

Editorial *Neo-Calvinism and Modern Economics*

When the Dutch theologian and statesman Abraham Kuyper gave his lecture on “The Social Question and the Christian Religion” at the First Christian Social Congress in the Netherlands in 1891, he claimed, “The social question is not a reality for you until you level an architectonic critique at human society as such and accordingly deem a different arrangement of the social order desirable, and also possible.”¹ This conviction, animated by the principles of Kuyper’s Reformed worldview, inspired the Neo-Calvinist theological tradition in the Netherlands and beyond to develop a deeper, even scientific, body of Christian social thought.

The question of Neo-Calvinism’s relation to modern economic science, however, was not settled in 1891 and continues to be discussed in the present. At least one hearer of Kuyper’s lecture, the Christian socialist Syb Talma, enthusiastically believed that “Kuyper was walking in the footsteps of [John Frederick Denison] Maurice.”² Joost Hengstmengel has recently shown that though Kuyper had extensive knowledge of Christian socialism in his day, his own views fall more in line with the German historical school.³ So Talma may have projected something of his own convictions onto Kuyper’s speech. Nevertheless, the fact that doing so was possible demonstrates the ambiguity surrounding the question of Neo-Calvinism and modern economics. Indeed, long after Kuyper’s time, Abraham Zeegers would argue in 1958 that economic liberalism, particularly the social market economy of West Germany, best reflected Kuyper’s views and the original economic position to which the Anti-Revolutionary party ought to return.⁴ Both he and Talma could make authentic appeals to Kuyper on particular points. And, of course, the Neo-Calvinist tradition is broader than Kuyper,

including other great theologians and philosophers, such as Herman Bavinck and Herman Dooyeweerd, to name only two of the most prominent. Their views cannot be collapsed into Kuyper's, whatever his precisely may have been, and their insights transcend their time and context no less than his.

In order to both clarify and complicate the question of the relation between Neo-Calvinism and modern economics, the Acton Institute organized its first annual academic colloquium on this theme on October 8, 2021, sponsored by the *Journal of Markets & Morality*. Participants were then invited to submit papers—either those presented or others—to a special issue of the journal on the same theme. Through the guidance and academic review of this issue's guest editors, Paul Oslington of Alphacrucis College in Sydney and George Harinck of the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, I am excited to publish four such papers herein.

While Jordan Ballor, the conference plenary speaker, and Steven McMullen take a constructive approach in their articles, Joost Hengstmengel and Peter HESLAM contribute to the exposition of historical sources: Dooyeweerd and Kuyper, respectively. Together, they demonstrate both the depth of the Neo-Calvinist tradition as well as the genuine potential the Reformed worldview holds for serious dialogue and integration with modern economic science today. As Kuyper put it, "Calvinism cannot but foster love for science"⁵—economic science inclusive.

However, neither is the Reformed worldview the only Christian worldview nor is Neo-Calvinist social thought the only tradition of Christian social and economic reflection and engagement. Thus, this issue also features a *Symposium* of three papers on the question of the relation between ethics, economics, and natural law, originating from a conference at the University of Notre Dame and accordingly more reflective of the Roman Catholic and Thomist traditions. Finally, our book reviews round out the issue by exploring various recent works related to the broader study of the morality of the marketplace today.

One final note: I would personally like to thank Paul Oslington, George Harinck, all of the colloquium participants, and all of my colleagues at Acton who helped make the event a success and thus make this theme issue possible. As I put it then (to the groans of all Neo-Calvinist scholars in attendance), though I had known of the Acton Institute, in hosting this conference I discovered the Acton organism. For that matter, I am thankful to Kuyper and the Neo-Calvinist tradition for helping me discover the relevance of that distinction, "dad jokes" aside. Our societies need healthy institutions to flourish, including research institutions, scholarly colloquia, and academic journals, but society itself is an organic whole whose interconnected members ensoul the spheres of our corporate life together, without whom they do not and cannot truly live. No "architectonic critique" of

“human society” can neglect this organic reality. That, to me, is more than mere theory. It is a fact I experience every day, for which I am deeply grateful.

—Dylan Pahman, Executive Editor

Notes

1. Abraham Kuyper, “The Social Question and the Christian Religion,” in idem, *On Business & Economics*, ed. Peter S. Heslam, Abraham Kuyper Collected Works in Public Theology, ed. Jordan J. Ballor and Melvin Flikkema (Bellingham: Lexham; Grand Rapids: Acton Institute, 2021), 201.
2. Gerard van Krieken, “Syb Talma: A Dutch Christian Socialist,” *Journal of Markets & Morality* 14, no. 2 (Fall 2011): 399.
3. See Joost Hengstmengel, “The Amateur Economist: Abraham Kuyper and Economics,” *Journal of Economics, Theology and Religion* 1, no. 2 (2021): 137–58.
4. See Abraham Zeegers, “From Kuyper to Keynes: The Anti-Revolutionary Party Astray on the Dirigiste Path,” *Journal of Markets & Morality* 24, no. 2 (2021): 343–94.
5. Abraham Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1931), 112.