

A Dead-end Journey: From Oppressed to Oppressor

I appreciate Lloyd Rang's "The Legacy of Liberation" (CC, April 27, 2015, pp. 1-2) and have no bone to pick with him, except for the all too easy transition from Dutch liberation from the Nazis to the Indonesian struggle for independence. Almost as if these events naturally flowed into each other as one uninterrupted seamless event. In fact, the two represent stark contrasts between liberation and imperialism.

Imagine for yourself a nation jubilating for its new freedom from oppressive, murderous foreign occupation and then, almost immediately, seek to deny the same impulse among a people that the Dutch had subjugated for centuries, all the time trying to organize its economic system to serve Dutch interests. In spite of the "Christian" veneer the Kuyperian Christian Anti-Revolutionary Party tried to give the Dutch war against Indonesian independence, it was grossly misdirected. You have just suffered a most cruel foreign occupation and you oppose the same impulse for freedom of the people you have subjugated?! It is hard to imagine a more contrarian situation than that.

I know, there was the commonly accepted Western ideological subterfuge of "divine trusteeship" over a primitive people. Pure poppycock successfully designed to motivate the Dutch populace to support the enterprise, missionaries and all. It was all in the interest of the Dutch. Any positive crumbs that fell to Indonesians—and there were some, even some entire slices—were either accidental or intentional to placate the Indonesian people and keep them from rising up or to assuage the conscience of the Dutch. Abraham Kuyper did adhere to a colonial divine mandate, but he also recognized that in reality that "mandate had been smothered in the search for gold." He recognized that the Dutch colonial record was inferior to that of the British. I am proud of my own Professor Johannes Verkuyl of the Free University, a Dutch missionary theologian in Indonesia at the time, who supported the independence movement and found himself in a Dutch prison at one time as the result. When I did my own dissertation on colonialism and missions under him, he would constantly remark, "*Mijn hart klopt er van*" ("My heart beats with excitement"), when he read my pages. He was hardly able to contain himself and be the objective academic supervisor expected of him.

The Indonesian War of Independence lasted from 1946-1949. According to Rang, 100,000 Indonesians were killed in this legitimate quest for freedom along with 2300 Dutch and 1200 British soldiers. What a waste of lives. I was only eight years old when

it started, but I remember veterans coming home to our Christian village. Every time one returned, he would be accorded a hero's welcome with the local Christian brass band and choir offering their best music in appreciation for the heroic work the returned soldier had done on behalf of his fatherland and, not to forget, God Himself. The entire village would gather and emotionally sing the national anthem.

I still look back on that phase of my childhood with some surprise. It was marked by three very adult questions, one of which was the colonial question. I still do not know where these adult doubts came from, but I entertained serious doubts about this war and the heroism of our veterans. I questioned how we could celebrate our recent liberation from foreign occupation and then immediately prevent another people from similar liberation. Though I never missed a chance to sing, I could not sing the national anthem along with the crowd. At the same time, I did not dare raise this question, for I sensed I would run into serious adult disapproval, probably including that of my parents. So I just kept quiet. But I still remember vividly this struggle within my young heart.

So, brother Lloyd, this was hardly the seamless succession of wars that your article implies. As for the rest of your article, interesting, and I thank you. A member of a later generation, you know some things about WW II that I, who lived through it, did not.

(John Boer is the author of a dissertation on missions and colonialism [1979]. A summary was published in 1984 under the title Missions: Heralds of Capitalism or Christ? It is available on < www.SocialTheology.com >, the Boeriana page.

Rang-Boer Correspondence:

June 11, 2015

Hi John:

Lloyd Rang here. Thanks for the great letter to the editor.

I just wanted to say that I totally agreed with your letter. In fact, I was trying to point out the irony of the Dutch trying to oppress someone else the moment they themselves were liberated. It's a black mark in Dutch history in my opinion. Sort of the colonial equivalent of the parable of the unmerciful servant.

I would have made that point more clear but I was weird about offending people. My

own dad was a marine at the time and was supposed to go to Indonesia but he was discharged following an accident in training. I didn't want to stir the pot with any of his old friends.

Anyway - thanks for your letter. Much appreciate the feedback.

Lloyd Rang.

June 29, 2015

Hello Lloyd,

Thanks for your comments on my response to your article. It seems we are basically on the same page. Perhaps I hesitate less to stir up the pot. I have relatives on various continents and some acquaintances here in Vancouver who were involved. It is possible that some may not like my writing. Well, this was on my heart for many decades and you finally provided the occasion to unburden myself and see people's reactions.

Keep up your good work.

John/Jan

From Hans Katerberg:

June 8, 2015

The title from this article seems very unfair to me towards the Dutch Government of those days. Also to all the men who went there to restore order and gave the best years of there life there. Many of them had been in hiding or in the resistance to fight the Germans.

Personally I know one whom was in the resistance and could finally marry after the war after a long engagement. When his wife was expecting their first child, he felt he had to go to help overseas in our colony. Would he say goodbye to his loved ones to oppress people there? The first troops were all volunteers. And was it not the duty of the Dutch government to govern in there Colony after the Japanese left?

Of course it was all very sad what happened when you look back and a waste of lives. But who is to blame? Could those freedom fighters not peacefully have negotiated their freedom? In those days the Dutch government was under pressure from the UN and had to give them their freedom anyway. Were all the hospitals and schools not also the result of the Dutch being there?

It is easy to blame and wonder how it all could go so wrong. It is maybe helpful to try to understand the circumstances from those days.

Hans Katerberg