
Abraham Kuyper's nascent views on Art

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Abstract

Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920) began to develop a Reformational approach to art, his work provided a key turning point in the development of contemporary views of Calvinism and art. His view can be summarized as, art is a gift of God that shows itself in an ability, which portrays beauty that can be enjoyed by all. In this paper, I expound his view by looking primarily at his Stone Lecture on 'Calvinism and art' (1888), where he draws upon Calvin, and defends Calvinism, extracts from writings on common grace in Wisdom and Wonder (1905) and the final section of his Pro Rege (1912).

I conclude that he was not fully successful in developing a Reformational aesthetic, in that he underplays the role of the antithesis in art and overemphasized the role of beauty. He tended towards a dualistic – almost neo-platonic – view of beauty. However, his nascent views provided the framework for Dooyeweerd to develop an ontology that includes the aesthetic, and Rookmaaker and Seerveld among developed his view that art is part of a cultural mandate and not merely the fringes on a theological garment.

Key words:

Abraham Kuyper, aesthetics, art, Calvinism

1. Introduction

Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920) was many things, a politician, a prime minister, a pastor, a church reformer, a journalist, a theologian, and a University founder, but he was not a practicing artist¹ – and yet he wrote extensively on art. Peter Heslam, in his 1998 dissertation on Abraham Kuyper's *Lectures on Calvinism*, states that Kuyper's ideas on art have been virtually neglected. The intervening years have seen little to improve that situation. Heslam (1999 – based on his 1998 work) and Roger Henderson (2017) are the only noticeable exceptions. This is despite a renewed interest in Christianity and art (see, for example, Anderson & Dryness, 2016; Brand & Chaplin, 2001; De Gruchy, 2001; Ryken, 2012; Siedell, 2008, 2015; Thistlewaite, 1998; Turner, 2001; Wolterstorff, 2015; Zuidervaart, 2014a, 2017). In part, this interest can be traced back to Kuyper.

Kuyper's 'aim was evidently to stimulate the development of a consciously and unashamedly Calvinistic aesthetics' (Heslam, 1998:213). In the following, I aim to re-examine Kuyper's seminal writings on art, on the one hand, to see how effective he was in developing a Calvinistic aesthetic;² and on the other hand, to see how his nascent and inchoate insights were critiqued and developed by other kuyperian scholars.

In Kuyper's milieu, there was a shift in attitude towards art. The invention of the gramophone and the development of photography had led to the popularization of art on the one hand and the specialization of art on the other. Art had increasing importance in society. This was seen in the role of art in entertainment – notably the theatre, on which Kuyper had reservations. In this, he reflected 'numerous prejudices of the age' (Anderson, 2013). Kuyper's main concern was the professionalization of entertainment, as it could erode the sphere of the family because families would spend less time together and more time in theatres. Theatre notwithstanding, Kuyper had a positive attitude towards art.³

Kuyper wrote about art in several places, but most extensively in *Pro Rege*. As neither Heslam nor Henderson discuss *Pro Rege* this will largely be the focus here. Chapter 5 of *Lectures in Calvinism, Wisdom and Wonder*

1 Although, Arie C. De Gooyer (1909-1992), in respect to Kuyper's image-rich use of the Dutch language, regards him 'as an expressive artist'. (De Grooyer & Van Reest, 2017 [1937])

2 I will thus cite Kuyper extensively, in an attempt to let him 'speak for himself'.

3 The artist Piet Mondrian (1872-1944), when a student, attended Kuyper's church (Bratt, 2013), this was well before Mondrian took up theosophical ideas.

and his rectorial address to the VU in 1898 entitled 'Calvinism and art' *Het Calvinisme en de Kunst*, are the other main places that Kuyper discusses art. He also gave a series of lectures on aesthetics at the newly formed Free University (Van Deursen, 2008:37; Bratt, 2013:240). I shall begin with lecture five of his Stone Lectures.

2. Lectures on Calvinism (1898)

The fifth of Kuyper's Stone lectures is entitled 'Calvinism and art'. It might have at the time appeared to be a strange choice of topic. Calvinism seemed to have a low view of the arts, if not hostility, and it had been virtually disregarded by Calvinist theologians. But it was for exactly these reasons Kuyper had to address it. Kuyper's square inch view, meant that art was also Christ's. As Heslam observes:

Given his aim of presenting Calvinism as a worldview of all-embracing proportions – embracing even the arts – it is understandable that he should have been concerned about the prevailing opinion that Calvin and Calvinism were hostile to the arts. If his case for Calvinism was to have any credibility, he needed to counter this opinion, showing that Calvinism had sustained, and still could sustain, a positive impact on the development of the arts (Heslam, 1998:202).

Kuyper begins by saying that art is one of God's richest gifts,⁴ it is beautiful and sublime and that an artistic instinct is a universal phenomenon. Here he is unashamedly drawing on Calvin who saw the creation as a mirroring of God's glory and art as God's gift to humanity (see, for example, Taylor, 2017).⁵ His view is far from the accusation made of Protestantism in the poem 'The Minister' (1953), by R.S. Thomas (1913-2000), as an 'adroit castrator of art'. So, why then did Calvinists seemingly have a poor regard for the arts?

4 This is also the title of a book on Christianity and art by Wilson (1981). Wilson wrote from a kuyperian perspective.

5 Recent work on Calvin and art includes Susan Hardman Moore (2011), who shows that although to some extent Calvin was an iconoclast, his motivation was to emphasise the written over the visual, the written scriptures over depictions of biblical scenes. A reassessment of Calvin's view has been undertaken by Christopher Joby (2005); Joby observes:

Although many believe John Calvin had a negative attitude towards the arts, particularly visual art, my contention is that we find within his writings and the development of the Reformed tradition a more positive attitude to the arts than has hitherto been recognized. (Joby, 2005:v)

He thus begins the lecture as an apologist for Calvin⁶ and Calvinists and their attitude to the arts. He defends Calvinism on three fronts by examining:

1. Why Calvinism was not allowed to develop an art-style of its own;
2. What flows from its principle for the nature of art; and
3. What it has actually done for its advancement (Kuyper, 1931:145).

Why didn't Calvinism develop an art style? Kuyper draws on the German philosophers Hegel (1770-1831) and Eduard Von Hartmann (1842-1906). They argued that higher forms of religion were able to develop independently of art: as art was unable to express the essence of religion. Kuyper had argued that the highest form of religion was Calvinism. Such an approach was supported by Kuyper's sphere sovereignty: religion and art should be free from interference from each other.

Calvinism thus had advanced the arts, not by building cathedrals, palaces or amphitheatres; rather it released art from the church's influence and authority. Previously, art and music could only flourish as far as it could serve the church. Calvinism unfastened the ecclesiastical chains that hindered the development of art.

Protestantism in general, but Calvinism more consistently, bridled the tutelage of the church, so also was music emancipated by it, and the way opened up to its so splendid modern development (Kuyper, 1931:168).

With common grace, it meant that the arts were not limited to the regenerate, though this point is not fully developed by Kuyper. Kuyper shows that art is a creation of God and not of Satan.

If the Sovereignty of God is and remains, for Calvinism, its unchangeable point of departure, then art cannot originate from the Evil One; for Satan is destitute of every creative power. All he can do is to abuse the good gifts of God (Kuyper, 1931:155).

The arts also have a significant role:

Art reveals ordinances of creation which neither science, nor politics, nor religious life, nor even revelation can bring to light (Kuyper, 1931:163).

Unfortunately, Kuyper does not discuss what these ordinances are or how they differ from those that the other spheres disclose.

6 Kuyper cites Calvin approvingly several times, however he does not provide a citation, and I have not been able to find the quotes in Calvin. These include:

To go direct to the heart of the question, we begin with Calvin's last saying, viz., that art reveals to us a higher reality than is offered by this sinful world. (Kuyper, 1931:154)

And this is what Calvin asserted: viz., that the arts exhibit gifts which God has placed at our disposal, now that as the sad consequence of sin, the real beautiful has fled from us (*Ibid.*)

An interesting project would be to investigate Kuyper's use of Calvin.

Common grace was an important theme for Kuyper. So, it is not surprising that his articles on common grace in *De Heraut* included one on art. It is these I will briefly examine in the next section.

3. Wisdom and Wonder (1905)⁷

In *Wisdom and Wonder* (WW) Kuyper develops his ideas of both science and art; the difference with which science and art are treated is marked – see the comments in §5 below. Inevitably, there are echoes of what has been discussed in his *Lectures* and later developed in *Pro Rege*. What is additional is a fuller development of his view of art and the *eschaton*. Art foreshadows the new Jerusalem and provides ‘prophetic glimmerings’, a ‘preliminary scintillation’ of what is to come. Art provides a form of homesickness for beauty. Kuyper emphasizes that art is not to be condemned or seen as something to be opposed (WW:116). Art is not a parasite that can only grow if attached to ecclesiastical life. Art has its own independent existence, it is not reliant on the ecclesiastical sphere, but has its own domain within common grace (WW:118, 120). It proceeds not from particular grace but from common grace. The defects seen in art arise not from art itself, but from the ‘impiety of its advocates’ (WW:119).

In his chapter on beauty (WW:ch 7), Kuyper maintains that beauty comes from God (WW:124-125). Satan has no creative capacity and thus beauty must have originated from God:

The world of beauty that does in fact exist can have originated nowhere else than in the creation of God. The world of beauty was thus conceived by God, determined by his decree, called into being by him, and is maintained by him. (WW:126)

Beauty, like art, is a creation of God (WW:126). The beauty that is seen in this world, however, pales into insignificance to the exalted beauty that will be seen in the age to come; it will be a ‘*kingdom of glory*’ (WW:129 – italics are Kuyper’s):

The more exalted beauty, called ‘glory,’ comes only in the hereafter (WW:129).

⁷ *Wisdom and Wonder* (WW) was first published in Dutch in 1905 as a supplement to *De gemeene gratie*. These chapters had been accidentally left out of the three volumes that comprised Kuyper’s *De Heraut* series on common grace (Kuyper, 2019a). They were subsequently published separately. *Wisdom and Wonder* is in two parts: Part 1 on science and Part 2 on art. The original title of the book was *De gemeene gratie in wetenschap en kunst* (Common grace in science and art).

This understanding of beauty as a shadow of heavenly glory has neo-platonic overtones and illustrates a dualism from which Kuyper was unable to escape. It is as if Kuyper is attempting to justify art by giving it a heavenly meaning.

The emphasis on the consummated kingdom in the discussion on art is another important emphasis of Kuyper's. Beauty has been affected by the fall, but common grace has preserved us from its complete destruction, we can still see much beauty, even though it 'no longer adorns the whole earth' (WW:133). We now see the beautiful, the ordinary, and the ugly.

Common grace has performed a twofold service: it has spared much of the beauty of paradise and supplies us with an appreciation of beautiful things – even though our sense of beauty has suffered (WW:134-13). We still have a sense of beauty because 'God created that sense of beauty within us' (WW:141). Kuyper sees that it belongs to the world of imagination, and laments that 'people have failed to take this world of imagination into account' (WW:141).⁸ It is the flourishing of art that is due to common grace, art is not called into existence by common grace, art is a part of creation, marred by the fall. Without common grace, beauty would be lost to ugliness and we would have no sense of beauty (WW:148).

Though beauty has been marred by the fall, but maintained by common grace, in the kingdom of glory there will be a higher degree of beauty; it will be restored and more. Art provides us with faint glimpses of the new Jerusalem, 'it provides a direct connection with our expectations for eternity' (WW:145). It provides a bridge between the now and the not yet of the kingdom:

... art forms a bridge between life here and life on the other side of the grave (WW:145).

In this Kuyper is addressing the view held by many at the time that life beyond the grave was exclusively a spiritual life, which resulted in among other things a denigration of art:

If, ..., you confess with Scripture ... that there will be a new Jerusalem, located on a new earth, under a new heaven, then art is a preliminary scintillation already in this earthly life of what is coming (WW:145).

Another key theme developed by Kuyper in this book is the relationship between art and humanity as the image bearers of God. In his chapter entitled 'Creativity', he develops the idea of art providing 'prophetic glimmerings' (WW:155) of the age to come. Art can go beyond nature, not merely copying

8 This theme of imagination was taken up and developed by Calvin Seerveld, see for example Seerveld (1987).

nature. The reason it can do this Kuyper maintains is that humans are created in the image of God. He wrote: ‘... in all art we find an imitation of the creating ability of God’. (WW:151). God creates, so too humanity develops creativity. He stresses, however, the distinction between the creation of God and human creativity:

God creates in reality, people create in semblance. God created the living person in the individual of Adam, the artist creates the human image out of marble (WW:150).

Many of these themes are developed further in Kuyper’s *Pro Rege*, where he devotes a whole section to art.

4. Pro Rege (1912)⁹

In the final section of the three-volume *Pro Rege* (henceforth PR), Kuyper looks at art in its ‘entirety’. He stresses that art is not merely a human fabrication but is a ‘function of the human mind that God himself placed in our lives’. It ‘cannot be anything but a gift of God’. In *The Work of the Holy Spirit* — echoing a theme in his Stone lectures — he states emphatically: ‘Art is not man’s [sic] invention, but God’s creation’ (2001:40). Here he develops the notion that: *Art is a gift of God that shows itself in an ability, which portrays beauty and can be enjoyed by all.*

4.1 *Art is a gift of God that shows itself in an ability, which portrays beauty and is to be enjoyed by all*

Kuyper begins by discussing art in terms of the fine arts – these include painting, sculpture, poetry, music and (to a lesser degree) architecture. Where architecture and to some extent music is concerned they have an ideal but also a practical goal – a place to live or worship, for example.

He is concerned, however, that there is no separation between the high ideal and primarily practical, there should be no condescension. Both may reveal God’s power and majesty.

4.1.1 *Art is a gift*

He stresses that art is a gift, although it is one that can be ‘wasted, abused, and spoiled’ (PR:384).

⁹ Series VII in volume three of *Pro Rege* (Kuyper, 2019b – henceforth PR) deals with ‘The kingship of Christ and art’.

Art is egalitarian in that it is distributed among all different social class and status. Art is being able to do something God equips you to do. It is a talent in that sense, but that does not mean it requires no practice, as he puts it: 'practice presupposes the presence of talent' (PR:384).

Lambert Zuidervaart in his discussion of Hans Rookmaaker (1922-1977), Calvin Seerveld (b. 1930) and Nicholas Wolterstorff (b.1932) observes that:

All three scholars share an anti-elitism that resists both the deification of artistic genius and the denigration of daily life (Zuidervaart, 2004b:387).

This observation is true of Kuyper. It is a kuyperian trait that these scholars have inherited.

4.1.2 Art is a gift of God

Art exists only because of the grace of God, not because humans conceived or invented it. For Kuyper, God is the Master Designer and Builder (Heb 11:10). Humans are created in the image of God – if God is the Master Artist then it follows we have an 'inclination for art and the gift to enjoy it' (PR:338).

However, there is a distance between what God and people can do, but the divine and derived art have a common root.

All human art is only an echo, imitation, and reflection of the divine art that expresses itself in all creation (PR:388-389).

As it is a gift of God it means that artists should not, then, seek their own glory:

Art is ... unthinkable without the ordination of God (PR:388).

Art is an indispensable part of a full and rich life. It is not that art had a demonic character as some Christians suppose. We do need, though, to distinguish between the legitimate and sinful use of art. Many still adopt a negative attitude towards art, because they confuse the sinful misuse of art, such as the idolizing of art, art that is done to feed the artist's pride and ambition and so on (see §4.2.2) with true art done in reliance upon God. Art exists only by the grace of God and by virtue of his ordinances. Art is not something subsidiary, which we could do without. Life would be impoverished without this gift.

4.1.3 Art is an ability

Kuyper offers a note of caution, 'people err when they start from the notion of beauty. The point of departure must rather be sought in the much more general notion of ability.'

All art is an ability, a capacity, to do something that someone else cannot (PR:393).

This ability is God-given:

Anyone who is not born a Rembrandt or Bach will never become one (PR:393-394).

The goal of artistic ability is to glorify God and to magnify his name. To do that it portrays beauty.

4.1.4 Art portrays beauty

He notes that beauty has become a word used less and less. Nice, charming, lovely, attractive are used in place of beauty; whereas, the scriptures tend to use 'beauty' and 'glorious'. Beauty tends to be used for 'the most excellent here on earth' and glorious for the things of God and the new heaven and new earth.

As we are created in God's image we can delight in the beauty. Art finds its purpose in giving delight in the beautiful, this characterizes its higher origin.

Beauty is elusive. Harmony, rhythm, symmetry, proportion, unity in multiplicity, liveliness and vibrancy all play a part. It must also engage our interest, it will captivate us, a work of art must give the impression of completion of being finished, 'it must not leave avoid'. These are important but do not define beauty.

The human dimension is also a factor in the perception of beauty. The desire for beauty comes from what God has created in us (PR:416ff). However, he perceives an 'independent character' to the way we see beauty (PR:416).

Without the entrance of sin into creation he identifies three things:

(1) The beauty of paradise would have shone in unbroken radiance, albeit as a beauty of a lower order. (2) In paradise the human race would have had the capacity to enjoy the beauty of paradise, albeit while thirsting for a greater beauty. And (3) this perfection of beauty would not have been in paradise, but with God, and the human race would have passed into that world of perfect beauty without first dying (PR:418).

Beauty is not static – as the human race develops there is a greater and greater thirst for beauty, for higher enjoyment.

He distances himself from Plato's flawed view of beauty, which led to a 'distaste for earthly beauty and an aversion to art' (PR:420). Sadly, this platonic view crept into the church and Western civilization (Seerveld, 1963:32). This can be seen in a similar aversion to art in the Puritans.

However, not always for the same reasons, they emphasized the written over the pictorial. As the Puritan Daniel Featley (1578-1645), in his 'An Advertisement to the Christian Reader' wrote:

Why delve they continually in humane arts and secular sciences, full of dregs and drosse? Why do they not rather dig into the mines of the gold of Ophyr [Scripture] where every line is a vein of truth, every page leafe gold?

Beauty was, however, affected by the fall – I shall examine this in more detail later.

4.1.5 Art is to be enjoyed

We can enjoy art; indeed we are created to do so. God too enjoys and delights in his creation.

It is important for a proper view on art to note how scripture depicts God delighting (PR:409).

There is a playfulness in beauty that is to be enjoyed. Kuyper was no killjoy Calvinist, nor was he an art 'castrator'.

4.1.6 All can appreciate art

Art is not the provenance of the wealthy – it is and should be open to all irrespective of position, status and rank. Kuyper – as mentioned previously – had an egalitarian view of art. This follows from art being a gift of God:

... this gift shows itself to be bound neither to social position nor to rank, it would be merciless to make the enjoyment of art accessible only to those who came from the upper levels of society (PR:388).

It is part of a full and rich life:

Human life would ... shrink and be impoverished, if art were cut off from it (PR:386-387).

Kuyper has a full-orbed view of life; art, as it is a creation of God (Kuyper, 2001:40), should thus be a legitimate area for Christians to work in and to enjoy. Although it is a creation that doesn't mean it has not been affected by the fall. It is to creation, fall and redemption I now turn.

4.2 Art with respect to creation, fall and redemption

Scripture offers us an even more profound account. It tells us of a paradise that once radiated in all its beauty but then was lost, and of a curse that came over humankind and nature through and because of sin (PR:420).

4.2.1 *Creation*

Kuyper repeatedly emphasizes art is a creation of God (see, for example, PR:388-389; 2001:40). Even without the fall, there would have been art:

There would have been art if the human race had stood firm in the face of Satan's first temptation (PR:433).

Art as a creation reveals the importance art should have in a fully developed Christian worldview. It is not a mere luxury it is integral to the creation and to what it means to be a human created in the image of the creative God. It is important though, to see that art has been tainted in some ways by the fall.

4.2.2 *The Fall*

All art worthy of that name comes from God. It is a gift of God not only for the artist, but in the artist also for our entire generation. But praising the Lord's name in art is—even more now than in the past—entirely alien to most. The art world shuts itself up within itself, and therefore becomes estranged from God. Yet even this may never tempt us to reject art as such. As a phenomenon in human life it remains a gift of God's grace—just like we do not appreciate the nightingale's song because the nightingale is singing to God, but because whoever knows God also knows that he alone gave the nightingale its wonderful song (PR:423).

Beauty and art have been affected by the fall. Art became estranged from God, 'it became detached from the support that piety could offer', it then became an 'even greater risk of being poisoned by sin' (PR:425). This may happen in several possible ways:

- An idolizing of art – it becomes the object of veneration.
- A fuelling of an artist's pride – the artist may be tempted to self-glorification, and seek to gratify the audience rather than glorify God.
- It becomes independent with respect to morality and the sacred – it attempts to free itself from the laws and ordinances of God.

The result is art becomes 'vulgar and depraved' in search of greater material profit. Thus:

For that reason, art can lend itself equally well to the satanic and demonic as it does to the lofty, divine, and sacred (PR:430).

4.2.3 *Redemption*

Kuyper goes on to: 'investigate whether art itself and as such lies within the dominion of the king of God's kingdom—that is, whether

there is something in the origin of art that is directly related to Christ, and whether its historical course is therefore governed by him or not' (PR:433). For Christians, and especially Christian artists, this is a crucial question.

To answer this Kuyper seeks to look at what art would have been without sin and to see how it has developed in the sinful world. As he rightly asserts:

If Christ's kingship is all-encompassing, then that obviously must include the field of art; the aberrations in that field notwithstanding (PR:441).

He sees the role of Christ, not as some add-on to art, including him to give him glory, but rather as an integral part. Christ existed before eternity, before beauty he was. It is through him that beauty can be revealed. To deal with art apart from a Christ is to 'tear the tree from its roots'. His view of art is Christological, thus:

For this reason every Christian is all the more duty bound, wherever the heathen world has robbed beauty for itself and its idols, to restore Christ through quiet worship to the honor he deserves, above all for the world of art and beauty (PR:439).

He places much store by the fact that, at least as far as Kuyper is concerned, that it was in Christian countries or at least those touched by the gospel, that

music [and other art forms] first reached its acme, and why it never reached under paganism or Islam the enormous heights encountered in Christian countries (PR:447).

This does not mean, however, that beauty and art cannot be opened up by unbelievers. Unfortunately, this point is left underdeveloped in Kuyper.

Finally, Kuyper identifies three spheres for art: the sacred, normal human life and that of evil and unclean. Beauty can be, according to Kuyper, found in the first two spheres. Art can magnify God in both the sacred and in ordinary human life.

Kuyper in his *Lectures* sums up the creation, fall and redemption aspects of art:

But if you confess that the world once was beautiful, but by the curse has become undone, and by a final catastrophe is to pass to its full state of glory, excelling even the beautiful of paradise, then art has the mystical task of reminding us in its productions of the beautiful that was lost and of anticipating its perfect coming luster (1931:155).

5. Evaluation

There are a few issues with Kuyper's approach and his attempt to develop a Calvinistic/Reformational view of art. His contribution was timely and apposite, however, it was not always original as he developed ideas in Calvin, particularly in his *Lectures*. At times his view reveals hints of a residual dualism and neo-Platonism. These non-biblical notions, are implicit in his view of beauty. Fortunately, other kuyperian scholars have identified some of these weaknesses and have been able to build on the strengths of Kuyper's position. It is these weaknesses I now examine.

5.1 Art is subsumed under the Christian/non-Christian distinction

The Kuyperian view of art is subsumed under his distinction between Christian and non-Christian thinking. Kuyper's contribution was to separate a Christian contribution from a secular one. His thinking was highly controversial and stimulated much thinking in this area, both then and today. His division of the world into two kinds of knowledge, two kinds of science, two kinds of people, thus divides science, knowledge, history on this basis, where common grace is used to bridge these perspectives (see, for example, Zuidema, 2013; McConnel, 2013).

Thus, when Kuyper discusses the physical sciences, particularly in *Wisdom and Wonder*, there is an emphasis on both common grace and the antithesis. In his writings on art, common grace is to the fore, but the antithesis is largely missing. Consequently, the distinction between Christian and non-Christian art is not developed by Kuyper and this may well be because of the lack of discussion regarding the role of the antithesis in art and Kuyper's lack of aesthetic judgement. In Kuyper's *Our Worship* (2009 [1911]) he examines the role of beauty in church buildings. He seems to posit an internal/external beauty.

Because a universal law of life governs the category of beauty, we may not restrict it to what is before our eyes; rather, we should first care about beauty in the invisible and only then about beauty in the visible. Although a church may be beautifully built and furnished, and though in that church people may conduct themselves flawlessly, when the spiritual, the internal, the invisible sincerity and piety of members and office bearers are absent, it is not beautiful at all but precisely in its beauty thoroughly ugly. That is why the temple of an idol can never make a beautiful impression. The truth is missing (Kuyper, 2009:49).

From this we see that the church is not at all hostile to art but posits two requirements: first, that art shall not be the controlling force in the church, and second, that external beauty shall not overpower internal beauty (Ibid: 50).

5.2 *The kuyperian art construct is subsumed under a nascent aesthetic judgement*

Kuyper's views on art have been influenced by his views on beauty. Kuyper's nascent philosophy of aesthetics may be a key reason why he did not rely on a firm foundation to apply aesthetics to art. Kuyper's view is that beauty has been affected by the fall, but common grace has preserved humanity from beauty's complete removal. In the new Jerusalem, there will be a higher degree of beauty, beauty will be restored into its full glory. Art provides a foreshadowing of the coming glory. Kuyper maintains: 'It lets us behold only scattered images that help us gauge and grasp something of what will appear in the kingdom of glory' (WW:144-145).

It is unclear why Kuyper places so much emphasis on art and the artists, and one questions why artists receive an elevated duty in this respect. Furthermore, it is not clear that Kuyper has adequately engaged with the contribution of non-Christian artists. I wonder if beauty is being asked to do too much by Kuyper – to use Kuyper's bridge metaphor: the load expected by Kuyper for art to carry is too heavy for art.

5.3 *The neo/platonic trap?*

Kuyper's linking of art and beauty has also come under criticism, particularly by Calvin Seerveld (b.1930). Seerveld is right in that this reflects a merger of a platonic view with Christianity in Kuyper. These criticisms were also picked up by Begbie (1991). Seerveld (1979) makes this apposite observation:

Beauty is no help at all in discovering what is creaturely 'aesthetic' if it only draws you into speculating about the nature of God and *per obscurius* settle down on what the answer is for creation, without any careful systematic historical examination of art, for example (1979:279).

This is a trap that Kuyper has fallen into. In his *Lectures* he makes this observation:

beauty ... has an objective existence, being itself the expression of a Divine perfection (Kuyper, 1931:156).

Seeing beauty as a part of the divine 'perfection' is close to the Greek view of perfection (Clouser, 1999:144). This is an example of a scholastic trait within Kuyper (see, for example, Dooyeweerd, 2013; Vander Stelt, 1973, Van der Walt, 2015 – who all identify scholastic and semi-mystical views in Kuyper)

Seerveld also observes:

Christian thinkers who adopt a theory of beauty are beset by the problems that attend natural theology and all theodicies: How radical and disfiguring is the reality of sin and the necessity of Christ's redemption? Can beautiful nature and art be evil? And, if human art is beautiful is it not naturally good (Seerveld, 1984:392)?

Again, this is something that Kuyper does not address.

More recently, artist Makoto Fujimura, who admits to being influenced by Kuyper (Fujimura, 2012), has argued for a re-emphasis on beauty. He asserts:

Beauty is the quality connected with those things that are in themselves appealing and desirable. Beautiful things are a delight to the senses, a pleasure to the mind, and a refreshment for the spirit. Beauty invites us in, capturing our attention and making us want to linger. Beautiful things are worth our scrutiny, rewarding to contemplate, deserving of pursuit. They inspire—or even demand—a response, whether sharing them in community or acting to extend their beauty into other spheres (loc.¹⁰ 558).

There has been resurgence in the notion of beauty (see, also, King 2018); there may be something in this. But care is needed to avoid a platonic view of beauty. Beauty is a creation of God and not a platonic ideal to be manifest on earth.

5.4 Kuyperian developments

Kuyper's aim was to develop a Calvinistic aesthetic. He didn't fully succeed in this. However, what he did do was to lay the groundwork for such an approach and show that such an approach was feasible and necessary. It was Dooyeweerd who was able to build upon Kuyper's ideas:

Everyone who has even the slightest acquaintance with the theory of law-spheres of the *Philosophy of the Cosmogenic Idea* will have to concede that in the scientific investigation of the structure of reality it is nothing but thinking through and elaborating this religious understanding of law found in the thought of Kuyper (Dooyeweerd, 2013:169).

Dooyeweerd developed Kuyper's sphere sovereignty from a social framework into a philosophical one by identifying fifteen different modal aspects. Each sphere has its own sovereignty but also a sphere universality. Dooyeweerd identified the aesthetic as one of the modal aspects. Each aspect Dooyeweerd maintained has its own kernel element. Dooyeweerd identified beauty, in the sense of harmony, as the modal kernel. For Dooyeweerd the order of the

¹⁰ This refers to the location in the kindle version of the book.

modal aspects was important, he placed the aesthetic between the sensitive and the formative aspects (see table 1).¹¹

TABLE 1: The kernels of each modal aspect and a tentative application to a work of art.

Modal aspect	Modal kernel	Application to a work of art
Numerical	Quantity	If it is an original work there will be only one of it
Spatial	Continuous extension	It will take up a certain amount of space
Kinematic	Motion	It can be moved/transported
Physical	Energy and matter	Materials such as marble, wood or paint, for example, were used to create it
Biotic	Life and vitality	It is an artifact created by a living person
Sensitive	Feeling	What response does the painting evoke?
Analytical	Distinction	Is it clear what the artist is conveying?
Historical	Formative power	Is there a structure to the painting? Is it the result of design or spontaneous? Does it contribute to the shaping of culture?
Linguistic	Symbolic representation	What symbols has the artist used, what meanings are attributed to them?
Social	Social intercourse	Who is the intended audience of the piece? How has it been received?

11 There has been subsequent debate over the kernel element of the aesthetic aspect and its position in regards to the other aspects. Duncan Roper (1940-2016) (1992) reorganizes the modal aspects. He splits the psychic aspect into the affective and percipient and places the aesthetic between the cultural and the affective.

Economic	Frugality	Is there an economy in the brush strokes or materials used – how much would the picture be worth at auction?
Aesthetic	Harmony	Is there harmony, allusiveness, beauty revealed in the picture?
Juridical	What is due	Has the artist done justice to the subject? Does it belong to someone?
Ethical	Love (self-giving)	Does generosity and good will come through? Does it reveal a love for art, for people, for certain ideas?
Pistic/ certitudinal	Faith and vision	How do the artist's faith commitments show in the painting? What worldview does it disclose?

Seerveld, despite his reservations mentioned above, writes out of a kuyperian spirit and draws on the categories of the Dutch Christian philosopher, Dooyeweerd's brother-in-law (Verburg, 2015:81), D.H.Th Vollenhoven. Seerveld sees imagination and allusiveness rather than beauty as the defining character of art. He is rightly wary of attempts such as Kuyper's to give art justification by giving it 'heavenly meaning' (Seerveld, 1980:122).

Kuyper, via Dooyeweerd, was also an influence on Hans Rookmaaker¹² (1922-1970). Birtwistle in the introduction to *The Complete Works of Rookmaaker* makes this observation:

Rookmaaker was grafted into a theoretical movement that, from its inception in the nineteenth-century writings of the Dutch Christian statesmen Groen van Prinsterer and Abraham Kuyper, had specialized in a critique of those Enlightenment and Revolutionary principles that had denied God and attempted to establish an autonomy and freedom for mankind (Birtwistle, 2002:xxviii).

Rookmaaker, like Kuyper saw art as being linked to beauty:

Art can be defined as human-made beauty, and as such has much in common with natural beauty (Rookmaaker, 2002a).

¹² In the acknowledgements to his PhD thesis on Gauguin Rookmaaker recognizes Dooyeweerd, Vollenhoven and Seerveld as 'scholars have helped me in some way or another with my study of the subject treated in this book' (In Hengelaar-Rookmaaker, 2012).

Rookmaaker followed Dooyeweerd in seeing harmony as the defining character of art. Rookmaaker had a considerable influence on Francis Schaefer (Duriez, 2008:80, 176; Schaeffer, 1973), particularly through Rookmaaker's notion of art as a 'worldview disclosure' and its relation to the 'contemporary cultural scene' (Rookmaaker, 1970:1).

Other Reformational scholars who have developed a Reformational aesthetic are, one-time students of Seerveld, Lambert Zuidervaart (2004a, b; 2017) and Adrienne Dengerink-Chaplin (Brand & Chaplin, 2001; Dengerink-Chaplin, 2019). Another writing in the kuyperian line is former student of Rookmaaker, John Walford (2007). As James Romaine remarks in his introduction to Walford's *Festschrift*:

... the Neo-Calvinist perspective that Walford brought to his vocation was philosophically rooted in Kuyperian theology, the application of Christianity to the field of art history was modeled by Rookmaaker (Romaine, 2012:35).

Flawed though Kuyper's views may have been they were certainly influential and in identifying its weaknesses these others were able to develop a more fully Christian approach to art and aesthetics. We all stand in the shoulders of giants and in this case the giant was Kuyper – even though his ideas on art were inchoate. Dooyeweerd, Vollenhoven, Seerveld, Rookmaaker, Roper, Dengerink-Chaplin, Walford and Zuidervaart, all see art as an important aspect of cultural activity, as part of the cultural mandate and not as an ornament on the theological mantelpiece. For whatever their differences with Kuyper, all stand in the line of Kuyper. Kuyper's legacy is that art is no fringe on the garment; it is an integral part of the kingdom of God.

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