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Kuyperania 2022

ABSTRACT

This article looks at new works published in 2022 by or about the Dutch polymath Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920).

KEY CONCEPTS: Abraham Kuyper, neo-Calvinism, Charity & Justice, Lectures on Calvinism, Klaas Schilder

ABSTRAK

Hierdie artikel kyk na nuwe werk gepubliseer in 2022 deur of oor die Nederlandse polimaat Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920).

KERNBEGRIPE: Abraham Kuyper, neo-Calvinisme, Liefdadigheid en Geregtigheid, Lesings oor Calvinisme, Klaas Schilder

1. INTRODUCTION

In 2022 we saw the completion of the *Abraham Kuyper Collected Works in Public Theology* translations. *On Charity and Justice* (Kuyper, 2022) is the final volume in the twelve-volume project. Lexham Press and the Acton Institute have done a marvellous job in getting out these superbly produced volumes. These volumes have to a large extent been responsible for a resurgence in Anglophone Kuyper Studies.

One of the most encouraging developments has been the interest in Kuyper, and the application of his views, in Asia, particularly in Indonesia (for example, Intan 2022; Kristanto, 2022; and Un, 2022) and China (for example, Tseng, 2022; Xu, 2022). Once more showing the relevance of Kuyper to contemporary society.

Jason Estopinal's Laymen's Lounge website has published several pieces looking at the state of neo-Calvinism around the world. These included the non-Western countries of Mexico, Brazil, and one by Surya Harefa on "The State of Neo-Calvinism in Japan" (Harefa, 2022). *The Journal of Chinese Theology* 8(2) has a special issue on Neo-Calvinism and inevitably Kuyper is mentioned. The editor Shao Kai Tseng points to the influence of Jonathan Chao (1938-2004) in bringing neo-Calvinism to China:

It was also Chao who travelled to Sumatra, Indonesia, to convince Stephen Tong (唐崇榮, b. 1940) to begin offering theological courses for the laity throughout Asia. Eventually, Tong, an autodidact in theology, initiated the Reformed Evangelical Movement that gave rise to a highly creative and evangelistic form of the Reformed faith that began to exert immense influence among churches in mainland China in the 1990s. While his teachings do not always conform

to confessional orthodoxy, he and Chao were at any rate the first to popularize a number of key neo-Calvinist ideas, including the cultural mandate, among Sinophone Christians.

As Tseng notes: "The present issue of the *Journal of Chinese Theology* is intended as a sample of the ongoing developments of neo-Calvinism in Sinophone Christianity." Articles in this volume discuss Bavinck (Sidharta, 2022); Ximian Xu (2022) - a doctoral student of James Eglinton - examines the resources that Kuyper provides for a Reformed theology that is "tailored to the Chinese context". Ryan McHenry examines the Reformational philosophy of Dooyeweerd and Vollenhoven in dialogue with Chinese philosophy. Jin Li's article looks at Bavinck through the older paradigm of Jan Veenhof rather than the more recent consensus of an organismic and holistic approach of James Eglinton (2012) and the "Edinburgh school".

2. TRANSLATIONS

2.1 *On Charity and Justice*

As mentioned, *On Charity and Justice* is the final volume of the *Abraham Kuyper Collected Works in Public Theology*. The details in the style of Kuipers (2011) of this translation are:

On Charity and Justice

Abraham Kuyper Collected Works in Public Theology

Bellingham, WA, Lexham Press 2022. 464 pp., 18.42 x 3.81 x 26.04 cm - £37.35

Published: 23 February 2022

Translations of:

Christ and the Needy (1895) The Reefs of Democracy (1895)

Not the Liberty Tree but the Cross! (1889)

Sphere Sovereignty.

Is Error a Punishable Offence? (From De Standaard, 1874)

Freedom of Speech and Freedom of the Press (From De Standaard, 1895)

Celebrating Twenty-Five Years of De Standaard (1897)

The Press as the Apostle of Peace (1913)

The Family, Society, and the State (1880)

You Shall Not Covet - Lord's Day 44A (1892-95)

Our Relationship to the Law - Lord's Day 44B (1892-95)

Translator: Harry Van Dyke, John Kok, and Ed M. van der Maas

General Editors: Jordan J. Ballor and Melvin Flikkema

Editor: Matthew J. Tuininga

Introduction by: John Witte Jr.

Binding: Hardback

ISBN: 978-1577996736

The main topics that occupy Kuyper in this volume include family, property, labour, welfare, democracy, sovereignty, and liberty. Tuininga, in his introduction, examines Kuyper's "gospel politics of charity and justice". Tuininga astutely observes:

For all the differences between our time and Kuyper's, Christians today face largely the same daunting task as did Kuyper: to articulate a vigorous, socially aware, gospel-centered Christian vision for a world that is in danger of fracturing under the diffusive and secularizing pressures of modernity.

Kuyper in "Christ and the Needy", the first article in this volume, regards the neglect of Jesus' teaching regarding social relationships as a failure of the church. This Kuyper asserts is partly because preachers have too often been guilty of spiritualising the Scriptures.

In "The Reefs of Democracy" he identifies potential obstacles that can prevent a democratically elected parliament from functioning. One of Kuyper's aims was to make parliament more democratic. One reef that might hinder this is "popular sovereignty". He rejects universal suffrage as he feels this opposes the sovereignty of God:

But universal suffrage is a formula that stands for an entirely different system. It is a system that opposes God's sovereignty with the proposition that governing authority resides in the latent will of the state, and that every inhabitant as a member of the body politic contributes toward expressing the will of the state. Then the state no longer depends on God but is self-sufficient, and the people acts politically on a foundation of atheism. The state then on principle denies God, even if it maintains freedom of religion as a private affair. (Kuyper, 2022:62)

Other reefs include the dominance of class egoism, rudeness, and the class struggle "because it tempts one class in society to avail itself of the state machine as a tool to break the neck of the other class." (Ibid.:68)

Three chapters in this volume show Kuyper's concern for a free press. A press that is constructive and not aggressive or humiliating. On the occasion of the twenty-fifth celebration of *De Standaard* in 1897 Kuyper was presented with a large black and white marble statue. On seeing it Kuyper remarked, "it's true then, Calvinists have once again learned to value art". (Ibid.:236). Herman Bavinck praised Kuyper for inspiring the common people and Theo Heemskerk (1852-1932) remarked that Kuyper "taught our people in the political arena not only to fight for the faith but also to live out of faith" (Ibid.:231).

Kuyper wrote four articles about journalism in *De Standaard* in November 1985 ("Freedom of Speech and Freedom of the Press"). In the final article Kuyper, discusses the essential principles of journalism. These include the notion that newspapers should be free to report and discuss (or not) as they please, and discussions that become polemics should be avoided except in exceptional cases. What distinguishes Kuyper is his emphasis on constructive journalism. He opposes harsh and demeaning journalistic behaviour. Would that newspapers and media today adhere to these principles!

On Charity and Justice is a well-produced volume and provides a good overview of Kuyper's approach regarding social concern and justice. Key elements for Kuyper are the family, the church, and charity albeit supplemented, when necessary, by State welfare. These themes are helpfully reiterated in this collection.

3. BOOKS ON KUYPER

Several books take Kuyper's *Lectures on Calvinism* (Kuyper, 1931) as a starting point. Heslam (1998) examined in detail the background to them and was awarded a doctorate as a result. The Stone Lectures are important because they were delivered by Kuyper to an American audience in English and addressed to the American context. *Calvinism for a Secular Age* is a welcome addition to help understand the importance of the Lectures and to see something of Kuyper's legacy. There are eight chapters sandwiched between an introduction and a conclusion by Jessica and Richard Joustra. The chapters are:

1. Kuyper and Life-Systems, Richard J. Mouw
2. Kuyper and Religion, James Eglinton
3. Kuyper and Politics, Jonathan Chaplin

4. Kuyper and Science, Deborah B. Haarsma
5. Kuyper and Art, Adrienne Dengerink Chaplin
6. Kuyper and the Future, Bruce Ashford
7. Kuyper and Race, Vincent Bacote
8. Lost in Translation: The First Text of the Stone Lectures, George Harinck

All the authors follow a simple but effective structure to their chapters: what Kuyper said, what Kuyperians have done, and what next. Consequently, this is more than a summary of the lectures. They provide an overview of how Kuyperians have taken up Kuyper's vision. There is no bowdlerising of Kuyper. For example, his ugly views on racism are not whitewashed but addressed head-on by Bacote in his chapter on "Kuyper and Race".

4. ARTICLES/ CHAPTERS IN BOOKS

Klaas Schilder (1890-1952), despite being in the neo-Calvinist tradition, was a vociferous critic of Kuyper's common grace, the church as organism, and the pluriformity of the church. However, despite this he was an admirer of Kuyper and saw himself in the line of Kuyper and Bavinck (de Jong, 2020:80). Unfortunately, much of Schilder's work has yet to be translated, so the *Schilder Reader* (Schilder, 2022) is a welcome addition. Schilder's criticisms of Kuyper sharpened from 1936 onwards. Nevertheless, de Jong can describe Schilder as "one of the most distinctly Kuyperian voices in the first half of the twentieth century" (de Jong, 2020:163). In the *Schilder Reader* we have his article on Kuyper's *Lectures on Calvinism*, written for an issue of *De Reformatie* to commemorate the centenary of Kuyper's birth. Here Schilder supports Kuyper against some of his critics.

Kuyper is a key "conversation" partner in Part II of the *Schilder Reader* (Common Grace and Culture). Schilder was one of Kuyper's fiercest critics over the issue of common grace and here we have some of his developing critique. Another critic of common grace is Herman Hoeksema (1886-1965) of the Protestant Reformed Church in North America (PRC).

Vásárhelyi (2022) draws extensively on PRC theologians in his critique of Kuyper. In many ways it is a rehearsal of the PRC anti-common grace arguments. Vásárhelyi begins the article with a brief biography of Kuyper but draws primarily on Hanks (1999) rather than Bratt (2013). He asserts that:

Kuyper's goal was to Christianize the Netherlands and her colonies, which he tried to do by forming a coalition with the Roman Catholic political party. Thus he used state powers to promote his goals, using as his doctrinal justification the idea of common grace, which he had introduced into Calvinism. (Vásárhelyi, 2022:15)

This is an unfair and inaccurate description of Kuyper's approach. Vásárhelyi even implies that it was a postmillennial approach (Ibid.:17). And yet Kuyper held to amillennialism (see, for example, Kuyper, 1935).

Vásárhelyi then examines Kuyper's *Lectures on Calvinism* (1931). He makes a strange assertion —without any evidence— that the "worldview introduced in this chapter [Calvinism and Religion], therefore, is not distinctively Reformed, but positivist and humanistic." Unfortunately, Vásárhelyi's critique can be summarised as Kuyper differs from the PRC's position, therefore Kuyper is not Reformed: "We urge the reader to turn away from Kuyper's Neo-Calvinism and to hold fast to the authentic, orthodox Calvinism of John Calvin, the Reformers and the precious Reformed confessions." There is nothing new in his critique that cannot be found in *Sin and Grace* (Danhof and Hoeksema, 2016).

As well as common grace, unity-within-diversity is a key Kuyperian theme. David Kristanto, a PhD candidate at the VU Amsterdam and lecturer at Harvest International Theological Seminary (Indonesia), explores Kuyper's approach to diversity. He discusses Kuyper's view and shows its potential for "engaging in interreligious dialogues that could lead to mutual faith-enrichments" in Indonesia. He shows how Kuyper is relevant to the pluralistic society of Indonesia:

He did so not by relativizing his Calvinistic faith but to develop the notion of civil liberty from a Calvinistic perspective that is rooted in the concept of God's absolute sovereignty. Thus, a Kuyperian concept of civil liberty for people from all religions or worldview could contribute towards stimulating faith-enriching interreligious dialogues in our time. Far from diminishing the faith of those who are in dialogues, such interreligious dialogues done on the basis of equality could lead to mutual faith-enrichment. (Kristanto, 2022:124-125)

Kristanto is also one of authors of a multi-author paper that takes a theological look at the use of a "virtual sacred space" (Salurante *et al.*, 2022). Drawing on Kuyper they conclude "there is nothing that hinders the virtual space to be used as a sacred space for worship purpose" (Ibid.:146).

Also in the Indonesian context is Intan (2022) who explores another Kuyperian theme, that of sphere sovereignty, he shows that it can be useful in bringing back a normative leadership in Indonesian politics, one that would "allow religion to fulfil its obligations to the state and the state towards religion, without getting trapped in the discourse of the politicisation of religion and the religionisation of politics." Antonius Steven Un is another Indonesian that utilises Kuyper. In Un (2022) he "presents a Kuyperian critique of ideological uniformity and political integralism in Europe and Indonesia".

In his book on law and gospel, Maarten Wisse, rector of the Protestant Theological University in the Netherlands, uses Kuyper's interpretation of the Lord's Supper as a case study (Wisse, 2022). In it he compares Kuyper and Bavinck as a basis for developing a "preliminary exploration of Neo-Calvinism in the development of the Lord's supper in the Reformed tradition" (Wisse, 2022:168). He sees Kuyper as offering a pneumatological approach and a Trinitarian view of the sacraments. He suggests that Kuyper prefers Calvin's view over that of Rome, Luther, and Zwingli. On this Kuyper and Bavinck agree. One main difference between them that Wisse discerns is that of the *unio mystica* in the doctrine of the sacraments; for Kuyper it is individual and collective, whereas for Bavinck it is individual. However, he does identify some differences, particularly how the Word and sacrament relate. Wisse writes:

Kuyper's contribution is much more creative and radical. Kuyper does not merely follow the Reformed tradition but also assesses its strengths and weaknesses. He diagnoses the relationship between Word and Spirit as a problem in the Reformed tradition. The efficacy of the Word depends on the work of the Spirit, who remains free to give grace to whomever God wants. This opens the possibility that there will be hearers of the Word who will not receive grace, and it also opens up the possibility that some will receive grace who never heard the Gospel (Wisse, 2022:176).

Bishop (2022a) examines Kuyper's perspective on evolution. Kuyper saw that evolutionism had origins in pantheism and monism and thus encouraged atheism; consequently, he was opposed to it. He did, however, leave the door open for some sort of evolution that was directed by God rather than chance.

Bishop (2022b) looks at some of Kuyper's critics. The paper focuses on primarily theological disputes and only briefly alludes to the more recent critiques of his cultural stereotyping and his alleged basis for South African apartheid. The critics focused on include Hoedemaker,

Schilder, Foppe Ten Hoor, A.A. Van Ruler, and members of the Protestant Reformed Church in North America. Issues discussed include Kuyper's ecclesiology, baptism and presumptive regeneration, non-Christian philosophical influences, and common grace. It concludes that despite Kuyper's flaws there is much to be learned from him.

Beck and Falconer (2022) provide a cartographic overview of trends in Reformed versions of cultural engagement. They identify three main views: a Klinean two-kingdom approach, Kuyper and Herman Dooyeweerd's "philosophical and structural monism", and perspectivalism and theonomy with their emphasis on "covenantal consistency and continuity". They suggest that "Kuyper's view certainly provides an interesting opportunity for further dialogue between Reformed Two-Kingdom and Neo-Calvinist theologians" (Ibid.:165).

5. REVIEWS

Bruce Pass reviews Kuyper's *Common Grace* volume 3 (Pass, 2022). He notes one or two weaknesses of the work – including Kuyper's view on art – but concludes: "As long as one remembers the intended audience for whom Kuyper was writing and the limitations of his medium, *Common Grace* makes for interesting if not rewarding reading."

6. CONCLUSION

It is good to see that Kuyper research is still flourishing. It is also encouraging to see that his work is being taken seriously in non-Western communities. The latter is an important trend that is already producing fruitful insights.

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