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# Kuyperania in 2016

*This article looks at new works published in 2016 by, on, or about Abraham Kuyper.***KEY CONCEPTS:** *Abraham Kuyper, Common grace, Ecclesiology, Organism-institute, Pro Rege, Sphere sovereignty**Hierdie artikel kyk na nuwe werk gepubliseer in 2016 deur of oor Abraham Kuyper.***KERNBEGRIPE:** *Abraham Kuyper, Algemene genade, Ekklesiologie, Organisme – Instituut, Pro Rege, Sfeersoewereiniteit*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Of the making of books by and of Kuyper (thankfully), there is no end - with apologies to Qoheleth. This is certainly true in 2016, which has been another great one for Kuyperania, not least because the Abraham Kuyper Translation Society has got into its stride and has released three major translations of Kuyper's work. There has also been one critical response to Kuyper's *Common Grace* publication, several journal articles - two introductory and two seeking to refine Kuyper's thought. In what follows I will examine these contributions. (There has been no publication this year of the *Kuyper Center Review*.)

## 2. TRANSLATIONS OF KUYPER

The three books from the Abraham Kuyper Translation Society are the first volumes of *Common Grace*, *Pro Rege* and *On the Church*. The details in the style of Kuipers (2011) are as follows:

### 2016

#### *Translations*

*.01 Common Grace: God's Gifts for a Fallen World**Volume 1: The Historical Section**Abraham Kuyper Collected Works in Public Theology*Bellingham, WA, Lexham Press 2016. 800 pp., 18 x 5.6 x 25.7 cm -  
£40.69/ \$49.99Translation of: 1902.13 *De Gemeene Grate. Eerste deel. Het geschiedkundig gedeelte*

Translators: Nelson D. Kloosterman and Ed M. van der Maas

General Editors: Melvin Flikkema and Jordan J. Ballor

Edited by Jordan J. Ballor and Stephen J. Graybill

General Editors' Introduction: Jordan J. Ballor and Melvin Flikkema  
(dated August 2105)

Editor's Introduction: Jordan J. Ballor and Stephen J. Graybill

Volume Introduction: Richard J. Mouw

Binding: Hardback

Published: February 2016

ISBN: 978-1577996538

*.02 Pro Rege: Living Under Christ the King.*

*Volume 1: The Exalted Nature of Christ's Kingship*

*Abraham Kuyper Collected Works in Public Theology*

Bellingham, WA, Lexham Press 2016. 576 pp., 17.5 x 4.6 x 25.7 cm -  
£40.69/ \$49.99

Translation of: 1911.03 Pro Rege of het Koningschap van Christus.  
Eerste deel. Het Koningschap van Christus in zijn hoogheid

Translator: Albert J. Gootjes

General Editors: Melvin Flikkema and Jordan J. Ballor

Editors: John Kok with Nelson D. Koosterman

General Editors' Introduction: Jordan J. Ballor and Melvin Flikkema  
(dated August 2015)

Editors' Introduction: John Kok and Nelson D. Koosterman

Volume Introduction: Clifford Anderson

Binding: Hardback

Published: June 2016

ISBN: 978-1577996545

*.03 On the Church*

*Abraham Kuyper Collected Works in Public Theology*

Bellingham, WA, Lexham Press 2016. xxxix+ 495pp, 26 x 18.5 cm -  
£40.69/ \$49.99

Translations of: Commentatio (1860)

Rooted and Grounded (1870.25)

A Tract on the Reformation of the Churches (1883.06)

Twofold Fatherland (1887.23)

Lord's Day 21 (1905.17)

State and Church (1916.06)

Address on Missions (1890.05)

General Editors: Jordan J. Ballor and Melvin Flikkema

Edited by John Halsey Wood Jr. and Andrew M. McGinnis

General Editors' Introduction: Jordan J. Ballor and Melvin Flikkema

Editor's Introduction: John Halsey Wood, Jr.

Volume Introduction: Ad de Bruijne

Translators: Harry Van Dyke, Nelson D. Kloosterman, Todd M. Rester,  
Arjen Vreugdenhil

Binding: Hardback

Published: December 2016

ISBN: 978-1577996750

## **2.1 Common Grace Volume 1**

Henry Van Til described Kuyper as the 'theologian of common grace' (Van Til, 1959: Ch8). This book provides good evidence to support that claim. At the outset, Kuyper claims that 'The Reformed paradigm has suffered no damage greater than its deficient development of the doctrine of common grace' (xxxv). However, common grace is a controversial subject – as we shall see below (§§3.1-3.2). In 1924, the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC) rejected Kuyper's common grace and so seceded from the Christian Reformed Church in North America. The PRC thought that common grace was Kuyper's invention. However, Kuyper sees himself writing in Calvin's line. As Kuyper puts it: 'we find three emanations of God's grace: a grace that applies to you personally, then a grace that you have in common with all God's saints in the covenant, but also thirdly, a grace of God that you as a human being have in common with all people' (4). It is the latter that Kuyper calls 'common grace'.

The original book began life in 1895 when Kuyper started a series of newspaper articles on common grace. Completed in 1901 they were then published in book form as *De gemeene gratie* in 1902.13, 1903.13 and 1905.08 (the numbered dates are those given in Kuyper's 2011 *Abraham Kuyper: Annotated Bibliography*). This new translation was previously published by Christian Library Press (see Bishop, 2014), but has now been reissued in hardback by Lexham Press.

The book is well laid out, the text is very clear and section numbers are placed in the margins. There is a 7-page bibliography, a 17-page subject/author index and a 6-page scripture index. It is broken into 77 chapters comprising over 600 pages - the chapter lengths betray their origin as newspaper articles. This is both an advantage and a disadvantage. It means the short chapters are easy to digest, but as the articles were originally published weekly, it does mean there is a lot of repetition.

This volume is subtitled 'the historical section' - this is misleading as it deals with the biblical rather than theological history of common grace. The majority of the book deals with the book of Genesis.

One surprising thing is that Kuyper begins his book not with creation but with the flood. He places much emphasis on the inclusive nature of the Noahic covenant and that it was not a redemptive covenant. The flood changed the state of the earth and the purpose of the covenant was to take into account these changes. This was because of God's grace - a common grace as it applied to all.

After dealing with the Noahic covenant Kuyper then turns to Adam in Paradise. The main focus is on the issue of original righteousness. This issue it seems is central to Kuyper's argument. He regards the initial Genesis passages as being historical and that Adam's creation was almost instantaneous.

The more closely we analyze the Paradise narrative, the more clearly we see that we must take everything literally as it stands written (232).

Throughout the book Kuyper is careful to distinguish between particular grace and common grace, however they have an almost symbiotic relationship - but one that is mutually beneficial. Common grace is seen as an emanation of particular grace but it stands in direct contrast to it - particular grace is personal - common grace would have no goal apart from particular grace. Common grace is the foundation upon which particular grace is built:

...particular grace always presupposes common grace, and the presence of common grace is the necessary precondition for any functioning of particular grace. Without common grace any functioning of particular grace would be unthinkable (505).

He is also careful to point out the problems with what he terms 'Jewish particularism':

... the gospel states that God so loved not the Jews but the world that he gave the world his Son; Jesus' name is not Son of the Jews but Son of Man; this is the great mystery, that salvation in Israel is prepared for the nations (424) ...

And

The nations do not exist for the sake of Israel, but Israel exists for the sake of the nations (439).

For Kuyper common grace was not merely an important doctrine, but it also impacts upon our worldview and our praxis:

The further we develop this doctrine of “common grace,” the more clearly we shall discover the far-reaching significance of this doctrine, not only for dogmatics, but also for our entire world- and lifeview, and for the praxis of life (420).

Common grace extends over all of life, it is not salvific and it is not constrained to the church.

There is a common grace that manifests itself in order and law; there is a common grace that manifests itself in prosperity and affluence; there is a common grace that becomes visible in the healthy development of strength and heroic courage of a nation; there is a common grace that shines in the development of science and art; there is a common grace that enriches a nation through inventiveness in enterprise and commerce; there is a common grace that strengthens the domestic and moral life; and finally there is a common grace that protects the religious life against an excessive degeneration (498).

Common grace is not salvific:

God has let the wonder of common grace operate among all peoples and in all nations, even where this had no direct connection with the salvation of the elect (302).

And is not ecclesiastical:

Common grace has operated for ages in China and India without there being any church of Christ in those countries. We still enjoy the fruits that have come from common grace in Greece and Rome in the days when even the name of Christ's church had never yet been mentioned (301-302).

For Kuyper common grace is ‘deduced directly from the sovereignty of God’ and is the ‘root and conviction for all Reformed people’ (xxxvii). Kuyper thinks that resuscitating the doctrine of common grace will help the believer ‘take hold of the plow’ rather than retreat from the world. Common grace provides the foundation for engagement with the world thus avoiding spiritual and ecclesiastical isolation and thereby helping believers exercise dominion (xiv). Let us hope that this will be the case. It is a much-needed message for many Christians who mistakenly tend to place the spiritual over the secular and grace above nature.

The engagement with the world and the nature of dominion is to the fore in *Pro Rege*, also recently translated by the Abraham Kuyper Translation Society.

## 2.2 *Pro Rege*

As with *Common Grace* Kuyper's book *Pro Rege* began life as series of newspaper articles. The articles that make up this volume began in January 1907. They were then published as *Pro Rege of het Koningschap van Christus*, door in 1911 (1911.03). This volume, the first of three, is split into three parts of increasing size. The first, ‘The darkening of Christ's kingship’ (§§I.1-11), the second the ‘Undermining of Christ's Kingship’ §§II.1-16) and the third ‘The Kingship of Christ according to Scripture’ (§§III.1-28). In it he covers some major topics, which include secularisation, the nature of miracles and the role of angels and demons.

As the introduction states: ‘Judging Kuyper's views on class, gender, and race requires a decent understanding of his historical world. Kuyper holds views that we find completely

unacceptable today'. Aspects of this book and Kuyper were certainly products of the Victorian age - yet other aspects transcend that age.

Kuyper begins by relating the experiences he recounted in *Om de oude wereldzee* (Around the Old World Sea) regarding Islam:

Altogether, this adds up to approximately 1,800 prayers per year, and for some Muslims over 2,500 prayers. In each of them, the commemoration of Muhammad occurs between four and ten times. This means that every single worshiper commemorates the name of Muhammad more than ten thousand times per year! (6).

He obviously has a high regard for their energy and zeal, which he notes would put Christians to shame.

The indifference toward Jesus encountered in Christian countries, or cowardly silence when the Divine Founder of our religion is defamed, is virtually unheard of in Islamic nations when it comes to Muhammad (7).

He notes that:

The kingship of Jesus comes to you with a demand. It demands faithfulness, allegiance, and submission. It demands of you—especially in this Christian nation—that you confess him, that you stand up for him, and that you plead for the honor of his Name (10).

But Kuyper laments: 'But in public life there is no regard whatsoever for Jesus' kingship' (18). He then traces some the reasons why this is the case. Here Kuyper is exploring the reasons for secularisation - and this was before it became a popular area of sociological research. Some of these reasons he identifies are the rise of science, the pressures of work and life, the shifting patterns of work and lifestyle, and the notion that religion is now seen as being outmoded as well as general busyness – as we can see from the following:

*The rise of science:* 'The universal dominion that we have achieved over the powers of nature has stimulated humanity's feeling of power and thus has significantly weakened humanity's feeling of dependence' (46).

*The pressures of work and life:* 'Nearly everyone is chased out of the house early every morning, many no longer even take their meals at their own table, and so we no longer enjoy the atmosphere of the home or gather together around the Word of God when we ought to give thanks to him for what we just enjoyed' (50).

*Shifting patterns of living and lifestyles:* 'People live in small houses; they no longer have their own room in which they can quietly pray' (52). And 'Modern life, as a whole, no longer works along with the holy, but against it' (55).

*Shifting patterns of work:* 'All too many leave home in the morning and do not make their way back until long after midnight. The home is a shelter for when they want to sleep or when they fall ill. People do not live at home but in the city' (70).

*Religion is seen as outmoded:* 'Religion is an extinguished phenomenon, a remnant of the past to which modern man looks back with a melancholic curiosity' (54).

*Busyness:* 'Since their minds are occupied, people no longer turn in toward themselves' (63).

The result is that 'Religion no longer occupies the place it used to in social and public life' (55).

He then summarises his argument so far:

We have seen the contrast in the human situation between then and now in three aspects. Humanity used to be powerless in the face of nature's forces; now humanity has dominion over them. Humanity used to be locked up in a small, tranquil world; now we participate in the restlessness of the entire globe's life. Similarly, we used to be limited in knowledge; today we are overburdened with knowledge. Applied to the religious life, humankind's powerlessness made them dependent; life's rest caused them to turn in upon themselves; and the small amount of knowledge acquired led them to reach greedily for the knowledge revealed (65).

Money also becomes more important. He sums up this in a one-liner: 'the enthroned-humanity itself became a slave of the mammon-king' (114). As Kuyper points out - we need a king. If we deny Jesus' kingship then humanity itself seeks to be king. Even with secularisation there is still a search for transcendence - this thinks Kuyper is evidenced in the attitude to art:

This is why art arose from the spheres of religion and first entered the world from that sacred sphere. First came temples, then monuments and palaces. First came psalms and hymns, then national anthems and epics. It is for that reason not strange, but entirely natural and necessary, that where society leaves and abandons religion, art comes to take its place (94).

Kuyper then develops an interesting view of miracles. He links miracles to the dominion over nature, this dominion is over all the earth is part of being the image of God. We can only understand the significance of miracles by looking back to God's ordinance to humanity to subdue the earth. It is the miraculous that humanity's kingship over the earth is restored. Unlike some Reformed theologians Kuyper maintained that miracles still happen today.

Another area of extended discussion in this volume is angels and demons. He sees this as an important area as: 'Nothing has done more damage to the church's confession of Jesus' kingship than the marked increase in the indifference toward the spirit world, whether toward angels or of demons' (423). As C.S. Lewis noted several decades later in his *The Screwtape Letters* (2016 [1941]) there are two errors regarding demons - disbelief in them or having 'an excessive and unhealthy interest in them'. Kuyper avoids both extremes. He stays close to Scripture:

In Scripture, Satan and his henchmen are perpetually seen as beings created by God himself, who exist through [God's] power alone and will in the end be subjected to his power once more. Nevertheless, it remains within the essence of the spirit's nature to exercise power and influence also over visible things, on visible nature, on what lies before one's eyes (428).

There are a number of things that Kuyper writes that might raise a few eyebrows. These are not only his stereotyping of races and cultures but also his seeming acceptance of clairvoyance and hypnosis. For example, 'Only in clairvoyance, and recently also with x-rays, do we have the ability to look through walls and from afar' (451).

### 2.3 On the Church

This volume, *On the Church*, is a fresh translation into English of seven of Kuyper's essays on the nature of the church. As John Halsey Wood Jr. notes in his introduction, Kuyper's

'concern for the church predated and permeated all ... other concerns' (xi). Kuyper was a church historian and a church pastor - among other roles and callings - and this is evidenced by the first of the essays translated in this volume. *Commentatio* is Kuyper's prize-winning essay that formed his doctoral thesis, comparing the Polish Reformer John à Lasco's and Jean Calvin's conceptions of the church. The sections reprinted here are mainly from the third section. In it, in seed thought, are much of Kuyper's ideas on the nature of the church. It is clear that Kuyper preferred à Lasco's view to Calvin's, chiefly because the former's view was closer to the Dutch spirit. This, of course, was before Kuyper's conversion to Calvinism.

Kuyper's later major contribution to ecclesiology was the distinction between the church as institution and the church as organism. For Kuyper, the church has to do not only with Sunday services or missions but the reforming of all facets of life and culture. Kuyper uses several metaphors to illustrate the church as organism—institution. In essence, the institution is the church organisation, its sacraments, its ministers; the organism is the church in the world, Christians at work in society, the body of Christ, strengthened and served by the church as institute. The church as institute does not run schools, universities, or trade unions; that is the role of the church as organism.

This distinction is to the fore in the second selection in this volume. *Rooted and Grounded* has previously been published in 2013 in booklet form - see the review in Bishop (2014). In this sermon, Kuyper places an emphasis on the priesthood of all believers. For the church to be truly an institution and organic the role of the institutional leaders is to equip the church as organism to be able to do the works of service in the market square, in the classroom, in the business place, in the political arena, in the laboratory and so forth.

The church as institution is the main focus of the next piece, *A Tract on the Reformation of the Churches*. This was written three years before the Doleantie secession from the Dutch Reformed Church, led by Kuyper. It has been previously translated by Herman Hanko and serialised in *The Standard Bearer* (1977-1986). Kuyper writes here as a church pastor with a heart for the right functioning of the church. His concern is for a pure church. Kuyper argues for a severing of the church and the State. This text is a basis for a manual for Reformed church government.

In *Twofold Fatherland*, an address delivered at the seventh annual meeting of the Free University, Amsterdam just after the Doleantie secession, we have Kuyper as an almost two-kingdom advocate:

... we have a twofold fatherland and live as a twofold people under a twofold King (226).

A cursory read of this piece seems to suggest that Kuyper is promoting a two-realm approach. But digging deeper this is far from the truth. He does suggest that there is a fatherland above and below, but both are given by God's grace – one by common grace, the other particular grace. Both are to give God the glory. The tension of hyper-spirituality (287), suggests Kuyper, is to devalue the earthly fatherland. He also posits that the earthly fatherland has been disrupted by sin and that there is a distinction between the (sinful) world and the earthly field of common grace.

The Lord's Day 21 is taken from Kuyper's *E Voto Dordraceno* – his commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism. This selection looks at three questions from the Catechism:

- Question 54: What do you believe concerning the 'Holy Catholic Church'?
- Question 55: What do you understand by the 'communion of saints'?
- Question 56: What do you believe concerning the 'forgiveness of sins'?



The essay *State and Church* is extracted from a two-volume work written for members of the Anti-Revolutionary Party in 1916. This was written by Kuyper for party leaders who had had no formal academic training and was designed to provide clarification to *Ons Program* (Kuyper, 2015).

The final selection, the address on missions, provides a fascinating insight into Kuyper's attitude to mission. These are verbatim notes taken from an address by Kuyper to a missionary conference in January 1890. What we have here are Kuyper's main theses and then a verbatim report. What is particularly interesting is Kuyper's stress on the fact that missions should be the work of the church and not of voluntary organisations as was primarily the case at the time.

The book closes with a detailed table of contents a brief section of biographical details on Kuyper and the contributors but not of the translators. There is also an extensive subject/author index and a scripture index. The essays by Wood and de Bruijne serve as excellent introductions to the context and to the relevance of Kuyper's essays.

Within these pages, we can see the distinctiveness of Kuyper's ecclesiology, although not always fully spelled out. Here we can see the distinction between organism and institution, the key role of common grace, sphere sovereignty especially in that the church should be free from state involvement and the state free from church meddling, and the key roles of the church in looking beyond itself in mission, evangelism and philanthropy.

These series of volumes are all subtitled the Collected Works in Public Theology. Public theology is a term that causes concern to Kuyperians, as it may suggest a priority of theology over the other sciences; nevertheless, if 'public theology' is in search of a framework then Kuyper's common grace, his institute-organism, and his concern for the kingship of Jesus to be expressed over all of life and culture, provides a solid biblical foundation for Christian action within the world. These volumes will deserve to be widely read, inwardly digested and then, we can in Kuyper's words, 'take hold of the plow'.

## 2.4 The Social Question and the Christian Religion

In November 1891 Kuyper opened the first Christian Social Congress in the Netherlands with an address 'The social problem and the Christian religion'. The book *Makers of Modern Christian Thought: Leo XIII and Abraham Kuyper on the Social Question*, edited by Jordan Ballor contains a new translation by Harry Van Dyke of that speech. The speech was originally published as *Het Sociale en de Christelijke Religie* (1891.14). A number of different translations of this have appeared under different titles, including *Christianity and the Class Struggle* translated by Dirk Jellema (1950.03) and as *The Problem of Poverty* by James Skillen (1991.01), the latter was republished by Dordt College Press in 2011. (Skillen's helpful editorial headings are also used in this edition.)

This version is titled 'The social question and the Christian Religion'. The book also contains the *Rerum Nova* by Pope Leo XIII also delivered in 1891. In his introduction, the editor, Jordan Ballor points out some striking commonalities between the two speeches; these include 'the doctrine of anthropology, the significance of private property and human stewardship, and the normative value of the principles of subsidiarity and solidarity' (xii).

I will now turn from books *by* Kuyper to books *on* Kuyper.

## 3. BOOKS ON KUYPER

The publication of *Common Grace* precipitated the (re)publication of two volumes, the first being *Sin and Grace* by Henry Danhof and Herman Hoeksema and the second being David Engelsma's *Christianising the World*.



### 3.1 Sin and Grace

The *Sin and Grace* book was originally published in 1923 in Dutch as *Van Zonde en Genade*. The two authors, Henry Danhof (1879-1952) and Herman Hoeksema (1886-1965), were Christian Reformed Church (CRC) ministers in North America. This was one year before the 1924 schism within the CRC that saw the formation of the Presbyterian Reformed Church (PRC). The issue behind the split was common grace. This is largely the subject of this book. Inevitably, Kuyper looms large as it was his view of common grace that Danhof and Hoeksema were opposing. The book was translated and published in 2003 by the Reformed Free Publishing Association and then in 2016 released in e-book format - justifying its place in this review. The book provides the PRC perspective surrounding the debate as Danhof and Hoeksema both seceded from the CRC to form the PRC.

In the introduction Hanko notes that one of the merits of the book is that it contains copious translations of Kuyper's *Common Grace* - this value has now been diminished as the first volume of the English translation Kuyper's *Common Grace* has been published and the other two volumes are to follow shortly.

The book has historical value nevertheless as it highlights some of the key issues around the split. It also contains, as the editor states in the introduction, 'the most extensive analysis of the errors in Kuyper's common grace doctrine to be found in English' - though many would take issue with calling them errors!

The PRC split from the CRC was over the three points of common grace. As Hanko notes in his preface there were two main versions of common grace. The first was associated with the free-offer of the gospel (point 1 of common grace adopted by the Kalamazoo CRC Synod in 1924); the other was Kuyper's (points 2 and 3). It is the latter that is dealt with in this book.

On the CRC website is a summary of the three points:

The essence of the position is contained in the following points:

- In addition to the saving grace of God, shown only to those who are elected to eternal life, there is also a certain favor, or grace, of God shown to his creatures in general.
- Since the fall, human life in society remains possible because God, through his Spirit, restrains the power of sin.
- God, without renewing the heart, so influences human beings that, though incapable of doing any saving good, they are able to do civil good.

The 1924 Synod 'also warned against an over-emphasis on the doctrine of common grace, deciding that there was more danger of conformity to the world than of flight from the world.'

The book is useful also in that it provides the backdrop to Engelsma's latest book criticising the Kuyperian approach.

In this book Danhof and Hoeksema attempt to show that Kuyper's views were original to Kuyper, and had not previously been seen in Reformed thought or in the Scriptures. They maintained that holding on to common grace would lead to 'worldiness'.

We include a criticism of the position that was taken especially by Dr. A. Kuyper on so-called common grace, and which many brethren promoted as one of the foundations of a sound Reformed life-view.

We are deeply convinced that Dr Kuyper led us in a fundamentally wrong direction when he wrote his *De Gemeene Gratie*.

Although they make the distinction between Kuyper's view and the free-offer view they do seem at times to conflate the two. They also maintain the Kuyper confuses creation and common grace. According to Kuyper, common grace is the basis for particular grace, which is a point that these authors don't seem to appreciate.

There are two key questions: Does God love sinners, despite their sin? And are sinners capable of doing good? Danhof and Hoeksema to both say no, whereas Kuyper says yes. And there lies the rub.

The book by Engelsma, to which I turn next, is in many ways a reformulation of the ideas within *Sin and Grace*.

### 3.2 Christianizing the World

David Engelsma's *Christianizing the World* is a book that began life as a lecture. In it he criticises Kuyper's view of common grace. The book's origins can be traced back further to a series of six articles by Engelsma in the *Beacon Lights* magazine from March 2013 to August 2013. Where they had the title *Christianising the World?* Now the question mark has been dropped (and the s replaced by a z!).

Engelsma makes some important points but unfortunately slips into the polemical mode and overstates his case. He asserts that Kuyper's common grace – like Danhof and Hoeksema he denies it is present in Calvin or the Reformed statements – leads to a universalising of the gospel and the acceptance of the well-meant offer; the denial of human depravity; and an affirmation of a point of contact for the gospel. For Engelsma common grace is a corruption of the gospel of grace. Engelsma (over)emphasises the antithesis. However, for Kuyper the antithesis and common grace go hand in hand. If we ignore the antithesis it may well lead to the issues that Engelsma points out.

In denying common grace and emphasising the antithesis, however, it can lead to a dry, negative and legalistic approach, one that stresses fence-building rather than bridge-building. Engelsma relies here primarily on the English translations of *Common Grace*. Kuyper never as far as I am aware mentions of the need to 'Christianise the world' – the only time the phrase is used is when it was used by Bavinck.

Several times Engelsma accuses the Acton Institute, one of the organisations behind the Kuyper Translation Society, of being a Roman Catholic organisation and this despite Acton's own claim:

Acton has no ties with any particular church or religious community. That's not by accident—it's by design. The Acton Institute for the Study of Religion and Liberty is a nonprofit, nonpartisan, ecumenical research and educational institute that conducts its affairs independently of any religious or political organization (Mauren, 2005:7).

This is merely a guilt-by-association play.

He makes a number of accusations against Kuyper's view of common grace. He claims that neither Calvin nor the Reformers held to the concept of common grace.<sup>1</sup> Yet there

<sup>1</sup> *Contra Engelsma, Robert Harris and John Knox, two key Reformers. did seem to hold to some notion of common grace. Robert Harris said:*  
*'There are graces of two sorts. First, common graces, which even reprobates may have. Secondly, peculiar, such as accompany salvation, as the Apostle has it, proper to God's own children only. The matter is not whether we have the first sort of graces, for those do not seal up God's*

seems at least some evidence to suggest they did. Calvin in his *Institutes* Book 2 Ch 3 §3:

But we ought to consider, that, notwithstanding of the corruption of our nature, there is some room for divine grace, such grace as, without purifying it, may lay it under internal restraint.

This is exactly the point Kuyper was making regarding the restraining power of common grace.

Both *Sin and Grace* and *Christianising the World* recognise that Kuyper was a key innovator of common grace. They also stress that Kuyper was an adherent of particular grace and not an advocate of the free offer of the gospel. However, their argument at times can be summarised thus:

1. The free-offer of the gospel is linked to common grace
2. The free-offer is wrong, therefore
3. Reject common grace.

They maintain *contra* Kuyper that common grace is a denial of total depravity and particular grace, and that it can lead to Arminianism. This seems a strange argument, as Kuyper was a particular-grace man and a whole-hearted Calvinist, not an Arminian. At best their argument is only against the misuse of the concept of common grace. What we have in their work is a conflation of soteriology and providence.

### 3.3 The Church's Social Responsibility

The previous two books have been critical of Kuyper. This volume is much more sympathetic to Kuyper's approach and develops his view of the church as institution and as an organism. The whole book takes seriously Kuyper's distinction and each chapter provides a take on that theme.

There has been a tendency in the past to play down the institution side of church. This is partly as a reaction against the ecclesiasticisation of Christianity - an approach often manifested in the idea that full-time Christian ministry is church work. Now we are beginning to realise that ministry is more than church work. It is more than what the 'laity' do on Sundays: there are no part-time Christians! There is a fresh recognition that the institutional church matters.

The book begins with three essays setting the scene. Carl Henry's essay is from his important and ground-breaking book of the time, *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern*

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*special love to a man's soul, but it must be saving grace alone that can do this for us' ((The Nineteenth Sermon. Matthew. 5:9. Blessed are the peace-makers: for they shall be called the sonnes of God. In The Works of Robert Harris [1635].)*

John Knox wrote:

*'After these common mercies, I say, whereof the reprobate are often partakers, he openeth the treasure of his rich mercies, which are kept in Christ Jesus for his Elect. Such as willingly delight not in blindness may clearly see that the Holy Ghost maketh a plain difference betwixt the graces and mercies which are common to all, and that sovereign mercy which is immutably reserved to the chosen children' (On Predestination, p. 87.)*

Likewise, Bullinger also seems to support a form of common grace:

*'For there is in God a certain (as it were) general grace, whereby he created all mortal men, and by which he sends rain upon the just and unjust: but this grace doth not justify; for if it did, then should the wicked and unjust be justified. Again, there is that singular grace, whereby he doth, for his only-begotten Christ his sake, adopt us to be his sons: he doth not, I mean, adopt all, but the believers only, whose sins he reckons not, but doth impute to them the righteousness of his only-begotten Son our Saviour. This is that grace which doth alone justify us in very deed' (Decades, 3rd Decade, Sermon 9, 1:329-330.)*

*Fundamentalism* (1947), written during the rise of neo-evangelicalism. As Henry Ockenga, one of the fathers of neo-evangelicalism, wrote:

Nevertheless—unlike fundamentalism—evangelicalism realizes the church has a prophetic mission to society.... We must...make evangelicalism more relevant to the political and sociological realities of our time...unless conservative Christian theologians take more time to point out the relevance of Christ and the Bible to important (social) issues conservatism will be neglected by the rising generation (Ockenga, 1956:4).

This call for relevancy was important for Carl Henry. There was an increasing realisation that the church had a social responsibility. For Henry, the church's role was to say no to moral and political issues, such as abortion, slavery, apartheid, rather than to say yes to party-political approaches or actions. This approach is endorsed by Richard Mouw, who tells the story of his wrangling over a few phrases of an essay he submitted to *Christianity Today* when Henry was the editor. Mouw wanted to advocate that the church should say a 'bold yes to specific policy-like solutions'; Henry wanted him to change the sentence. Mouw now sees he was wrong and Henry's no-saying approach can be seen as being correct. Although Mouw has slight misgivings about the way Henry presented his case, to remedy this Mouw draws on Kuyper's church as institute and as organism. Kuyper would agree with Henry that the church (as institute) is limited in what it can say about issues in public life, however, the church (as organism) as the body of Christ has a responsibility to go out and form organisations to engage in areas of cultural involvement and policy formation.

Kuyper's theme is also taken up in Part 2, Principles of responsibility, with essays from Driessenga, Koyzis and Wagenman. All three endorse Kuyper's institute and organism approach. Driessenga also uses the metaphors of pearl and leaven taken from Kuyper's contemporary Herman Bavinck. Koyzis introduces an important point from one of Kuyper's successors, Herman Dooyeweerd. Dooyeweerd makes a distinction between institutional communities and voluntary associations. The church is the former and not the latter. This has implications for the way we see the church as institution; church is not 'a mere association of converted individuals' (50). Church is called into being by a divine covenant, not by common interests, being members of the church is not like joining a club for its own ends. Koyzis ends his chapter with an important point: 'We dare not neglect the institutional church and the meaning of grace which offer such nourishment' (53).

Wagemann also develops Kuyper's distinction. He also warns against asserting that the institutional church has no relationship to social issues - as the church is to proclaim the gospel. As Wagenman wisely puts it:

... Kuyper taught that the unique calling of the institutional church was the contextualised and comprehensive proclamation of the gospel. The gospel doesn't dictate a particular government policy but the gospel has some applicability to every issue of human life (57)

If the church fails to do this then it is only preaching part of the gospel and thus failing in its institutional role. It is important to realise that church as institution/ organism doesn't set up a new form of dualism.

Part 3, Practices of Responsibility, looks at the church's role in social justice. Van Reken maintains that 'The primary work of the institutional church is not to promote social justice, it is to warn people of divine justice' (67). He also follows Henry's approach:

My view is that the institutional church should speak out against preventable poverty, but in most cases, must not recommend exactly which social justice will best reduce poverty (68).

Vander Meulen's thesis is that 'the institutional church needs to vigorously encourage - at personal and corporate levels... - faithfulness in doing justice' (72). Hogenterp acknowledges that silence over issues can be ambiguous.

The Church and Society, part 4, contains essays by Den Dulk, Summer and Bacote. Den Dulk returns to the important theme of social justice and argues that the church ought to pursue its claims, but their role is limited - but it is within these limitations that 'the churches will find their strongest voice' (93). The issue of what is and what isn't a Christian think tank is the subject of Summer's, the CEO of the Centre for Public Justice a prominent Christian think tank, piece. She sees them as playing an important role. She identifies three wrong answers to the question why do we need distinctively Christian think tanks and then three right responses. She makes a striking point:

The wrong answer — that there is no need for distinctively Christian think tanks if the church just does its job — is wrong because it conflates the task of the church as institute and the church as organism (97).

Bacote looks at social justice and Christian obedience. He examines some present and future challenges; these being marriage, religious liberty, race, gender, abortion and environmental concerns, economic life and poverty. He ends by noting that talk alone will not suffice; it's time for action.

In closing, in the historical afterword, Kevin Platt examines some important lessons from the United Church of Canada.

This book contains a diverse range of short articles - it can be read in less than two hours and yet it is packed with insight and wisdom. What is perhaps most remarkable is the agreement of most of the authors on the importance of the distinction between the church as organism and the church as institute. It was a distinction that Kuyper made first in his 'Rooted and grounded' sermon in 1870 republished in *On the Church*, yet as can be seen from these essays it is still relevant; and indeed more than relevant it can help to frame the role of the church in the public square today. This book is an important contribution to the debate regarding the role of the church in society.

If of the making books on Kuyper there is no end – then this is also true of journal articles.

## 4. JOURNAL ARTICLES

The January edition of *Transformation* has two papers looking at Kuyper and Dooyeweerd: Harvey (2106) and Keene (2016). The interest of these scholars, both associated with the Oxford Centre for Mission Studies, in Kuyper and Dooyeweerd is because 'we have noted increasing attention toward the work of Kuyper and Dooyeweerd amongst some Asian and African scholars'. The scholars Harvey mentions are, from China, Zhuo Xinping, Director of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, and Ng Kam Weng of Malaysia. As Harvey points out Zhuo Xinping is not a neo-Calvinist but one who appreciates the contribution neo-Calvinists have made to China (see, for example, Xinping, 2006).

Ng (2004) 'turns to the "sphere sovereignty/sphere stewardship" of Abraham Kuyper as that alternative social vision' (Keene, 2016). Keene thinks that China and Malaysian endorsement of sphere sovereignty is 'at once understandable as it is paradoxical'. He then looks at Kuyper's sphere sovereignty in the context of the Netherlands before considering its viability in Asia. He poses the questions 'how do [the understanding and application of

sphere sovereignty] stand up to the “epistemic presuppositions of modernity?” Do they offer a path to make Christian claims credible and relevant to informed engagement across the sovereign spheres today? Harvey is not as optimistic about the Reformational approach as the Asians – he concludes:

Given the regnant status in Western universities of the secular epistemic frameworks, such a zero sum perspective leaves Christian engagement marginalised and irrelevant. ... In Europe, where Christendom has been displaced by secularism, Kuyper and Dooyeweerd’s appeal to sphere sovereignty now largely reinforces a secular status quo (Harvey, 2016:62).

Keene (2016), on the other hand, seems more positive. He provides a helpful introduction to Kuyper and Dooyeweerd, he focuses in particular on sphere sovereignty and the creation, fall and redemption ground motive. He then looks at the State, church, family, business and the university as social structures. This is a helpful introduction for those who have little knowledge of Reformational thought.

Brill’s *Journal Reformed Theology* has three papers that look at Kuyper. Bräutigam in a provocatively entitled piece, ‘Kuyper among the Lutherans?’ (Bräutigam, 2016), seeks to bring a Kuyperian perspective into dialogue with the arts, and music in particular. He maintains that Kuyper’s approach to the arts and music shows more affinities to Luther than to Calvin. To support this perspective he cites Jeremy Begbie’s contention that Luther roots much in creation while Calvin looks to anthropology. Bräutigam sees that Calvin and Kuyper’s common grace can only take us so far in developing a perspective on music. He asks: ‘Should Bach be preferred over Boulez and Cage?’ Yes - he suggests both Kuyper and Luther would answer.

Bräutigam then looks at the Catholic composer Messiaen. He concludes by suggesting that it is time that theologians engaged more with music and developed a theology of listening; something he thinks Kuyper would have supported.

Butner (2016) looks at the accusation sometimes levelled against Reformed theology that it is too individualistic. He draws upon the Jesuit theologian Henri de Lubac’s (1896-1991) notion of *ressourcement* to critique this accusation. In looking at Kuyper’s pneumatology, as well as John Owen’s view of limited atonement and Henrich Bullinger’s doctrine of election, he shows that although the accusation has some foundation it does not necessarily mean that Reformed theology – at least as viewed by Kuyper, Owen and Bullinger – cannot also be social: an individual theology does not undermine a social theology.

Another theologian is utilised by Stubbs (2016) to examine Kuyper’s view of common grace. Stubbs believes that David Kelsey’s work can help to ‘polish Kuyper’s gem of common grace’ (Stubbs, 2016:316). He examines four aspects of Kuyper’s work: the understanding of special grace, the relationship between special and common grace, the ‘progressive’ aspects of common grace and the Trinitarian understanding that underpins Kuyper’s thinking. He writes:

In sum, in Kuyper we find a very rich, Trinitarian understanding of God that provides the basis of and out of which flows the shape and “motive” of the twin operations of common and special grace, or creation and re-creation (Stubbs, 2016:325).

What Stubbs believes Kelsey can contribute is to sharpen the distinctions between common and special grace – to avoid binary patterns, to develop the Trinitarian distinctions in common grace and to produce a more dynamic view of Kuyper’s static order. Some of the weaknesses in Kuyper’s thought pointed out by Stubbs have been



addressed before and some like Dooyeweerd have provided a better development than what Kelsey offers.

I now turn to reviews of books written about Kuyper. These have been surprisingly few. One exception is a review of Larson (2015).

## 5. REVIEWS

Larson's *Abraham Kuyper, Conservatism, and Church and State* (Larson, 2015 – reviewed in Bishop 2016) is reviewed by Micah Watson (2016), a political science professor at Calvin College. Watson begins by noting that the audience of Larson's book is conservative American Christians. He identifies two aims of Larson: 'to claim Kuyper as a political conservative' and to persuade readers that 'judicial tyranny threatens the United States' (131). Watson suggests that if there is one flaw to the book it is that Kuyper is too big for it (131). Watson makes a good point, which undermines Larson's thesis:

For instance, what does it mean to claim that Kuyper is a conservative if what counts as conservative can include both Abraham Lincoln as a "the statesman of American conservatism" (7) and the vociferous slavery advocates Robert Dabney and James Thornwell (14, 15, 22, 44, 54)? (Watson, 2016:131).

Watson closes by posing some pertinent questions - one's that Larson doesn't fully answer:

What would Kuyper say for Christians today? Would he advise starting an explicitly Christian party (as he did) or would he tell conservative Christians to continue working with the Republican Party as it is? Would he encourage us to invest in more Christian-specific enterprises (newspapers, universities) or be a salt-and-light presence alongside our nonbelieving fellow citizens? The best compliment on hand for Dr. Larson's book is that its subject matter is so crucial and its questions so fundamental that it calls for even more substance, more thinking, and more Kuyper (Watson, 2016:132).

The only other review is from Clifford Anderson (2016) of Jan de Bruijn's pictorial biography of Kuyper.

## 6. CONCLUSION

Once again we have seen that the legacy and impact of Kuyper survive and are taken forward by scholars. But despite the seeming rise of interest in Kuyper in Asia and Africa, once again *most* of the publications are from white males in the northern hemisphere.

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