge, established in 1709 with financial support from the church, aimed to promote schools in the Highlands and in the cities. It was now financially independent and could boast 260 schools. Founded a century later, the Gaelic School Society also aimed at strengthening education in rural Scotland. The 70 schools provided by this society, which offered basic education in reading, writing and religion, were known for their ambulatory teachers. Several schools were also established by private endowments, and some of these were counted among the best schools in Scotland. Additionally, there were reformatories, like George Heriot's hospital and schools and Donaldson's hospital, both in Edinburgh. During his stay in Scotland, Nissen had visited Donaldson's hospital, which was located in what Nissen referred to as 'probably the most magnificent building in Scotland'.⁵² This reformatory, which was adapted for 200 poor children, was also ground-breaking in terms of pedagogy. One-third of the pupils were deaf-mute and had learned to talk using sound, something that was not yet common in Scottish schools. Nissen could enthusiastically report that the methodology deployed here was apparent in the children's appearance:

nearly none of these deaf-mute children had the look which is so typical for deaf-mute. I am liable to think that the reason can be found in the educational principle at this school. They were raised commonly with hearing children, and they were treated the same way as hearing children were.⁵³

Nissen's presentation and the actual situation

The foregoing discussion has shown that Nissen presents the educational situation in Scotland as a rivalry between two denominations: the Established Church and the Free Church. The Established Church is presented as having a lawful right to claim primacy over the schools, if only on the strength of its previous success in education, evident in the civilised and educated Scottish national character. The Free Church's rivalry with the Established Church could be viewed in two different ways. On the one hand, the efforts made by the Free Church to establish schools and provide education disturbed the natural order of school and education in Scotland. On the other hand, these efforts forced the establishment to shape up and improve the existing system. There is no direct mention of the National Educational Association in Nissen's text, and the few references to governmental attempts to improve education appear in his discussion of the establishment's fear of losing control over the parochial schools (see Nissen's remarks on Lord Melgund's bills, discussed below).

Thus, in comparison with how recent research had presented the educational landscape in Scotland in the mid-nineteenth century, and particularly the relationship between religion and education, Nissen gives a very simplified account. He is also clearly biased towards the Established Church. With reference to the 1851 Population Census of

⁵²The building appeared like a castle, and had cost £125,000 or about 600,000 *Speciedaler*: *ibid.*, 122.

⁵³*Ibid.*, 123.

Great Britain, John Stevenson has pointed to an extended fragmentation of schooling in Scotland.⁵⁴ Under the category of ‘schools supported in any degree by religious bodies’, Stevenson reported the existence of 914 schools belonging to the Established Church, 719 Free Church schools, 61 schools coming under the United Presbyterian Church, 38 under the Episcopal Church, and 32 under the Roman Catholic Church. Nissen mentions the denominational schools in his overview, but his presentation is limited to the bare facts. His reference to the number of schools connected to each denomination is different from that provided by Stevenson, probably owing to the sources he used. Regarding the schools affiliated with the Free Church, Nissen points out that they were organised similarly to those of the Established Church. This made any further presentation of schools’ organisation superfluous. The annual report from the Free Church in 1852 showed that the church governed 620 schools and that each teacher earned £49 on average.⁵⁵ He also explains that the necessary money came from monthly collections in the churches, and that the Free Church’s educational committee was responsible for distributing payment to the teachers. The Free Church was also in charge of supervising and governing these schools. According to Nissen, the United Presbyterians had established 78 schools, while 40 came under the Episcopal Church.⁵⁶ Schools belonging to other denominations, such as the Roman Catholic Church, amounted to ‘only a handful’. There were some schools without formal ties to any denomination even though they were connected to the different churches through their teachers and their religious orientation. The presbyteries of the Established Church or the Free Church occasionally oversaw these schools.

It is well known that the fragmentation and duplication within Scottish schooling prompted the development of a national educational system in Scotland. In the years prior to Nissen’s visit, Lord Melgund had been one of the most eager proponents of improving education, and he agitated for a national system built upon the existing foundation. In an 1848 pamphlet and in his 1850 and 1851 bills aimed at reforming and extending Scotland’s already existing school establishment, Melgund argued that there was a need to abolish the Established Church’s superintendence of the parochial schools. Many of those supporting his views blamed the existing educational system for the increasing social problems and perceived decline in morals in Scotland.⁵⁷

Even though Melgund’s educational bills failed to pass in the House of Commons, his suggestions caused much debate, including within the different denominations. In his very interesting article on Scottish Presbyterianism and national educational debates, Ryan Mallon has pointed to the persistence of sectarian tensions after the passing of Melgund’s bills.⁵⁸ These tensions were overtly displayed in the Scottish press, and many of the debates centred on the role of religious instruction. While some prominent members of the Free Church spoke in favour of Lord Melgund’s secular proposal, others opposed him in favour of an overtly religious system. These debates pointed ahead to the advancement of new education legislation in the coming decade but, nonetheless, lines of tension among the dissenters had been drawn. According to Mallon, the debates on

⁵⁴Stevenson, ‘Scottish Schooling in the Denominational Era’, 143.

⁵⁵Nissen reports that 52 teachers earned more than £100: Nissen, *Beskrivelse over Skotlands Almueskolevæsen*, 28.

⁵⁶According to Nissen, there were few schools belonging to other denominations: *ibid.*, 29.

⁵⁷Stevenson, ‘Scottish Schooling in the Denominational Era’, 144. See also Stevenson, *Fulfilling a Vision*.

⁵⁸Mallon, ‘Scottish Presbyterianism’, 373 ff.

Scottish education in the mid-nineteenth century should not be seen as a simple and unipolar conflict between the establishment and dissenters,⁵⁹ but rather as a series of shifting and complicated relations and hostilities between members of the different denominations.

These tensions seem to have been overlooked by Nissen. He mentions Lord Melgund's bills in his survey, but only in a footnote and as an explanation of how the establishment is afraid of losing its jurisdiction over the church:

The frequently mentioned Lord Melgund's bill implied that the parochial schools as well as the common schools should be under the jurisdiction of a civil direction. If this proposal had been approved, this would have meant that the influence of the presbytery as well as of the General Assembly would have been annihilated. The proposal was certainly not approved by the House of Commons, but as it found much support there, and as he who suggested this bill, Lord Melgund, is closely connected with the most influential persons in the government, this incident has caused much ado within the domains of the Established Church.⁶⁰

However, says Nissen, most of the congregations (clergy as well as lay members) belonging to both the Established Church and the Free Church seemed to agree upon the importance of religious instruction:

because they assume that even if they provided sufficient religious teaching outside the schools, this organisation of schooling would implant the image among the children that religion is something that is separated from their upbringing, and that it was possible to become wise and good without thinking about divine concerns.⁶¹

According to Nissen, this unification of members from the Established Church and the Free Church created a front against 'the not insignificant party' that was fighting for a national school system. Some of the members of this party were devoted to religion and some were not; the latter group obviously assumed that natural religion was sufficient. This 'not insignificant party' was most likely the National Educational Association, whose importance is signalled in Nissen's inclusion of a relatively detailed survey of Scotland's secular schools, of which there were only four, in his overview.⁶² These secular schools were different from other Scottish schools in that they omitted religious teaching from the curriculum and left this responsibility to parents and the clergy. Thus, Nissen seems to have lacked specific information regarding the dissenter debates and to have interpreted the Free Church as a more or less homogeneous group, at least in regard to the issue of the role of religious education in the schools. He seems to have interpreted the National Educational Association as an organisation aiming to provide secular education only; in his view, the Established Church and the Free Church presented a common front against the NEA.

In the concluding part of his presentation, Nissen provides a solution to the overall improvement of the Scottish educational system. He admits that there is doubtless a need to improve the system and, in his opinion, this could be done through common plans. The lack of an overall organisation was striking: there was no cooperation between the denominations, and this caused inefficiencies in the schools. He reiterates that the rivalry

⁵⁹Ibid., 379–80.

⁶⁰Nissen, *Beskrivelse over Skotlands Almueskolevæsen*, 184.

⁶¹Ibid., 184–5.

⁶²Ibid., 110 ff.

between the different denominations had resulted in a massive expansion of schools, including in places where these expansions seemed unnecessary. The fundamental principle appeared to be clear: there was broad agreement that the schools' most important aim was to mediate a religious spirit. This was the principle upon which the organisation of schools should be founded. Apart from this conclusion, Nissen does not suggest how these common plans might be developed. However, keeping in mind his previous understanding of the Established Church, it is hard to imagine that his recommendations would not involve greater control by the country's largest church.

Hartvig Nissen's view on Scottish education: a possible explanation

The scholarly attitude Nissen assumes in his report is reflected in the thoroughness of his research, his use of reliable sources and a large number of informants and official documents, and his empirical approach to his subject. Travelling to Scotland in person and in the company of a highly respected governmental inspector gave weight to the messages aimed at his home audience. Further underlining the trustworthiness of Nissen's report were positive reviews in important Norwegian periodicals, such as the piece by Ole Vig (1824–1857) in the teachers' periodical *Den Norske Folkeskole* (second issue).⁶³ As a prominent member of the Society for the Promotion of Public Enlightenment as well as the editor of the society's periodical, *Folkevennen*, Ole Vig was highly respected among the Norwegian public.

But despite these indications of Nissen's neutrality towards his subject, as I have indicated in my analysis, his report on schooling and education in Scotland is hardly unbiased and clearly favours the influence of the Established Church. His praise for the high level of *Bildung* in Scotland, which he ascribes to the strong ties between church and education, as well as his explicit acknowledgement of the role of the Established Church in governing the schools, reveals his lack of neutrality, as does his apparent failure to notice the multiple and nuanced positions towards education taken by those outside the Established Church. In light of Hartvig Nissen's importance in his own country at that time, as well as his significance for Norwegian education and schooling in the mid-nineteenth century, this must be regarded as highly noteworthy.

At least in theory, the appearance of bias on Nissen's part may have resulted from his unfamiliarity with the complexities of the debates over religion and education in Scotland at that time, as revealed in recent research. In the introduction of his report, Nissen informs his readers that he attended private gatherings during his travels around Scotland, and among those he met, he particularly mentions John Gordon and John Cook, prominent members of the Established Church's educational committee. The man who accompanied him on his travels throughout Scotland, school inspector Edward Woodford, was known to be politically conservative. It is likely, then, that during his stay, Nissen received nudges in favour of the establishment from important protagonists of the old system.

Nissen refers to the views of the Established Church in underlining its statutory right to claim primacy over Scottish schools and in pointing to the church's role as the preserver of an educational tradition that had shaped the fabric of Scottish life.⁶⁴ This role was particularly evident after the passing of the Poor Law Amendment Act in 1845. In his book on the contribution of the Church of Scotland to school and education, John

⁶³Vig, 'Beskrivelse over Skotlands Almueskolevæsen'.

⁶⁴Stevenson, *Fulfilling a Vision*, 161.

Stevenson particularly mentions Cook and Gordon as two figures eager to highlight the efforts of the Established Church in improving Scottish education. In connection with the Argyll Commission reports, regarded as the most comprehensive studies of the schools in Scotland from the commission established in 1864, Gordon and Cook underlined the large number of schools established by the Church of Scotland.⁶⁵ According to Stevenson, these reports, like Nissen's, seem to overlook facts in order to favour the Established Church. In a reply to the Argyll Commission's statement that the rivalry of the denominations had forced an improvement of the school system, Cook has argued that the majority of the schools were set up before the disruption, and the denominational rivalry was a matter of fact long before the disruption.⁶⁶ Thus, if Gordon and Cook are representative of Nissen's social environment during his stay in Scotland, their perspective may have influenced Nissen's views on the Scottish educational system and education in general.

However, another perspective on Nissen's lack of impartiality has to do with his position as an educator in Norway. Nissen went to Scotland as an adviser for the Norwegian Ministry of Church and Education, which was in charge of education in his own country. He was therefore a representative of the establishment in a country where the church and schools were closely bound together. This might have had consequences for how he encountered the issue of schools and education in Scotland. In his private life, he tended to champion governmental initiatives. As both the founder and leader of the Society for the Promotion of Public Enlightenment and as an educator, Nissen did his best to prevent alternative voices on school and education from gaining ground in Norway, with regard to both political and religious alternatives. The Society for the Promotion of Public Enlightenment was partly established to clamp down on the educational initiatives promoted in 1848 by the Norwegian labour movement, founded by Marcus Thrane (1817–1890).⁶⁷ Thrane, who was jailed for agitation in 1851 and later sentenced, had established Sunday schools for adults and initiated comprehensive educational programmes. Nissen was an active antagonist of Thrane, not least because he viewed Thrane's initiatives as a threat to social order. Consequently, in several texts published by the Society for the Promotion of Public Enlightenment, as well as in the press, he warned against the labour movement's educational activities.

Moreover, Nissen was a strong defender of Norwegian Protestant culture. Since the enactment of the Dissenter Act in Norway in 1845, dissenter congregations could establish themselves in the country after receiving government approval. This movement towards religious pluralism potentially threatened the church's position, and Nissen used a number of his writings to warn about the dissenters and to defend Protestant culture.⁶⁸ It is possible to trace a similar defence of Protestant culture in Nissen's report from Scotland. To a certain extent, he harmonises the relationship between the Established Church and the Free Church, mistakenly (or misleadingly) stressing their unity around

⁶⁵Ibid., 161–2. See also Marjorie Cruickshank, 'The Argyll Commission Report: A Landmark in Scottish Education', *British Journal of Educational Studies* 15 (1967): 133–47.

⁶⁶According to Stevenson, the United Secession Church particularly provoked the rivalry prior to the disruption. See Stevenson, *Fulfilling a Vision*, 162.

⁶⁷See Roos, *Hartvig Nissen*; Merethe Roos, 'Marcus Thrane, demokratiet og 1850-tallets opplysningsvirksomhet', *Nytt Norsk Tidsskrift* 2 (2018): 138–50.

⁶⁸Roos, *Hartvig Nissen*; Merethe Roos, 'Hartvig Nissen and N. F. S. Grundtvig: Grundtvigianske aspekter i norsk skoletenkning rundt midten av 1800-tallet. Polemikken mellom Hartvig Nissen og Frederik Bugge i Morgenbladet 1845', *Teologisk Tidsskrift* 2 (2019): 115–29.

a common goal of defending religious education. As we have seen, this view oversimplifies the contemporary Scottish religious landscape. It seems to be important for Nissen to assure his Norwegian readers that the high level of *Bildung* in Scottish society can be seen as a consequence of a Protestant culture – a culture on which dissenting groups can also unite against a common foe.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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