

Kuyper's sphere sovereignty and institutional religious freedom in Indonesia



Authors:

David Kristanto¹ Tony Salurante² 

Affiliations:

¹Department of Theology,
Harvest International
Theological Seminary,
Tangerang, Indonesia

²Department of Theology,
Arastamar Evangelical
Theological Seminary,
Tangerang, Indonesia

Corresponding author:

David Kristanto,
d.kristanto@hits.ac.id

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Although the Indonesian Constitution guarantees religious freedom in Indonesia, the implementation of that freedom is not without ambiguity. As the state defines what constitutes religion and categorises official and nonofficial religions, religious communities such as indigenous religious groups are struggling to obtain equal access to the public administration and to express their faith to the broader society. The ambiguity of religious freedom in Indonesia is obvious in the matter of institutional freedom of religion. Minority religious groups, especially those of nonofficial religions, would find their institutional freedom much restricted. Kuyper's sphere sovereignty has proved to be successful in establishing institutional religious freedom in the Netherlands. This article seeks to show the relevance of Kuyper's sphere sovereignty to the matter of institutional religious freedom in Indonesia.

Intradisciplinary and/or interdisciplinary implications: Kuyper's sphere sovereignty does not only show the importance of religious freedom but also the equal access for every religious community to institutionalise themselves. In the Indonesian context, sphere sovereignty could contribute to the issue of institutional religious freedom, especially for the adherents of nonofficial religions.

Keywords: Abraham Kuyper; institutional religious freedom; freedom of religion and belief (FoRB); theology; Indonesia.

Introduction

Discussions on freedom of religion or belief have generally focused on the matter of individuals. It emphasises the need to recognise every person's right to freely choose what to believe according to the person's conscience. However, that position only touches the matter of *forum internum* but not *forum externum* when using the word 'religion'. Religious life and practices cannot be restricted to a personal matter alone but should obtain a place for public expression or manifestation. Without being able to manifest itself in public life, the idea of religious freedom is somehow vague and limited.

The Indonesian Constitution guarantees religious freedom in Indonesia. The first principle of Pancasila and Article 29 in the 1945 Constitution are generally referred to as the constitutional basis for religious freedom in Indonesia. Unfortunately, the two applications have not always been in line with the spirit of protecting religious freedom in the nation. The state defines what religion is and what it is not and categorises official and nonofficial religions. Official religions are considered true religions, while other beliefs are considered to be a culture or tradition [*adat*]. As a result, the constitutional basis for religious freedom has been interpreted too narrowly and often led to the advantage of the majority religious groups (Islam and Christianity).¹

Seen from the perspective of the state–religion relationship in Indonesia, discussions on religious freedom should not be limited to private or subjective matters alone but to the matter of institutional religious freedom that takes into account the rights of the religious communities to institutionalise themselves in the public sphere. Thus, religious freedom includes not only *forum internum* but also *forum externum*. How the state and the society accommodate the right to express one's religion in the public sphere could be a leading indicator of how tolerant a nation is.

Abraham Kuyper was a Dutch Calvinist theologian with remarkable public achievements in his time. He was a prolific author; he founded the Free University Amsterdam, a new church

1. For a detailed elaboration on how the Muslim–Christian framework had played out significantly in Pancasila and the 1945 Constitution, see (Intan 2008:31–44).

denomination and a new Christian political party named Anti-Revolutionary Party (ARP). Kuyper also served as the Netherlands' Prime Minister from 1901 to 1905. However, James Bratt, Kuyper's most authoritative biographer, wrote that perhaps the most precious legacy that Kuyper has given to the present generation is how he mobilised the religious groups at his time to bring forward the public implications of their faith (Bratt 2013:xiii). In 1878, a school law required every school to increase their standards: facilities, hygiene, curriculum and higher teacher salary. Public elementary schools of that time were upholding the principle of religious neutrality, which opposed any form of religion taught at school. Therefore, they had no problem fulfilling the higher standard, as the state fully funded them. However, the private religious schools throughout the country could not possibly fulfil the higher standard, as they did not receive state funds. Moreover, the parents from religious families (Protestants and Catholics) were required to pay a high tax despite the economic depression in Europe at that time, because the state-funded public schools would be built nationwide. As a result, religious parents could not afford religious-based education for their children (Naylor 2006:185). Under that hardship, Kuyper mobilised the religious group to collect what was called the People's Petition, which had successfully obtained almost 500000 signatures in total. The number was three times higher than all eligible voters in the Netherlands at that time: 127000 voters (Naylor 2006:279–280).

What Kuyper and his followers believed in was a principle or a notion called sphere sovereignty. He argued that God is the one who is sovereign of all spheres in life, not the state, and he had distributed sovereignty to every sphere in life so each sphere could flourish for his glory. Kuyper's belief that God had directly distributed sovereignty to parents in each family to educate their children based on conscience, had led him to protest the state's regulation of religionless education. Furthermore, he also criticised the Dutch government for controlling the Dutch Reformed Church. According to the notion of sphere sovereignty, the church as a religious institution should have its own sovereignty, without any external intervention. When the state decides what the true religion is and what it is not, or which one is the true religious institution (church) and which one is not, the state has breached the sovereignty given by God to the church.

This article argues that Kuyper's notion of sphere sovereignty is highly relevant to the issue of institutional religious freedom in Indonesia. Drawing insights from that notion could be a lesson from Dutch history on obtaining equal institutional rights for all religious groups. Furthermore, it could encourage many religious groups in Indonesia to strive constitutionally to obtain their institutional religious freedom. Finally, this notion could also contribute a theological basis for activism that promotes emancipating the institutional rights of vulnerable religious groups in Indonesia.

This work is a library research paper that seeks the relevance of the notion of sphere sovereignty as coined by the Dutch

statesman-theologian Abraham Kuyper to the issue of institutional religious freedom in Indonesia. The approach is interdisciplinary as it draws insights from Christian theology and religious studies. Firstly, this paper will analyse Kuyper's notion of sphere sovereignty; secondly, it will demonstrate the notion's relevance to the issue of institutional religious freedom in Indonesia.

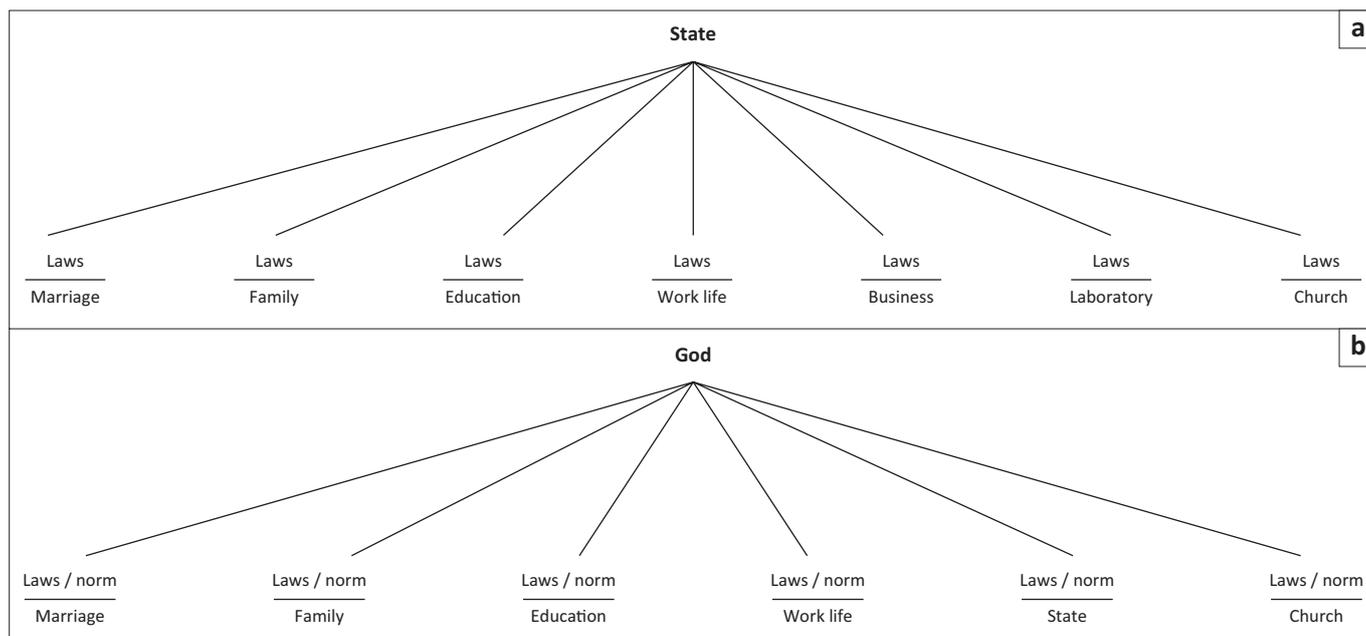
Sphere sovereignty

In the inaugural oration of the Free University Amsterdam in 1880, Kuyper introduced the notion of sphere sovereignty through his famous adage²: 'There is not a square inch in the whole domain in our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry: "Mine!"' (Kuyper 1998:488). The basic understanding of this notion is that God has a grand purpose for all spheres in creation: nature, family, science, art, church or religious institution, state and many others. Christ is the King of all spheres in life and has directly bestowed sovereignty to each sphere of life so they can function independently. Kuyper was not specific about how many spheres there are in life. He said that it could be as many as the constellations of stars in the sky (Bratt 2013:131). For a society to flourish, every life sphere that exists should have its own sovereignty. There should not be any breach of sovereignty from one sphere to another. The state should not breach the sovereignty that God has given to the family by controlling how parents should educate their children. Universities should have their own sovereignty to conduct research without any intervention from anyone or any other human institutions. When everything in life is decided based upon an economic rationale, that would be considered a breach of the sovereignty of other life spheres.

It is also important to note that God directly gives the sovereignty of each sphere without any mediating agent or institution. This position is different from the Catholic understanding that the church should mediate between God and the creation. In Kuyper's understanding, all spheres in life stand in equality under the sovereign God. The church is but a sphere in life; it stands equal with other life spheres. This notion is in contrast with the understanding that the state is in control of making laws for all spheres of life, as shown in Figure 1 (Bishop 2020:64–65).

The notion of sphere sovereignty is also salient in his *Lectures on Calvinism*, which he delivered at Princeton in 1898. He used this notion to argue that the state should not give a verdict upon which church is the true one and which one is false. However, it does not mean that Kuyper was a theological relativist who believed there was no distinction

²The reception of Kuyper's sphere sovereignty is problematic in South Africa, as it was used as the basis for apartheid. However, it was not the true interpretation of Kuyper's original intention of sphere sovereignty. Some points have to be considered when thinking about the relationship of sphere sovereignty and apartheid: (1) Kuyper's idea was for vertical segregation or pillarisation (*verzuiling*) of the people based on worldview or religious persuasion, not race; (2) the pillarisation is voluntary in nature, not coerced by the government; (3) Kuyper never advocated for absolute segregation. Although people from every worldview could build their own pillar, sphere sovereignty also speaks about sphere responsibility, wherein every people should work towards the flourishing of the nation. The first two points are from Baskwell, and the third is argued by Venema (Baskwell 2006:1289; Venema 2013:88).



Source: Bishop, S., 2020, 'Abraham Kuyper: Cultural transformer', *Foundations* 79, 60–76.

FIGURE 1: A representation of: (a) State sovereignty and (b) Kuyper's sphere sovereignty.

between the true and false church. He believed that the distinction existed, but he saw that the state could not judge the church as a religious institution, and if the state decided to do so, it would be a breach of the sovereignty of the church committed by the state. The state should respect that it is the church's sovereignty to give a verdict upon which church is the true one and which is the false one. Kuyper insisted that churches could only thrive if the government allowed them to live out their convictions freely, without external coercion (Kuyper 1898:105–106).

For Kuyper, the national church of the Netherlands, the Dutch Reformed Church [*Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk*], was in the condition of spiritual lethargy because it was controlled and funded by the state.³ He saw that the only way to revitalise the church was to propose the 'Free Church' system. The system opposed any political control of the state over the church as a religious institution to demarcate the precise boundaries of sovereignty between the two.

Kuyper saw the importance for the institutional church to be sovereign in its own sphere and for the church members, whom he saw as the organic church, to hold their faith based on the freedom of conscience. Kuyper drew insight from the Bible when making the distinction between the institution of the church and the church members as the church organism. He used the metaphor in Ephesians 3:17 that the church is 'rooted' and 'grounded' in love. 'Rooted' refers to the church's spiritual, inner and organic aspect, while 'grounded' describes the church's visible, external and institutional form. The relationship between the two is like how a river could not be

³The *Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk* (NHK) was the national church [*volkskerk*] but not a state church, as the state also sanctioned other churches such as Roman Catholic, Lutheran and Remonstrant churches. However, it was considered the national church because it was unified under one administrative unit under King William I through a national synod in 1816. As the church and its ministers were funded by the government, its worship was supervised by the governmental department of public worship (Wood 2013:517–518).

without the banks that formed all its rushing water (Wood 2013:520). When the Bible uses images of a temple or a house for the church, it refers to the church institution, while the metaphors of mustard seed, vine branches, yeast and the body of Christ refer to the church as an organism (Banks 2013:25–27; Kuyper 2013:14–15). The organic church, which refers to its every member, should be free because the Holy Spirit indwelled them individually. They should be able to select their leaders, guided by the Holy Spirit in their hearts, without any external intervention. Kuyper also rejected Article 36 of the Belgic Confession of Faith, which states that it is the task of the government to protect the sacred ministry by preventing idolatry and false worship. Kuyper insisted that the church's purity is the sole responsibility of the church, not the state (Wood 2013:522–523).

In his *Lectures on Calvinism*, the notion of sphere sovereignty was used by Kuyper to refer to the sovereignty of a person's conscience. He saw freedom of conscience as the right of every individual because God has directly given to everyone what he called 'individual sphere sovereignty'. He radically believed that a person's conscience submits to no one but God alone. A person should not be forced to stay in a church when her or his conscience urges him or her to leave that church and vice versa. Freedom of conscience allows a person to serve God freely under the guidance of the heart (Kuyper 1898:107, 109).

During the Dutch School Struggle, Kuyper gave a speech entitled 'An Appeal to the National Conscience' to the Association for Christian National Primary Education. In that speech, he argued that the insistence of the Dutch government to enforce religious neutrality in the public schools was against the conscience of the religious parents of that time. As most Dutch children were baptised and belonged to Christian families, it would be against the

conscience of the parents to teach the children under non-Christian principles (Kuyper 2019:317; Naylor 2006:22–23). For Kuyper, to impose religionless education on every Dutch child of his time was a ‘moral suicide’. In affirmation of God’s sovereignty over everything in life, he argued that there should be ‘principled pluralism’ in the matter of education. This argument was not a call to Christianise every elementary school in the Netherlands of his time but an invitation to Kuyper’s vision of a ‘pluralist educational policy’ that enabled people from every line of conviction or worldview to establish their own schools (Naylor 2006:211–212). He affirmed that both religious groups (Catholics and Protestants) and nonreligious groups (those who followed the principles of the French Revolution) should have complete freedom ‘to contribute to constructing the new home in which the Dutch people shall live’ (Kuyper 2019:321). Both religious-based and nonreligious schools should have equal funding and access to freely establish their institutions.

Kuyper devoted three articles (Articles 59–61) in his political manifesto, *Our Program*,⁴ to address the issue of ‘freedom of conscience’. Article 59 states that ‘conscience is sovereign in its own sphere;’ Article 60 states how freedom of conscience limits the state sovereignty. One should be able to exercise one’s freedom. The government is only allowed to intervene when the person harms others; Article 61 states, ‘conscience cannot be coerced’ (Kuyper 2015:69–74). *Our Program* explicitly states that there should be equal rights for all in religious affairs. As it is written:

No matter how much the government may sympathize with the gospel, it should never allow itself to be tempted to banish or bind preachers who wish to combat the gospel. If a Jew wishes to take exception to the Messiah of the Christians, or a Muslim to Holy Scripture, or a Darwinist to the idea of creation – or for that matter, if a positivist wants to protest against the root which for all things holy lies in faith – all should be free to do so. (Kuyper 2015, p.68)

Kuyper’s pluralistic vision eventually reached its fulfilment in the sphere of education. The ARP, founded by Kuyper, won the election with Baron Aeneas Mackay as the Prime Minister in 1888. Mackay addressed the educational question by making state subsidies for the salaries of the religious schools’ teachers. In 1917, the constitutional amendment granted equal and complete funding for each child from elementary to high schools. In that Constitution, there are rules concerning a minimum number of students and the minimum academic qualifications to establish a school. However, touching upon the belief system that underlies the school is forbidden. In 1920, this amendment was put into practice. As a result, three publicly funded schools emerged: Catholic, Calvinist and the so-called neutral public schools. The list has expanded in recent decades to include:

Islamic, Orthodox Jewish, Liberal Jewish, Catholic, Pietistic Calvinists, ‘Liberated Calvinist’, evangelical, generally Christian

⁴This is the official document of the ARP, a political party that established by Kuyper. He himself became the Prime Minister of the Netherlands in 1901–1905, and this political party had significantly shaped Dutch politics from its inception until now; see Kuyper (2015).

(with no doctrinal emphasis), ecumenical (generally religious), and schools with philosophical or pedagogical orientations such as Montessori and Rudolph Steiner Schools. (Naylor 2018:329)

Institutional religious freedom

Although Kuyper’s 19th century Netherlands and present-day Indonesia are two different contexts, they both deal with pluralism. As mentioned earlier in the introduction part, religious pluralism is an undeniable social fact in Indonesia, whereas in Kuyper’s context, the Netherlands was progressing towards a more pluralistic society than it was before. At the end of the 18th century, there were around 2 million members of the public church (55%); Catholics (38%); Protestants outside of the public church, mainly Lutherans (7%); 4 000 Arminians (0.2%); and Mennonites (1.5%) (Rooden 2003:120). There were around 37 000 Jews living in the Netherlands at the beginning of the 19th century, mostly in Amsterdam (De Ruiter 2014:15). Islam was absent from the 19th-century Dutch context; the first Muslim immigration to the Netherlands was recorded at the end of the 20th century, which counted 850 000 Muslims (Kennedy & Zwemer 2010:267).⁵ In particular, Kuyper’s sphere sovereignty is relevant to the issue of institutional religious freedom in Indonesia.

The concept of institutional religious freedom emphasises the broader social expressions of religion to the understanding of religious freedom. Alongside religion’s individual or subjective nature, it emphasises its profound social and institutional dimensions. Without acknowledging the right of the religious communities to institutionalise themselves, the individual freedom of religion would be denied or at least limited. Institutional religious freedom is the ‘condition of possibility’ of individual religious freedom. This concept also invites us to see beyond the individual regarding the needs of how different religious communities or traditions should construct different kinds of institutions in order to flourish. Discussions on this concept do not just take into account the rights of religious freedom that belong to every individual but also how the different understanding of religion affects the understanding of religious freedom. Furthermore, it also considers that the plurality of religious institutionalisation has created ‘differentiated’ citizenship among the people (Hefner 2021:1–2).

Even though religious freedom is constitutionally guaranteed in Indonesia, the condition of religious pluralism in the country is not without problems. Throughout the country’s history, the government has been actively defining the meaning of religion, differentiating religion and beliefs, categorising beliefs not as a religion but as culture and later making a few religions official religions of Indonesia. The case of the recognition of Hinduism as one among other official religions shows how the state’s definition of religion had failed to accommodate the indigenous communities in

⁵Even though there were no Muslims in Kuyper’s Netherlands, Kuyper himself met many Muslims as he visited around 20 different countries around the Mediterranean Sea. His impressions on the people and especially how Islam played a vital role on their society are documented in his *On Islam* (Kuyper 2017).

Indonesia. At first, the indigenous people of Bali did not have any particular name or term when referring to their religious practices and ceremonies. The inclusion of the island of Bali as part of the Republic of Indonesia led the Balinese to discern what religion is and what is culture or tradition [*adat*]. The Ministry of Religion (MOR) formulated that religion should be monotheistic, have a scripture and have international recognition. As Balinese religious practices did not meet those requirements, they were once categorised as indigenous religion [*agama suku*] with all of their rituals as culture [*adat*]. As a result, the government considered them unqualified to be an official religion (Picard 2020:305).

After the term 'religion' [*agama*] in Indonesia had become popular, the Balinese people started to call their rituals Balinese religion [*agama Bali*]. Because there were Balinese who had converted to Christianity and Islam, to distinguish Balinese who still upheld their religious ceremonies from those who converted, the term 'Balinese Hindu' [*Hindu Bali*] was introduced. Through a long debate, it was agreed among Balinese leaders in 1952 that the name Balinese Hindu Religion [*Agama Hindu Bali*] became a name that would unify every religious practice and belief in Bali. Unfortunately, they could still not convince the Minister of Religion to recognise their religion as official. As a reaction to that situation, the Balinese reformist movement had to construct the theology and ethics of Bali Hinduism through the perspective of Islam and Christianity. They also started to study Hinduism in India; many religious schools were opened, canonical Hindu texts were translated and scholarships were provided for Balinese students to study Hinduism in India. After a strong mobilisation, the state recognition of Balinese Hinduism was obtained, and a special department for Balinese Hindu Religion was established. In 1959, the Parisada Dharma Hindu Bali was established to coordinate the activities of the Hindu Bali Religion. The first Parisada congress in 1964 changed the name to Parisada Hindu Dharma [*Indonesia Hinduism Society*], showing their effort to delocalise their religion as more Balinese people lived outside Bali. Balinese leaders who had studied in India made their religion progress towards a more universal orientation rather than retaining their particular identity as Balinese. That was why President Sukarno's list of official religions in 1965 listed Hinduism [*Hindu*] instead of Balinese Hinduism [*Hindu Bali*] as one of the other five official religions in Indonesia (Picard 2020:306–307). The recognition of Hinduism in Indonesia was not possible without significant theological adjustments made by the Balinese religious leaders.

While the indigenous communities in Bali could obtain their official recognition, many indigenous religions in Indonesia have yet to gain equal recognition in the eyes of the state. In that context, the freedom of religion seems to be much more limited for many of Indonesia's indigenous communities.⁶ The worst period for them was perhaps 1968–1978, when the adherents of indigenous religions were accused of supporting

6. Some among many of indigenous religions in Indonesia are Sapta Dharma, Sunda Wiwitan Paseban, Sangehe, Ammatoa, Parmalim and others; according to Maarif, there are 182 centre organisations belonging to the indigenous religious people with more than 1000 local branches (Maarif 2017:ix, 4).

communism and forced to identify themselves with any official religion in Indonesia (Maarif 2017:112). In 1978, the People's Representative Council issued a resolution (TAP MPR No. IV/1978) that categorised beliefs (including indigenous religions) as not religion but culture [*adat*]. They listed five official religions recognised by the state, followed by the regulation that a citizen should embrace one among those official religions to have state recognition and service.⁷ The situation also affected the Chinese Indonesians, who were not affiliated with any theistic religion. Adherents of Confucianism were suspected of connections to China's communism. According to Seo (2012):

A directive from the Ministry of Religious Affairs in 1978 confirmed that there were only five religions and therefore Confucianism was no longer considered one of the state-recognised religions. Confucianism was prohibited in public for more than three decades until President Abdurrahman Wahid repealed the ban by the Presidential Decree No. 6/2000. (p. 1053)

Following the Confucianism ban, many Chinese Indonesians decided to convert to Christianity, especially Pentecostal churches (Aritonang & Steenbrink 2008; Seo 2012:1053).

The situation was even more difficult for the indigenous communities when the Ministry of Home Affairs declared that adherents of indigenous religions would have to leave the religious column blank on their identity cards [*Kartu Tanda Penduduk*]. That policy had caused them to face difficulties in accessing government services such as obtaining birth certificates, education, public cemeteries, insurance and mortgages and marriage licenses. The judicial review in 2017 held that the policy was contrary to the Constitution. Hence, the Court recommended creating the seventh category, 'Believers of the Faith', to fill the religious column for the indigenous people (Marshall 2018). Although this might be a good start towards recognising the rights of the indigenous people, the ambiguities of religious freedom for their institutions remain problematic. Moreover, it would take time to implement the Court decision nationwide, and society might not welcome the existence of religions beyond the listed official religions.

Towards institutional equality

Applying Kuyper's sphere sovereignty to the issue of institutional religious freedom in Indonesia would first question the position of the MOR itself. Intan wrote that the establishment of the MOR in Indonesia was originally to accommodate Islamic affairs alone; then, later on, it became extended to the service of other state-recognised religions (Intan 2019:231–232). Given that situation, it is no surprise that the public policy on religious matters tended to be seen from the Islamic perspective, because the MOR was originally for Muslims. However, from the perspective of sphere sovereignty, the establishment of the MOR shows a blurred distinction between the sphere of the state and the sphere of the religious institution. Through MOR, the state-defined

7. Confucianism was added later to the list of Indonesia's official religions in 2006. See Marshall (2018:86).

religion then officially recognised only some among many religions in Indonesia.

Kuyper did not go against the state's role to uphold order in a plural society. However, he would oppose the practice of defining and categorising religions and oppose the state's direct involvement in religious matters. In his sphere sovereignty, Kuyper understood the state as the 'sphere of spheres' that could intervene when a sphere of life breaches the sovereignty of the other spheres (Kuyper 1998:472). For example, although it is the right of parents to educate their children, in the case of abusive parenting, the state could intervene because the abusive parents breached the personal sphere sovereignty of the child. The same applies to many other spheres of life. The state's sovereignty is not unlimited, as such unlimited sovereignty belongs to God alone, yet it is genuinely sovereign to uphold order and promote justice in the nation.

It is also important to note that Kuyper's sphere sovereignty does not argue for complete isolation among the life spheres. Although he argued that the church should be independent of the state, he did not believe in complete separation between the church and state. On the contrary, there should be cooperation between the two so life could be enhanced to a better quality. Religion could give insights into the nation's political life, and politics could genuinely be in line with the moral compass provided by religion. In order to practise that state-religion relationship, he proposed to establish a special committee he called the 'committee of correspondence' that might enable cooperation between the church as a religious institution and the state (Kuyper 2015:355). Through this committee, religious insights could contribute to the state, but the sovereignty of the two would still be mutually respected. This is a Kuyperian way to guard against both the politicisation of religion and the religionisation of politics.

Moreover, Kuyper's sphere sovereignty would argue for equal saying and equal footing for all religious groups in the public sphere. This understanding includes the freedom of the religious groups to institutionalise themselves freely. Through institutional equality in public, Kuyper hoped that people from all religions could indirectly influence the public sphere towards the common good. While he discouraged the state's direct influence on religious institutions or vice versa, he encouraged religious members to influence the public sphere through their religious insights.

Equality in the public sphere is not just a matter of state recognition of any particular religion. However, it further demands the circumstances that enable any religious group to express themselves in public. Minority religious groups should be encouraged to make public contributions to their nations. Among indigenous peoples in the world, the Amazonian indigenous communities in Ecuador and the indigenous communities in New Zealand have contributed to their nations. Their advice was taken into consideration in the constitutional revision of their countries: the Ecuadorian Constitution of 2008 and the 2014 *Te Urewera Act* of Aotearoa in New Zealand (Sempertegui 2021; Tănăsescu 2020:429).

To apply sphere sovereignty towards equal footing for all religious groups in Indonesia requires explicit encouragement from both state and society for the indigenous communities to be involved in public life. It should be the nation's aim for there to be indigenous religious lessons, indigenous religious institutions, indigenous higher education and indigenous political parties. As it was in Kuyper's time, equality for all means equal access to the state's funds.⁸ The indigenous communities and other religious groups that have yet to receive the state's recognition are still seeking their full rights as citizens. Nevertheless, it should be beyond that. There should be equal institutional rights for all through equal access to funding.

Finally, Kuyper's understanding of religious freedom is closer to the declaration of human rights than Indonesian regulations on religious affairs, such as the 'blasphemy law'. The first deals with protecting the people from any harm caused based on one's convictions, whereas the second also deals with the state's commitment to the purity of religions. Kuyper opposed any efforts made by the state to purify religion. However, he would agree with the declaration of human rights that anyone should be able to express his or her beliefs freely, without any coercion or harm. Institutional religious freedom in Indonesia can only be achieved if the state steps back from defining the true religion and listens to the religious communities on what religion means for them.

Conclusion

The discussion on religious freedom should also consider the *forum externum*. Without the room for a religious community to express themselves in public, their religious freedom could be said to be limited. Institutional religious freedom in Indonesia is problematic because the state attempts to define what is religion and what is not and categorises which religions are official and which are not. Abraham Kuyper's notion of sphere sovereignty affirms both the state's sovereignty and the church or religious institutions. However, the two should not breach each other's sovereignty by either politicisation of religion or religionisation of politics. The interrelatedness between the two should be seen in harmonious mutual respect and mutual contribution from each sphere towards one another. The state should protect and accommodate the religious communities to exercise their religious freedom. In contrast, the church or any other religious institution should be the moral compass of the state and seek to contribute to the common good of the society.

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⁸George Harinck called Kuyper's position as 'the principle of equal distribution of public money;' see Harinck (2020:115).

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The authors declare that they have no financial or personal relationships that may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this article.

Authors' contributions

D.K. and T.S. contributed equally to the writing of this article.

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Disclaimer

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