

# The Doleantie

Anno 1886

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Dr. Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920), theologian and politician, was the driving force behind the Doleantie.

Everything was going well. It was a weekday and without being noticed the little group of inconspicuously dressed men entered the „Nieuwe Kerk” in Amsterdam. But how to enter the consistory room, which was as always securely locked? One of the intruders produced a small saw from under his jacket and proceeded to remove a few panels from the door. Now the conspirators crawled through the opening and occupied the room where in the course of the centuries so many preachers had spent the final minutes before addressing the Reformed faithful of the famous harbor city by “Het Y”.

With the occupation of the Nieuwe Kerk by Abraham Kuyper and some of his friends and followers the first shots were fired in the celebrated church conflict, which eventually led to the Doleantie and the formation of „De Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland”. Kuyper and his fellow militants by embarking on this adventure were aiming at securing and preserving the Nieuwe Kerk both in a material and spiritual sense as a bulwark for orthodoxy. They were willing to test the laws of the land and the Judiciary to find out whether in an eventual pull-out by “orthodox” elements from the Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk (the Dutch State

Church), a new orthodox successor church could rightfully lay claim to a proportionate share of the Church buildings and other possessions of the State Church. We must report that Kuyper c.s. were evicted by the authorities from the Nieuwe Kerk and that the Gereformeerde Kerken, as opposed to the Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk, were subsequently to fend for themselves.

Considerable courage and a deep conviction were needed to follow the path of confrontation with the mighty Dutch Reformed Church. But then Abraham Kuyper, the driving force behind the Doleantie of 1886, was a man of courage and unshakable conviction. When he was a young preacher in the village of Beesd in the Betuwe, a simple member of his congregation named Pietje Baltus, refused to shake his hand for — so she declared — “dominee did not preach the unshortened Gospel of the Bible”. Kuyper was shocked and gradually became convinced he must break with the modern school of preaching, whose representatives had gone too far in compromising with the enlightened and God-denying spirit of the times.

As Kuyper was a forceful man and not free from radical impulses and a certain impatience, a rift with other

prominent orthodox figures, who also advocated changes in a more orthodox direction but within the bosom of De Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk itself, was probably unavoidable from the beginning. A man like Jhr. A.F. de Savornin Lohman, who had been present at the break-in into the consistory room of the Nieuwe Kerk in Amsterdam, did ultimately not see face to face with Abraham Kuyper regarding departure from the Netherlands Reformed Kerk. We do not need to relive the tensions in this church prior to the Doleantie, nor do we want to focus on the differences between De Savornin Lohman, Hoedemaker and Kuyper.

They were all great personalities striving for and working for the preservation of Reformed orthodoxy. Their epoch is one of the most heartening times in the history of the Christian Church. If this sounds perhaps incongruous we only have to point to the revival of Reformed orthodoxy, not only in the Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland but also in the Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk as proof of the inherent dynamism of Calvinism. Thus the happenings of those days within the Church in the Netherlands instill hope for the future and trust in the regenerative power of the Gospel also for the church



of our days.

To return to Abraham Kuyper, there is no denying that in his person a deep Christian conviction combined with a forceful character which went straight for its goal. In 1880 Kuyper was the man behind the establishment of the Free University in Amsterdam, largely achieved with Frisian financial backing. The University was — among others — to produce orthodox preachers. However the Dutch government in what proved to be a delaying action, required further training at a State University (Rijks-Universiteit) before granting Kuyper's students, a preaching license.

Kuyper and de Savornin Lohman initially were both professors at the Free University, a convincing indication of their striving for the same goals. When in 1886 the Doleantie became a fact, the two professors however parted ways. In this year approximately 400 ministers of the Word and some tens of thousands of church members left the Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk to form their own denomination. De Savornin Lohman remained in the Netherlands Reformed which he hoped to change from within. Abraham Kuyper's motto was always: „Je lève banniére, suivre je ne peux” (“I lift the banner, follow I cannot”).

It reveals him better than anything else and shows the human element in this most dedicated champion of orthodoxy. But even Luther was human and no saint when in his exuberance he exclaimed „Pecca Fortiter”, “Sin vigorously”, meant of course not as an encouragement to a sinful life but as an exclamation of wonder and awe at God's forgiveness.

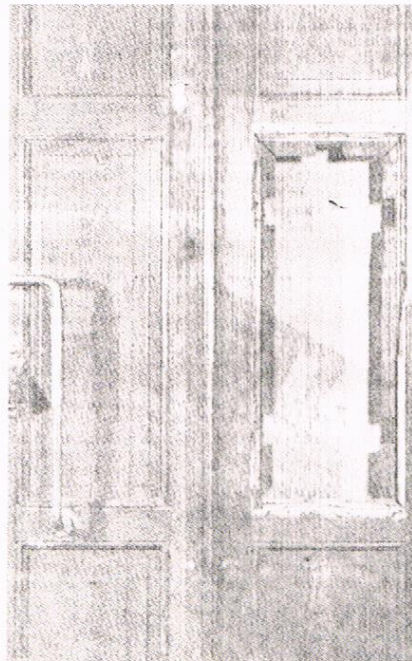
Kuyper was besides being a giant, bestriding the ecclesiastical scene in the Netherlands during the last two decades of the 19th century, also a self-confident orator and politician. But like Luther he was above all a servant of the Lord of the Church.

We admire him also as the man who brought the Church back into the mainstream of Dutch national life. In his own person the gist and essence of orthodox Calvinism, in which the common folk of the Netherlands had been steeped since birth was irrepressibly rising to the surface, reflecting the

centuries old Reformed truths.

Kuyper took the Church out of the hands of the spiritual manipulators and charlatans who passed for Christian preachers and who offered the orthodox crowd stones for bread.

Since Abraham Kuyper's time Orthodoxy was experiencing a great revival in the Netherlands Reformed Church and found, — at least until World War II, — in the Gereformeerde Kerken a secure environment and a respected milieu.



*The door of the consistory (council) room of the "Nieuwe kerk" in Amsterdam from which Abraham Kuyper, Dr. F.L. Rutgers, Dr. A.F. de Savornin Lohman, and some others cut away a panel so as to gain entrance to the archive kept there. This miniature Watergate resulted eventually in a mass exodus of members out of the then Dutch State Church.*

*The door is kept in the Catharijne convent in Utrecht.*

It was no coincidence that the Doleantie occurred towards the end of the 19th century. This was the time when Marxism and revolutionary sentiments made severe inroads among great segments of the population to whom the Church means little or nothing. The Church preached progress through knowledge and scientific development. It did not address the deep-seated human need for inner peace and faith in a God above and yet a Father unto his children. Such a notion was ridiculed by most

of the leading spiritual lights. Besides the Church did not or could not see the plight of the poor, the oppressed, the disadvantaged.

Again it is Kuyper's merit to have effected a break towards the right for the "little people" (Kleine luyden) by proclaiming the validity of the Gospel for all of life, also where want and poverty were concerned and thus placing the quest for social justice on the path of duty of the Christian politician. Through this stance, Kuyper saved no doubt thousands of our forefathers for Church and Christ's Kingdom, who otherwise would have succumbed to the siren song of the Revolution.

The Doleantie was a product of its time and it could only happen when its time had come. Until 1886 the Dutch Reformed Church had placidly continued on its way, only occasionally disturbed by peripheral tremors of which the Secession of 1834 was no doubt the most serious. Also a movement such as „Het Reveil" had early recognized the dangers confronting Calvinist orthodoxy.

It remained for Abraham Kuyper and De Savornin Lohman to act decisively on behalf of orthodoxy, each in his own chosen arena. When we commemorate the events leading to the Doleantie, we rejoice in the memory of men like Kuyper and Lohman and we will not relinquish hope for a regeneration of the spirit of the Gospel in places where now there is undue emphasis on insights of mere men.

For it is as a friend and Reformed preacher once said in answering the question, whether he preached an evangelical Christianity: "I do not know of any other Christianity".

In other words, preaching wisdom of men and not the Bible, no matter how spellbinding and how much in accordance with the latest theological and philosophical insights, does not make a Christian preacher but merely an entertaining causeur.

We are privileged to have the Doleantie as proof of Calvinism's inherent strength and dynamism. Is there reason to assume that in the Netherlands or elsewhere, it will never reassert these qualities or demonstrate them again?