

The main point of the book is to present how Calvin defined a thoughtful approach to public life that was rooted in his understanding of the gospel and its teaching concerning the kingdom of God, and how that view is relevant for a Christian attitude toward politics and public life today. Convincingly, Tuininga states that Calvin was committed to keeping the church distinct from the state and that here Calvin also presents a middle road between theocracy and sectarianism. Calvin was of the opinion that civil law cannot establish spiritual righteousness but that governments still are bound by the law of God and have a calling to promote and defend true religion. This position, according to Tuininga, comes from Calvin's two-kingdoms theology. Interestingly, the author states that Calvin's position on the state's care for religion came more from his view on natural law than from his exegesis of Scripture. It might be asked whether these are really two different sources. That is, doesn't the Bible also contain much of natural law?

Tuininga is well aware that we read Calvin from our context and through the lenses of the history after Calvin and before us, which is why he does not focus on Calvin's political actions and opinions but on his political theology. This is why this book is so relevant. Tuininga moves beyond a historical approach and presents Calvin's theological ideas as useful even long after Calvin.

Tuininga has written a highly interesting and rich book that serves not only the academic world, and the field of Calvin research in particular, but also the present-day concern about what political attitude Christians can and even should have in a changing Western world. Thus, in his conclusion, Tuininga shares with the reader his conviction that "Calvin's two kingdoms theology offers us good reason to embrace political liberalism and helpful guidance for what our participation in its practices and institutions might look like." After all that Tuininga has quoted from Calvin this conviction comes as no surprise, but it is also well grounded.

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## Contours of the Kuyperian Tradition: A Systematic Introduction

**Craig G. Bartholomew**

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As his title indicates, Craig Bartholomew sets out to "introduce readers in some depth to the contours of the Kuyperian tradition and their contemporary relevance." "Kuyperian" refers to the thought and legacy of Abraham Kuyper (1837–1920), the larger-than-life Dutch Reformed theologian, journalist, and politician. Bartholomew aims to "flesh out the great landmarks of his thought and that of his immediate colleagues" (ix), and he is quite successful in this task. His work is a well-written, wide-ranging, and engaging study that should prove to be a fine introduction to this school of thought for the uninitiated, and will also provide important material for reflection among those already familiar with it.

Bartholomew writes the book as an insider to the “Kuyperian tradition.” He describes himself as “wildly passionate” about Kuyper’s thought and wants to “retrieve” it for today (ix). Nevertheless, he helpfully acknowledges various dangers and weaknesses that have beset the tradition; he mentions, for example, its temptations to be too Dutch, to neglect the church in its quest to promote a public vision, to fall into triumphalism, and to accommodate to its surrounding culture while professing to transform it—and he laments how some advocates used it to support apartheid. Bartholomew also discusses a number of internal debates among prominent proponents of the tradition, such as the rather different Dooyeweerdian and “Reformed epistemology” schools of Kuyperian-inspired philosophy. Thus, although Bartholomew writes as an apologist for the tradition, he wants it to remain open to criticism, development, and chastening.

The book begins with a helpful and interesting introduction to Kuyper’s life and thought, with special focus on his conversion. The second chapter turns to issues of nature and grace, and contains the book’s most extended interaction with non-Kuyperian traditions, particularly Anabaptist, Lutheran, and Thomist. Subsequent chapters turn respectively to Scripture, worldview, sphere sovereignty, the church, politics, mission, philosophy, theology, education, and spiritual formation.

I think it is fair to say that the prime attraction of the Kuyperian tradition for Bartholomew, and the concern that gets most attention in the book, is the tradition’s comprehensive interest in all areas of life. He unpacks this in large degree through several interlocking themes that wind their way through the book. Worldview is the most important of these. On a number of occasions, Bartholomew states that, for the Kuyperian tradition, Christianity *is* a worldview. Although the idea of worldview had an “inauspicious beginning” in Kantian thought (103), Kuyper put it to good use and it remains “a rich and useful word for articulating the comprehensive, unified vision embodied in the kingdom of God” (124). As a worldview, “Calvinism” developed “a form for political and social life” and “a distinctive approach to art and science” (106). Theology itself is apparently subservient to worldview (288).

Closely connected to worldview, for Bartholomew, is the Kuyperian tradition’s view of the kingdom of God. The kingdom is “utterly comprehensive in its outlook” (31) and concerns the recovery of God’s purposes for his whole creation. A third theme, inseparable from the first two, concerns the rather trendy term *missional*. Although Bartholomew insists that evangelism and the activities of the church are indispensable, he often emphasizes that mission cannot be reduced to these. Instead, mission is “serious Christian engagement with life and culture” (129) that gives “expression to his [God’s] kingship in all areas of life” (186). Finally, the dark side to these three ideas is dualism. Bartholomew often portrays the Kuyperian tradition as staunchly opposed to dualist temptations, such as “secular/sacred dichotomies” (33) or seeing Christianity as relevant only to “spiritual” matters such as church and mission and making everything else “unholy” (38).

Bartholomew ultimately invites us to ponder whether the Kuyperian tradition’s vision is a faithful—perhaps even the most faithful—account of biblical Christianity. A short review can hardly contribute much to that question, but I raise one large-scale issue for

consideration. For those, like this reviewer, who identify with the classical Reformed tradition that developed for several centuries before Kuyper and who live somewhere on the outskirts of the Kuyperian world rather than downtown, it can be striking how different the Kuyperian tradition is from the classical Reformed tradition in many respects. Bartholomew occasionally refers to a larger Reformed tradition, to which he obviously believes Kuyperianism belongs, but he offers little concrete reflection on how innovative (or not) Kuyper and other “neo-Calvinists” have been.

I mention in passing several issues for which important differences exist between the Kuyperian tradition (at least as Bartholomew interprets it) and classical Reformed Christianity. For the former, it is of utmost importance that Christianity is a worldview; for the latter, Christianity is a faith, a confession, and a piety, but certainly not a worldview (an idea not invented until the late eighteenth century). For the former, the kingdom of God is all of life now; for the latter, Christ’s kingdom is the new creation, anticipated now in the church. The former zealously professes antidualism; the latter has ordinarily adopted a version of the two-kingdoms doctrine. The former seeks a holistic Christian philosophy; the latter has been philosophically eclectic. The former has been stridently anti-“scholastic” (a habit Bartholomew tries to temper); the latter has used the scholastic method to explain and defend its beliefs. The former has been very critical of Thomas Aquinas’s alleged nature-grace synthesis (while synthesizing Scripture with the Kantian idea of worldview rather than with Aristotle); the latter has produced many thinkers who critically utilize Thomas’s work. The former has come to understand the biblical story in terms similar to N. T. Wright’s biblical theology; the latter understands it in terms of a classical covenant theology (exemplified, for example, in a seventeenth-century Dutchman, Herman Witsius). And I also observe that issues such as atonement and justification, or the proper mode of worship and Lord’s Day observance—perennial concerns of classical Reformed Christianity—receive little or no attention in Bartholomew’s account of the Kuyperian tradition.

It is interesting that a number of “Kuyperians” have deemed Kuyper himself too dualistic in aspects of his thought and have labeled both Kuyper and his eminent contemporary Herman Bavinck “scholastic”; Bartholomew discusses these points briefly. In my judgment, the Kuyperians who say this have a good point. Kuyper and Bavinck themselves, in many important ways, belonged to the classical Reformed tradition that seems “dualistic” and “scholastic” to many claiming Kuyper’s mantle. This raises my honest question whether it is better to understand Kuyper and Bavinck as belonging to an older tradition that they re-energized or as progenitors of a new tradition. Another way to ask it is whether classical Reformed Christianity and post-Kuyper Kuyperianism are really parts of the same tradition. If so, how will the tensions between them be resolved? If not, to which do Kuyper and Bavinck really belong? These are some of the questions that, to my mind, hang over this winsome account of the Kuyperian tradition.

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