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Abraham Kuyper among the Nations

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Abstract: Abraham Kuyper, Dutch Prime Minister (1901–1905) and modern Calvinist, was a controversial figure, not least in his foreign affairs. Yet while Kuyper's legacy has been felt in the world of religious, especially Christian, political, and social theory, very little has been made of Kuyper's actual record as a foreign policy maker and a Prime Minister. So, what was Kuyper's "Christian" perspective and policy on foreign affairs? Using newly available English translations, this article outlines Kuyper's "overseas manifesto" made most plain in *Our Program*, and compares it against Kuyper's commentary and policy in three major foreign crises: the Boer Cause, in South Africa; the "pacification" of Aceh, in modern-day Indonesia; and finally, the calamity of the Great War in Europe. From these I will paint an introductory, if general, picture of a serious, religious foreign policy maker, and a commentator on world affairs; a complex picture of religiously inflected policy in the early 20th century, with lessons and warnings for scholars of religion and foreign policy today.

INTRODUCTION

Abraham Kuyper (1837–1920) was many things in life: journalist, editor, pastor and theologian, the founder of a university, a founder and leader of a political party, and even a Prime Minister of the Netherlands. A disciple of Groen van Prinsterer, his "anti-Revolutionary" party was marked by its anti-modernism, its political pluralism, its vibrant and theologically grounded disestablishment, and yet also its serious Calvinism. Much has been made of his intellectual and political legacy, his writings, which were voluminous, are still being translated into English, Korean,

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and more.[1] Yet while his writings and legacy remain the subject of study and debate, his time as Prime Minister was perhaps even more controversial, and has left a still more uncertain legacy. Of his policies as Prime Minister, few could be more complex and contentious than his foreign policy, to underline the controversy what he himself called "colonial policy" and "overseas possessions." How did the practical, real time life of a foreign policy maker meet in this academically and theologically minded pastor turned Prime Minister? That is the substance of this article.

It should, perhaps, first be asked why we would want to talk about such a short-lived Dutch Prime Minister's foreign policy (1901–1905), which has been described simply as a "failure," which "in fact did not become a foreign policy at all" (Kossmann 1978)? Two reasons, I think, stand out.

First, Abraham Kuyper has had and continues to enjoy a real renaissance in evangelical political thought in North America. He remains a towering figure for political theorists and theologians who wish to find a *different* path from either of de Tocqueville's twin dystopias: the anomie of a fractured republic (Levin 2016), on the one hand, or a thicker (read: Orwellian) civil religion on the other (Legutko 2016). Yet while much has been made of Kuyper's Calvinistic contributions to *domestic* political theory, almost nothing has been said of his *foreign* policy (See for example, Marshall 1998; Skillen 2005; Goudzwaard, Vander Vennen, and Van Heemst 2007; Goheen and Glanville 2009). This is a real gap for those who think this political-religious tradition, sometimes called neo-Calvinism, holds real promise for redressing the political and social pathologies of our day. It is also a gap for studies of the influence of religion, especially Christianity, on policy beyond the domestic sphere.

Second, however, Kuyper is a worthy figure to align within an emerging cast of thinkers on not only religion and foreign policy, but on the "religious turn" (Kubálková 2009) in international relations more generally. What began after the Cold War in a kind of recovery of religion as a significant causal factor in politics (Johnston and Sampson 1995; Huntington 1998), has — after September 11, 2001 — created a minor sub-field in the discipline (see, Fox 2012), one which increasingly reaches back before the heyday of positivism to recover alternative models (Troy 2014). Kuyper was certainly a kind of Augustinian Realist, an approach Eric Patterson (2015) says is consonant with great American realists like Reinhold Niebuhr. But Kuyper was also very much a European, and with his candid talk of international society, law, and culture might fit better within the early English School (Jones

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2003), one of several "post-secular prophets" (Barbato and Kratochwil 2009) like Martin Wight (Thomas 2001), Christopher Dawson, and Herbert Butterfield, from the North Atlantic world (Troy 2012). Given Kuyper's hostility to the British in his foreign policy, it is hard to imagine a richer irony than him crossing the English Channel to take his place among them, but that is just what I'm suggesting. Kuyper, then, like these others in the early English School, is one of the historical voices we must recover in our tumultuous times of transition, Kuyper's the crash of modernity, ours the global resurgence of religion (Thomas 2005);[2] one of the pantheon for thinking about and making foreign policy in *God's Century* (Philpott, Toft, and Shah 2011; Joustra 2017).

To make my case, I have chosen several focusing events during Kuyper's political tenure, both before his time as Prime Minister, during his time in office, and after. First, I discuss his "Overseas Manifesto" found most plainly in a new translation of *Our Program*; second the Boer War(s) in South Africa; third Indonesia and the so-called pacification of Aceh; and finally, at the end of his career and life, the Great War itself, a singular event which pierced Kuyper's European idealism, and drew him to such dramatic conclusions about the evil that had permeated his own home continent.

What can we say about "Abraham Kuyper among the nations" from this brief survey? We can say that Kuyper's big ideas and his policy making were not always in perfect alignment, that he too — often with great frustration — had to make what he called "necessary adjustments" to his ideals of international relations. Those ideals that changed most dramatically, as evidenced in these case studies, were his Christian nationalism, especially a badly discredited Eurocentrism from the events of the Boer War, then the inconclusive war in Aceh, and finally in the Great War itself. However, some of his ideals emerged stronger in practice than even in theory and are ones we — scholars of religion and foreign policy, but even those simply counting themselves Christians thinking about politics more generally — can take lessons from even today: his belief in organic, moral communities at the heart of nations; his belief in an international law which need rest on multiple, particularistic (theological, cultural, historical) grounds rather than fragile, falsely universalistic ones; and finally his belief in the freedom of religion or belief which makes the above possible, and facilitates the essence of a democratic, but "rooted and grounded" political community. For Kuyper, then, foreign policy necessarily lapsed into political theology in his final days. As that baptismal-sheen came off his own Dutch-Christian

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nationalism, perhaps there are lessons for our own days hotly contested American-Christian order that may be instructive.

KUYPER'S OVERSEAS MANIFESTO

Abraham Kuyper was most certainly a man of his time. Even his ambition, tireless productivity, and frenetic pace matched the industrializing spirit of his age. Thus, we find in *Our Program*, written by Kuyper, and published on January 1, 1878 by a provisional committee located in Amsterdam, sweeping, passionate, and idealistic responses to the great problems of Kuyper's Netherlands (Kuyper 2015). It is "anti-Revolutionary" to be sure, after the name of Kuyper's own party, but that should not lead us to misunderstand him as conservative, slow, or modest. Kuyper captures all of this in a "manifesto" of no short length, at least two chapters of which (18: National Defense, and 19: Overseas Possessions) give sustained treatment on issues of an international character.

The context into which *Our Program* was delivered was one of considerable turmoil in Dutch foreign policy. The "liberals" had managed to abolish the state monopoly over the East Indies, resulting in an initial boom, though largely dependent on what became the unrestrained, ungoverned, and largely abusive system of foreign labor. Eventual price drops brought an end to the small-scale capitalism of the 1870s and 1880s, resulting in larger scale state backed enterprises, an economic model which compounded Dutch liabilities in the Indies. The liberal doctrine of "non-interference" also ran its course in the near collapse of the rule of law, famously in the harassment of trade ships along crucial trade routes near Aceh. The Boer War flared up persistently, stoking Dutch nationalism and the Dutch themselves — of which Kuyper was a mirror reflection — resented the British for their ascendency and South African policies, all the while depending on their fleets to keep the law of the seas. The contest among European powers was intensifying, and would nearly reach crescendo by the time Kuyper himself took office as Prime Minister.

Onto this scene came *Our Program*, with three main emphases for foreign affairs: (1) international law, (2) the sovereignty of nations, and (3) the *moral* obligation to share the Christian gospel *and its* social and political fruit.

International Law was long a feature of Dutch foreign policy, and one that can be generally expected from middle powers as a strategy of containment on the part of greater powers. C.B. Wels (1982) calls the

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"foundations of Dutch foreign policy" aloofness and neutrality, on the one hand, and "respect for and promotion of international law" on the other. It was fundamental for Kuyper too. But, for Kuyper, international law only acquired a "genuine basis" once it was "nourished by Christianity" (Kuyper 2015). This is why the degradation of a "Christian family of nations" so alarmed Kuyper, for the effect, in his mind, was the decline of international law into "unnatural sentimentalism" or a ruinous violation of the rights of nations. The purpose of international law, he argued:

> … was to guarantee the right of existence — of existence with honor — to all nations, large and small. This guarantee rested on having the nations together submit to a higher law. Nowadays the purpose of international law is taken to mean the opposite. It demands sacrificing the nations' right of independent existence to a certain imaginary right of Europe's peoples to form agglomerates and to eliminate every barrier and obstacle that still prevent the merger and blending of the life of the nations (Kuyper 2015).

Citing no less than the communists, Napoleon, Victor Emmanuel II, and Bismarck, and losing no opportunity to sully the British for their actions in Afghanistan and South Africa, Kuyper said this was a system designed by utility, not what was "right and just."

The whole purpose of international law, then, rests on what Kuyper would call the sovereignty of nations (Kuyper 2015), a preservation of cultural, social, and political pluralism which the "revolutionary spirit" of the age tried to homogenize or destroy. This is a double-edged sword for Kuyper's inheritance. On the one hand, Kuyper applauded Woodrow Wilson's concept of the self-determination of nations on this basis, a principle at the heart of the League, and one which forecasts empires relinquishing their colonies. On the other hand, it also spoke to the separateness with which Kuyper thought distinct nations should live, an idea that would be perverted decades later into the segregation of races in South Africa. Wrote Kuyper,

> … if you hold that a nation is a product of a divine dispensation in history and that therefore every state is delimited by the natural radius of the national life thus shaped – then of course any idea falls away that you can embrace a Javanese and a Frisian, an Achin and a Hollander as fellow citizens of one and the same state, as members of a single organic community (Kuyper 2015).

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The tension between Kuyper's Wilsonian idealism and the dark spectra of racial segregation is present throughout his manifesto on colonial affairs. He writes,

> … we shall respect the shape and form of peoples and nations as they have come to be in their independence and distinctiveness under the providential rule of the Creator. So, let us stop trying to melt together what by nature cannot be melted together (Kuyper 2015).[3]

Kuyper, of course, was mainly thinking about the Netherlands. He even argued in his treatise on National Defense (Chapter 18) that the first defense of any nation is a *moral defense*, the most significant components of which were: (1) knowledge of the history of our country, (2) the sense of justice, (3) civic spirit, and (4) diplomacy. To defend the nation was foremost an internal and spiritual struggle for Kuyper; navies, militias, recruitment, and more only follow *after* the sure purpose and nature of the nation is established. His whole treatise on defense begins with this idea of the "defense" of the nation:

> For if every nation is a distinctive organism, guided by a distinctive idea, energized by a distinctive blood, and called by God to a distinctive task, then it is only natural that the nations came to see that a single divine dispensation is common to them all and that they are, however different in character and in essence, parts of a mightier whole, taken up in a high community of nations, and therefore mutually bound to a higher law shared by all. Next to a special national mission, they came to realize that there is another, common human mission to fulfill, a mission in which nations are to be led by the ordinances of the holy, Triune, God acknowledged by all (Kuyper 2015).

Herein, then, the third fundamental point of Kuyper's manifesto on foreign affairs: the moral obligation of the Christian gospel as foundation and fertile ground for any kind of political and social order. This was, in Kuyper's opinion, the main claim that colonial affairs needed to champion: the "free proclamation of the gospel" (Kuyper 2015).

There were Three Systems, said Kuyper that the Dutch could consider in "what to do with its overseas possessions." The first two, exploitation and colonialization, he considered unfit for a Christian. Exploitation was an obvious violation of God's law, and colonization was both impractical and "unnatural." Thus, he argued, the only "sound, lawful, and honorable system for us as a Christian nation is a system of trusteeship" (Kuyper 2015).

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Trusteeship was a carefully chosen word, since Kuyper wanted to be clear these peoples should not be "under tutelage forever." No, he called them rather "minors," with Dutch guardians who were responsible to foster (1) a moral education, (2) wise management of the estates, and (3) if it please God, to achieve greater independence. The foundation for all three, and the hermeneutic clue for moral education, was the "Christianization of the Indies." He wrote,

> … in our colonial program the Christianization of the Indies cannot be some extra ingredients but must be the chief inspiration for all who also honor in the Christ of God, the Savior of the Gentiles (Kuyper 2015).

Only, argued Kuyper, "turning to a Christian principle of life can open up for these peoples the prospect of higher development." And, as further evidence of his early Christian nationalism, Kuyper makes clear that "factually only the Christian nations in Europe and America have attained that purer disclosure of nobler strength that has created human society as we know it, a society to which the former — and in part still present — heathen civilizations in China and British India can in no way be compared" (Kuyper 2015).

There was no question in Kuyper's mind, then, that the development of a people was integrally related to their knowledge of Jesus Christ, and that the best evidence to his day showed that civilizations which accepted that saving faith bore the fruit of economic, social, and political progress. This was a kind of Christian imperialism, to be sure, but not one that seems ultimately rooted in prejudice of race or geography. The Dutch, at best, were a kind of chosen catalyst, not the only or even main inheritors of the gift of the Gospel. That this faith was deeply European in expression, and that this development was Eurocentric in the extreme, is certainly notable, but hardly unique for the time. Indeed, what is more unique is Kuyper's insistence on self-determination in the midst of it. Pre-empting larger movements toward freedom of religion or belief, Kuyper includes this critical caveat in his Trusteeship:

> It must be brought home to the peoples of the Archipelago that we leave them free to practice their idolatries — not from appreciation, absolutely not; nor from fear of an explosion of fanaticism; but solely in virtue of the demand of the Christian principle itself, which desires to triumph in no other way tha[n] through persuasion (Kuyper 2015).

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Even as regarded modernization, Kuyper could be argued to have had an early theory of "multiple modernities," arguing that because religion was so important and so varying (even the Christian religion), technical and economic modernization were unlikely to cause cultural homogeneity. On the contrary, recalls James Bratt, "they are not destined to become just like us. Western innovations could and would become thoroughly assimilated for native ends, as the Japanese had just dramatically demonstrated against Russia" (Bratt 2013).

THE BOER CAUSE (1899–1902)

E. H. Kossmann writes that the Dutch population was made "painfully aware" of the country's "total impotence" when confronted with the South African crises, and at no time more so then when Abraham Kuyper was Prime Minister, a man who "represented much of what was modern … imperialism, militarism, nationalism, and an indomitable desire for action" (Kossmann 1978).

Dutch affinity for the Boers can be explained in part by history. The Boers were Dutch colonists, long removed from the Netherlands, and who, in some respects, attracted little attention from the Dutch. When in 1877 the British annexed the Transvaal, Dutch reaction was reserved. Kossmann argues that the Boer brand was one of "unrealability … quarrelsomeness … harshness toward the natives and … their religious rigorism met with distinct disapproval" (Kossmann 1978). The Boers were, then, an unlikely proxy through which to channel a revival of Dutch nationalism, but they became just that. During the Boer War (1899–1902) the policy of neutrality came under public fire.

The precipitating incident was a breakdown of the 1884 Convention of London, where under Gladstone, whom Kuyper much admired, a treaty was signed which granted the Boer republics sovereignty over their own internal affairs but not over international affairs. The Transvaal gold rush of 1886, along with Cecil Rhodes Charter Company in 1888, and the Jamestown raid of 1895, became focusing incidents for the Boers who launched an all-out war in the fall of 1899.

During the late nineteenth century, the Dutch had gained influence in the Transvaal, notably through the young Dutchmen W. J. Leyds, who became Paul Kruger's confidant and highest civil servant. Economic inter-relationships, driven by nationalism rather than pure commercial interest, increased, but eventually climaxed by about 1890. Dutch influence was, therefore,

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already on the decline by 1898, even though on the outbreak of war the public passionately chose the Boer side (Bratt 2013).

Kuyper was more member of the public than the government when it came to neutrality, a position which landed him a few tight spots (Bratt 2013). Writing for the prestigious *Revue des Deux Mondes* (February 1900) Kuyper vilified the English for what he called "brutal egoism and passionate materialism" (of which he accused British Colonial Secretary Joseph Chamberlain of being a "rabid apostle"). His primary attack was legal, argues Bratt, one which "mixed a ready command of international law and comparative immigration policy with special pleading" (Bratt 2013).

There were some attempts at Dutch mediation. Queen Wilhelmina herself tried to broker an accord through the German Emperor, but this came to nothing. Public opinion became hard to contain after the British took a Red Cross column as prisoners of war for transporting letters to South African soldiers. Opinion swung even more dangerously on the expulsion of Dutchmen working on the railways considered unreliable by the English (Wels 1982). It was, writes Kossmann, "the moral issue that was paramount, the Boers winning sympathy as the innocent victims of cynical imperialism" (Kossmann 1978). Nobody really drew the parallel to the Dutch's own imperial war in Aceh, because the issue wasn't really about *imperialism as such*, but about English versus Dutch nationalism. British imperialism under Chamberlain was "brutal egoism and passionate materialism" (in the language of Kuyper), whereas Dutch policy was an ethical trusteeship, a guardianship intended to bless, rather than possess its colonies. In reality, the semantics suggest a polarization in elite attitude and practice in colonial Europe that probably didn't exist.

Kuyper, finally, on being made Prime Minister tried to make his mark on the situation, though his private initiatives became so controversial he was later accused of dislocating Dutch foreign policy and endangering the policy of independence (Wels 1982). In fact, some argue it was Kuyper's ambition "to alter in some way or another the traditional course of Dutch foreign policy based on neutrality and a reluctance to get involved in major international problems" (Kossmann 1978). In reality, Kuyper was almost surely trying to find an independent foreign policy path that would reduce Dutch dependence on the British and, like all middle powers, sought to balance the influence of one great power with another: in this case, Germany.

Kuyper's perspectives became so well known, and his penchant for going off message so widely feared, that he was deeply mistrusted by

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his own civil servants and diplomats in the Foreign Office. Even Queen Wilhelmina took the trouble of putting into writing her firm belief in the policy of neutrality. Writes James Bratt,

> Queen Wilhelmina was loathe to appoint him [Kuyper] to head the cabinet. She shared the royal family's suspicion that this "agitator" was a republican at heart, and she had not forgotten his absence from her coronation (during his trip to America) or his putative slurs upon her father. She resented the condescension she perceived in his attitude toward her youth (she was but twenty years old) and as a woman. Faced with no alternative, she hailed him to the palace to set some bounds on his administration. There would be strict neutrality with respect to the South African war, lest the British naval protection of the East Indies be jeopardized. The pacification of Aceh would go forward, as would reform of the army. And there would be no repeating of a previous instance in which he published her Majesty's confidential remarks in his newspaper (Bratt 2013).

Hands tied, Kuyper unleashed a feverish diplomatic effort in Western capitals in January of 1902, offering Britain his services as mediator. Though the British rejected his offer, they did use it to force their own negotiations to bear fruit. Using Kuyper's offer as evidence that the Dutch had accepted Boer defeat, the British made clear to the leaders in the Transvaal that the Dutch had abandoned them, and forced a peace later in 1902.

For Kuyper, this could be a kind of success, albeit an accidental and inadvertent one. The Boer population survived the war and peace negotiations found purchase as a result of his intervention. Writes Kossmann (1978), "the profound impotence of Kuyper's foreign policy had been emphasized by the fact that only in this (from the point of view of the Boers totally negative) way could he contribute to the solution of the South African problem." A far more damning consequence would be the unintended legacy of Kuyper's own language of race, a kind of warrant for adapting his language of nation and race to his concept of sphere sovereignty, creating the nightmare that would become South African *apartheid*.[4]

In immediate foreign policy outcomes, the South African crises had exposed Kuyper's willingness to challenge Dutch neutrality, and — in my opinion — Kuyper's emerging perspective that great power balance was the only true path of independence for a middle power like Holland. Kuyper's rapprochement with Germany would earn Kuyper more than a little enmity among his own ranks,[5] though geopolitically it is at least understandable why middle-power, seafaring economy

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sandwiched between Britain, France, and Germany would seek a more balanced arrangement. Whether Kuyper ever intended to abandon neutrality entirely and side with the Germans is a matter for biographical and historical debate, though I don't believe he did. What we can know for certain is that the Boer cause drove Kuyper away from Britain, toward Germany as a counter-balance, and ultimately showcased not only his own difficulty in making foreign policy, but the impossibility and incoherence of the Dutch colonial project at the turn of the century.

THE PACIFICATION OF ACEH

The Dutch government had nationalized the former colonies of the Dutch East India Company in 1800 (not unlike what other European powers had done), because of growing concerns of security and trade. The goal, particularly of what became the liberal colonial policy of non-interference, was to reap the benefit of trade and growth with as little investment and exposure on the part of the Dutch government as possible. What it ended up producing was some growth over the short term, but also an almost total collapse of the rule of law, a situation which was nowhere more severe than in what became known as the war in Aceh (the northern most tip of modern day Indonesia, a semi-autonomous region), and the rampant piracy in the straits of Malacca (between modern day Indonesia and Malaysia).

All of this was well known to Kuyper when he wrote *Our Program*, a manifesto whose colonial components were directed precisely against both the kind of laissez-faire resource extraction of the liberals and the overbearing and crippling costs of imperial occupation. Writing in *Our Program* he argued against the war in Aceh, calling it an "overhasty breach of the peace and overwhelming force. That approach spells military and financial ruin" (Kuyper 2015). And that, "… the people on this chain of islands should not have to fear the appearance of a Dutch flag, but should be able to welcome and bless it. Only then are we justified before God and man" (Kuyper 2015).

Kuyper, and his colonial contemporaries like Keuchenius and Idenburg, wanted an "ethical" foreign policy. The Dutch were to be guardians, not masters, stewards rather than the rightful kings of the East Indies, and it was their job to turn the resources of Indies to their inhabitants' advantage. There was more than a little imperial idealism and "white man's burden" in these policies, but they were true to Kuyper's convictions that

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Calvinistic Christianity was the only sure foundation for a prosperous and just society, and that the people of Java should be given every opportunity to embrace and build on that foundation. So, said Kuyper, "establishing our sovereignty should proceed very slowly" (Kuyper 2015) with the goal, as with parents to children, of eventual independence. As with South Africa, Kuyper's foreign policy was constrained at several turns, though unlike in South Africa his students, and eventual successors, especially in the person of Idenburg, would have a more lasting influence. That influence was a mixture of ethical imperialism and Christian nationalism, one which recognized real limits on the possibilities of empire, both religious (no coercion in religion, for example) and practical (the limits of middle power imperialism, for example), but which nonetheless sought to find a middle road between unlimited market-exploitation and direct imperial governance. They would hardly be the last Europeans in the 20th century to struggle to find that balance in the world of colonialism and its rhetoric of development, though they were some of the first.

The long war in Aceh was, in some respects, not the result of Dutch imperialism, but rather just the reverse: the liberal principle of non-interference. Although at times in the 19th century the Dutch had tried, through military expeditions, to pacify other islands (Borneo, Sumatra, Celebes, Bali, for example), this could hardly be the case across the archipelago. Rather, the Dutch hoped that some nominal recognition of suzerainty would deter other marauding powers. The policy had the advantage of being cost effective; direct occupations were extremely expensive, and the Dutch had a poor record of recouping such costs. Aceh was one significant example of this policies failure.

Here, despite nominal Dutch sovereignty over the region, the safety of the seas became majorly contested. Foreign ships, among them American, quickly became prey to pirates. The situation became urgent when the Suez Canal changed the main route of trade from the Cape to one that included the Straits of Malacca. The Dutch attempt to impress their paper sovereignty on the Sultan of Aceh failed, and by 1873 the Dutch had declared war on this tiny state. At the time, Kuyper denounced the "liberal" war in the strongest terms.

The war in Aceh was, in a word, a quagmire, one with ominous parallels to contemporary foreign affairs. It was a decade long conflict in the making on the Dutch declaration, a region about which the Dutch knew little geographically and less politically and socially. The hope was to rapidly subjugate the population in a year. When expeditions failed, new methods followed: blockades, reconciliations, force concentration,

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fortified posts — all failed. It was an unwelcome war with uncertain funding, and it's hard to imagine the Dutch government's heart was in it. Writes Kossmann,

> Until 1885 between 15 and 20 million guilders yearly were spent on Achin; after 1885 when the so-called concentration system was tried and the Dutch forces remained stationary within a circle of about three miles, costs were much lower (about 7 million a year) but for the twelve years during which this policy was maintained nothing whatsoever was achieved. In the early 1890s the bankruptcy of traditional policies toward the Outer Provinces was glaringly apparent (Kossmann 1978).

This was the springboard from which ethical colonialism took flight. Dr. C. Snouck Hurgronje was one such early architect, whose famous 1892 report called both for "strong aggressive policies" to overcome the religious-nationalist Aceh resistance, and for an accompanying, aggressive development. The goal was both to establish security and the rule of law, but to also take up the "urgent task in this exhausted country to promote agriculture, industry, and especially trade" (Kossmann 1978). The spirit of this was picked up by progressive liberals like C. Th. van Deventer, an admirer of Kuyper, and author of a manifesto on the new ethical policy. It made sense, then, that Kuyper and his Christian cabinet should be the first to make the ethical colonial conception government policy in a speech from the throne in 1901, that "the Netherlands as a Christian nation had a moral obligation towards the colonies." Kuyper, in that respect, "was ahead of the other parties both in his 'ethical' colonial views and in his messianic nationalism" (Kossmann 1978). The ethical policy came to be an integral part of the Christian democratic system.

Given Kuyper's anti-war stance it is, then, ironic that it was his Cabinet which can be credited with eradicating the guerrilla resistance in the Aceh interior. Kuyper counted it, writes James Bratt, "as one of those necessary adjustments to reality" (Bratt 2013). The five-month campaign left nearly 3000 dead, a third of them women and children. Idenburg, Kuyper's disciple and Colonial Secretary (1902–1905) tried to salve the wound by vigorously pursuing the "debt of honor" through interest free loans, cultural development, and public investments. But, writes Bratt,

> The paradox of paternalism and indigenization evident here was compounded by Kuyper's insistence that the Christian interest in the colonies be promoted in the face of its majority-Muslim population (Bratt 2013).

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Following in Kuyper's anti-Revolutionary footsteps, Idenburg tried to find a balance between the need for the rule of law and the desire to catalyze investment and development. He promoted good government as a good in and of itself, commissioned investigations into rampant social problems, including one on the coolie-labour system which produced "results so appalling that he suppressed publication of the data, releasing only the executive summary" (Bratt 2013). To this, Idenburg added an "Antirevolutionary twist in granting greater self-governance to local communities" (Bratt 2013). Of his colonial policies, James Bratt argues Kuyper could count them as a "solid success," one which "followed his old principles" but also gained "support from other parties." It was certainly the first tangible shift in Dutch colonial policy since the failed liberal agenda of the previous century.

The pacification of Aceh showcases the tensions of Kuyper's idealism but also the intractable problems of colonialism at the turn of the century. His Christian nationalism is hardly in question, but his idealism in finding a way between imperial occupation and liberal non-interference would turn out to be one of the burning questions of the 20th century, still — in some respects — at the heart of debates over foreign development assistance and foreign aid. Kuyper inherited a colonial nightmare not of his own making, and a set of policies he himself was sharply critical of. Ultimately, Kuyper would become convinced that the whole system of European colonialism and its manifest corruption would plunge that continent into a ruinous war, one which would temper his Christian *nationalism*, and drive him, as with much of the world after that great cataclysm, away from the hubris and imperialism of the last century. Indonesia was, for Kuyper, a tempering and sobering experience of international realities as a middle power Prime Minister, even though it was exactly here that much of the mark of his Anti-Revolutionary agenda could be most felt in foreign affairs.

THE GREAT WAR

Since the Boer War, Kuyper had grown increasingly pessimistic about the state of international affairs. It became his conviction since that time that the egoistic imperialism of the European powers was destined not for balance but rather for catastrophe. When the Bosnian crisis of 1908–1909 (the annexation of Bosnia by Austria with British support) took shape, Kuyper accurately predicted this would be the trigger for a much broader

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conflict. The anger of Serbia, the humiliation of Russia, and the aggression of Austria would not end well. Already in March 1909 he wrote,

> The most painful prospect here is that, should the blaze at the Danube spread, no one can predict the limits in which the war can be contained. Russia can hardly stand idly by as Serbia and Montenegro are crushed. But if Russia intervenes in the conflict, Germany, as Austria's ally, may swiftly follow suit and bring the danger right to our backyard. Even more, if Russia were hard pressed, France would have to take sides. So all of Europe could be set aflame (Bratt 1998).

When the Great War struck, then, Kuyper could hardly be said to have been taken by surprise. His geopolitical predictions were eerily accurate, a war that had turned from Europe's "fratricide" into "suicide" (Bratt 2013). And while Kuyper maintained the official Dutch policy of neutrality, he nonetheless felt Germany had more of the right of the conflict.

France had always represented to Kuyper a godless combination of revolutionary spirit and statism. Russia, he feared for reasons of scale and race, a threat that may "engulf the Germanic peoples," cites James Bratt. Britain, of course, had long been Kuyper's nemesis, from the South African War to its domination of the seas, Kuyper couldn't trust "the pretensions of its civil and religious oratory, and its imperial ambitions in the Middle East" (Bratt 2013). Germany was hardly blameless, but it represented to Kuyper at the last a bulwark against "heathen Japan" and "the world historical curse of having set into motion the powers of the Mongol races." He even chides Belgium, arguing he would have permitted the German forces passage, if under protest, on the precedent of Deuteronomy 2 and the edict of Hugo Grotius (Bratt 2013).

The fundamental flaw of Europe was, however, neither German nor British. It was, in a word, that venal sin of pride. Europe, he said, "had smashed upon the rocks of human pride. They had mistaken cultural advances for moral improvement, so that their technical progress had only multiplied their powers to destroy" (Bratt 2013). Says James Bratt, the situation fit one of Kuyper's favorite mottos: "the best, corrupted, becomes the worst." As for international affairs, the error, he argued, was that the great powers had grounded their policies not on "the Right grounded in God's ordinances" but "on Might" and "pure self-interest" (Bratt 2013). To that problem, Kuyper saw no ready solution, other than repentance, a condition Christian Europe seemed unable to find its way back to in this great "consummation." Even the attempts of prewar

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peacemakers Kuyper called delusional, apart from the rediscovery of Christian humility and the peace it makes possible. Kuyper himself had been one of those peacemakers, a consultant with Andrew Carnegie about a proposed center for world peace, and an advocate for the restraint of aggression through international law. But with war breaking out just a year after Carnegie's Peace Palace, Kuyper called it all fantasy. He argued, "the misery that is now sweeping the world shows the bankruptcy of all scientific socio-political, and diplomatic striving outside of [commitment to] the high God" (Bratt 2013).

While he held some modest hope for American intervention, especially under the American President Woodrow Wilson, the final peace of Versailles struck Kuyper as a deal fated for yet more violence. Writes Bratt,

> The winning powers were either cynical or hypocritical in assigning all war guilt to Germany, he judged. The proposed League of Nations might better be called a "league of winners" that would either prove ineffectual by its lack of capacity or a step toward a tyrannical combination of power that augured the coming of antichrist (Bratt 2013).

Although Kuyper's commentaries were considered by many, even his own son, to lack "conceptual unity" with themes that "clashed," what remains clear is that in Kuyper's opinion the imperial *nationalism* of Christian Europe had, in its pride, "exploded civilization" (Bratt 2013). Argued Kuyper, "People had been satisfied with [Christian] appearances alone and failed to bring the gospel to the heart, and the sad outcome was that in Europe the torch of division and discord (with a view to life's most fundamental principles) was set alight" (Kuyper 2018).

Kuyper had argued that through common and special grace Christian Europe had achieved the world's highest standards and achievements, but now he was forced to concede that "the genuinely devout in every one of them [Christian nations] had not lagged a bit in baptizing their country's cause as the Lord's" (Kuyper 2018). The fervor and fury with which Europe's great capitals took up the cause of war had smashed his idealism. Writes Bratt, "the moral and material resources that were harnessed in the war effort Kuyper attributed to Christian influence," but what now — that these great resources had clashed in the greatest conflagration of history?

"We must assume already now," Kuyper wrote in his final volume of *Pro Rege*, "that Christian Europe's period of dominion is nearing its

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end, and that in terms of both technology and ideas, as well as religion, the age-old struggle is once again being revived with a growing intensity" (Kuyper 2018).

The promise of Christian democracy, and even the sure Calvinistic idealism of his youth, seemed not enough when tested by the idols of his day. *Pro Rege* contains some of Kuyper's most significant revisions to the relationship between society and the state. Here, at last, he recognizes that in the century ahead the great challenge may not be only the growth of the state, but rather "the massive expansion of economic, technological, and social institutions that had forged the new system wherein the sovereignty of God seemed eclipsed. One step in its retrieval, therefore, was to acknowledge a more active role for the state" (Bratt 2013). His qualified suspicion of the state, a hallmark feature of his *Lectures on Calvinism*, was moderated by a recognition that society itself didn't do much better in the Great War. Kuyper recognizes the need for limited, but robust states, ones that can balance the material idolatries of the coming age. Not empires, to be clear, and not the imperial egoism or tyrannical totalism modeled by Napoleon and Bismarck, but institutions of justice capable of balancing and restraining the worst of society's excesses. There, then, is a kind of Christian Realism, international to be sure, but far from the baptized nationalism or idealistic foundationalism of his youth. *Christian* foundations were essential to Kuyper, but no nation, and no continent, should lay exhaustive claim to those pillars. The evidence of that project, for Kuyper, was the past and — as he rightly feared — coming ruin of Europe.

CONCLUSION: WHAT OF KUYPER'S FOREIGN POLICY?

What are the lessons we in the present day can take from this foreign policy maker, Abraham Kuyper, then? Each of Kuyper's three distinctive contributions to foreign policy, as emphasized in *Our Program*, underwent major revision in his time as Prime Minister, and later toward the end of his life under the pressures of the Great War. There is no question that there were major areas of error and prejudice in Kuyper, but there is also little question that his perspective on international affairs and his cutting insight into the theological cataclysm of the Great War yielded real, explanatory and predictive fruit. In turn, it is worth considering what we can learn from, and perhaps also *alongside*, Kuyper in each of these three areas.

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In international law, Kuyper's emphasis is one that most, broadly liberal international theorists can support. International law, for Kuyper, was about recognizing the constraints under which power, even great global power, operate. International law was also about the *necessarily plural* foundations of any global order, about the need for both Christians and non-Christians alike to recognize the instability and ultimate danger in proposing any singular, hegemonic foundation for something as vast and plural as international law.

While, for Kuyper, he would unapologetically have thought of the laws among nations as a kind of *functional stewardship* of deeper norms (most significantly the norms of Christ and his Kingdom) it was also clear that for Kuyper such norms could not, and should not, simply be installed by force or by sleight of hand onto societies and cultures from which there was no such confession.

I wonder, then, what Kuyper would have made of an exercise like the religious-political dialogues over the Universal Declaration of Human Rights? Here, certainly, there were convicted Christians arguing from those convictions in theologically serious ways about the rights and responsibilities of citizens in the world. But here, also, were co-religionists, Muslims, Hindus, and others, making their own arguments for those rights, on the basis of their own traditions and teachings. Could Kuyper ever come to terms with the idea that the non-Christian tradition could bear similar social and political fruit as the Calvinist? *International* law, in particular, is the most conceptually rich field to ask this question, for it necessarily includes the widest possible pluralism in political affairs.

The conclusion from these cases must surely be that Kuyper would unswervingly confess his need to root international law in *Christian* principles and confessions, *but* in the here and now he may well have time, patience, and even some fascination with other-religious traditions articulating their own, indigenous rationales for those same principles. I think that for Kuyper there could be no *other* way of imagining international law in a plural world: for while Christians may well strive for all nations to know the Gospel, as one of those "necessary adjustments to reality" the Christian *foreign policy maker* must know that it is both impractical and naïve to wait for the new heavens and the new earth to make policy and partnership with non-Christian neighbors and nations. And, further, because of Kuyper's strong emphasis on religion as a ground motive and life force of a civilization, the work of international law, particularly in a post-secular world order, becomes as much *inter-*

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religious dialogue as it does politics. There is, in that sense, no set of laws between plural nations that is purely secular. All laws, per Kuyper's thought, have one foot in religion. The key, then, is finding *common* cause, rather than abdicating particularistic visions, like Kuyper's. Here there is a lesson for both the Christian heirs of Kuyper and the students of religion and foreign policy more generally: *both* the singular reliance on Christian foundations *and* the hope for other universalistic (secular) foundations are unstable and ultimately dangerous because they neglect the particularistic grounds of other societies and cultures. Such an exercise would repeat the colonial failures of Europe's past, rather than recognize *the necessarily particular and plural roots* of international law and its common causes.

Second, the nation itself takes on a different character for Kuyper. Certainly, Kuyper's Wilsonian idealism has been corrupted into a kind of segregationist argument, one which while not his intent, is not hard to infer from his racially charged rhetoric. This part of Kuyper must be read in his context; not dismissed for it, but recognized as badly wrong. What we may salvage from his *organic* conception of the nation-state is at least two-fold.

First, for scholars of religion and foreign policy, is the increasingly urgent recognition that the national character of a people has religious or spiritual dimensions. These may be plural, but they should not — Kuyper would say cannot — be simply ignored or ruled out of bounds. Religion, then, is not a by-product of a national life, but it is one of those wellsprings from which national life emerges. To even *do* foreign policy is first, then, to ask *religious* kinds of questions: what is it my neighbor loves? And how have they arranged their social and national life around the objects of their worship? This is not a purely cognitive or philosophical task of investigating histories, policies, and religious texts. It is a more *anthropological* task than that, for the *organic* nature of nations must be observed, and maybe lived, not simply intellectual dissected. True worship springs up, observed in practice, not merely preached from pulpits or delivered in national assemblies.

And, for Kuyper's Christian heirs, we must also take from Kuyper his ready repentance, in his final days, of *baptizing* any nation's foreign policy with a religion. For Kuyper, to say that a nation's identity is divinely ordained as coterminous with Christ's Kingship is to risk the kind of egoistic, Christian imperialism that unseats the *sovereignty of God* and exchanges it for the idol of the nation.

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Kuyper saw first-hand the clash of idolatries in the Great War, and we would do well to remember that despite his enduring passion for Calvinistic Christianity as a sure foundation for national life, the simplistic identification of one nation's life with the will of God was a great and terrible evil from which the world did not soon recover.

Second, we may take from Kuyper a kind of qualified endorsement of state sovereignty. What Kuyper saw were the challenges in 20th century society demanding a balancing of powers and institutions, and with the growth of technological and economic power in particular, he foresaw the need to grow the institutions of justice alongside them. Governance, in other words, must keep pace with the scale of problems to be governed, not to lapse into the tyrannical states Kuyper so feared (recalling his implausible dictum, "the state is not an octopus"), but recognizing that public justice in a century dominated by the pace of technology and commerce that was before unseen would need governance regimes capable of maintaining the *boundaries* of those spheres of life. State sovereignty, then, for Kuyper was not about the absolutist authority on the part of the nation-state, but rather about investing in it sufficient authority so that it may successfully accomplish its God-ordained task of doing public justice. "Sovereign in its own sphere," as Kuyper would say, means a different thing than Westphalian "state sovereignty." The former speaks of balanced, bounded powers, the latter of uncontested, anthropocentric authority. For Kuyper, sovereignty could never be absolute, for where states fail in their stewardship, there may well be a role for higher authorities, international laws fore among them, to mitigate such failure.

Finally, there is no question that perhaps Kuyper's most driving concern was the free proclamation of the Gospel. For Kuyper, a fundamental feature of foreign policy was making safe the world for the proclamation of the Gospel, and so he would be a passionate advocate today of what is called freedom of religion or belief. There is some question about whether Kuyper would embrace that freedom for *all* religions, or if he would have a special or perhaps exclusive priority for the Christian religion. But I believe it is clear from Kuyper's own policies in Indonesia, that while he placed special priority on freedom for Christian missions, he also recognized that fundamental Biblical precept that there can be no coercion in religion, and therefore *all religions* must have the same freedom he so cherished for Christianity. If, indeed, the character of nations is shaped in part by their religious worldviews, freedom of religion or belief not only ensures the Great Commission it also ensures the *organic* character of nations; the freedom to contest and debate what a nation *is*, its identity,

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its future, and its loves. Here Kuyper's Calvinism dovetails with scholars of religion and foreign policy: for no nation that cannot debate its spiritual parentage can be truly said to be free in any meaningful sense of the term. There is no "self-determination" and no "organic" character where the fundamental questions of life and God are denied to a people. The incapacity to do political theology, for Kuyper, would be a denial of the organic character of a nation; it would be an authoritarian formalism, frozen and fragile, destined not to bend and grow, but simply to break.

These are, I think, good sign posts even in our present day, posts on the same path that Jodok Troy calls "Soft Realists" like Scott Thomas, Jeffrey Haynes, Daniel Philpott, and others (Troy 2012). They come, unlikely as it may seem, from a politician whose own foreign policy could hardly be counted as more than a failure. And yet they also come from a giant of religious and political leadership, whose *struggles* and even whose *failures* prove so instructive to us more than a century later. Kuyper unquestionably had his failures and his blind spots, some very serious, and extremely damaging, but he also labored to find balanced and faithful positions on international affairs, and upon principles, that we would do well to imitate today. We would not want to adopt his policies as they were, but we could do much worse than to have a new man *like* him work out, with his theological and political seriousness, the intractable problems of our globe today.

NOTES

1. A new 12-volume English translation series on Abraham Kuyper's collected works in public theology are available at: www.abrahamkuyper.com. This article drew significantly from several of these, including *Common Grace*, *On the Church*, *Pro Rege* (Vol. 1–3), and *Our Program* (Kuper 2016a; 2016b; 2016c; 2017).

2. Or the crash of "post-modernity." Scott Thomas calls it the "clash of rival apostasies" in *God and Global Order: The Power of Religion in American Foreign Policy*, eds. Chaplin, Jonathan with Robert Joustra. Baylor University Press.

3. There is some debate on "which Kuyper" gets the last word on unity and diversity of nations and races. In the Volume 1 Introduction of the English translation of *Pro Rege* Clifford Anderson argues that "unity and universalism have the final word."

4. In his biography on Kuyper, James Bratt writes that "Romantic sociology and European racism received a warrant beyond appeal — and quite beyond what Kuyper intended" (Bratt 2013).

5. Writes C.B. Wels, during his talks in Berlin "Kuyper gave the impression that his country was becoming pro-German. According to this view, this is what induced Schlieffen to include the passage of German forces through Limburg in his notorious plan" (Wels 1982).

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