

Book 3

Harry Van Dyke: *The Legacy of Abraham Kuyper*

(Aalten: Wordbridge Publishing, 2024). ISBN:978-90-76660-76-9, pbk, pp ix + 90.

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Most readers of this journal are likely familiar with the name Abraham Kuyper. Some names that perhaps may not be so familiar are Kuyper's predecessors and successors. Harry Van Dyke, Professor Emeritus of History at Redeemer University in Canada, has ably examined seven who preceded Kuyper and seven who came after him. The seven predecessors discussed are:

Willem Bilderdijk (1756–1831),
Isaac da Costa (1798–1860),
Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer (1801–1876),
Otto Gerhard Heldring (1804–1876),
Johan Adam Wormser (1807–1862),
Isaac Esser (1818–1885), and
Klaas Kater (1850–1916).

This section was published in Bishop and Kok, ed. (2013). Van Dyke chose these seven as key representatives of Dutch Calvinism preceding Kuyper. He ably shows that Kuyper revived and adapted Dutch Calvinism to address contemporary issues, challenges and contexts, hence the term neo-Calvinism. Kuyper's ideas did not emerge in a cultural vacuum; his predecessors significantly influenced his thinking. Van Dyke highlights how these forerunners, along with the rise of Anti-Revolutionary politics, shaped Kuyper's approach. The legacy of Kuyper is placed within the context of a historical synthesis of influences with innovative political thought to grapple with the challenges of his age. A common theme among those discussed was the need for a Christian political identity and a resistance to liberalism and secularism. Although Kuyper as Van Dyke points out "was more than the sum of his inheritance... He was also unique" (48).

Kuyper's work laid the foundation upon which future generations of Christian thinkers and politicians would build. Kuyper's immediate heirs discussed—each with one sort of connection or another to the Anti-Revolutionary Party (ARP)—are as follows:

Levinus Wilhelmus Christiaan Keuchenius (1822–1893) — fought against exploitation in the Far East. Keuchenius, Minister of Colonial Affairs (1888–1890), opposed exploitation in the Far East and influenced Kuyper's pledge to uphold moral duties in the colonies.

Alexander Idenburg (1861–1935), like Keuchenius, was a minister for cultural affairs, his heart was for the Indian sub-continent. He “held to an enlightened version of the White Mans Burden ... and disavowed modern imperialism” (54). He wanted the Netherlands to do what it could to alleviate disease, illiteracy, and poverty.

Revd Aritius Sybrandus (Syb) Talma (1864–1916) was a pastor in the National Reformed Church with an interest in the social question. He was the editor of *Patrimonium's* weekly paper and campaigned for the extension of the vote. He entered into politics and was the chair for Kuyper's temperance bill. Under the premiership of Theo Heemskerk, he was the Minister of Agriculture. During the Great War, he served as a chaplain-at-large.

Alexander Frederik de Savorin Lohman (1837–1924) was the leader of the Christian Historical Union, a party formed after a split with Kuyper's ARP.

Jan Schouten (1883–1963) saw the error of an authoritarian rule, be it communism or fascism, as the solution to the economic recession of the 1930s. From 1933 he was leader of the ARP.

Victor Henry Rutgers (1877–1945) in 1919 became the leader of the ARP. He was involved in the Dutch resistance movement against the Nazis.

Perhaps the best-known is the VU Amsterdam, philosopher *Herman Dooyeweerd* (1894–1977). He developed a distinctly Christian philosophy based on much of Kuyper's work. It is perhaps surprising that Dooyeweerd's brother-in-law D.H.Th. Vollenhoven (1892–1978) is omitted from this list of Kuyper's heirs. Together, they developed Reformational philosophy and founded both the Association for Christian Philosophy and the journal *Philosophia Reformata*.

Van Dyke closes Part II with a challenge, it is worth quoting in full:

It is up to present-day researchers of Neo-Calvinism to mine this legacy for all its worth; to weed out what is dated and what was misguided; to inspire a new generation to stand in the breach against the onslaughts of secularism, and in a spirit of compassion and humility to offer biblical alternatives for the healing of the societies in which they have been placed. (73)

Part III contains some helpful lessons from history. One interesting observation is that Van Dyke maintains that the failure to reform the national church encouraged Groen and Kuiper to put their energy into non-ecclesiastical action. He highlights some important points to avoid—including equating action with the kingdom of Gods, a reliance on power, and smugness— and points to emulate—including dedication to the public cause, the adoption of principled pluralism, and the development of a well-rounded Christian worldview, and respect for all callings. Above all, he rightly stresses that we are not to rely on a Christian *denomination* or Christian *theology* to guide the “Christian mind”.

Part IV concludes with a review of a 1938 book that examine the impressive achievements of the Christian influence on social work in the Netherlands.

Van Dyke concludes this informative and inspiring book with these pertinent words:

The “hallmark of accommodation politics’ — more accurately named “institutionalised worldview pluralism”— is one of the enduring legacies of the culture wars in which Abraham Kuiper played such a dominant role” (85).

Bibliography

BISHOP, S. & KOK, J. H. (Eds.) 2013. Abraham Kuiper: Heir of an Anti-Revolutionary Tradition. *On Kuiper: A Collection of Readings on the Life, Work & Legacy of Abraham Kuiper*. Sioux Center, IO: Dordt Press (pp. 7-26).