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Cover illustration: *Suske en Wiske. Het Lijdende Leiden*. By Willy Vandersteen. Standaard Uitgeverij Rode reeks no. 314, 2011. Downloaded from [http://suskeenwiske.ophetwww.net/albums/ak/het\\_lijdende\\_leiden2.php](http://suskeenwiske.ophetwww.net/albums/ak/het_lijdende_leiden2.php).

## From the editor

Inge Genee

It is Spring 2016 and this is our fall 2014 issue. This means that, unfortunately, our continued efforts to catch up on our backlog have not yet been successful. Our apologies once again to our readers for the long wait.

As mentioned in my editorial to the previous issue, you can help us keep the journal viable by sending us your work and by alerting your students and colleagues to CJNS/RCEN as a possible publication venue for their work. Please prepare your submission according to our guidelines (see <http://caans-acaen.ca/journal/authors/>). And if you don't have an article to submit, you might consider writing a book review for us. Available titles waiting for a review article are listed on our website at <http://caans-acaen.ca/journal/publications-for-review/>, and we welcome suggestions for other titles to review.

The current issue is short on quantity but long on quality, with two contributions. In a sense they both concern aspects of religious conflict in the history of the Netherlands, but that is where the similarities end. The first paper is by Robert Tiegs, a very welcome addition to the small group of young scholars in North America whose research concentrates on the Low Countries. His contribution, *Hidden beneath the waves: Commemorating and forgetting the military inundations during the siege of Leiden*, looks at the use of inundation as a war tactic during the attack on Leiden by the Spanish army in 1574. As the author himself notes, this line of work has important connections with Kirk Goodlet's article "*Reduced to the banks of mud from which they were reclaimed*": *The province of Zeeland, war and reconstruction, 1940-1945*, published in our fall 2013 issue, in which the inundation of Zeeland during WWII was the central topic. Both papers critically discuss the environmental damage that results from deliberate flooding of large tracts of land.

The second paper began as an oral presentation at our annual conference held at Brock University on May 28-29, 2014, but was not ready in time to be included in the Proceedings of that meeting, which we published in our previous issue. We are very pleased that Harry Van Dyke did not give up on us and worked patiently with the reviewers' comments and with our managing editor Madoka Mizumoto. The result is a lovely paper highlighting the discussion between Abra-

ham Kuyper and Jan Kappeyne van de Coppello during the Dutch *schoolstrijd* ('school struggle') of the late nineteenth century, which ultimately led to the establishment of the basic funding model for elementary and secondary education that is still more or less in place today.

We are, as always, grateful to the anonymous reviewers of the articles published here, for their careful and detailed comments. Also as always, I would like to thank Dr. Basil D. Kingstone for all French translations in this issue. This issue was produced with in-kind support from the University of Lethbridge Journal Incubator (<http://www.uleth.ca/lib/incubator/>), a joint initiative of the University of Lethbridge School of Graduate Studies and University of Lethbridge Library (<http://www.uleth.ca/research/centre-study-scholarly-communications>). The managing editor was Madoka Mizumoto.

## De la rédaction

*Inge Genee*

Nous voilà rendus au printemps de 2016 et voici notre numéro d'automne 2014. Donc, hélas, nos efforts pour nous rattraper n'ont pas encore réussi. Encore une fois, nous offrons nos excuses à nos lecteurs pour la longue attente.

Comme je l'ai dit dans ma dernière note de la rédaction, vous pouvez nous aider à garder cette revue valable en nous envoyant vos articles, et en la signalant à vos étudiants et à vos collègues comme lieu possible de publier leurs travaux. Prière de préparer vos articles selon nos lignes directrices (voir <http://caans-acaen.ca/journal/authors>). Et si vous n'avez pas d'article à nous soumettre, pensez à écrire pour nous un compte rendu de livre. Nous avons une liste de livres qui attendent une critique (<http://caans-acaen.ca/journal/publications-for-review>), et nous accueillerons d'autres titres avec plaisir.

Le présent numéro a des articles de qualité mais peu nombreux : au nombre de deux. Il s'agit dans les deux cas d'aspects de conflits religieux dans l'histoire des Pays-Bas, mais ils n'ont que cela en commun. Le premier est de Robert Tiegs, un des rares jeunes chercheurs en Amérique du Nord qui se penchent sur les Pays-Bas. Sa contribution, « Caché sous les vagues : commémoration et oubli des inondations militaires pendant le siège de Leyde, » examine l'usage de l'inondation comme tactique de guerre pendant l'attaque de Leyde par l'armée espagnole en 1574. Comme l'auteur lui-même le remarque, son article a des liens importants avec l'article de Kirk Goodlet, « Réduits aux bancs de boue dont ils ont été réclamés : la province de Zélande, la guerre et la reconstruction, 1940-1945, » publié dans notre numéro de l'automne 2013, dont le sujet central était l'inondation de la Zélande pendant la guerre de 1940. Les deux articles offrent une discussion critique des dégâts environnementaux qui résultent de l'inondation après de grandes étendues de terre.

Le deuxième article a commencé comme présentation orale à notre congrès annuel à Brock University les 28 et 29 mai 2014, mais n'était pas prêt à temps pour paraître dans les Actes de cette réunion, que nous avons publiés dans notre dernier numéro. Nous sommes très heureux que Harry Van Dyke nous soit resté fidèle et ait travaillé si patiemment avec les commentaires des évaluateurs et avec notre directrice de la rédaction, Madoka Mizumoto. Il en est

résulté un article excellent sur le débat entre Abraham Kuyper et Jan Kappeyne van de Coppelo pendant le *schoolstrijd*, la querelle scolaire de la fin du XIXe siècle qui se solda par l'établissement du modèle de subvention de l'éducation primaire et secondaire qui existe, plus ou moins inchangé, de nos jours.

Comme toujours, nous tenons à remercier les évaluateurs anonymes des articles publiés ici, pour leurs commentaires considérés et détaillés. Je remercie aussi le docteur Basil D. Kingstone pour les traductions françaises. Ce numéro a été produit avec le soutien technique de l'University of Lethbridge Journal Incubator (<http://www.uleth.ca/lib/incubator/>), initiative conjointe de l'University of Lethbridge School of Graduate Studies et l'University of Lethbridge Library (<http://www.uleth.ca/research/centre-study-scholarly-communications>). La directrice de la rédaction était Madoka Mizumoto.

# **Hidden beneath the waves: Commemorating and forgetting the military inundations during the Siege of Leiden**

*Robert Tiegs*

This article analyzes the process of commemoration relating to the relief of Leiden. The siege and subsequent rescue of the city were pivotal moments in early years of the Dutch Revolt. As the Prince of Orange and the rebel forces could not save the city with traditional military maneuvers, they employed military inundations, or the intentional flooding of land, for tactical purposes. Over the course of two months the rebels flooded roughly half of southern Holland through dike breaches and the opening of sluices. This man-made flood only carried the rebels so far, and it took a rain storm and a change in the direction of the wind to finally allow them to save the city. This article focuses on a print produced shortly after the city was saved on October 3, 1574. The image highlights the traditional narrative of how the siege was portrayed and commemorated in sixteenth century Holland, focusing on the famine and distress of the city while also showcasing how it was saved through what the rebels interpreted as divine intervention. As a point of departure, this article explores how the military inundations were remembered and memorialized in the image and more broadly in other contemporary accounts. The print, and many other commemorations, interpreted these natural changes in the weather as a sign of God's blessing. Framing the relief of Leiden as providential served a number of important functions for contemporaries. Most importantly, it allowed the rebels to avoid addressing issues of reparations and compensation resulting from the military inundations. This paper argues that the providential interpretation of the rescue of Leiden helped to hide the uncomfortable truth that the conquest of nature and the domination of humans are intimately connected.

Key terms: Dutch Revolt; Siege of Leiden; memory studies; environmental history; military history.

## Introduction

The anonymous untitled print seen in Figure 1 provides a fairly standard account of the traditional highlights of the siege of Leiden in 1574.<sup>1</sup> On the left-hand side of the image the female personification of the city of Leiden is beset by the familiar travails of early modern siege warfare: disease, famine, and death. On the right-hand side, the Spanish soldier stands poised, ready to deliver the final blow. Fortunately for distraught Leiden, the city is spared ultimate defeat by God. In the foreground He is seen to hold back the Spaniard's sword thrust, while in the background He is understood to have delivered the waters which allowed the rebel navy passage, bringing with it food and supplies to the beleaguered burghers. From an environmental history perspective, what is most interesting about the theme of divine intervention in this print is that it obscures the role which the rebel military played in flooding large tracts of southern Holland. This is not to say that the Dutch people were not genuine in their belief of heavenly intervention, but framing this increasingly common military tactic as providential had important ramifications (Klinkert 2007). While this sort of inversed scorched earth policy had obvious military advantages, it was a contested practice. As the landscape is a site of collective memory, the interpretation of the relief of Leiden as divinely guided helped to wash away the human elements of the story (Walsham 2011, 6-7). In other words, the providential interpretation of the rescue of Leiden served to silence the contested aspects of the siege; it served to help hide the uncomfortable truth that the conquest of nature and the domination of humans are intimately connected.

Not a great deal is known regarding the production of the untitled print. It is relatively small (24 cm x 24 cm) and is currently housed in the *Rijksmuseum* (National Museum) in Amsterdam. In the bibliographic data section the museum officially lists the artist as anonymous, even though the name Isaac Nicolai is written in the lower left-hand corner immediately above the poem. The museum does, however, list two possible artists: Zacharias Dolendo and Isaac Claesz van Swanenburg, both of whom had connections to the city. Dolendo's older brother was born in Leiden so he clearly had family ties to the area. Swanenburg, however, appears as the more likely artist since the name Isaac Nicolai was an alias (Rijksmuseum 2001; Horst 2003, 151, 334). Furthermore, Swanenburg actually lived in Leiden prior to the siege and returned only a few months

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<sup>1</sup> I have numerous people to acknowledge for their help with this article. Adam Sundberg and my advisor Christine Kooi both read drafts of this work and provided excellent feedback. In terms of the language issues, Kristopher Fletcher helped with the Latin transcriptions and Wijnie de Groot assisted with the Dutch poem translation. The editors of this journal deserve mention as well, as they patiently worked with me to bring this article to fruition. I offer my sincere thanks to all of these individuals. If there are any errors or issues with the article they are my own.

afterwards, later serving as its *Burgemeester* ('mayor'). He also produced several other works on the siege of Leiden such as the glasswork titled *Het ontzet der stad Leyden, door de Spanjaarden belegerd* ('The relief of the city of Leiden, besieged by the Spaniards') (Van der Aa 1874). The anonymous artist never titled the print, but the museum aptly lists it as an *Allegorie op de nood en het ontzet van Leiden* ('Allegory on the peril and deliverance of Leiden', hereafter referred to as the *Allegorie*). Additionally, the museum dates the print as being produced in 1574. As the image depicts events related to the end of the siege on October 3, this provides a fairly small three month window in which the print could have been created. Overall, it appears likely that the artist knew the city well and produced the print almost immediately after the siege ended.



Figure 1. *Allegorie op de nood en het ontzet van Leiden*, 1574 ('Allegory on the peril and deliverance of Leiden, 1574). Rijksmuseum. Reproduced with permission.

<https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/nl/collectie/RP-P-2001-149>.

Even if the Spaniard, O Leiden full of devotion  
 With fire and sword threatened you with a bitter death,  
 Even if the raging plague and famine,  
 O praiseworthy citizens, were going to cut your throat,  
 And ended up in the utmost distress  
 Yet, leaning on accord and firm ground,  
 The heavenly host, stood at your right  
 Upon which you received God's help  
 While the wind and rain stood at your service  
 Driving back the enemy in dishonor  
 And bringing food and supplies to the distressed,  
 [It was] Neptune's work, but through God's blessing<sup>2</sup>

The print itself blends a number of different themes both Christian and classical. The left side of the image shows the personification of Leiden sitting in great peril. In her left hand, Lady Leiden holds a bundle of arrows to symbolize the unity of burghers, while in her right she holds a book, presumably the bible. She looks to have tripped over a circular container which held foodstuffs that got strewn about on the floor. The star shaped caption above her head is the Tetragrammaton, the four Hebrew letters which signify Yahweh or God. Immediately behind her, from left to right, are the figures of disease, death, and famine. Disease appears to be sucking the life out of her, while the skeletal figure of death wields a spear, and famine is poised to flail her with a stick and a scourge, or some other type of whip. At the feet of Lady Leiden is situated one of the city's burghers, weak from lack of food with his ribs clearly visible. The right side of the image shows a Spanish soldier's attack being thwarted. In the upper right-hand corner God's hand is shown emerging from the clouds to halt the Spaniard's sword thrust. The background on the left side depicts a litany of classical gods working to save the city. Immediately underneath the hand of God, Aeolus can be seen blowing the rebel ships safely toward the city. To the left of this an Okeanid, or oceanic nymph, is seen perched in the clouds, pouring water from her vase in order to extinguish the Spaniard's torch, while at the bottom of the image Neptune rises from the waters to grab the Spaniard's foot while simultaneously striking him with his trident. The central portion of the right side also portrays a Naiad, or water nymph, blowing on a seashell. Its role in the scene is not entirely clear. The poem serves to highlight the central message of the image, namely that Neptune, and by association all the other classical figures, are working under the direction of God.

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<sup>2</sup> The English translation of the original Dutch text in the print is given here. For a transcription of the original Latin and Dutch text as it appears on the print see Appendix 1.

The blending of classical imagery with biblical purpose in the *Allegorie* is interesting, but not necessarily unique to this print. The famous Lakenhal tapestry (discussed below) also included classical elements in its depiction of the siege of Leiden. Dutch artists often took episodes from their own history and repackaged them within a classical or biblical framework (Westermann 2005, 102). For instance, Simon Schama's examination of a seventeenth century engraving titled *Nederlantsche gedenck-Clanck* ('Dutch Anthem of Commemoration') depicted "images that are simultaneously classical and pious, humanist and Calvinist" (Schama 1987, 99-100). In sixteenth and seventeenth century Holland allegorical works of art similar to the one examined here were a popular medium for moralizing tales. As such, the instructional meaning of the image seems to have taken precedent over any stylistic loyalty to a singular theme.

While the allegorical message of the print is clear – God intervened on Leiden's behalf – the image also obscures and purposefully evades a lot of the more complex and contentious issues relating to the great siege and the flooding of a large portion of southern Holland. The rest of this paper takes a closer look at the unstated messages of the print. It begins with a discussion of the background of the siege, placing it in the context of the larger events of the Dutch Revolt. The focus then shifts towards rebel attempts to turn sections of Holland into a militarized landscape, examining issues of agency and how the endeavors to direct the flooding were both partial and incomplete. Attention then shifts to an examination of the memorialization and commemoration of the siege in the *Allegorie*, demonstrating how attempts to avoid or forget the human causes of the flooding were already underway. The final section addresses the relationship between the conquest of nature and conquest of people, arguing that framing the relief of Leiden in terms of a providentially sanctioned event helped reduce discord in the already fractured Dutch society.

### **Contextualizing the Siege of Leiden**

The early years of the Dutch Revolt (1572-1648) were a chaotic and tumultuous period. A litany of economic, social, political, and religious motivations drove several provinces in the Low Countries to resist Spanish Habsburg rule. The Revolt spread rapidly once the privateer fleet known as the Sea Beggars (*Watergeuzen*) captured Brielle (Den Briel) on April 1, 1572 in the name of Prince William of Orange. The provinces of Holland and Zeeland formed the core of the Revolt, but the opposition was by no means unanimous. The early phases of fighting bore the characteristics of a civil war as many cities in the two provinces only reluctantly joined the Revolt, with Amsterdam holding out the longest until 1578. A prime example of such reluctant support is the town of Gouda, which was the first to support the Revolt after Brielle, but often came into open conflict

with the Prince over a number of issues. As C.C. Hibben aptly noted, the early support for the Revolt was clearly a “protest vote” against Spanish rule, rather than a proactive call for some new revolutionary government by the Prince (Hibben 1983, 55).

Several events during this first stage of the conflict served to polarize the populations in Holland and Zeeland and increase the tenacity of the struggle. Prior to the Revolt, a number of influential Protestants had fled Spanish persecution and taken up residency in nearby Emden, but the capture of Brielle signaled an opportunity for them to return home to Holland and Zeeland and establish Reformed churches. They achieved a lot during their time away, establishing a printing operation for Reformed theology and forming the first synod of the Netherlands in 1571 (Pettegree 1992). After suffering in exile, however, those who returned were better organized and ready for a fight. Additionally, the Sea Beggar leader, Count Guillaume Lumey de la Marck, fueled the flames with his harsh treatment of Catholic priests, torturing and executing seventeen of them after his capture of Brielle.

The Spanish, for their part, were no less aggressive with their style and were not willing to lose the provinces without a fight. For decades, the Low Countries had been economically vital to the Spanish Habsburgs, acting as a veritable gold mine for their wars throughout Europe (Tracy 1990). Philip II’s placement of Fernando Alvarez de Toledo, the Duke of Alva, as governor general of the Low Countries in 1567 speaks volumes about his attitude toward rule. The so-called “Iron Duke” set about constructing citadels to cow local inhabitants into submission, while he simultaneously established the Council of Troubles (*Raad van Beroerten*), more popularly known as the Council of Blood (*Bloedraad*). The goal of this organization was to aggressively root out what he deemed heretical practices and find those responsible for the Iconoclast Riots (*Beeldenstorm*) of the previous year. This council investigated and prosecuted nearly 9,000 cases of heresy and treason, executing over 1,000 of the accused (Israel 1995, 156-157). He remained steadfast with his approach after fighting erupted in 1572. As the citadels had failed to bring the Dutch to heel, brutal massacres took their place. When Zutphen failed to surrender as quickly as Alva had wished the town was summarily sacked by the Spanish with numerous residents brutally murdered. He followed up this “victory” with mass executions at Naarden a few weeks later (Parker 1977, 141-142).

In this atmosphere the fighting took on apocalyptic dimensions and bore the characteristics of a millennial confrontation between good and evil. Aside from the economic incentives of retaining the Low Countries, Philip II had sincere religious motivations as well. As Defender of the Faith, it was his responsibility to uphold Catholicism. This meant maintaining Catholicism within his empire and

expanding it when opportunities arose. Philip and his advisors viewed rebellion and rioting as one of the seven deadly sins (pride), and thus needed elimination (Baeana 2011, 36). It appears as though Philip and his advisors viewed the Low Countries as the first piece in a series of dominos, that if their control fell there, many other places were sure to follow. Conversely, Alva's actions in Naarden and Zutphen confirmed what many of the militant Protestants already believed, and convinced many others of the fact that the end was indeed drawing near. The millennial character of the fighting came to epitomize the siege of Leiden, as both sides viewed the city as the key to ultimate victory. The apocalypse approached, but which side would God choose?

### Militarization of the Landscape

The essential goal of the inundation to secure the relief of Leiden was to turn Holland into a militarized landscape, defined here as a "material and cultural site mobilized for military purposes" (Coates et al. 2011, 458). In other words, the rebels attempted to control nature and harness its powers for strategic ends. The landscape, however, was not so easily manipulated, and a large amount of collateral damage ensued. C.S. Lewis once noted that "[w]hat we call Man's power over nature turns out to be a power exercised by some men over other men with Nature as its instrument" (Worster 1985, 50; Lewis 1996).<sup>3</sup> This quote provides an apt characterization of the human toll of the inundations. Even with centuries of experience in flood prevention and other water management activities the Dutch struggled to make the environment conform to their particular need (TeBrake 1985; Van de Ven 2004; Van Dam 2012). This is hardly surprising; however, as many scholars have discovered, the militarization of a landscape is rarely comprehensive or lasting (Vierling 1920; Mitchell 2002; Pearson, Coates, and Cole 2010, 5). The brief description of the siege and relief of Leiden that follows demonstrates the difficulties inherent in attempts to control nature for military purposes.

The first instance of purposefully flooding the land for tactical reasons occurred at Brielle, but it would become commonplace over the next several years. Interestingly, the use of military inundations was almost entirely a rebel tactic, with the Spanish forces rarely engaging in such maneuvers. That is not to say that the Spanish did not consider the use of flooding. In fact, the Spanish developed plans to breach some of the more important sea dikes and

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<sup>3</sup> Donald Worster uses this quote to encapsulate the argument in his work *Rivers of Empire* (1985), in which he demonstrates how access to water rights became an important source of political power when the United States began its westward expansion in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

systematically flood the entire province of Holland. Alva had gone so far as to have a surveyor produce a detailed map to carry out the plan. Philip never authorized it, however, for two reasons. First, he believed that Holland essentially served as a massive barrier which protected some of the further inland provinces from flooding. Second, and somewhat ironically, he believed the act would give the Spanish a poor reputation throughout Europe (Parker 1997). In the place of water as a weapon, the Spanish preferred fire, and they used it often.

Two years after the fall of Naarden and Zutphen, and a few short months after Haarlem surrendered, Alva turned his attention to Leiden. The city lay in the center of southern Holland and was considered the key to unlocking the entire province (see map in Figure 2). The siege of Leiden highlights the tenacity of the war as the success of the fledgling Revolt still hung in the balance. As the well-known historian Jonathan Israel commented, “[t]he siege of Leiden, if not quite the longest – that of Middelburg was longer – was the costliest, hardest fought, and most decisive, as well as the most epic of the great sieges of the Revolt” (Israel 1995, 181). If Leiden fell, then most likely all of southern Holland could have been easily retaken by Alva and the Spanish crown.

The Prince and the rebels could not match the Spanish forces in terms of numbers or organization. After the Iconoclast Riots in 1566 Alva raised an army of 13,000 soldiers which formed the core of the Army of Flanders. Once Brielle fell, this number swelled to 67,000, the largest in the western world at the time (Parker 2004, 21-23). The Prince and the States of Holland and Zeeland could never have supported such a force at the outset of the Revolt. Only a few years earlier Orange had had to flee Straatsburg under cover in order to avoid his creditors. The States of Holland attempted to fund the war as best they could, but had to resort to devaluing its currency, confiscating property, and borrowing money from its own military commanders (Fritschy 2003). Unable to muster an equivalent army, the Prince and the rebels began employing military inundations more frequently.



Figure 2. The attacks of the Spanish troops under the Duke of Alva, 1572 (Klinkert 2007, 456).

By the time the rebels saved Leiden in October 1574, the city had been besieged for a year with only a brief respite in April, but the situation became especially dire in the final months. The Spanish had done well, successfully isolating the city with the construction of a wide arc of sconces and other defenses. As traditional military maneuvers had proven ineffective, the rebels resorted to more desperate tactics. Faced with the idea that the city might be starved into submission, the rebels, under the command of the Prince, decided on the unthinkable: flooding the land and saving the city with its navy. Jan Fruytiers, an eye witness of the siege, noted that the common consensus for the rebels was *beter bedorven dan verlooren landt* ('better broken/spoiled land than lost land') (Fruytiers 1577, 16). In a similar vein, the Prince argued that if Leiden was saved, then Holland for the time being would be spared as well (Fruytiers 18). The rebel forces were quite willing to employ destructive tactics to help ensure this victory. The States of Holland was clear in its resolution on July 30, 1574, that it intended to put the water board regions of Rijnland, Delfland, and Schieland under water (Den Heijer 2010, 5-6). There was no way of misinterpreting their designs for southern Holland.

The first dike breaches occurred on August 3, and the early phases of the flooding were uncharacteristically orderly and systematic. The great Dutch historian S.J. Fockema Andreea noted that the inundation was "well controlled" (Fockema 1953). The dikes along the Hollandse IJssel and Maas were cut in at least sixteen different locations with Orange personally present at the first breach near Capelle. In order to carry out the task the rebels assembled a veritable army of *dijkgravers* ('dike diggers/breachers') with decades of experience in water management. Individuals such as Pieter van der Does, the dike warden (*dijkgraaf*) of Delfland, and Paulus Buys, the future Lands Advocate and member of the water board of Rijnland, helped instruct the various labourers and supervised the cuts (Den Heijer 2010, 8). Even the young Johan van Oldenbarneveldt helped with these early inundations. Although his exact role is not clear, it was presumably to coordinate financial and jurisdictional issues with different polder governments and help limit the amount of collateral damage (Den Tex 1980, 24). Unfortunately this is one aspect of the great statesman's career that has not been studied in depth.

While the goal of the flooding was apparent, practical issues proved more problematic, and the rebels encountered increasing difficulties directing the flood waters toward the city (Gottschalk 1975, 730-1; Den Heijer 2010). As the siege wore on and the situation in Leiden became more desperate, panic and disorder came to characterize the whole operation. The rebels were prevented any initial success because of Spanish sconces and defenses they held around the city. This situation forced the rebels to take an alternative flood route towards

the city, which was less direct and required additional dike breaches. Throughout September they continued to break dikes and open sluices in order to gain access to the city by water.



Figure 3. The relief of Leiden and the concurrent inundations, 1574.  
(Klinkert 2007, 462).

In the end, Orange and the rebels succeeded because of a fair bit of good luck. A surprise attack intended to cut the important *landscheiding* dike, which separated the various water boards, actually ended up at the wrong dike after the soldiers got lost at night. Fortunately for the rebels, this botched operation was still enough to scare the Spanish into withdrawing their forces (Den Heijer 2010, 24-5). By this point, the water boards of Schieland and Delfland were nearly completely inundated, but the water levels in Rijnland remained too shallow to allow the barges waiting in nearby cities to sail to Leiden (Andreae 1953).

The greatest bit of luck came in the form of natural forces as rains and Northwest winds provided enough water for ships to reach the city. As Fruytiers declared, God “sent the wind out of the Northwest with his powerful hands” (“*juyst met den springvloet heft zijn crachtighe hant den wint eerst stromende uit den Noortwesteren ghesonden*”) and “spread the water out wonderfully” (“*de wateren verspreyden hun wonderbaerlijkerwijse*”) (Fruytiers 1577, 27). This allowed the estimated seventy galleys and 250 flat bottomed ships to set out towards Leiden (Heijer 2010, 16). While the heavenly sent wind and rain provided the final “drops” needed to relieve the city, in truth the container that was southern Holland was nearly full to the brim because of the rebel army’s activities. Even if the land immediately surrounding Leiden initially remained too dry for ships to sail, large areas of land had been taking on water for two months. James Tracy, who has done considerable research on the military inundations, estimates that between 1572 and 1576 roughly half of Holland’s farm land was under water at one period or another, largely as a result of the relief of Leiden (Tracy 2008, 120).

### **Memorializing and commemorating the Siege**

This account adds further proof to the idea that the environment is not a passive canvas awaiting human agency (Nash 2005, Mitchell 2002). It took both human and natural forces to save the city, but in terms of commemoration in the *Allegorie* the human elements are ignored. The portrayal of the flooding in the background of the image displays none of the desperate events of the actual fighting. There are no broken dikes, open sluices, or botched night raids to denote any worldly responsibility for the inundations. The poem notes that the wind and rain stood ready in the city’s service to drive back the enemy, but the underlying implication was that God was directing the events. This idea is highlighted in the image of the Greek god Aeolus blowing the rebel ships along their course while another deity pours out the rain to extinguish the Spanish soldier’s torch. Neptune himself reaches up out of the water to arrest the Spaniards’ progress. Although the classical gods are performing the actions, they

are doing so at God's bidding. The message is clear: the city was saved through divine intervention and not by the rebels' actions.

The relief of Leiden served as a prime example of the ordeal (*beproeving*), or the trial of faith by adversity, as described by Simon Schama. He notes how trials by water could serve as a "determinate of moral authority" (1987, 25). This idea fit perfectly with the Reformed theology which spread throughout Holland and the Low Countries. The central belief of the new doctrine was that salvation was predestined by an omnipotent God that elected which individuals to save and which to condemn. The followers thought of themselves as children of Israel setting up a new Zion that was under God's protection as long as they lived a pious life. Members of the Reformed community were constantly on the lookout for signs that they were part of the elect and were being sufficiently devout. They believed that failure to live up to the exacting moral codes could result in any number of punishments, but unanticipated natural disasters such as flooding were most often interpreted as Godly wrath. Similarly, the ability to prevent flooding could also be put in a divine context. For centuries the Dutch had carried out land reclamation which they interpreted as a clear sign of Godly favor. Andries Vierlingh, the famous sixteenth-century hydraulic engineer, noted that only God can make land, but He also gives some people the intelligence and ingenuity to reclaim land. As Schama pointed out, the fact that the land remained dry helped create the idea of communal identity, likening themselves to survivors of the deluge or flood. By the time of the Revolt, this belief was firmly entrenched as the Dutch had been surviving inundations for centuries.

In other words, the landscape provided a sort of moral geography, or spiritual compass, whereby the Reformed community could determine their piety through the lack or abundance of environmental disasters (Schama 1987, 35, 94). Divine intervention and the corresponding proof that the rebels were part of God's elect came to be one of the central elements in subsequent tales and commemorations of the siege of Leiden. The people demonstrated their faith through their suffering and starvation, and God showed his favor by sending out the wind and rain to save the city. Ironically, this interpretation turns the notion of divine favor through flood protection on its head. In this regard, it probably represents one of the only instances when flooding indicated divine favor, but it showed Godly approval nonetheless.

The communal process of memory, commemoration, and forgetting has already been thoroughly studied in connection with the siege of Leiden in terms of the starvation and divine deliverance. As was usually the case in siege warfare, the Spanish tactic was not to capture Leiden by force, but instead starve it into submission. The *Allegorie* clearly alludes to this tactic in the figure of the frail Leiden burgher situated just behind the personification of the city at her feet. He

feebley clings to the carrot on the ground while the other foodstuffs are strewn about, just out of reach. The focus on starvation present in so many accounts of the siege, which has traditionally been taken for granted, has recently been reexamined by some historians, demonstrating that food shortages may have actually been exaggerated (Wijsenbeek-Olthuis 2006). More importantly for the purposes of this paper, Judith Pollmann revealed that the focus on starvation served as a unifying element in terms of memory and commemoration in the century following the relief. Depicting the difficulties which the burghers withheld in terms of famine allowed the city to demonstrate its mettle and fortitude while simultaneously allowing commentators to avoid discussion of divisive religious issues which remained even after the siege, especially in terms of the treatment of religious minorities (Pollmann 2008, 7-12).

The *Allegorie* clearly fits within the tropes of memorialization and commemoration discussed by Pollmann. It served to promote unity by making no distinction between the different segments of the Leiden population, and treated them as a bloc, ignoring any divisions within the city, which were already present. Even during the siege itself, when the city should have been completely united, there were divisive debates over something as innocuous as the motto on newly printed paper money in the city. The magistrates had chosen "*Haec libertatis ergo*" ('This for the sake of liberty'), which one of the Reformed Church's Calvinist preachers lambasted as too Libertine, instead calling for the motto to have been "*Haec religionis ergo*" ('This for the sake of religion'). Despite their unified opposition to the Spanish, church and state still had differing priorities regarding the meaning of the Revolt (Kooi 2000, 30). The *Allegorie*, however, makes no distinction between the various populations of Leiden and dissenting viewpoints. In this instance, God's salvation from the terrible siege is for all those in Leiden, and by extension, the entire Revolt. Additionally, the *Allegorie* demonstrates the city's mettle through steadfast devotion and unflinching piousness in face of a Spanish assault. The Dutch had survived their ordeal.

The religiosity and unity of enduring a flood (and a siege) are also clear themes of the *Allegorie* and the attached poem. The piety of the city is demonstrated in the fact that despite having her soul literally sucked out of her by the figure of disease, she determinedly clings to her bible (presumably) in her right hand. The unity of the city is shown with the bundle of arrows clutched in her left hand. The focus on the flood is shown in the last lines of the poem noting that Neptune worked through God's blessing. In this case, Neptune had performed admirably, as all of the fields in the background were completely inundated, allowing the ships a sheltered voyage towards Leiden, safely out of the range of the Spanish soldiers stranded on one of the sconces.

The *Allegorie* also helped to promote unity by intentionally ignoring certain aspects of the siege, specifically the rebels' role in the inundation. The background of the image shows the military inundation to rescue the city, but its depiction is not meant to catch the viewer's attention. In total the flood waters cover roughly one-eighth of the print, being obscured by the wall on the left-hand side of the image, the Spanish soldier, Neptune, and a water nymph riding on a wave on the right-hand side. The flood waters that are visible appear serene. Barely a ripple breaks its calm surface. In this portrayal there are no allusions or references to any role which the rebels played in the flood. There are no images of water flowing through broken dikes or open sluices to mark rebel responsibility for the inundations. The only part of the image that depicts any flooding is the nymph pouring water from his perch in the clouds. Even this, however, is directed more towards extinguishing the Spaniard's torch than inundating the land. The human sources of the inundation, although responsible for the majority of the flooded lands, are washed away by the focus on the providential.

This sort of purposeful elision is not singular to the *Allegorie*, but appears in other commemorations of the siege as well. It represents one of a myriad of different works of art which commemorated the relief of Leiden that chose to minimize the human causes of the flooding. Two of the more well-known pieces, by Frans Hogenberg and Joost Jansz Lanckaert, demonstrate this point (see Figure 4 and Figure 5). Both provide a sort of cartographic representation that includes a more detailed (and less allegorical) account of the siege, focusing not so much on symbolism but on the various military maneuvers. Hogenberg produced his print several decades after the siege of Leiden. It shows a small section of southern Holland flooded, from Delft to Leiden, with the main focus on the flotilla of barges making their way to the beleaguered city.<sup>4</sup> Lanckaert produced a high quality wall tapestry providing a detailed visual account of the relief of Leiden. Although he produced the tapestry roughly fifteen years after the event, it was evidently based on designs which the cartographer Hans Liefrinck developed during the actual siege (Andreae 1953). Lanckaert's production includes a much more expansive view of southern Holland, stretching from the North Sea in the west to the Rotte River in the east, and from Leiden in the north to the Merwe in the south. The main focus in the tapestry is again the fleet of barges sailing towards Leiden which occupy the central area of the work.

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<sup>4</sup> Latin Transcription in Figure 3: Aggeribus scisis, et sublato obijce Ponti, / Auriacus Batavis immittit flumina campis, / Oceani moriens undam magni haurit Iberus, / Solvit et obsidione gravi pia moenia LEIDAE. English translation: With dikes torn apart and the barrier of the sea taken away, / Auriacus sends floods into Batavian fields; / While dying, the Spanish drink the water of the great Ocean, And frees the pious walls of Leiden from heavy siege.

The attentive viewer can see several of the dike breaches near Rotterdam with the water flowing into southern Holland. Lanckaert also attempts to provide a scope of the flooding with portions of the tapestry colored in light blue to denote the flooded section of Holland, in contrast to the pastel green showing the unflooded sections of land. A large portion of Schieland which was also flooded did not, however, make it onto the tapestry.

It is noteworthy that in both of these other commemorations and accounts of the relief of Leiden the human causes of the flooding are again ignored. Both chose to focus on the fleet of barges sailing towards Leiden. The fact that this moment was the climax of the whole siege is undoubtedly part of the reason behind this omission, but the artists could have just as easily incorporated events from the earlier stages of the siege as well. There are numerous examples of art that collapse multiple events with different dates into a single image. Lanckaert filled the edges of his tapestry with eight smaller images depicting classical deities that are again conspiring to help save the city. From this evidence, it is clear that the artists willfully omitted some of the more divisive elements of the story.

### **Controlling people by controlling nature**

The idea that the environment itself chooses sides in war is a common trope in commemoration, and it had important ramifications for depictions of the relief of Leiden (Keller 2009; Pearson 2009, 150-170). In this case, nature inevitably implied the divine as well, since God was understood to have control over the environment and directed the flood waters as well. In terms of an environmental history of war in the early modern period, this idea is extremely important.<sup>5</sup> As David Blackbourn noted regarding militarism in Germany, the conquest of nature often implies the conquest of people, which is clearly the case here, as the assault on the landscape with military inundations had the intended goal of conquering the Spanish forces (Blackbourn 2006). This line of thinking is clear in the *Allegorie* as well, demonstrated in the horizontal organization of the image. On the left side of the image the situation is all but decided as the life of the city hangs in the balance. The right side of the image provides the resolution, as God halts the Spaniard and directs the flooding while the ships sail smoothly to their destination. This providential interpretation served to legitimize the rebels' actions, or at the very least, avoid contentious discussions regarding remunerations and repayment for damages.

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<sup>5</sup> Most works on early modern environmental history of war focus on resources management. See Kjærgaard (1994) Warde (2006), Hupy (2008), McNeil (2004), and Appuhn (2009).

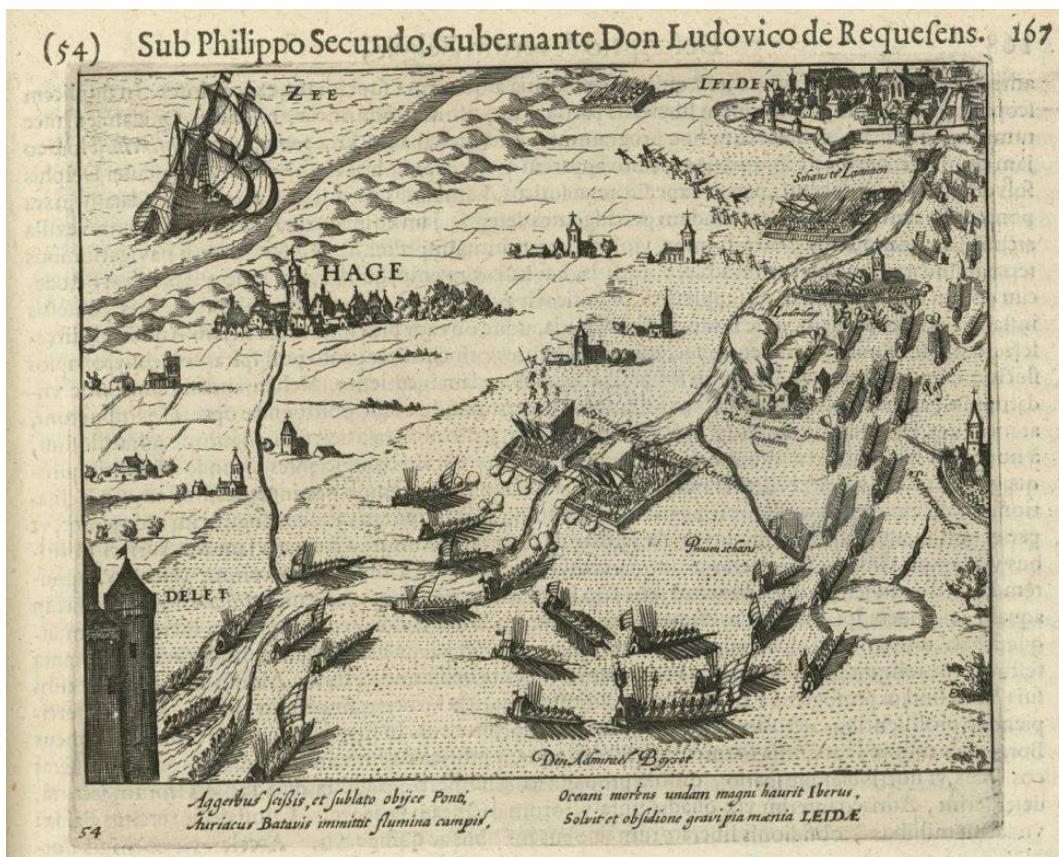


Figure 4. Ontzet van Leiden, 1574 ('Relief of Leiden, 1574'). Rijksmuseum. Reproduced with permission. <http://hdl.handle.net/10934/RM0001.COLLECT.453700>.

This type of forgetting, or intentional elision, is clear in many written accounts of the siege as well. Jan Fruytiers, Emmanuel van Meteren, and Pieter Bor all provided relatively contemporary accounts of the siege and all of them side-stepped discussing the lasting destruction of the inundation. For the most part they provide a detailed account of rebel activities and dike breaches as they worked their way to the city from August to October. Additionally, most of them noted the rebel motto, "better broken land than lost land", with van Meteren stating it would have been better to do 600,000 guilders worth of damage than surrender the land to the Spanish (Van Meteren 1608, 235). When it came time to actually give an account of the degree to which the land was broken, however, they were all relatively silent. Once the city was saved, Fruytiers discussed how the rebel Admiral Louis de Boissot went straight to the church and prayed with the other "children of Israel". They gave thanks to God for He "so wonderfully made a sea over dry land and brought and held it in the desired place" ("soo wonderlijk een Zee over draech lant ghemackt end behouden ter ghewenschter plaetse gebracht hadden") (Fruytiers 1577, 31). The chroniclers

also mention, almost in passing, that the day after the city was saved the wind shifted again to help dry the land. Fruytiers, Bor, and van Meteren all used the exact same phrasing to describe how the water obediently retreated from the land, *als nu zijn officie ende dienst ghedaen hebbende* ('as if now its office and service had been done') (Fruytiers 1577, 32; Van Meteren 1608, 102; Bor 1617, 560).

In actuality, the water withdrew more slowly, and not surprisingly, the flooding of a large portion of southern Holland created numerous problems and conflicts. By the time the Prince and the rebels saved the city the water boards of Schieland and Delfland were almost completely flooded, with the streets of Delft and Rotterdam standing underwater (Groenveld 2001, 18-19). Fruytiers estimated that the flooding incurred 300,000 gold crowns worth of damage, with most of it occurring in Schieland and Delfland (Fruytiers 1577, 16-19). Many of the watermills in the area were damaged during the flooding as well, and some people worried that salt water might make the land unusable for years to come (Den Heijer 2010, 7; De Kraker 2015). According to one historian's estimation, by 21 February 1576, 93 percent of the area around Alphen to the east of Leiden was still *desolaet end ongebruyc* ('desolate and unused') (Groenveld 2001, 14-22). The Alblasserwaard region lying southeast of Rotterdam fared even worse, as it experienced only short dry periods for seven years. It had been flooded during the All Saints Day Flood in 1570 and was again inundated with the relief of Leiden to prevent a Spanish attack from the rear (Gottschalk 1975, 731-739). In short, saving Leiden incurred a tremendous amount of long lasting collateral damage.

Undoubtedly, part of the problem of repair and reparations was administrative, since the war had disrupted many of the traditional forms of governance (Van Nierop 2009). Resistance to Spanish authority provided the largest motivation for open revolt, but agreeing upon a new political system to replace the Habsburg monarchy proved more problematic. The organization and financial apparatus of the rebellious provinces were still fluid as they attempted to stabilize their position. It was several years before the States General established a quota system to ensure the regular payment of troops, while a concrete political organization remained an open question until at least 1588 (Rowen 1988; Van Gelderen 1992; Israel 1995, 179-220). On a more local scale, the inundated areas were largely self-contained water districts, each with its own organization responsible for policing and maintaining the water conditions in the area. These organizations encountered their own difficulties as many were divided among themselves in their loyalties. Numerous members of the water boards of Delfland, Schieland, and Rijnland remained loyal to the Spanish Monarchy rather than join the rebellion, creating administrative vacuums that

were difficult to fill ('t Hart 1974, 16; Postma 1989, 390-393). Immediately after the relief, the Prince ordered the repair of several dikes, but the progress was rather slow. There were numerous attempts to raise taxes for repair but the issues always stalled; it appears as though the individuals least able to pay for the repairs were forced to bear the largest burden ('t Hart 1974, 28; Groenveld 2001; 't Hart 2014, 101-122).

Gouda's role in the relief and subsequent repairs highlights some of the important issues which the *Allegorie* ignores. The city had initially protested against cutting the dikes for obvious reasons. Afterwards they estimated that the relief and subsequent repairs cost the city roughly 12,000 guilders (Hibben 1983, 81). In 1577, three years after the initial inundation, one visitor to the city observed that it still appeared as a seaside town with waters continuing to flow through the ruined dikes (Jacobsz 2008, 274). In addition to the expenses which the city had to muster for the repairs the dike breaches also affected the city's income. The city became infuriated because this new passage created for the relief of Leiden in the Leidschendam ultimately diverted ship traffic and its toll revenue to nearby Delft. Both sides of the city ledger were affected by the military inundation. The prince had assured Gouda that following the relief the new passage would be quickly removed, but his promise proved hollow. Gouda openly protested the situation, leaving no doubt as to its opposition to the passage. The Prince urged the city to remain quiet, as he believed the Spanish would interpret internal disputes as a sign of weakness (*Resolutiën van de Staten van Holland 1575*, 9-10). The dispute was one of the most vociferous and long lasting disputes from the inundations. After three years of heated debate, with Gouda abstaining from sending representatives to the States of Holland for several months, the city finally took matters into its own hands. Two days before Christmas 1577 it sent out its militia to destroy the passage (Hibben 1983, 143-152).



*Figure 5. Het Ontzet van Leiden, tussen 1587-1589 ('The Relief of Leiden, between 1587-1589'). Museum de Lakenhal. Reproduced with permission.<http://www.lakenhal.nl/en/collection/3358>.*

### Conclusion

A recent article in this journal by Kirk W. Goodlet (2013) can help highlight the broader significance of the commemoration of military inundations. His article discusses the Allied “liberation” of Walcheren during World War II, secured through bombing operations that targeted the sea dikes of the island. It is ironic that these bombings began on October 3, 1944, exactly 370 years to the day after the relief of Leiden. Goodlet’s article similarly deals with the topic of commemoration, calling into question the “wartime love affair” that exists between the Dutch and Anglo-Canadian soldiers. While most Dutch men and women fondly remember the Canadian forces that liberated them from the Nazis, the people of Walcheren view the events differently. Goodlet shows how

the Allied “liberation” of the island devastated the local population and the environment. With no Allied or Canadian assistance for reconstruction, it was up to the local population to begin the arduous task of rebuilding the damaged water management infrastructure. In terms of memory and commemoration in Zeeland, the event is remembered more for its toll on the environment than for the liberation from the Nazis. Over the course of a few short weeks the Allied bombings and inundations wrought more ecological destruction than the four previous years under Nazi control.

It is odd that a military practice which brings with it such ecological and human devastation is so often portrayed in a positive light. The Allies “liberated” Zeeland while God “saved” the people of Holland from Spanish tyranny. Coupling these military maneuvers in such idealized terms helped to silence many of the dissenters and avoid the complicated issues that followed. In the euphoria that followed such dramatic events it could prove difficult for someone to complain about something as trivial as flooded fields and lost crops.

Is the providential framework depicted in the *Allegorie* an echo of Orange’s pleas for solidarity during his talks with Gouda? An image filled with portrayals of rebel dike breaches would imply that cities and rural residents have a secular recourse to recover their damages. In other words, if the *Allegorie* showcased the role which the rebels played in the military inundation, then people could direct their request for reimbursement to the rebel forces, which many initially tried but ultimately failed (‘t Hart 2014, 106). As it was, the relief of Leiden was interpreted as providential. How does one argue with God for compensation? In any case it appears as though the act of forgetting was largely successful. The well-known historian of the Dutch Republic James Tracy noted that he could find no indication that the rural population in Holland ever received any compensation relating to the damage from the relief of Leiden in all of his archival research (Tracy 2009, 41-54). As one historian astutely observed, the inundations which should have been liberating, in fact had the opposite effect (Groenveld 2001, 33). Remembering the relief of Leiden in providential terms permitted a sort of communal catharsis which allowed contemporaries to forget the difficulties which they had just endured and focus on the righteousness of their ongoing struggle.

#### **Appendix 1: Transcription of the Latin and Dutch text on the *Allegorie***

##### *Latin*

Districto jugulum frustra petit ense Maranus  
 Incassumque furit per mille cadavera stragem  
 Det licet ingentem, Stygia concita palude

Atra fames, letho comitat aqua lurida Pestis:  
 Dum tibi Lugdunum, figenti ad sidera vultus,  
 Nitentique super diae fundamina Petrae,  
 Dextra dei prono vindex succurrit Olympo  
 Aeolias acies fugienteis armat in hosteis,  
 Neptunumque jubet per inhospita capita ferre  
 Civibus obsessisis inopina classe salutem  
 Hinc Paeana canens Tritonis buccina, clangit  
 Leida Batavorum unanimi virtute triumphat

### *Dutch*

Al was 't dat u de Spaingnaert, o Leyden vol trouwen  
 Met swaert en vlam dreijchde de bitterlijcke doot  
 Al was 't dat u de vierich pest end 'hongers noot  
 O loftlijke borgers de keele toe ginck houwen  
 Also geraerct sijnd in het uiterste benouwen  
 Nochtans u steunende op accoort en vaste gront  
 Den hemelschen hoestee, heb dy ter rechter stont  
 De hulpe godts daer op ghij u verliet vercregen  
 De wijl tuwen dienste bereijt stont wint en regen  
 Te rugh drijvende met oneer uwen vijant  
 Maer den benauden brengeden spijs en proviant  
 Wel Neptuni werc maer wesende doch godts segen

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### Caché sous les vagues: commémoration et oubli des inondations militaires pendant le siège de Leyde

Le présent article analyse le processus de commémoration de la délivrance de Leyde. Le siège et la délivrance qui suivit constituèrent des moments critiques dans les premières années de la Révolte néerlandaise. Le prince d'Orange et les forces rebelles, ne pouvant pas sauver la ville par des manœuvres militaires traditionnelles, employèrent l'inondation délibérée de la terre à des fins tactiques. Au cours de deux mois, ils inondèrent environ la moitié du sud du pays en perçant des digues et en ouvrant des écluses. Cette inondation artificielle ne fut pourtant pas suffisante, et il fallut un gros orage et un vent favorable pour leur permettre enfin de délivrer la ville. L'article se concentre sur une gravure produite peu après la délivrance de la ville, le 3 octobre 1574. L'image souligne le récit traditionnel du siège et sa commémoration en Hollande au 16e siècle, en insistant sur la famine et la misère dans la ville, tout en

affirmant qu'elle avait été sauvée par une intervention divine. Nous partons de la manière dont cette image, et plus généralement d'autres récits contemporains, rappelaient et commémorèrent les inondations militaires. La gravure, comme maintes autres commémorations, interpréterent les changements naturels météorologiques comme signe de la bénédiction de Dieu. Cette interprétation remplit plusieurs fonctions importantes pour les contemporains - notamment, elle permit aux révoltés de ne pas réparer ou compenser les dégâts causés par les inondations militaires. En somme, nous avançons que l'intervention divine de la délivrance de Leyde cacha la vérité inconveniente que la conquête de la nature et la domination humaine sont liées de manière intime.

### **Verborgen onder de golven: Het herdenken en vergeten van de militaire inundaties tijdens het beleg van Leiden**

Deze bijdrage presenteert een analyse van het herdenkingsproces rond het ontzet van Leiden in 1574. Het beleg en het eropvolgende ontzet van de stad waren cruciale momenten in de vroege jaren van de Tachtigjarige Oorlog, tegenwoordig ook wel bekend als de Nederlandse Opstand. Toen het duidelijk werd dat de Prins van Oranje en de opstandelingen de stad niet konden redden met traditionele militaire manoeuvres, werd besloten tot het inzetten van militaire inundaties, oftewel het opzettelijk onderwaterzetten van het land voor tactische doeleinden. Gedurende een periode van twee maanden zetten de opstandelingen ongeveer de helft van de zuidelijke provincie Holland onder water door het doorsteken van dijken en het openen van sluizen. Deze kunstmatige overstroming bereikte echter niet genoeg, en er moesten een storm en een verandering van windrichting aan te pas komen voordat ze eindelijk in staat waren de stad te ontzetten. Het onderwerp van dit artikel is een prent die gedrukt werd kort na het ontzet van de stad op 3 oktober 1574. De prent verbeeldt de gangbare zestiende-eeuwse interpretatie van het beleg, waarbij de nadruk valt op de hongersnood en chaos in de stad en het ontzet wordt voorgesteld als goddelijke ingrijpen. Dit artikel gaat in op de manier waarop militaire inundaties worden herdacht en in beeld gebracht op deze prent en in andere bronnen uit dezelfde tijd. Net als vele andere herdenkingsstukken interpreerde de prent de veranderende weersomstandigheden als aan teken van God's zegen. De weergave van het ontzet van Leiden als veroorzaakt door goddelijke hand had een aantal voordeelen. Het belangrijkste daarvan was dat het de rebellen ontsloeg van verantwoordelijkheid voor herstel en compensatie voor de schade die veroorzaakt was door de overstromingen. Ik benoem dat deze interpretatie van het ontzet van Leiden uiteindelijk bijdroeg aan het verbloemen van de

pijnlijke waarheid dat heerschappij over natuur en mensen niet los van elkaar gezien kunnen worden.

## **Government schools or Free schools? Abraham Kuyper addresses a long-standing controversy in the Dutch parliament**

*Harry Van Dyke*

The Netherlands experienced a struggle for educational freedom between 1840 and 1920. Although this freedom was guaranteed in the Constitution of 1848, the ruling elite insisted for many decades that only public schools, which were operated by the government and consigned to religious neutrality, qualified for public funding. Private, religious schools were excluded. This meant that parents who used a private Christian school in fact paid double for the education of their children: first as taxpayers for the public school, and then for their own school. Christian parents in the lower classes thus faced a dilemma: either education for their children in the spirit of home and church, involving expensive tuition fees; or education in the religiously neutral public school, which was free of charge; or else no school attendance at all for their children (school attendance was not compulsory). A foremost champion of parity treatment of both types of schools was the journalist-theologian Dr. Abraham Kuyper. For many years he and his followers campaigned against the inequality, particularly since it jeopardized freedom of conscience. They challenged the claim that education could be religiously neutral. Kuyper spoke often about the issue, both as a member of parliament and from 1901 to 1905 as prime minister. He did that so eloquently that a selection of quotations from his parliamentary speeches is worth taking note of. The struggle was ultimately resolved when both public and private schools were accorded equal funding from the public treasury.

Key terms: educational freedom; Dutch schools struggle; Dutch parliament; Abraham Kuyper; Jan Kappeyne van de Cappello; pluralism; pillarization.

### **Introduction**

The pleasure of being involved in translation projects, as has been my good fortune since retiring from teaching, is that you come across fascinating texts

that you might otherwise have missed.<sup>1</sup> I was recently asked to comb the 223 published works of the scholar-statesman Abraham Kuyper for texts in which this nineteenth-century figure had expressed his thoughts on pluriformity in education. That I came across many such texts was not surprising, since the anti-revolutionary movement and the Anti-Revolutionary Party,<sup>2</sup> of which Kuyper was the undisputed leader and spokesman, owed its origin and longevity to what is often referred to as “the eighty-years’ war for freedom of education.”<sup>3</sup> In the end I focussed on two main sources: Kuyper’s speeches in parliament, published (i) in a single volume covering his first term as a member of the Second Chamber or lower house (Kuyper 1890), and (ii) in a set of four volumes covering his years as a member and as prime minister (Kuyper 1908). Perusing these volumes impressed me with the oratorical skill displayed there in the tone and logic – and, yes, passion – of the debates. The intent of this essay is to give translated extracts from some of the more characteristic speeches delivered by Kuyper on the subject. They offer a window into Dutch parliamentary proceedings of over a century ago and provide a taste of the style and level of argumentation used at the time.

### **Setting the stage**

Let us first listen to an exchange between two leading champions in the debate as they address a chronic bone of contention since the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century: *Should elementary schools be public or private?* Next: *Should schools be paid for from the public treasury or from the private purse?* Implicit is the question: Should private school supporters pay twice for schooling, first with taxes that support the government schools, then with their own money for their own schools?

The champion of private schools is Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920). He is trained as a theologian and his decade as a minister in the *Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk* ('Dutch Reformed Church') has established his reputation as a consummate pulpитеer. He has recently given up his status as a clergyman in Amsterdam for a seat in the Second Chamber. He is editor-in-chief of the daily

<sup>1</sup> This is an expanded version of a paper read at the annual meeting of CAANS, Brock University, 28 May 2014.

<sup>2</sup> “Anti-revolutionary” in this context meant opposition, not to revolutions, but to the specific set of ideas or ideology popularized in the Age of Enlightenment and implemented in the French Revolution of 1789. Today we call it “modernity”. See Kuyper (1879, § 5; 2015, xii, 1-3).

<sup>3</sup> This name, alluding to the Eighty Years’ War for Dutch independence from Spain (1568-1648), was often used by proponents of free, non-government schools to designate the *schoolstrijd*, i.e., their struggle for equal standing with public schools, a struggle that began with the first alternative schools in the 1840s and ended in victory by the so-called Pacification of 1920.

newspaper *De Standaard* ('The Standard') and the church weekly *De Heraut* ('The Herald'). Bram is also very much a family man, the father of six children. He hails from the middle classes and prides himself on being a spokesman for the common man, the *kleine luyden*.



Figure 1. A portrait of Abraham Kuyper. Source:  
[http://www.dbl.org/tekst/rome002erf/01\\_01/rome002erf/01\\_01\\_0032.php](http://www.dbl.org/tekst/rome002erf/01_01/rome002erf/01_01_0032.php).

The champion of the public school is the barrister Jan Kappeyne van de Cappello (1822-1895). He prides himself on being a progressive liberal.<sup>4</sup> Jan is a confirmed

<sup>4</sup> Dutch liberalism in the early part of the 19th century favoured small government, private initiative and free enterprise. By the 1870s, as the Netherlands began to industrialize in earnest, more liberals were found, especially among the younger members, who leaned toward granting government a larger role in trade and industry, socio-economic affairs and public education.

bachelor and has the reputation of being one of the keenest debaters in the house. Though not of aristocratic stock, he does belong to the ruling elite and many expect him to become government leader after the next general elections.



*Figure 2. A portrait of Jan Kappeyne van de Coppello. Source:  
[http://www.dbl.org/tekst/alqr001disp03\\_01/alqr001disp03\\_01\\_0015.php](http://www.dbl.org/tekst/alqr001disp03_01/alqr001disp03_01_0015.php).*

Kuyper and Kappeyne have both earned a doctorate at Leiden University and are personally on good terms with each other (Kuyper 1908-10, Vol. IV, 962). But in politics they square off like fighting cocks. Kappeyne looks forward to enlightened action by the central government that will at last establish a definitive elementary education system for all children in the land. Kuyper is the anti-revolutionary who is intent on preserving alternative, Christian schools available to children from all parents, at the latter's choice, even from the poorest families that can ill afford tuition fees.

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Throughout, however, liberals held to a pragmatic and secular approach to politics in which religious principles were not supposed to influence public policy.

In the lower house, on December 8, 1874, Jan Kappeyne broaches the education question with a visionary statement: “The ideal for us progressive liberals is: tuition-free elementary education in religiously neutral government schools for the entire population. If I were told that if this is your wish you will oppress the minority, then I would almost say: then that minority will have to be oppressed, because then that is the fly that spoils the ointment and has no right to exist in our society” (Kuyper 1890, 243).

In the evening session of the same day, Kuyper, stung to the core, asks the floor and unburdens himself: “Mr. Speaker, should the day ever arrive that a minister of the Crown announced this member’s program as the program of the Government, saying that if need be he would oppress the minorities and kill the fly that spoiled the ointment, I would say to him: Then also remove the lion from the Dutch coat of arms, proud symbol of liberty, and replace him with an eagle, a lamb in its claws, the symbol of tyranny” (Kuyper 1890, 244).

This exchange certainly set the stage. The choice was clear: would Dutch children, many of whom did not attend any school or at best for a few years only,<sup>5</sup> be educated in public, secular schools operated by the government, or in private, religious schools? Government schools would be funded from the public treasury, to which all contribute through taxes. Would private schools share at all in public funding? Not on your life, said the ruling majority. And thus arose the *schoolstrijd* ('schools struggle') of the nineteenth century.

On December 7, Kuyper had outlined his own vision for Dutch elementary education: “What education system,” he asked, “is best suited to our country?” In a long speech he outlined a system in which all schools would be free, independent, self-standing corporations, free from church and state, run by locally elected school boards. The State has rights, he conceded – for example, to regulate academic standards, to inspect schools, and to issue teacher certificates – but therefore it also has duties: regardless of which school was attended, the State should compensate parents financially for tuition fees, prorated according to a family’s income (Kuyper 1890, 221-29). Kuyper continued with a nasty insinuation that may actually have been plausible for the time: “Members opposite may object by saying they would then lose the privilege they enjoy at present of drilling Kantian deism into the children’s heads. But I sincerely hope they will not say this, otherwise they will confirm the definition that Groen van Prinsterer once gave of the government school: ‘the privileged school of a specific religious sect’” (Kuyper 1890, 226).<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> The Truancy Act, or *Leerplichtwet*, making school attendance compulsory, was not enacted until 1900.

<sup>6</sup> G. Groen van Prinsterer (1801-76) was the founder of the anti-revolutionary movement. Historian, publicist and parliamentarian, Groen had argued throughout his career that a

A *religious sect*? The designation was highly charged. How could advocates of religiously neutral education ever be convinced that they somehow represented a specific “religious” choice? It would be many decades before “neutralists” agreed that their position, too, implied a choice for some ultimate commitment held with conviction – for a set of non-negotiable values and assumptions that were on a par with the fundamental convictions of religious folk.

In any event, on December 7, 1874, Kuyper had pleaded with the Minister to inform the house with a clear, unambiguous declaration of his intended policy with respect to elementary education. “The public would like to know where he will take us.... The issue is weighty enough to warrant the installation of what the English call a *royal commission*. The nation ought to be consulted about the issue. At present, discussions in the land are unfocused: people don’t know what to support or what to oppose. Will the Minister let us know what his political intentions are?” (Kuyper 1890, 236-37).

The request fell on deaf ears. The government was reluctant to deal with this hot potato. The Constitution of 1848 stated in Article 194 that educational instruction was free, but it added that the government had to see to it that elementary education was provided “throughout the country”. However, did this proviso imply that only public schools would meet this requirement and that private schools were not eligible for government support?

Nine years later came the answer. The Education Act of 1857 said: Yes! The government school was to be the common school, religiously neutral, serving Protestant, Catholic and Jewish children alike, instructing them in “civic and Christian virtues” (though teachers were forbidden to invoke the Bible or explicit Christian teachings) (Van Essen 1990, 62-63). The expression “civic and Christian virtues” was a legacy from 1806, when the Dutch education system was first set up. At that time, Bible readings, prayers and the singing of psalms and hymns were recommended parts of the curriculum, but by mid-century these Christian elements were considered sectarian and therefore unsuitable in a common school (Feringa 1878,<sup>7</sup> 2). Now the expression essentially stood for a creed that has been fairly summarized as the generic religion of the “brotherhood-of-man, fatherhood-of-God”.<sup>8</sup> The common school enjoyed wide

religiously neutral education was not possible and that consequently a government school – the common school intended for all children – could not avoid basing its instruction on a set of values indifferent if not hostile to Christianity. See Van Essen (1990a, 1990b).

<sup>7</sup> This slim volume contains all the official documents related to the People’s Petition of 1878 (see below).

<sup>8</sup> The popular expression BOM-FOG denotes the attempt to amalgamate beliefs held by Christians, theological modernists and humanists.

support in the hope that it would defuse sectarian differences and promote national unity and tolerance.

However, one reaction to the Act of 1857 was a rush toward establishing private religious schools, which were not hard to fund for the well-to-do but posed a financial burden for the lower middle classes and were virtually out of reach for the working classes, unless they could use parochial schools paid for by the church, or had access to a private school paid for by a local lord or endowed by a philanthropist. Lacking these, they would often have their children attend the public school, but with a burdened conscience.

A whole year later, on December 13, 1875, Kuyper again tried to hold the Minister's feet to the fire. In another lengthy speech he urged that a revision of the Elementary Education Act of 1857 should not be delayed any longer because the common school "was introduced to prevent confessional wrangling but has only inflamed confessional quarrels" (Kuyper 1890, 275). Anticipating an oft repeated claim that "the nation is attached to the common school," he pointed out that private schools, "the more they are suppressed, the more they grow in number." He concluded his speech by stating that people were attached to the public school "not from a bond of love but by a financial tie, not from the heart but because of the law and the silver cord" (Kuyper 1890, 282-83).

This last remark sounded like a low blow, but it was probably an honest assessment. Up until this time, public schools were funded by the municipalities, which often demanded no tuition fees, in part to defeat potential competition from private schools which as a rule had no choice but to levy fees from the pupils and their families.

### **From local government to central government**

The schools struggle entered a critical phase in 1877. The conservative government of Jan Heemskerk tried to pass a compromise education bill, which satisfied neither liberals nor anti-revolutionaries: the former felt that the concessions to private schools were too generous, the latter that they were too little. Kuyper at this time was living in southern France; he had suffered a nervous breakdown after working too hard as a novice member of parliament, and he now sought healing in a prolonged period of non-activity and rest. His friend-foe Kappeyne was devoted to the parliamentary system, so he sent Kuyper a letter in which he expressed the hope that Kuyper would be restored in time to come home and join him in the house to attack the Heemskerk bill, even

if on opposite grounds. We need to have this debate, he added, “for whichever principle triumphs, it is desirable that each be powerfully defended.”<sup>9</sup>

When the government fell, new elections were held and the liberals won and formed the government. Now Kappeyne got his chance. As leader of the Cabinet he tabled an Elementary Education bill that brought some much needed reforms: (1) school buildings had to have windows, large ones, for fresh air, as well as decent toilets away from the back of the classroom; (2) the central government in The Hague would establish Normal Schools where teacher training could be seriously taken in hand; and (3) class size had to be reduced to a maximum of 40 (down from 70). Obviously, all this would cost a lot of money. However, “The Hague” would reimburse the municipalities for up to 30% of the increased costs. The catch: all schools, public and private, were obliged to meet the new standards, but private schools would not be reimbursed, as that was said to be unconstitutional.

Kappeyne’s aim was to settle the schools question once and for all, in line with his progressive, modern vision. He realized that his bill, if approved by parliament, would price private schools right out of the market. He honestly believed that would be best for education and for the country. Many years later, on May 31, 1905, Kuyper reminisced: “It would be a mistake to think that Kappeyne, when he proposed the law of ’78, was motivated by cruel intentions, that he acted as it were from a pure delight to suppress the minority. Far from it. The matter is this. Kappeyne was a man who held to a religion of sorts, a religion that can best be described as the apotheosis of the power of the State. He knew no higher power than the power of the self-creative, self-sufficient State. It was his firm conviction that this State alone fulfilled its duty toward the nation by guiding the people according to its principles.... But this doctrinaire stance, which I just now called his religion, this State which he almost worshipped, could also turn into the Moloch that could demand the sacrifice, if need be, of those children whose parents did not agree with him” (Kuyper 1908-10, Vol. IV, 962-63).

Kappeyne’s bill ran into heavy weather. When the bill passed parliament, private school supporters immediately mounted a “People’s Petition”, to be presented to the King. Redacted by Kuyper, who was back at work, it asked His Majesty to act in the spirit of the House of Orange and veto a discriminatory measure that would violate people’s freedom of conscience. The petition as such was a great success; within two weeks in mid summer, local action committees collected 305,000 signatures of concerned citizens, representing 114,000 school-

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<sup>9</sup> Kappeyne to Kuyper, 18 Oct. 1876; Kuyper-archief, no. 971; Historisch Documentatiecentrum voor het Nederlands Protestantisme (1800-heden), VU University, Amsterdam.

age children. The ruling elite were surprised by the depth and breadth of the protest, and the King felt cornered and asked his minister for advice. Kappeyne's *Report to the King*, published for all to read in the official gazette, the *Staatscourant* of August 13, 1878, stated that citizens were free, of course, to use their constitutional right to establish private schools; but when they then asked the State to help fund such schools they were embracing "the rankest Communism." Reality dictated, the Minister concluded, that private schools could never be more than "a luxury for the well-to-do and a form of charity for the needy." King William decided he had no choice but to carry out his constitutional duty and sign the controversial bill into law.<sup>10</sup>

Kuyper used the occasion of the successful mass movement to organize the local committees into a nation-wide political party with an articulated program – the birth of the Anti-Revolutionary Party, the first political party in The Netherlands to adopt an organizational structure. Membership and voting constituency were chiefly composed of members of the Reformed or Calvinist churches.

Kappeyne's law and the People's Petition had another ramification as well. Henceforth, on the date the bill was signed, a fundraiser was held every year throughout the country in support of private schools. When the mayors of the towns of Albllasserdam, Gorinchem and Delft forbade a door-to-door collection, Kuyper sent a complaint to the government. Kappeyne wanted to be a liberal of fair play; he wrote Kuyper to inform him that his staff had found Orders in Council of 1824 and 1841 dealing with public fundraising and on that basis he had instructed the mayors to cease their obstruction.<sup>11</sup>

### **The power of numbers**

The liberals continued to be an informal grouping in parliament, sometimes labelling themselves the "anti-clericals". By 1887 they felt that the time was ripe for a revision of the Constitution to allow an extension of the franchise. Any revision required a two-thirds majority in parliament. The "clericals", now consisting of the Anti-Revolutionaries and a majority of the Catholic members of parliament, when combined, controlled more than one third of the votes. Conscious of their power, they let it be known that they could not in good conscience support a revision of the Constitution unless the article on education would also be revised in order to clear the way for public funding of religious

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<sup>10</sup> This paragraph is based entirely on Feringa (1878).

<sup>11</sup> Kappeyne to Kuyper, 28 July 1879 and 16 Aug. 1879; Kuyper-archief, nos. 1702 and 1720; Historisch Documentatiecentrum voor het Nederlands Protestantisme (1800-heden), VU University, Amsterdam.

schools. Interestingly, the political standoff was resolved when the two sides next came to an informal understanding: leading liberal voices spoke up saying that the Constitution did “not necessarily” prohibit some public funding for private schools. Their opponents now felt free to help achieve the required majority for a constitutional revision (Wirtz 1926, 71).

And so it was done. The right to vote was extended to include the lower middle class. That class counted many church-going voters. Predictably, the “clericals” won the general elections and were mandated to form the next government. The resulting Calvinist-Catholic coalition government, led by Aeneas baron Mackay Jr., shepherded a revision of Kappeyne’s law through parliament in spite of vehement opposition by (now senator) Kappeyne and some of his fellow “anti-clericals”. The Elementary Education Act of 1889 in principle signalled a fundamental step toward parity treatment of all schools. It contained two reforms: (1) the national government would partially subsidize private schools to cover teacher salaries; and (2) public schools were required to levy a minimum of tuition, to mitigate their financial advantage over private schools (Wirtz 1926, 77).

### **Kuyper as Prime Minister**

The next decade saw the liberals back in office, but by 1901 the Calvinist-Catholic coalition regained power and Kuyper became prime minister. In the intervening years, school attendance had been made compulsory by the *Leerplichtwet* of 1900 (30 years behind Ontario and British Columbia, 130 years behind Prussia). Overnight, a growing number of lower-class families faced a dilemma: should they send their children to a private school of their choice, which would entail tuition fees they could scarcely afford, or to a public school which inculcated values and an outlook on life that were out of harmony with the teachings in church and home? In one of his last speeches in parliament, on May 31, 1905, Prime Minister Kuyper spoke on their behalf by summing up the heart of the issue in these memorable words: “To be forced to send one’s child to a school where it will be nurtured in a spirit that is opposed to that of its parents is an evil that must not be perpetuated any longer. The rich can afford to choose private schools, but the poor cannot. They too must have the opportunity to give their children an education that is in harmony with their basic beliefs.... There is no neutral education that is not governed by a spirit of its own, and the very spirit of the religiously neutral school is the antithesis of all positive belief” (Kuyper 1908-10, Vol. IV, 987, 989).

But that summary came at the end of his time as government leader. The story is much longer, with some very interesting details. For example, in my study of Kuyper’s parliamentary career I saw much evidence that he made it a

rule to completely master the minutiae of legislation that interested him, often quoting figures and statistics in his speeches as well as drawing comparisons with neighbouring countries. When the liberal government had introduced its truancy act in 1900, it had promised the opposition that private schools would be reimbursed for any new, additional costs. But on May 2, 1901, Kuyper – this was shortly before he became prime minister – informed the Chamber that he had discovered that “the Minister’s arithmetic is wanting.” Quoting precise guilder amounts, he explained that when he had gone over the promised subsidies for hiring more teachers and enlarging school facilities or building new ones, he had discovered that the cost of maintaining private schools had actually increased, and increased significantly. At the level of these subsidies, he calculated, private schools would still depend for the greater part on private funding. And he reminded his hearers that “we have few capitalists among us; tuition fees and donations come largely from the common people.” However, he concluded, “we will not act like beggars in this Chamber. What we want is a revision of the entire regulation of elementary education so that it may at last become *healthy*” (Kuyper 1908-10, Vol. I, 701, 705). In this way he reminded one and all that his party’s ultimate aim was to have subsidies replaced by equity, charity by equality.

When the elections of 1901 brought the Coalition to power, Kuyper began by taking the schools struggle from the elementary to the tertiary level of education. One of his first acts was to introduce a Higher Education bill that gave private universities a place under the sun next to the state universities. It sparked acrimonious debates, especially in the Senate, so he asked the King to dissolve the upper house, calculating that new elections would make it more representative of the electorate. And indeed, the subsequent elections resulted in a more cooperative Senate and the bill was passed.

Kuyper defended his proposal by referring – he was years ahead of the sociology of knowledge – to the inevitable role played by presuppositions and personal worldviews in the practice and pursuit of scholarship. This shows, he argued, that it is possible to have a bona fide university based on religious principles. As examples he cited many universities in the United States, a country he had toured in 1898 (Kuyper 1908-10, Vol. IV, 948). Moreover, he contended, it is not up to the State to determine which principles are acceptable and which are not in the universities of the land (Kuyper 1908-10, Vol. III, 50).

Shortly before the vote, the opposition in apparent desperation stooped to painting the Free University in Amsterdam<sup>12</sup> as “a cramming school where

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<sup>12</sup> The Free University opened its doors in Amsterdam in 1880. It was an initiative by Kuyper and his followers to have a university that was “free of church and state” yet based on the “Reformed [read: Calvinist or neo-Calvinist] principles.” In 1905 it had 3 departments, 12 professors, and 180

students are drilled in predigested, long outdated views" (Kuyper 1908-10, Vol. III, 71). On another day they referred to it as an institution governed by nepotism in its appointments (Kuyper's son Herman had recently been appointed there). At this, the prime minister bristled. Not only do members opposite "insult the serious academic work done at the Free University," he retorted on May 19, 1905, but they also "cast a slur on the scholarly qualities of my son. Members opposite may insult me here as much as they wish, but they have to keep their hands off my children!" (Kuyper 1908-10, Vol. IV, 941).

At last Kuyper tabled a revision of the Elementary Education Act. Its provisions were fourfold: (1) all teachers, in public or private schools, were eligible for the same civil service pensions; (2) all teachers were placed on an improved salary schedule, for which all school boards, private or public, would be reimbursed by the central government; (3) teachers must be hired on the basis of a written contract (ending some abuse in the private sector); and (4) all schools must submit a *leerplan* ('curriculum') to ensure quality of instruction (Kuyper 1908-10, Vol. IV, 395).

Although the bill was simply an enhancement of the policy adopted in 1889 and reaffirmed in 1900, this time opposition was fierce. No doubt its sponsor's personality and posture was no help; his self-confidence and intransigence only goaded them into resistance. The prime minister tried to win over the opposition with an historical overview. On January 30, 1903, he argued that the grave difficulties his generation faced in the area of education, also in the Netherlands, stemmed chiefly from the fact "that the nineteenth century began with a more or less unified worldview so that all of education was organized in the same spirit." But times have changed: "it has become clear that this unity of worldview is beyond recall. At every point it has fractured.... Today we are dealing with several worldviews, which sharply oppose each other. That being so, the power of the State must not be used in favour of one of them. The contest between the worldviews must be decided in a free grappling of the spirits – provided the terms of the tournament are equal – so that at last both sides can clear the air and make it possible to reach a compromise, a certain *modus vivendi* that satisfies both sides. I believe we have begun to arrive at such a happy *modus vivendi* in the area of elementary education and that we will eventually be able to complete it" (Kuyper 1908-10, Vol. IV, 732).

The opposition was not persuaded. Members warned that private schools were responsible for an erosion of national unity. Kuyper's rejoinder drew on his

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students. It was operated by the *Vereniging voor Hoger Onderwijs op Gereformeerde Grondslag* ('Association for higher education on Reformed principles') which in 1905 had 10,020 dues-paying members contributing 25,465 guilders, supplemented by the proceeds of voluntary collections worth 13,742 guilders. Figures in Roelink (1956, 118, 126, 127).

long-standing grievance against the spirit of modernity that privileged sameness over otherness (see Kuyper 1869, cited in Bratt 1998, 19-44). The differentiation in our national culture, he held forth, has been a good thing: "When we had a uniform public education system the spiritual temper of the nation was down. But struggle ensued and a rich life blossomed forth in the fight for schools where one's principles and beliefs are propagated.... We are told that this has taken place at the price of national unity. I dispute that. One should not entertain erroneous notions about the unity of national life. Unity must not be sought in uniformity" (Kuyper 1908-10, Vol. II, 658). Kuyper envisioned a unity of national accommodation and compromise, collectively borne up by the several "pillars" that made up the nation's population.<sup>13</sup>

One of his toughest opponents to hold out the longest was the aging senator Samuel van Houten. Kuyper addressed his position on February 1, 1905 in the following words: "The honourable member from Friesland and I appear to disagree very little on the meaning of justice, but not on what freedom means. His freedom leads only to State tyranny. He wants the government to operate schools that teach young people to practice critical thinking even if it goes against their faith. In other words, it is to be a school that satisfies Mr. van Houten and his like-minded friends and with which those who think like him are content. That school, he says, must be financed from the public treasury, hence must receive favoured treatment, because that is the only real school. Everybody else has full freedom to establish other schools, provided they do not ask for money from the public treasury. You are entirely free, but you will have to pay for it yourself. Thus the honourable member first takes from the purse of those who do not support public education the money needed for the government schools that he supports, and when the non-supporters have spent all they could on education he says to them: Now that I have pumped you dry you are welcome to establish schools with your own money" (Kuyper 1908-10, Vol. IV, 902).

After this pointed attack, Kuyper continued: "That is not what I understand by freedom. As a minister of the Crown I refuse to endorse for one minute the view that one citizen can claim more rights than another. I do not wish to abridge the rights of Mr. van Houten and his adherents. I do not seek a single privilege for myself and my adherents. But what has to stop is that there is

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<sup>13</sup> "Pillars" is the sociological term for the institutionalized worldview pluralism that characterizes Dutch society to this day: not only education but also the media, trade unions, farmers' organizations, hospitals, sports clubs, etc., are divided over separate organizations committed to Catholic, Calvinist, or secular humanist principles. Attempts at "depillarization" after 1945 have been only partially successful. The pillars have to share the country, its space, its economy, its social services, so they are forced to work together. Together they hold up the one national culture – a state of unity in diversity, with a level playing field from which no group is excluded.

a political party that says: we and our adherents have a right to all the benefits of the public treasury, and those who do not agree with us will just have to wander about in the wilderness and live off wild honey and grasshoppers. That leads to dividing our people into two parts: one that lives off the State, the lucky ones, and another that is deprived, left out. There must be equality in the Netherlands, both for those who hold to the Christian and for those who hold to the modernist worldview" (Kuyper 1908-10, Vol. IV, 902–03).

A few months later, on May 31, 1905, the prime minister put into words what may be the simplest yet most fundamental issue in this entire controversy about schooling in a nation with a religiously diverse population. Facing Van Houten, he remarked: "The honourable member assumes that elementary education is the responsibility of the government.... We maintain that the first responsibility lies with the parents, not the government" (Kuyper 1908-10, Vol. IV, 982). This echoed what he had said when he first introduced his bill, back in December of 1902, using an historical analogy. In answer to a question from a member who belonged to his own party, he replied: "The member for Zierikzee points out that compulsory school attendance has resulted in a painful loss of income for low-income families. I agree that in those cases municipal poor relief is called for. I do not agree with Mr. Troelstra [leader of the social democrats] that the solution is to provide school meals and school clothing. It is the primary responsibility of parents to feed and clothe their offspring.... The ancient philosopher Plato wanted to shift child-rearing from the parents to the State. Some circles today are already starting to say that all births must take place in a state hospital, that newborns must be put in daycare centres, toddlers in kindergartens, and young children in elementary schools where they will be fed and clothed. That would end in putting the State in charge of child-rearing and so destroy the family. This Cabinet, by virtue of its principle, cannot and will not support this trend" (Kuyper 1908-10, Vol. II, 314).

On April 5, 1905, the prime minister once again addressed the reputed threat to national unity. He stated with some emphasis: "National unity is absolutely not promoted by a common school. Amsterdam from the beginning provided separate schools for Jewish children with Jewish teachers. One would think that Jew-baiting must have been rampant in that city. There is a lot of that in Russia, in Vienna, in Berlin, but I never noticed any of it in Amsterdam." Next, Kuyper tried to turn the tables on the opposition by arguing that it was the common school that had brought division in the nation: "Under the common school tolerance was so sparse that after 1834 the Seceders<sup>14</sup> were jeered and scorned; and in 1853 we even had no-popery riots! After the common school

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<sup>14</sup> A reference to the *Afgescheidenen* who seceded from the national church to preserve orthodoxy.

was reinforced in 1857, it did so little to foster toleration that the liberal press never tired of fanning the flames of discord between Catholics and Protestants.<sup>15</sup> So what remains of the claim that separate schools break the unity of the nation and that the common school unites all? Nothing. It is an assertion that cannot pass the test.... National unity is in danger precisely when justice is denied, when liberty is abridged, when our citizens are hurt I do not say in their material interests but in their deepest convictions. That is what sows bitterness and that is what divides a nation" (Kuyper 1908-10, Vol. IV, 407-08).

Partisan though he was, Prime Minister Kuyper could also act the statesman. He ended this last speech with an appeal to the common interest: "Let us rather join hands and resolve together to raise the formation and development of our people to ever higher levels. That cannot help but heighten people's sense of unity. The entire nation will benefit, and that is what this Government expects from the passage of this bill" (Kuyper 1908-10, Vol. IV, 409).

### A national legacy

With these last quoted words Kuyper gave expression to a spirit that has been a hallmark of Dutch politics in the twentieth century: a genuine and generous accommodation of differences.

The bill of 1905 passed, and in 1920 the long saga of the schools struggle came to an end when all parties agreed to full parity for public and private schools, without exception. Today, the majority of Dutch families use private schools – without financial penalty. Professionally staffed and regularly inspected, all schools – secular, Protestant, Catholic, Muslim, Montessori, Waldorf, and still other varieties – enjoy equal funding. To be sure, in our century, the growing presence of non-western cultural groups in the Netherlands has raised questions among some people whether the education system will continue to fit the fabric of Dutch culture. Nonetheless, public policy continues to honour the spirit of mutual respect and tolerance. It is the fruit of more than a century of principled political debate in that low country by the sea.

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<sup>15</sup> They were divided over the use of the Bible in the common school.

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### About the author

Harry Van Dyke was born in Rotterdam and moved with his family to Canada at the age of twelve after having completed six years of Christian elementary school. He attended five years of public high school in St. Catharines, Ontario, after which he earned a B.A. in history at Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan. He returned to Holland to attend the Free University in Amsterdam where he earned a D.Litt. He returned to Canada to teach history at Redeemer University College in Ancaster, Ontario, from which he retired in 2005. Since then he has been involved in translation projects featuring Abraham Kuyper and the Dutch philosopher Herman Dooyeweerd.

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### **Écoles laïques ou écoles libres: Abraham Kuyper intervient au Parlement néerlandais dans une controverse de longue date**

La lutte pour la liberté éducative aux Pays-Bas dura de 1840 jusqu'à 1920. Bien que cette liberté fût garantie par la Constitution de 1848, l'élite gouvernante insista pendant de longues décennies que seules les écoles laïques, opérées par le gouvernement et astreintes à la neutralité en matière de religion, avaient le droit aux deniers publics; les écoles privées, d'obédience religieuse, étaient exclues. Cela faisait que les parents qui envoyavaient leurs enfants à une école chrétienne privée payaient deux fois: d'abord comme contribuables, pour les écoles laïques, et ensuite pour

leur propre école. Les parents chrétiens des classes pauvres se trouvaient donc devant un dilemme: ou bien éduquer leurs enfants dans l'esprit du foyer et de l'église, mais c'était coûteux, ou bien les envoyer à l'école laïque, neutre en matière de religion, mais gratuite – ou bien ne pas les envoyer à l'école du tout (ce n'était pas obligatoire). Le docteur Abraham Kuyper, journaliste et théologien, était un champion important pour le traitement égalitaire des deux types d'écoles. Pendant de longues années, lui et ses adhérents firent campagne contre cette inégalité, surtout parce qu'elle menaçait la liberté de la conscience. Ils n'acceptaient pas que l'éducation puisse être neutre en matière de religion. Kuyper prenait souvent la parole sur cette question comme député et, de 1901 à 1905, comme premier ministre, avec une telle éloquence qu'un choix de citations de ses discours au Parlement ferait une anthologie intéressante. La lutte fut enfin résolue quand le Trésor accorda une subvention égale aux deux systèmes éducatifs.

### **Overheidsscholen of Vrije Scholen? Abraham Kuyper's uitspraken over een langlopende controverse in het Nederlandse parlement.**

Nederland heeft van 1840 tot 1920 een schoolstrijd doorgemaakt om vrijheid van onderwijs. Hoewel deze vrijheid in de Grondwet van 1848 was vastgelegd, werd door leidinggevende kringen decennia lang volgehouden dat alleen openbare scholen voor financiële steun in aanmerking kwamen. Bijzondere, confessionele scholen zouden hiervan uitgesloten zijn. Dit betekende dat de ouders die van een bijzondere school gebruik maakten, voor onderwijs feitelijk dubbel betaalden: eerst als belastingplichtigen voor de openbare school, en daarna nog eens voor hun eigen school. Lagere inkomenklassen van kerkelijke huize stonden voor de keus: onderwijs voor hun kinderen in de geest van gezin en kerk, waarvoor schoolgeld op tafel moest, dan wel onderwijs aan de religieus-neutrale openbare school, dat kosteloos was, dan wel géén schoolbezoek voor hun kinderen (leerplicht kwam pas in 1900). De journalist-theoloog Dr. Abraham Kuyper en zijn volgelingen streden jarenlang tegen deze ongelijkheid, te meer daar zovelen hierdoor in gewetensnood kwamen. Als kamerlid en later ook als premier sprak Kuyper vaak over de kwestie, zó welsprekend, dat een verzameling van citaten de moeite van kennismaking loont. De strijd is uiteindelijk geslecht door voortaan beide schoolsystemen – openbaar en bijzonder – in gelijke mate door de overheid te laten financieren.