

***Worldviews Collide: The Unapologetic  
Apologetic of Abraham Kuyper***

*or*

*"A Critical Assessment of Abraham Kuyper's Worldview  
Apologetics, with Special Reference to the  
Stone Lectures."*

By

Jeffrey C. Waddington

Submitted in Consideration of  
*The Greene Prize in Apologetics*

on

Thursday 15 April 1999

at

Westminster Theological Seminary  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Prolegomena	1
1.1 A Centennial Commemoration	1
1.2 A Continuing Legacy	2
1.3 Thesis and Format	5
2. An Overview of Kuyper's Worldview Apologetics	6
2.1 What is a worldview?	6
2.2 Characteristics of Kuyper's Worldview	9
2.21 Comprehensive Nature of Worldviews	9
2.22 The Normalist/Abnormalist Distinction	11
2.23 Conceptual Monism	12
2.24 Evolutionary Development	13
2.25 The Antithesis/Common Grace Dialectic	15
3. Kuyper's 1898 Stone Lectures on Calvinism	20
3.1 Calvinism a Life-System	20
3.2 Calvinism and Religion	21
3.3 Calvinism and Politics	23
3.4 Calvinism and Science	28
3.5 Calvinism and Art	32
3.6 Calvinism and the Future	36
4. A Critical Assessment	40
4.1 On Worldviews	41
4.2 Comprehensive Nature of Worldviews	42
4.3 The Normalist/Abnormal Distinction	44
4.4 Conceptual Monism	44
4.5 Evolutionary Development	45
4.6 The Antithesis/Common Grace Dialectic	46
4.7 Concluding Remarks	47
Bibliography	

*The man without the Spirit does not  
accept the things that come from  
the Spirit of God, for they are  
foolishness to him, and he  
cannot understand them,  
because they are  
Spiritually  
discerned.*

St. Paul in 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 2:4 (NIV)

## **1. Prolegomena**

### **1.1 A Centennial Commemoration**

The year nineteen hundred and ninety-eight saw the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Dutch theologian-statesman Abraham Kuyper's<sup>1</sup> presentation of his justly famous *Stone Lectures on Calvinism*<sup>2</sup> at Princeton Theological Seminary. In that series of six lectures, Kuyper strove to demonstrate that Calvinism was not simply a religious dogma that some might argue was relevant for confessional purposes only, but was a thoroughgoing "life-system".<sup>3</sup> Kuyper himself described the life-system of Calvinism as "all embracing,"<sup>4</sup> "comprehensive,"<sup>5</sup> and "far-reaching."<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup>An excellent first hand source for biographical information on Kuyper can be found in his *Confidentie: Schrijven aan den Weld* (Amsterdam: Hoveker and Wormser, 1873), portions of which can be found translated into English as "Confidentially" in James Bratt's *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader*, pp. 46-61 and throughout Peter Heslam's thorough study *Creating A Christian Worldview: Abraham Kuyper's Lectures on Calvinism*.

<sup>2</sup>Abraham Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1931.)

<sup>3</sup>Kuyper, *Lectures*, p. 11ff

<sup>4</sup>Kuyper, *Lectures*, p. 11

<sup>5</sup>Kuyper, *Lectures*, p. 11

<sup>6</sup>Kuyper, *Lectures*, p. 11

The centennial of Kuyper's *Stone Lectures* has been the occasion for critical reassessment and reappraisal of Kuyper's thought in general and with regard to the *Stone Lectures* themselves as can be seen in the recent publication of Peter Heslam's *Creating a Christian Worldview: Abraham Kuyper's Lectures on Calvinism*,<sup>7</sup> a compilation of previously unavailable (in English) writings of Kuyper edited by James Bratt entitled *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader*,<sup>8</sup> and John Bolt's forthcoming volume *Abraham Kuyper and American Political Theory Today*.<sup>9</sup> We have clearly entered into a time when a critical reassessment and perhaps even a reappropriation of Kuyper's basic insights is called for. Of course, Westminster Theological Seminary stands in conscious debt to the hoary tradition of Dutch Reformed thought as exemplified in the *Stone Lectures* through the salutary influence of men like Cornelius Van Til.<sup>10</sup>

## 1.2 *A Continuing Legacy*

It is somewhat ironic that we should even be talking about Kuyper's "worldview" (or life-system) apologetic, given his basically negative evaluation of the discipline as traditionally practiced. Kuyper apparently thought that in the long life of the church, apologetics had contributed little of

---

<sup>7</sup>Peter S. Heslam, *Creating A Christian Worldview: Abraham Kuyper's Lectures on Calvinism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998).

<sup>8</sup>James Bratt, ed., *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998).

<sup>9</sup>This forthcoming volume will be published by Eerdmans. Information obtained through personal correspondence with the author.

<sup>10</sup>This, of course, is not to ignore the fact that Westminster Theological Seminary is also the heir to "Old Princeton" and the preeminent scholarship of the Hodges, Warfield and Machen. See Greg L. Bahnsen, *Van Til's Apologetic: Readings & Analysis* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishers, 1998), pp. 596 - 612 for a helpful analysis of Van Til's use of both Abraham Kuyper and Benjamin B. Warfield in his apologetic method.

value, by giving away its case before it had made its defense. In fact, at the very outset of his *Lectures*, he gives us this assessment:

In this struggle (between conflicting life-systems-ed.) Apologetics have advanced us not one single step. Apologists have invariably begun by abandoning the assailed breastwork, in order to entrench themselves cowardly in a ravelin behind it.<sup>11</sup>

So when discussing Kuyper's "apologetic" we need to keep in mind that apologetics, at least as he understood it, was a questionable enterprise. And yet, he himself practiced apologetics (although sometimes inconsistently, per Van Til) all the same. Those who stand within the presuppositional school of apologetics have benefitted greatly from the trenchant criticisms that Kuyper made of so called "traditional" apologetics.<sup>12</sup>

As Peter Heslam has pointed out, one key to Kuyper's negative assessment of traditional apologetics was his notion (following in the footsteps of Augustine and Anselm) of *faith seeking understanding*<sup>13</sup> which laid great stress on the fact that people were brought to faith by the work of

---

<sup>11</sup>Kuyper, *Lectures*, p. 11 See also Kuyper's comments in his *Principles of Sacred Theology*, translated by J. Hendrick Devies (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1968), p. 160. In speaking to the issue of the "antithesis" in science, he says, "It will be impossible to settle the difference of insight. No polemics between these two kinds of science can ever serve any...purpose. This is the reason why...Apologetics has always failed to reach results." Also cited in Bahnsen, *Van Til's Apologetic*, p. 33.

<sup>12</sup>See again Bahnsen, *Van Til's Apologetic*, pp. 596-612, where Bahnsen (along with the lengthy citations from the various writings of Van Til) explains the strengths and weaknesses of *both* Kuyper and Warfield (who may represent to many the "traditional" apologetic method) and how Van Til endeavored to take the best insights of both men and meld them into an effective apologetic method. Of course, one of Van Til's preferred targets was Bishop Butler's *Analogy*. Perhaps Kuyper would best be seen as practicing a form of apologetics close in *style* to Warfield's brand of polemical theology. If that is the case, it would have an "elenctic" or convictional character, much as Van Til's presuppositional method. More about this later.

<sup>13</sup>Otherwise known in its Latin form as *fides quaerens intellectum*. See Heslam, *Christian Worldview*, p. 127. See also, Muller *Dictionary of Greek and Latin Theological Terms* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1985), p.47, and Anselm's *Proslogion* and *Monologion* in *The Works of Anselm* (Buffalo, NY: Open Court Books, 1967).

the Holy Spirit (the so called “testimonium Spiritus Sancti”)<sup>14</sup> and not intellectualistic argumentation.<sup>15</sup> Kuyper’s thought is not without its own problems (which we will wrestle with below)<sup>16</sup> but the broad contours of his views on the “antithesis” between the believer and the unbeliever are basically correct (in the view of this writer) and have even exercised some influence beyond strictly Presbyterian and Reformed circles in the thinking of Evangelicals like Carl F. H.

---

<sup>14</sup>See Eric Bristley’s helpful, but unpublished 1989 ThM thesis from Westminster Theological Seminary, *From Probability to Certainty: The Witness of the Holy Spirit and the Defense of the Bible in Presbyterian and Reformed Apologetics, 1870 - 1920*. which goes into some depth on the differences between Old Amsterdam (Kuyper and Bavinck, et al) and Old Princeton (Warfield and others) on the place of the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit the apologetic defense of Scripture.

<sup>15</sup>Recently, Carl Trueman, in his excellent treatment of the theology of John Owen made this balanced evaluation appropriate to the topic at hand, “In line with his basic Augustinian anthropology, Owen considers human beings to be subject to two conditions that render their appropriation of God’s revelation impossible: their essential finiteness; and their sinful depravity. The first cuts them off from God because God is an infinite object beyond the grasp of finite beings. As noted above, even in the state of integrity, Owen argues, the finiteness of the human mind renders its incapable, in itself, of understanding the mysteries of God. Human minds are simply not capable of comprehending God, and this is why people are not only dependent on upon ectypal theology. But also require God’s assistance in order to grasp this theology for themselves. The second condition, that of innate sinful depravity, serves to blind people to that revelation. Owen regards this depravity as having two effects. First, it plunges human minds into darkness and blinds them to God’s revelation, and second, it implants corrupt affections which lead people to reject Scripture. As a result, a person can only come to grasp God’s revelation once this darkness and the corrupt affections have been overcome. In other words, objective revelation is not enough, there must also be a subjective transformation within human beings to make the grasping of revelation a reality. This is where the work of the Holy Spirit becomes vitally important.” *The Claims of Truth: John Owen’s Trinitarian Theology* (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster Press, 1998), pp. 75-76. Clearly enough, Kuyper stands within the mainstream of Reformed tradition as Trueman’s remarks regarding John Owen bear out. It appears that Kuyper may have drawn incorrect conclusions from his basically sound position, as Cornelius Van Til has shown. See Bahnsen, *Van Til’s Apologetic*, pp. 271, 293 & 596-612.

<sup>16</sup>See Bahnsen, *Van Til’s Apologetic*, pp. 596-612 on Van Til’s judicious judgement on the strengths and weaknesses of Kuyper and Warfield, where Bahnsen shows how Van Til endeavored to show that both Kuyper and Warfield drew invalid conclusions from proper views each held respectively. More will be said about this matter below.

Henry<sup>17</sup> and Edward John Carnell.<sup>18</sup>

### **1.3 Thesis and Format**

Our thesis is that the worldview (or life-system) apologetics of Abraham Kuyper is basically sound in its contours and content. The view that the believer and the unbeliever interpret all of life from a different set of epistemological principles seems biblically on target. One major issue that we will be wanting to wrestle with is the recognized tension that exists in the twin concepts of the antithesis and common grace which are so prevalent in Kuyper.<sup>19</sup> We believe that Kuyper's contribution toward the understanding of the epistemological antithesis between belief and unbelief is significant and ought to be examined, refined and appropriated. To a large extent this has already been done in the apologetic of Cornelius Van Til, so what we conclude here will no doubt reflect the influence of his writings. Ultimately, we believe that Abraham Kuyper's worldview apologetic is best described as *polemical theology with an elenctic flavor*.

---

<sup>17</sup>Carl F. H. Henry, *God, Revelation & Authority* in six volumes (Waco, Texas: Word, 1976-83) which has been recently re-released by Crossway Books in commemoration of Henry's 85<sup>th</sup> birthday. Henry was a founding faculty member of Fuller Theological Seminary and the founding editor of *Christianity Today*. See his *Confessions of a Theologian* (Waco, Texas: Word, 1986) and George Marsden's *Reforming Fundamentalism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989).

<sup>18</sup>Carnell, erstwhile president of Fuller Theological Seminary, had the benefit of sitting under the teaching of Gordon Clark at Wheaton College and Cornelius Van Til at Westminster Theological Seminary. See Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism* and Rudolph Nelson's *The Making and Unmaking of an Evangelical Mind: The Case of Edward Carnell* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987). See Nelson's brief remarks on page 137 on Carnell's use of, among others, Abraham Kuyper, in his *The Case For Orthodoxy*. Amazingly, W. Andrew Hoffeker and Gary Scott Smith in their two volume *Building A Christian Worldview* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed Publishing, 1986) give scant attention to the foundational influence of Kuyper. He is mentioned on the last page of text (p. 457) in the second volume and even then not with reference to his worldview apologetic per se.

<sup>19</sup>Heslam, *Christian Worldview*, p. 262ff reflects this "unresolved" tension.

The format of this paper will be to present an overview of Kuyper's own understanding of his "worldview" apologetic involving the salient elements of the concept (drawn primarily from the first lecture, *Calvinism a Life-System*) and detailing some of the influence which James Orr's *A Christian View of God and the World*<sup>20</sup> may have had on Kuyper. This will be followed by a concise analysis of the lectures themselves concentrating on highlights after which we will conclude with some helpful observations clearly influenced by Cornelius Van Til and the recent review of Heslam's *Creating a Christian Worldview* by Esther L. Meek in the *Presbyterian Journal*, entitled "Embrace It or Replace It".<sup>21</sup>

## **2. An Overview of Kuyper's Worldview Apologetics**

### **2.1 What is a "worldview"?**

Strictly speaking, Abraham Kuyper didn't adopt the term "worldview" to describe his concept of an all embracing Calvinism. On the advice of American friends Kuyper translated the German compound *Weltanschauung* as "life-system."<sup>22</sup> Kuyper himself describes his selection of life-system

---

<sup>20</sup>James Orr, *A Christian View of God and the World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1989 Reprint). Reference to the influence of this book on Kuyper's thought can be found in Heslam, *Christian Worldview*, p. 92-96 and elsewhere throughout the book and in William Edgar's review of Heslam's book in the *Westminster Theological Journal*, Vol. 60, no. 2 (Fall 1998), pp. 355-358.

<sup>21</sup>Esther L. Meek, "Embrace It or Replace It: The Christian and Culture-A Review of Peter S. Heslam's *Creating a Christian Worldview: Abraham Kuyper's Lectures on Calvinism*" in *The Presbyterian: Covenant Seminary Journal*, Vol. XXIV, no. 2 (Fall 1998), pp. 119-125.

<sup>22</sup>Although as Peter Heslam informs us, "It is worth clarifying, however, that the evidence is strongly against Kuyper's claim to have used 'life-system' in the title of his first lecture. The version of the Stone Lectures he used to deliver his lectures at Princeton, the syllabus of the lectures distributed to each member of his audience, and the press reports of Kuyper's Stone Lectures, all testify to the original title having been 'Calvinism and History'. Kuyper changed the title of the first lecture to 'Calvinism a Life-system' for the published version of the lectures in English, most probably in order to draw attention to the fundamental thesis of the lectures as a whole-that Calvinism was an all-embracing life-system, rather than a narrowly defined set of doctrines or a particular ecclesiology." *Christian*



in this manner:

As Dr. James Orr (in his valuable lectures *The Christian View of God and the World*, Edinb., 1897, p. 3) observes, the German technical term *Weltanschauung* has no precise equivalent in English. He therefore used the literal translation *view of the world*, notwithstanding this phrase in English is limited by associations, which associate it predominantly with *physical* nature. For this reason, the more explicit phrase; *life and world view* seems to be more preferable. My American friends, however, told me that the shorter phrase: *life system*, on the other side of the ocean, is often used in the same sense.<sup>23</sup>

Undoubtedly Kuyper developed the idea of a worldview from his interaction with German Idealism in his student days and because evolutionary ideas were “in the air” in Kuyper’s day as a part of the *Zeitgeist*. But the one source that probably solidified Kuyper’s thinking on worldviews was James Orr, the Scottish theologian, who himself had delivered a series of lectures on worldview thinking. As William Edgar comments,

Heslam informs us that Kuyper’s awareness of worldview thinking stems not only from the antecedents in German Idealism but also from James Orr. The Scottish theologian had himself delivered the Kerr Lectures in 1890-1891, published two years later under the title, *The Christian View of God and the World*. The parallels are striking, particularly considering Orr’s emphasis on the systematic character of every religion, and the need for a “comprehensive method” in the defense of the Christian view of things.<sup>24</sup>

Orr tells us that anyone who read the better known works of German theology would constantly run into the word “Weltanschauung” especially if those theological works consciously referred to works in the field of the philosophy of religion. Apparently, this compound German word could be

---

*Worldview*, p. 88.

<sup>23</sup>Kuyper, *Lectures*, p. 11, note 1.

<sup>24</sup>William Edgar, “A Review of Peter Heslam’s *Creating A Christian Worldview: Abraham Kuyper’s Lectures on Calvinism*, *The Westminster Theological Journal* Vol. 60 no. 2 (Fall 1998), p. 355. See also Heslam’s remarks on pages 88 - 96 of his *Creating A Christian Worldview*.

interchanged with “Weltansicht” another somewhat opaque term.<sup>25</sup> While an exact English translation may not have been found, the terms “worldview” and life-system seem more than adequate. As Orr goes on to say,

The idea of the “Weltanschauung” may be said to have entered predominantly into modern thought through the influence of Kant, who derives what he calls the “Weltbegriffe” from the second of his Ideas of Pure Reason, to which is assigned the function of the systematic connection of all our experiences into a unity of a world-whole (Weltganz). But the thing itself is as old as the dawn of reflection, and is found in a cruder or more advanced form in every religion and philosophy with any pretensions to a historical character.<sup>26</sup>

So a worldview is a set of beliefs that “underlie and shape all human thought and action” and would perhaps be called a “meta-narrative” in our day, something that would pull all our thoughts and experiences together and make sense of them in a unified fashion. Perhaps we could say that a worldview is a way of looking at the world, just as we would say that someone with an overly optimistic or naive outlook would be looking at the world through “rose colored glasses”. A worldview is the grid through which we all filter life. Needless to say, Kuyper (in the footsteps of Orr) had something very particular in mind when he explained his idea of a worldview or life-system. Next we will look at some of the defining characteristics of Kuyper’s worldview apologetic which he himself explained in the first lecture<sup>27</sup> that he delivered at Princeton Theological Seminary. Given that Kuyper was drawing, at least in part, on his reading of Orr’s lectures, it may be valuable

---

<sup>25</sup>Orr, *The Christian View*, p. 3.

<sup>26</sup>Orr, *The Christian View*, pp. 4-5. Heslam tells us that the idea of the Weltanschauung was “coined by Kant in his *Kritik der Urteilskraft* (1790), [and] became a key word in the thought-world of German Idealism and Romanticism, and was used to denote a set of beliefs that underlie and shape all human thought and action. As such it was akin to philosophy but without philosophy’s rational pretensions.” *Christian Worldview*, pp. 88-89.

<sup>27</sup>Kuyper’s first lecture in the series of six was entitled *Calvinism a Life System. Lectures*, pp. 9-40.

---

for us to look to Orr on occasion as well.

## **2.2 Characteristics of Kuyper's Worldview**

While there are many aspects of Kuyper's worldview apologetic that are worthy of analysis, our goal will be to examine the following five characteristics: the comprehensive nature of worldviews, the normalist/abnormalist distinction, the so called monistic basis of worldview thinking, the evolutionary thrust of Kuyper's worldview and last (but surely not least), the antithesis/common grace dialectic.

### *2.21 Comprehensive Nature of Worldviews*

One of the most important features of any worldview would be its comprehensive character. It could be seen to be along the same lines of an explanatory hypothesis whose strength lies in its ability to explain progressively wider fields of enquiry. James Orr, in a singular way, set the agenda when he said,

To some the subject which I have thus chosen may seem unduly wide and vague. I can only reply that I have deliberately chosen it for this very reason, that it enables me to deal with Christianity in its entirety or as a system, instead of dealing with particular aspects or doctrine of it. Both methods have their advantages; but no one, I think, whose eyes are open to the signs of the times, can fail to perceive that if Christianity is to be effectually defended from attacks made upon it, it is the *comprehensive method* which is rapidly becoming more urgent. The opposition which Christianity has to encounter is no longer confined to special doctrines or to points of supposed conflict with the natural sciences; -for example, the relations of Genesis and geology, - but extends to the whole manner of conceiving the world, and of man's place in it, the endeavor of conceiving of the entire system of things, natural and moral, of which we form a part. It is no longer an opposition to detail, but of principle. The circumstance necessitates an equal extension of the line of defense. It is the Christian view of things in general which is attacked, and it is by an exposition and vindication of the Christian view of things as a whole that the case can most successfully be met.<sup>28</sup>

---

<sup>28</sup>Orr, *The Christian View*, pp. 3-4 (italics mine).

Kuyper further delineated the nature of this comprehensiveness by showing that any worldview must answer three interrelated and crucially significant relations. He tells us, "Hence we must ask what are the *required* conditions for such general systems of life, such as Paganism, Islamism, Romanism and Modernism, and then show that Calvinism really fulfills those conditions."<sup>29</sup> These "fundamental" relations are: 1. Our relation *to God*, 2. Our relation *to man* and 3. Our relation *to the world*.<sup>30</sup> According to Kuyper, any worldview worth the name would have to tackle these concerns. Christianity in general<sup>31</sup>, and Calvinism in particular, has done just that.<sup>32</sup>

---

<sup>29</sup>Kuyper, *Lectures*, p. 19.

<sup>30</sup>Kuyper, *Lectures*, pp. 19-32.

<sup>31</sup>It is interesting to note in passing that James Orr sets out to defend Christianity whereas Kuyper refines or narrows that down to Calvinism, which is apparently related to Kuyper's adoption of "heliotropism" which will be discussed in greater depth below. One senses the affinity that this view has with Benjamin Warfield's idea that Christianity is meant to "reason its way" to preeminence in the world with regard to apologetics. See Warfield's *The Plan of Salvation* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publications, 1915).

<sup>32</sup>In summing up his section of the three crucial human relations to which any legitimate worldview must answer, Kuyper says this with regard to Calvinism in particular, "Thus it is shown that Calvinism has a sharply-defined starting-point of its own for the three fundamental relations of all human existence: viz., our relation *to God*, *to man* and *to the world*. For our relation *to God*: an immediate fellowship of man with the Eternal, independently of priest or church. For the relation of man *to man*: the recognition in each person of human worth, which is his by virtue of his creation after the Divine likeness, and therefore the equality of all men before God and his magistrate. And for our relation *to the world*: recognition that in the whole world the curse is restrained by grace, that the life of the world is to be honored in its independence, and that we must, in every domain, discover the treasures and develop the potencies hidden by God in nature and human life. This justifies us fully in our statement that Calvinism duly answers the three above-named conditions, and thus is incontestably entitled to take its stand by the side of Paganism, Islamism, Romanism and Modernism, and to claim for itself the glory of possessing a well defined principle and all-embracing life system." *Lectures*, pp. 31 & 32. Perhaps it would be appropriate here to mention that the Calvinism Kuyper commends is a somewhat revised form which grapples with modern concerns and is therefore commonly labeled "neo-Calvinism". As William Edgar has said, "Only Calvinism can provide such a life-system; but not simply traditional Reformed theology. It has to be an awakened form of Genevan principles, legitimately known as 'neo-Calvinism.'" *A Review of Hesham*, p. 355. Perhaps this point can be seen in these words of Kuyper, "The conclusion arrived at in my previous lecture was first that, scientifically speaking, Calvinism means the completed evolution of Protestantism, resulting in a both higher and richer stage of human development. Further, that the worldview of Modernism, with its starting point in the French Revolution, can claim no higher privilege than that of presenting an atheistic imitation of the brilliant ideal proclaimed by Calvinism, therefore being unqualified for the honor of leading

2.22 *The Normalist/Abnormalist Distinction*

Key to Kuyper's notion of worldview (or life-system) is the question of the condition of mankind. Expressly dealt with in his lectures on religion<sup>33</sup> and science,<sup>34</sup> Kuyper cuts to the heart, in commenting on another feature of his idea of worldview thinking (namely the antithesis), he says,

Hence it follows that the conflict is not between faith and science, but between the assertion that the cosmos, as it exists today, is either in a *normal* or *abnormal* condition. If it is *normal*, then it moves by means of an eternal evolution from its potencies to its ideal. But if the cosmos in its present condition is *abnormal*, then a *disturbance* has taken place in the past, and only a regenerating power can warrant it the final attainment of its goal.<sup>35</sup>

Clearly the "normalists" and "abnormalists" are in conflict, and that at a most basic level. Kuyper's distinctions here are simply another way of expressing the classical doctrine of original sin. If that doctrine is true, it has repercussions in the world of science (amongst other places). It is not as though abnormalists reject all aspects of the idea of evolution, but they do reject evolution "in infinitum".<sup>36</sup> Kuyper refused to allow evolution to be extended to the level of a comprehensive worldview that denied the unique creation of man and the problem of sin.

---

us higher on. And lastly, that whoever rejects atheism as his fundamental thought, is bound to go back to Calvinism, *not to restore its worn-out form, but once more to catch hold of the Calvinistic principles, in order to embody them in such a form as, suiting the requirements of our own century, may restore the needed unity of Protestant thought and the lacking energy to Protestant practical life.*" *Lectures*, p. 41 (italics mine). Note the evolutionary strain in Kuyper's thought here, possibly due to the notion of "heliotropism".

<sup>33</sup>Kuyper, *Lectures*, p. 43.

<sup>34</sup>Kuyper, *Lectures*, pp. 131-136.

<sup>35</sup>Kuyper, *Lectures*, pp. 131-132.

<sup>36</sup>Kuyper, *Lectures*, p. 132. More will be said below about the influence of evolutionary thought on Kuyper, even though he expressly rejected the comprehensive extension of the idea of evolution to the level of a distinct worldview. He could not accept the denial of the unique creation of man that such a worldview seemed to entail, at least as expressed at the time. More will be said concerning evolution in the thought of Kuyper below.

The *Abnormalists*, on the other hand, who do justice to relative evolution, but adhere to primordial creation over against an *evolutio in infinitum*, oppose the position of the Normalists with all their might; they maintain inexorably the conception of man as an independent species, because in him alone is reflected the image of God; they conceive of sin as the destruction of our original nature, and consequently as rebellion against God; and for that reason they postulate and maintain the miraculous as the only means to restore the abnormal...<sup>37</sup>

Certainly Kuyper is here following the direction of Scripture, but he is also preceded here by James Orr. In his Kerr Lectures, which were subsequently published as *The Christian View of God and the World*, and read by Kuyper, Orr explains,

The Christian view affirms the fact of sin and disorder in the world, not as something belonging to the Divine idea of it, and inhering in it by necessity, but as something which has entered it by the voluntary turning aside of man from his allegiance to his Creator, and from the path of his normal development. The Christian view of the world, in other wording involves a Fall as the presupposition of its doctrine of Redemption; whereas the “modern” view of the world affirms that the so-called Fall was in reality a rise, and denies by consequence the need of Redemption in the Scriptural sense.<sup>38</sup>

Kuyper not only shared basic Christian presuppositions with James Orr, but he also reflected the age in which he lived.

### 2.23 *Conceptual Monism*

Part and parcel of nineteenth century system building was the concern to unify thought around a single theme or central controlling idea.<sup>39</sup> As Esther Meek has said,

In the Stone Lectures Kuyper introduces the notion of worldview, or life-system: a comprehensive, internally coherent set of answers to fundamental questions, *shaped by a single prevailing principle, which serves to shape a person’s general*

---

<sup>37</sup>Kuyper, *Lectures*, pp. 132-133.

<sup>38</sup>Orr, *The Christian View*, p. 32.

<sup>39</sup>Orr, *The Christian View*, pp. 4 & 5. Heslam also states, “Bavinck wrote in his introduction to this work that in philosophical circles the search for a unified (“einheitliche”) worldview had become an obsession, due to the disharmony and division of modern life (p. 8).” *Christian Worldview*, p. 89, note 11.

Kuyper, like many thinkers in his day, sought to bring unity to the disparate experiences of life and thought by positing a major controlling motif. This motif or starting point, would then be fruitful for developing further elements.

Thus understood, Calvinism is rooted in a form of religion which was peculiarly its own, and from this specific religious consciousness there was developed first a peculiar theology, then a special church-order, and then a given form for political and social life, for the interpretation of the moral world-order, for the relation between nature and grace, between Christianity and the world, between church and state, and finally for art and science; and amid all these life-utterances it always remained the self-same Calvinism, insofar as simultaneously and spontaneously all the development sprang from its deepest life principle.<sup>41</sup>

For Kuyper, that unifying element or starting point was the sovereignty of God.<sup>42</sup>

#### 2.24 *Evolutionary Development or "Heliotropism"*

The idea of a central controlling idea (what has been called "monism") may stem from the influence of evolutionary thought on Abraham Kuyper.<sup>43</sup> Even in some of Kuyper's remarks that we have already seen, there appears to be an element of developmentalism that looks very much like tamed evolutionary sentiments.<sup>44</sup> This is most clearly seen in Kuyper's notion (shared by others at the

---

<sup>40</sup>Meek, *Embrace It or Replace It*, p. 121 (italics mine). Heslam, in his *Christian Worldview*, states that, "Moreover, his attempt to present Calvinism as a worldview or 'life-system,' reflected the predilection for systems in theoretical thought that was characteristic of nineteenth century monism," p. 259.

<sup>41</sup>Kuyper, *Lectures*, p. 17.

<sup>42</sup>Esther Meek, in her review article *Embrace It or Replace It*, has said that "Calvinism is a life-system, he says; or better, Calvinism expresses most fully the life-system embodied in Scripture. Its dominating principle, contra the Lutherans, for example, is the Sovereignty of God, not the primacy of justification by faith," p. 121.

<sup>43</sup>Heslam would argue that Kuyper's idea of a comprehensive unity in thought (thus a "worldview") stem from the influence of two of his stated opponents, namely pantheism and evolutionism. See his *Christian Worldview*, p. 259.

<sup>44</sup>As Heslam reminds us, "He was also not opposed, in contrast to most of his Catholic and orthodox Protestant contemporaries, to the idea that one species may have evolved out of another rather than that all species had been created by the direct activity of God. While holding fast to 'primordial creation' over against an "*evolutio*

time) of the development of the human race from lower to progressively higher levels and that this movement also moved geographically from east to west. As Peter Heslam tells us,

In the end, Kuyper's rejection of the evolutionary worldview was not as radical as he proposed, and indeed there are clear signs of its influence on his thought. His view of world history, for instance, as we have seen, was of a continual process of development which flowed in a single stream from east to west, Calvinism representing the highest and most recent stage of development. Before reaching this stage, he taught, it had passed through successive stages of Paganism, Islam, and Roman Catholicism (LC, pp. 32-34). He thus came to a position characteristic of much nineteenth century evolutionary thought, adopted by mainstream liberalism, that humanity was involved in a process of evolutionary development from primitive to advanced stages.<sup>45</sup>

This evolutionary movement had come to be called "heliotropism" and Kuyper would have been exposed to the idea in the writings of a whole host of authors, Christian or otherwise.<sup>46</sup> For Kuyper, Calvinism was simply the latest and highest development of humanity.

Hence, as a central phenomenon in the development of humanity, Calvinism is not only entitled to an honorable position by the side of Paganistic, Islamistic and Romanistic forms, since like these it represents a peculiar principle dominating the whole of life, but it also meets every required condition for the advancement of human development to a higher stage.<sup>47</sup>

---

*in infinitum*' he sought to do justice to 'relative evolution' (LC, p. 132). For Kuyper the true conflict lay between the belief that the cosmos came into being through the creative activity of God and developed organically according to a divine plan, and the idea that the natural world originated and developed mechanically, independent of God." *Christian Worldview*, p. 107.

<sup>45</sup>Heslam, *Christian Worldview*, p. 108. Earlier Heslam said this about this developmentalism, "Kuyper's comments during his American tour that America could expect a bright future due to the Calvinistic principles upon which it was founded cannot be attributed merely to flattery or to wistful optimism. They were derived from his idea that the historical development of civilization had followed a westward path from its origins in the Middle East through Europe to America, where it had crossed from the eastern to the western states, and had now come to a temporary standstill on the shores of the Pacific Ocean, before its likely continuance through China and Japan (LC, pp. 32-33). This was Kuyper's expression of a myth with a long history, according to which humanity was seen to be following a course of development from east to west, passing from its origins in the river deltas of Asia through Greece and Rome to Western Europe and on to America, from where it would return to Asia, thus completing the circle. The history of this myth of 'heliotropic' development can be traced in the works of a host of distinguished writers and thinkers..." *Christian Worldview*, pp. 78-79.

<sup>46</sup>Heslam, *Christian Worldview*, p. 79.

<sup>47</sup>Kuyper, *Lectures*, p. 38.



2.25 *The Antithesis/Common Grace Dialectic*

We now come to the last and perhaps best known characteristic of Kuyper's concept of worldview thinking and that is Kuyper's twin notions of the antithesis<sup>48</sup> and common grace,<sup>49</sup> which work in mutual interaction with each other.<sup>50</sup> For Kuyper, both concepts are present when considering the relationship of Christian belief to unbelief and the epistemological implications of human creaturehood (and therefore finitude) and sinfulness. Since both the antithesis and common grace stem from Kuyper's thought prior to his delivery of the *Stone Lectures*, we would expect to find some evidence of these ideas in earlier writings and communications, and in this we are not disappointed. But first, it may be helpful to remind ourselves how James Orr's Kerr Lectures helped to solidify Kuyper's own thinking, especially with regard to the antithesis.

It need not further be denied that between this view of the world involved in Christianity, and what is sometimes termed "the modern view of the world," there exists a deep and radical antagonism. This so-called "modern view of the world," indeed,-and it is important to observe it,- is, strictly speaking, not one view, but many views,- a group of views,- most of them as exclusive of one another as together they are of Christianity. The phrase, nevertheless, does point to a homogeneity of these various systems- to a bond of unity which runs through them all, and holds them together in spite of their many differences. This common feature

---

<sup>48</sup>Edgar, in *A Review of Heslam*, says, "As expected, Kuyper's approach is centered in the notion of the antithesis. The lecture series opens with the theme of struggle and peril, owing to the clash of the two great worldviews, Christianity and modernism," p. 355.

<sup>49</sup>Esther Meek tells us that, "At the same time Kuyper developed the idea of common grace, the doctrine that because the effects of sin and the curse impact creation in its length and depth, for society and culture to succeed at all requires the mitigating efforts of the Holy Spirit. Thus we are right to recognize good in creation and society, not because some of it was untouched by sin, but because God extends common grace to every person and institution...The notion of common grace enables believers to collaborate with unbelievers in efforts for the common good," *Embrace It or Replace It*, pp. 121-122.

<sup>50</sup>Peter Heslam, *Christian Worldview*, pp. 262-263, argues that Kuyper has an unrelieved tension in his concept of a worldview because of these two interacting notions. That they are in tension is probably true, but perhaps we might prefer to say that they are complimentary. But we would not want to quibble about words, the dialectical relationship is clear enough. More will be said about this later when we make our concluding evaluation and interact with the suggestions of Cornelius Van Til and Esther Meek.

---

*Worldviews Collide*

---

is their thoroughgoing opposition to the supernatural,- at least of the specifically miraculous,- their refusal to recognize anything in nature, life, or history, outside the lines of natural development. Between such a view of the world and Christianity, it is perfectly correct to say that there can be no kindredship.<sup>51</sup>

The antithesis reflects the collision of opposing worldviews and for Kuyper, the major contender for opposition was “modernism” which Kuyper traces to the French Revolution.<sup>52</sup> In fact, Kuyper had built a political party in the Netherlands on principles that stood opposed to it.<sup>53</sup> Kuyper tells us in his first lecture that modernism is a composite term for three different yet related elements,

This accounts for the fact that among Protestant nations Pantheism, born from the new German philosophy and owing it's concrete evolution-form to Darwin, claims for itself more and more the supremacy in every sphere of human life, even in that of theology, and under all sorts of names tries to overthrow our Christian traditions, and is bent even upon exchanging the heritage of our fathers for a hopeless modern Buddhism. The leading thoughts that had their rise in the French Revolution at the close of the last, and in German philosophy in the course of the present century, form together a life-system which is diametrically opposed to that of our fathers.<sup>54</sup>

Elsewhere, Kuyper has said, in *The Blurring of the Boundaries*,

In Scripture God is called by the Hebrew word *Hammabdil*, because He it was who drew lines, first between Himself and the created world, and then throughout the entire domain of the created world. Lines of design, lines of demarcation, lines of distinction, lines of separation, lines of contrast. It is precisely these lines that pantheism attempts to blur. It still knows of distinction but no separation may ever be real. *En Kai Pan*, one and all, remains the magic phrase. And since to the Christian the most essential issues are at stake here, it seemed to me that this *blurring of the boundaries* is well worth a deliberate discussion. In this connection, I aim to demonstrate, first *that* the spirit of our age inclines in this direction, next, *what* dangers this tendency brings in its wake; finally what *resistance* must be

---

<sup>51</sup>Orr, *Christian View*, p. 9.

<sup>52</sup>Kuyper, *Lectures*, p. 23.

<sup>53</sup>Known as the ARP or Anti-Revolutionary Party, it built on the basic views of Guillaume Groen Van Prinsterer as developed by Kuyper and other colleagues. See McKendree Langley's *Emancipation and Apologetics: The Formation of Abraham Kuyper's Anti-Revolutionary Party in the Netherlands, 1870-1880*, a 1995 unpublished PhD dissertation for Westminster Theological Seminary for an interesting and in-depth look at this aspect of Kuyper's career.

<sup>54</sup>Kuyper, *Lectures*, pp. 18-19 and also cited by Heslam, *Christian Worldview*, p. 96.

---

offered here.<sup>55</sup>

It would appear that one of Kuyper's concerns here involved the transgression of the so-called Creator/creature distinction<sup>56</sup> which is grounded in Scripture itself from the beginning and which pantheism (and the "Modernism" built upon it) failed to take seriously at all. For Kuyper, the issue, in this case at least, was not reapproachment but "resistance". There is quite clearly a clash or collision of worldviews here.<sup>57</sup> And Kuyper wanted his Princeton audience to grasp the significance of the *kulturrekampf* between Christianity and unbelief (as particularly manifested in his day in the guise of modernism). That struggle was (and is) the essence of the "antithesis." But that is not all there is to it. The very idea of the antithesis would make no sense without the doctrine of common grace.

Abraham Kuyper was not only a champion of the antithesis, but also of the doctrine of common grace, which he explicates in his *Stone Lectures* as well as in a series of articles that appeared in his religious periodical *De Heraute*<sup>58</sup> over a six year period that were later brought together under the

---

<sup>55</sup>Abraham Kuyper, "The Blurring of the Boundaries" in *A Centennial Reader*, p. 368.

<sup>56</sup>While certainly not limited to him, Cornelius Van Til has put an emphasis on maintaining the Creator/creature distinction throughout his apologetic. See Bahnsen, *Van Til's Apologetic*.

<sup>57</sup>Kuyper's words sum it up best, "There is no doubt then that Christianity is imperilled by great and serious dangers. Two *life systems* are wrestling with one another, in mortal combat. Modernism is bound to build a world of its own from the data of the natural man, and to construct man himself from the data of nature; while, on the other hand, all those who reverently bend the knee to Christ and worship Him as the Son of the living God, and God himself, are bent upon saving the 'Christian Heritage.' This is *the* struggle in Europe, this is *the* struggle in America, and this also, is the struggle for principles in which my own country is engaged....," *Lectures*, p. 11.

<sup>58</sup>Dutch for "The Herald" which was Kuyper's weekly religious newspaper that complimented his other daily paper *De Standaard* ("The Standard"), both of which Kuyper was editor of many years. See Heslam, *Christian Worldview*, p. 37.

title *De gemeene gratie* (“Common Grace”)<sup>59</sup> and a later addition entitled *De gemeene gratie in Wetenschap en kunst*.<sup>60</sup> In his three volume work on common grace, Kuyper gave a helpful explanation of common grace, especially as it related to *saving grace*,

This manifestation of grace consisted in restraining, blocking, or redirecting the consequences that otherwise would have resulted from sin. It intercepts the natural outworking of the poison of sin and either diverts and alters it, or opposes and destroys it. For that reason we must distinguish two dimensions in this manifestation of grace: 1. a *saving grace*, which in the end abolishes sin and completely undoes its consequences; and 2. a *temporal restraining grace*, which holds back and blocks the effect of sin. The former, that is saving grace, is in the nature of the case *special* and restricted to God’s elect. The second, *common grace*, is extended to the whole of our human life.<sup>61</sup>

Common grace does not save, but accounts for the “civic good” that we find in unbelievers. As James Bratt has said, “Common grace was thus a theology of public responsibility, of the Christian’s shared humanity with the rest of the world.”<sup>62</sup> Common grace has been defined as the influence of the Holy Spirit in restraining the effects of sin and in encouraging of the good in God’s creation. Kuyper applied his understanding of common grace especially in the arena of science where he sought to acknowledge the great gains made in science, even by those who professed no faith in Christ.

Thus, we confront the fact that science has arisen outside the Christian church which has produced true and essential knowledge on the one hand but which has led to a life-conception and a worldview utterly opposed to the truth of God’s word in the

---

<sup>59</sup>Kuyper, *De gemeene gratie*, 3 Vols. (Amsterdam: Hoveker and Wormser, 1902-1905) which, unfortunately, has not (yet) been translated from the Dutch into English, except for a portion of which appears as “Common Grace” in *A Centennial Reader*, pp.165-201. See Heslam’s remarks in his *Christian Worldview*, pp. 177-178.

<sup>60</sup>“Common Grace in Science and Art” (Amsterdam: Hoveker and Wormser, 1905), also unavailable in English save for a small portion which appears, once again, in *A Centennial Reader*, pp.441-460.

<sup>61</sup>“Common Grace” in *A Centennial Reader*, p. 168.

<sup>62</sup>Bratt, *A Centennial Reader*, p. 165.

other. To put it differently, we confront a science that has arisen out of the world under the rule of sin and yet may boast of results from which sin's darkening is virtually absent. We can explain this only by saying that, while sin has continued to spread decay, common grace has entered in to bind and temper its operation... That we may and must speak most positively of God's work in this regard is evident from the undeniable fact that in men like Plato and Aristotle, Kant and Darwin, shone stars of the first magnitude, geniuses of the highest degree, who uttered the most profound thoughts even though they were not confessing Christians. They had this genius not in themselves but received it from the God who created them and endowed them for this kind of thinking.<sup>63</sup>

The relationship between common grace and the antithesis is a complex one which Peter Heslam has said remains an "unresolved tension" in the thought of Kuyper. Whether the antithesis/common grace dialectic is an insurmountable problem remains to be seen.<sup>64</sup> At this point, we are prepared to affirm both doctrines with Kuyper (as our use of the term "dialectic" demonstrates).

Now that we have had an overview of Kuyper's worldview apologetic (remembering Kuyper's questioning of "traditional" apologetics so that his practice of apologetics can be described as *polemical theology with a strong elenctic flavor*), we can move in for a closer look at his *Stone Lectures*.

---

<sup>63</sup>"Common Grace in Science," in *A Centennial Reader*, p. 448. It should be noted that Cornelius Van Til took exception to an idea that *may* be subtly expressed here, namely, that certain aspects of the scientific endeavor may be free of the taint of sin and therefore would be more or less "neutral" with regard to the matter of the antithesis. See Bahnsen, *Van Til's Apologetic*, pp.??? for more on this. Also, for a more contemporary expression of this same problem, see Scott Oliphint's unpublished 1994 Westminster Theological Seminary PhD Dissertation *The Apologetical Implications of Alvin Plantinga's Epistemology*, pp.196ff where Oliphint critiques Plantinga for the same problem of neutrality.

<sup>64</sup>Cornelius Van Til has addressed this apparent dilemma as has Esther Meek more recently in her lengthy review of Heslam's book, *Embrace It Or Replace It*. We will interact at greater length with these alternatives below when we begin to draw this paper to a close. Van Til has made a statement that in itself reflects the very tension we are addressing here, "If there is no head on collision with the systems of the natural man there will be no point of contact with the sense of deity in the natural man..." Bahnsen, *Van Til's Apologetic*, p. 300. The "point of contact," we believe, seems to be *grounded* in the creation of man in the image of God which is *preserved* in the context of common grace, and yet this point of contact gets highlighted in the very awareness of the antithesis.

---

### **3. Kuyper's 1898 Stone Lectures on Calvinism**

Our goal in this section will be to reflect on the salient points of each of Kuyper's six lectures which he delivered and correlate them with Kuyper's overall *worldview* apologetic methodology as laid out in the previous section. Given the fact that we have drawn primarily from Kuyper's first lecture, *Calvinism a Life-System*, as the basis of our last section, we will only briefly touch open the major facets of that lecture as we begin this examination.<sup>65</sup>

#### 3.1 *Calvinism a Life-System*

It is in Kuyper's first lecture that he outlines his concept of a *worldview*<sup>66</sup> as a comprehensive and all-embracing point of view which develops out of a single starting point.<sup>67</sup> There Kuyper stated that all worldviews worth their salt must answer three interrelated questions about man's relationship with God, man, and the world.<sup>68</sup> From the examination of these three questions, Kuyper concluded that Calvinism was indeed a bona fide worldview and could thus stand with the other views he had explicated.<sup>69</sup> It is not necessary to correlate Kuyper's worldview apologetic here since this lecture was obviously concerned with just this question, what is a worldview and how does it function?

---

<sup>65</sup>Heslam gives a helpful overview of the historical context of Kuyper's lectures in his *Christian Worldview*, pp. 57-84.

<sup>66</sup>Or "life system"

<sup>67</sup>See Esther L. Meek, *Embrace It or Replace It*, p. 121.

<sup>68</sup>Kuyper, *Lectures*, p. 19. "Hence we must ask what are the *required* conditions for such general systems of life, as Paganism, Islamism, Romanism and Modernism, and then show that Calvinism really fulfills these conditions...These conditions demand in the first place, that from a special principle a peculiar insight be obtained into the three fundamental relations of all human life: viz., (1) our relation *to God*, (2) our relation *to man*, and (3) our relation *to the world*."

<sup>69</sup>Kuyper, *Lectures*, pp. 31-32.

### 3.2 Calvinism and Religion

In his second lecture, Kuyper breaks his subject down into three categories, which are discussed as religion “as such,” as “manifested in the life of the church” and as seen in the “fruit of Religion for practical life.”<sup>70</sup> Under his first heading, Kuyper asks several questions,

First, then, we must consider *Religion as such*. Here four mutually dependent fundamental questions arise: -1. Does Religion exist for the sake of *God*, or for *Man*? 2. Must it operate *directly* or *mediately*? 3. Can it remain *partial* in its operations or has it to embrace the *whole* of our personal being and existence? and, 4. can it bear a normal, or must it bear an *abnormal*, i.e., a soteriological character?<sup>71</sup>

After detailing how various other philosophies and religions answer these questions (basically those he has already mentioned-Paganism, Islamism, Romanism and Modernism), he states that Calvinism is a religion that exists *for God*,<sup>72</sup> operates *directly*,<sup>73</sup> so that it must “lay hold upon our *whole* existence,<sup>74</sup> and it bears a *soteriological* character meant to address man’s *abnormal* condition.<sup>75</sup>

In addressing the issue of religion as manifested in the life of the church, Kuyper addresses the

---

<sup>70</sup>Kuyper, *Lectures*, pp. 42-43.

<sup>71</sup>Kuyper, *Lectures*, p. 43.

<sup>72</sup>Kuyper, *Lectures*, pp. 43 & 45-47.

<sup>73</sup>Kuyper, *Lectures*, pp. 47-49, where he states that “Now we find that in all non-Christian religions, without any exception, human intercessors are deemed necessary, and in the domain of Christianity itself, the intercessor intruded again upon the scene, in the Blessed Virgin, in the host of angels, in the saints and martyrs, and in the priestly hierarchy of the clergy; and although Luther took the field against all priestly mediation, yet the church which is called by his name, renewed by its title of the ‘*ecclesia docens*’ the office of mediator and steward of the mysteries. On this point also it was Calvin, and he alone, who attained to the full realization of the ideal of pure spiritual religion. Religion, as he conceived it, must ‘*nullis mediis interpositis*,’ i.e., without any creaturely intercession between God and the human heart.”

<sup>74</sup>Kuyper, *Lectures*, p. 43 & 49-54. Kuyper tells us that this question involves the *organ* (that is, religion can be partial because it involves only one aspect of human personality-mind, emotions or the will), the *sphere* (that is, religion becomes excluded from science and public life and thus becomes internalized and privatized), and the *group of persons* amongst which it will grow.

<sup>75</sup>Kuyper, *Lectures*, pp. 43 & 54-59.

*essence*,<sup>76</sup> *manifestation*<sup>77</sup> and *purpose*<sup>78</sup> of the church. The fruit of religion for the practical life is addressed when Kuyper speaks on the “question of morals”<sup>79</sup> involving the Christian living “before the face of God.”<sup>80</sup> In conclusion, Kuyper addresses three “vetoes” on the Christian life, namely, carding playing, theater attendance and dancing.<sup>81</sup> Calvinism recognized that it faced a world infected with sin and responded accordingly,

Calvinism understood that the world was not to be saved by ethical philosophizing, but only by the restoration of tenderness of conscience. Therefore it did not indulge in reasoning, but appealed directly to the soul, and placed it face to face with the Living God, so that he trembled at His holy majesty, and in that majesty, discovered the glory of His love.<sup>82</sup>

---

<sup>76</sup>Kuyper, *Lectures*, p. 59, where Kuyper tells us that the church is “a spiritual organism, including heaven and earth, but having at present its center, and the starting-point for its action, not upon earth, but in heaven.”

<sup>77</sup>Kuyper, *Lectures*, pp. 62-66, where we read, “The church on earth is not an institution for the dispensation of grace, as if it were a dispensary of spiritual medicines. There is no mystical, spiritual order gifted with mystical powers to operate with a magical influence upon laymen. There are only *regenerated and confessing individuals*, who, in accordance with the Scriptural command, and under the influence of the sociological element of all religion, have formed a society, and are endeavoring to live together in subordination to Christ as their king. This, alone, is the church on earth,- not the building,- not the institution,- not a spiritual order. For Calvin, the Church is found in the *confessing individuals themselves*, - not in each individual separately, but in all of them taken together, and united, not as they themselves see fit, but according to the ordinances of Christ.”

<sup>78</sup>Kuyper, *Lectures*, pp. 66-68, “That purpose cannot be human or egoistic, *to prepare the believer for Heaven*. A regenerate child, dying in the cradle, goes straight to Heaven, without any further preparation and wheresoever the Holy Ghost has kindled the spark of Eternal life in the soul, the perseverance of the saints assures the certainty of eternal salvation. Nay, upon earth also, the Church exists merely *for the sake of God*.”

<sup>79</sup>Kuyper, *Lectures*, pp. 69-73.

<sup>80</sup>Kuyper, *Lectures*, p. 69.

<sup>81</sup>Kuyper, *Lectures*, pp. 73-77, where we read, “Our fathers perceived excellently well that it was just these three: Dancing, Card-playing, and Theater going, with which the world was madly in love. In worldly circles these pleasures were not regarded as secondary trifles, but honored as all-important matters: and whoever dared attack them exposed himself to the bitterest scorn and enmity. For this very reason, they recognized in these three the *Rubicon* which no Calvinist could cross without sacrificing his earnestness to dangerous mirth, and the fear of the Lord to often far from spotless pleasures.”

<sup>82</sup>Kuyper, *Lectures*, p. 77.



Kuyper reveals the worldview structure of his thinking here as he has given us a comprehensive view of the religious nature of Calvinism in the three headings of religion “as such,” as “manifested in the life of the church” and as resulting in fruit in the “practical life”. It proceeds from one dominant idea, namely the sovereignty of God, and has developed organically. Also, it recognizes the abnormal state of humanity and this is expressed in the antithesis of the Christian in the world where the common grace motif appears to be somewhat muted.

### 3.3 *Calvinism and Politics*

Kuyper next moved into an arena with which he was intimately acquainted, the arena of politics. As mentioned earlier, Kuyper had been a disciple and friend to the Dutch political thinker and activist Guillaume Groen Van Prinsterer<sup>83</sup> and from him Kuyper learned the principles that would be embodied in his Anti-Revolutionary Party, perhaps the first modern political party in the Netherlands, and a precursor to the modern Christian Democratic movement in Europe.<sup>84</sup>

Calvinism couldn't help but expand its influence beyond the confines of confessional affiliation. Kuyper even quotes George Bancroft, the American historian, that “The fanatic for Calvinism was a fanatic for liberty, for in the moral warfare for freedom, his creed was a part of his army, and his

---

<sup>83</sup>Groen Van Prinsterer had been the one who influenced Kuyper in seeing the devastating results of the French Revolution. He was an archivist for the Dutch king. See Heslam, *Christian Worldview*, p. 32ff.

<sup>84</sup>See Heslam, *Christian Worldview*, pp. 143-147.

most faithful ally in the battle.”<sup>85</sup> Here, and in his lectures on science, we see Kuyper’s notion of the antithesis at work, especially in his remarks on the basis of “modernism” in the French Revolution of 1789,

Further, that the worldview of Modernism, with its starting point in the French Revolution, can claim no higher privilege than that of presenting an atheistic imitation of the brilliant ideal proclaimed by Calvinism, therefore being unqualified for the honor of leading us higher on.<sup>86</sup>

Stating that the fundamental principle of Calvinism in the political arena was “*the Sovereignty of the Triune God over the whole cosmos*, in all its spheres and kingdoms, visible and invisible,”<sup>87</sup> Kuyper explicated the doctrine that has come to be called “sphere sovereignty” involving the state, society and the church.<sup>88</sup> In his *De gemeene gratie in Wetenschap en kunst*, Kuyper had said,

But here is the glorious principle of Freedom! This perfect sovereignty of the *sinless* Messiah at the same time directly denies and challenges all absolute sovereignty among *sinful* men on earth, and does so by dividing up life into *separate spheres*, each with its own sovereignty.<sup>89</sup>

With regard to the sovereignty of the state, Kuyper said that man was created from one blood but that states endeavored to split up that organic unity and where therefore “mechanical.”<sup>90</sup> While man

---

<sup>85</sup>George Bancroft, *History of the United States of America* (New York: Appleton, 1882-1884), p. 464 and cited in Kuyper, *Lectures*, p. 78. Kuyper follows Bancroft’s quote with a remark by Groen Van Prinsterer, “In Calvinism lies the origin and guarantee of our constitutional liberties.” Heslam has a very brief, but helpful discussion on Kuyper’s interaction with Bancroft in his *Christian Worldview*, pp. 60 & 75. See also Kuyper’s *Calvinism: Source and Stronghold of Our Constitutional Liberties in A Centennial Reader*, pp. 280-322.

<sup>86</sup>Kuyper, *Lectures*, p. 41.

<sup>87</sup>Kuyper, *Lectures*, p. 79.

<sup>88</sup>Kuyper, *Lectures*, p. 79.

<sup>89</sup>Kuyper, “Common Grace in Science” in *A Centennial Reader*, p. 467.

<sup>90</sup>Kuyper, *Lectures*, p. 80.

was intended to live with a “one world empire” the entrance of sin onto the world stage now precludes that oneness and so the governments that now obtain do so under God’s authority as “...*God has instituted the magistrates, by reason of sin.*”<sup>91</sup> Kuyper then summed up the results of the influence of Calvinism in the sphere of the state thus:

It is therefore a political faith which may be summarily expressed in these three theses: 1. God only- and never any creature-is possessed of sovereign rights, in the destiny of the nations, because God alone created them, maintains them by His Almighty power, and rules them by His ordinances. 2. Sin has, in the realm of politics, broken down the direct government of God, and therefore the exercise of authority, for the purpose of government, has subsequently been invested in men, as a mechanical remedy. And 3. In whatever form this authority may reveal itself, man never possesses power over his fellow-man in any other way than by an authority which descends upon him from the majesty of God.<sup>92</sup>

In the sphere of the state, Kuyper states that there are two major competitors to Calvinism, namely *popular sovereignty* as exemplified in the atheistic French Revolution of 1789 and *state sovereignty* seen most clearly at that time in the developments towards the unification of Germany under Otto von Bismark which grew out of “German philosophical pantheism.”<sup>93</sup>

In the sphere of society, Kuyper stresses “*sovereignty in the individual social spheres*” which develop according to their God-given design and thus answer to “*nothing above themselves but God*” so that the power of the State to intrude is limited.<sup>94</sup> But the State can intrude itself into the otherwise sovereign societal spheres for the following reasons:

---

<sup>91</sup>Kuyper, *Lectures*, p. 81.

<sup>92</sup>Kuyper, *Lectures*, p. 85.

<sup>93</sup>Kuyper, *Lectures*, pp. 85-90.

<sup>94</sup>Kuyper, *Lectures*, p. 91.

It possesses the three-fold right and duty: 1. Whenever different spheres clash, to compel mutual regard for the boundary-lines of each; 2. To defend individuals and the weak ones, in those spheres, against the abuse of the power of the rest; and 3. To coerce all together to bear *personal* and *financial* burdens for the maintenance of the natural unity of the State. The decision cannot, however, in these cases, *unilaterally*, rest with the magistrate. The Law here has to indicate the rights of each, and the rights of the citizens over their own purses must remain an invincible bulwark against the abuse of power on the part of the government.<sup>95</sup>

Finally Kuyper turns to the sovereignty of the sphere of the Church, which he himself recognizes as problematic because of the history of the church since the time of Constantine in which the church has been intertwined with the State and he even recognizes the challenge of drawing boundaries in the light of Calvin's involvement in the Servetus affair. But as Kuyper rightly points out, Calvin's involvement in Servetus' execution hardly made him exceptional in his day. Nevertheless, it is a part of ecclesiastical history from which we must learn hard lessons.<sup>96</sup> One answer Kuyper gives to the alliance of church and state is the *pluriformity* of the church. If you allow for different expressions of the church, it is less likely, if not impossible, for the "one" church to fall into the snare of political power shared with the State into which the *one* church in the Middle Ages fell.<sup>97</sup>

In light of the limitations placed upon the State because of sphere sovereignty, Kuyper argues that magistrates still serve God and therefore have duties 1. towards God, 2. towards the Church and 3. towards individuals.<sup>98</sup> The magistrate must recognize the sovereignty of God and with regard to the

---

<sup>95</sup>Kuyper, *Lectures*, p. 97.

<sup>96</sup>Kuyper, *Lectures*, pp. 99-101.

<sup>97</sup>Kuyper, *Lectures*, p. 101.

<sup>98</sup>Kuyper, *Lectures*, p. 103.

church, the magistrate must realize that he does not have the competence to judge in spiritual matters and in relation to the individual the magistrate needs to remember to guard the individual's "liberty of conscience," of "speech" and of "worship."<sup>99</sup> In the end, as Kuyper shared Calvinism was the guardian of liberty. "In the French Revolution a civil liberty for every Christian *to agree with the unbelieving majority*; in Calvinism, a liberty of conscience, which enables every man to serve God *according to his own conviction and the dictates of his own heart.*"<sup>100</sup>

In Kuyper's lecture on politics we see the interaction of the ideas of antithesis and common grace in that Calvinism stands opposed to both popular and state sovereignty (the antithesis), and at the same time provides for different spheres of sovereignty which allow for essential freedoms to be exercised (common grace) that limit the power of the state. With regard to the influence of Calvinism, we can see that the concept of sphere sovereignty derives from the singular starting point of the sovereignty of God (and is thus "monistic," to use Peter Heslam's terminology). Clearly for Kuyper, Calvinism is a great improvement over popular and state sovereignty as well as over the church/state amalgam of the Middle Ages and so we find the concept of evolutionary development at work (perhaps in the background) here. And most assuredly Calvinism is a comprehensive worldview in the arena of politics as we see that the concept of sphere sovereignty embraces all of life (which Kuyper conveniently divides into the three spheres of state, society and church).

---

<sup>99</sup>Kuyper, *Lectures*, p. 108.

<sup>100</sup>Kuyper, *Lectures*, p. 109.

### 3.4 Calvinism and Science

We now come to what may arguably be the most fascinating lecture in this series (tying with the lecture on politics for this honor) as we can see quite clearly how Kuyper's worldview apologetic works, especially with regard to the dialectical dance between the antithesis and common grace.<sup>101</sup>

Kuyper begins by pointing out that "...Calvinism fostered and could not but foster *love for science*; secondly, that it restored to science its *domain*; thirdly, that it delivered science from *unnatural bonds*; and fourthly, in what manner it sought and found a solution for the unavoidable *scientific conflict*."<sup>102</sup>

Kuyper demonstrates that Calvinism has fostered a love for science, particularly in his home land.

It is an undeniable fact, that the Calvinistic Netherlands *had* love for science and fostered it. But the most evident, the most convincing proof is doubtless found in the establishment of Leyden's University. To receive as the highest reward a University of the Sciences in a moment, when, in a fearful struggle, the course of history of the world was turned by your heroism is only conceivable among a people in whose very life-principle love for science is involved.<sup>103</sup>

Kuyper explains that the domain of science was reinstated by Calvinism after a hiatus during the Medieval period<sup>104</sup> and that the rediscovery of the writings of Aristotle made a limited contribution via a renewed interest in study. Calvinism points back, through the cross, to creation and so brings

---

<sup>101</sup>Whether Kuyper gives an adequate accounting of how these two ideas interrelate is an interesting question which we will be addressing below.

<sup>102</sup>Kuyper, *Lectures*, p. 110.

<sup>103</sup>Kuyper, *Lectures*, p. 113. For Kuyper, Calvinism fostered a love for science because of its doctrine of predestination which provided for the "unity," "solidity" and "order" of the universe which was beckoning the scientist to come and explore it.

<sup>104</sup>Kuyper, *Lectures*, p. 117.

within the purview of science the whole created cosmos. God is the maker of heaven and earth and all that dwell therein so that the scientist has an immense field of enquiry. Not only so, but as John 1 tells us, all creation came to be through the agency of the Word, the Lord Jesus Christ himself, who also will restore his creation which includes not only humanity but also embraces the rest of creation.<sup>105</sup>

In keeping with this, the final outcome of the future, foreshadowed in the H. Scriptures, is not merely spiritual existence of saved souls, but *the restoration of the entire cosmos*, when God will be all in all under the renewed heaven on the renewed earth. Now this wide, comprehensible, cosmical meaning of the gospel has been apprehended again by Calvin, apprehended not as a result of a dialectic process, but of the deep impression of God's majesty, which had molded his personal life.<sup>106</sup>

Along with this comprehensive restoration comes Kuyper's concept of common grace, as the restraining of the baneful effects of sin on creation and in the lives of people.

It was now understood that it was the 'common grace' of God, which produced in ancient Greece and Rome the treasures of philosophic light, and disclosed to us treasures of art and justice, which kindled the love for classical studies, in order to renew to us the profit of so splendid an heritage. It was now clearly seen that the history of mankind is not so much an aphoristic spectacle of cruel passions as a coherent process with the Cross as its center...<sup>107</sup>

Thirdly, Kuyper endeavors to show that Calvinism freed science from "unnatural bonds" in providing for the advancement of its "*indispensable liberty*"<sup>108</sup> which is most clearly seen in the establishment of universities (wherein science could be pursued) free of the imprimatur of the church, especially the charters given by the Pope which were usually required in the Medieval

---

<sup>105</sup>Kuyper, *Lectures*, p. 119.

<sup>106</sup>Kuyper, *Lectures*, p. 119.

<sup>107</sup>Kuyper, *Lectures*, p. 125.

<sup>108</sup>Kuyper, *Lectures*, p. 126.

period.<sup>109</sup>

Lastly, Kuyper addressed the inevitable conflicts that arose between the various scientific schools.

You understand the conflict I have in view. Free investigation leads to collisions. One draws the lines on the map of life differently from his neighbor. The result is the origin of schools and tendencies. Optimists and pessimists. A school of Kant, and a school of Hegel...Everywhere contention, conflict, struggle, sometimes vehement and keen, not seldom mixed with personal asperity. And yet, although the energy of the difference of principle lies at the root of all these disputes, these subordinate conflicts are entirely put in the shade by the *principal conflict*, which in *all* countries perplexes the mind most vehemently, the powerful conflict between those who cling to the confession of the Triune God and His Word, and those who seek the solution to the world-problem in Deism, Pantheism and Naturalism.<sup>110</sup>

For Kuyper, the conflict is not between those who have faith and those who do science, but between two kinds of science, namely science done by believers on principles of belief and science conducted by unbelievers.<sup>111</sup> After all, as Kuyper has pointed out, *all* science proceeds from some sort of faith commitment. It is not the *element* of faith that makes one form of science different from another, but the *object* of that faith. There are scientists who operate on a *normalist* principle in which the universe continues just as it always has and there are *abnormalists* who recognize the radical disjuncture in creation from the way it came from the Maker's hands.<sup>112</sup> There is therefore, not one stance based upon faith and another based upon science, but "*two scientific systems*" each with their own faith stance or theology.<sup>113</sup>

And finally, these two scientific systems of the Normalists and the Abnormalists are not relative opponents, walking together half way and, further on, peaceably

---

<sup>109</sup>Kuyper, *Lectures*, pp. 126-130.

<sup>110</sup>Kuyper, *Lectures*, p. 131.

<sup>111</sup>Kuyper, *Lectures*, p. 131.

<sup>112</sup>Kuyper, *Lectures*, p. 132-133.

<sup>113</sup>Kuyper, *Lectures*, p. 133.



suffering one another to choose different paths, but they are both in earnest, disputing with one another *the whole domain of life*, and they cannot desist from the constant endeavor to pull down to the ground *the entire edifice* of their respective controverted assertions, all the supports included, upon which their assertions rest. If they did not try this, they would thereby show on both sides that they did not honestly believe in their point of departure, that they were no serious combatants, and that they did not understand the primordial demand of science, which of course claims *unity of conception*.<sup>114</sup>

Science can only be properly so called when it is true to its defining principle. And only a science which recognizes the abnormal condition of creation at this stage in history can have a free science or allow others to develop science out of their (admittedly inconsistent) other worldviews.

The final result, therefore, will be, thanks to Calvinism, which has opened for us the way, that liberty of science will also triumph at last; first by guaranteeing full power to every leading life-system to reap a scientific harvest from its own principle;- and secondly, by refusing the scientific name to whatsoever investigator dare not unroll the colors of his own banner, and does not show emblazoned on his escutcheon in letters of gold the very principle for which he lives, and from which his conclusions derive their power.<sup>115</sup>

Kuyper's worldview thinking shines especially brightly here in his lecture on science and so we shall not have to much trouble in drawing out the elements which reflect the characteristics of that conceptuality. Firstly, Kuyper's understanding of science is comprehensive. Science is either conducted from a "normalist" or "abnormalist" perspective, which seems to cover the whole spectrum of possibilities and this schema also points up the fact of the antithesis in the field of science. And yet, science can be done by unbelievers because the universe is as it is because God created it and has extended his common grace. Science inevitably develops out of its own dominant starting point and as Kuyper argues, only the freedom Calvinism engenders allows each type of science to unfold as coherently as it can and for Calvinism this starting point is the fact that God

---

<sup>114</sup>Kuyper, *Lectures*, p. 133.

<sup>115</sup>Kuyper, *Lectures*, p. 141.

created the cosmos and rules it in his sovereignty.<sup>116</sup>

### 3.5 *Calvinism and Art*

With this lecture, we come to the last of Calvinism's interactions with different human endeavors (the last lecture deals with the conditions of Calvinism at the time the lectures were given at Princeton). There is somewhat of a sea-change in the approach of this chapter compared to others. It takes a more defensive posture (defending Calvinism from the charge of being anti-art) and so ventures into areas somewhat new to Calvinism. Whereas the other lectures have tended to stress the antithesis perhaps more so than the doctrine of common grace (although this may be an oversimplification of the case), this lecture tends toward laying the stress completely on common grace. As William Edgar has said, "Kuyper's penultimate lecture is on a surprising topic: Calvinism and Art. He approaches the material rather differently from the previous material in politics and science."<sup>117</sup> Edgar goes on to say that,

In strong contrast to his previous sections, Kuyper does not ground his approach to art in the antithesis so much as he does in common grace. Unlike his advocacy of a renewed science, which should be conducted in separate research institutions, his defense of the arts is limited to justifying the Calvinist vision against prejudice.<sup>118</sup>

---

<sup>116</sup>Thus, for Kuyper, there ought to be Christian research institutes that allow for and encourage the development of a distinctly *Christian* science. At the same time he allows for other scientific endeavors which stem from other worldviews. We may see here an example of what has been called *Verzuiling* or "pillarization" in which different groups in one society stand side-by-side within their own subculture with their own churches, schools, civic leaders, etc.

<sup>117</sup>Edgar, "A Review of Heslam," p. 357.

<sup>118</sup>Edgar, "A Review of Heslam," p. 358.

Kuyper addresses the issue of art (or the “arts”) by defending Calvinism from the charge of being anti-art, which he believes results from a misreading of Calvinistic churches not adorning their buildings with ornamentation nor investing their worship with more symbolism than was necessary (for instance beyond the symbolism of baptism and the Lord’s Supper).<sup>119</sup> Kuyper proposes to examine the relation of Calvinism under the headings of “1. why Calvinism was not allowed to develop *an art-style of its own*; 2. what flows from its principle for *the nature of art*; and 3. what it has actually done for its *advancement*.”<sup>120</sup>

Calvinism was not allowed to pursue its own ecclesiastical art-style because of its “*higher*” principle and Kuyper here connects the development of an art-style to the issue of worship.<sup>121</sup> He then seeks to show that the intimate connection of art-style with worship in the developing history of the church was part and parcel of the overall evolution from a symbolic form of worship, with its emphasis on the sensual, to the higher stage of spiritual worship as exemplified in Calvinism. Calvinism by its very nature couldn’t develop its own uniquely ecclesial art-style for its very form of worship precluded such a thing.<sup>122</sup> Art has its own sphere of sovereignty and so must be separate and differentiated from the public expression of religion (although on Calvinist principles, art cannot be divorced from religion since religion *is* the starting point of its whole worldview, namely the

---

<sup>119</sup>Kuyper, *Lectures*, pp. 145-147.

<sup>120</sup>Kuyper, *Lectures*, p. 145.

<sup>121</sup>Kuyper, *Lectures*, pp. 145-146.

<sup>122</sup>Kuyper, *Lectures*, pp. 145-152.

sovereignty of God).<sup>123</sup> For Kuyper, it wasn't as though Calvinism had not developed an art-style *but that its very life-principle did not allow its art-style to be reflected ecclesiastically or liturgically*.<sup>124</sup> Rather, as Kuyper will argue, Calvinism permitted the flourishing of art *outside* the ecclesiastical domain or sphere. The question Kuyper asked was "Is there in the life- and world-view of Calvinism a place for art, and if so, what place?"<sup>125</sup>

Kuyper argues that art has its own sphere. He asks whether

...a world without *art* (would) lose one of its ideal spheres? I do not speak now of the abuse, but simply of the use of art. In every domain, life is bound to respect the dimensions of this domain. Encroachment on the domain of others is always unlawful; and our human life will only attain its nobler harmony when all its functions cooperate in just proportion to our general development. The logic of the mind may not scorn the feelings of the heart, nor should the love of the beautiful silence the voice of conscience. However holy Religion may be, it must keep within its bounds, lest, crossing its lines, it degenerate into superstition, insanity or fanaticism. And in the same way, the too exuberant passion for art which laughs at the whispering of conscience, must end in an unlovely discord quite different from what the Greeks exalted in their kalokagathos.<sup>126</sup>

Art, says Kuyper, originates neither in man nor the Evil One, but in God as sovereign over his good

---

<sup>123</sup>Kuyper, *Lectures*, pp. 151-152, "Thus by itself the possibility must be denied that a proper art-style can originate independently of religion; but if even this were otherwise, it would still be illogical, and this was my second argument, to demand such a secular tendency of Calvinism. For how can you desire that a life-movement, which found the origin of its power in the arraignment of all men and of all human life before the face of God, should have sought the impulse, the passion and the inspiration for its life *outside of God* in so exceedingly important a domain as that of the mighty arts? There remains, therefore, no shadow of reality in the scornful reproach that the non-creation of an architectural style of its own is conclusive proof of Calvinism's artistic poverty. Only under the auspices of its religious principle could Calvinism have created a general art-style, and just because it had reached a so much higher stage of religious development, its very principle forbade it the symbolical expression of its religion in visible and sensual forms."

<sup>124</sup>Kuyper, *Lectures*, p. 152.

<sup>125</sup>Kuyper, *Lectures*, p. 152.

<sup>126</sup>Kuyper, *Lectures*, p. 152.

creation.<sup>127</sup> For the Calvinist, art points *back* to the beautiful creation as it came from the hand of the Creator, and *ahead* to the consummation in which that beauty will be restored and perhaps even surpassed. God as sovereign is the “Master-Builder” and the “Supreme-Artist” and therefore gives gifts of artistic skill wherever he wills, both inside and outside the church, amongst believers and unbelievers alike, so that artistic skill and art-style are a matter of common- and *not* saving- grace.<sup>128</sup> Man as created *imago Dei* can be artful and can also appreciate beauty.<sup>129</sup> So art has its own sphere in which to grow and develop.

Finally, Kuyper demonstrates that Calvinism not only encourages the development of art and art-style, within its own sphere, in principle, but has actually encouraged the development of art in fact. And we are not surprised when Kuyper points to his own Holland for supporting evidence. While not drawing upon a more international collection, the mere mention of the name Rembrandt in the field of painting and (to a lesser extent perhaps) the names of Bourgeois and Goudimel in the field of music should be enough to show that Calvinism has had its time of artistic flowering.<sup>130</sup> Calvinism may not have had a huge growth in the arts but it has had some development, much of which is connected with the Renaissance and the Reformation.

---

<sup>127</sup>Kuyper, *Lectures*, p. 155.

<sup>128</sup>Kuyper, *Lectures*, pp. 156-157.

<sup>129</sup>Kuyper, *Lectures*, p. 157.

<sup>130</sup>Kuyper, *Lectures*, pp. 163-169.

Even here in Kuyper's fifth lecture we can see the ligaments of his worldview apologetic. Calvinism is comprehensive in that allows for art its own sphere in which to develop and flourish. It is evolutionary in asserting that Calvinism has developed beyond forms of Christianity (like Roman Catholicism) which seem to concentrate on the sensual and symbolic in worship, which also points up the antithetic element (although admittedly muted here) that Calvinism is distinct and cannot be judged by a criteria developed in use with other forms of religion, even forms of a more outwardly symbolic Christianity (after all, Calvinistic worship is spiritual). Calvinism is different and its development of an art-style outside of the church also demonstrates that art develops in the context of common grace, not within the context of saving grace as found within the life of the church. The place of the development of art and art-style within the context of common grace of course reminds us that art is the gift of the Master-BUILDER and Supreme-Artist, our Sovereign God. While there is a note of antithesis in Kuyper's defense of a Calvinistic vision for art, the normalist/abnormalist note gets little play here.

### *3.6 Calvinism and the Future*

Peter Heslam has said that Kuyper's sixth and final lecture in the *Stone Lectures* reflects his assessment of the state of Calvinism at the time of the lectures more than it embodies a prognostication for the future.

Calvinism's achievements in the past, outlined in the first five lectures, were not to be dwelt on for their own sake but were to inspire and inform further vigorous activity. It was at this point that Kuyper's lectures shed a good deal of their apologetic style and took on something of the nature of a party-political address aimed at outlining a specific program of action. As such, the concern of the last lecture was chiefly with the current state of affairs, rather than with circumstances that might have been envisioned for the future. It was by bringing his vision of the

past triumphs of Calvinism to bear on the present situation that Kuyper developed a program for Calvinistic activity in the future. The title of the lecture-“Calvinism and the Future” -needs, therefore some clarification. It suggests that it was primarily concerned either with the specific interpretation, or vision, of the future provided by Calvinism, or with the likely course Calvinism would take in the future, whereas neither of these is true. In stimulating the desired response, Kuyper sought to indicate Calvinism’s potential, not so much to interpret or predict the future, but to affect its course. In doing so he devoted considerable space to a characterization of the current circumstances.<sup>131</sup>

In our day, we might characterize Kuyper’s closing lecture as a quasi-motivational speech rather than an act of prognostication or prophecy. Kuyper was calling for a new appropriation of the Calvinistic heritage that would respond to current needs and the needs of the future. Excluding “imitative repristination,”<sup>132</sup> Kuyper called for a “*new Calvinistic development needed by the wants of the future.*”<sup>133</sup>

While being quite pessimistic about the current circumstances in which the church found itself in the world, Kuyper was hoping to revive a living and vibrant Calvinism. His first concern, therefore, was to ascertain how the world has reached its current low point. For Kuyper, part of the problem rested with those churches and regions that did not accept the Reformation , among which would be, of course, France, where the dreaded French Revolution had taken place in 1789.<sup>134</sup> Movements such as the French Revolution resulted in “Modernism” which Kuyper characterized with two

---

<sup>131</sup>Heslam, *Christian Worldview*, p. 225.

<sup>132</sup>Kuyper, *Lectures*, p. 171, “This, of itself, excludes every idea of imitative repristination, and what the descendants of the old Dutch Calvinists as well as of the Pilgrim fathers have to do, is not to copy the past, as if Calvinism were a petrification, but to go back to the living root of the Calvinist plant, to clean and water it, and so to cause it to bud and blossom once more, now fully in accordance with our actual life in these modern times, and with the demand of the times to come.”

<sup>133</sup>Kuyper, *Lectures*, p. 171.

<sup>134</sup>Kuyper, *Lectures*, pp. 175-180.

themes,

The Spirit of this *modern life* is most clearly marked by the fact that it seeks the origin of man not in creation after the image of God, but in evolution from the animal. Two fundamental ideas are clearly implied in this: (1) that the point of departure is no longer the ideal or the divine, but the material and the low; (2) that the sovereignty of God, which ought to be supreme, is denied, and man yields himself to the mystical current of an endless process, a *regressus* and *progresses in infinitum*.<sup>135</sup>

For Kuyper, the only line of defense is a reinvigorated Protestantism, in other words, Calvinism. The then current defense was a two pronged attack along *practical* and *mystical* lines.<sup>136</sup> Kuyper urged a greater defense of the Scriptures against modern criticism and the criticism of dogmatism<sup>137</sup> for even though Christians could increase their activity in works of mercy, that would not sustain the faith. Neither would Mysticism. Kuyper urged greater devotion. But both will fail, he contended, if it was thought that either do without the “Truth of Salvation.” So called “practical” and “mystical” Christians were deceiving themselves if they thought they could do without a Christian worldview. That path led down the road already trod by Rousseau and Darwin.<sup>138</sup> Nothing less than a return to Calvinism would suffice. But what did Kuyper envision here? Certainly not that all Protestants would miraculously affirm the Reformed creeds. No, Kuyper laid out these four points,

(1) that Calvinism would no longer be ignored where it still exists, but be strengthened where its influence continues; (2) that Calvinism shall again be made a subject of study in order that the outside world may come to know; (3) that its

---

<sup>135</sup>Kuyper, *Lectures*, p. 178.

<sup>136</sup>Kuyper, *Lectures*, p. 187.

<sup>137</sup>Kuyper, *Lectures*, p. 187.

<sup>138</sup>Kuyper, *Lectures*, p. 189.



principles shall again be developed in accordance with the needs of our time, and consistently applied to the various domains of life; and (4) that the Churches which still lay claim to confessing it, shall cease being ashamed of their own confession.<sup>139</sup>

Kuyper then stressed the essential nature of the Calvinistic doctrine of election (as opposed to the evolutionary doctrine of *selection*),

Now, when we compare these two systems of *Selection* and *Election*, does not history show that the doctrine of Election has century upon century, restored peace and reconciliation to the hearts of the believing sufferer; and that all Christians hold election as we do, in honor, both in *creation* and in *providence*; and that Calvinism deviates from the other Christian confessions in this respect only, that, seeking unity and placing the glory of God above all things, it dares to extend the mystery of Election to spiritual life, and to the hope for the life to come.<sup>140</sup>

While the tone of Kuyper's closing remarks may have tended toward the pessimistic, he understood that Calvinism was just the instrument to be used by God to turn the world situation around. It would not simply be a matter of Calvinists becoming more active in their world. But of placing themselves where the Spirit of God could use them.

Unless, God send forth His Spirit, there will be no turn, and fearfully rapid will be the descent of the waters. But you remember the Aeolian Harp, which men were wont to place outside their casement, that the breeze might wake its music into life. Until the wind blew, the harp remained silent, while, again, even though the wind arose, if the harp did not lie in readiness, a rustling of the breeze might be heard, but not a single note of ethereal music delighted the ear. Now, let Calvinism be nothing but such an Aeolian Harp,- absolutely powerless, as it is, without the quickening Spirit of God- still we feel it our God-given duty to keep our harp, its strings tuned aright, ready in the window of God's Holy Zion, awaiting the breath of the Spirit.<sup>141</sup>

While these words do sound pessimistic, there is the recognition that with the Holy Spirit, Calvinism could be the catalyst for a great sea-change in the condition of the world. Still, there is a wistfulness

---

<sup>139</sup>Kuyper, *Lectures*, p. 192.

<sup>140</sup>Kuyper, *Lectures*, p. 197.

<sup>141</sup>Kuyper, *Lectures*, p. 199.

in the hope Kuyper extends to Calvinism and we can't help but think things could have a brighter future if Kuyper was correct on the basics of developing a Christian worldview.

Even in the closing lecture in this series, Kuyper uses elements that characterize his worldview apologetic. There is still the comprehensive nature of Calvinism that stems from its one starting point which recognizes the sovereignty of God and Kuyper recognizes the continuing normal/abnormal dichotomy that exemplifies the antithesis in the condition of the world in the age of modernism. Surely even here, the current situation is the result of the heliotropic development of humanity (one could argue that Kuyper's apparent pessimism regarding the future of Calvinism stemmed from his acceptance of heliotropism). There is still a place for common grace, though, as individual believers interact with unbelievers in their work-a-day worlds.

#### **4. A Critical Assessment of Abraham Kuyper's Worldview Apologetic**

We now come to the concluding section of this study where we will endeavor to interact with Abraham Kuyper's worldview apologetic and make a critical assessment from *within*. That is, we believe that Kuyper's worldview apologetic is basically sound. We have made a tour through Kuyper's *Stone Lectures* along with some supplementary materials (writings written before and after Kuyper's delivery of the lectures at Princeton), so that we are now able to assess the various elements that characterize his method. It appears to us that the best way to interact with the material is to go back over familiar ground that we covered when discussing the characteristic elements of Kuyper's worldview apologetic. This time, rather than being simply descriptive, we will endeavor

to adjust and refine concepts where we deem appropriate.<sup>142</sup> In so doing, it is our goal to appropriate and advance Kuyper's insights as we seek to live for our Lord Jesus Christ. To the critical assessment we now turn.

#### 4.1 *On Worldviews*

We have been interested in worldview thinking for sometime so that it is natural for us to use it in the service of apologetics. As we said at the outset of this study, we would tend to classify Kuyper's practice of apologetics as polemical with an *elenctic* element, which involves *convictional confrontation* and asks the question that J. H. Bavinck has framed so well, "what have you done with God?"<sup>143</sup> This approach could just as easily encapsulate the presuppositional approach of apologetics pioneered by Cornelius Van Til. So even though Kuyper disdained traditional apologetics as selling the Christian birthright for a mess of pottage (i.e., intellectual favor or acceptance), Kuyper still practiced a new kind of apologetic which is alive and well within the Reformed tradition.<sup>144</sup>

---

<sup>142</sup>This is not said without some trepidation, since we recognize that Kuyper had a far better grasp of Scripture and theology (not to mention other fields such as philosophy) than we do, but we want to be able to appropriate what we can do as he suggested in his lectures when he stated that we cannot merely reproduce (what Kuyper called "imitative repristination") the past, but must critically reappropriate our heritage, which involves at least some *sifting*. In other words, it involves some struggle on our part in determining as best we can what can and ought to be carried forward and what ought best be left behind. Our desire here is to *advance* the Kuyperian tradition, which we believe ourselves to be standing in, so that we can be faithful to our Lord, who, as Kuyper claimed, is Lord of every sphere. For our part, we are more sanguine for the future of Calvinism in some respects, than Kuyper appeared to be himself, if one can judge by the conclusion of the *Stone Lectures*.

<sup>143</sup>J. H. Bavinck, *An Introduction to the Science of Missions* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed Publishing, 1961.), pp. 221-272.

<sup>144</sup>This may be the best place to state that we wish the presuppositional approach to apologetics, which as far as we can tell, is Kuyperian worldview apologetics by another name (for the most part), were better known and understood.

All of us interpret the world which we experience and in which we think. Therefore all of us have some sort of worldview, so that Kuyper, and James Orr before him in his Kerr Lectures, were correct in drawing to our attention the need to develop and maintain a Christian worldview. While Paul's words in Romans 12:1 & 2 were addressed to a group of believers, we believe it is not an illegitimate use of those words to take them to mean that Paul's exhortation to renew our minds involves the individual believer's intellect and use of it in the continual process of sanctification (albeit in the context of community). Abraham Kuyper, in other words, is simply putting feet, as it were, on Paul's injunction. The issue is whether we will be open, honest and up front about our presuppositions or whether we will pretend to some sort of "neutral objectivity." For our part, we would prefer to reckon with the fact that we are Christians and wrestle with the implications of that for the whole of our lives (which includes the intellectual even though not limited to that). So broadly speaking, we believe Kuyper is on track, even if the term *Weltanschauung* was first coined by Immanuel Kant. We are not worried that a term may be borrowed for borrowed terms do not equal borrowed concepts (the form and content issue). At the same time, we can say that Kuyper is, to a certain extent, a child of his times. It could not be otherwise.

#### 4.2 *Comprehensive Nature of Worldviews*

It has been said that our postmodern era disdains "meta-narratives" which are stories that attempt

to explain how everything relates to everything else. Well, Christianity *is* a meta-narrative,<sup>145</sup> which may put Christianity on the outs in some quarters of society, but perhaps that is one element of the “offense of the cross” or the scandal of particularity which Christians are called upon to bear in this world. Kuyper simply has made us more aware of the comprehensive claims of the faith. Christianity claims to have found the truth, or rather, to have been *found by the Truth!*

Now, it is one thing to state that Christianity embraces the truth and involves the story that explains all of reality, it is another thing for any particular Christian to claim comprehensive knowledge, for only God can have that. System building is not *ipso facto* idolatrous, but it can become that if the one who is endeavoring to pull everything together does not remember that God alone has comprehensive knowledge.<sup>146</sup> So we can say that Christianity is comprehensive and that the Christian worldview is comprehensive because God’s knowledge is exhaustive, even though ours is not. Having said that, our knowledge (including our worldview) can approximate God’s knowledge on the human level and so therefore is *analogical* (in the Van Tillian sense of that term). But taking those limitations into consideration, we can comfortably say that the Christian (and particularly Calvinistic) worldview is comprehensive. It touches on every facet of human existence and endeavor, without a doubt.

---

<sup>145</sup>For a discussion of the meta-narrative nature of Christianity, see Middleton and Walsh, *Truth Is Stranger Than It Used To Be* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity Press, 1995). While we disagree with much that Middleton and Walsh write in this volume, we still think it a worthwhile read.

<sup>146</sup>One recalls the controversy between Cornelius Van Til and Gordon H. Clark during the 1940's which centered around the incomprehensibility of God and the nature of Divine and human knowledge and how they relate. For a helpful exposition of that debate, see John Frame, *Cornelius Van Til: An Analysis of His Thought* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed Publishing, 1996).

#### *4.3 The Normalist/Abnormalist Distinction*

Abraham Kuyper was also correct, when dealing with the issue of politics and science that there is a great divide between those who operate in this world as though the world were as it has always been and those who recognize the human predicament. As James Orr stated so clearly, Christianity presupposes the fall into sin in its understanding of the need for redemption (no sin, no need of a savior). Kuyper's analysis of how this distinction works itself out is insightful. Normalism would seem to lean in some sort of evolutionary or developmentalistic/pantheistic direction.

#### *4.4 Conceptual Monism*

It is true that Kuyper was always tracing back his worldview to one dominating starting point, which for Calvinism was the sovereignty of God. He also did the same for other worldviews so that he did have something like a conceptual monism-that is, he shared with his generation the idea of systematizing thought around some central idea that could comprehend all of the data put to it. We are loathe to be critical of Kuyper at this point for we see value in emphasizing the sovereignty of God and we see heuristic value in being able to organize experience and thought around a major theme.

Having said that, we would also want to recognize the thinking of Cornelius Van Til and scholars such as John Frame and Vern Poythress who have pointed out the value of looking at things from many different angles just as you could look at a whole diamond through the many facets catching

slightly different refractions of light and exposing different aspects of the diamond.<sup>147</sup> So while we recognize that the sovereignty of God stressed by Kuyper is a major facet through which we can view the whole of the Christian faith, it is not the only legitimate facet from which to build even a Calvinistic worldview.

#### 4.5 *Evolutionary Development or "Heliotropism"*

This element is perhaps the greatest sign of Kuyper's age. It seems to reflect the influence of German idealistic philosophy and Romanticism, both of which Kuyper repudiated as systems of thought, but which were nevertheless "in the air" of his day. Heslam has pointed out how prevalent this *developmentalism* is in Kuyper's thought and it would add a tremendous amount of material to an already lengthy study to interact in any significant detail with this aspect of Kuyper's thought other than to say that Kuyper's rejection of evolution as a worldview didn't preclude his benefitting from its insights where appropriate. While we would not want to argue against the idea of development altogether (how can we forsake it completely since it is "in the air" for us as well in the form of the so-called "American Dream" and the idea of continual progress<sup>148</sup>), we cannot accept the idea of "heliotropism" which Heslam has aptly described as a myth. Heliotropism was the idea that humanity was going through stages of continual progression from east to west and back to east. Our criteria for determining whether Calvinism is the correct worldview are Scripture and the fact

---

<sup>147</sup>See both John Frame *Doctrine of the Knowledge of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed Publishing, 1987) and Vern Poythress *Symphonic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1987).

<sup>148</sup>For a critique of the idea of unending progress, see Christopher Lasch's *The True and Only Heaven* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1991.)

of our inability to explain or predicate anything meaningful of anything else apart from the Christian (and Calvinistic) worldview. We believe for Kuyper to declare Calvinism as the highest development of religion based upon the heliotropic myth (if indeed he did that-perhaps he used the heliotropic myth for its explanatory or heuristic value) to be quite arbitrary. For if human development continues from east to west and around again, who is to say, based upon the myth itself, that there won't appear a further developed form of religion. Heliotropism seems to suffer from the same problems as evolution in general. Namely, if evolution were true, how do we know there couldn't be further development in which the human species vanished altogether (this may in fact be held by some, although we have not come across it in our reading).

#### *4.6 The Antithesis/Common Grace Dialectic*

Many think that Kuyper has a major contradiction right at the center of his formulation of the Calvinistic worldview. While Kuyper may have problems articulating how the two concepts relate, we believe he is reflecting the nature of the case. In other words, it is not either the antithesis or common grace but both. Now it is true that Kuyper's followers have differed over which should get priority, but we for our part think that the tension (as Heslam calls it) is a factor in what in Reformed theology (and elsewhere) has become known as the already/not yet factor in Christian eschatology.<sup>149</sup> In other words, the antithesis is the result of the fall, but common grace mitigates the full effects of sin. If it were not for common grace, the antithesis would be complete in practice as well as "in principle".

---

<sup>149</sup>This suggestion has been cogently articulated by Esther L. Meek in *Embrace It Or Replace It*, pp. 121-124.



Van Til may be helpful here. His discussion of the antithesis entails how believers and unbelievers think and act *in principle* as well as how they think and act in practice. If there was no common grace, then unbelievers could (theoretically) be consistent. That is, they would know nothing truly. If the effects of the fall were allowed to “fall out” unimpeded, there would (perhaps) be a complete application of the principle of antithesis. But the point is, because of common grace, the otherwise expected results of the fall are more or less mitigated.

The above may not be a completely satisfactory answer, but it does highlight the fact that just because there is a tension in Kuyper’s thought, that tension in itself doesn’t indicate poor thinking, but may actually be a more accurate reflection of the human condition, as we live in the time between the times or in the eschatological overlap of the ages.

#### 4.7 *Concluding Remarks*

While Abraham Kuyper delivered his *Stone Lectures on Calvinism* (now) more than a hundred years ago, they still read as a fresh articulation of biblical truth. While the lectures are not without their problems (what human endeavor isn’t?), we find them to be a solid and forthright worldview apologetic. We stand by our characterization of Kuyper’s worldview apologetic as *polemical theology with an elenctic flavor*.

As expected there are aspects which we can carry forward as we endeavor to reappropriate Kuyper’s vision and advance it. For instance, while we agree that the sovereignty of God is a central element

of Christianity, we would not want to say that it is the only center around which to formulate a Calvinistic worldview. Also, we cannot embrace the more obviously heliotropic and evolutionary formulations of Kuyper (but neither have we thought of a better way of formulating these things at this time). We happily recognize Kuyper's insights into worldview (presuppositional) thinking which reflect the normalist/abnormalist distinction and the antithesis/common grace dialectic. We live in the time between the times, and that will be reflected in various tensions in the Christian life. As Vern Poythress has so well put it, the life of suffering that the Christian is called to also involves *intellectual* suffering.<sup>150</sup> That is, until the consummation, there are some things that will just be unresolved. Until the return of our Lord, Kuyper is dependable guide. Until then, worldviews will collide. And like Kuyper, our apologetic needn't be apologetic.

---

<sup>150</sup>Dr. Poythress has made this salient observation regarding hermeneutics in his class lectures on that subject.

## ***Bibliography***

1. Bahnsen, Greg L. *Van Til's Apologetic: Readings & Analysis* Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed Publishing, 1998.
2. Bavinck, J. H. *An Introduction to the Science of Missions* Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed Publishing, 1960.
3. Bristley, Eric D. *From Probability to Certainty: The Witness of the Holy Spirit and the Defense of the Bible in Presbyterian & Reformed Apologetics, 1870-1920* Unpublished ThM Thesis. Philadelphia: Westminster Theological Seminary, 1989.
4. Edgar, William. "A Review of Peter S. Heslam's *Creating a Christian Worldview: Abraham Kuyper's Lectures on Calvinism*" in *The Westminster Theological Journal* Vol. 60, No. 2 (Fall 1998).
5. Heslam, Peter S. *Creating A Christian Worldview: Abraham Kuyper's Lectures on Calvinism* Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998.
6. Kuyper, Abraham. *Lectures on Calvinism* Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1931.
7. Kuyper, Abraham. *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader* James Bratt, Editor. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998.
8. Langley, McKendree R. *Emancipation and Apologetics: The Formation of Abraham Kuyper's Anti-Revolutionary Party in the Netherlands, 1870-1880* Unpublished PhD Dissertation. Philadelphia: Westminster Theological Seminary, 1995.
9. Meek, Esther L. "Embrace It Or Replace It: The Christian and Culture-A Review of Peter S. Heslam's *Creating Christian Worldview: Abraham Kuyper's Lectures on Calvinism*" in *The Presbyterian: Covenant Seminary Journal* Vol. XXIV, No. 2 (Fall 1998), pp. 119-125.
10. Muller, Richard. *Dictionary of Greek and Latin Theological Terms* Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1985.
11. Oliphint, K. Scott. *The Apologetical Implications of the Epistemology of Alvin Plantinga* Unpublished PhD Dissertation. Philadelphia: Westminster Theological Seminary, 1994.