

# Abraham Kuyper's Historical Understanding and Reformed Historiography

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Abraham Kuyper's historical understanding was shaped by religion and national identity. Both aspects have to be understood as typical nineteenth century interactions with modernity. To clarify this, I will start with a sketch of the state of mind of the Dutch nation at the time when Kuyper came of age. The second theme of religion will follow suit.

The United Kingdom of the Netherlands was a result of the deliberations of the pan-European Congress of Vienna (1814-1815). The aim of the four triumphant Great Powers at the Congress was to erect a barrier of strong states around trouble-maker France. Europe knew that France had lost a battle, but the history of the last twenty years suggested that at any time France might start waging war again. And indeed, when Napoleon escaped from Elba early in 1815, the threat was there again. It was a great relief that after a tense period known as the Hundred Days Napoleon was defeated at Waterloo – a great relief it was: London got its Waterloo Station as a reminder, Amsterdam its Waterloo Square - , but his ghost kept on threatening Europe, and containment was the answer. As a result of this diplomatic aim of the Congress of Vienna the Kingdom of the Netherlands was born.

The territory of the new Kingdom matched the combined territory of the old Dutch Republic and of the former Spanish Netherlands, the present Belgium. As such, the kingdom reminded of the unity of the Netherlands before 1581. This *déjà vu* was strengthened by the fact that the hereditary sovereignty of the new kingdom was handed over to the House of Orange. The princes of Orange - William the Silent, Maurice, Frederic-Henry, William III and three other Williams - had been closely connected to the Dutch Republic for ages. And added to this was the restoration of the Dutch Reformed Church to its predominant position.

So, the new kingdom had strong historical features. But the Dutch were not thrown right back into history, just like Mark Twain's Connecticut Yankee who was suddenly transferred centuries back, into King Arthur's court. The national amalgamation confronted the Dutch with some

striking modern aspects as well. Among the novelties the Netherlands received were a parliament and a constitution. Like all new things introduced in these years, they were all tailored to the national size and aimed to unify the new nation. In the Dutch Republic, people were mainly tight to a local or regional community. But the more deplorable the state of the Republic was, the stronger grew the national feeling. At the end of the eighteenth century one could speak of a 'cult of the fatherland'.<sup>1</sup> The national character of the new political institutions over against localism corresponded with this feeling, but it was implemented without any consultation of the people or its representatives, and it certainly was a present that had its dark sides. But in 1815 not much attention was paid to them. The Netherlands was created in the first place as a buffer state north of France to protect the international interests of the conquerors of Napoleon. This newly created state was designed to play a role in the new balance of power politics of the small and the great European nations.

Thus the new kingdom had to offer something old and something new. Its nineteenth century features had one thing in common. The old Dutch political traditions were considered to be obsolete and the novelties were presented as the modern answer to the challenge of the age to come. The new kingdom was a Napoleonic absolute monarchy in a mitigated, national form. It was Napoleonic, not only because of all sorts of unifying measures, like the introduction of a national tax system or of the meter as a standard size, but because it meant uniformity in general. The particularistic and democratic character of the old Dutch Republic was replaced by a centralist and aristocratic government. As head of the new state King William I of Orange deliberately walked in the footsteps of the French dictator. The new political structure had been imposed on the people and all the political instruments were used to achieve national unity. In a moment of absent-mindedness the Reformed Church in 1816 subjected to the new regime and thereby to its objectives. Its democratic structure was remodelled into a hierarchal national order. The king appointed the first members of the governing bodies of the church, the national synod, the provincial synods, and the classes. They were appointed in a new, revolutionary way, but it was still the same old elite that governed the church. And the congregation was officially stripped of its rights to elect elders or deacons. As the young Abraham Kuyper wrote in his first publication on church affairs in 1867: 'Alas, the new rule was a step backwards again. It did not just have oligarchic tendencies, but in it oligarchy was openly proclaimed.'<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> N.C.F. van Sas, 'Vaderlandsliefde, nationalisme en vaderlands gevoel in Nederland, 1770-1813', *Tijdschrift voor Geschiedenis* CII (1989), 473.

<sup>2</sup> A. Kuyper, *Wat moeten wij doen, het stemrecht aan onszelven houden of den kerkeraad machtigen? Vraag bij de uitvoering art. 23* (Culemborg 1867) 14: 'Helaas, dat reglement was zoo mogelijk nog een stap terug! Daar school de oligarchie niet slechts in, daar werd ze openlijk in geproclameerd.'

In the state there was a parliament, but the people were not represented and the power of the king outweighed the influence of this body by far. The Dutch were a sovereign people, but the sovereignty was executed solely by the king. He guarded and represented the liberties of the people. But there was no freedom outside the sphere of the king. There was no room for politics either: there was hardly a public debate and the parliament lacked the right or the means to control or balance the power of the king. The schools became national schools, where the spirit of uniformity was spread. And there was no freedom to assemble. Never in Dutch history the people had less freedom than during the reign of King William I.

The new kingdom was a well organized state, but it did not root in the history of the Dutch nation. If there was a future for the Dutch people, they had to find their way out of this political framework imposed on them as a prison. The first rebellion came from the churches. There was no freedom of religion. All religious activities were subjected to the law. So, when in 1815 a Roman-Catholic priest opposed his bishop in ecclesiastical matters, he was sentenced by the civil court of justice. Some years later, a similar thing happened in the Reformed Church. Some people rebelled against the church government and its anti-Calvinistic synodical policy. Ministers were deposed, some imprisoned, and all over the country small groups of Calvinists seceded from 1834 on. They constituted their own church and claimed to be the true continuation of the Reformed Church. The state interfered for two reasons. The Seceders were not free to assemble – if more than twenty people attended the service, they violated a Napoleonic law and were fined or imprisoned. And they were not allowed to found a new church without the King's approval. The Seceders did not want to respect the King's authority in religious matters and the king would not accept the Seceder's pretensions that they had founded no new church, but continued the old Reformed Church. There was simply no possibility for the state not to interfere in religious matters.

But the Seceders did not give in. In their days the Seceders were generally considered to be uneducated and therefore simple people with old fashioned ideas, but their stubborn refusal to accept the Napoleonic governmental structure became the source of freedom for the Dutch. The secession of 1834 was a conservative revolution in the sense of Edmund Burke. It was the rebellion of the historic Dutch democracy against the imposed Napoleonic totalitarian state. And it was in the democratic nature of the reformed people that the Dutch quest for freedom in the nineteenth century started in the church, among the common people.

It was in these days Abraham Kuyper was born in the Netherlands in 1837, in a nation that gradually tried to escape from the uniformity imposed on it. In 1839 Belgium seceded from the Netherlands, This event marked the end of the Napoleonic politics of King William I; he abdicated in 1840. In 1848 the Dutch parliament voted for a new constitution that gave more power to the parliament and freedom of religion. To many Dutch it was a shock this freedom included a loss of the predominant status of the Reformed church. But the people received more freedom. Recovered from the shock of the French occupation and its Napoleonic aftermath, they began to reconsider their possibilities. Would the future hold better times in stock?

It is no surprise that in order to shape a new nation gifted spirits in the Netherlands in these circumstances turned their attention to the birth of the Dutch Republic. They wanted a golden age, and there it was. They may have been historians, or theologians, or medical doctors, or lawyers, they may have been protestant, or roman-catholic, or humanist, but their common aim was a revival of their waning nation. And therefore their basic question was: what had made the magnificent Dutch Republic tick?

Let us consider the answers of some tutors of Kuyper. To begin with, everyone acknowledged religion as the primal force, the motor of the Republic. In the nineteenth century no historian had to explain what Dutch historians need to tell today: 'Who excludes religion cannot understand the culture of the seventeenth century.'<sup>3</sup> And, secondly, everyone was nationalistic: 'Fruin, and all other historians of his time, either Roman-Catholic, or Protestant, or liberal, they were all inspired by nationalism.'<sup>4</sup> Modernity urged for a new definition of nation and religion alike. The historian Robert Fruin was Kuyper's teacher in his Leiden high school, the *Stedelijk Gymnasium*, before he became professor of history at Leiden University in 1860. He concentrated his historical research on the birth of the Dutch republic in the sixteenth century. In a famous study, *Tien jaren uit den tachtigjarigen oorlog, 1588-1598* [Ten Years in the Eighty Years'War], completed in 1858, this liberal historian concluded that civil liberty and free trade were the cornerstones of the power and prosperity of the Dutch Republic. He acknowledged that Calvinism had been a driving force behind the struggle for these liberties, but he was a modernist, who believed that in the course of history religion had been overcome by reason. The most famous author of Fruin's age that elaborated on his theme was the American historian

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<sup>3</sup> Willem Frijhoff en Marijke Spies, *1650. Bevochten eendracht* (Den Haag 1999) 608: 'Wie de religie tussen haakjes zet kan de cultuur van de zeventiende eeuw niet begrijpen.'

<sup>4</sup> Álbert van der Zeijden, *Katholieke identiteit en historisch bewustzijn. W.J.F. Nuyens (1823-1894) en zijn 'nationale' geschiedschrijving* (Hilversum 2002) 65: 'Fruin en alle andere historici van zijn tijd, katholiek, protestant of liberaal, waren allen nationalistisch geïnspireerd.'

John Lothrop Motley. This child of Massachusetts stated that the Dutch republic was ‘conceived in liberty and rooted in a Puritan heritage’.<sup>5</sup>

Another Dutch historian was Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer. He was a politician and the archivist of the House of Orange. Kuyper’s search for the documents of the founding era of the Dutch Reformed church (1530-1580) brought him in 1864 into contact with Groen and soon this aristocrat became his tutor in politics. Like Fruin, Groen concentrated his historical research on the rise of the Dutch Republic. He was more explicit in his qualification of the Calvinist influence. According to his *Handboek der geschiedenis van het vaderland* (Handbook of the History of the Fatherland), completed in 1846, it was impossible to separate the civil liberties in the Dutch Republic from Calvinism. Calvinism had been the formative power, not humanism. He even called this religion the source and stronghold of liberty. Subsequently, a return to Calvinism would be the remedy for the Netherlands in the nineteenth century. Groen’s Calvinism was primarily a religious faith and not a political theory, and his political ideas resemble Edmund Burke’s more than Calvin’s. Groen was respected as a historian, but his opinions did not get much support. Simon Schama’s distorts Groen’s point of view when he writes in his *Patriots and Liberators*: ‘Not many historians of his generation were prepared to subscribe uncritically to Groen van Prinsterer’s Calvinist-Orangist fundamentalism.’<sup>6</sup> Groen was no fundamentalist and not that much out of tune with his Orangism and Calvinism as Schama seems to suggest. In the late 1850s, Kuyper’s theology professor at Leiden University was Jan Hendrik Scholten, the ‘apostle of reason’. His modern theology was sensational and students from all over the country came to Leiden to attend his classes. ‘I really believe Scholten is more, is greater than the apostle Paul,’ one of the students wrote to his father.<sup>7</sup> Scholten too concentrated his studies in church and theology on the early stage of the Dutch Republic. In 1850 he published his famous book *De leer der hervormde kerk uit de bronnen voorgesteld en verdedigd* [The Doctrine of the Reformed Church presented and defended on base of the historical sources]. He depicted Calvinism as the highest level Christianity had achieved up till his days, Calvin – quite unhistorical – being a monist and anti-supra-naturalist like himself. His own modern theology was the subsequent phase. It was based on reason and exchanged all supra-naturalism for the idea of development in history and nature. So, just like Groen he related Calvinism to the nineteenth century, be it as a historic phenomenon only.

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<sup>5</sup> O.D. Edwards, ‘John Lothrop Motley and the Netherlands’, in: J.W. Schulte Nordholt and Robert P. Swierenga, *A Bilateral Bicentennial. A. History of Dutch-American Relations, 1782-1982* (Amsterdam 1982) 179.

<sup>6</sup> Simon Schama, *Patriots and Liberators. Revolution in the Netherlands 1780-1813* (New York 1977) 17.

<sup>7</sup> As quoted in G. Puchinger, ‘Kuyper’s bekering’, in his: *Kuyper-herdenking 1987 (de religieuze Kuyper). Vijf opstellen en lezingen ter gelegenheid van de herdenking van de honderdvijftigste geboortedag van Abraham Kuyper, 29 oktober 1987* (Kampen 1987) 11.

Church historians in Kuyper's days also concentrated on the national history of sixteenth century. Quite a few of them – mainly the Groningen School and modernists - were less positive on Calvinism however. They stressed the national character of the Reformation in the Netherlands and considered Calvinism as a later and foreign movement that disturbed the national Reformational religious climate that was exemplified by Erasmus. They mainly favoured the reformation as a biblical humanist movement opposing moral and organizational abuses, over against an in the end victorious Calvinism that had concentrated on doctrine, redefining it in several confessions.<sup>8</sup>

This will do to make clear that when Kuyper in 1855 started his studies at Leiden University, Calvinism was not unknown in academia. As an object of study it was *en vogue* and it was a subject of vivid academic discussions. Kuyper was educated as a church historian and concentrated his studies on Dutch Calvinism in its early stage, from the 1550s till the 1580s. He wrote his dissertation on Calvin and John A Lasco on church governance. In his opinion A Lasco's influence was formative on the structure of the Dutch refugee churches. In 1866 he published a still unsurpassed edition of A Lasco's works.<sup>9</sup> He was respected as an outstanding church historian and published several articles on the early history of the Dutch Reformed Church that showed his skills. In one of these articles, published in 1867, he described a conviction that would become his guiding principle:

The free church in the free state: thus was the clear manifesto of these brave men [Dutch protestant clergy and elders at the 1574 Synod of Dordt] who right from the start and with a steady hand wanted to create order in the desolate situation [of the church]. (...) Starting from Calvin's principles, the church fully wanted to act on its own authority.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> J.C.H. Blom and C.J. Misset, 'Een onvervalschte Nederlandsche geest'. Enkele historiografische kanttekeningen bij het concept van een nationaal-gereformeerde richting', in: E.K. Grootes and J. den Haan (eds.), *Geschiedenis, godsdienst, letterkunde. Opstellen aangeboden aan dr. S.B.J. Zilverberg ter gelegenheid van zijn afscheid van de Universiteit van Amsterdam* (Roden 1989) 225. The debate over the dominance of Calvinism is still going on, see: P.H.A.M. Abels review of Huib Noordzij's *Handboek van de Reformatie. De Nederlandse kerkhervorming in de zestiende eeuw* (Kampen 2003) in *Tijdschrift voor Nederlandse Kerkgeschiedenis* (TNK) VI (October 2003) 98-99 and Noordzij's reply in *TNK* VI (December 2003) 126-128.

<sup>9</sup> See: J. Vree, 'The editions of John a Lasco's works, especially the *Opera omnia* edition by Abraham Kuyper', *Nederlands Archief voor Kerkgeschiedenis* LXXX (2000) 309-326.

<sup>10</sup> A. Kuyper, 'De eerste kerkvergaderingen of de vestiging onzer Hervormde Kerk, en de strijd om haar zelfstandig bestaan', in: B. ter Haar en W. Moll, *Geschiedenis der christelijke kerk in Nederland in tafereelen* (Amsterdam 1869) 80: '(...) de vrije kerk in den vrijen staat; ziedaar het duidelijk uitgesproken manifest dier kloeke mannen, die van stonde aan met vaste hand orde wilden scheppen in den ontredderden toestand. (...) Uitgaande van Calvijn's beginselen, wilde de kerk geheel uit eigen magtsbevoegdheid handelen'.

It was this 'grand principle of sovereignty'<sup>11</sup> that guided his interest in the well-being of the church he served as a minister since 1864. After the introduction in the Netherlands of the separation of church and state in 1848 the government had started to sever its ties with the church. The Reformed church however had serious problems to adapt to the new situation. It was still the largest Protestant church by far, but it had lost its predominant status and shared equal rights with f.e. the Roman Catholic Church. These were the circumstances when the young Kuyper in 1867 raised his voice in church matters for the first time. He started a brochure on this topic by demanding principal thinking on the issue of the church and bluntly stated that the differences on this issue between modern and orthodox members were so large, that keeping the old Reformed church intact would be nonsense: 'No, in this case I don't talk of archeologic preference for ruins. Instead, I will bring my crowbar and pick-axe to eliminate that faded heap of stones the sooner the better'.<sup>12</sup> From the start he envisioned an adaptation of the church to modern circumstances. He firmly asked from church people to take sides with one of the parties in the church and promoted the cause of the free church. Groen wrote him this was Kuyper's opinion was the most remarkable in the burning question, and indeed, Kuyper was the first who not only had a clear opinion about the church, but also unfolded a master plan to achieve his goal. While the Reformed Church either deplored the loss of its predominant position or tried to restore it, Kuyper fully accepted the separation of church and state as a new possibility: 'The state church is obsolete. It may be asked if she ever was a blessing. Now all spheres of life search their own shape, even the thought of restoration should be banned.'<sup>13</sup> He even went a step further. He not only defended a free church, but also promoted denominationalism: 'As far as the *institute* [of the church] concerns, the confessors divide in several institutions, and everyone joins the institute, that in his opinion is the most pure.'<sup>14</sup> He fully sensed that the modern differentiation of society demanded an adaptation of the church organization as well. In a sermon in 1873 he said: 'Look in America, my listeners. Over there Christ reigns without compulsion and without yoke, and Christ Himself watches over the altar of America's holy

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<sup>11</sup> Kuyper, 'De eerste kerkvergaderingen', passim.

<sup>12</sup> A. Kuyper, *Wat moeten wij doen, het stemrecht aan onszelven houden of den kerkeraad machtigen? Vraag bij de uitvoering art. 23* (Culemborg 1867) 20: 'Neen, dan kom ik niet met archeologische voorliefde voor ruïnes, - dan kom ik met breekijzer en houweel, om hoe eer hoe beter dien valen steenhoop weg te ruimen'.

<sup>13</sup> A. Kuyper, *Vrijheid. Rede ter bevestiging van dr. Ph.S. van Ronkel* (Amsterdam 1873) 8-9: 'De staatskerk heeft uitgediend. Het mag gevraagd, of ze ooit ten zegen strekte. Nu alle levenskring een eigen vorm zoekt, mag aan haar herstelling zelfs niet worden gedacht.'

<sup>14</sup> A. Kuyper, *De gemeene gratie*, III (Amsterdam s.l.) 425.

freedom.<sup>15</sup> At about 1870 he fully abandoned the historic trade and concentrated on actual politics in church and nation instead.

The surprising thing is not that Kuyper as a student and as a church historian concentrated on the study of Calvinism. Quite the contrary, in Dutch historiography Calvinism was on its way to regain its place of honour as important factor in the later development on the Reformation in The Netherlands.<sup>16</sup> Neither is it remarkable that his historical vision bear the traits of his tutors. His indefatigable quest through all Europe for A Lasco's texts was remarkable, but followed the new international trend of academic life. And his critical publication won high regards, but mirrored the modern historical standards of Fruin and Groen. And his conviction that Calvinism had to be developed and brought in accordance with the spirit of the nineteenth century resembled Scholten's aim. No, the really surprising thing was that he, contrary to the common opinion in his days, no longer took Calvinism as an historic phenomenon only, but made the Calvinist point of view his own. He realized that the publication of the historical sources of the Dutch Reformed church, that he collected zealously as a young minister all over Europe, was not just a Dutch contribution to an international academic program: 'We have no history of *our* reformation yet. (...) The publication of the patents of nobility of the church in a time like this would consolidate her self esteem tremendously'.<sup>17</sup> It was not an irenic or Enlightened kind of Christendom the Netherlands needed for its revival: the choice in church and state was according to Kuyper between '(...) tolerance by neutralizing principal differences' or 'respect for the conviction of others as a result of one's own firm conviction'.<sup>18</sup>

The Dutch Republic was born out of dogmatic Calvinism and nothing else, and therefore The Netherlands would never revive, as long as it rejected Calvinism as an obsolete religion. History had taught Kuyper that Calvinism had been the driving force behind the war against Spain and it offered the fabric of everything the Dutch Republic was famous for: its political and religious freedom, its richness, its arts, and its science. Kuyper would elaborate most forcefully on this theme in his famous Stone lectures on *Calvinism*, published in 1899. If the Netherlands aimed at a renaissance the only way to achieve this would be by returning to Calvinism.

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<sup>15</sup> A. Kuyper, *Predicatiën in de jaren 1867 tot 1873 (...)* (Kampen 1913) 406.

<sup>16</sup> D. Nauta, 'De reformatie in de historiografie', in: P.A.M. Geurts, A.E.M. Janssen, *Geschiedschrijving in Nederland. Studies over de historiografie van de nieuwe tijd. Deel II: geschiedbeoefening* (Den Haag 1981) 218.

<sup>17</sup> A. Kuyper aan G. Groen van Prinsterer, 24 mei 1867, in: J.L. van Essen (ed.), *Groen van Prinsterer. Briefwisseling, vijfde deel, 1827-1869* ('s-Gravenhage 1980) 675, 676: 'We hebben nog geen geschiedenis van *onze* reformatie. (...) Moet dat zóó blijven, in een tijd, waarin juist het openleggen van haar adelbrieven het zelfbewustzijn der kerk zoo machtig zou consolideeren?'

<sup>18</sup> A. Kuyper, *De Nutsbeweging* (Amsterdam 1869) 46??: '(...) verdraagzaamheid door opheffing van belijdenisverschil' of 'eerbied voor anderer overtuiging juist door vastheid van eigen overtuiging gewekt'.



This starting point seems respectful for a devout missionary or for an academic like Groen, but it seemed senseless in modern church life or in politics. Kuyper's ideas seemed to be completely out of tune. Then, what made this opinion so compelling to many Dutchmen? I think three points stand out.

In the first place there still were many Calvinists in the country, as Kuyper acknowledged in 1867: 'If the orthodox party develops its power and learns how to use it, it is precisely this party that is the decisive force.'<sup>19</sup> They were not known, they were not respected, they were not represented in the consistories, but as a minister Kuyper met them in his first parish in Beesd (1864-1867) and learned to appreciate them: Calvin's name was almost unknown among these common people, but their religious life and opinions reflected his doctrine. The main reason why they were obsolete was according to Kuyper the fact that the Dutch nation functioned in the wrong way. The Dutch were not free, but still captivated by a uniform Napoleonic mindset, that favoured reasonable civilians, but was a threat to anyone who rejected this reasonableness, and to the freedom of the people in general. State and church did not oppose this compulsory uniformity, but supported it.

History not only taught Kuyper this situation had to be changed. That was no news. Groen had said this for years already. But history also taught Kuyper *how* this change could be accomplished: in the sixteenth and seventeenth century the democratic structure of the Reformed church had made possible the participation of the common people in public life.<sup>20</sup> By mobilising the common people against the hindering structures, and activating especially the Calvinists among them. Kuyper envisioned them as the motor of change. Kuyper the academic became a man of the people; Kuyper the Calvinist became the adaptor of the Dutch nation to modernity.

In the second place he really offered an alternative for Napoleonic uniformity. The liberals, who dominated in politics, in the universities and in the press, had mitigated the Napoleonic forms of the state, and strived for liberty, but it was they who defined what this liberty meant in the public sphere. Only those people were considered to be civilised where those who agreed with them. This was clear in the school issue. The state schools taught a reasonable Christendom. Anyone who wanted a Catholic, a Jewish, or a Reformed education for his children had to send them to private schools. Groen had protested against this discrimination. He argued on historical grounds that the state school should be reformed. Groen's motto had been: a Christian church,

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<sup>19</sup> Kuyper, *Wat moeten wij doen?*, 29: 'dat het de orthodoxe partij juist is, die zoo ze haar kracht maar ontwikkelt en weet te gebruiken, de beslissing in handen heeft.'

<sup>20</sup> Kuyper, 'De eerste kerkvergaderingen', 80, on the program of the Dutch Reformed Church of the sixteenth century: 'Full autonomy over against the civil authorities and a strong unity within expressed in confession, observances, and liturgy' ('Volkomen autonomie tegenover het burgerlijke bestuur en krachtige eenheid naar binnen in belijdenis, gebruiken en eeredienst'). Cf. Frijhoff en Spies, *1650*, 362.

and a Christian school, in a Christian state. This meant that Groen also strived for uniformity, just like the liberals, be it in a Christian setting. Neither his opponents nor he fully rejected the Napoleonic idea. They rejected either liberalism or Calvinism, but they both agreed with the Napoleonic idea, that one opinion should govern the public sphere.

The new thing Kuyper did was rejecting this uniformity and promoting a pluriform public sphere. His motto was: a free church, and a free school, in a free state. His point of view had serious consequences. Instead of uniformity in the public domain he wanted pluriformity, instead of reason he wanted religion, instead of tranquillity and a consensus of opinion he wanted debate and party strife, and instead of oligarchy he wanted democracy. For Kuyper this was a matter of 'to be or not to be': 'The present dominating idea of the state is satanic, principally false, and cannot be changed, but must be destroyed.'<sup>21</sup> Kuyper pleaded for a modern and open society, based on the principle of pluriformity.

In the third place Kuyper operated as a modern politician, making use of modern means of communication, like the newspaper, offering solutions to overcome political problems, and also offering a new perspective on the future of Dutch society. He did not take the dividing lines of class, education and religion for granted, but invented new social and political entities and introduced a new 'antithesis' instead. His idea of Christian politics was a farewell to the state church and to the idea of a religious state. He introduced a new dividing line, between those who relied on reason and those who relied on revelation, those who adhered to the bible, and those who adhered to the ideas of the French Revolution. Kuyper often used traditional phrases and often referred to the past, but his presentation and his political objectives were modern.

Kuyper was a leader, and backed by the people he gained influence in church, state and society. In politics it meant the introduction of political parties as a means to organize public opinion. His Antirevolutionary Party was remodelled in 1879 as the first modern political party in the Netherlands. In parliament public debate became the main function of this body. The parliament had been there since 1815, and since 1848 it had been the place where reasonable men agreed on reasonable measures. But it was not reason that made a nation tick, it was religion and worldview. And since there were several worldviews the people adhered to, these views had to be present in parliament, where the people were represented. Pluriformity took the place of uniformity in parliament, and in the 1870s and 1880s, when the franchise was extended, the people's own representatives took the place of the aristocrats.

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<sup>21</sup> Quoted in: Piet de Rooy, *Republiek van rivaliteiten. Nederland sinds 1813* (Amsterdam 2002) 88, 89: '(...) de tegenwoordig overheersende staatsidee is satanisch, is principieel vals, kan niet bekeerd, maar moet vernietigd worden'.

On the same premises, Kuyper rejected the state school in favor of the denominational school, in 1886 he rejected the grand old Reformed Church to found free churches, in 1896 he accepted a secession in the Antirevolutionary Party, in favour of a democratic franchise. In the eyes of everyone who had embraced the idea of a uniform state, Kuyper had 'broken'<sup>22</sup> The Netherlands and he was blamed as the big schismatic. To others however, protestants and Catholics alike, he was the Moses who set the Dutch people free from the compulsion of uniformity.<sup>23</sup> Ever since in Dutch society it is pro or against Kuyper, up till the present day.

This debate is intimately related to Kuyper's historic vision of Calvinism. In a recent historic publication on the Dutch iconoclasm of 1566, Kuyper is held responsible for the popular idea that the Dutch Republic was a Calvinistic state and that *ipso facto* the Calvinists were the only real Dutchmen, not only in the sixteenth and seventeenth century, but in the nineteenth century as well.<sup>24</sup> According to the dominant historiographic trends he is called an 'inventor of traditions', who projected his 'absolutely constructed national identity'<sup>25</sup> on the future. Others have stressed that the whole idea of a permanent Dutch Calvinistic tradition has no historical ground.<sup>26</sup> Kuyper claimed a historic continuity that never existed. A famous historian like Pieter Geyl stated that Calvinism only became dominant in the Dutch republic, not for religious reasons, but mainly because the people were pressed by power or profits to denounce Catholicism. The real formative power behind the Republic had been politics, not religion. When we overlook twentieth century Dutch historiography on the early history of the Dutch Republic, Kuyper's thesis seems to have been rejected all over. Historians like Johan Huizinga claimed biblical humanism as the essential trait of the Dutch republic, Jonathan Israel took Calvinism for granted but valued the first signs of the radical Enlightenment in the tolerant climate of the Republic as its essential trait. The same can be said of church historians. No one speaks of a Calvinistic reformation anymore, even the thought of the existence of 'The' Reformation has vanished. There has only been a plurality of reformations in the 16th century: a Calvinist reformation, a radical reformation, and speaking of Trent, even a catholic Reformation.

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<sup>22</sup> Cees Fasseur, *Wilhelmina. De jonge koningin* (Amsterdam 1998) 34.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. A. Kuyper, *Eenvormigheid de vloek van het moderne leven* (Amsterdam 1869) (Uniformity, the curse of modern life).

<sup>24</sup> Herman Kaptein, *De beeldenstorm* (Hilversum 2002) 91.

<sup>25</sup> Michael Wintle, 'Natievorming, onderwijs en godsdienst in Nederland, 1850-1900', in: Henk te Velde en Hans Verhage, *De eenheid en de delen. Zuilvorming, onderwijs en natievorming in Nederland, 1850-1900* (Amsterdam 1996) 23.

<sup>26</sup> Peter van Rooden, 'Studies naar locale verzuiling als toegang tot de geschiedenis van de constructie van religieuze verschillen in Nederland', *Theoretische Geschiedenis* 20 (1993) 439-454.

The Reformation in the Netherlands is called today a protestant reformation. This was primarily an international reformation *par excellence*, without special Dutch ingredients.<sup>27</sup>

I consider this historiography as a reaction to the historic vision of Kuyper and others. Of course Kuyper the historian made mistakes, and he accentuated the role Calvinism played in the early Dutch Republic rather strongly. We know much more than he knew a century ago, no discussion about that. But Kuyper is part of the modern historiography that dates from his days. He belonged to the first historians with a critical approach towards the historical sources, and his *Opera omnia* of A Lasco is an outstanding example of the results of modern historical research. Kuyper was no amateur, blinded by parochial presuppositions. With his methods and international way of operating he belongs to the modern historic trade. I think we should stick to this position when we discuss Kuyper. But he had different objectives. He realized that Calvinists were only a minority in the Republic, be it in a different sense than we tend to stress today. His point was, that worldviews reign society and that it was Calvinism that put its mark on Dutch state and church.

In his objectives he is not much different than any of us. It is obvious, to restrict myself to my own country, that twentieth century Dutch historiography reflects the social-cultural developments of the society it belongs to, like secularization, individualization and internationalization, just as the historiography of Kuypers days reflects nineteenth century society with its national and religious preoccupations. It is true that Kuyper made an effective use of history to make his case in the political, cultural and religious debate of the late nineteenth century. Most historians nowadays are no politicians, church leaders or journalists anymore. The professional differentiation has separated these respective responsibilities and historians have become historians' historians mainly. This may be a change for the better in many cases. But this does not mean *per se* that modern historians are morally any better, nobler, or more fair than their predecessors, nor that the historic discipline of today has found its ultimate format. Modern historians who call Kuyper the 'master-manipulator'<sup>28</sup> or refer to his stigma of fanaticism or lust for power<sup>29</sup> seem to create a moral distance between Kuyper and themselves, for which there is no moral ground. In the end we all use history to make our partisan case, in one way or the other, otherwise our work is meaningless. Kuyper did it openly, and Fruin could

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<sup>27</sup> W. Bergsma, 'The Low Countries', in: B. Sribner et al. (eds.) *The Reformation in National Context* (Cambridge 1994) 67, quoted in: Wim Janse, 'De protestantse reformatie in de Nederlanden. Wendingen in de twintigste-eeuwse historiografie', in: Jack de Mooij and Ineke Smit (eds.), *Balans van een eeuw. Wendingen in de historiografie van het christendom, 1901-2001* (Heerenveen 2002) 38.

<sup>28</sup> Wintle, 'Natievorming', 23.

<sup>29</sup> Fasseur, *Wilhelmina*, 140.

appreciate that: 'As for me, I long for contradiction. (...) For this reason I rejoice wholeheartedly in the revival of the catholic as well as the Calvinist antirevolutionaries.'<sup>30</sup>

Kuyper's national and confessional orientation has been abandoned altogether by Dutch historians. Mainstream Dutch historiography is internationally oriented and religion is studied as a cultural phenomenon. But this difference is merely a matter of taste, not of quality. And as the historical discipline is very open and sensitive to new developments in society, a historiographic change can be foreseen. In the Netherlands the ideal of a multicultural society has resulted in a defective integration of groups of immigrants from mediteranean countries and in confusion about Dutch national identity. In education and in the labour market these groups perform below the average. The different cultures in the Netherlands don't interfere very well with each other, partly because there is no shared opinion on the assets of Dutch national identity. This is the cause of much confusion nowadays. Again the question rises that was so important in Kuyper's ideas: what made the Netherlands tick? The Dutch are not tempted yet to look back in history, but it is clear that one of the issues of former days will return on the political and cultural agenda, and that is religion. The debate on whether the Netherlands is a Calvinistic nation will not be reopened, but the question of the meaning of Christian religion over against the Islam is unavoidable. 9-11 made this question all the more urgent, in the United States, but in the Netherlands as well. At this moment the opinion makers do their best to keep religion out of the public sphere, but, since it is in the nature of religions like Christianity and Islam to pervade all aspects of life, and civility cannot be separated from religion, this defense is not very sensible. It is as if we have returned to the positions of Kuyper's days. The liberal opinion makers try to suggest that religion has nothing to do with the falling apart of modern multicultural society. They call for unity, for respectability and for tolerance. But this is only a repetition of a morale that in recent years failed to work.

Kuyper's historical insights have been corrected on several points, but his conviction that religion shapes a culture, and not civil liberties as such, and his conviction that the people make a nation, still stand out. And, as soon as the questions of nationality and of religion are back on the historian's agenda, historians will pay homage to the great schismatic of the nineteenth century, who turned out to be the restorer of a nation: Abraham Kuyper.

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<sup>30</sup> Fruin aan Kuyper, 7 December 1880, in: H.J. Smit and W.J. Wieringa (eds.), *Correspondentie van Robert Fruin, 1845-1899* (Groningen/Djakarta 1957) 247: 'Ik voor mij hunker naar tegenspraak (...) Om die reden verheug ik mij van ganscher harte in het Reveil van de katholieke zoowel als van de calvinistische anti-revolutionairen.'