

# Abraham Kuyper and the Social Order

## Principles for Christian Liberalism

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Abraham Kuyper was a staunch critic of the secularist liberalism that he identified as the legacy of the French Revolution, but in its place, he advocated a political theology that is best described as a form of Christian liberalism. Believing the world was in danger of fracturing under the diffusive and secularizing pressure of modernity, he attempted to articulate a vigorous, socially aware, gospel-centered Christian vision of political engagement. At the center of this attempt were his writings on charity and justice.

### Introduction

Abraham Kuyper believed that the salvation proclaimed in the gospel of Jesus Christ extends to every part of creation. The good news is not simply that the souls of individual Christians will be saved for an eternity in heaven. Nor is it merely that the church will be ransomed out of the world for a fresh start in the future kingdom of God. Rather, Jesus came to bring salvation to the material creation, including the social life of embodied human beings. And while that salvation will not be complete until the age to come, it nevertheless begins during the present age. As a result, a programmatic dimension of faithful Christian witness is the collective Christian commitment to promoting love and justice in every sphere of human life—from economics to politics, from journalism to the household, from the most turbulent of social questions to the basic motivations of human life. Kuyper believed Christians were dangerously neglecting this witness in his day, even as the secularism, materialism, and individualism of the

French Revolution were tearing modern society apart. The gospel demanded a vigorous, socially aware, gospel-centered Christian response.

Though he clearly did not get everything right, the prescience of Kuyper's analysis of the crisis of modernity at the dawn of the twentieth century is impressive. Even his practical proposals, logically designed for his late nineteenth-century Dutch context, remain surprisingly relevant to the contexts of twenty-first-century Christians across the globe. Kuyper's evaluation of liberalism and conservatism, democracy and socialism, materialism and individualism, capitalism and secularism, pluralism and consumerism remain so apt for our times that it is sometimes easy to forget that Kuyper wrote these words more than a hundred years ago.

For all the differences between our time and Kuyper's, I believe Christians today face largely the same daunting task as did Kuyper: to articulate a vigorous, socially aware, gospel-centered Christian vision for a world that is in danger of fracturing under the diffusive and secularizing pressures of modernity. Here I offer my assessment of how Kuyper's writings on charity and justice might help us do this.

## The Gospel Politics of Charity and Justice

Abraham Kuyper was not impressed with the Dutch Reformed church's social teaching. In a series of articles eventually published as *Christ and the Needy* in 1895, he complained that "for so many years the preaching in our churches has neglected to proclaim Jesus' direct teaching about social relationships."<sup>1</sup> Kuyper noted the irony that while Christians found all kinds of reasons to assume that Jesus' social teaching had no contemporary relevance, it was often nonbelieving socialists who took Jesus' teaching most seriously. The chief problem was that too many pastors and teachers spiritualized scripture. Where gospels speak of Jesus' poverty and humble identification with the poor, these leaders "used it to exhort to heavenly mindedness."<sup>2</sup> Jesus proclaimed blessings on the poor and woes on the rich, but "one can hardly approve of the constant *spiritualization* of all these statements in today's preaching such that every connection with life is eliminated from them by ignoring the social meaning implicit in them.... Once one imagines that all such statements by Jesus apply only to the condition of the soul, one breaks the connection between *soul* and *body*, between our inner and outer life situation—a connection to which both Scripture and Jesus hold fast."<sup>3</sup> Such spiritualizing tendencies reflected the "spiritual poverty"<sup>4</sup> of a church that failed to grasp the depth of sin and evil and therefore failed to preach the "full Christ" and the *whole* gospel.<sup>5</sup> The result was a Christian society in which

few Christians could be said to be followers of Christ “in *social respects*,” and in which “prevailing conditions and personal relationships . . . *blaspheme* the person and word of our blessed Savior.” Kuyper had harsh words for pastors guilty of such spiritualization: “Woe unto you if you take just half the gospel of our Savior and admonish submission, while concealing the divine mercy of the Christ of God for the socially oppressed and for those who must bear a cross.”<sup>6</sup>

Kuyper’s antidote was to remind his readers of the comprehensive nature of the gospel. Jesus brought “deliverance from the social needs of his time,” first and foremost by breaking the power of the sin that lay at the root of so much poverty.<sup>7</sup> He not only secured justification through the forgiveness of sins; he called his followers to conform to the justice of God from which such justification could not be separated. He therefore condemned the “service of Mamon” and the idolatry of capital.<sup>8</sup> He consistently chose the side of the poor, the “have-nots,” wherever “poor and rich were at odds.”<sup>9</sup> Understanding this, the Protestant reformers, “precisely by emphasizing *justification*, reinforced justice among the people, deepened their sense of justice, and promoted justice throughout the land.”<sup>10</sup>

But—and this point was crucial for Kuyper—Jesus did not stop with such spiritual deliverance, moral exhortation, and personal example. “He also organized.”<sup>11</sup> He established the church as a social body centered on the ministry of the word, a ministry that encompassed his social teaching. Even more poignantly, he established “an organized *ministry of benevolence* which in the name of the Lord, who is the single owner of all goods, demands the community of goods in the sense that it will not be tolerated in the circle of believers that a man or a woman should go hungry or lack clothing.” Finally, he established the church on the principle of “equality.” “He abolished all artificial divisions between men by joining rich and poor in one holy food at the Lord’s Supper.”<sup>12</sup>

The social principles of the gospel were taught by Jesus and embedded in the institutional structure of the church in order that they might gradually infuse the broader social order. And over time the gospel did indeed have a real, if imperfect, impact. Slavery was ended, the poor were cared for, and the moral principle of fundamental human equality was established. Indeed, “if the church had not strayed from her simplicity and heavenly ideal, the influence of the Christian religion on political institutions and societal relationships would eventually have become dominant.”<sup>13</sup>

The diaconate was a particularly important expression of the church’s social identity in Christ. Kuyper observed that Calvinism was unique among the major branches of Protestantism in its reinstating of the ecclesiastical office of poor relief.<sup>14</sup> He claimed that the original diaconate operated according to

two important principles. First, it served the nonbelieving and believing poor alike, just as God shows mercy to both the just and the unjust. Second, it was intended “exclusively for the needy,” not for “the aged, the widows and orphans among our working classes.”<sup>15</sup> In other words, it was not intended to replace ordinary means of care and support. Rather, it was designed for emergencies, for those poor and destitute who slipped through the ordinary network of care. Kuyper believed the social crisis of his own day had overwhelmed the resources of the diaconate and of families. Because the system had broken down, it was necessary for the state to intervene. But the eclipse of the diaconate could not be tolerated, because it was an expression of a fundamental Christian principle: the “diaconate is the expression of the morally elevating thought that help and care for the needy do not come from man but from God.... He receives his alms from the same God from whom the rich man receives his wealth.”<sup>16</sup>

Kuyper argued that because care for the poor is rooted in the gospel it must be conducted according to the gospel principles of love and justice. The poor do not merely have civil or political rights to relief, he maintained, nor should their needs be relieved merely to satisfy the economic purposes of the state. Rather, the poor are brothers and sisters made in the image of God, members of the social body whose well-being is an essential requirement of the health of that body. The people of any given country make up “a *community* willed by God, a living human *organism* ... standing under the law of life that we are all members of one another, so that the eye cannot do without the foot or the foot without the eye.”<sup>17</sup> As he puts it in *The Social Question and the Christian Religion*, “The really decisive question in all this is simply whether you recognize in the less fortunate, indeed in the poorest of the poor, not just a *persona miserabilis*, a wretched creature, but someone of your own flesh and blood and, for Christ’s sake, your *brother*.”<sup>18</sup>

The sort of love Kuyper had in mind therefore implied social solidarity as an expression of basic Christian equality.<sup>19</sup> Following leading theologians of the Christian tradition such as Ambrose, Aquinas, and Calvin, Kuyper emphasized that a certain “para-equality” with respect to the “ordinary requirements of life,” matters such as shelter, bed, food, and clothing, is a demand of justice and right. “This is the right that the poor have, for Christ’s sake, with respect to those possessing more. Those who possess more but fall short in this matter are not only unmerciful but commit an injustice, and for that injustice they will suffer the punishment of eternal judgment in eternal pain.”<sup>20</sup> Lest his readers imagine that he was exaggerating, Kuyper was ready with a stern appeal to Matthew 25, where Jesus declared that in the final judgment he would separate the sheep from the goats on precisely this basis. The lesson to Kuyper was as

clear as it was sobering: “these *basic* ideas of Jesus about social relationships are at the same time the *main* ideas in his teaching about the kingdom.”<sup>21</sup> No one could read the Bible seriously and claim that “social relationships were a side issue for Jesus. In the Gospels the issue comes up again and again. It is explained both theoretically and practically in every possible manner. It forms one of the *salient* points in the whole of Jesus’ preaching. Anyone who denies or disputes this is lacking in respect for the Word of the Lord. Anyone who bows before this Word must stand on our side in this matter.”<sup>22</sup>

### The Godless Politics of Revolution and Materialism

While the gospel calls for a politics of charity and justice, Kuyper believed that the forces of the Revolution were driving modern society toward secularism, materialism, and individualism. The crises of labor, poverty, democracy, journalism, education, and the family were all products of its godless and antisocial emphasis on human autonomy. At the same time, Kuyper found the conservative reaction to the forces of modernity to be just as troubling. Because the Revolution’s ideology ultimately consisted of rebellion against God, the solution was not conservatism but what Kuyper called social Christianity.

Kuyper’s critique of Revolutionary ideology often focused on its radical individualism, which he placed in sharp antithesis to the inherently social nature of Christianity. The French Revolution’s rejection of the oppressive tyranny of the *ancien régime* was in many ways justified and even “horribly necessary,”<sup>23</sup> but its effect was the “demolition of all social organization”<sup>24</sup> in a misguided attempt to return to “undeveloped nature.”<sup>25</sup> In the name of nature the Revolution ripped apart the organic social ties that bind human beings to one another. It “separated, contrary to God’s ordinances, nature from history and replaced the will of the *Creator of nations* with the will of the *individual*.”<sup>26</sup> Its ultimate effect was to run roughshod over nature itself, casting each individual onto a sea of ruthless competition. Thus “while the Christian religion seeks the dignity of the human person in the relationships of an organically integrated society, the French Revolution disrupted that organic tissue, severed those social bonds, and finally, with its atomistic tinkering, left us with nothing but the solitary, self-seeking individual that asserts its independence.” Whereas the Christian religion, “as the fruit of divine compassion, introduced the world to a love that wells up from God, the French Revolution opposed this with the egoism of a passionate struggle for possessions.”<sup>27</sup> The Revolution “made the possession of money the highest good; and then it set every man against his fellow man in the pursuit of money.”<sup>28</sup> This, Kuyper stressed, was the “pivot on which the whole

social question turns. The French Revolution, and so too present-day liberalism, is antisocial; and the social distress which today disturbs Europe is the evil fruit of the individualism that was enthroned with the French Revolution.”<sup>29</sup>

The competition provoked by the Revolution’s individualism was made all the worse by the “mercantile gospel”<sup>30</sup> of “*laissez faire, laissez passer*,” according to which economic competition among individuals was to be unrestrained by government.<sup>31</sup> The constant need for efficiency and a competitive edge exacerbated the ever-increasing division of labor and drastically lowered the conditions of labor. The old organic ties of lord and servant gave way to the brittle ties of contracts easily severed. Labor was just another commodity managed according to the principles of supply and demand without regard for the well-being of workers or their families as human beings. The need for surplus capital encouraged the exploitation of labor, leaving “the broad lower strata of society with only so much as appeared strictly necessary for keeping them alive as instruments for feeding capital (for in this system labor counted for nothing more).”<sup>32</sup> Capitalism thus gave rise to unprecedented class warfare. Covetousness was unleashed and unrestrained.<sup>33</sup> The new capitalist “*aristocracy of money*” was more powerful than that of the *ancien régime*, and it had lost any sense of social obligation to the lower classes.

The Revolution could not offer individuals any god other than Mammon “because it cut off the prospect of eternal life and directed men to seek happiness on earth, hence in earthly things. This created a base atmosphere in which everything was valued in terms of money and anything was sacrificed for money.”<sup>34</sup> The glitz and glitter of the rich was only the tip of the iceberg of materialism, advertising, and consumerism that trickled down to all classes. Kuyper indicted even the “bourgeois practice of instilling false needs in the poor by making a display of its wealth, and of undermining the contentment that can leave men happy with little by igniting in them . . . a feverish passion for pleasure.”<sup>35</sup> Money—or Mammon—was the god of capitalism, and it fixed the minds of the have-nots on their lack even as inequality between rich and poor rose to unprecedented heights. The Revolution preached liberty, equality, and fraternity, “But alas, the equality they dreamed of turned out to be an increasingly offensive inequality, and for the promised fraternity they got a replay of the fable of the wolf and the lamb.”<sup>36</sup>

The result was a social crisis in which the eventual demand of the lower classes for social democracy was inevitable. The protests of the free market liberal elites notwithstanding, there was no rational reason why the lower classes should not push the logic of the Revolution to the point where they too might benefit from liberty, equality, and fraternity. “It must be stressed,” Kuyper wrote,

“that the liberal calls a totally arbitrary halt on a trajectory which according to his theory has to be followed. Thus the liberal not only has spiritual kinship with the social democrat, but unlike him he is in the wrong, because he is arbitrary, self-serving, and inconsistent.”<sup>37</sup>

Socialism emphasized “a rising sense of community, of the rights of community and the organic nature of society, in opposition to the one-dimensional individualism with which the French Revolution has impregnated our society, along with its corresponding economic school of *laissez faire, laissez passer*.” But this “zeal for the *social* principle” led to “a battle over property rights and a war on capitalism, given that the individual finds his strongest bulwark precisely in his property.” Absolute property rights were now viewed as the “insurmountable obstacle preventing society from doing justice to its sociological nature.”<sup>38</sup> In fact, the social crisis spawned by the Revolution was giving way to all manner of reactions ranging from nihilism and anarchy to state socialism and social democracy. Those liberals who refused to embrace social democracy were the new conservatives. But they all shared a common foundation: commitment to the basic principle of the French Revolution.

Kuyper recognized the seeming contradiction in his claim that socialism was the logical and necessary outworking of the French Revolution even though it opposed the Revolution’s liberal individualism. “This apparent contradiction stems from the fact that the individualistic character of the French Revolution is only a derived principle. It is not its root principle from which it drew its dynamic. That root principle is its defiant cry *Ni Dieu, ni maître!* Or, if you will: man’s emancipation from God and from the order instituted by him.”<sup>39</sup> For all of his rhetoric about the antithesis between liberal individualism and social Christianity, Kuyper believed that the true conflict of the future was between secularist materialism and social Christianity, or, as he saw it, between godless revolution and fidelity to the creation ordinances of God. The heirs of the Revolution, whether from the left or the right, inevitably elevated the god of Mammon in the place of the creator. Class warfare continued to intensify because the rich and the poor and all those in between subjected their lives to the overriding purpose of material prosperity, each seeking control of the state in order to advance their own interests. “Thus, however idealistic social democracy may present itself, its striving remains focused, at bottom, on nothing other than acquiring more *financial* power. It calls for more material well-being but to the neglect of every other element.”<sup>40</sup>

Much of Kuyper’s critique of democracy as a political philosophy rested on this point. Five of the six chief dangers facing democracy that he identified in “The Reefs of Democracy” (1895) revolved around materialism in one way or

another. One of those reefs was the “materialization” of political life. Kuyper praised the social democrats for denouncing the inequality in society but charged that they sought to replace that inequality with a thoroughly materialistic understanding of human well-being that left no place for the spiritual. Yet humans consist of both body and soul. “If you invert the order of things, in defiance of our nature, of Christ’s command, and of the moral character of politics, and push *material* interests so emphatically to the foreground that the spiritual aspect becomes a *side issue*, then you debase our life as human beings.... [Y]ou materialize law and justice.”<sup>41</sup> Thus while Christ called people to “Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you,” the social democrats effectively called people to “Seek ye first the improvement of your material needs, and the spiritual goods will follow.”<sup>42</sup>

A further reef facing democracy was its tendency to exacerbate class warfare. To be sure, some measure of class conflict was the inevitable result of necessary inequality in a sinful world, but democracy “tempts one class in society to avail itself of the state machine as a tool to break the neck of the other class.”<sup>43</sup> No longer did the classes regard the state as an expression of the sovereignty of God designed to transcend partisan interests by serving the common good of the organic community. Locked in conflict with one another, they threatened to “destroy all social harmony,” debasing government into “an instrument for promoting economic interests.”<sup>44</sup>

Along with materialism and class conflict, Kuyper identified the further danger of “rudeness and vulgarity” that would follow from the efforts of parties and demagogues to pander to crass popular interests. Political life would decline as uneducated people spurned the “finer nuances” of careful political reasoning in favor of “toxic slogans and glittering generalities,” and the press would no doubt pander to such delusion. In the end, all public solidarity would give way to the egoism of class interest. With its power increasingly reaching into the affairs of banks and corporations, government would fall prey to corruption. Respect for government and law would fall in proportion to the extent to which they came to serve the interests of money.<sup>45</sup>

The dangers Kuyper associated with materialism and class conflict ultimately pointed to the deeper problem with the Revolution’s commitment to human autonomy. Its heirs increasingly proclaimed a role for the state that ran roughshod over nature. The first phase led it to “dismantle the existing order and leave nothing standing except the individual with his own free will and his supposed supremacy.” In the second phase its adherents sought to “push God and his order aside ... and, deifying yourself, sit in the seat of God ... and from your own head you create a new order of things.”<sup>46</sup> The socialists “look upon



the entire structure of contemporary society as nothing but a product of human convention.<sup>247</sup> The social democrats allowed the state to be absorbed into society while the state socialists allowed society to be absorbed by the state, but both were totalizing in their efforts to make humanity “the maker of society in the strictest sense of the word,” even where that required “violat[ing] natural laws wherever they stand in the way or push[ing] aside the moral law whenever it forms an obstacle.”<sup>248</sup> No sphere of life was left to develop organically according to the creation ordinances of God. “The social edifice has to be erected according to man’s whim and caprice. That is why God has to go, so that men, no longer restrained by natural bonds, can invert every moral precept into its opposite and subvert every pillar of human society.”<sup>249</sup>

In “The Reefs of Democracy” Kuyper identified this as the “pernicious idea” of “popular sovereignty” or “universal suffrage,” the most dangerous reef threatening democracy. Kuyper opposed giving the ballot to all adult individuals, preferring a household-based society, but it was not the expansion of the right to vote about which he was concerned. Rather, by the terms popular sovereignty and universal suffrage he referred to “a system that opposes God’s sovereignty with the proposition that governing authority resides in the latent will of the State, and that every inhabitant as a member of the body politic contributes toward expressing the will of the State. Then the State no longer depends on God but is self-sufficient, and the people acts politically on a foundation of atheism.”<sup>250</sup> In short, by popular sovereignty Kuyper denoted an inherently atheistic system in which government was seen to rest on human beings’ “arbitrary will” rather than on the “ordinances of God.”<sup>251</sup> It was a system in which majority rule was deemed a sufficient basis for any given policy, regardless of the rights of individuals or the integrity of various spheres of life. Such a theory of authority would inevitably grow more and more radical as it sought to remake society according to human desires, even tearing down such traditional bulwarks of the social order as the Christian household.

## **Christian Democracy: Kuyper’s Social Policy**

It is against this Revolutionary backdrop that Kuyper’s ideas of sphere sovereignty and the rule of divine law are best understood. For Kuyper the central conflict of human history was the conflict between human sovereignty and divine sovereignty. The Revolution was merely the latest and most profound expression of human rebellion against the creator. Yet in the gospel of Christ, God had already asserted his own decisive claim: “There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign

over all, does not call out: ‘Mine!’”<sup>52</sup> This was not, for Kuyper, mere rhetoric. Nor was the appeal to Christ’s lordship designed to justify the claims of a particular political party or agenda. Rather, by consigning all of God’s authority to Christ, Kuyper sought to uncover all *other* human pretensions to illegitimate sovereignty. To be sure, God regularly delegates his authority to human beings, his image-bearers. But he does not delegate his “all-encompassing sovereignty” to any one human authority or institution.<sup>53</sup> On the contrary, rooted in the creation itself are a myriad of creation ordinances, each governing its own sphere. As Kuyper put it, “there are in life all kinds of spheres as numerous as constellations in the sky,” each with “a unique principle as its center or focal point.... Just as we speak of a moral world, a world of science, a world of business, an art world, so we speak still more properly of a sphere of morality, a family sphere, a sphere of socio-economic life, each having its own *domain*.”<sup>54</sup>

Kuyper made no attempt to articulate an authoritative list of the spheres. To do so would miss the point. What Kuyper did point out is that because the spheres are mutually interdependent—“all these spheres interlock like cogwheels”—they constantly threaten to disrupt or suppress one another. The task of the state is “to enable the various spheres, insofar as they manifest themselves visibly, to interact in a healthy way and to keep each of them within proper bounds.”<sup>55</sup> Government exists to administer and uphold justice, but “its duty is not to take over the tasks of family and society; the state should withdraw its hands from them. But as soon as collisions arise from contacts between the different spheres of life, so that one sphere encroaches upon or violates the divinely ordained domain of another, then a government has the God-given duty to uphold rights against arbitrary acts and to push back the stronger party in the name of God’s rights to both spheres.”<sup>56</sup>

A Christian political vision will therefore call the state to fulfill its proper responsibility with respect to each social sphere, including that of education, which was Kuyper’s particular concern in the address on “Sphere Sovereignty” that he delivered at the founding of the Free University.<sup>57</sup> The state is to do this without usurping the sovereignty of God delegated to each sphere. In this sense liberty is a fundamental commitment of Christian political theology. Christians must always be at the forefront of attempts to defend the liberty of organic human life from the invasive tendencies of the Revolutionary state.

At its heart Kuyper’s public theology was fundamentally deontological. Underlying all human flourishing was the sovereignty of God as communicated through his law. In its purest form, Kuyper believed, this law was expressed in the Ten Commandments. Properly understood and fulfilled, the law “coincides ... with the image of the Son of God.... In its ultimate completion the law and

the Christ are one. Thus the law explicates the Christ to you, and Christ shows you the unity of the law in its completion.”<sup>58</sup> This was a radical claim, designed to encourage pastors “finely and strictly and sternly” to preach the law, and Kuyper went to great lengths to dispel concerns that his emphasis on the law was contrary to the teaching of the apostle Paul. Yet at the heart of Kuyper’s defense of the law in his commentary on Lord’s Day 44b was not a nuanced biblical theology of law but a practical reflection on what the Christian tradition has called God’s moral law. For Kuyper, that moral law was best communicated in the Ten Commandments, but it was also “woven into our creaturely existence through creation.” While sin has undermined humans’ “awareness and knowledge of the law,” through common grace God has restrained the power of sin such that “also in the unregenerated and unconverted there is still always a remnant of knowledge of the law.”<sup>59</sup> This law, which the Christian tradition historically called natural law, but which Kuyper preferred to describe as God’s creation ordinances, helps to preserve “a certain civil justice which does not do anything for salvation but makes a humane life possible and thus gives the church a place to stand.”<sup>60</sup> Both the state and the church have the responsibility to maintain it.

But law itself could not save a sinful society. Only the gospel offered a sufficient response to the Revolution and its god of Mammon: “Legislation by itself will not cure our sick society unless at the same time drops of the medicine enter the hearts of rich and poor.”<sup>61</sup> The poor required much more than outward possessions and sensual pleasures. They needed “spiritual well-being” and the “peace of God.”<sup>62</sup> For this reason, material efficiency could not be the sole criteria by which to evaluate a social system. Christianity highlighted “deeper-lying principles” that had to be taken into account. As far as Kuyper was concerned, “either coercion will make way again for love, for God’s sake and to the church’s credit; or else coercion will gain the upper hand, but only to have the state absorbed into society and at last to see society and government sink away into communism.”<sup>63</sup>

Kuyper understood the argument of the social democrats that material improvement would elevate the lives of oppressed people “*morally and intellectually*.” But, he charged, “For the time being these are just so many words, and meanwhile they restrict people’s horizon to existence in this life.”<sup>64</sup> Moral and intellectual well-being would not simply emerge by themselves in a context of plenty. They had to be actively promoted. Just as Jesus’ social teaching was part of his announcement of the kingdom of heaven, so the problem of poverty required that Christians, like Jesus, “do not for a moment wage even the struggle against social injustice otherwise than in connection with the kingdom of heaven.”<sup>65</sup> It was this that distinguished Christians from socialists.

On the other hand, it was only a complete Christianity, a *social* Christianity, that would be of any use. “If you fail to realize this and think the evil can be exorcized by fostering greater piety, kindlier treatment and ampler charity, you may think that we face a religious question, or a philanthropic question, but not a social question. 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.”<sup>66</sup> Christians had to reject the anti-social individualism of *laissez-faire* liberalism. “If . . . the question is raised whether our human society is an aggregate of individuals or an organic body, then all those who are Christians must place themselves on the side of the social movement and against liberalism.”<sup>67</sup> Nor could Christians approve of a state that remained passive in the face of grinding poverty, for the sake of free market principles.

Kuyper’s insistence on a social Christian approach to politics led him to articulate distinct Christian perspectives on classic liberal themes of property, human dignity, rights, and democracy. Invoking the Christian moral tradition, he utterly rejected the liberal notion of absolute property rights that some conservative Christians were defending. It was legitimate to appeal to the eighth commandment, “You shall not steal,” as warrant for the ownership of resources necessary for one’s life. This was a basic principle of natural law. But “it is most incorrect the way many people have appealed to the eighth commandment in order to defend *today’s* distribution of wealth as well as *current* rights of ownership and property.”<sup>68</sup> If property owners “try to deduce from the eighth commandment that all they have is their lawful property and that God has given them the freedom to do with it as they please, Christian ethics has the duty and calling to break down all such false notions.”<sup>69</sup> A person only has the right to dispose of his or her belongings “to do good.”<sup>70</sup> The church is called to preach “constantly and ceaselessly” that God alone possesses full ownership of goods; human beings are merely stewards.<sup>71</sup>

A corollary of this principle, for Kuyper, again following the Christian tradition, is that “we can never have any other property right than in association with the organic coherence of mankind, hence also with the organic coherence of mankind’s goods.”<sup>72</sup> Thus while communism is inherently wrong, a social system in which, say, land is held in common might not be.<sup>73</sup> The eighth commandment could *not*, therefore, be used as a weapon against the social democrats. Its prohibition of theft “says nothing about the nature of the distribution of earthly goods and leaves room for different forms of the distribution of wealth.”<sup>74</sup> Indeed, Kuyper invoked the Heidelberg Catechism’s broad definition of theft as justification for the claim that “*a very large part* of the belongings

in this world are stolen property.”<sup>75</sup> He condemned excessive land ownership, insisting that the rights of the poor were violated if they were left in poverty while others amassed wealth.<sup>76</sup>

Kuyper also argued that the eighth commandment requires government to regulate property in accord with principles of justice. “The assumption that the right of ownership is regulated on its own by social relationships is on the whole false, and to the degree that it does contain some truth it does not excuse the government. As God’s minister, the government is charged with the responsibility to ensure that the regulation of the right of ownership does not lead to the ruin of society.”<sup>77</sup> Thus, Kuyper insisted, “government is to give guidance to the distribution of wealth” in accord with biblical principles.<sup>78</sup> Such regulation must extend to “land ownership, interest rates, firstborn rights, and rights of inheritance,” and it must ensure “that the repulsive inequality between powerful capitalists and defenseless citizens remains within certain limits.”<sup>79</sup> Scripture does not provide particular details here, but it does provide general principles from which Christians could discern that the theory of absolute property rights and the *laissez-faire* economic theory that went with it were unjust.<sup>80</sup> The social situation of Kuyper’s day “created situations that cry out for God’s justice,” and all conscientious Christians were obligated to work to improve the laws in accord with that justice.<sup>81</sup>

Kuyper also articulated a Christian conception of fundamental human dignity in contrast to the sort of human dignity envisioned by the Revolution. The Revolution imagined human beings to be autonomous individuals, each seeking their own self-fulfillment. In contrast, Christianity characterized human beings as subjects of God created for loving service within “the relationships of an organically integrated society.”<sup>82</sup> The Revolution embraced human pride, launching a program of social deconstruction that wrenched apart “everything that gives human life its dignified coherence.” Christianity recognized all persons to be sinful and needful of grace and repentance.<sup>83</sup> Whereas the Revolution robbed the poor of their dignity by suggesting that they lacked the chief things worth living for—“outward possessions, material goods, and sensual pleasures”—Christianity offered the poor the hope and happiness that comes from the fear of God.<sup>84</sup> Christ himself had identified with the poor and the oppressed, not the rich and the powerful. It angered Kuyper that many of the poor were tempted to follow social democracy because Christians had failed to proclaim the full social implications of the gospel.<sup>85</sup> “When from the side of democratic socialism and anarchism an enticing, defiant call is targeted also at *our* working people and little folk [*kleine luyden*], with the aim of making them forsake their God, stimulate their greed, and inflame their passions, is it then not our calling, our

bounden duty, to make the voice of our Savior heard in reply to those cries out of the depths?"<sup>86</sup>

For Kuypers equality in human dignity called for at least a "para-equality" of possessions. Absolute equality was out of the question, but it was unjust that some could not meet their most basic needs while others lived in luxury. "The worker, too, must be able to live as a person created in the image of God. He must be able to fulfill his calling as husband and father. He too has a soul to lose, and therefore he must be able to serve his God just as well as you.... To treat the workingman simply as a 'factor of production' is to violate his human dignity."<sup>87</sup> This concept of human dignity led Kuypers to use the language of rights to describe the claims persons might take to government. For instance, people who have spent their lives working responsibly "have a moral right to a pension when their strength begins to fail." This right does not come from government or from human beings but is "grounded in ordinances imposed by God on mankind."<sup>88</sup> He likewise argued that the people collectively "has a right to defend, *before* the government and if need be *against* the government, those God-given liberties which it has received in its organic components." Such a right came from God, not from government. "This is not a legal but a moral right, and on that ground alone it never stops in its quest for a political voice."<sup>89</sup>

It was this right that grounded Kuypers's conviction that while government receives its authority from the sovereign God (hence nullifying the principle of popular sovereignty), the people maintain the right to voice their concerns and defend their liberties. This is a right properly exercised through broad popular suffrage and through a democratic parliament that possesses the power of the purse. In fact, Kuypers argued that according to God's ordinances, as a people matures its political forms should become more democratic. "As a tree trunk during its growth expands and splits every bond and obstacle, so the natural growth of a people bursts every shackle with which its development is being held back."<sup>90</sup> To oppose democracy was to oppose a "developmental law of national life."<sup>91</sup> Kuypers declared that "the task of each of us as Christians is to foster that development and at the same time to guide it into proper channels."<sup>92</sup> He defended expanding the franchise to the lower class not as a natural (that is, human-derived) or civil right but as a "moral right." Where that right was not honored, "injustice is done to one segment of the nation because the other segment arrogates to itself the right to reserve all representative power for itself."<sup>93</sup>

But the modern tendency was to collapse everything into the all-powerful social state. While Kuypers advocated a stronger role for government in protecting the rights of the poor, he insisted that government do so in a way that preserved the integrity of the other spheres. One of those spheres was that of

private enterprise. *Laissez-faire* economics represented the autonomy of the market taken to an extreme, to the point of trampling over the other spheres, and should therefore be rejected. But the market should nevertheless be free to develop according to its own principles in accord with the proper development of the other spheres. Capital and business had their rights, even though these could not be permitted to run roughshod over the rights of laborers to good working conditions, to a living wage, and to the organization of unions.<sup>94</sup>

Kuyper was especially concerned about the family. In opposition to the antisocial atomism of the Revolution, Kuyper argued that the family, not the individual, was the true basis for the social order. It was in the family, more than any other social institution, that individuals learned the meaning of justice and the virtues of citizenship. Indeed, Kuyper argued, “The basic premise of our antirevolutionary politics is rooted in the family.” The family “is the first to give shape to all the veins of the network along which the state sends out its life-blood to its widest circumference and back again to its center.”<sup>95</sup> The relationship of parents and children communicated the organic nature of human society, putting the lie to myths of individualism and the social contract. Fathers and mothers taught their children practices of justice, fairness, reconciliation and arbitration, providing a foundation for peaceful judicial systems and constitutional arrangements of power. In fact, the true meaning of the Revolutionary slogan of “liberty, equality, and fraternity” was revealed in the relationships of brothers and sisters in the Christian household rather than among individuals in the secular state.<sup>96</sup> The relationships of husbands and wives embodied the fundamental social virtues of trust, accommodation, and honor, all in a context of faithfulness. Even the relationships of masters and servants fostered virtues of service and care that organically knit the different classes of society together as one body.

Kuyper was unabashedly patriarchal in his vision of the family. As he saw it, the Christian household revealed the proper balance between principles of equality and inequality. On the one hand, the members of a family are fundamentally equal to one another before God.<sup>97</sup> On the other hand, in numerous respects, including authority, they are profoundly unequal. God has ordained certain expressions of authority that are inviolable, including that of husbands over wives, parents over children, and masters over servants. “Households where the woman is number one and the man plays a subordinate role have become all too common. Such arrangements are sinful. Households like that have been turned inside out by the revolution and are in conflict with God’s ordinance.”<sup>98</sup> For Christians to be antirevolutionary was to be committed to maintaining these relationships in accord with “the solid ground of the Word of God.”<sup>99</sup>



In accord with his theory of sphere sovereignty, Kuyper argued that the family needed to be promoted and protected so that it could develop freely in accord with God's will, and so remain "that wondrous creation from which the rich fabric of man's organic life is to evolve.... We do not have to organize society; we have only to develop the germ of organization which God himself implanted in our human nature."<sup>100</sup> The various movements spawned by the Revolution, however, trampled over the family in the name of individualism and social reconstruction. "Away, therefore, with false individualism, and anathema on every effort to break up the family!"<sup>101</sup> Because sexual immorality was a threat to the family it was also a matter of proper political concern. "[I]t is especially for this reason that adultery, prostitution and all unchastity constitute a direct threat to the welfare of the state. These sins will gradually produce a generation without any faithfulness or trust, without any sense of mutual accommodation, and without any sense of honor for the nation."<sup>102</sup>

Taken together, all of these principles made Kuyper's social policy balanced and nuanced. His workers' pension plan, which he proposed in the Dutch Parliament in 1895, serves as a helpful illustration. Kuyper saw his pension plan—which would guarantee workers the continuation of a living wage in their declining years—as a partial solution to the disintegration of the organic social relationships that had once provided such support. He argued that while the abolition of traditional social bonds such as serfdom and guilds had increased individual liberty, it had reduced economic solidarity and security. Due to ruthless competition, workers could no longer negotiate living wages with their employers in order to provide for their families, nor could they band together in unions to limit competition in the labor market. Kuyper's conclusion was simple. "Clearly, only the government can help."<sup>103</sup>

But, Kuyper insisted, government should not ordinarily take up the permanent responsibility of caring for workers. Such a permanent role on the part of government would usurp the role of various other spheres, so hindering the organic development of society. It would take away from the dignity of workers by eliminating room for private initiative. And it would greatly constrict the possibilities for private charity and bonds of care that aimed to serve the whole person. The work of charity for the poor was a task for individuals, churches, and other social organizations, not the task of government.<sup>104</sup> Nevertheless, "when pauperism spreads and philanthropy falls short and starvation is imminent, government *inaction* would be criminal." When the social crisis is so desperate that "private initiative cannot hope to rectify" it, government must step in.<sup>105</sup> As Kuyper defined the principle, "government is duty-bound to protect rights if



injustice results when they are left in the care of the voluntary sector.”<sup>106</sup> “Such intervention should not permanently displace private initiative, but instead should assist private initiative, strengthen it, and so conduct affairs that before long government can withdraw again.”<sup>107</sup>

On the other hand, sometimes a state of affairs required permanent legislation backed by coercive force. Kuypers believed that just as the government regulated trade and commerce, so “wage labor has come to need enduring legislation to guide and protect it. And this level of involvement by government will not be temporary but permanent.” Just as there was a Commercial Code, so there needed to be a Labor Code.<sup>108</sup> It was not sufficient simply to establish a voluntary insurance plan. For while many workers could be expected to save voluntarily, “sloth and sin” would prevent others from doing so.<sup>109</sup> On the other hand, the government could not be expected to finance such a plan. A government funded program that amounted to a system of handouts would paralyze private initiative rather than strengthen it. It would amount to “distributing money, not justice.”<sup>110</sup> Material assistance on the part of the state had to be limited to the “smallest dimensions” if it was not to “weaken the working classes and break their natural resilience.”<sup>111</sup>

Kuypers’s solution was “mandatory participation.”<sup>112</sup> Workers would be required on a weekly basis to contribute to a retirement fund that was payable to themselves and their families. Employers would be required to provide funds for sickness and disability insurance. Workers would collectively contribute to a fund providing unemployment insurance. Initially government would supplement these programs, but its role would gradually diminish to that of oversight.<sup>113</sup> The goal was to secure the just rights of workers and their families without making government relief permanent, as well as to reduce the number of people requiring charity, to the point that the resources of churches and private initiative would again be sufficient to serve their needs. Those who had earned care as a matter of justice and right could do so through the pension plan, while those who were “destitute” or who “hit bottom through their own fault” could experience the care of God through the diaconate of the church.<sup>114</sup> In this way the dignity of those who sought to earn a living wage and provide for their families would be preserved through the combined contributions of capital and labor, without swallowing any of these spheres into the all-powerful grasp of the state. For their part, the destitute and otherwise poor could be served in a way that served their spiritual needs as well as their material needs. It was a plan of government intervention that respected the social and private purposes of property, preserved the integrity of organic society and private initiative,

secured the rights of workers and their families in accord with their equal dignity, and promoted loving care for the spiritual and material needs of the poor by granting due place to the social ministry of the church.

## Conclusion: Kuyper's Social Thought for Today

Abraham Kuyper was deeply conscious of the eclipse of orthodox Christianity in modern Europe. He accepted pluralism as a defining feature of his world, and he thought long and hard about how Christians might participate politically in a pluralistic society from a principled, theological standpoint. For all of his skepticism about the future of a world increasingly distancing itself from Christianity, Kuyper could be breathtakingly optimistic about progress and modernity. His writings reflect the hubris of his day with respect to matters of race, nationality, and colonialism, and Kuyper maintained thoroughly conservative patriarchal views with respect to gender and the household. Yet in the areas of poor relief, labor, health care, and education, he was a committed progressive. In short, Kuyper's social thought exhibited all the paradoxes one might expect from a late nineteenth-century European Christian democrat. His intellectual brilliance and proclivity toward dialectical thought enabled him to offer a social and political perspective that defied the reactionary categories of the right or the left. He embraced key ideas from the conservatives, liberals, and socialists alike, while showing how a Christian perspective must ultimately differ from all three.<sup>115</sup>

A striking feature of Kuyper's thought is his ruthless criticism of the liberal tradition and *laissez-faire* capitalism, both of which he associated with the French Revolution. And yet, in the irony of all ironies, Kuyper waxed eloquently about the virtues of the United States and its glorious future, despite the fact that in some respects the United States displayed its liberal and capitalist commitments with even greater vigor than did nineteenth-century France. Kuyper quickly forgot his penetrating criticism of the liberal tradition when he took the United States into his sights, viewing America through rose-colored glasses. In part he was able to do this because of his selective historiography. Kuyper argued that, like the Netherlands and Britain, the United States owed its commitment to liberty to its Calvinist inheritance, an inheritance transmitted to America by the Puritans, secured through an essentially conservative revolution, and carefully institutionalized by pious founding fathers. True, he acknowledged, America was a republic that vested sovereignty in its people. But Americans were a deeply religious people who acknowledged the sovereignty of God. This

was in stark contrast to the form of liberalism that had emerged in France with its godless revolution.

Kuyper's optimism about America stemmed from his belief in the possibility of a sort of Christian democracy (or what we might call Christian liberalism). It was not democracy *itself* to which he was opposed. On the contrary, he viewed it as the moral right of a mature people. Nor was Kuyper opposed to regulated free-market capitalism. On the contrary, he advocated policies that would secure social justice with minimal government interference in other spheres. Kuyper's disciplined Christian reflection on politics enabled him to transcend the categories of left and right. He discerned that liberalism and conservatism, capitalism and socialism alike rested on the atheistic, individualistic, and materialistic assumptions of modernity, and he grasped how crucial it was for Christians to refuse to allow such modern assumptions to dictate the shape of Christian political thought. Christians needed to articulate an alternative political theology rooted in the creation ordinances through which God has enabled human society to flourish in all of its diversity. What is more, it was insufficient for Christians to seek a social order that merely conformed to God's law outwardly. Christians needed to seek the welfare and salvation of the whole person—body and soul—and the whole society—material and spiritual. In short, Kuyper offered a vision of charity and justice that was ultimately rooted in the Christian gospel.

How might we apply Kuyper's ideas in our own pluralistic and often deeply polarized contexts? Certainly not by pandering to the politics of the right or the left (although no doubt Kuyper would have incorporated key insights of both the right and the left). Nor can it be by offering simplistic appeals to the lordship of Christ as crass justification for imposing our political predilections on others. Like Christ, Christians are called to witness to the lordship of Christ through sacrificial service, not domination (see Phil. 2:5–11). As Kuyper grasped, such service calls us to seek charity and justice for all people.

I would suggest two core commitments that must define any Kuyperian political or social vision. First, Christian public engagement must be grounded in a core commitment to divine sovereignty as the fundamental principle of creation. Kuyper shared the classic Christian conviction that God does not rule creation simply through his word, from the outside, so to speak. Rather, his moral law—what Christians have classically called natural law and what Kuyper called creation ordinances—is written into the creation itself. Thus for any human society to flourish, its practices, customs, and laws must arise from creation itself. This is true for every sphere, from economics and journalism to sexuality and marriage. Government's task is not to usurp the work of these spheres,

even when we want it to. Rather, its task is to secure order, stability, and justice, in order that humans might freely serve God in every area of organic society.

Second, Christian public engagement must be social in orientation. We cannot flourish as isolated individuals, each pursuing our own happiness according to our own lights, just so long as we do no harm to another. Rather, we are called to stand in solidarity with one another as brothers and sisters called to be united in Christ. The tendency of modernity has been to reduce all social ties to the level of the easily broken contract. Kuyper grasped the classic Christian insistence that we are one another's keepers. Whether in our stewardship of resources, our faithfulness to the bonds of embodied life, or our struggles against injustice, we are called to bear one another's burdens. This solidarity should characterize our churches and our communities, but it must also characterize our politics.

## Notes

1. Abraham Kuyper, "Christ and the Needy," in Abraham Kuyper, *On Charity and Justice*, ed. Matthew J. Tuininga (Bellingham: Lexham Press, forthcoming). An earlier version of this set of articles by Kuyper appeared as Abraham Kuyper, "Christ and the Needy (1895)," trans. Herbert Donald Morton, *Journal of Markets & Morality* 14, no. 2 (2011): 647–83.
2. Kuyper, "Christ and the Needy."
3. Kuyper, "Christ and the Needy."
4. Abraham Kuyper, "Working People and the Church," in Abraham Kuyper, *On Business and Economics*, ed. Peter S. Heslam (Bellingham: Lexham Press, 2020), 127.
5. Kuyper, "Christ and the Needy."
6. Kuyper, "Christ and the Needy."
7. Abraham Kuyper, "The Social Question and the Christian Religion," in Kuyper, *On Business and Economics*, 188.
8. Kuyper, "The Social Question and the Christian Religion," 188.
9. Kuyper, "The Social Question and the Christian Religion," 189.
10. Abraham Kuyper, "Income and Expenditure," in Kuyper, *On Business and Economics*, 383.
11. Kuyper, "The Social Question and the Christian Religion," 191.
12. Kuyper, "The Social Question and the Christian Religion," 192.

13. Kuyper, "The Social Question and the Christian Religion," 193. Kuyper maintained that "Christianity is preeminently social," and "rightly viewed, the original organism of humanity, now purified, has been resurrected in the church of Christ." See Kuyper, "The Social Question and the Christian Religion," 202n58.
14. See Matthew J. Tuininga, "Good News for the Poor: An Analysis of Calvin's Concept of Poor Relief and the Diaconate in Light of His Two Kingdoms Paradigm," *Calvin Theological Journal* 49 (2014): 221–47.
15. Abraham Kuyper, "Draft Pension Scheme for Wage Earners," in Kuyper, *On Business and Economics*, 248.
16. Kuyper, "Draft Pension Scheme for Wage Earners," 249. In this way Kuyper contrasted the diaconate with private charity and state provision.
17. Kuyper, "The Social Question and the Christian Religion," 201–2.
18. Kuyper, "The Social Question and the Christian Religion," 226.
19. Kuyper, "Christ and the Needy."
20. Kuyper, "Christ and the Needy."
21. Kuyper, "Christ and the Needy."
22. Kuyper, "Christ and the Needy."
23. Kuyper, "The Social Question and the Christian Religion," 184n21.
24. Kuyper, "The Social Question and the Christian Religion," 196.
25. Kuyper, "The Social Question and the Christian Religion," 182n19.
26. Kuyper, "The Social Question and the Christian Religion," 185n21.
27. Kuyper, "The Social Question and the Christian Religion," 194–95.
28. Kuyper, "The Social Question and the Christian Religion," 196.
29. Kuyper, "The Social Question and the Christian Religion," 195n41.
30. Kuyper, "The Social Question and the Christian Religion," 196.
31. Kuyper, "The Social Question and the Christian Religion," 197n44.
32. Kuyper, "The Social Question and the Christian Religion," 197. See Abraham Kuyper, "The Family, Society, and State," in Kuyper, *On Charity and Justice*.
33. See Abraham Kuyper, "You Shall Not Covet," in Kuyper, *On Charity and Justice*.
34. Kuyper, "The Social Question and the Christian Religion," 196.
35. Kuyper, "The Social Question and the Christian Religion," 198.

36. Kuyper, "The Social Question and the Christian Religion," 198. See also Kuyper, "You Shall Not Covet."
37. Kuyper, "The Social Question and the Christian Religion," 199n47.
38. Kuyper, "The Social Question and the Christian Religion," 206.
39. Kuyper, "The Social Question and the Christian Religion," 210.
40. Kuyper, "Christ and the Needy." See also Kuyper, "You Shall Not Covet."
41. Abraham Kuyper, "The Reefs of Democracy."
42. Kuyper, "The Reefs of Democracy."
43. Kuyper, "The Reefs of Democracy."
44. Kuyper, "The Reefs of Democracy."
45. Kuyper, "The Reefs of Democracy."
46. Kuyper, "The Social Question and the Christian Religion," 210.
47. Kuyper, "The Social Question and the Christian Religion," 206.
48. Kuyper, "The Social Question and the Christian Religion," 215n87.
49. Kuyper, "The Social Question and the Christian Religion," 215.
50. Kuyper, "The Reefs of Democracy."
51. Kuyper, "The Reefs of Democracy."
52. Abraham Kuyper, "Sphere Sovereignty" in Kuyper, *On Charity and Justice*.
53. Kuyper, "Sphere Sovereignty."
54. Kuyper, "Sphere Sovereignty."
55. Kuyper, "Sphere Sovereignty."
56. Kuyper, "The Social Question and the Christian Religion," 223.
57. Kuyper believed that education had long been dominated by an "authoritarian" state whose policy of secularization served to "weaken private initiative and dampen personal energy" with severe religious, economic, and political consequences. Securing equal support for religious schools therefore became one of Kuyper's most dynamic policy initiatives. See Kuyper, "The Reefs of Democracy."
58. Abraham Kuyper, "Our Relationship to the Law," in Kuyper, *On Charity and Justice*.
59. Kuyper, "Our Relationship to the Law."

60. Kuyper, "Our Relationship to the Law."
61. Kuyper, "The Social Question and the Christian Religion," 224.
62. Kuyper, "The Social Question and the Christian Religion," 225.
63. Kuyper, "Draft Pension Scheme," 250.
64. Kuyper, "Christ and the Needy."
65. Kuyper, "Christ and the Needy."
66. Kuyper, "The Social Question and the Christian Religion," 201.
67. Kuyper, "The Social Question and the Christian Religion," 216.
68. Abraham Kuyper, "You Shall Not Steal," in Kuyper, *On Business and Economics*, 39. Emphasis added.
69. Kuyper, "You Shall Not Steal," 40.
70. Kuyper, "You Shall Not Steal," 44.
71. Kuyper, "You Shall Not Steal," 44.
72. Kuyper, "The Social Question and the Christian Religion," 217.
73. Kuyper, "You Shall Not Steal," 42. See also Kuyper, "The Social Question and the Christian Religion," 218–19.
74. Kuyper, "You Shall Not Steal," 41–42.
75. Kuyper, "You Shall Not Steal," 40.
76. Kuyper asserted in a meditation on Isaiah 5:8: "Overly large landholding is rooted in sin. It militates against the ordinances of God." See Abraham Kuyper, "Woe to Those Who Join House to House," in Kuyper, *On Business and Economics*, 362.
77. Kuyper, "You Shall Not Steal," 61.
78. Kuyper, "You Shall Not Steal," 61.
79. Kuyper, "You Shall Not Steal," 63.
80. Kuyper, "The Social Question and the Christian Religion," 218n92.
81. Kuyper, "You Shall Not Steal," 66.
82. Kuyper, "The Social Question and the Christian Religion," 195.
83. Kuyper, "The Social Question and the Christian Religion," 194.
84. Kuyper, "The Social Question and the Christian Religion," 225.

85. Kuyper recognized that the “demoralization that follows on the heels of material need” led many to abandon Christianity. “Were not almost all those who now rage once baptized? And following their baptism, what has been spent on those thousands to make them understand, instead of the caricature of the Christian religion against which they now utter their curses, something—at least something—of the true love of God that there is in Christ Jesus?” Christian theologians and intellectuals had utterly failed the working class. See Kuyper, “The Social Question and the Christian Religion,” 213–14. See also Kuyper, “The Reefs of Democracy.”
86. Kuyper, “Christ and the Needy.”
87. Kuyper, “The Social Question and the Christian Religion,” 222.
88. Kuyper, “Draft Pension Scheme,” 234.
89. Kuyper, “The Reefs of Democracy.”
90. Kuyper, “The Reefs of Democracy.”
91. Kuyper, “The Reefs of Democracy.”
92. Kuyper, “The Reefs of Democracy.”
93. Kuyper, “The Reefs of Democracy.”
94. Kuyper, “The Reefs of Democracy.”
95. Kuyper, “The Family, Society, and State.”
96. Kuyper, “The Family, Society, and State.”
97. Interestingly, here Kuyper rejected “natural” superiority as a basis for household hierarchy, preferring to rest his case for household authority on scripture alone. See Kuyper, “The Family, Society, and State.”
98. Kuyper, “The Family, Society, and State.”
99. Kuyper, “The Family, Society, and State.”
100. Kuyper, “The Social Question and the Christian Religion,” 221.
101. Kuyper, “The Social Question and the Christian Religion,” 221.
102. Kuyper, “The Family, Society, and State.”
103. Kuyper, “Draft Pension Scheme,” 236.
104. Kuyper defined charity as material assistance to those who are poor and unable or unwilling to work, whether “through their own fault or through no fault of their own.” Such persons are rightly left to the care of the church and to private generosity. The draft pension plan, on the other hand, was concerned with those



individuals who had worked hard their entire life, yet had insufficient resources to care for themselves, those who had been disabled by sickness or accident, those who were unemployed despite a desire to work, or family members whose working caregivers had died. See Kuyper, “Draft Pension Scheme,” 245, 251–52.

105. Kuyper, “Draft Pension Scheme,” 242.
106. Kuyper, “Draft Pension Scheme,” 245.
107. Kuyper, “Draft Pension Scheme,” 242.
108. Kuyper, “Draft Pension Scheme,” 243.
109. Kuyper, “Draft Pension Scheme,” 243.
110. Kuyper, “The Social Question and the Christian Religion,” 224.
111. Kuyper, “The Social Question and the Christian Religion,” 224.
112. Kuyper, “Draft Pension Scheme,” 243.
113. Kuyper, “Draft Pension Scheme,” 244.
114. Kuyper, “Draft Pension Scheme,” 251, see 248–52; and Kuyper, “The Social Question and the Christian Religion,” 192.
115. Kuyper’s proposals also reflected the political context that he inhabited: the parliamentary constitutional monarchy of the modern Netherlands. The version of democracy he defended, with its rejection of popular sovereignty and its distinction between the parliament and the government, made little sense in republican contexts that differed from constitutional monarchies such as the Netherlands or Britain. Likewise, his insistence that Reformed Christians should maintain their own minority political party, constructing alliances with other parties on specific issues while avoiding anything like a permanent alliance, presupposed the existence of a multiparty parliamentary system quite different from that of the United States.