

Undoubtedly, Guinness sees that a reordering of societal virtue and values is paramount. The status quo is unsustainable; the republic will not even merely be able to stay afloat. At best, it seems the country can manage its steady decline.

While Guinness may not have all the answers, and would presumably admit as much, this account is a modern defense of ordered liberty that addresses the lack of civic vision that plagues this country. It makes sense that such a critique would come from an individual who is not American; perhaps it takes an outsider's unique perspective to assist in diagnosing many of the internal problems that are causing a once-vibrant nation to crumble from moral and economic rot. We must somehow find a way to ask again the questions that once made us not just a great nation but a great example to the free world.

—Ray Nothstine
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Wisdom & Wonder: Common Grace in Science & Art

Abraham Kuyper

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Translated by Nelson D. Kloosterman

Grand Rapids: Christian's Library Press, 2011 (pages)

If the name Abraham Kuyper rings a bell with you, then you already know him as a proponent of the doctrine of common grace. The concept of common grace existed in Christian theology before Kuyper, of course, but he adopted it as a signature doctrine and developed it at great length in an eponymously titled three-volume *opus*. This slim book represents the first fruits of a project to translate those volumes into English. (I serve as one among many informal advisors to the project.)

What is common grace? Simply put, the doctrine of common grace describes God's care for and development of the creation after the fall. Common grace has nothing directly to do with the salvation of individuals. Kuyper underscored this point by publishing a separate treatise on particular grace, which emphasized the uniqueness of salvation in Jesus Christ. By contrast, the doctrine of common grace examines God's work outside of the church—in nature, history, and culture. While common and particular grace may be conceptually distinct, both function together in the lives of Christians—and Christian societies—to accomplish God's purposes.

The two series of reflections in this book focus on the effects of common grace in the sciences and the arts. Fairly self-contained, they formed a coda to Kuyper's long-running meditations on common grace that he serialized in *The Herald*, a weekly paper. They were first issued as a separate publication in 1905 under the title "Common Grace in Science and Art," and then posthumously incorporated into the second edition of his volumes on common grace in 1922. This publication, rendered fluently from the Dutch by Nelson D. Kloosterman and supplied with elucidatory notes, permits English-speaking readers to

engage for the first time with Kuyper's rich and multifaceted meditations on the relation between Christianity and the arts and sciences.

A primary burden of both series is to convince his audience that both science and the arts are gifts of God to be embraced, not shunned. In his series on science, he sought to overcome a prejudice against the natural sciences among his readers who had been thrown on the defensive by the triumphal tone of scientific progress in the nineteenth century. On the one hand, Kuyper contended that God is at work in the scientific achievements of non-Christians: "God's activity is immediately evident from the undeniable fact that in people like Plato and Aristotle, Kant and Darwin, stars of the first order have shined ... even though they were not professing Christians" (53–54). On the other, he asserted that when scientific inquiries go beyond observation and measurement, a gap becomes evident between worldviews. His analysis of this gap, which emerges into full view in the "spiritual sciences," leads to an apologia for Christian universities, where scientific investigations can be conducted on the basis of shared principles and presuppositions.

His exploration of the arts similarly teases out what may be attributed to common grace and what is distinctly Christian. Kuyper sought to counteract the widespread perception that the Reformation—in particular, Calvinism—opposed the arts. The Calvinists did not wish to suppress the arts but to free them from ecclesiastical tutelage. The arts have an essence and calling distinct from religion. The secularization of the arts after the Reformation was thus not an accidental consequence but an unfolding of divine intention. Of course, artists may abuse their freedom but such abuses do not invalidate the power of artistic vision. At their best, artists provide glimpses into the glory of the coming kingdom.

Abraham Kuyper was a sophisticated communicator who tailored his writing to his audience—in this case everyday Christians, not academic theologians. When writing for popular audiences, he made regular use of earthy metaphors and analogies. His tone was generally didactic, instructing rather than arguing for his positions. The combination of his magisterial tone and colorful rhetoric may strike modern readers as idiosyncratic—as, for example, his claim that three aesthetic gradations exist after the fall:

A lion is beautiful; a calf is ordinary; a rat is ugly. The same holds for the plant kingdom. The cedar enthalls us with beauty, the willow strikes us as ordinary, and the thistle turns us off. The Arab attracts with his beautiful form, we Dutch are rather ordinary in appearance, while some primitive tribesmen arouse a sense of aversion (133).

This citation exemplifies the whimsicality and bourgeois insouciance that too frequently characterizes Kuyper's illustrations of common grace. Such evaluations disturb theologians already inclined toward the dialectical theology of Karl Barth. "How can you ascribe to God's common grace what seem like personal prejudices?" they ask. It is a good question.

While it is easy to take potshots at Kuyper, doing so misses the contemporary relevance of his meditations. Kuyper opposed repristination in any form. Instead, he believed that the Spirit is working progressively in history and in the spheres of social life to achieve God's goals for the creation despite the fall. Kuyper called us to engage with all spheres of life, including the arts and sciences, and not to forsake communication with non-Christians

because of disagreements over first principles. Contemporary evangelicals would do well to imitate Kuyper's balancing act by engaging with the blessings of common grace in culture while pursuing the particular calling of Jesus Christ in their lives and communities.

—Clifford B. Anderson

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The Challenges of Cultural Discipleship: Essays in the Line of Abraham Kuyper

Richard Mouw

Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012 (236 pages)

This volume is a collection of thirteen articles and chapters that Richard Mouw regards as the “back story” of his more popular presentation of ideas stemming from the work of Abraham Kuyper, the Dutch Calvinist theologian, journalist, and politician. The phrase “in the line of” is an important indicator of the approach Mouw takes to Kuyper's legacy; less a “party line” than a general framework of Reformed theology applied to a range of subjects. One vital dimension in this regard is that Mouw intends not only to extend Kuyper's legacy, but also to offer important corrections of some of his ideas. This corrective move can be seen as early as the first essay, “Calvin's Legacy for Public Theology,” which addresses not only Calvin's complex legacy but also that of Kuyper, particularly the way in which his theory of sphere sovereignty was appropriated in support of the apartheid system in South Africa. Mouw acknowledges that while Afrikaners drew on Kuyper's unfortunate view on race and the imprecision in his articulation of social spheres (which was taken in South Africa to include races as cultural spheres that should be separate), they failed to live up to and express the liberative dimensions of Kuyper's thought that stem from his belief in Christ's lordship over “every square inch” of life and the pursuit of a flourishing civil society.

Kuyper's doctrine of sphere sovereignty receives significant attention in four chapters, and one of Mouw's most interesting contributions to the Kuyperian conversation comes from his willingness to consider various ways to refine this well-known theory of structural and worldview pluralism. Sphere sovereignty is an idea Kuyper developed to articulate a world that is under the authority of the one true God, a God who structures the created order in such a way that various forms of social organization (church, family, business, state, education, and so forth) have their own integrity; it is also a way to carve out public space for confessional institutions such as Christian schools. Some discussions of this topic emphasize a strong distinction between sphere sovereignty and the Roman Catholic view of subsidiarity, which has a more vertical approach (one only moves up to the next level of institutions when it is necessary) in contrast to the more horizontal cast of Kuyper's theory. Mouw argues that while it is important to place an emphasis on the integrity of spheres, at times there is a place (or even a need) for a vertical hierarchical dimension as Christians engage the various dimensions of life.