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Abraham Kuyper

*Modern Calvinist,
Christian Democrat*

James D. Bratt

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Foreword

The interwoven questions that this splendid biography answers are, “Who was Abraham Kuyper, and why should we care?” Answering the first question is not easy, since Kuyper’s career was as filled with noteworthy achievement as that of any single individual in modern Western history. From his birth in 1837 in the Dutch seaport of Maassluis to his death in The Hague in 1920, Kuyper’s life encompassed an extraordinary range of enterprises. As only a partial list, he was a minister of the Dutch Reformed Church, the driving force behind a major schism in that church, a professor of theology, the long-time editor of a daily newspaper, the founder of the Netherlands’ first mass-based political party, an effective advocate for public funding of religious schools, the founder of a university, a much celebrated traveler in Britain and America, a member of the Dutch Parliament (and later Senate), from 1901 to 1905 the prime minister of the Netherlands, and throughout his adult life an absolutely indefatigable author on topics political, theological, cultural, and devotional. Somehow he also managed to fit time for several long collapses from nervous exhaustion that seemed only to bring him back with larger ambitions for longer agendas.

If Kuyper’s ideas had been entirely humdrum, his list of achievements alone would make him worthy of sustained attention. But since his ideas were well articulated beliefs that propelled his many activities, trying to answer “who was Kuyper?” requires full attention to his thought. He was first a convinced Protestant who held the image of Reformation guided by the word of God as the highest ideal. Almost as intensely he believed that the French Revolution had un-

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leashed the most destructive forms of rationalism, individualism, and atheism imaginable. He inherited the instincts of European Christendom (and the assumption that all aspects of life needed to be held organically together), but was also committed to heartfelt personal piety (and so could write movingly about the work of the Holy Spirit). He believed that the creation in its fullest extent was a gift of God beyond imagining and that Christ's redemption extended to the uttermost reaches of that creation. He matched his confidence in the New Testament's message of redemption in Christ with an equally firm belief that the Old Testament showed God's intimate concern for family life, agriculture, politics, economic structure, warfare, international relations, and more. He was deeply committed to "sphere sovereignty," the belief that God had organized the creation into discrete theaters of activity (family, business, art, education, church, state) with each one given specific purposes by the Creator and each possessing its own integrity. He held a positive conception of government, not as an all-purpose solution to every problem, but as the God-given "sphere" ordained to adjudicate disputes among other spheres, to defend the weak against the strong, and to maintain the state's natural duties for developing infrastructure and promoting the general welfare. At the highest level, he held both that God had gifted all humanity with the ability to contribute meaningfully to the common good ("common grace") and that regeneration in Christ created a community, a mind, a predisposition, and a sensitivity utterly opposed to everything of the world ("the antithesis").

The vigor of Kuyper's convictions, along with his strenuous efforts at putting them into practice for religious, educational, and political purposes in the Netherlands — and with the significant numbers around the world who have found his ideas inspiring — makes him a figure of world historical significance. It also means that a biography like this one must be done with care, so that readers come to understand Kuyper in his own life context as well as the influence his ideas have had. The range of that influence is noteworthy — as a contributor to European Christian Democracy, a beacon for Dutch immigrants in many parts of the world, a figure used to justify South African apartheid, a guide for many leaders of evangelical higher education in America, a special inspiration for modern Christian philosophers, and a stimulus with his concept of "worldview" to active culture warriors in our own day.

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James Bratt's great success in meeting that challenge comes from a subtle blend of well-researched facts and carefully considered judgments. Both are important. Given the range of Kuyper's activities, the life was extraordinarily complicated, but the clarity of the narrative that follows never flags. Given the lofty range of Kuyper's thought as well as the rare mix of his personal qualities (humble Christian, arrogant steamroller, sensitive theologian, populist stem-winder, wily politician, principled statesman), the demands on an interpreter are extreme, but Bratt's judgments are throughout as convincing as they are empathetic.

There is, in addition, that other question: "Why should we care?" The chance to reflect on the life opened in this book offers much to ponder for those with eyes to see. More than any Protestant of the modern era, Kuyper succeeded at bringing together theology (especially creation and redemption) and life in the world (especially through the practice of sphere sovereignty). But how convincing, a Protestant must inquire, was Kuyper's scriptural basis for his notion of sphere sovereignty? Along with only a few other statesmen of the modern era (perhaps Konrad Adenauer and the almost-Christian Vaclav Havel), Kuyper carried out a political strategy that kept faith with both transcendent spiritual realities and the gritty realities of practical power. But does Kuyper's approach to Christian politics require a nation as small as the Netherlands was in his day (a population just over five million) or as relatively monocultural as the Dutch were back then? Kuyper's vision of thoroughly Christian reflection bravely fathoming Christ's claim on "every square inch" of human life has been one of the key background factors behind the best of modern Christian higher education. But what should observers make of Kuyper's own great project, the Free University of Amsterdam, which secularized quite rapidly a half-century after his passing? And not least, to whom in the contemporary maelstrom of American politics does Kuyper belong? To the Right with his strong advocacy of traditional values and his ardent defense of family rights? Or to the Left with his relatively large role for government and his suspicions of the rich and powerful?

Attentive readers of this landmark biography will come away learning a great deal about a noteworthy individual. They should also be in much better position to reflect on vital questions of Christianity and education, church and state, Christian universalism and Chris-

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tian particularism, and many more that remain of first-order importance still today, nearly a century after Kuyper passed away.

Mark A. Noll

Introduction

Even if he were only a historical curiosity, Abraham Kuyper would still be remarkable. The catalogue of what Kuyper achieved in his homeland of the Netherlands in the period between 1870 and 1920 is astonishing. He authored over twenty thousand newspaper articles, scores of pamphlets, and numerous multivolume treatises. He edited two newspapers, one published weekly and one daily. He co-founded a new university, where he also served as professor. He co-founded a new religious denomination. If all that were not enough, he led a major political party in the Netherlands for four decades — and served as the nation's prime minister for four years.

But perhaps Kuyper's greatest significance for our own religiously and culturally fractured world is the way he proposed for religious believers to bring the full weight of their convictions into public life while fully respecting the rights of others in a pluralistic society under a constitutional government. His was no right-wing crusade: he wanted to align religious conviction behind the progressive, liberating wave of modern development while securing his followers in a conservative commitment to their own tradition. He taught them how to use that tradition to counter their secularizing opponents — but also to promote self-criticism and reconstruction. He asked them to reassess their accommodations to contemporary life and to rethink what justice and freedom meant under the reign of a transcendent God. In short, he was a religious reformer and something of a religious crusader, even as he defied our own stereotypes of what religiously driven public life looks like.

This may be particularly surprising because of where references

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to Kuyper show up in contemporary life, especially in the United States. A much-watered-down understanding of some of his seminal concepts is sometimes heard from the Christian Right in invocations of a “Christian worldview” and the putative Christian foundations of the United States. But Kuyper can and should be invoked in other settings. More moderate evangelicals have found help from Kuyper for reconceiving education, scholarship, and political action. Going further left, analogies to Kuyper’s project are present in the American liberal heritage of Woodrow Wilson and Martin Luther King Jr. More broadly, observers throughout the world might consider the ways Kuyper’s life teaches how devotees of any faith — Islam and Hinduism as well as Christianity, but also any secular “replacement religion” — can carry on a responsible public life in contention, and concert, with people of other convictions.

Fragmentary reports about Kuyper’s life have been published in English before now, and some of them are unusually helpful. But there has never been in English a full-scale, well-rounded account of his entire life. It was a life, as this book tries to show, that repays close attention in order to understand its many triumphs, but also to reveal that this quintessential man of God was also very much a person of ordinary flesh and blood.

A Tradition for Modernity

As the father of Dutch Neo-Calvinism, Kuyper cultivated a small but potent religious strand in a small nation of outsized historical influence. He made something big of that combination by claiming a relevance for religion across the whole spectrum of public life — not “church and state” narrowly defined, but religion and politics, religion and culture, religion and society. For Kuyper, Calvinism was a world religion, indeed a world-formative one, and his titanic energies, deployed across many fields over a very long career, were devoted to fashioning fresh, authentic ways of making religion work in the modern world.

Three adjectives in that last sentence were key to Kuyper’s work. His was first of all a *modern* project. Born (1837) at a low point in Dutch national fortunes, Kuyper began his career in the 1860s as modernization in the Netherlands gained real momentum: rapid, in-

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tegrated transportation and communications systems, urbanization and the rudiments of industrialization, religious disestablishment, mandatory elementary education, increased prestige for the sciences and secular outlooks in higher education, and the rise of elected assemblies over hereditary monarchy in politics. Kuyper's genius was to affirm the salience of traditional faith in this modernizing context by remarkably innovative means. He founded one of the Netherlands' first mass circulation newspapers, its first popular political party, and a distinctively Christian university. He provided the ideas and the political support for an alternative Christian public school system and encouraged the emergence of a Christian labor union, soon the nation's largest. Most controversially, he split the traditional national church, the *Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk*, for the sake of recovering the integrity of doctrine, governance, and life that — in his view — had been compromised by its establishment status.

These were all *fresh* ventures for a new age, articulated against secularist naysayers and religious opponents. The latter came in three types: traditionalists, who pined for the old days and old ways; modernists, who wanted to reduce Christianity to terms dictated by the new order; and moderates, who wished to avoid both of those unpleasant scenarios by making faith a matter of the inner self with little public corporate weight. All of these options — and secularism too, Kuyper argued — violated the *authenticity* of the Christian faith or the equity of the modern public order, or both. Historic Christianity, he repeated, was based on enduring biblical foundations and expressed in definitive creeds or confessions that needed to be retained, reclaimed, and reaffirmed over against secularist denials and modernist dilutions. At the same time, he understood that historic Christianity, like every other product of human culture, was deeply historical — that is, evolving over the course of time and thus to some extent relative to particular stages along the way. Kuyper recognized, in other words, that the Calvinist or Reformed tradition in Christianity *was* a tradition. Over against literalists and in parallel with modernist critics, he said that it needed to be upgraded according to the needs of the age. Let us “go back to the living root” of the tradition, he said, “to clean and to water it, and so to cause it to bud and to blossom once more, now fully in accordance with our actual life in these modern times, and with the demands of the times to come.” Just where “accordance” became “conformity,” or what in a given situation was the perennial “principle” and

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what a relative “expression” thereof, could become issues of pointed dispute. Many of his epic battles in a life full of conflict were devoted to settling that question; some of Kuyper’s key conceptual breakthroughs occurred as he worked his way through the process of finding an answer.

Just as controversial was Kuyper’s insistence that religious activism be authentic to the modern — that is, pluralistic — socio-political order. For him pluralism came in two forms. The first was ontological. Human society in his view was comprised of autonomous “spheres,” and a society’s health could be measured by the relative independence with which those spheres operated according to their God-given principle of development. His own crusades under this rubric were to purify the church from the residue of state control and to free higher education from the control of both church and state. The other pluralism was religious, and it stemmed from God’s work of redemption just as ontological pluralism came from creation. People in modern Europe, as in various traditional Asian societies, lived in a common polity but out of different fundamental convictions — historically called religions but also understandable as first principles, core values, or ultimate loyalties. The modern distinctive in such situations was to prevent any one of these “world and life views” from gaining official preference or privilege. This lack of preference was a good thing, Kuyper said; in fact, it was the authentic Calvinist thing. The latter assertion embroiled him in polemics with secularists, while the former outraged some Dutch traditionalists who yearned for the days of Reformed establishment.

Kuyper’s most creative move was to unmask the emerging modern regime of putative religious “neutrality” as in fact a scheme of secularist hegemony and to devise a system whereby those loyal to each of the Netherlands’ salient belief-blocs — Reformed or Anabaptist, Roman Catholic or Jewish, liberal Protestant or labor-socialist — could assert their claims in public affairs without apology, but also without aiming to take over the whole and subordinate the rest. After all, Kuyper thought, the two types of pluralism were made for each other: a society of vigorous autonomous development would thrive best in a polity of maximal religious assertion under rules of mutual regard.

In short, Kuyper taught that in a modern society religious pluralism had to be respected, but the individualization and privatization of faith had to be avoided. Each confessional community (including sec-

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ularists) must be granted its legitimate proportion of access to and participation in all sectors of public life, especially political representation, educational funding, and media access. Let a dozen flowers bloom, Kuyper said on his happy days; let their relative beauty compete for attention, and let the Lord at the last day take care of the tares sown among the wheat. This is a different way of adjudicating the church-state issue from those we more often hear about today. It is a model of no little relevance to nations around the globe that are engaged with similar tensions: from Ghana and Nigeria to Turkey and Israel, India and Pakistan, Indonesia and Korea, and perhaps most portentously, China.

Principle and Paradox

Kuyper was a rare combination of first-rate intellectual and first-rate organizer. The ideas he espoused made up a powerful abstract theory; the institutions he created made them something more than just theory. This combination injected a pragmatic note into any given statement of his ideas. With some justice, Kuyper could insist that he was a consistent and systematic thinker, proceeding from fixed principles to their logical conclusions. His architectonic approach excelled at disclosing hidden connections linking disparate domains, even as it aspired to capture the divine coherence in all things. It was an approach that could challenge the conventional wisdom, especially the socio-political applications that people might draw from theological dogma. Not least it gave him and his followers confidence in holding to their positions against protests that they were defying common sense.

At the same time Kuyper was instinctive and creative; his logical deduction from principle could be remarkably adaptive — “convenient,” his critics said. Any innovator is susceptible to inconsistency, especially an innovator who claims to be steering by tradition and orthodoxy, and most especially one who is trying to be a popular leader besides. Where paradox gives over to self-contradiction or outright duplicity is each observer’s right to judge. Kuyper in his lifetime was often accused of both. In my opinion he was neither entirely consistent nor abjectly pragmatic; instead, he operated in a third mode, moving through a force-field suspended between opposite poles, the very opposition making for creative tension.

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Paradox characterized him nonetheless, in substance as well as style. Thus the generous Kuyper who could espouse a beauty contest among a dozen ideological flowers in the garden of public life was more often the movement builder mobilizing his forces in tones of alarm: the tares of error and unbelief were threatening to take over all of God's Dutch acres, and the Calvinist faithful were a righteous remnant called to win back as much as they could. Other of his seeming paradoxes lie in our preconceptions, however, and call them to account. For instance, present-day right-wingers who cheer Kuyper's aspersions against the encroaching state will be nonplussed to read on the next page his warnings about the inequities of free markets. It is the same for his insistence on both social justice and small government. In the intellectual sphere, Kuyper would have been fully — and instantly — conversant with recent postmodernist controversies; he articulated his own intermediate position in that debate at the dawn of high modernism over a hundred years ago. He believed that a — *the* — real world did exist, created and upheld by God's providence; but he also held that people's cognitive grids (owing in part to their relative social power) so sorted and shaped their perceptions that human beings are, in a real and proper sense, framers of their own worlds. Here the seeming paradoxes piled up. Christians were no exception to the rule of human framing, he taught, yet Christian truth was final and the only firm ground for human morality, even though that truth was still developing and even though other believers often outdid Christians in ethical as in cultural achievement.

Further, Kuyper taught that Europeans and their North American kin stood at the apex of world civilization. Accordingly, he felt that the West's global empires (the peak of Kuyper's career, 1885-1905, coincided with theirs) were natural; yet he also pictured them as besmirched by depredations and injustice that cried to heaven — and that would be heard. Again, the traditionalist Dutch Calvinist Kuyper deplored the theory of popular sovereignty as a denial of God's authority; yet he was also an enthusiastic supporter of democracy — indeed, fashioned an early, and the principal Protestant, entry in the Christian Democratic movement that spread across Europe in the next generation. Without any political training, he rose to become prime minister of the Netherlands. Educated in theology, he formulated a political theory on the basis of independent reading and then compiled a practical agenda that spoke to every issue of the day. He

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called his followers to rise above the secular left-right political spectrum of the day and build an independent platform on consistently Christian premises — an appeal that might serve as an example for Christians, or people of any faith, amid the deadlocks of our own day.

The most striking tension in his thought probably lay between the twin themes of liberation and order. This, being an inherent trait in Calvinism, can be ascribed to the tradition to which Kuyper was a loyal devotee, but as the pages below will detail, it lay deep in Kuyper's personality as well. It was also a leading issue of his times. Marxism, modern conservatism, and the pioneering works of sociology as a discipline all arose alongside of Kuyper, and over the same question: how was society to cohere and freedom survive under the conditions of modernity? The question has never gone away, more recently under the conditions of decolonization, globalization, and postmodernity. In that light it is revealing to think about Kuyper as a type of liberation theologian, galvanizing faithful followers of the Lord to throw off the belittling consciousness imposed by their oppressors and build a new order with justice for all. Yet an *order* this would be: Calvinism, Kuyper's personality, and the social location of his following guaranteed that. Calvinist freedom is freedom to do the right thing, and in a pinch it can translate into the duty to obey. Kuyper's God was first of all a sovereign, a lawgiver; hence his social theory, political program, and theology all opened by trying to identify, understand, and fix due authority.

Much of Kuyper's legacy has divided along these two lines. His "conservative" heirs have amplified the themes of order, ontological fixedness, suspicions of secularism, and aspersions toward the Left. His "progressive" progeny have followed his call for fresh thinking, epistemological openness, social justice, and aspersions toward the rich. Which of these is the "real" Kuyper? Both, and more in between. This very diversity testifies to perhaps Kuyper's greatest value. He asked a set of astute questions, and he creatively parlayed answers both theoretical and practical to the most pressing issues of the day.

A Comprehensive Calvinist

Progressive and conservative, principled and adaptive, modern and traditional: Kuyper would recognize all these terms in himself but

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would rate them all below his first allegiance, to Calvinism — better, to apostolic Christianity, of which Calvinism was the purest distillation. (Kuyper was never modest on that line, but then neither were the champions of every other Christian tradition, especially in his era.) Even better yet: to the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, revealed ultimately in Jesus Christ as recorded in Scripture and evident throughout creation. Kuyper's self-description as Calvinist is insufficient, however, since the several strains of that faith tradition have often mounted titanic quarrels among themselves as to which holds true title to the heritage. So which sort of Calvinist was Kuyper?

In terms of British and American history, Kuyper stood consciously and proudly in the extroverted, Puritan, New-School tradition of political activism and cultural engagement. He is most interesting, however, because he did not trim or deny the hard predestinarian dogma of Calvinism, as this side of the heritage tended to do in the nineteenth century. Instead, he amplified it. It was precisely the doctrine of election, he insisted, that both mandated and empowered Christians' public engagement, and that warranted democracy as the political order of modern life. Kuyper tended the boundaries of Reformed orthodoxy with as much passion as did the other, more introverted strain of Calvinism characteristic of various Old-School Presbyterian and pietist circles. He was just as devoted as they to a pure church, closely regulated sacraments, and by-the-book governance. The problem with this more introverted kind of Calvinism, he said, was that it sold God short. Public engagement, too, was part of Calvinist orthodoxy, a direct consequence of that heartiest of Calvinist perennials, the sovereignty of God. To quote his most famous saying: "There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over *all*, does not cry, '*Mine!*'" Thus, in terms of the great quarrel in nineteenth-century American Calvinism, Kuyper combined the organization skill of Lyman Beecher, the platform presence of Charles Finney, and the public activism of both with the theological convictions — and no less the theological acumen — of Charles Hodge.

Yet if Calvinism opens up the question of public life, it no less leads into the inner heart, where one wrestles with the most intense of personal questions. Kuyper stood at the front of that line too. He passed through tumults of conversion as keen as Beecher or Finney — or Edwards, Whitefield, and Spurgeon — might have wished. His

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most characteristic literary production, in a career marked by fifty years of daily journalism and over 200 books and pamphlets, was the Sunday devotional meditation. Here the individual believer encountered a God she could not help but disappoint but who still held her up, called her on, and gave her ample cause for joy and thanksgiving. Kuyper worked this old vein with rare discernment, but also drew heavily on Romantic ideals absorbed from his voluminous reading as an undergraduate literature major. He experienced Romanticism's titanic struggles of heart, understood them in the categories of Reformed practical theology, and refracted the whole in a compelling way to ordinary readers. That was his margin of excellence as a pastoral counselor. His distinctive contribution as a public theologian was to call Christians to attend to the structural, institutional, and philosophical dimensions of their witness, both for the health of the faith and the fulfillment of their public duty. Kuyper's excellence in both lines of work at once was, and remains, exceedingly rare.

Kuyper as a Subject

This book is a biography. It does not aim to systematically treat any one piece of Kuyper's thought or action, as many valuable studies have done. Such systematizations are reflections after the fact, after the whole life is finished and all the utterances compiled. A biography instead watches as the various pieces of the whole emerge, as now one and now another waxes, then wanes, only to come out again at a later date, perhaps reshaped and relocated. Good biography is contextual, and I will provide as much context as I feasibly can. After all, Kuyper was not the virgin recipient of pure principle revealed above the contingencies of time; no one is. I will explore the parallels between Kuyper's work and comparable projects on the contemporary scene, between Kuyper's experiences and those of notable contemporaries such as William James and Friedrich Nietzsche, between the ambience in which he worked and those in other nations at the time. This is not to explain Kuyper's project away by ascribing it to forces of the age, but rather to determine just where he was distinctive, how he combined his era and his insights into a creative new whole.

"Nations" above is intentionally plural. The treasure of Dutch scholarship upon which I have drawn, and here most gratefully ac-

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knowledge, tends to stay within that country's perimeters, its complex institutions, its rich and variegated past. As an outsider I have taken the opportunity, and risk, of drawing some international comparisons and of (silently) drawing on more theoretical literature than Dutch historians are wont to do. I hope as a consequence to have enriched a Dutch audience's self-understanding and to have translated some of their fascinating history, and this one fascinating man, into terms that an international audience can more readily appreciate.

A biography also invites the reader (as it demands of the author) to come to terms with the *person* at the center of the story. Readers are free to draw their own conclusions about Kuyper as they move along through this volume; I only hope to have supplied ample, nuanced evidence to make theirs a balanced judgment. Here is mine: Abraham Kuyper was a great man but not a nice one. He was immensely talented, energetic, and driven to great exploits. He appeared always confident, partly to quiet his own insecurities. He was an ambitious person who sought power, and often felt uneasy over that quest. He could be congenial and polemical, sometimes to the same person in fairly quick succession. He loved radical options and was typically more generous to opponents than to spiritual kin who differed with him on details. He loved having collaborators and disciples but drove them away when they stepped up as equals. In public he often showed a better understanding of God than of himself. He majored in ideas — Big Ideas above all — with some impatience over the intricacies of mid-range policy or scholarly discourse as it evolved in its own deliberate way.

This description, however, applies to any number of people who have ascended to power over time, and especially to such in Kuyper's age of an emerging mass society, where the stakes seemed so high, the alternatives so starkly opposed, the guidance of the past so attenuated. The late nineteenth century was filled with not-so-nice men — and some women — who were building ideologies and organizations to sustain society, protect their followers, and save the world. "Nice" has long since become a cliché, like "interesting." It is an easy choice. Most British and American evangelicals, for example, would much rather spend time in a fishing boat with Benjamin Franklin than with his contemporary Jonathan Edwards, however contradictory that preference might be to their own theology. By this measure Kuyper belongs with Edwards — in his own time, with William Ewart Gladstone,

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William Jennings Bryan, and Eugene Victor Debs, for all of whom truth and justice were objects of an urgent, unyielding quest.

I will thus paint Kuyper warts and all — both the real ones and the ones that might seem like blemishes only to us. As a real Calvinist he would understand such a portrait, even though he might not like it. My critical observations are not meant to disparage his motives, his goals, or his achievements; indeed, these are remarkable enough to survive any record of his personal foibles. Just as Kuyper would own that he was in part a child of his times, formed by the providential circumstances in which God placed him, so he would, ultimately, appreciate the citation I make, as a fellow Calvinist, from the apostle Paul, that the treasure of the gospel comes to us in earthen vessels to show that its transcendent power belongs to God (2 Cor. 4:7).

Technical Notes and Acknowledgements

This book is intended primarily for native English readers but, unlike most Kuyper studies rendered in that language, draws off voluminous Dutch sources, primary and secondary. For ease of reading I decided to keep original Dutch terms and quotations to a minimum in the text. The Netherlands' States-General I often refer to as (the Dutch) Parliament, composed of an Upper and a Lower House or Chamber, rather than the Eerste and Tweede Kamer. Kuyper's Vrije Universiteit is rendered as the Free University; the Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk as the national or Dutch Reformed Church. All translations from Dutch sources are my own, and all italics in quotations are in the original, unless otherwise indicated. Readers knowledgeable of Kuyper will note that I cite his 1898 Stone Lectures at Princeton minimally. I do so because these *Lectures on Calvinism* are readily available to English readers and might be the only Kuyper text they have read, because the *Lectures* are digests of themes he treated at greater length and with greater nuance in other places, and because the *Lectures* themselves have been treated in detail in Peter Heslam's *Creating a Christian Worldview: Abraham Kuyper's Lectures on Calvinism*.

This project has taken many years to complete, and I have accumulated many obligations along the way. I was awarded a Fulbright research grant in 1985 for what I thought would be a short, stand-alone project involving Kuyper. I received another, as Roosevelt-Dow Distinguished Research Chair at the Roosevelt Study Center in Middelburg, to close off the research process on this book in 2010. I am grateful to the Council for the International Exchange of Scholars and the Netherlands America Commission for Educational Exchange for their sup-

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port in this regard; likewise to Dow Benelux, the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences, and the Fulbright Scholar Program. Special thanks to Hans Krabbendam, Giles Scott-Smith, Kees van Minnen, and Leontien Joosse at the RSC for the encouragement and hospitality that made my time there as pleasant as it was productive.

Dick Kuiper of the Free University of Amsterdam was my academic host for that first Fulbright. Not only did he perform ably in that role, he provided exceptional hospitality for my family in our residence abroad and has ever since remained a faithful and discerning reader of my Kuyper work. As a resource for information and interpretation on Kuyper, his legacy, and the dynamics that surrounded him, Dick has proven an invaluable aid to whatever merit this book may have. Likewise, I have gleaned much benefit from the knowledge, wisdom, and friendship extended to me by Kees and Margriet van der Kooi, Jasper Vree, and George Harinck together with the excellent staff at the Historisch Documentatiecentrum at the Free University of Amsterdam. Professors van der Kooi, Harinck, and Vree all read significant portions of the manuscript with helpful comments and critique. If I have not adopted all of their suggestions, I was certainly stimulated by them to try to formulate my own conclusions with better warrant and clarity. The Rev. Tjitze Kuipers provided bibliographical help in the process of compiling his definitive record of Kuyper's writings, and along the way extended me personal kindnesses as well — not least my first tour of Flevoland. Very early in my research Kuyper-master George Puchinger offered some sage advice: "First you'll love the man, then you'll detest him, finally you'll understand him. Then you're ready to write." Truth, perhaps, for all biographers; I hope I have attained the third stage, encouraged by his counsel.

Over the course of this project I also received very generous aid from my home institution of Calvin College: two sabbatical leaves, a Calvin Research Fellowship, two stipends from the Calvin Alumni Association, as well as the grant from the Calvin Center for Christian Scholarship that supported the production of my earlier Kuyper book, *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader*. More than that, Calvin has provided the environment of splendid colleagues dedicated to the better part of Kuyper's project, reappropriating the Christian tradition for fresh ventures into an unknown future. It is a rare privilege to have the concerns of one's scholarly work enacted in their own way by so many able people on an everyday basis.

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My Calvin colleague and treasured friend Bill Romanowski read the entire manuscript with the best writing advice this historian has ever received: think like a screenwriter. The reader will readily detect which chapters profited most from that counsel. George Marsden also read all the pages that follow, right off his own experience of writing a biography of Jonathan Edwards that deserved all the prizes it won. I have tried to follow many of his suggestions, and where I have not it is because Kuyper was not Edwards and so deserves some sterner measures. More importantly, as one of my first teachers and prime mentors in the field George endowed me with confidence that I could find my way as a historian. That that way was indeed shaped by him, and likewise by his partner in this endeavor, Ronald Wells, has been one of the great good fortunes of my life, and so it is a pleasure to dedicate this book to them as a token of my gratitude and of their legacy.

Brief Time-Line

1837 born October 29 in the manse at Maassluis (South Holland). Father is an ecumenical conservative in the national Reformed church. Family moves to Middelburg (capital of Zeeland), later to Leiden for young Bram's educational advantage.

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- 1858 finishes undergraduate studies
- 1860 wins medal in national scholarship competition
- 1861 suffers first nervous breakdown
- 1862 completes doctorate at Leiden, experiences earnest evangelical conversion.
- 1863 marries Johanna Schaay; installed as pastor in rural parish of Beesd (province of Gelderland, near Utrecht). Moves toward strict Calvinist orthodoxy. Publishes his first pamphlet, mixing theological and political concerns and aimed against reigning liberalism and stolid bureaucracy in church affairs.
- 1867 vaults to pulpit in Utrecht, capital of national “God & Country” conservatism. Soon alienates other leaders there by advocating a religiously pluralistic public school system.
- 1870 takes pulpit in Amsterdam. A radical conservative (or conservative radical), popular with orthodox working-class audience, and a skilled agitator in local ecclesiastical councils.
- 1872 assumes editorship of *De Standaard*, a daily newspaper (with its Sunday supplement, *De Heraut*) that would be his perennial pulpit and power base. By this means he shapes an audience and a cause, both of which would ever be identified with him as a person.
- 1874 resigns active ministry to take seat in Parliament; remains in the city-wide consistory of Amsterdam.
- Through 1875 scandalizes Parliament with his rhetorical vehemence; attends Robert Pearsall Smith’s Holiness meetings in Brighton, England; proselytizes for same in the Netherlands.
- 1876-77 suffers second breakdown; long recuperation in Italy, Switzerland, and south of France; resigns parliamentary seat.
- 1877-80 reaffirms strict Calvinist (as opposed to evangelical-holiness) orthodoxy and crystallizes the three national networks that lastingly define the Neo-Calvinist movement: the Antirevolutionary Party (ARP), the Christian school association, and the Free University (VU) society.
- 1880 opens the VU with his famous “Sphere Sovereignty” address; professor there through 1901.
- 1883-86 agitates church reform question on the basis of confessional orthodoxy and anti-bureaucratic polity. This campaign culminates in the Doleantie: the splitting off of 10% of Hervormde Kerk membership. In 1892 these congregations

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- merge with most of the churches descended from the Secession of 1834; together they form the Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland (GKN).
- 1891 with educational and church questions settled and the ARP a force to be reckoned with, he revives his earlier concern with the “social question.” Gives famous address on “Christianity & the Social Question,” with democratic-radical tones. Encourages Patrimonium, a Christian labor union.
- 1893-95 split in the ARP over his socio-political radicalism. Conservatives form the Christian-Historical Union (CHU); Kuyper consolidates control over ARP. Suffers his third breakdown.
- 1893-99 his high tide as a scholar, symbolized by honorary degree from and Stone Lectures at Princeton on trip to USA (in 1898). Begins writing *Common Grace*, stressing ongoing divine sustenance of creation and social order, legitimating Christian participation with people of other convictions in public life.
- 1901-5 prime minister of the Netherlands.
- 1905-6 electoral defeat propels him on an extended trip around Mediterranean. Keen observations of the European periphery in *Om de Oude Wereldzee*.
- 1907-15 intra-party maneuvering leaves him frustrated. Writes *Pro Rege*, with renewed emphasis upon Christian cultural (as opposed to political) mission in conditions of advanced modernity.
- 1911-20 the much honored chief on the sidelines. Continues party chair and editorial functions; member of (semi-honoric) upper house of Parliament; harsh polemics vs. his successors in ARP. Takes German side in World War I; writes of the second coming of Christ and the hollow core of Western civilization; calls ARP to renewed commitment to the social question.
- Dies, 8 November 1920