
Abraham Kuyper and some of his Critics

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Abstract

Abraham Kuyper was not universally admired and followed. In this paper, I examine some of his critics and the reasons for their criticism. These include P.J. Hoedemaker, Klaas Schilder, Foppe Ten Hoor, A.A. Van Ruler, and ministers of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America (PRCA). The main issues with which they disagree with Kuyper include his ecclesiology, common grace, and presumed regeneration. These differences are then evaluated.

Keywords:

Abraham Kuyper, P.J. Hoedemaker, Klaas Schilder, A.A. van Ruler, common grace, ecclesiology, baptism

1. Introduction

Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920) and his writings have enjoyed a resurgence in recent years.¹ Kuyper was a great polymath and entrepreneur. As has often been said, he founded a Christian University, developed a Christian political party (the Anti-Revolutionary Party), formed a new Church denomination (the *Doleantie*), and was instrumental in uniting two Dutch Reformed denominations – the *Afscheiding* and the *Doleantie*. He was a

¹ Thanks in part to the Abraham Translation Project which has produced 12 large volumes translating much of Kuyper's work, including his three-volume *Common Grace* and the three-volume *Pro Rege*. On recent publications on and by Kuyper in English see the series on 'Kuyperania' in Koers (Bishop, 2014- 2021).

church minister, a journalist, a theology professor, and a prime minister. He wrote over 2000 meditations and other writings that were itemised in a 756-page book (Kuipers, 2011). He was a pragmatic theoretician. However, not everyone agreed with or even liked Kuyper. While he was admired and respected by many, he was also loathed and hated by others. Like many politicians, he was reviled and vilified as many of the cartoons at the time illustrated.²



Kuyper was not easy to work with. A.W.F. Idenburg (1861-1935), governor-general of what was then known as the Dutch East Indies, a close friend of Kuyper, wrote to his wife on 24 October 1915:

The great difficulty with Kuyper is that his sensitivity is so unharmoniously developed. It is very finely developed (hypersensitive, I would say) if it applies to himself; undeveloped, when it applies to others. Because of this, he has been able to do great things but it has also served to alienate many people.³

2 See, for example, *Kuyper in de Caricatuur*. Amsterdam: Van Holkema & Warendorf.

3 *Briefwisseling Kuyper-Idenburg*, Eds. J. de Bruijn and G. Puchinger. Franeker: Wever, 1985:568. Cited in Heslam (2020:318, fn 7).

In what follows I will survey and focus on points of theological disagreement that have been raised.⁴ Many of the disagreements surfaced during the formation of the *Doleantie* and the subsequent union of the *Doleantie* and the *Afscheiding*. And then the separation of the Liberated churches in 1944. So, even after his death his ideas were being debated and discussed. Here I will examine some of the disagreements by topic rather than chronologically.

2. The key critics

Many have taken issue with Kuyper over his theology and his practice. I will provide some brief biographical details regarding some of the most vehement critics. There were obviously more than are briefly mentioned here – space forbids a complete overview.⁵

2.1 P.J. Hoedemaker (1839-1910)

Philippus Jacobus Hoedemaker (1839-1910) was a colleague of Kuyper's at the Free University in Amsterdam (now the VU Amsterdam). He resigned his position when Kuyper led the *Doleantie* secession from the state church. Hoedemaker remained a member of the Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk, the state church. He agreed with Kuyper on many issues but conflicted with him on the question of church and state. Hoedemaker became one of Kuyper's most trenchant critics.

Hoedemaker was born in Utrecht.⁶ His father owned a religious bookstore and was a member of the *Afscheiding*. His mother was a staunch supporter of the national state church. In 1851 the family emigrated to the USA. First to Michigan and then on to Kalamazoo. Sadly, soon after the move, his mother died. "With her death," said young Philippus, "I lost that guiding hand which I so sorely needed at this time of my life" (Eelman, 1957:19).

Hoedemaker began attending Kalamazoo College, where he got to know Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882), who was one of the cornerstones of the Romantic and transcendentalism movement in the USA. Emerson, it seems had an impact on Hoedemaker.

4 I will deal primarily with works in English as it is among English speakers this resurgence of interest in Kuyper has flourished. I have left unaddressed issues of Kuyper's racism and cultural imperialism. On this see the excellent work of Vincent Bacote (2022).

5 See also the discussion of some objections to Kuyper in Venema (2013).

6 This biographical sketch draws largely on Eelman (1957) who in turn drew upon Scheers (1936).

From Kalamazoo College, Hoedemaker moved on to Rutgers College in New Brunswick, New Jersey. After two years he left to take up a position in a lawyer's office. There he took an interest in politics and joined the Democratic Party. He moved back to Kalamazoo as a clerk and then schoolteacher in a church school. From there he went to study at the Congregational Theological Seminary in Chicago. On graduation, he became a supply minister in the Olivet Congregational Church of Chicago. He became somewhat restless and decided to embark on a tour of Europe. In 1862 he sailed to Europe.

As part of his journey, he revisited the Netherlands, without any intention of staying. Stay, however, he did. He felt the call to minister in the Netherlands. So, he began his studies at the University of Utrecht and graduated in 1867.

He began his church ministry in Veenendaal in the province of Utrecht. Five years later he was called to Rotterdam. From there he was appointed a professor at the VU Amsterdam (then known as the Free University).

During his time at the VU Amsterdam, he began to feel increasingly isolated.⁷ He also came into conflict with Kuyper's views. He eventually resigned from the VU in 1888 and took up a pastoral role in Nijland until 1890 when he accepted a call to minister in Amsterdam. He remained there until retirement in 1909. One year later he died.

Two of his most important followers were Oepke Noordmans (1871-1956), a minister of the Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk, and A.A. van Ruler (1908-1970). Both were fervent critics of Kuyper's approach.

2.2 *Foppe Martens Ten Hoor (1855-1934)*

Zwaanstra in his study of Calvinism in North America, identifies three main mentalities present within the Christian Reformed Church (CRC): the Confessional Reformed; Separatist Calvinists and American Calvinists (see Table 1). Of these three the Confessional Reformed was the most antagonistic towards Kuyper, in particular Kuyper's theology, and they were not enamoured with Christian political or social activity. Foppe Martens Ten Hoor of the Confessional Reformed was the "most competent thinker and articulate spokesman for the group" (Zwaanstra, 1973:69).

⁷ It may or may not be significant but there is little mention of Hoedemaker in van Deursen's history of the VU (Van Deursen, 2008).

Table 1. Zwaanstra's three distinct Calvinistic minds/mentalities.

	Confessional Reformed	Separatist Calvinists	American Calvinists
Attitude to Kuyper	Critical of Kuyper's theology	Committed disciples of Kuyper	Positive towards Kuyper
Key themes	Disliked the term Calvinist/Calvinistic Preferred the term Reformed	Stress on the antithesis God's people could not go along with and cooperate with the world or unbelievers Demand for separate Calvinistic organisations God place in creation laws/norms for the life and existence of all created things Held to Kuyper's organism/institute view of the church	An authentically American church with a distinctively American form of Calvinism Stress on common grace Openness to American society
Magazine	De Gereformeerde Amerikaan (est 1897)	De Calvinist De Wachter [The Watchman]	The Banner
Advocates/proponents	F.M. Ten Hoor W. Heyns L.J. Hulst H. Beuker M. Bourduin G.K. Hemkes P. Jonker K. Kuiper J. Noordewier J. Robbert H. Van Hoogen	K. Schoolland J. Van Lonkhuyzen H. Danhof E. Folkertsema J.C. Monsma J. Vander Mey D. Veltman	H. Beets J. Groen B.K. Kuiper C. Bouma A. Dykstra G. Hoeksema G. Hylkema G. Sjaardema E.J. Tanis W. Stuart

Source: compiled from data in Zwaanstra (1973, Chapter III)

Ten Hoor was a professor of Systematic Theology at Calvin Seminary from 1900 to 1924. Prior to that, he was the CRC minister at Oakdale Park Church (1896-1900). He was ordained into the CRC in 1880, the same year he married Elizabeth Petrolla Kok, and served in the Netherlands at Genderen, Opperdoes, and Franeker (1880-1896). He was born in Haulerwijk, Friesland, the Netherlands. He studied for the church ministry at the Theological School in Kampen. Before his call to Oakdale Park CRC in Grand Rapids, he served several congregations in the Netherlands. While at Oakdale he became the editor of the monthly *De Gereformeerde Amerikaan* (1897-1916). The *De Gereformeerde Amerikaan* [The Reformed American] represented the views of the 1834 secession church – it aimed to speak for the “Reformed American” (Zwaanstra, 1973:3).

In 1900 Ten Hoor began to teach dogmatics and ethics at Calvin Theological Seminary. He remained there until 1924. Apparently, Ten Hoor was not a popular figure among the students at Calvin. They felt he was “caustic and unapproachable, that he strayed in class into issues and people not pertinent to the lecture topic, [and] that he harboured strong antipathy toward Abraham Kuyper and made contemptuous reference to him...” (De Jong, 2007:16). Ten Hoor’s antagonism towards Kuyper stemmed from differences primarily over the nature and task of the church, Kuyper’s supralapsarianism, and his view of theology.

Ten Hoor was a convinced infralapsarian, Kuyper a supralapsarian. Ten Hoor was ambivalent regarding common grace. He is reported to have said, “I have studied Common Grace for forty years, although I believe there is such a thing, I still do not know what it could be” (cited in Baskwell, 2009:77). He felt that Kuyper’s views were more a result of the influence of Kant and Hegel rather than “old Reformed theology” (Pronk, 1987).

2.3 Klaas Schilder (1890-1952)

Schilder was a native of Kampen and was baptised as an infant in the De Hervormde Kerk. His father, Johannes, died when he was five and his mother, Grietje (nee Leydekker), struggled to make ends meet for her family.

Schilder’s education took place in Kampen. He attended the theological college there. Schilder seemed to excel in the classical languages. He graduated *cum laude* in 1914 from Kampen. He married Anna Johanna Walter and took up his first pastorate at Ambt-Vollenhove. He went on to pastor congregations at Vlaardingingen, Gorinchem, Delft, Oegstgeest, and in 1928 at Rotterdam-Delfshaven.

At Rotterdam he took leave to study for his doctorate at Frederick-Alexander University in Erlangen. He graduated in 1933 with his dissertation *Zur Begriffsgeschichte des Paradoxon* [On the conceptual history of paradox]. In 1934 he took up the position of professor of Systematic Theology at the Theological University of the Reformed Churches in Kampen. He continued in that post until his death in 1952.

He began the editorship of the magazine *De Reformatie* in 1934. In 1938 he visited the United States of America.⁸ His visit was not welcomed by all, for example, H.J. Kuiper in *The Banner* suggested that it might stir up the common grace controversy of 1924, which led to the deposition of Herman Hoeksema and Henry Danhof (see §2.5 below).

During the Second World War, Schilder was arrested by the Nazis for his work on *De Reformatie*. He was held at Arnhem until December 1940. He was released on the order to cease publication. This he ignored – he spent the remainder of the war in hiding until August 1944.

In 1943 he wrote to Synod saying that he couldn't support the ruling on presumptive regeneration. Some of Schilder's supporters issued "The Declaration of Liberation or Return" – this is the catalyst for the formation of the Liberated Churches. The Dutch synod moved to depose Schilder. Unfortunately, Schilder was not able to defend himself because of the restraints put upon him by the Nazis. The deposing of Schilder led to the formation of another split within the GKN of what was termed the Liberation.

A meeting was held on the 11th of August to discuss the way forward. The meeting was originally planned to be at a church building in the Hague but had to be moved to the much larger Lutheran church to accommodate the greater than expected turnout. Herman Knoop (1890-1948) and Schilder addressed the group.

Knoop identified several reasons for the decline – these were important and pertinent points. He begins by noting the influence of Kuiper.

In the previous century Dr. A. Kuyper had called Reformed people out of their isolation, so that they began to fulfill their God-given calling in all of public life, in politics, education, social action, charities, sciences, arts, youth-movement, press and radio. Now what was the motivating force behind this? Was it thirst for power, a kind of Christian imperialism? No, it was the pure Calvinistic adage: the honour of God in all of life. And the Lord gave His blessing, as a reward of grace.

⁸ This was his first visit to the United States, he revisited in 1946. The American Lectures from his first visit have been translated and published in Harinck, De Jong & Mouw, (Eds.) 2022.

But how it fell prey to all kinds of dangers!

He goes on to identify seven of these dangers, including a sense of “having arrived”, a shift of emphasis from Christ to self, a hardening of spiritual life, the lack of living in the expectation of Christ’s return, the lack of persecution, growing materialism and secularization, politizing and tactics, and the trap of self-righteousness.

Schilder’s main problems with Kuyper’s position were his view of the church, presumptive regeneration, and common grace. Schilder in the early days agreed with Kuyper’s view of the church – it wasn’t until the early 1930s that he began to question Kuyper’s view (Batteau, 1995:67). Common grace was also the major problem for what became the Protestant Reformed Church (see §2.5 below).

2.4 Arnold Albert Van Ruler (1908-1970)

A.A. van Ruler was born in 1908 in Apeldoorn of Reformed parents. At 17 he became acquainted with P.J. Hoedemaker’s writings; these had a great influence on him. Like Hoedemaker he held to the importance of a state church. Van Ruler studied theology at the University of Groningen in 1927, there he met Th.L. Haitjema, who like Hoedemaker had a theocratic vision. From Groningen Van Ruler became a minister in the Netherlands Reformed Church in Kubaard, where he married Joanna Adriana Hamelink.⁹ At Kubaard he published a study critical of Kuyper’s common grace, *Kuypers idee eener christelijke cultuur*. He felt that Kuyper’s common grace perception had a “diluting effect” and “hindered him” (Van Ruler, [1945]).

Initially, Van Ruler was enamoured by the writings of Karl Barth – he later distanced himself from them. Nevertheless, Barthian tendencies can be seen in his approach.

In 1940 he and his wife moved to take up a pastorate in Hilversum. When the Second World War broke out within months of moving, they facilitated a house group of theological students – De Hilversumse theologienklub – to read and study together. Some of van Ruler’s essays and lectures from this time were published in 1945 as *Religie en politiek* [Religion and politics].¹⁰ During his time at Hilversum, he completed his doctorate, *De vervulling van de wet* [The fulfilment of the law], in 1947.

⁹ She ensured many of van Ruler’s writings were published after his death.

¹⁰ Extracts have been translated by Ruben Alvarado: Van Ruler, [1945a, b]; [1947].

Van Ruler's theocratic ideas led him to be involved with the beginnings of the "Protestantse Unie" (PU) which was founded to promote the theocratic vision of Hoedemaker. Van Ruler stood as a candidate for the House of Representatives in 1946. No candidate from the PU was elected – after 1946 primarily because of its poor showing in the elections it became a theocratic study circle. De Vries (2011) notes that "Besides as a political design of life, Van Ruler also uses theocracy as a structure of theological thought and as an encompassing sense of life."

He was appointed church professor at the University of Utrecht in 1947. He took great interest in his students and visited them in their pastorates after graduation. Few of Van Ruler's works have been translated into English, those that I have include *Calvinist Trinitarianism and Theocentric Politics* (Van Ruler, 1989) *The Christian Church and the Old Testament* (Van Ruler, 1971) and *I Believe* (Van Ruler, 2015). There have been several doctoral dissertations on Van Ruler (for example, Hommes, 1966; Hodnett, 2002; Janssen, 2006; De Vries, 2011).

2.5 Protestant Reformed Church

Ten Hoer was the mentor of Herman Hoeksema at Calvin Seminary (Baskwell, 2009:75), although Hoeksema was a supralapsarian and Ten Hoer infralapsarian.

Herman Hoeksema (1886-1965)¹¹ and **Henry Danhof** (1879-1952), were Christian Reformed Church (CRC) ministers in North America. In 1924 the debate over the nature of common grace brought conflict. They wrote the book *Van Zonde en Genade* [*Sin and Grace* – Danhof and Hoeksema (2003; 2016)] to defend their position over and against the common grace position of Abraham Kuyper.

The result of the 1924 debate was a schism. Danhof and Hoeksema were suspended from the CRC and subsequently formed the Presbyterian Reformed Church (PRC).

Danhof was pastor at the First Church, Kalamazoo and Hoeksema at Eastern Avenue Church, Grand Rapids. Both congregations left the CRC and became part of the PRC. Although Kalamazoo returned to the CRC in 1946.

11 A helpful biography of Hoeksema is Baskwell (2009). Hoeksema wrote a history of the PRC (Hoeksema, 1936).

Their *Sin and Grace* book 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!¹²

The split of the PRC from the CRC concerned 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 their *Sin and Grace*.

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 of the doctrine of common grace, deciding that there was more danger of conformity to the world than of flight from the world”. Danhof and Hoeksema attempt to show that Kuyper’s views were original to Kuyper, rather than in Reformed thought or in the Scriptures. They asserted that holding on to common grace would lead to “worldliness”. They write:

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*.

Another PRC minister who engages with Kuyper’s common grace is **David J. Engelsma** (1939-). Hoeksema was Engelsma’s mentor (Engelsma, 2020). Engelsma is a graduate of Calvin College (A.B.), Protestant Reformed Seminary (B.D.), and Calvin Theological Seminary (Th.M.). He was a pastor in the PRC (1963-1988) and was then appointed as the professor of Dogmatics and Old Testament at the Protestant Reformed Seminary. He retired from the post in 2008.

12 Some of this section draws upon Bishop (2017).

3. Areas of criticism

The reasons could be separated into two broad categories: cultural and theological.¹³ Cultural differences include common grace, and church—state relations. Theological would include presumptive regeneration and ecclesiology.

Hoedemaker objected to the fact that Kuyper maintained that the Anti-Revolutionary Party (ARP) was the only group that stood for Christian principles. He saw a division between Groen and Kuyper – a division that he thought was increasing. (Kuyper’s split with Lohman Hoedemaker saw as evidence of this as Lohman was also a mentee of Groen.)

He regarded Kuyper’s pronouncements as having the “air of papal decrees” and viewed Kuyper’s views as “warmed-over liberalism” (Hoedemaker, 2019:19) He also took issue with “the so-called Neocalvinist agenda, at its core, viewing it as a further development of the Revolution, precisely what it was supposed to combat” (Alvarado, “preface” in Hoedemaker, 2019).

3.1 *Ecclesiology: the organic—institute distinction*

3.1.1 *Article 36*

For Hoedemaker, Kuyper’s approach to church and state was an advocacy of the neutrality of the state. He conflicted with Kuyper over several points, primarily he maintained that Kuyper was promoting the neutrality of the state. He wrote against Kuyper’s view of Article 36 of the Belgic Confession (Hoedemaker, 2019).

Kuyper’s main arguments against Article 36 and his development of ideas in the relationship of church and state were published in *Common Grace* Volume 3. They were first written for *De Heraut* from October 1899 until November 1900.

Hoedemaker objected to what he perceived as Kuyper’s use of pragmatic reasons over and above scriptural reasons. Kuyper maintained that the invisible church existed from creation, but the church as an institution began at Pentecost. This was a problem for Hoedemaker.

Kuyper did not hold to a single state church institution. Hoedemaker did. For Kuyper the church was pluriform, there were different expressions of it. Kuyper rejected a one state, one church position.

As regards Kuyper’s ecclesiology, **Ten Hoer** thought that Kuyper’s

13 Not that the distinction is watertight! There is much overlap.

formulation of the invisible church led to the notion of two churches within a congregation. Kuyper maintained that a church could be a true church even if the elders and deacons were heretical but one elect person was present. This implied that there was a church-forming potential. Ten Hor disagreed. As a secessionist he regarded the Dutch State Church as a false church; Kuyper did not. Therefore, Kuyper thought the secession, of which Ten Hor was a member, was wrong to secede. For Kuyper the state church as an institute was deformed but still a true church. According to Ten Hor, "The Reformed Church as an organization, separate from the churches as a visible communion of members is a fiction, i.e., such a church exists only in the imagination of Dr. Kuyper and his disciples" (cited in Brummel, 2018:124). For Ten Hor the congregation must consist of true Christian believers for it to be a true church.

3.1.2 *Institute and organism*

Schilder moved from a pro-Kuyper to a selectively anti-Kuyper position at the beginning of the 1930s (Batteau, 1995:74ff). He, as did Ten Hor, disagreed with Kuyper's notion of invisible and visible church, of institute and organic church. In his Nineteen Theses on the Church, he writes:

As has already been said, the church is gathered (brought together) every day by the living Lord (Kurios) Jesus Christ. This activity of gathering occurs daily in the "imperfect present" tense. Every distinction between the "being" and the "well-being," between the "invisible" church and the "visible" church, between the church as "organism" and the church as "institute", is therefore false and fatal, if it disengages (abstracts) the "coming together" of believers, occurring daily in the imperfect present tense, from the "bringing together" of believers by Jesus Christ (the congregation of believers), which likewise takes place daily in the "imperfect present" tense (Schilder, 1972 – thesis 6).

Elsewhere Schilder (1944) maintains that the term 'organism' comes from the philosophy of Schelling and German idealism which had been taken over by Kuyper. This view is echoed by William Young, who writes:

[Kuyper's] metaphor of an organism is inflated into a principle, akin to the pantheistic doctrine of Schelling and Hegel, that goes beyond the drawing of necessary consequences (Young, 2011:216).

Van Ruler held to the ideal of a state church and this coloured his objections to Kuyper's sphere sovereignty, common grace, the organism/institute distinction. He disliked the institute and organism

as, he maintained “it robs the church of its place and role and function in the public, political, social, economic, cultural, moral, and spiritual life of the nation, and secondly” (Van Ruler, [1945]). He goes on:

Instead of the church comes the Christian organization “in all areas of life”. And in the place of the state comes the Christian political party. And these Christian people get ready to build a Christian culture, this time a real one, that is “Christian” only in subordinate degree. Christian culture become a ghetto in humanized Europe, soon to be eradicated when Europe becomes itself, which is to say, pagan (Van Ruler, [1945a]).

Van Ruler is concerned that the church is neglected, in “Kuyper’s theology” he maintains:

There arise Christian political parties, Christian schools and universities, Christian trade unions and societies, a Christian press and Christian art. In a word: the whole of Christian culture. The church stands outside of this. And the government, the servant of God, stands outside. And the people as people stand outside (Van Ruler, [1947]).

As Alvarado (2021 [2015]) puts it:

So for Kuyper, actually everything is organism. Although he says some good things about the institute, he actually previously castrated it and relegated it to a subordinate role.

3.1.3 *Plurality of the church*

Schilder also had problems with Kuyper’s view of the pluriformity of the church. He once wrote: “Pluriformity is a nice name for a horrible thing” (cited in Van Laar, 2007). Van Laar describes what is meant by pluriformity:

Pluriformity is the idea that the world is full of more-or-less pure churches, and that while these churches all have some differences, they are all true churches of Christ. Closely related to this doctrine is the concept of the invisible church manifested in various local churches and which all together form the true church. ... Schilder clearly opposed pluriformity and went to great effort to explain that the differences between churches exist because of sin. It must be understood that the divisions between churches are not merely the result of small squabbles or minor differences of opinion but because of sin.

3.2 *Infra- v supralapsarian*

One of the common factors for most of Kuyper’s critics was that they held to an infralapsarian position, whereas Kuyper was a supralapsarian. In many ways, this was the heart of the disagreement over baptism and presumed regeneration and to a lesser extent common grace.

The difference between the infralapsarians and the supralapsarians is the logical order in which God chooses the elect: supralapsarian before the fall and infralapsarian after the fall. Table 2 illustrates the main differences.

Table 2. The differences between supra- and infralapsarianism.

THE SUPRALAPSARIAN ORDER	THE INFRALAPSARIAN ORDER
<p>1. God first decreed to glorify Himself in the salvation of some and in the damnation of other men, who at this stage existed in His mind only as possibilities.</p> <p>2. Next, God created man.</p>	<p>1. God first decreed to create man.</p> <p>2. Next, He decreed to permit the fall of man.</p> <p>3. Then He decreed to elect a certain number of the fallen and justly condemned race to eternal life and to pass the others by, consigning them to everlasting destruction for their sin.</p> <p>4. Finally, He decreed to provide a way of salvation for the elect.</p>
ADVOCATES	
<p>Abraham Kuyper, Theodore Beza, Franciscus Gomarus, Herman Hoeksema, Herman Hanko, David Engelsma, Louis Berkhof(?), Geerhardus Vos, Gordon Clark, Robert Reymond</p>	<p>Foppe ten Hoor, Cornelius Pronk, Peter Martyr Vermigli, Francis Turretin, John Owen, Matthew Henry, B.B. Warfield, W.G.T. Shedd, Charles Hodge, R.C. Sproul, R. Scott Clark</p>

Source: Compiled from data in Pronk (2001).

Pronk maintains:

Kuyper, being a supralapsarian with a vengeance, held views on such doctrines as the covenant of grace, justification, regeneration and baptism, which his opponents considered unscriptural (Pronk, 2001).

3.3 Baptism and presumptive regeneration

Supralapsarianism led Kuyper to hold to presumptive regeneration and infant baptism. This meant that a “conversion moment or experience” was the moment of rebirth when one becomes aware of what was anticipated at baptism. As Wood (2012) points out, Kuyper was treading a line between a state church and a confessional church as he developed his view of baptism:

The basis for baptism was not covenant membership, which Kuyper feared would lead back to the national church, but was regeneration. Regeneration, however, was presumed on the basis of covenant membership, thus to Kuyper's mind avoiding sectarianism (Wood, 2012:135).

The issue of supra- and infralapsarian was one of the central concerns in the union of the *Afscheiding* and *Doleantie* groups in 1892.

Schilder also focused his criticism of Kuyper on Kuyper's doctrines of baptism. He disagreed with Kuyper's "presumed regeneration" and its association with paedobaptism. Schilder did not believe presumptive regeneration was biblical and suggested that it could lead to "indifference and passivity" in the church (Batteau, 2015). Schilder, "came more and more to believe in the covenant as a relation between God and believers and their children, regardless of whether those children were already regenerate or not, or even were elect or not" (Batteau, 2015).

Cornelis Pronk while seeing many positives in Kuyper regards his major mistake as presumptive regeneration.

This giant among theologians dominated the whole theological scene in the Netherlands for over forty years (1880-1920). Kuyper was a great man, but as often happens with such men, they can make great mistakes too. One of his greatest mistakes, certainly from the point of view of the Old Calvinists, was his doctrine of presumptive regeneration (Pronk, 2006).

3.4 The role and place of theology

Ten Hoor was convinced that Kuyper's view of theology was influenced by Kant, and this was evident he maintained in Kuyper's *Principles of Sacred Theology*. Kant rejected the idea that theology was a science as God was outside the cosmos and could therefore not be the subject of science. Ten Hoor maintained that this is the position that Kuyper held. He thought that Kuyper broadened the definition of theology to include ecclesiastical theology and academic or scientific theology. He disagreed with Kuyper and maintained that God can be the object of theology.

3.5 Common grace

There were numerous issues around the debate on common grace. These included discussion as to the source of common grace – is it Christ as the mediator of creation (Kuyper) or as the mediator of redemption (S.G. de Graaf and Dooyeweerd)? What is its purpose? Is it the development of the potential of creation or to men only for the sake of the elect? (Praamsma, 1985:135-144).

There was criticism from the national Church advocates. T.L. Haitjema accused common grace of promoting secularism and A.A. van Ruler branded it spiritualistic, dualistic, and declared there is but one grace.¹⁴

Schilder also disliked the term “grace” in reference to unbelievers (God is not gracious to them). Schilder thus rejected Kuyper’s common grace and replaced it with the notion of a mandate or an obligation; hence the term “cultural mandate”. Schilder developed his views in *Christ and Culture* (Schilder, 2016).

3.5.1 PRC on common grace

The most vehement against common grace – Schilder excepted – were the theologians associated with the Protestant Reformed Church, such as Hoeksema and Engelsma. The denomination was born out of the rejection of common grace and has become a central foundation of this denomination. Engelsma makes some important points in his critique but unfortunately slips into the polemical mode and sometimes 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.

The PRC theologians make several accusations against Kuyper’s view of common grace. They claim that neither Calvin nor the Reformers held to the concept of common grace.

Both *Sin and Grace* (Danhof & Hoeksema, 2003) and *Christianising the World* (2016) 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:

14 Douma (2017) discusses in length Van Ruler’s objections and finds them flawed.

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. It is a denial of the antithesis and that it is opposed to Reformation doctrines and is therefore heresy.

Cornelius Van Til (1947) also criticizes Kuyper's views. He draws on C. Veenhof's analysis [*In Kuyper's Lijn*]. He sees:

- a vagueness inherent in Kuyper's treatment of common grace
- the danger of abstract thinking in Kuyper
- platonic elements in Kuyper's position
- a weakness in his epistemology; i.e. Kuyper doesn't start "unequivocally from the presupposition of the ontological Trinity", and
- evidence that there is "a lack of clarity in Kuyper's thought as to the distinction between Christian and non-Christian notion of the limiting thought".

3.6 *Other areas*

3.6.1 *Idealism and other philosophies*

Several people have identified what they perceive as idealism or Kantian influences on Kuyper. For example, W.H. Velema (1929-2019) asserts "Romanticism and idealism in partnership are responsible for the 'pitfalls' of Kuyper's theology"¹⁵ (Velema, 1988:12). (See also, Bratt, 2013:31-33.)

Ten Hoor believed that Kuyper was influenced by Kantian and Hegelian views (Baskwell, 2009:78). In a recent piece on Cornelius Van Til and R.C. Sproul, defending Sproul's natural theology against Van Til's presuppositionalism, Mathison makes the following accusations.

The doctrine of the antithesis forces us to look at one additional issue, and that is the question of indirect Kantian and idealist influences. Van Til repeatedly notes the influence of Abraham Kuyper and Herman Dooyeweerd on his thinking. The influence of Kuyper is most evident in Van Til's teaching on the antithesis, and the influence of Dooyeweerd is most evident in Van Til's structuring of the history of philosophy and in his use of a transcendental argument. However, what is significant is

¹⁵ The one pitfall that Velema mentions is presumptive regeneration.

that both Kuyper and Dooyeweerd are known to be heavily influenced by Kant and by idealism. James Bratt, for example, notes that Kuyper combined “Reformed Christian and German Idealist sources”. Bratt observes “how deep and permanent was the impact of German Idealism on his thinking”. Dooyeweerd’s thought as well was heavily influenced by Kantianism. If there are traces of Kantianism and idealism in Van Til’s thought, and if they are related to the doctrine of the antithesis, they may to some extent have been mediated through Kuyper and Dooyeweerd (Mathison, 2020).

3.6.2 *Apologetics and the role of reason*

Bishop and Wagenman (2021) examined Kuyper’s apologetics. Suffice here to mention that it was B.B. Warfield (1851-1921), the Princeton Seminary theologian, who took issue with Kuyper’s approach both to apologetics and with his view of reason. Warfield held to a much higher view of both apologetics and reason than did Kuyper. Related to these objections was Warfield’s disagreement over Kuyper’s view of two kinds of science.

3.6.3 *Dualistic anthropology*

In his book *Faith Life and Theology*, written to support theology as “pisteology”, John Vander Stelt (1934-2020) devotes a chapter to Kuyper (Vander Stelt, 2020).¹⁶ He obviously has much respect for Kuyper:

[Kuyper] focused on the urgent and complex issue of how Christians should live in a culture shaped by leaders who were deaf to God’s Word revealed in Christ Jesus. His work, and role, was in a sense comparable to that of John Calvin ... (Vander Stelt, 2021:101).

But he also identifies some flaws in Kuyper’s approach:

As with any reformer, Kuyper had his limitations. He was most innovative when he ventured into new areas of reflection and renewal called for by major social, political, economic, and other challenges in his country and culture. As to certain traditionally firmly established ways of living and thinking, he was less innovative and reformative, especially in the areas of deeply rooted ecclesiastical customs and scholastically tainted theological thinking (Vander Stelt, 2021:110).

Vander Stelt identifies several “positive features of [Kuyper’s] worldview”. These are “common grace, creation, fall, redemption”, and “the authority of Scripture”. He also identifies what he describes as “questionable features in his worldview”. These he sees as being

¹⁶ Some of this section draws upon Bishop (2021).

inherent in the conservative tradition he inherited¹⁷ and are related to his philosophical, anthropological, and epistemological thinking. These features include:

Remnants of a dualistic anthropology

Kuyper's view of formal faith

A semi-scholastic and idealistic epistemology

A dualism in his encyclopaedia of the sciences

A hierarchy in the God—world relation

A philology unable to acknowledge the full impact of sin and renewal in logic, philosophy, and pedagogy.

He deals with the first two in more detail, in sections entitled “philosophical anthropology” and “formal faith”. In his critique of Kuyper's anthropology, he draws upon Fernhout (1975).

According to Vander Stelt:

To stress the unity of man, Kuyper introduced a (non-substantial) qualitative distinction within the (substance of) soul between “psyche” and “pneuma”.

He sees Kuyper as having an accommodated anthropology, accommodated from Plato and Aristotle, via Scholasticism, in his adoption of a higher and lower substance in his dualistic theory. The higher part expresses itself in thinking, willing and feeling – the intellect (thinking) is seen as the most important part. This traditional scholastic element remained in Kuyper's anthropology.

The other “questionable feature” Vander Stelt discusses is Kuyper's view of formal faith. Though it is less clear why he sees it as being questionable.

Kuyper sees faith not as an addition or an optional, but as integral to being human. He sees faith as a formal function.

Vander Stelt then describes “four problems” these are “faith and theology”, “encyclopaedia and curriculum”, “organic and logical”, and “Creator-creation relation”. As regards faith and theology Vander Stelt notes that Kuyper recognised that both faith and theology have religious roots and that theology does not have a privileged role in the academy, it is one of several disciplines.

Vander Stelt maintains that Kuyper “opened up the door ... for Dooyeweerd, Vollenhoven and other students to think of faith life as something human and as religiously directed in a Christian and non-Christian way” (Vander Stelt, 2021:129).

¹⁷ Vander Stelt suggests that Kuyper “Uncritically, ... accepted the views of Voetius.”

4. Evaluation

There is much that Kuyperians can learn from these disagreements. They should not be dismissed out of hand.

4.1 Ecclesiology

Kuyper's first and last articles were on the church. As John Halsey Wood Jr. notes, the church was the bookends of Kuyper's theological writings (Wood, 2013:3). Kuyper was a pastor in a church, led a reform of the Dutch Reformed Church, and wrote his doctorate on Calvin's and à Lasco's views of the church. Kuyper always had a deep concern for the church: as he said, the "church question dominates every other issue" (Kuyper, 2013:22). His book *Our Worship* was written solely on the institutional church (Kuyper, 2009). Kuyper's view of church as organism does not relegate church as institute to a "subordinate role". It is clear from Kuyper's writings that both organism and institute are needed, and both are important. Christian political parties, schools and universities are important but so too, for Kuyper, is the church as institute.

The many accusations that Kuyper downplays the role of the institutional church are not borne out by the evidence.

4.1.1 Church and State

For Kuyper, the church arose from particular grace, the state from common grace. This meant for Kuyper the state could not judge between heresy and truth. It went beyond the calling and vocation of government. This was not a dualism between public and private, however. The state had no right to lord it over the church.

Kuyper's objections to Article 36 were several-fold:

It was taken over by the Reformed fathers from Romanish practices

It uses Constantinian language

The sword should not be used to kill heretics

It presupposes that the magistrate can judge the difference between truth and heresy.

Kuyper, however, recognised that in arguing against it he conflicted with the Reformers including Calvin.

A change was necessary, argued Kuyper, because of the development of pluralism in society. There were now many churches with different confessions – how could democratic governments decide which was

the true church? Would different successive governments change their mind over which one was the true church? This was a different age to that when Guido de Brés (1522-1567) instigated the Belgic Confession. At issue, for Kuyper, was the relationship between church and state, and church and civil government.

Both Kuyper and Hoedemaker were agreed on their dislike of the hierarchical structure of the Dutch state church. But they differed in their solutions. Hoedemaker wanted a return to the original Presbyterian church order and for the church to take its proper place in public life. Hoedemaker thought Kuyper's solution was for a new denomination with a Congregationalist/independent structure. Hoedemaker disliked Kuyper's pluralist approach. Kuyper's view of "equal rights for all" led to individualism, the nation was the sum of individuals within a political border. It leads to a majority rule and knows no national character. For Hoedemaker, "The principle of neutrality and the doctrine of equal rights lay at the heart of Kuyper's politics." This meant, Hoedemaker understood, as a reinterpretation of the antithesis. No longer did it mean no neutrality in anything.

Accepting the neutrality of the state leads, according to Hoedemaker, to the tyranny of majority rule. The majority and not God would be sovereign. However, Kuyper does not hold to the neutrality of the state. A neutral state, Kuyper argues, is an impossibility – a chimera: the fundamental notion of the "neutral" state was nothing but a chimera. For even if we assume that government could take a neutral position vis-à-vis the various churches and could refrain from making choices in the religious realm, it assuredly could not do so in the moral realm (Kuyper, 2020:205).

The suggestion that a Christian/non-Christian antithesis leads to a separation of believers from non-believers leads to the church being a "private voluntary association" is an overstatement of Kuyper's view of the antithesis. It was not a Christian/non-Christian person separation; it is not a separation of sacred and secular; rather it was a separation of *principle* not persons. Kuyper uses the terms abnormalist and normalist to show this antithesis or conflict. The conflict is not between faith and science, but between opposing scientific systems, each based on their own faith (Kuyper, 1931:131).

Kuyper did not hold to a congregationalist view of church structure – he did not hold to the view that authority was held by the congregation (further see Venema, 2013:82-84). Although Kuyper did oppose a top-

down hierarchical approach where broader assemblies could impose their authority and will on local congregations.

4.1.2 *The pluriformity of the church*

The pluriformity or multiformity of the church was another of Kuyper's key themes. In essence this means that churches of different confessions have a right to exist alongside one another. This, however, doesn't mean that there is a plurality of truth. This confusion seems to be at the heart of some objections to Kuyper's view. It does not necessarily mean that it opens the way up for ecumenism. Neither does it mean that Kuyper espouses religious relativism.

But we are equally conscious of the fact that we alone do not constitute the Church of Christ in the earth; that there is a conviction of truth which operates outside our circle ... (Kuyper, 1968:326).

The plurality stems from Kuyper's sphere sovereignty and creation:

The starlit heaven does not show us innumerable identical stars but endless groups of stars all different from each other. Precisely in this multiform distinction the beauty of the firmament shines. So it may not be assumed that God meant to have uniformity in his human world and that pluriformity arose as a result of sin ... Moreover, the very fact that God created male and female proves conclusively that uniformity was not part of the creation plan (Kuyper, 1998:445).

He discusses this multiformity in *Common Grace* Volume 3, Chapter 32. He recognises that the multiformity of the churches was not always the case. Before the Reformation in the West¹⁸ there was only one church, the Roman Catholic Church. The deviances from this were called sects or schismatic. In each village there was only one church. Then came the Reformation. All the Protestant Reformers took the position of the absolute unity of the visible church. "Different churches alongside one another seemed an absurdity. A church was either true or false." Yet as the Reformation developed in Lutheran and Calvinist churches the differences became more pronounced.

There was a principle of one, single church, yet in reality there was a multiformity – this became the new form of life. This multiformity was accepted with increasing openness. This multiformity cannot be denied. Kuyper even goes as far as suggesting that "it is our firm conviction that multiformity is a developmental stage to which the church of Christ *had* to come ..." (Kuyper, 2020:286).

18 In the East, of course, existed the Copts and Nestorian churches.

Some, Kuyper suggests, object to this by saying it is not a New Testament principle. He defends his position by noting that the epistles are addressed to one church in one city/region – to all who were in the same circumstance. This was only a little more than a half-century after Christ’s ascension. The apostles did not try to ensure the unity of all the churches by, e.g., establishing a collegium (Kuyper, 2020:269). They established no such single external organisation or clerical institution to maintain unity. “It is not the *clerical* institution but the *believers* themselves who constitute the church” (Kuyper, 2020:270)

He uses the metaphor of a plant to illustrate his point. A plant may split into many stalks, but it was initially one. This is so with the different manifestations of the visible church.

The objective truth remains one, but the subjective appropriation, application, and confession must differ, even as the colour of light will differ depending on the glass that captures it (Kuyper, 2020:271).

He goes as far as to suggest that “Opposition to the multiformity of the church arises from a false dualism” (Kuyper, 2020:272). The gospel is not a leaven to be put on top of the flour – it penetrates into the flour.

Several of the critics such as Hoedemaker and Van Ruler held to a theocratic view of the state. Hence their disagreements over church and state relationships with Kuyper. They regarded Kuyper’s view as opening up the way for secularisation. The theocratic view also sees the church as having a key role in society – thus they wanted an important role for the state church. The church would play a role similar to that of Israel in the Old Testament. But, as Kuyper observed: “Israel’s unique situation cannot serve as a model” (Kuyper, 2020:246).

Hoedemaker placed much of his argument against Kuyper in what he felt was Kuyper’s view of a neutral state. This is mistaken, or at least an overstatement.

Kuyper’s approach was more pragmatic than Hoedemaker’s, but it was also more practical. Kuyper addressed the situation as it was, Hoedemaker as he wanted it to be. Hoedemaker asked important questions – even if we cannot always agree with his answers. His approach poses the question: how realistic is his model of a state church? Could the church be what Hoedemaker wanted it to be this side of the eschaton?

4.2 The role of theology

Kuyper's *Principles of Sacred Theology* is in many ways a work in the shadow of Kant. However, it is written to show theology is a science and can have a place among the other sciences in the academy. So, Ten Hoor is only partly correct – he is correct that Kuyper does not view God as the object of science; but wrong because Kuyper does defend theology as a science. For Ten Hoor it seems that theology is the queen of the sciences – this is (rightly) rejected by Kuyper.¹⁹

4.3 Supralapsarianism and baptism

Many of the disagreements stem from adherents of infralapsarianism who take issue with Kuyper's supralapsarianism.

Baptising on the basis of presumptive regeneration was not uncontroversial in the 1930s and 40s. Kuyper's views were entrenched within the church hierarchy, Schilder's dissent with some of these views including baptism, led to Schilder's suspension.

Even for those who might not fully agree with Kuyper's doctrine of baptism, it is important to notice how Kuyper was trying to safeguard and honour a few convictions that he regarded as crucial for the Reformed faith. These were the rejection of the state-church idea, the importance of palingenesis (regeneration), and a desire to maintain the sovereignty of God.

William Young (1918-2015), one of the translators of Dooyeweerd's *New Critique of Theoretical Thought*, makes much of Kuyper's presumptive regeneration and sees it as being the main point of deviation between what he terms Historic Calvinism and neo-Calvinism. He uses it to contrast Kuyper with other Reformers to the detriment of Kuyper and thus to drive a wedge between Historic Calvinism and Kuyperian neo-Calvinism (Young, 1973-1974). By "Historic Calvinism", Young means his own take on Calvinism. It is, however, disingenuous to use presumptive regeneration to distance neo-Calvinism from other forms of Calvinism, as some Calvinists who adopt presumptive regeneration also reject neo-Calvinism; and many Kuyperian neo-Calvinists do not embrace presumptive regeneration. (Even if Kuyper did.)

19 As Kuyper observes: "We do not advocate, therefore, a certain subserviency of the other sciences to theology as the queen of sciences. There can never be a question of such a relation of mistress and servant, in a scientific sense, among the sciences" (Kuyper, 1968:606).

Supralapsarian is a recognised (minority) position among Reformed theologians (see the advocates in Table 2).

4.4 *Common grace*

In *Sin and Grace*, although Danhof and Hoeksema make the distinction between Kuyper's view and the free-offer view, they do seem at times to conflate the two. They also maintain that 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.

The assertion that common grace is a denial of total depravity and particular grace, and it can lead to Arminianism seems a strange argument, as Kuyper was a particular-grace man and a whole-hearted Calvinist, not Arminian. Kuyper's *Particular Grace* appeared in 1884, his *Common Grace* in 1902. His *Particular Grace* was the basis for *Common Grace*.

At best the PRC's 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. It is clear from even a cursory reading of Kuyper that these accusations are without foundation as the work of Masselink and Kuiper show. William Masselink in his study of *General Revelation and Common Grace* (1953) when discussing Kuyper's common grace correctly observes:

Here [in *Common Grace* volume 1] it is clearly stated that both common as well as special grace presuppose the doctrine of the total depravity of man (Masselink, 1953:210)

Engelsma claims that neither Calvin nor the Reformers held to the concept of common grace. Yet there 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. Kuyper never claimed originality in his development of the doctrine of common grace; rather he thought of himself as a copyist of Calvin. Kuyper only aimed at making explicit what was implicit in Calvin. Kuyper maintains he is working in Calvin's line.

Masselink (1953) writes “Hepp states that the first one must yet appear to prove Kuyper departed from John Calvin” (1953:11). Masselink also notes that “The works of John Calvin already contained the doctrine of common grace, although it was not yet developed” (1953:187).

Kuiper (1928) in his study of Calvin’s common grace has shown how Calvin does endorse such an approach. He also includes numerous quotes from Reformers and Calvinists who likewise embrace the Reformation and common grace. These include Peter van Mastricht, Johannes Marck, Wilhelmus a Brakel, Bernhardinus de Moor, Jonathan Edwards, Charles Hodge, A.A. Hodge, Herman Bavinck, and V. Hepp, as well as Kuyper. Rather than being a denial of the Reformation, common grace is in line with the Reformation. It is clear then that Kuyper’s common grace is no heresy, and it is in the line of the Reformers and Reformation, Calvin included.

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

The PRC wanted to deny common grace, Schilder wanted an alternative. Schilder proposed a cultural mandate as an alternative to common grace as a basis for cultural involvement. Both Kuyper and Schilder agreed that Christians should be culturally active. For Kuyper cultural involvement stemmed, in part, from common grace, for Schilder it comes from a mandate, the cultural mandate. This is not so much, then, a difference or disagreement rather it is a different emphasis, a different starting point. The working-out of both is very similar.

Gootjes (1995) identifies the following themes in Schilder’s approach:

1. Culture is the totality of the work to be done in this world.
2. The belief that the cultural mandate implies that the world has to be developed.
3. Culture is the duty of all mankind.
4. Culture should always be to the glory of God.
5. Sin gives us a wrong perspective on culture.

None of these would be disagreeable to Kuyperians.

4.5 Non-Christian philosophical influences

A point worth mentioning is that we are all influenced in one way or another. The issue is how much does that influence turn us away from Christian principles. How much do we recognise those influences and how do they

shape us? Using someone else's philosophical terms and concepts/ideas does not necessarily mean that they render the approach non-Christian. It is possible to plunder Egyptian gold (Ex 12:35-36). But the care must be taken not to make that gold into a golden calf (Ex 32).

Non-Christians may have important insights — they too are dealing with the data of creation, however flawed or tinted their “spectacles” may be. That said, however, how apposite is this critique? There are no doubt elements of non-Christian influences within Kuyper. These have also been pointed out by those in Kuyper's line (see, for example, Vander Stelt in §3.6.3 above and by Dooyeweerd, 2013:153-178). It is important to be aware of them.

This said, however, the accusation of idealism and Kantian influences against Kuyper is perhaps overstated. And we should also be wary of committing the genetic fallacy – the origin of a term does not determine its current meaning. Similar accusations have been made against Bavinck, claiming that his use of the organic metaphor shows the influence of German idealism. As Brock and Sutano (2017) point out: “In Bavinck one encounters a practised conviction that an organic worldview bestows the freedom to use various thinkers in an eclectic manner.” There is no reason to suggest that is not the case for Kuyper.

Eglinton (2010; 2012), drawing on Mattson (2012)²⁰ and Josef Bohatec (1926), has shown that the organic metaphor can be traced to Jean Calvin. As Eglinton comments: “Bohatec begins with the recognition that the organic motif is central to neo-Calvinism and is one of its great merits” and that he “seems to regard the relationship of organic thinking between Calvin and Kuyper as incontestable”.

4.6 Dualistic views

Vander Stelt in his analysis draws upon Dooyeweerd and Vollenhoven to critique Kuyper. There is much truth in his analysis. Dooyeweerd (2013) identified two streams within Kuyper's thought – the scholastic stream, which Vander Stelt ably critiques, and the Reformational stream. It is the Reformational stream which Dooyeweerd, Vollenhoven, Janse, and others developed. Vander Stelt has also seen the strengths in Kuyper's position and Vander Stelt writes from a Reformational perspective.

²⁰ Eglinton draws upon Mattson's 2008 PhD Thesis which was subsequently published in 2012 (Mattson, 2012).

5. Conclusion

Regrettably, a triumphalist tendency among Kuyperians and neo-Kuyperians has often been perceived. According to Engelsma, it has been less than triumphant. For example, he points to the Free University (now the VU Amsterdam) and Christian politics in the Netherlands, both falling far short of what Kuyper had envisioned in his writings. He describes this approach as “cultural Calvinism” as opposed to his own form of “genuine” or “spiritual” Calvinism (Engelsma, nd:6-8).

The British sociologist Warner’s (2007:86) description of Evangelicals as having a “vision inflation” (they all seem to promise much more than they can actually deliver) also seems to apply to the Kuyperian position. It poses the question of whether a triumphalist attitude may have hampered the promotion of Kuyperian ideas. Mouw (2003) suggests that Schilder provides a corrective to the triumphalist ways of Kuyper and culture. Stopping to reflect on these critiques is no bad thing.

Many of the critiques illustrate that more work needs to be done by Kuyperian scholars. In particular, as regards the church as institute and organism, the relationship of church and state, and common grace.²¹ That much is misunderstood or misinterpreted in the criticism of these areas shows that there is a need to clarify and develop nascent ideas.

Knudsen (1953) in his review of William Young’s *Toward a Reformed Philosophy* (Young, 1952) has this to say:

“With Abraham Kuyper the situation changed. Though he did not succeed altogether in breaking with the traditional philosophy he nevertheless developed ideas that pointed the way. He realized the need for obtaining a true, transcendent position as starting point for philosophy (p. 48): he developed the idea that sin also affects the mind of man and consequently his thought (p. 56); he found an organic connection between faith and knowledge, so that faith was seen as undergirding knowledge (p. 59); he originated the idea of faith as a function of human nature, which involves the position that all human life is led by faith, whether this faith be true or false (p. 59f.); he stressed the antithesis between the regenerate and unregenerate consciousness, and held that there was a two-fold development of science, Christian and non-Christian (p. 62); and he initiated the idea of sphere-sovereignty, which he did not limit to the social spheres, but regarded as a principle for other aspects of the cosmos as well (p. 68).”

21 See, for example, Zuidema (2013) and McConnel (2013) for ways in which common grace and the antithesis have been discussed and related.

There are obvious weaknesses and flaws in Kuyper's approach; he was very much a person of his time. This is particularly seen in his view of non-Western culture and his cultural imperialism. Nevertheless, he was able to achieve much – even though as Knudsen puts “he did not succeed altogether in breaking with the traditional philosophy”. The Kuyperian themes mentioned by Knudsen above were, however, fundamental to the development of a Christian philosophy by Dooyeweerd and Vollenhoven. We can still stand on Kuyper's shoulders, as shaky as his foundations may be.

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