

# What Does It Mean To Be Kuyperian?

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## I. Prefatorial Remarks

Let me begin my talk by referring us back to the original question that led to this series of assembly talks: What does it mean to be “Kuyperian”? In this talk, I will attempt to uncover the central motivations behind Kuyper’s philosophical and theological directions, and then draw some attention to some themes he developed from his fundamental principles. I have chosen to focus on what I understand to be the foundation of what it means to be “Kuyperian,” that underlying all knowledge, there must be a faith, and that underlying true knowledge, is the faith in the Creator God. Central in this discussion is the question of what is common among men, relating to common grace, and the role of differing faiths in antithesis. I also find these themes important for any discussion of the academic enterprise, for it is exactly the question of understanding what we can accept from others and what we must reject that we need to decide. What I hope to accomplish in this talk is to present how Kuyper understood these questions, and to suggest how his perspective should be fruitful for all of us in our present academic context.

My talk will begin with a brief biographical sketch of Kuyper, providing some idea of the beginning of his wrestlings. From there I will move on to a discussion of his faith in the organic unity of all creation, followed by a somewhat closer look at the role of this faith. This naturally leads to the question of what is common among men in the doing of ‘science’ (Kuyper uses this term to mean all areas of academic investigation). Then I will show how Kuyper saw the subject of the antithesis arising naturally from within the common scientific enterprise, a division that ultimately arises because of the differing faiths which motivate at the foundational level. Next I will make a few remarks about Kuyper’s heritage, and in particular about the place of Dooyeweerd in his line of thought. Finally I’ll close with some comments suggesting our direction forward in the Kuyperian tradition. There is so much more to Kuyper than I could possibly present in a talk of this nature, so I hope this is only a beginning of our investigation of his contribution to our Reformed tradition.

## II. Biographical Notes on Kuyper

In a very brief and concise paragraph, B.B. Warfield sums up Kuyper’s achievements this way:

For many years he has exercised a most remarkable influence in his own country. Leader and organizer of the antirevolutionary Party; editor-in-chief of *De Standaard*; founder, defender and soul of the Free University of Amsterdam; consistent advocate of spiritual freedom in the church, and of the rights of the confession and the principles of the Reformed truth, to which the Dutch people owe all that has promoted

their greatness; teacher of religion who feeds thousands of hungry people with his instruction in *De Heraut*, his weekly, and whose lectures at the Free University have shaped a generation of theologians who are well versed in historical and systematic theology - in short, a power in Church and State . . . (Praansma 125-6)

This is indeed a remarkable set of achievements. No less are those mentioned in Louis Praansma's summary of Kuyper's work in his brief biography of Kuyper, *Let Christ be King*:

When Kuyper appeared on the scene, the Dutch nation, in its leadership and majority, had lost contact with its glorious past. Some liberals tried to revive that past by pointing to the great cultural achievements of the 'golden age.' Kuyper emphasized the Calvinistic character of the nation and appealed to the energy, fearlessness and faith of the Reformation era.

When he died, free Christian schools were to be found from north to south. Believers were applying Christian principles in their homes, churches and associations. Christian men of science were demonstrating that belief in the Bible was not antiquated but up-to-date. The face of the country had been renewed. (186)

Abraham Kuyper was born on October 29th, 1837 to the family of a Dutch minister in the Reformed State Church. In 1855, he enrolled in the University of Leiden, where he studied mainly literature, and received a B.A. in classical literature. After his B.A. he took up the study of theology. During this time he decided to become a minister himself and came under the teaching of J.H. Scholten, a modernist theologian who is referred to as "the grand master of Dutch Modernism" by Praansma. Scholten was deeply influenced by the successes of the science of his day; and consequently he had ceased to hold to the "faultlessness" of scripture, replacing it with an inner authority based on reason. During these years of university training, Kuyper lost his childhood faith. Of these days in Kuyper's life, Praansma records:

In his student days, Kuyper had been an enthusiastic disciple of the proponents of the Modern theology. The Moderns, as their name suggests, wanted to be men of the present, not of the past. . . . The Moderns lived in an age when natural science could point to great triumphs. Historical criticism of the original biblical sources became a project of theology. . . . In such a time, a problem that had confronted Schleiermacher was knocking with new power at the door of the church: Is there still a little corner left for faith? What is the relation between faith and science? Is it possible for us to be men of our time and men of the Bible, to be living and active men of our age and loyal, faithful members of the church? (36)

These were indeed pressing questions that Kuyper also wrestled with after his conversion. In all his teachings and cultural activities, he was concerned to demonstrate the depth and the extent of the relevance of the Reformed principles of Calvinism for the modernism of his day. Kuyper himself later reflected back on Scholten's theology thus:

. . . Scholten's modernism was deterministic, starting from an idea of God, whereas real Reformed theology was Scriptural, starting and continuing with the living God. A genuinely Reformed theologian should not set up a system, but should listen to the Word, as Mary did at Jesus' feet. (Praansma 136)

## Kuyper's Conversion

Kuyper's conversion took place partly through the reading of a novel *The Heir of Redclyffe* by Charlotte Yonge, in which he identified with a main character whose pride led to his eventual downfall. This self-recognition apparently brought Kuyper to his knees as he was confronted with his own pride and misdirection. Kuyper, when looking back on this episode, realized that there are

two directions, two paths, open to everyone. Each has its own principle and in the systematic development from that principle, the one necessarily flows forth out of the other, . . . [marking] it as a life direction. . . starting from a . . . spiritual orientation of the human heart. (Henderson 31)

Subsequently, he took a pastorate at a church in rural Beesd, where contact with traditional Calvinists eventually led him away from the path of modernism. Another influence also had a profound effect on him as well. Roger Henderson explains in his article, *How Abraham Kuyper became a Kuyperian*, that during his time at Beesd, Kuyper came across an article of his former professor, J.H. Scholten, which stated his opinion that the apostle John did not write the Gospel of that name. Kuyper was quite shocked at this, having remembered vividly numerous lectures he had heard as a student in which Scholten had given multiple reasons why John had indeed written this Gospel.

What had caused the change? According to Scholten's own admission, the change came about because of a shift in world view; he moved from a Platonic to a more Aristotelian perspective. (33) Kuyper then recognized that Scholten had identified "an *a priori* as the guiding star of his criticism." (34) Of this, Henderson comments

Kuyper does not conclude from this, however, that Scholten is a poor scholar doing substandard work. Quite to the contrary, he concludes that Scholten has candidly, if inadvertently, disclosed something of vital importance about every scholar, namely that he or she is dependent upon a worldview. A worldview influences and helps the scholar to conceive and work out new theories and ideas. This recognition of what he calls the "a priori," the central role that worldviews play in scholarly activity gave Kuyper the courage he required to disagree with an older, more learned scholar like Scholten. By breaking with him he broke with "modern" theology as such. Kuyper's discovery helped him to resist the powerful influence of the intellectual trends of his day. (34)

In this way, Kuyper came to that understanding which became so central to his thinking, that faith at the root level of the heart's commitment precedes knowledge in every form, and that this is the major factor separating the Modernist from the traditional Calvinist.

## Kuyper as Reformer

From this point on, Kuyper began to develop into a strong reforming influence in Holland, first in the church, and then reaching out to the culture at large. He also became a prolific writer, starting as editor in chief of the weekly paper *De Heraut* in 1871, and of the daily *De Standaard* the following year. He used these two papers over the years to formulate and spread his Reformational thinking throughout the land.

Among his political achievements are his victory in getting the state to grant to Christian and other sectarian schools equal status with public schools, and the establishment of the Free University (of Amsterdam) as a higher educational institute which is not subservient to the state. His involvement in politics led him to serve in the Dutch parliament and ultimately to the Prime Ministership of Holland. In this role he vigorously pushed a social agenda that avoided such extremes as revolutionary action on the one hand (he helped to establish the “Anti-Revolutionary Party”), and absolute property rights on the other. He saw all human activities as subservient to God, and vigorously defended the rights of the various social and scientific spheres from domination by the state. In this sense he saw the need for balance among the many structures of society.

However, we must leave all of these interesting chapters of his life and their implications for another day. Today we have only time to look into the foundational level. Let us now return to the question of what it means to be Kuyperian.

### III. The essentials of “Kuyperianism”

#### Kuyper as a Calvinist

When we come to Kuyper’s theological foundations, two main things need to be said. The first is that he held solidly to the teachings of Calvin. At a time when many Dutch ministers of his day had turned to liberalism, Kuyper rediscovered Calvinistic orthodoxy and saw that the way ahead for the church in Holland lay in recovering the energy and strength and directions which Calvinism still had to offer. At the same time, he had a keen awareness of the necessity to adapt and apply this teaching to the times in which he was living. His dedication to the principles of Calvinism was not that of a longing for a return to a stronger historical past. Rather it emerged as an insistence on making those doctrines apply to the spirit and the conditions of his own age and times.

#### 1. “Soteriological Calvinist”

Let us start with a quote that illustrates Kuyper’s thorough commitment to an orthodox view of the Word of God as recorded in the Holy Scripture:

Our human race, once fallen in sin, can have no more supply of pure or sufficient knowledge of God from the natural principium [general revelation]. Consequently God effects an auxiliary revelation for our human race, which, from a special principium of its own and under the necessary conditions, places a knowledge of God within the reach of the sinner which is suited to his condition. It took many centuries to accomplish this central Revelation, until it reached its completion. The description of this action of God, i.e. the providing of this central Revelation for our human race, is contained in the Holy scripture. He who would know this central Revelation, must seek it therefore in the Holy Scripture. And in that sense the question, where the special principium with the central Revelation to our race as its fruit is now to be found, must be answered without hesitation as follows: In the Holy Scripture and in the Holy Scripture alone. (Principles of Sacred Theology 361-2)

This and other similar quotes, reveal that Kuyper held very strongly to the absolute necessity of the scripture as God's central revelation for providing knowledge for salvation. Beyond accepting the Holy Scriptures as direct revelation from God, Kuyper affirmed the Calvinistic system of doctrine, with an emphasis on the sovereignty of God in all things. More importantly, Kuyper penetrated to the cultural significance and implications which lie within the heart of this system of doctrine, perhaps more so than many before him. Thus he ascribed to Calvinism, a critical role in understanding and shaping culture.

Witness, for example, what he says of Calvinism in his famous "Lectures on Calvinism" given as the Stone Lectures at Princeton University in 1898. In the context of discussing World Views, or "Life Systems" as he sometimes calls them, Kuyper suggests that Calvinism alone has understood man's relation to God rightly. Further he says

... Calvinism has neither invented nor conceived this fundamental interpretation, but that God Himself implanted it in the hearts of its heroes and its heralds. We face here no product of a clever intellectualism, but the fruit of a work of God in the heart, or, if you like, an inspiration of history. This point should be emphasized!  
(24)

Without belaboring the point further, we can say that Kuyper was a thoroughgoing Calvinist in the very same soteriological sense that we mean it today. He had all the petals on his tulip. And he exalted Calvinism as a system of thought given by God, rather than invented by man. What we are more interested in here today is the implications that he drew out of this system for life and culture.

For Kuyper, Calvinism as a Life System had something unique to say to every time and every culture. So while pointing the church back to its confessions, he also warned against mere traditionalism. Emphasizing the old motto " 'ecclesia Reformata, quia semper reformanda' (a Reformed church because we never stop reforming [sic])." (Praansma 61) He was keenly aware that every age in history has its own set of problems and unique conditions so that it is necessary to assess anew the problems of his own day, in order to apply to them the principles of Calvinism. His activism for the church in Holland in the last century should be understood in the light of these two points: his firm commitment to Calvinist principles and confessions on the one hand, and his understanding of the need to assess each situation anew, on the other.

## 2. Calvinism as "Life System"

In the first of Kuyper's Stone Lectures entitled "Calvinism a Life System," he used the term "life system" roughly the way we use the term "World View" from the German "Weltanschauung." A life system, says Kuyper, had to be governed by a principle strong enough to embrace the whole unity of life and to guide further cultural development. In view of this, he says that in his time, two such life systems, Christianity and Modernism, were in a struggle for the minds and hearts of the people of the day, "wrestling one another in mortal combat." (11)

In order to determine the character of a life system, Kuyper offers three criteria: what

does the system say about man's relation to God, man's relation to man, and man's relation to the created world? (19) Perhaps not surprisingly the first two of these echo Calvin's opening words in the Institutes, where he says

Our wisdom, in so far as it ought to be deemed true and solid wisdom, consists almost entirely of two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves. But as these are connected together by many ties, it is not easy to determine which of the two precedes, and gives birth to the other. . . it is evident that man never attains to a true self-knowledge until he has previously contemplated the face of God and come down after such contemplation to look into himself. (I.1-2)

The inextricable connection between our knowledge of God and our knowledge of ourselves is stressed by Kuyper when he lays out his own theory of knowledge. But in terms of identifying the character of a life system, Kuyper adds a third test: our understanding of our relation to the creation around us. This third concern comes across strongly throughout much of Kuyper's writings. Perhaps this is partly due to the emphasis of science at the time, in which Kuyper had a great interest, but nevertheless it is an important addition, because it focuses part of the discussion squarely on issues of ontology in the philosophical realm and issues of culture in the practical realm. The Stone lectures are largely written to flesh out these ramifications of Calvinism for all our cultural activities.

### **Organic Unity of all revelation: special and general**

In understanding Calvinism to be the central principle on which we build our life system, an important tenet of Kuyperian thought is the organic unity of all that is revealed, including both realms of revelation: general ("natural principium") and special ("special principium"). The German Idealists also were looking for such an "organic unity" and some might think that Kuyper is merely "Christianizing" this notion, but this appears to be far from the case. For Kuyper the case for the organic unity of all knowledge rests on the Calvinistic principle of the sovereignty of God, and on the fact that He is the origin of all that is revealed.

This concept of the organic unity of the world and of knowledge gave Kuyper a basis for the Christian's involvement in the sciences and led him to work out an extensive doctrine of common grace. Because he believed in a common grace that allows non-regenerate people to have genuine insights in knowledge, he was not shy about using insights from other thinkers who were formulating similar ideas. On the other hand, he also criticizes the German Idealists strongly concerning their starting points, recognizing appropriately that their formulations of organic unity would end with a form of pantheism. Kuyper would not allow God to be collapsed into the creation. Instead he saw the necessity for God as the starting point of our knowledge when we approach science. We see this in the following quote concerning the relationship between man the knower and the world as the object of his knowledge:

And since the object does not produce the subject, nor the subject the object, the power that binds the two organically together must of necessity be sought outside of each. And however much we may speculate and ponder, no explanation can ever suggest itself to our sense, of the all-sufficient ground for this admirable correspondence and affinity between object and subject, on which the possibility and development

of science wholly rests, until at the hand of Holy Scripture we confess that the Author of the cosmos created man in the cosmos as micro-cosmos “after his image and likeness.

Thus understood, science presents itself to us as a necessary and ever-continued impulse in the human mind to reflect within itself the cosmos, plastically as to its elements, and to think it through logically as to its relations; always with the understanding that the human mind is capable of this by reason of its organic affinity to its object. (Principles 83)

In his book, *Encyclopedia of Sacred Theology*,<sup>†</sup> Kuyper examined quite intensively the idea that all things in creation and hence all parts of human knowledge are interrelated to each other in an organic unity. Here the notion of “encyclopedia” represents to Kuyper a comprehensive and unified treatment of knowledge in which all of the different sciences are brought together in their interrelations and reflected on as a whole. This is in contrast to our present notion of encyclopedia as a compendium of facts organized in an alphabetical order, but with no other relation among themselves.

In this work, Kuyper laid out his perspective on a comprehensive approach to the study of the sciences, including what we call the natural sciences, but also including what Kuyper calls the “spiritual sciences,” psychology, sociology, economics, and so on, as well as theology. He did this in order to lay the groundwork for treating theology as a legitimate part of the whole enterprise of human knowledge, in fact an indispensable part of a university and to all seeking after knowledge. What is implied in this is that theology is related to all the other sciences and has a role in formulating human knowledge as a whole. Some quotes from the early parts of the Encyclopedia will give us an idea of his focus:

Since now that the world of our knowledge and that world of phenomena are not chaotic but organic, our thinking cannot rest till in the treasure of our knowledge it has exhibited such an Encyclopedic order as will harmonize with the organic relation both of that world of our knowledge and of that world of phenomena. Thus our human spirit is not to invent a certain order for our knowledge, but to seek out and to indicate the order which is already there . . . This necessity alone imparts to Encyclopedic study its scientific character. (Principles 28)

Here we see Kuyper emphasizing what flows from his ground principle that if God has created both the world and the means by which we obtain knowledge, we are not inventing order, but uncovering the unity which already exists. Similarly Kuyper says,

. . . If from this the necessity arises for man to begin a scientific investigation of himself as a thinking being and of the laws which his thinking obeys, then there follows from this at the same time the demand that he shall make science itself an object of investigation and exhibit to his consciousness the organism of science . . . Science is distinguished from general knowledge by the fact that science puts the emphasis upon the order in that knowledge. Science is systematic, i.e. it is knowledge orderly arranged . . . the dilettante-Encyclopedist asks merely after the knowledge at

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<sup>†</sup> Only a part of this work appears in English translation, under the title *Principles of Sacred Theology*.

hand, while the Encyclopedist who is a man of science interprets that knowledge as a system, and understands it consequently as science. (Principles 29)

Kuyper is therefore not so much interested in the contents of the particular sciences as he is in the system of science as a whole, or the system of investigation of knowledge. It is in the context of such an idea of the organic unity of creation and of knowledge that he can talk about how one's faith and the principles one accepts on faith affect knowledge and one's whole view of reality. This brings us to Kuyper's emphasis on the role of the centrality of faith in all of life.

### **Centrality of Faith**

One might wonder at this stage how Kuyper could escape the Kantian problem of the inability for our rational thought to be assured that it is embracing experience of phenomena that actually reflects what exists. For this Kuyper appealed to the revelation of the transcendent God and to faith. For, he explains, "if there were no other way open to knowledge than through discursive thought, . . . because of the uncertainty . . . which is the penalty of sin, and [because of] the impossibility [of having therefore an objective method to decide] between truth and falsehood," skepticism would reign. (Principles 123) Here we see a remarkable foreshadowing of post-modernism. Kuyper continues,

But since an entirely different way of knowledge is disclosed to us by wisdom and its allied common sense, which, independent of scientific investigation, has a starting point of its own, this intuitive knowledge founded on fixed perceptions given with our consciousness itself, offers a saving counterpoise to Skepticism.

Thus he agrees that knowledge cannot come through scientific investigation alone, but we have an entirely different source of confidence which rests in the wisdom disclosed to us through faith. This wisdom results in what Kuyper calls a "relative certainty" which does not depend in any way on scientific investigation, but which is constantly confirmed through practical experience. Such knowledge would not be possible apart from the revelation of a transcendent God and the faith that accompanies it.

In order to understand how faith plays an important role in all of life, Kuyper talked not about the specific contents of man's faith but of faith as a general human function by which man finds certainty for his life and actions. Thus by faith, Kuyper says, he "does not mean the 'faith in Christ Jesus' in its saving efficacy for the sinner, nor yet the "faith in God" which is fundamental to all religion, but that formal function of the life of our soul which is fundamental to every fact in our human consciousness." (Principles 125) Further he explains

Heb.xi.1 anticipates our wish to restore faith to its more general meaning. There we read that faith is 'the assurance of things hoped for, the proving of things not seen.' Thus faith is here taken neither in an exclusively religious sense, much less in a soteriological significance, but very generally as an 'assurance' and 'proving' of objects which escape our perception, either because they do not yet exist, or because they do not show themselves. . . .

There is no objection, therefore, to the use of the term faith for that function of



the soul by which it obtains certainty directly and immediately, without the aid of discursive demonstration. This places faith over against ‘demonstration’; but not of itself over against knowing. This would be so, if our knowledge and its content came to us exclusively by observation and demonstration, but, as we tried to prove . . . this is not so. (Principles 127-9)

Thus in contrast to the Kantian view, which essentially gave up on certain knowledge as it was then sought, Kuyper clearly understood that knowledge is based on faith, and that no knowledge can be gained apart from the knowledge of God, for knowledge ultimately depends on the revelation of God, the transcendent creator of the universe. True knowledge, through true faith, is therefore ultimately a gift of God.

But what of the twin pillars of rational thought and empirical investigation upon which knowledge is supposed to have been built? Of these Kuyper says that ultimately both of them depend on faith. He first sets the stage by explaining that our human self-consciousness is necessary for investigation, and that this is the ultimate starting place for doing science. However, we can never have any certainty of the existence of our self-consciousness apart from faith; faith now being taken “merely as the means or instrument by which to possess certainty, and as such needs no demonstration, but allows none.” (Principles 131-2)

He then argues that every act of thought or observation proceeds from the certainty of the existence of our ego, and therefore these can also only be established by faith. He points out that this is equally true of the starting point for our perceptions, and of our rational thought. For to have any certainty about our perception, we (our ego) must believe in our senses, and to have any certainty of the conclusions of our rational arguments, we must believe in the axioms on which we base our reasoning. So no matter where we turn, faith is ultimately at the bottom of every attempt at certainty.

I find it remarkable that Kuyper understood all this as early as he did, for it took another seven decades or so before philosophers in general began to understand the bankruptcy of trying to ground the search for certainty of knowledge in our own abilities. To the extent that they do not believe in the creator God, they are thus forced to skepticism. In this, we see Kuyper as the precursor both to van Til and to the post-modern age.

Kuyper goes on to argue that even to search for laws in science from particular data (inductive reasoning) you have to have a faith that there is indeed a general pattern to be found. (Thus those who deny the creator, act as if they do not deny Him when they are doing science.) He concludes by pointing out that as faith provides a starting point for both rational and empirical investigation, it also provides a “motive for the construction of science. . . .” (Principles 137)

Thus for Kuyper, faith is absolutely essential as the foundation for any particular life system. Furthermore, he goes on to say that for a faith to be worthy of its name it should generate an interest in an investigation of the world around us. In his later books, *Common Grace* and *Pro Rege*, Kuyper went on to plead the case for how the Christian faith provides the basis for cultural engagements and scientific investigations.

For Kuyper our faith relation as finite creatures to an infinite God is the central unifying

point in our human existence from which all our diverse creaturely activities flow. In the depths of our hearts, where we confront God, lies the existential focus from which we all live out our different paths in life. Of this Kuyper says:

Hence the first claim demands that such a life system shall find its starting-point in a special interpretation of our relation to God. This is not accidental, but imperative. If such an action is to put its stamp upon our entire life, it must start from that point in our consciousness in which our life is still undivided and lies comprehended in its unity, . . .

This point, of course, lies in the antithesis between all that is finite in our human life and the infinite that lies beyond it. Here alone we find the common source from which the different streams of our human life spring and separate themselves. Personally it is our repeated experience that in the depths of our hearts, at the point where we disclose ourselves to the Eternal One, all the rays of our life converge as in one focus, and there alone regain that harmony which we so often so painfully lose in the stress of daily duty. . . . (Lectures 20)

## Common Grace, Antithesis, and the Academic Enterprise

### 1. Science

As a foundation for science, Kuyper asserts that our faith in the doctrine of God's sovereignty in the temporal development of the creation should lead us to expect that humans can and will discover patterns or laws associated with different aspects of creation. He deduces that because God sustains all his creation according to one fixed plan, this would result in the existence of various "laws" or regularities of creation pertaining to the different sciences which exhibit a "unity, stability and order of things." (Lectures 115) In the Stone Lectures, he says:

What now does the Calvinist mean by his faith in the ordinances of God? Nothing less than the firmly rooted conviction that all life has first been in the *thoughts* of God, before it came to be realized in *Creation*. Hence all created life necessarily bears in itself a law for its existence, instituted by God Himself. There is no life outside us in Nature, without such divine ordinances, — ordinances which are called the laws of Nature — a term which we are willing to accept, provided we understand thereby, not laws originating *from* Nature, but laws imposed *upon* Nature. So, there are ordinances of God for the firmament above, and ordinances for the earth below, by means of which this world is maintained, and as the Psalmist says, These ordinances are the servants of God. Consequently there are ordinances of God for our bodies, for the blood that courses through our arteries and veins, and for our lungs as the organs of respiration. And even so are there ordinances of God, in logic, to regulate our thoughts; ordinances of God for our imagination, in the domain of aesthetics; and so, also, strict ordinances of God for the whole of human life in the *domain of morals*. (70)

So for Kuyper as for Calvin before him, the notion of science is much broader than what we normally think of today; it includes not just the "hard" sciences, but all the humanities as well. Thus he declares that "laws" are to be expected in every area of life. Indeed, for Kuyper the faith which accompanies Calvinism does provide the motivation for science; to

be engaged in scientific activities is to discover the order which is already placed in nature by God Himself.

In the Stone lectures as a whole, Kuyper provided a rough outline for cultural involvement, first by demonstrating the extent of Calvinism as a life-system, and then by discussing how this can be worked out in the areas of politics, science and academics, and the arts. Specifically dealing with science, he argued in his lecture on “Calvinism and Science” that Calvinism uniquely fosters a love for science, that it restores science to its proper domain — the domain of Christ, and that it frees science from bondage under other spheres such as the church or the state. Furthermore, he said that Calvinism provides a solution for the “unavoidable scientific conflict.” Here Kuyper is not speaking of a conflict between faith and science as it might be supposed, but rather he is speaking of the inevitable *antithesis* between the conclusions of two faiths that are fundamentally at odds with one another; in particular the Calvinist faith in the Creator God, and the modernist faith in naturalism. How does Calvinism “solve” this conflict? What Kuyper apparently means here is Calvinism reveals the nature of the conflict between the two different camps in science by identifying the conflict as stemming ultimately from the commitment of the heart of man.

Before addressing this important topic of antithesis we should first investigate what we can have in common with unbelievers under the subject of *common grace*. For according to Kuyper, antithesis is not set off against common grace, but antithesis flows out of common grace.

## 2. Common Grace

There are two directions from which to approach common grace. The first is the theological side, within which one would ask such questions as what are the grounds of common grace, what is its relation to special grace and to Christ as mediator of creation and of redemption. There has been considerable controversy about these questions, and it is not even clear that Kuyper himself was consistent and settled in his formulations. However, it does appear that Kuyper was the major proponent who brought this whole issue to the fore. For our purposes, let us not delve into the theological questions, but rather let us turn to those more pertinent to the exercise of our academic enterprise.

This second direction is to approach from the the practical side, leading us to ask such questions as how much do we really have in common with unbelievers for approaching our academic disciplines, and how do we take their insights and investigations. Can we really work together, and if so, how do we know how far to go?

We have already touched on the common role of faith. To relate this to the present topic, let us look at a quote from the Stone Lectures in which Kuyper summarizes the common role of faith in doing all science:

Every science in a certain sense starts from faith, and, on the contrary, faith, which does not lead to science, is mistaken faith or superstition, but real, genuine faith it is not. Every science presupposes faith in self, in our self-consciousness; presupposes faith in the accurate working of our senses; presupposes faith in the correctness of the laws of thought; presupposes faith in something universal hidden behind the

special phenomena; presupposes faith in life; and especially presupposes faith in the principles, from which we proceed; which signifies that all these indispensable axioms, needed in a productive scientific investigation, do not come to us by proof, but are established in our judgment by our inner conception and *given with our self-consciousness*. (131)

Here Kuyper points to faith as the common foundation for doing science and in so doing he lists those common areas which all human investigators presuppose in their work: a functioning selfhood, a reflecting mind, our physical senses, the laws of logic, objects of investigation, existence of something universal behind the particular phenomena, etc. These areas of commonality apply to both the natural and the ‘spiritual’ sciences, i.e. to both the hard sciences and to the humanities. Further,

...it is a matter of pre-assumption that there is a God, that a creation took place, that sin reigns, etc., we grant this readily, but in the same sense in which it is pre-assumed in all science that there is a human being, that that human being thinks, that it is possible for this human being to think mistakenly, etc., etc. He to whom these last named things are not presuppositions, will not so much as put his hand to the plough in the field of science, ...” (Principles 175)

Indeed, Kuyper maintains that our being born again, or *palingenesis* as he calls it, does not affect our faculties of sense, or of reason, and therefore we can use these faculties to guide us in identifying those data and knowledge which we share in common with unbelievers:

This must be emphasized, because it is in the interest of science at large, that mutual benefit be derived by both circles from what is contributed to the general stock of science. What has been well done by one need not be done again by you. It is at the same time important that, though not hesitating to part company as soon as principle demands it, the two kinds of science shall be as long as possible conscious of the fact that, formally at least, both are at work at a common task. ... The formal process of thought has not been attacked by sin, and for this reason palingenesis works no change in this mental task.

There is but one logic, and not two ... (this one logic) contributes in two ways important service in maintaining a certain mutual contact between the two kinds of science.

In the first place, from this fact it follows that the accuracy of one another’s demonstrations can be critically examined and verified, in so far at least as the result strictly depends upon the deduction made. By keeping a sharp watch upon each other, mutual service is rendered in the discovery of logical faults in each other’s demonstrations, and thus in a formal way each will continually watch over the other. And on the other hand, they may compel each other to justify their points of view over against one another. (Principles 159-160)

Thus when it comes to gathering data and to logical reasoning in our scholarly work, it is possible for believers and non-believers to hold each other accountable, since these judgments proceed within a sociological framework which we all share, a framework which has ontological grounding.

Kuyper goes on to identify different stages of scientific investigation. The first he calls the

“simple observation” which is the primitive point of departure for all scientific investigation. Then comes the stage of inferring from data in order to find and express the regularities observed in the data in more general laws. These two stages relate more directly to simple observation and reasoning, and can for the most part be held in common by all. But Kuyper says that stopping at this level cannot satisfy our “highest scientific need.” Here he says that

... the thinking mind cannot rest ... [until] It searches also after the relations among the several kingdoms of nature, between earth and the other parts of the cosmos, between all of nature outside of us and man, and finally after the origin of nature and of the tie which binds us to it, even in our body. These are the points of connection between the faculty of Natural Philosophy [Natural Science] and the other faculties. (Principles 209)

At the highest stage of scholarship, we are concerned with the significance and the meanings of the various phenomena studied for the whole picture of human reality. It is here, according to Kuyper, that our directions radically differ, and our foundational faith will reveal itself most clearly. It is in the light of this resulting divergence between the two sciences that we must sift through the preceding data and facts we share. When this divergence appears at the higher stage of science, it also bears testimony to the fundamental difference at the root of our differing faiths. Kuyper recognizes this also when he says,

Everything astronomers, or geologists, physicists or chemists, zoologists or bacteriologists, historians or archaeologists bring to light has to be recorded,—*detached of course from the hypothesis they have slipped behind it and from the conclusions they have drawn from it*, [my emphasis]—but every fact has to be recorded by you, also, as a fact, and as a fact that is to be incorporated as well in your science as in theirs. (Lectures 139)

This ability of the non-believer to investigate and to discover things that are (more or less) true about the world has historically been included in the notion of *common grace*, that grace which allows the world to continue in the present age without falling fully into utter wickedness. Kuyper did not want to use the term “general grace” as Calvin did, because he wanted to emphasize that it is grace common to all God’s earthly creatures, after the fall. (Praansma 141) He also emphasizes that it is temporal grace, which sets it apart from the grace which leads to eternal life. (Klapwijk 172) In that sense, common grace is only a kind of clemency for unbelievers, but grace for believers, in order that all of God’s purposes will be fulfilled before the final judgment. As Kuyper continually reminds us, if it were not for God’s grace, all mankind would have been destroyed already, so it is certainly due to grace that men are able to arrive at any insight into life.

Kuyper was concerned not only about justifying the significance of common grace for Christian cultural involvement but he was also concerned about showing the interrelations between common grace and special grace. These concerns resulted in two main works – the first one called *Geemene Gratie* (Common Grace), and the second called *Pro Rege* (For the King). Of these works, Kuyper said

I had made an effort, in my three-volume work *Common Grace*, to draw a systematic picture of the meaning of the work of God in the life of the nations and in society-without-Christ. But this was not the end of my investigation. Too often believers imagined that until the day of Christ's return, two separate parts of our human race would exist, the one part to be found in the society of Christians, and the other part in society outside Christianity. Furthermore, such believers suppose that Christ reigns as King over the Christian segment of the population but exerts no influence on the other segment. Therefore *Pro Rege* had to be written as a sequel to *Common Grace*. In *Common Grace* it was demonstrated that all that was beautiful and noble in the life of the nations before and after Christ's coming was solely due to the grace of God, who had been merciful to the nations. The purpose of *Pro Rege*, however, was to demonstrate how the kingship of Christ also dominates the total course of human life." (Praansma 155)

Kuyper's doctrine of Common grace is never meant to push aside the antithesis or the necessity of particular grace and of special revelation. He liked to use the metaphor of the grafting of a new branch into a wild tree to illustrate the relationship between natural revelation and special revelation:

The wild tree is the sinner, in whose nature works the *natural* principium of the knowledge of God as an inborn impelling power. If you leave this natural principium to itself, you will never have anything else than *wild wood*, and the fruit of knowledge does not come. But when the Lord our God introduces from without, and thus from *another* principium, a shoot of a true plant, even the principle of a pure knowledge into this wild tree, i.e. into this natural man, then there is not a man *by the side* of a man, no knowledge *by the side* of a knowledge, but the wild energy remains active in this human nature, i.e. *incomplete* knowledge; while the ingrafted new principium brings it to pass, that this impelling power is changed and produces the fruit of *true* knowledge.

The *special knowledge* is, indeed, a new and proper principium, but this principium joins itself to the vital powers of our nature with its natural principium; compels this principium to let its life-sap flow through another channel; and in this way cultivates ripe fruit of knowledge from what otherwise would have produced only wood fit for fire. (Principles 375-6)

Thus out of common grace, by the mercy of God, particular grace brings forth true knowledge. It is also within the realm of common grace that the antithesis springs.

### 3. Antithesis

Kuyper saw that while common grace provides a context for Christian cultural activities, it can be used by the unregenerate against the Kingdom of God as well. In his words,

... we see that common grace serves both the coming of the Kingdom of God and the coming of the Antichrist. By conserving humanity, it prepares a place for the gospel, but it also serves as a foundation for the development of sin, which will culminate in the appearance of the man of sin. (Praamsma 142)

Thus in regard to doing science, he spoke of "two kinds of people" who, because of their different faith commitments gave birth to "two kinds of science." It should be clear from

the metaphor of the wild tree that he did not mean the methods of scholarly investigations used were completely different; what he meant was that the two sciences arrived at different interpretations even from the same data, and that these interpretations were at odds with one another. This is illustrated well in the following passage from his Stone Lectures.

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 an *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. This, and no other is the principal antithesis, which separates the thinking minds in the domain of Science into two opposite battle-arrays. (Lectures 132)

That these two perspectives are radically different is undeniable. However, that does not do away with the common constraints that creation imposes upon us. At the level of data, these faith commitments may not have much consequence. However, at every other level the antithesis will come into play - it affects our selection of the kind of theories to look for, it determines what sort of experiments we do; and most important of all, our interpretation of the meaning of the data can be radically different.

Two quotes from Kuyper here will show how differently the believer and the naturalistic non-believer would approach science. Of the believer he says:

He . . . who himself lives in the palingenesis, or who at least accepts it as a fact, has eo ipso an entirely different outlook upon himself and his surroundings. Palingenesis implies that all existing things are in ruins; that there is a means by which these ruins can be restored, yea that in part they are already restored. He neither may nor can, therefore draw compulsory conclusions from what exists outside of palingenesis; there can be no question with him of an evolution process; and for him the necessity of all science does not lie in what presents itself to him, but in the criticism of existing things by which he distinguishes the abnormal from the normal. (Principles 219-220)

Of naturalism, Kuyper says

All prosecution of science which starts out from naturalistic premises denies the subjective fact of palingenesis, as well as the objective fact of a special revelation, which immediately corresponds to this. (Principles 224)

For Kuyper this antagonism between the two kinds of sciences should not deter the Christian from scientific and cultural engagements but should only spur him into active investigations from his own principles. A few more words from his Stone Lectures are appropriate here:

. . . the energy and the thoroughness of our antagonists must be felt by every Christian scholar as a sharp incentive . . . also to go back to *his* own principles in his thinking, to renew all scientific investigation on the lines of these principles, and to glut the press with the burden of his cogent studies. If we console ourselves with the thought that we may without danger leave secular science in the hands of our opponents, if we only succeed in saving theology, ours will be the tactics of the ostrich. To confine yourself to the saving of your upper room, when the rest of the house is on

fire, is foolish indeed. Calvin long ago knew better, when he asked for a *Philosophia Christiana*, and after all, every faculty, and in these faculties every single science, is more or less connected with the antithesis of principles, and should consequently be permeated by it. (139)

Kuyper would thus urge upon us the obligation to get involved in all areas of life in order to further the principles that support our Calvinistic roots. In any realm where we are silent, we will give it over to the devil and his kingdom.

So sharp is the distinction portrayed here, that one might wonder whether we will be able to have any dialogue whatsoever between the two camps. After all, with such radically different starting points, how can we hope to communicate? For the Kuyperian, this brings us back full circle to common grace.

As S. Zuidema points out, it is the areas which we have in common which make Christian action possible:

Common grace supplies the believer with the material for fulfilling his calling to be culturally formative and to fight the battle of the Lord in the world of culture. The sphere of common grace is the sphere of action for people who are blessed with particular grace and now seek to administer the blessings of particular grace. It is the area where Christian scholarship, Christian politics, Christian social action and individual Christian activity are to be developed. Common grace provides the platform, as it were, on which all these cultural tasks are to be acted out. Common grace is the presupposition of the possibility of Christian cultural activity. Common grace makes the activity born of particular grace possible. Common grace makes the antithesis, makes Pro Rege action possible. (Zuidema 57-58)

We are thus confronted with the full complexity of doing science or scholarship in our present dispensation. Common grace provides both the ground for cooperation between the believer and the nonbeliever in their quest for knowledge as well as the ground for antithesis between them. Again in Kuyper's words:

... this practice of giving each other an account at the point of intersection effects this very great gain, that as scientists we do not simply walk independently side by side, but that we remain together in logical fellowship, and together pay our homage to the claim of science as such ...

However plainly and candidly we may speak thus of a two-fold science, and however much we may be persuaded that the scientific investigation can be *brought to a close* in no single department by all scientists together, yea, cannot be continued in concert, as soon as palingenesis makes a division between the investigators; we are equally emphatic in our confession which we do not make in spite of ourselves, but with gladness, that in almost every department there is some task that is common to all, and, what is almost of greater importance still, a clear account can be given of both starting points. (Principles 161-2)

We see here a recipe for Christian scholarship emerging. We are to understand the methods of investigation, as to their reliability as generally accepted, and at the same time we are to bring critical attention to the places where faith commitments creep in. Thus separating the two, however imperfectly (for our ability to do so will be no less successful



than that of the unbeliever), we will be able to promote a dialog concerning both what can be concluded, and what the fundamental assumptions are behind the conclusions. Such a dialog in and of itself will not convert people to our point of view, but at least it will remove the unjustifiable certainty upon which they rest, leaving them without excuse.

#### IV. Dooyeweerd

Since I have tried in this talk to bring out those elements in Kuyper's work which make significant contributions towards doing science and a distinctively Christian scholarship, I would like just to point to the legacy he left to his followers. In this regard I want to bring up briefly Herman Dooyeweerd as a notable heir to the Kuyperian tradition.

Herman Dooyeweerd was a professor of jurisprudence at the Free University of Amsterdam. Although his background was in law, he became primarily interested in philosophy, and in particular, in the possibility of a distinctive Christian philosophy. Subsequently, Dooyeweerd's writings on Christian philosophy have been used by some followers as a "system" of thought which we "apply" to our disciplines. Actually I don't think this is the essential Dooyeweerd. If I would choose the most important contribution Dooyeweerd made, it is his transcendental critique of theoretical thought.

Motivated by Kuyper's realization that all knowledge is based on faith, Dooyeweerd saw that this is not the usual way philosophy has been viewed in our cultural tradition; so he set out to re-examine philosophy in the light of its faith commitments. Following Kuyper, he saw that the heart plays a central role in guiding our thinking, and this led him to identify the main motives of the human heart or "ground motives" as he calls them as the foundational principles of philosophy. His major work, laying all this out, is the *New Critique of Theoretical Thought*, in four volumes.

As I become better acquainted with the thought of Kuyper, I am amazed at how much of Dooyeweerd's thought was already either explicit or implicit in Kuyper's writings. Other themes which play a large role in his work are Kuyper's notion of laws in every sphere of human scientific investigation (giving rise to the Dutch title of Dooyeweerd's Critique, *Wijsbegeerte der Wetsidee*, or literally, "the philosophy of the law idea") and the notion of the antithesis.

In general, I would characterize Dooyeweerd's work as an attempt to work out in a systematic way the Kuyperian framework and its implications for scholarship. I find his works significant from the perspective of a scientist because it addresses the foundations of science from a Reformed perspective. There are very few Christian thinkers besides him who have chosen to work on the subject of ontology. For this reason, I am very thankful for Dooyeweerd's efforts. Even if one does not subscribe to his 'system' in its entirety, there is still much that we can learn from him both in what he failed to achieve and what he did achieve.

## V. Kuyperianism in our own setting

As we come back to the question, “what does it mean to be Kuyperian?” let me read from the summary given by Louis Praansma of Kuyper’s Inaugural address for the opening of the Free University of Amsterdam, as I find these remarks particularly pertinent for an institution such as ours. Of Kuyper’s address, Praansma says:

His title was ‘Sovereignty in the Distinctive Spheres of Human Life.’ His main thesis was (1) that God Almighty is solely sovereign over all His creatures, (2) that He turned all power in heaven and on earth over to His son Jesus Christ, and (3) that the sovereignty of Jesus Christ must be recognized in every distinctive sphere of life. . . . In His wisdom, God created several distinctive spheres of life; in His grace He kept and restored them after they were corrupted by sin. They can function properly only by being subject of Jesus, the King of kings.

Let Christ be King! This should be the motto of the statesman, the businessman, and also the man of science. The Free university should therefore be free from the authority of the secular state and also free from the arrogance of secular science. The University should be subject only to the One in whom all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hid. . . . The university should be free from wrong principles and founded on the Word of God - the Word found in Holy Scripture and sealed by the testimony of the Holy Spirit in our hearts. (76)

In view of these remarks, in conclusion, I would like to add a few suggestions for consideration as to the future direction of scholarship among us.

As I see it, one focus that seems to bring together all the different sides of the Kuyperian discussion is the work of Christ in His creational role, His sustaining role and in His redemptive role. Christ is indeed the metaphysical center of all earthly existence in a very deep sense. He is a mediator not only between God and man in redemption but also between God and creation as creator and sustainer. We already adhere to a Christocentric view of theology, and of history. It seems to me that we should also work towards the development of a Christocentric view of ontology.

Kuyper seems to hint at this in many places without pursuing it directly. In this regard, let me quote what Klapwijk says of Kuyper’s doctrine of common grace,

With this doctrine Kuyper wanted to express the fact that in spite of human sin and self-will, God does not forsake the work of his hands. He upholds the world by his ‘creation ordinances’. In his grace he is and he remains the sovereign law-giver and meaning-giver. Yet, . . . Kuyper did not adequately stress that God does all this for the sake of Christ. Kuyper stated that the earth (common grace) bears the Cross (particular grace); he often did not see that in a deeper sense the reverse is true: the Cross bears the earth. (183)

Interestingly, he goes on to say that

Dooyeweerd’s contribution has been to re-formulate Kuyper’s view of common grace on such a Christocentric basis. The doctrine of common grace can be kept unsoiled by the stubborn tradition of the two realms theory on condition that it be anchored Christocentrically alone. Only then, furthermore, is it able to offer the possibility of

evaluating non-Christian thought correctly. (183)

Since our own college bears the motto, “In all things, Christ pre-eminent” it would certainly behoove us to work out the implications of this leading principle in all of our academic enterprise. Kuyper helped to set the stage for doing this by pointing to the central roles of faith, of common grace and the antithesis in shaping our cultural and academic endeavors. These are insights we can use and sharpen as we work out their dynamics in our respective disciplines.

Finally let me return to the emphasis from Kuyper’s work of the interdisciplinary direction regarding our academic endeavors. For Kuyper the destination of the various academic disciplines is not to remain only within our disciplines but to arrive at a unified view of the whole of human knowledge. He had the faith to believe in the possibility of such an ‘encyclopedic’ project because of his faith in the sovereignty of God. At the same time, he was aware that such a project offers no closure and is always tentative in its findings. In his spirit, I see much more that we Christian scholars can do to work towards a more unified view of creation by bringing to this common task the insights from our respective disciplines. This interdisciplinary cooperation would certainly express the spirit of what it means to be Kuyperian.

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