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Coffee Colored Calvinists

Neo-Calvinist Perspectives on Race in the Dutch Colonial Empire

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Abstract

This article aims to discuss neo-Calvinist perspectives on race in the Dutch Colonial Empire. How did the colonial racial practice affect the Dutch neo-Calvinist perspectives on race? This article is based on new research: an analysis of a race-debate among neo-Calvinist church leaders in the Netherlands and colonial Indonesia. It is a debate which took place in the Dutch Christian weekly *De Heraut* in 1893 and 1894 and focused primarily on the practice of racial separation in the reformed church of Batavia. This article will describe, analyze and criticize this debate and bring it into context by making use of a model for racial categorization proposed by the Dutch scholar Diennek Hondius. In the end, it argues that the main argument of the neo-Calvinists for defending a separation policy was based on a linguistic, societal and cultural distinction. The neo-Calvinists however, ignored their own racial prejudice and preserved their church-practice of racial disjunction.

Keywords

colonialism – racism – race – history – imperialism – discrimination – supremacy – institutional

Introduction

White male neo-Calvinist theologians are often framed as racists. In the USA it was their voices that defended racism during the nineteen sixties. During these years white churches were reluctant towards—and frequently downright opposed to—southern civil rights movements.¹ Apparently the ‘black voice’ barely existed in theology, as the famous James Cone demonstrated in 1969 in his *For My People: Black Theology and the Black Church*:

Is there a message from Christ to the countless number of blacks whose lives are smothered under white society? Unless theology can become “ghetto theology,” a theology which speaks to black people, the gospel has no promise of life for black [people]—it is a lifeless message.²

The same questioning of white domination in theology was brought forward on the 2015 Kuyper-conference at Princeton Theological Seminary (PTS) by PTS-theologian Yolanda Pierce. Pierce presented a paper entitled ‘*Blacker Than Coal: Race, Theological Language, and Power*.’ In her interesting presentation she demonstrated a characterization of the historical theological discourse as a completely white stronghold.³ According to Pierce, the academic field of theology as a whole, and the Princeton Theological Seminary specific, was an example of racism *par excellence*. Princeton University was founded by pro-slavery theologians of the eighteenth century and maintained an active slavery policy for a long time.⁴ In order to preserve white supremacy and power,

1 Jamie Arpin Ricci, ‘Racism and Christianity. Interview With Drew G.I. Hart’, *The Huffington Post*, January 14, 2016.

2 James H. Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power* (New York, Orbis Books, 1969). And: James H. Cone, *For My People: Black Theology and the Black Church. Where have we been and where are we going?* (New York, Orbis books 1984). As quoted in: M. Shawn Copeland, ‘Revisiting racism. Black theology and a legacy of oppression’, *America. The National Catholic Review*, July 7–14, 2014.

3 M. Shawn Copeland, ‘Revisiting racism. Black theology and a legacy of oppression’, *America. The National Catholic Review*, July 7–14, 2014.

4 Besides Princeton, also Yale, and William & Mary—together the three oldest colleges in the United States—were the cradle for pro-slavery theology.

The discussion about Princeton University as the stronghold of white-supremacy erupts every now and then. Recently with protests against the campus-remembrance on Woodrow Wilson, “an unapologetic racist whose administration rolled back the gains that African-Americans achieved just after the Civil War” As described in: ‘The Case Against Woodrow

white theologians often used arguments which resonated in such terms and phrases as ‘moral obligation’ towards black slaves, supposedly demonstrating a ‘guardianship’ towards black. After all, it were the whites who were destined to lead the world. For Pierce, the Dutch reformed theologian Abraham Kuyper (1837–1920), who spoke at Princeton in 1898 and who did not reject this ‘abject past’ of PTS, was an exponent of the racist legacy of the pro-slavery theology. In fact, as Pierce implied, Kuyper was a racist.

Listening to the inspiring keynote of Pierce in Princeton, I realized that the arguments given by white pro-slavery theologians were similar to arguments made by Kuyper and Dutch colonial specialists such as Alexander Idenburg (1861–1935) in defending the Dutch colonial policy in the East Indies. During my research on the Dutch colonial policy of the neo-Calvinist politician Idenburg I recognized the same moral vocabulary. In their political statements Kuyper and Idenburg spoke about the moral obligation to educate the inhabitants of the Dutch Colonial Empire. At the same time, they defended societal inequality by maintaining the distinction between the white rulers and the indigenous (yellow, brown or black) population which had no civil rights. How can we describe the Dutch neo-Calvinist perspectives on race around 1900 in the Dutch Colonial Empire? This article will search for an answer. If we want to understand the reformed ideas on race in the colonial context we have to search for a debate among them. I found one in Kuyper’s own Christian weekly *De Heraut*. In this article I will give an analysis of this race-debate. A debate that has never been analyzed before.

In this article I will first of all give an analysis of a race-debate among Dutch reformed Christians during the years 1893 and 1894. By doing this I will bring to light some new insights in the reformed ideas about race and racism. It gives us new insights in the way of thinking on the relation of race and Christianity⁵ by reformed Western Christians in that era. Secondly, I will compare this with the model of European race-categories as put in writing by the Dutch scholar Diennek Hondius. This article finishes with my conclusion that the main argument of the neo-Calvinists for defending a separation policy in the church was based on linguistic, societal and cultural distinctions. In their defense, the neo-Calvinists lacked the recognition of their own racial prejudices and supremacy. They vindicate their church-practice by means of

Wilson at Princeton’, *The New York Times*, November 24, 2015. Also see: ‘Woodrow Wilson’s racist legacy’, *The Washington Post*, December 11, 2015.

5 Puchinger and De Bruijn paid attention to the debate, although not extensively and not critical: George Puchinger and Jan de Bruijn, *Briefwisseling Kuyper-Idenburg* (Franeker: T. Wever, 1985) 134–136.

racial disjunction. Although there existed unquestionably (latent) feelings of racism among reformed Christians, the Dutch reformed Christian perspective was ambivalent and dualistic rather than normative. It depended on the person and situation as to what kind of racism we can speak of. The debate proves that an ambiguous and complex relation existed between race, neo-Calvinism and colonialism.

Before we start I have to clarify and define the word *racism*. We have to keep in mind that racism has its etymological origins in colonialism of the seventeenth century. Thus racism and colonialism are strongly related. I will make use of the definition of racism, given by the Oxford Dictionary. According, racism can be described as: 'prejudice, discrimination, or antagonism directed against someone of a different race based on the belief that one's own race is superior'.

Historical Backgrounds

In the wake of the Enlightenment the notion of 'race' was transformed from a clear homogeneous 'innocent' noun to a loaded synonym for everything that had to do with the racial 'Other'.⁶ Up until the late nineteenth century the Dutch politicians and journalists barely spoke about race or racism. Most of the Dutch people believed that race-issues were absent in the Netherlands because of its homogeneous white population. Most of the Europeans thought the same about their own country. There was no European history on race relations or even much of race awareness at all.⁷ Indeed, the European imperial powers had overseas colonial areas with a 'brown' or 'yellow' or 'mixed' population, with the famous colonial societal classification: the lighter the skin, the better. And indeed: up until the end of the nineteenth century, the notion of white rulers versus indigenous mass still existed, but, according to these Europeans, that had nothing to do with racism.

For the Dutch general citizen, the public awareness of racism occurred during the nineteenth century. For instance, by the politician and emancipation-writer Wolter Robert van Hoëvell (1812–1879) who wrote in 1854 his *Slaven en vrijen onder de Nederlandsche wet* [Slaves and freedman under the Dutch law].

6 E. Nathaniël Gates (ed.), *Racial classifications and history. Critical Race Theory. Essays on the Social Construction and Reproduction of 'Race'* (New York and London: Garland Publishing Inc., 1997).

7 Dienke Hondius, *Blackness in Western Europe: Racial Patterns of Paternalism and Exclusion* (New Brunswick New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 2014).

It was a strong plea against slavery and racism in the Dutch East Indies (Indonesia) and the West Indies (Dutch Guyana, Caribbean). During the century—and particularly in the latter half—new ideas on race and racism entered the East Indies. At the same time an increasing pan-Asian thought spread its wings all over Asia. This development can be described as a search for self-awareness and for common identity for the Asian people ('Asia for Asians'). In historiography the Japanese victory on Russia is anchored as the first turning point in modern racial relations between 'yellow' and 'white'. It widened the gap between the Asian East over against European West, as Cemil Aydin pointed out in his *The politics of Anti-Westernism in Asia*.⁸

Despite these voices of pan-Asianism, most Europeans in the Dutch Empire did not notice a growing gap. For them the white supremacy was a definitive and an enduring status quo. Moreover, people in the Netherlands in the 1880's and early 1890's had no need to speak about racial inequality in the colonial areas, nor about colonial politics at all. It was Herman Bavinck (1854–1921) who complained about the lack of interest in the Dutch colonial policy.⁹ This indifference occurred also in debates on race, on racial diversity or on racial segregation. When newspapers around 1890 wrote about race-issues, they focused primarily on foreign debates or events, for example in North-America or South-Africa. However, despite the wavering between ignorance and denial such debates did force some Dutch to pay attention to colonialism and race.

The Debate

After the merger of two Reformed denominations in 1892 the church-leaders of the new orthodox Reformed Churches in the Netherlands—the church of Kuyper and Bavinck—had not only to reformulate a new church policy for the Dutch in the country, but had also to reconsider a policy towards the Dutch colonial areas as well.¹⁰ The issue was discussed at the General Synod

8 Cemil Aydin, *The politics of Anti-Westernism in Asia. Visions of world order in pan-islamic and pan-Asian thought* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007) 9.

9 J. de Bruijn and G. Harinck, eds., *Een Leidse vriendschap. De briefwisseling tussen Herman Bavinck en Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje, 1875–1921* (Baarn: ten Have, 1999).

10 A couple of years earlier Bavinck held a lecture about mission and colonialism: H. Bavinck, "Waarmede moet de zending beginnen: met de bearbeiding van geheel volken of met den enkele?" Lecture held at a mission-day of the Christian Reformed Foreign Mission, June 28, 1887, Leiden. See: *Het Mosterdzaad. Orgaan van de heidenzending der Chr. Ger. Kerk* 7, no. 1 (January 1888): 1–15.

in 1893 in the city of Dordrecht. The ink was barely dry on the papers about the issues when the decisions of the General Synod already sparked a sensitive and polemic debate. A discussion on the issue in Kuyper's Reformed weekly, *De Heraut*, lasted almost an entire year.¹¹ Kuyper initiated the debate by publishing an article of Johan Cornelis Sikkel (1855–1920), an influential pastor from the city of The Hague and a delegate of the Synod.

According to Sikkel—who on Saturday October 7 already had published his article in the regional reformed weekly *Zuid-Hollandsche Kerkbode*, 1893—the Christian reformed sister church in Batavia (later called Jakarta) enforced an active and systematic policy of racial segregation.¹² Sikkel had heard about rumors—anononymously—that the European Christians in this church (mainly Dutch) did not allow Javanese Reformed Christians to attend worship services and Holy Communion. According to Sikkel—and some other delegates of the Synod agreed with him—the white Christian Reformed Europeans in Batavia maintained a status of inequality and servility. Without further questioning or researching the anonymous accusations, or underlying reasons of these accusations, Sikkel concluded that inside the reformed church of Batavia: “the white man has a higher position than the black” (...) “the white man keeps the black man down and below him.” Concerning the Javanese believers, Sikkel stated: “For those coffee colored people there is separated preaching, separated holy communion, and even a separated church governance”. Moreover, Sikkel complained: “It is never the intention of protestant mission to incorporate

11 The debate took place in *De Heraut*. Contributions are dated on: October 15, 1893; December 10, 1893; January 19, 1894; February 4, 1894; February 18, 1894; February 21, 1894; April 15, 1894; May 20, 1894; May 27, 1894; June 17, 1894; July 1, 1894; July 5, 1894; August 12, 1894; August 19, 1894; September 9, 1894.

Beyond these issues, some articles also were published in church weekly's and missionary weekly's such as *Zuid-Hollandsche Kerkbode*, *De Bazuin* and *Het Mosterdzaadje*.

Participants in the debate were: rev. J.C. Sikkel, prof. dr. A. Kuyper, A.W.F. Idenburg, dr. L. Adriaanse, miss. A. Bolwijn, rev. J.H. Donner, miss. F. Lion Cachet, J. van der Valk, rev. K. Fernhout, miss. J.C. Cleton, dr. P. Jansz., A. Dem'os (pseudonym of a former missionary from Surabaya).

12 From December 19, 1873 onward, the Dutch missionary E. Haan, send by the Christian-reformed Church (Christelijk Gereformeerde Kerk), tried to establish a church. He held his first service (in Dutch) in August 1874. Officially the church was founded in 1877. From 1924 the Malay-speaking part of this community had their own pastor. The church still exists as: Gereja Kristin [Protestan] Indonesia Kwitang, at the Kwitangstreet no. 28.

I visited this church in March and April 2016 and met the helpful pastor Agus Mulyono. In the consistory hung the enlisted pictures of all the pastors from the past, all the way back to missionary Haan.

Javanese believers. Mission is a matter of Europeans only". And to consolidate their power in the church, the Europeans condemned the Javanese as having to sit "not next to the white man, but on the skirt of his garment (...) or under his feet." Sikkel's vitriolic conclusion was crystal clear: the reformed church in Batavia was nothing more than an unchristian church, maybe even a racist church: "If Jesus Christ would go to Batavia to preach, to worship, and to go the Holy Communion, where would he go? I think he would go to the black rather than the white church."

In response to Sikkel's critics, Kuyper praised this pastor for his 'excellent' commentary and contribution on a very 'sad fact' that occurred in the Batavian church—as the theologian wrote on 15 October and 10 December 1893.¹³ Kuyper agreed with Sikkel's rejection of the racial segregation in Batavia's church. For him this colonial habit of segregation was an illustration of the strength of secular racism. Racism had to be avoided and rejected because of Jesus Christ himself. In Christ every racial distinction had to be erased. Everybody was equal. Or as Kuyper wrote firmly, referring to famous bible-verses: "In Jesus Christ there is neither a Jew, nor a Greek, a Scyth nor a Barbarian. And for that reason, this sin must be banned from the Indies". And later, he wrote, about this 'gross abuse'.¹⁴ Another critic, which Kuyper obtained from dr. L. Adriaanse, confirmed the accusations made by Sikkel.¹⁵ Adriaanse was a pastor who—within one year—would go to the Indies to be a missionary. In preparation of this new function the reverend spoke two (anonymous) Christian navy officers from the navy bases in Den Helder, north of Amsterdam. These officers had just arrived from the Indies where they had been members of the reformed church in Batavia. Within this church these men encountered the astonishing discriminating colonial habits of racial divide. For them the visit of the reformed church in Batavia was transferred into a complete disillusion. Like Sikkel, their comments on the practices in the church in Batavia were also crystal clear: this church was build on racism.

Introducing Idenburg

The statements of Sikkel, Kuyper and Adriaanse—none of whom had ever travelled to the Indies themselves—caused indignant reactions, mainly from

13 De Heraut, October 15, 1893; December 10, 1894. See: Puchinger, *Briefwisseling*, 136, note 2,3.

14 De Heraut, December 10, 1893.

15 De Heraut, May 27, 1894.

pastors, missionaries, and elders who actually lived in the Indies. The first and most important reactions came from the young army-officer Alexander Idenburg (1861–1935). In this article I will focus on his contributions.

In the period of 1900–1930 Idenburg would become the most important colonial specialist of the Dutch Reformed Antirevolutionary Party (ARP). He became member of the Dutch Parliament, minister of Colonial Affairs (three-fold), governor of Suriname, governor-general of the East-Indies, vice-president of the ARP, State Councilor, and Minister of State. Idenburg became known as the first executer of the Dutch civilization mission towards the colonial areas. He became a national and international highly respected politician and governor. In historiography he is known as the ‘incarnation of the Christian variant of the ethical colonial policy’.¹⁶ Back in 1893 however, when the *De Heraut* ‘race debate’ took place, Idenburg was the great unknown on the reformed theological battlefield. It was the first time this young army-officer was engaged into a public debate.¹⁷ In a letter to Kuyper—dated December 8, 1893—a fragile and insecure Idenburg mailed his comments. It was the first commentary on Sikkel’s. Within a couple of months four more articles of Idenburg followed.

Idenburg was bewildered by the statement of Sikkel and Kuyper. On the 12th of January and 18th of February 1894 Kuyper published two critical reactions of Alexander Idenburg. And later on there followed two more publications. Idenburg was a devoted orthodox-Christian and an elder in the reformed church of Batavia. He had close contact with Dutch reformed Synod-delegates, and his father, P.J. Idenburg, a medical doctor and elder of the reformed church in Utrecht, was a delegate himself.

The first response to Sikkel’s accusations made by Idenburg, was published by Kuyper in *De Heraut* on 21 January 1894.¹⁸ The second, a more extended article—written by Idenburg—was entitled ‘Black and White’ and was published by Kuyper on 18 February. In the following months, Idenburg contributed two more articles, respectively on 15 April and on 12 August. In his articles he responded to the allegations made by his fellow reformed brethren in the Netherlands. According to Idenburg the conclusions of Sikkel and Kuyper were

16 Pieter Holtrop, “Een zendeling op de troon in Buitenzorg? Het regeringsbeleid van A.W.F. Idenburg als gouverneur-generaal van Nederlands-Indië (1909–1916),” *Documentatieblad voor de Geschiedenis van de Nederlandse Zending en Overzeese Kerken* 5, no. 2 (1998), 43.

17 These articles of Idenburg in *De Heraut* contained two topics. One topic focused on Christian military hospices in the Indies. The second topic was on race. Kuyper published both contributions in the late 1893 and early 1894.

18 Puchinger, *Briefwisseling*, 136, note 4.

completely beyond reality.¹⁹ During the eleven years that Idenburg lived in the Indies he never discovered any kind of racism in the church. It was true that the reformed church of Batavia had separated services between Malay and Dutch, but that was because of 'language, educational development and societal rank', and definitely not because of race or feelings of moral superiority, as Idenburg had argued.²⁰ In his contributions Idenburg defined two arguments.

Reformed Argument 1

First, Idenburg came up with a linguistic argument. He explained that, because of the very international environment, there was not one clear, uniform lingua franca that dominated others in the capital Batavia. Similar to the biblical Babel, Batavia had its own confusion of tongues. On the streets one could hear Batavian Malay, the Sundanese and Madurese language, Sumatran, Chinese, French, German, English, Portuguese or Dutch. Therefore, the possibility to speak but one language in church was but an illusion. The question, was how to hold services with the linguistic differences? How could there be a united Christian community? According to Idenburg, the best solution was to uphold separated services and yet simultaneously preserve a one church-government. This was the situation that originated from the beginning of the foundation of this Batavia Christian-reformed church in 1873 by the missionary E. Haan.²¹

Idenburg compared this Batavian situation with the Reformed Church in the Netherlands during the seventeenth century in which separate services were held for Wallonian and Dutch Christians. Separate services, but one goal: to get inspired by the gospel of Jesus Christ. To get inspired, Idenburg argued,

19 Idenburg to Kuyper, December 8, 1893. Puchinger, *Briefwisseling*, 134, 135; *De Heraut*, January 19, 1894.

20 *De Heraut*, January 19, 1894.

For race-diversity in the Netherlands East Indies see: F.H. Sysling, *The Archipelago of difference. Physical anthropology in the Netherlands East Indies, ca. 1890–1960*. Dissertation, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, 2013.

21 H.E. Niemeijer, Th. Van den End and Tj. Mualim, *Arsip pengurus Gereja Protestan di Hindia-Belanda/Indonesia 1844–1950*. Dengan daftar dokumen-dokumen tentang masa pendudukan Jepang, 1942–1945, 2 volumes (Jakarta: ANRI, 2010). For further readings on Indonesian/Dutch church history see the extensive work of (a.o.) prof. dr. J.S. Aritonang, dr. Th. van den End and dr. Chr. G.F. De Jong.

See for the long history of the reformed church in colonial Indonesia: G.J. Schutte (ed.), *Het Indisch Sion. De Gereformeerde kerk onder de Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie* (Hilversum: Verloren 2002).

people had to understand the preacher. True religious education could only occur in case of mutual understanding of the issues. And that was only possible by speaking each other's language. Because of the practical impossibility to do so, a linguistic separation—yet within one church—was the best practical solution. Moreover, it was the apostle Paul who had written in 1 Cor.14:9: “Unless you speak intelligible words with your tongue, how will anyone know what you are saying? You will just be speaking into the air.”²²

Idenburg quoted the well-known missionary dr. F. Lion Cachet, who had just written an extended inspection-report on mission. On behalf of the Dutch reformed Synod he had to inspect the reformed church in the East Indies. In his conclusions Lion Cachet pointed out that among the reformed Christians in Batavia there was a ‘Malaysian’ rather than an ‘indigenous community’. This Malay community was formed by language, not by race. When race should be the leading factor, he seemed to imply, there should be an ‘indigenous community’ as well. According to Lion Cachet, the rumors in the Netherlands—that a member of the Malaysian community was not allowed to visit the European services in the reformed church of Batavia—were completely besides the truth. In this tiny reformed church everybody was welcome. This was shown every Sunday. Practically, however, as Lion Cachet explained, most of the Christians went to the services which they actually could understand.²³ Idenburg confirmed this policy of tolerance towards the indigenous people.

Reformed Argument 2

The second argument made by Idenburg was of social rank. Idenburg stated that before God's throne there was no difference between races or people, other than the fundamental disconnection between believer and non-believer: “we are all—white and brown—equally sinners and equally washed in ‘one blood’”²⁴ Thus, in the Dutch Colonial Empire, and certainly within Christian communities, people had to make a distinction between being religious or non-religious. But that is not a choice between different races. Yet, other than these biological diversities, Idenburg also acknowledged the existence of a divide between cultures. In the Dutch colonial empire, as Idenburg continued in his article, some races were more developed in Christianity than others. This had

²² 1 Cor. 14:9.

²³ *De Heraut*, February 18, 1894.

²⁴ *De Heraut*, February 18, 1894.

to do with cultural and educational development. Therefore the Dutch had a duty to apply a more social policy towards colonial areas and their inhabitants. The Dutch had a moral obligation to civilize the indigenous mass. The ultimate goal was to civilize and Christianize them.

The reformed described Dutch colonialism as Kuyper had described in *Ons Program* ('Our Program')—, the political program and guideline of the reformed political party since 1879.²⁵ In chapter 19 we read about the overseas colonial possessions. According to the neo-Calvinists the Dutch had a moral 'guardianship', a God-given responsibility, for colonial areas in general and for the indigenous people in particular. According to Kuyper the best way to develop the Indies was provided in the concept of association: 'no colonialism, no expansion, but association.'²⁶ Association was a manner to merge the culture of the East with the wisdom of the West. It was a policy that tried to create a unity of Eastern Asian and Western Dutch: united politically and nationally by a bond which racial differences could not weaken.²⁷ This concept contradicted the far reaching assimilation-policy, as the French applied in some of their colonies. For Dutch Christians a fundamental element of the association was Christianity. To share the great heritage of Christianity in the West, these Christians were convinced that the only way to educate the indigenous towards was through mission. The reformed motto was: Take the Javanese people by their hands and educate them in Christianity.²⁸ By the reformed Christians this responsibility was taken lightly, and without much thought. But they spoke of it, as if it was a tremendous responsibility, a heavy yoke and burden for the Dutch.

As an elder in the Batavian reformed church, Idenburg—different than Kuyper—operated in an environment in which he was confirmed in the neo-Calvinist perspective of the 'undeveloped' Javanese Christians. Idenburg acknowledged the need for mission and Christian education. He wrote: "the

25 A. Kuyper, *Ons Program* [Our Program] (Amsterdam: J.H. Kruyt, 1879, 1880).

26 Kuyper, *Ons Program*.

27 Edouard J.M. Schmutzer, *Dutch Colonial Policy and the Search for Identity in Indonesia: 1920–1931* (Leiden, Brill, 1977) 25–31.

28 As a prime-minister of the Netherlands in 1901–1905 Kuyper transformed this 'reformed colonialism' into a colonial political program, known as the Ethical Policy. Kuyper's protégé Alexander Idenburg became minister of Colonial Affairs in 1902 and had to execute this ethical policy. For Kuyper, Bavinck and their perspectives on colonialism, see: George Harinck, 'Universality and dualism. Herman Bavinck and the Debate on Whether to Civilize the Dutch East Indies through Missions or Education', *Calvin Theological Journal*, vol. 48 (2013), no. 2., 217–233.

native Christian is like a child that needs to be fed with Milk. The ministry of the Word has to be very, very simple. So simple that—even in the smallest and most back-ward village in the Netherlands—people cannot imagine how simple it has to be.”²⁹ Reformed people like Idenburg and Kuyper saw Javanese Christians as culturally, economically and religiously underdeveloped. According to Idenburg, this had nothing to do with any kind of racial or moral haughtiness, but with religious education and the societal place provided by God. He was convinced that the Dutch reformed were not higher or better than Javanese Christians. The Dutch, however, were predestined to play another role in history. Reformed Dutchman like Idenburg denied the Erasmusian free will and embraced a kind of ‘theological determinism’.³⁰ The main task for Dutch Christians was to educate the Javanese in Christianity, and secondly try to develop them in economics.

In addition to this, the *Heraut*-debate continued with a clear statement of J. van der Valk. He objected that even in the hypothetical case there was no linguistic gap between the European and Javanese Christians, yet still there was an intellectual, educational and cultural void, provided by a legal basis. In the Indies there was a strong prejudice against the natives. The natives did not have the same civil rights and laws as the Dutch. And that was completely normal. First, as Van der Valk wrote, when the ‘brown’ felt himself no longer subordinated to the white, and language was no longer a barrier, the “harmony could be restored between the sons of Noah”. According to Van der Valk this had to be the ideal of the *Indische Kerk* (Indonesian church).

Idenburg agreed with Van der Valk. Idenburg saw racism too, but only among the secular ‘other’ Europeans; they maintained racism. Idenburg argued: [Here in the Indies] “many Europeans who live without God, see Javanese people nothing more than apes”. Together with the missionary medical doctor J.G. Scheurer and the missionary F. Lion Cachet who both already had written some critics on secular colonialism, Idenburg fulminated against the typical secular liberal European with his racism and discriminatory attitude towards indigenous people. In contrast with these secular perspectives, Idenburg placed the reformed perspective in the church. This perspective was tolerant towards Javanese Christians.

In the Netherlands, Sikkell and Kuyper accepted the statements and clarifications made by Idenburg *cum suis*. Finally, after one year of the polemic and pub-

29 *De Heraut*, July 5, 1894.

30 Kevin Timpe, *Free will in Philosophical Theology* (New York and London: Bloomsbury, 2014) 9.

lic race-debate in *the Heraut* after September 1894 the discussion faded away. For Sikkel and Kuyper it was clear that the racial segregation in the Batavian church was only a late fruit of the biblical tong-confusion. Kuyper admitted the false allegations made by some Synod-delegates. However, he stayed very critical towards the Batavian church.³¹

Essence of Neo-Calvinist Perspectives on Race

I will resume the essence of the reformed perspectives on race, as presented in the race-debate in *De Heraut* in 1893 and 1894.

1. The Dutch neo-Calvinists accepted separated church-services for Europeans and Javanese Christians in the reformed church of Batavia by embracing linguistic arguments.

2. The neo-Calvinist leaders in the Netherlands rejected and denied racial arguments.

3. According to the neo-Calvinists, colonialism had nothing to do with racism. Colonial social structures were a kind of theological determinism. Structures in which they saw themselves not as higher creatures than Javanese Christians, but as people who played another role in Gods predestined plans. Social rank was just as important as the linguistic argument to legitimate separation of services.

4. The *De Heraut*-debate showed that when it is about colonialism, the reformed perspective on race was rather dualistic, arbitrary, and more subjective than normative. There was no status quo in the church policy on race or race-policy. The young (new) reformed church had to formulate new arguments. In fact, this race-debate marked a starting point of a larger colonial debate among reformed leaders which erupted within a couple of years, especially after the General Synod of Middelburg in 1896.

5. The neo-Calvinists obviously made a distinction between, on the one hand racism and colonialism executed by the unchristian 'Other', and on the other hand bible-based tolerance and the Christian way of colonizing areas by mission.

³¹ *De Heraut*, February 4, 1894.

Critical Analysis

In order to understand the position of the reformed Christians we have to read Hannah Arendt, especially her 'Race-thinking before racism'.³² Arendt claimed that the rise of racism during the nineteenth century was not a consequence of race-thinking but rather of the rise of new imperialism, from the 1880's onwards to present day. Racism was a 'by-product' of this imperialism. In her work Arendt makes a distinction between on the one hand race-thinking, such as pseudo-scientific and anthropological studies about racial hierarchies and biological origins. And on the other hand racism, which she describes as the ideology eventually used as a justification for the national political agendas of imperialism. According to Arendt slavery was a way to 'domesticate' the 'savage population' of colonial societies. Just like neo-imperial states did with their 'ethical policy' to educate the indigenous mass. The distinction between 'savages' and the rest of humanity was not an issue of skin color, but one of behavior. In fact Arendt makes a distinction between biological and political-cultural superiority.

More recently an important model for racial differentiation is worked out by Dutch historian Dienne Hondius in her fascinating work *Blackness in Western Europe: Racial Patterns of Paternalism and Exclusion*. In order to understand the Europeans in their perspectives on race, without framing them automatically as racists, she conceptualize their propositions and gives us tools to classify and clarify the reformed perspectives on race.³³ Hondius writes about 'racial separation in European Churches'. According to Hondius, the relations between the paternalistic white Europeans and 'inferior' colonial inhabitants (Africans and Asians) can be distinguished in five patterns or characteristics: 1. *Infantilization*: non-white Africans and Asians were treated like children. 2. *Exoticism*: Europeans had the tendency to treat Africans and Asians as extraordinary, fascinating, beautiful (etc.) creatures. 3. *Bestialization*: Europeans had the inclination to treat Africans and Asians as animals. 4. *Exclusion and distancing*: Europeans have kept Africans and Asians at a distance. 5. *Exceptionalism*: a very small group indigenous (mostly children, woman or aristocracy) had entrance in European circles.

Hondius gives us a good insight in how Europeans, and among them the Dutch reformed Christians, thought of other races. To me this model has proved persuasive. In my archival research I often encounter confirmations of these

32 Kathryn T. Gines, *Race*, 38–53.

33 Hondius, *Blackness*. See her Introduction-part.

characteristics. I think that if we really want to understand the Dutch reformed perspective we have to keep this model in mind. At the same time we—in order to understand Kuyper and Idenburg—have to add some remarks here. I think this model pays less attention to the distinction between biological superiority and cultural superiority, often made by the neo-Calvinists themselves. This can be seen when one reads Kuyper and Idenburg carefully. Kuyper firmly rejected biological racist-theories of the influential French novelist Joseph Arthur Comte de Gobineau.³⁴ From the reformed perspective this biological ‘race superiority’ was a sin. God created all humens biologically equal. Therefore, the neo-Calvinists rejected and denied these racist-theories of De Gobineau *cum suis* and their denial of race-mixing and uplifting of the Aryan or Caucasian race. Idenburg has the same arguments in the race-debate in *De Heraut*. According to him—and Kuyper agreed on this—one can distinguish this kind of biological race-superiority from a so called ‘cultural superiority’. European Christians are not higher creatures because of race, but because of cultural development. They were convinced that God had given them another function, and another position in society. Javanese were not people of a lower race but in another stage of development and serve another function in God’s creation and world.³⁵ And the reformed had the moral obligation, the Christian duty to educate the indigenous people in Christianity. This determinist idea of their role in history is what Dienne Hondius called a ‘history of Christian ambivalence.’³⁶

Concluding Remarks

My main question in this article was: how can we describe the Dutch neo-Calvinist perspective on race around 1900 in the Dutch Colonial Empire? I identified and summarized a race-debate in Kuyper’s weekly *De Heraut* in 1893 and 1894 and demonstrated a complexity of race-arguments among reformed Christians in the Netherlands and colonial Indonesia. The topic of the debate contained the question to what extent the reformed church in Batavia should retain their policy of separation between church services for Malay and Dutch church-members. Calvinist critics, with Kuyper among them, argued that this practice was illustrative of a deeply rooted form of racism. And racism was a sin.

34 James D. Bratt, *Abraham Kuyper. Modern Calvinist, Christian Democrat* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 2013) 328.

35 A similar kind of argumentation is provided by Luttikhuis in: ‘Beyond race’.

36 Hondius, *Blackness*.

I presented the reformed perspectives from Christians who actually lived in the Indies and strongly denied these accusations. In their defense they wrote, the disjunction was not intended as a separation by race. According to them this was a consequence of linguistic difficulties and of social rank of the undeveloped ‘coffee colored’ Calvinist Christians. They admit that the secular colonial world, was larded with racial terminology, this however was only the case outside of the world, the secular ‘Other’.

It was not typical for Dutch reformed Christians to have this opinion. Reformed perspectives on colonial race correlates with racial perceptions of secular Europeans of that time.³⁷ Dutch liberals and socialists thought the same way although they weren’t focusing on the biblical explanations. In fact it was the opinion of the majority in Dutch society. European colonialism was a world with strong racist and discriminator elements.

As most of his Christian contemporaries, Idenburg had an underdeveloped racial consciousness and inadequate racial self-reflection. According to him racism only occurred in the secular world, outside of the church, as he wrote. Obviously the reformed brothers like Kuyper failed to refer to the pan-Asian emancipation.³⁸ This movement marked a tension in the relationship between white rulers and non-white ruled. During the 1890’s the Dutch neo-Calvinists looked with selective eyes, ignoring the actual racial elements in their own church politics. In this first phase of pan-Asianism, the reformed actually identified indeed signs of ‘Asian wide nationalism’. In literature and archives originated in these years, they describe the emancipation of an Asian ‘culture’, and sometimes they call it the emancipation of the ‘yellow’ or ‘coffee colored’ race. But this last statement is absent in the De Heraut-debate. Obviously, because it did not underline the strength of the argument that the separation in the church was based on cultural arguments, rather than racial arguments. By neglecting these racial arguments, the reformed accepted the inequality of church services. Based on the authority of the ‘Indies-specialties’—such as Idenburg, Kuyper and Sikkel—did not search for further explanations other than linguistic ones or cultural ones. For them the colonial societal structures

37 Elisa von Joeden-Forgey, ‘Race Power, Freedom, and the Democracy of Terror in German Racialist Thought’, in: King and Stone, *Hannah*, 21–37, 26. Bratt, *Abraham Kuyper*.

38 Clifford Anderson propagated the idea that parallel with the rise of pan-Asianism and rising pan-Islamism, by the late nineteenth hundred, also a kind of pan-neo-Calvinism arose. This was an answer to dominating liberal imperialism. See: Clifford Anderson, ‘Neo-Calvinism and Pan-Islamism. Kindred Movements Against Liberal Imperialism?’, *Calvin Theological Journal*, vol. 48 (2013), no. 2, 234–247.

were completely normal and matched fully with the prevailing racial ‘colonial common sense’, to paraphrase Ann Laura Stoler.³⁹

The Dutch neo-Calvinists had similar views on races as Dutch liberals or socialists. Among Europeans (the neo-Calvinists not excluded) the typical classification of the colonial inhabitants was: the lighter the skin, the better. Diennek Hondius describes the typical European way to approach colonial races. It is a persuasive model, confirmed by my own archival-research. Yet, although this model is an important tool to categorize, it lacks the essential Calvinist idea of Christian obligation to Christianize the mass, placing cultural-superiority above race-superiority.

In defending a separation policy, the main argument of the neo-Calvinists was based on a linguistic and societal (cultural) divide. In the context of a first (and careful) strive for societal equality by the Javanese, the neo-Calvinists focused on their idea of ‘developing the indigenous Christian’ rather than focusing on the actual events that manifested desire for common identity and a desire for racial equality. It is difficult to understand why the Calvinists in their debate, didn’t give any attention to this last topic.

For us the question remains: were the white Dutch orthodox-reformed Christians racists? It is a question that arose in the beginning of this article, implied by a scholar like Pierce. When we look at the given contemporary definition (see Introduction) then we have to admit that there are examples of prejudice, discrimination, or antagonism directed against the indigenous people. In that sense the neo-Calvinist in the *De Heraut*-debate closed their eyes for the racial aspects that really exists at that moment. And by doing so they legitimized racial diversity and inequality.

For nineteenth century orthodox-Christians the separation in the Batavian church between European Christians and indigenous Christians was not based on the belief that one’s own *race* was superior, but one’s own *culture*. An essential difference! Let us not forget how the debate in *De Heraut* started in October 1893. When Sikkel and Kuyper heard rumors about a racialized separation in the church, the first response was one of a firm *rejection* of racism. They immediately condemn any kind of racism. They accused the church for their sin and wrong policy towards racial minorities. When the debate continued the argumentation moved from rejecting this *racial distinction*, towards the embracing of *cultural diversification*, which was approved by them. We have to keep in mind that for these Christians the perspective on race was highly influenced

39 Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain. Epistemic anxieties and colonial common sense* (Princeton and Oxford 2009).

by a concept of culture wherein Western Christianity was leading. Christian superiority was only possible with the cultural domination of the West, a culture that had its roots in Christianity. And this was, according to these neo-Calvinists, not only just an ideological idea, but a convinced execution of the will of God. This enabled them to reject racism so firmly, while simultaneously embrace a policy of cultural disjunction.

This is an example of what Dienke Hondius called the 'Christian ambivalence'. The demarcation did after all enable a racial disconnection as well. The demarcation line was remarkable enough drawn exactly along racial lines. The neo-Calvinists lacked in recognizing this, and preserved their church-practice of racial separation. The Calvinist hid their (unintentional) racism behind their own cultural white-superior blindness. Despite this, the Dutch reformed perspective was ambivalent and dualistic rather than it was normative. It depends on the person and situation as to what kind of racism we can speak of. The Dutch theologians in the Netherlands did not force their followers to follow a one-sided perspective on race, but were transparent and open for debate. The debate shows an ambiguous and complex relation between race, neo-Calvinism and colonialism.