

“Property Is Theft”

Abraham Kuyper
and the Church Fathers
on Poverty and Wealth

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This article explores Abraham Kuyper’s interaction with the patristic view of an original community of goods and Pierre-Joseph Proudhon’s assertion that “property is theft.” Through a consideration of Kuyper’s general appreciation for the early Church fathers, John Calvin, and Christian socialists in his day, it concludes that patristic influence, if only indirectly, on Kuyper’s views of poverty and wealth is likely.

Introduction

The elements of air, water, fire, and sunlight are more essential to life than money. As such, they are given by God indiscriminately, and in abundance, to all human beings. Were this not the case, the covetousness of the rich would lead them to withhold them from the poor.

These three opening sentences may be thought to reflect increasing concerns in the twenty-first century about access for people in poverty to “the commons”—especially clean air and water. They could have been spoken by contemporary activists, theologians, and church leaders concerned with social justice. In fact, they reflect the thinking of St. John Chrysostom (c. 349–407), one of the early church fathers (henceforth “fathers”), as expressed in one of his sermons to congregations in the wealthy Byzantine cities of Antioch and Constantinople.¹

Fifteen centuries later, words from that sermon are cited by one of Chrysostom’s successors as a preacher, pastor, and theologian Abraham Kuyper (1837–1920). He does so in the first installment in a series of meditations on the six “Isaianic

woes” recorded in the fifth chapter of the book of Isaiah. In the first of these woes, this Israelite prophet of the eighth century BC laments, “Woe to those who join house to house, who add field to field, until there is no more room, and you are made to dwell alone in the midst of the land” (Isa. 5:8). In reflecting on this verse, Kuyper cites (in somewhat paraphrased form) the following sentence from Chrysostom’s sermon: “Your cupidity extends so far that at last you would deprive the poor even of sunlight and free air.”²

Kuyper’s citation of Chrysostom occurs immediately after he refers to a denunciation by the Reformed theologian John Calvin (1509–1564)—made in the wealthy city of Geneva—of the tendency of the rich to take more than their fair share of land for their fine houses and gardens, consigning the poor to slums.

Although Kuyper does not make it explicit, he is clearly dependent on Calvin for his reference to Chrysostom, for Calvin himself refers to Chrysostom’s claim in his treatment of the same verse from Isaiah’s prophecy. Calvin writes,

So great is the keenness of covetous men that they desire to have everything possessed by themselves alone, and reckon everything that is obtained by others to be something which they want, and which has been taken from them. Hence the beautiful observation of Chrysostom, that “covetous men, if they could, would willingly take the sun from the poor,” for they envy their brethren the common elements, and would gladly swallow them up.³

Chrysostom’s sermons and writings on poverty and wealth, along with those of other fathers, most notably Saint Basil the Great (330–379), have had a profound influence on Christian social teaching through the centuries. This is reflected not only in the fact that they are recalled by medieval scholastic theologians such as Saint Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274), and Reformers such as John Calvin, but also in the fact that their feast days are commemorated worldwide. They are, moreover, frequently cited in Catholic social teaching, including the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, and in sermons, exhortations, and encyclicals by Pope Francis (Jorge Mario Bergolio).⁴

Kuyper’s appeal to Chrysostom—albeit by way of Calvin’s *Commentary on Isaiah*—invites an enquiry into how Kuyper’s teaching on wealth and poverty may have been influenced (positively or negatively) by the teaching of the fathers. Insofar as Kuyper and the fathers both draw on the Bible, some similarities can of course be expected. But is there any evidence—other than his brief allusion to Chrysostom—that the fathers influenced his thinking on poverty and wealth?

Another stimulus to this inquiry is fundamental to the nature of Kuyper’s teaching on this subject. An anthology of Kuyper’s writings on business and economics has recently been published.⁵ Those writings—which in never having

been brought together before reflect a lacuna in Kuyper studies—vary widely in terms of provenance and style and reveal that he held both positive and negative views of wealth.⁶ This may not be so interesting a fact, were it not for the tendency of theologians, church leaders, and preachers, especially since the proliferation of liberation theology in the 1960s, to present an exclusively negative view of wealth. There is an irony here. The concern of such spokespeople is generally to address the problem of poverty, yet material wealth is (self-evidently) the only antidote to material poverty. It is only logical, therefore, that a concern for poverty and its causes should be matched with a concern for wealth and its causes (provided, of course, those causes are good for the planet and its people). Wealthy well-intentioned people may preoccupy themselves with poverty, yet people in poverty are generally preoccupied with wealth and how it can be generated and sustained. It is no coincidence that some of the highest rates of entrepreneurial wealth generation globally can be found among first-generation immigrants who have no inherited privileges or wealth to fall back on; and that many countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America with historically high levels of poverty but improved business environments are among the world’s fastest growing economies.⁷

The anthology reveals that both concerns—for poverty alleviation and wealth generation—were central in Kuyper’s thinking. But can they both be found in the fathers? Going by many treatments of patristic teaching on wealth and poverty, “no” would be the only credible answer, as they focus on teaching they regard as proto-communist.⁸ This article does not provide space to present evidence to counter that standpoint. But if a balance exists in the teachings of the fathers on the value of wealth, it could have provided Kuyper with grounds for the balance that is demonstrated in the anthology. Kuyper could, of course, have reached his nuanced position by way of a route that did not involve the fathers. But even if that is the case, Kuyper’s position could still have historical *precedent*—if not historical *source*—in the teaching of the fathers.

In this article, one aspect of the teaching of the fathers and Abraham Kuyper on poverty and wealth will be discussed—the notion that to own is to steal. A key reason for this selection is the inspiration it has provided, not only to socialism (as will become clear below) but also to contemporary Catholic social teaching. For example, paragraph 2446 of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states:

St. John Chrysostom vigorously recalls this: “Not to enable the poor to share in our goods is to steal from them and deprive them of life. The goods we possess are not ours, but theirs.” “The demands of justice must be satisfied first of all; that which is already due in justice is not to be offered as a gift of charity”: When we attend to the needs of those in want, we give them

what is theirs, not ours. More than performing works of mercy, we are paying a debt of justice.⁹

In another example, Pope Francis also appeals to Chrysostom: “I encourage financial experts and political leaders to ponder the words of one of the sages of antiquity: ‘Not to share one’s wealth with the poor is to steal from them and to take away their livelihood. It is not our own goods which we hold, but theirs.’”¹⁰ Following this discussion, Kuyper’s attitude to the fathers in general will be considered. While the research undergirding this article has not found any explicit reference by Kuyper to patristic teaching on poverty and wealth, besides his fleeting appeal to Chrysostom, investigating Kuyper’s reference to patristic teaching in general should help determine how likely it is that the fathers influenced his thinking in this field. Following this discussion, attention will turn to how that one selected aspect of the fathers’ teaching recurs (albeit without explicit reference to the fathers) in Kuyper’s deliberations.

The Church Fathers on Property as Theft

For the fathers of the church, the right handling of wealth was one of the most important issues faced by the church of their day, and this is reflected in the amount of attention they pay to it in their extant writings. Despite this, it is an area that has until relatively recently received comparatively little attention in patristic study, and is one in which further research still needs to be done.¹¹ One reason for the relative neglect is that the richest sources for this teaching are homilies, rather than theoretical treatments, addressed to specific congregations in specific circumstances. Partly as a result, this area of the fathers’ teaching is shot through with tensions and apparent contradictions between positive and negative strands that can bewilder and deter researchers who lack a thorough understanding of their historical, geographic, and social context.

One clear strand in the negative teaching of the fathers is the ultimately evil origin of wealth.¹² Saints Irenaeus, Jerome, Chrysostom, Ambrose, and Augustine all agree that the beginning and root of wealth is to be found in some form of injustice, either on the part of the wealthy person themselves or on the part of the person or people from whom their wealth is gained or inherited.¹³

Chrysostom in particular added theological justification to his arguments, insisting that wealth is evil because God, who is the ultimate owner of everything, has created all material goods to be held in common—the primordial condition of humanity is perfect commonality. To claim sole possession of any part of it, therefore, is to be guilty of theft, both against God and against other human

beings. In his homily on the Parable of Lazarus and the Rich Man, Chrysostom argues forcefully that the rich possess the property of the poor.¹⁴ Basil the Great is no less explicit, calling “robbers” those who make their own those things they have received to distribute, and those who are able but unwilling to clothe the naked.¹⁵ This teaching—that to own is to steal—is closely tied to teaching about the desirability of common ownership, based not only on the original condition of humankind depicted in the first two chapters of Genesis but on the so-called *panta koina* (“everything in common”) of Acts 4:32 (cf. Acts 2:44).¹⁶ From these two foundational teachings emerges the idea that when the rich give to the poor this is a matter of just redistribution rather than of charity.¹⁷ It is simply rendering the poor their due—a matter of obligation rather than of bounty or benevolence.¹⁸

Abraham Kuyper on Property as Theft

The first traceable encounter Kuyper had with the notion that to own is to steal occurs during his pastorate as a Dutch Reformed minister in Amsterdam (1870–1874). In that role, he published a booklet in 1871 on working people and the church by an anonymous writer, and provided an introduction.¹⁹ It should be of no surprise to secular liberals, the author contends, that people in poverty are threatening to loot their property under the pretext “If there is no more heaven, we at least want to partake in the earthly pleasures that we have brought to others through our own hard work!” Instead of acknowledging that everything belongs to God, the writer continues, the International Workingmens’ Association (IWA) has blazon across its banner the slogan of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon (1809–1865): “Property is theft.”²⁰ If the state and the law are regarded in purely secular terms, the writer concludes, there can hardly be any question of an unlawful violation of the right to property.²¹

In this publication, and in all Kuyper’s subsequent references to Proudhon and the “property is theft” idea, the denial of property rights is associated with the rise of revolutionary enlightenment thinking (especially in its anti-religious and pantheistic forms), and the associated rise of doctrinaire socialism. In the published version of a lecture that Kuyper delivered on “Modernism” in several Dutch cities within a few weeks of writing the introduction to *De Arbeiderskwesitie*, he warned his audience against the attempt Proudhon (and Auguste Comte, 1798–1857) had made to develop a religion against God—“an anti-Christian fanaticism.”²² Likewise, in a series of articles he published in 1874 in *De Standaard*, the daily newspaper Kuyper founded in 1872, he claimed that the notion of “property is robbery” is tied to the notion of “popular sovereignty” because both are rooted in “the denial of God.”²³ Kuyper continued this theme in the 1890s, critiquing the “property is

theft” idea in the context of critiquing pantheism, communism, and other forms of radical socialism, all of which he regarded as having stemmed from the French Revolution.²⁴

These references of Kuyper to the notion that property is theft reflect the increasing momentum of the socialist movement over the final three decades of nineteenth-century Europe. This is exemplified in the rise of the IWA, referred to above, which enjoyed strong support from Proudhon’s followers. Two years before Kuyper’s publication of *De Arbeiderskwesitie* and *Het Modernisme*, the IWA congress in Basel in 1869 saw a confrontation between mutualists, made up largely of Proudhon supporters; and collectivists, made up largely of supporters of Marx. When in 1872 the IWA met in the Netherlands in The Hague, the Proudhon-Marx division came to a head in a conflict between anarchists and Marxists.²⁵ Its resolutions, which would have alarmed and galvanized the anti-revolutionary circles Kuyper joined in 1869, committed the IWA to founding political parties that aimed to capture the power of the state in a bid to instigate socialist transformation. Kuyper’s resistance to the notion that “property is theft” must be understood, therefore, as a response to the threat, as he saw it, from socialist anarchy to the rule of law, especially concerning the right to property.²⁶ But could it also have been a response—even if he does not admit it—to the teaching of the fathers?

Father Abraham among the Church Fathers

Kuyper is known worldwide as a leading Reformed theologian, social activist, and public intellectual in the Calvinist tradition. Indeed, he is widely acknowledged as the founding father of the global neo-Calvinist tradition. It cannot be taken for granted, therefore, that his appeals to theologians of the past should include much reference to those outside the Reformed tradition. Given the attention that is given to the fathers among Catholic and Orthodox theologians, it might be more obvious to assume that Kuyper paid little heed to patristic teaching.

This would, however, be as wrong an assumption about Kuyper as it would be about Calvin, or other major Reformers that Kuyper admired, such as the Dutch Calvinist theologian Gisbertus Voetius (1589–1676). Both Calvin and Voetius were deeply versed in, and respectful of, the fathers, despite their criticisms. Calvin contended, in fact, that the authority given to the fathers in Reformed theology far exceeded that given to them in Rome.²⁷ Although in his dogmatic theology Calvin’s most frequent patristic references were to Augustine, and he critiqued in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* Chrysostom’s understanding of grace and free will, Chrysostom is the most frequently referenced father in Calvin’s commentaries. Impressed by the practical relevance of Chrysostom’s

sermons, Calvin even planned to produce a French translation of them, for which he wrote a preface.²⁸ Regard for the fathers was also reflected at Reformed centers of research outside Geneva, such as Heidelberg University in the seventeenth century and Princeton Theological Seminary in the nineteenth century.²⁹

Similar regard for patristic teaching is apparent both in Kuyper’s public theology, which was written largely for lay people, and in his academic writings, which were written largely for theologians, clergy, and students. In his latter corpus of writings, his familiarity with the fathers is in part reflected in the ease with which he cites from them in the original Greek and Latin.³⁰ This in turn reflects the fact that he began his academic career as a church historian, having received a thorough grounding in historical theology, and a familiarity with its original sources, as a student at the University of Leiden (1855–1862). He even took part during his student years in five literary disputations in 1857–1859 in which he defended verbally in Latin proposals for improvements to the texts of classical authors, including *De Baptismo* by Quintus Tertullian (155–220).³¹ During this time he also worked on a master’s thesis on “The Development of Papal Power under Pope Nicholas I,” which he wrote for the linguist Matthias de Vries (1820–1892). In this substantial and highly scholarly dissertation—written in Dutch but based on Latin sources—Kuyper discussed the role of the church in society and praised Pope Nicholas I (820–867) for his concern for the poor.³² Facility with Latin sources is also evident in Kuyper’s prize-winning student essay that compared the ecclesiology of the reformers Calvin and John à Lasco (1499–1560)—a work of original research numbering 267 pages, excluding footnotes—all in (handwritten) Latin.³³

When the tables were turned and he came to address students himself, Kuyper was clearly more than willing to cite from the fathers. In lectures he gave in systematic theology at the Free University of Amsterdam in the 1880s and 1890s, Kuyper cited the famous line from Saint Augustine of Hippo (354–430): *Inquietum [est] cor meum, donec requiescat in te*.³⁴ For Kuyper this was a “beautiful,” “precious,” and “wonderful” saying of Augustine, and he repeated it in addresses he gave in 1898 in the United States of America to seminary faculty and students in Chicago and New Brunswick, and to the Presbyterian Historical Society in Philadelphia. He provided, in the published version, the English translation “My heart remains unquiet until it can rest in Thee, O God.”³⁵

It was, indeed, Augustine for whom Kuyper reserved special regard in his engagement with the fathers.³⁶ Although he found himself at odds with some aspects of Augustine’s ecclesiology and eschatology, he greatly admired him for his contribution to scholarship, for his public theology, and for his teachings on the fall and on election.³⁷ Much of this admiration sprang from Kuyper’s firm

belief in the sovereignty of God. It was, Kuyper claimed, because of Augustine's profound trinitarian understanding of God's sovereignty that "not even the Synod of Dordt taught God's sovereignty more beautifully and gloriously than Augustine."³⁸

For Kuyper, it was from this belief that Augustine derived his love for *wetenschap* (scholarship and science) and had developed his doctrines, for which Kuyper also expressed great admiration, of *felix culpa* ("the happy fall") and of election.³⁹ Regarding *wetenschap*, the workings of common grace meant that Aristotle "knew more of the cosmos than all the church-Fathers taken together,"⁴⁰ yet early Christian scholars found in Augustine "a thinker who elevated science [*wetenschap*] to new heights."⁴¹ In his treatments of the doctrine of election, Kuyper claimed, Augustine had demonstrated great courage, "unparalleled boldness" and "almost Herculean" intellectual and spiritual power. For Kuyper, Augustine had proved able to "unveil the mystery of election with a firm yet consecrated hand."⁴² He had also, according to Kuyper, rescued orthodoxy from the heretical teachings of Origen that even Tertullian, Ambrose, Basil the Great, and Chrysostom sometimes seemed to support.⁴³ In Kuyper's view, Augustine had received from God "powerful genius," and no one had influenced the confession of the church more profoundly; he was "incomparable amongst the Church Fathers."⁴⁴

The teachings of those fathers on wealth and poverty was derived, however, as much from their spirituality as from their dogmatics, and it was the deep mystical root of patristic theology that most impressed Kuyper in his estimation of Augustine. He expressed admiration for the saint's ability to write from the depths his own inner struggle. In disclosing how great wickedness had spewed forth from the "murder pit" of his heart, Kuyper claimed, Augustine had reminded the church of the wickedness that God in his mercy keeps locked behind bars of grace in every human heart.⁴⁵ Augustine had "learned to gaze on the firmament of God's never-ending mercies, from the abyss of his own guilt and inner contortion."⁴⁶ This mystical basis for Augustine's theology was, for Kuyper, the key to its vitality: "He was a living theologian, not a cold analyst. His *Confessions* were not strung together from dry concepts, but from his own soul experience. In his writings against Pelagius, he gave not the fruit of his mind, but a part of his soul."⁴⁷

Kuyper is far from paying lip service here. His book *Confidentie* ("Confidentially") echoes Augustine's *Confessions* not only in its title but also in its love for the church, its account of personal conversion, and in its appreciation of God's providence and guidance.⁴⁸ Despite Kuyper's impressive theological output in terms of academic writings, moreover, his theological output in the

form of meditations and biblical reflections was far greater. Indeed, most of his multivolume tomes in public theology began life not in academic articles but as reflections for ordinary lay people published in the weekly religious journal *De Heraut* (*The Herald*), of which he became chief editor in 1870.⁴⁹ This helps explain why, for Kuyper, one of the most impressive aspects of patristic teaching is the warmth of the spirituality it embodies. Regardless of their shortcomings, the Holy Spirit had, in Kuyper’s view, worked beauty and enlightenment through the hands of the Church fathers, who can be regarded as “the warm interpreters of the Christian religion.”⁵⁰ The author of *Confidentie*, and of over two thousand meditations—which he continued to write during his term of office as Prime Minister (1901–1905)—had a strong mystical streak that found resonance in the writings of the fathers.⁵¹

From this survey of Kuyper’s engagement with the fathers, it would seem likely that Kuyper’s familiarity and regard for the Church fathers—especially for the mystical dimension of their teaching—meant that he was familiar (beyond his citation of Chrysostom) with their teaching on poverty and wealth. However, we now need to turn to his most sustained engagement with Proudhon and his “property is theft” doctrine to judge whether or not it confirms this likelihood.

Kuyper and the Catechism

In Kuyper’s commentary on the Lord’s Day 42 of the Heidelberg Catechism, Kuyper argues that the eighth commandment—“you shall not steal” (Ex. 20:15)—decisively gives the lie to Proudhon’s “property is theft” doctrine. That commandment, providing as it does the basis for property rights, is “a fixed point for the question of ownership” and “one of the foundations for the very structure of society.”⁵² Kuyper adds, however, an important caveat. When rich owners try to deduce from the eighth commandment that all they own is their lawful property, with which God gives them the freedom to do as they please, then “Christian ethics has the duty and calling to break down all such false notions.”⁵³ The Heidelberg Catechism provides a good basis for this moral enterprise, for it teaches that the eighth commandment is not only transgressed by types of theft that are punishable in law but also: “(i) by all who have in their possession something that was obtained by a scheme, by deception, by usury, and so forth; (ii) by all who are greedy or who squander what they have; and finally (iii) by all who do not use their possessions in order to promote their neighbor’s utmost good and to help the poor.”⁵⁴

Therefore, it is clear, Kuyper argues, that “transgressors of the eighth commandment are largely found amongst owners, and that their number is greater outside the prison walls than inside them.” This claim is striking, based as it is

on the “property is theft” notion he repeatedly opposed. But it is followed by another striking claim that is of overriding importance to the quest made in this article to investigate the potential influence of the fathers on Kuyper’s perspective on wealth and poverty:

Proudhon’s claim that *all* property comes from theft is certainly untrue. On closer examination, however, it is true that *a very large part* of people’s belongings in this world is stolen property—yet it was not Proudhon who discovered this, for as early as 1563 this awareness could already be found in the Heidelberg Catechism.⁵⁵

Kuyper’s decades-long rejection of Proudhon’s perspective on property, receives here, “on closer examination,” a reappraisal: it is actually enshrined in the Heidelberg Catechism! Unabashed, Kuyper now presents a sixteenth century Reformed confession, rather than the writings of a nineteenth-century socialist, as the source of this idea. But if Kuyper’s engagement with the fathers suggests it is likely that he was familiar with their teaching on “property is theft,” why does Kuyper trace back this idea only as far as the Heidelberg Catechism?

One possible answer is obvious: as Kuyper was an advocate of the Reformed theology the Catechism represents, admitting that the idea (now presented in a more positive light) harked back to the fathers would not have helped his cause. This is, however, improbable, given that Reformed scholars (including Kuyper) have generally been only too willing to emphasize the patristic roots of their perspective.⁵⁶ Indeed, the Reformed tradition (along with what is often called Evangelical Protestantism) has demonstrated, in contrast to what is often assumed, great commitment to investigating and appropriating early Christian theology and practice.⁵⁷ A case could even be made that one reason why Kuyper pinned his critique of the “property is theft” idea onto Proudhon, rather than onto the fathers, is that he was reluctant to be seen to be critical of the fathers.

Kuyper and the Social Congress

Another possible explanation is that Kuyper held a bias against those spiritual traditions more readily associated (in popular perception) with the fathers, whether inside or outside Roman Catholicism, and that this held him back from open engagement with patristic social teaching. This, however, would take inadequate account of the published version of Kuyper’s famous speech at the Christian Social Congress in Amsterdam in 1891, held just six months after Pope Leo XIII issued his encyclical *Rerum Novarum*. In that speech, Kuyper asked what Christians in

the Netherlands should be doing about the social needs of their time. Christians in other countries, he claimed, had been coming to the realization that serious study and determined action were required. In the following citation from that speech, the endnote it contains is Kuyper’s own.⁵⁸

Think of the action of the Christian Social Workers’ Party ... in Berlin, or the Christian Socialists, inspired by Maurice and Kingsley, who have joined forces in London under Rev. Headlam, or the Christian Society of Social Economics ... in Geneva. Speaking of Christianity in the broadest sense, think of what has been done toward a solution of the social question from the side of Catholics⁵⁹ by such capable intellectuals as Le Play and Von Ketteler; by a whole series of significant congresses in Germany, France, and Belgium; and most recently by Leo XIII in his encyclical. Our own entry [into the debate on the social question], therefore, does not come too early but too late. We lag behind others when we could have been in the vanguard.

This passage and its endnote demonstrate something that is evident throughout the speech and in the scholarly references in its over one hundred endnotes—that Kuyper was knowledgeable of, and had appreciation for, social thinking produced not only by Roman Catholics but also by secular and Christian socialists, including two leading Anglican Christian socialists and professors at Cambridge: Frederick D. Maurice (1805–1872) and Charles Kingsley (1819–1875).⁶⁰ His interest in Maurice was long-standing. In a letter to his predecessor as leader of the anti-revolutionary movement in Dutch politics, Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer (1801–1876) in 1873, Kuyper wrote, “Do you know *Social Morality*, by F. D. Maurice? In my opinion, it is a lovely and excellent book that we ought to have translated.”⁶¹ The following year he published an article and a feuilleton on Maurice in *De Standaard*, the daily newspaper Kuyper founded in 1872.⁶²

But the cited extract from Kuyper’s speech does not only demonstrate that he found inspiration in left-leaning Catholic and Anglican thinking. It also shows Kuyper calling for the same kind of in-depth study—of relevant literature and of adverse social circumstances—in which Roman Catholics and socialists were far excelling Protestants. He argued that, with earnestness and deep commitment to scholarship:

Our Christian intellectuals should already have been laboring for twenty or thirty years ... to plumb the depths of this desperate situation. This point cannot be emphasized enough. We too, for our part, ought to be engaged in study and action. We will not make any progress in tackling the social question with sentimental talk or shallow generalities. That was the mistake of the earlier communists and utopian dreamers such as Fourier and Proudhon.

Socialism is a power to be reckoned with precisely because of its studies and serious research.⁶³

Kuyper's extensive reading and erudition on the social question, including the work of Anglican and Catholic writers, makes it even more surprising—given the propensity such writers share with Reformed writers to make frequent and explicit reference to the fathers—that he makes no substantial reference to the social teachings of the fathers. The book, for instance, by Maurice that Kuyper valued so highly contains several references to the fathers, noting their “powerful influence on the life of society.”⁶⁴ Maurice lauds Chrysostom in particular as a man of eloquence and integrity, who emphatically opposed tyranny. As “a faithful witness for a Gospel to the poor,” Chrysostom caused offence to the Court of Constantinople, while “the people of the city looked up to him as their friend and champion.”⁶⁵ Likewise Frédéric Le Play (1806–1882), whom Kuyper also cites, refers to “the luminous expositions of Saint Jerome and Saint Augustine.”⁶⁶ In the encyclical Kuyper refers to in his speech, Pope Leo XIII alludes to Tertullian's teaching on the care of the poor.⁶⁷

Even Proudhon refers to the fathers. He only does so tangentially, and not in support of his “property is theft” thesis.⁶⁸ However, there are good grounds to suggest that Proudhon is directly dependent on patristic teaching for his “property is theft” idea. This is because when he began his career in 1827 as an apprentice at the printing firm Gauthier in Besançon, his main task was proofreading ecclesiastical works, including writings by the fathers. His contemporary, the French literary critic Charles Sainte-Beuve (1804–1869), wrote that Proudhon thereby became a self-taught expert in comparative philology, and that he became so familiar with works on church history and theology that “uninformed people were led to believe that he had studied at a seminary.”⁶⁹ In fact Proudhon was at this time questioning many of the religious beliefs he had grown up with. In part through the influence of the utopian socialist philosopher Charles Fourier (1772–1837), whom Kuyper also mentions in the quote from “The Social Question” above, Proudhon eventually rejected Christianity and became the acknowledged father of anarchism and the author of many writings with provocative titles, such as “God is Evil, Man is Free.”⁷⁰ The provocation clearly worked in the case of Kuyper, who as a young Reformed minister in Amsterdam (as noted earlier) began critiquing Proudhon for advocating anti-God religious fanaticism. Proudhon may have been, in Kuyper's words twenty years later at the Social Congress, a “utopian dreamer.” But that dream does appear to have been inspired, at least in part, by the fathers and their notion of the original commonality of earthly goods.

Kuyper made clear in his Social Congress speech what he thought of this notion: “what the social democrats call ‘community of goods’ existed neither in ancient Israel nor in the first Christian community. On the contrary, an absolute community of this kind is everywhere precluded in Scripture.” Even the account of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5:1–11 confirmed, Kuyper claimed, the validity of property rights. For when the apostle Peter confronted Ananias about the full proceeds of his land sale, he did so saying, “While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, were not the proceeds at your disposal?” (Acts 5:4). Neither Calvin nor any Reformed exegete, Kuyper averred, had interpreted Acts 2:44–45 (the *panta koina* so favored by the fathers) as describing a “community of goods.”⁷¹

However, the claim that property rights are absolute was, for Kuyper, as misguided as the call for all private property to be converted into communal property. Christians should oppose both these fallacies, on the basis of God’s ordinances. They should insist that

there can be no question of absolute ownership except in the case of God himself, and that all our possessions are only held on loan from him. We manage our possessions only as a form of stewardship. This means on the one hand that none but God the Lord can release us from our responsibility for managing those possessions; but on the other hand that we can never have any other property right than in association with the organic coherence of humanity, hence also with the organic coherence of humanity’s goods.⁷²

Here are two important ideas that encapsulate Kuyper’s perspective on “property is theft,” as discussed in this article: “stewardship” and “the organic coherence of humanity’s goods.” Stewardship requires little elucidation, as it has become, especially since the latter part of the twentieth century, a familiar term in Christian social thinking and in wider public discourse, particularly in the face of climate change.⁷³ For Kuyper, owners are not necessarily thieves, but they are most definitely stewards. They own nothing in an absolute sense—all their assets belong to God, to whom they are responsible for how they use them.⁷⁴ Less familiar is the idea of the “organic coherence of humanity’s goods.” But it stems, as Kuyper points out, from the notion of the “organic coherence of humanity.” This notion bears resemblance to the idea encountered earlier in Chrysostom that the primordial state of human beings is one of perfect commonality. It has played an important role in the tradition of Catholic Social Teaching that has ensued since Pope Leo XIII issued *Rerum Novarum* in 1891, expressed most notably in the idea of “the universal destination of goods.”⁷⁵

For Kuyper, humanity is organically interrelated, within itself and with the rest of creation, because all that exists shares a common maker and is imbued with the creator's ordinances. This is reflected in the responsibility humans have to care, as stewards, for the rest of creation. For Kuyper this stood in stark contrast to *laissez-faire* liberalism, which regarded society as little more than an aggregate of self-seeking, autonomous individuals, and to collective socialism, in which the organic structure of society is subsumed by an overweening state. Kuyper's alternative was his famous doctrine of "sphere-sovereignty," in which the state is regarded merely as one of many social spheres, albeit one with special powers to intervene when conflict occurs between the spheres.⁷⁶

Kuyper provided additional theological justification for his belief in the organic nature of human society, despite the fall, in the Eucharist, in the resurrection, and in ecclesiology. "The Lord, who is the single owner of all goods, demands the community of goods . . . [and has] abolished all artificial divisions between people by joining rich and poor in one holy food at the Lord's Supper." This symbol of unity, Kuyper explained, not only binds Christians together; it binds all people together as fellow human beings.⁷⁷ As a result of Christ's reconciling and redemptive work, the "original organism of humanity, now purified, has been resurrected in the church of Christ." In view of these truths, "Christianity is preeminently social."⁷⁸

Conclusion

This article began by noting how words from an eighth century BC prophet in Israel inspired a fourth century pastor in Turkey (Türkiye), who in turn inspired a sixteenth-century pastor in Switzerland, who in turn inspired a nineteenth-century pastor in the Netherlands, to challenge the tendency of the rich to exploit the poor by taking private ownership of public goods. The fact that this prophetic wave has rippled across millennia no doubt reflects the power, beauty, and profundity of Israelite poetry, especially when relayed through three of Christianity's most accomplished and effective communicators. The same challenge has flowed in Catholic as well as Protestant directions, as reflected in two more great communicators: Thomas Aquinas and Pope Francis. Indeed, the latter's pronouncements, one of which was noted earlier, suggest that this challenge still retains its force. In the citation from *Evangelii Gaudium* (§ 57), Pope Francis shows himself to be entirely at ease in appealing to the "property is theft" motif, and is even prepared to direct it toward bankers and politicians. More recently he has written:

In the first Christian centuries, a number of thinkers developed a universal vision in their reflections on the common destination of created goods. This led them to realize that if one person lacks what is necessary to live with

dignity, it is because another person is detaining it. Saint John Chrysostom summarizes it in this way: “Not to share our wealth with the poor is to rob them and take away their livelihood. The riches we possess are not our own, but theirs as well.” In the words of Saint Gregory the Great, “When we provide the needy with their basic needs, we are giving them what belongs to them, not to us.”⁷⁹

In recognition of such pronouncements by Pope Francis (made instant and global in the social media era of his pontificate), the Isaiah-Chrysostom-Calvin-Kuyper relay has provided the starting-point of the enquiry made in this article into how Abraham Kuyper’s engagement with the notion of “property is theft” may have been influenced by the social teachings of the fathers.⁸⁰ After outlining those teachings, Kuyper’s polemics against this notion—which he associated with the anarchist Pierre-Joseph Proudhon—are surveyed against the backdrop of the rise of socialism in late nineteenth-century Europe. Kuyper and his anti-revolutionary colleagues were alarmed by the threat radical socialism posed to the rule of law, including the right to property.

The survey of Kuyper’s engagement with the fathers, which began as a student in Leiden, seems to suggest that he would have been aware of the social teaching of the fathers, especially because of his regard for Augustine and for devotional theology. But Kuyper’s engagement with the “property is theft” motif in his commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism calls this into question, as he traces the origin of the idea only as far back as the Catechism. This is remarkable in itself, given the fact that he had hitherto attributed the idea to anti-religious anarchism of the sort represented by Proudhon. Equally remarkable, given this attribution, is that Proudhon may have gleaned his idea directly from the fathers.

Various reasons are considered as to why Kuyper may have been unwilling to concede that the “property is theft” idea originates in the fathers. But none of these are deemed entirely satisfactory. The Heidelberg Catechism, born as it was out of a long tradition of reflection on the economic implications of biblical teaching that stretches back to the fathers, to an extent Kuyper appears not to have considered before he came to write his commentary on it in 1893, echoed the idea that to own is to steal.

This article concludes with a discussion of how Kuyper resolved the tension in his thinking between two moral imperatives: the right to own property and the responsibility of property owners to use their assets to help the poor. Framed within a broader tension between the claims of *laissez-faire* liberalism and collective socialism, the paper suggests that Kuyper’s solution was a combination of two closely related ideas—“stewardship” and “the organic coherence of human-

ity's goods." His idea of stewardship of resources may have been inspired by the sixteenth century theologian Jeremias Bastingius,⁸¹ but it has a contemporary ring to it that suggests Kuyper was portentous, rather than retrospective, in his use of the term. Kuyper's "organic coherence" concept echoes the idea of primordial commonality in the fathers but it too is suggestive and foreshadows the concept of the universal destination of goods in Catholic social teaching. It also resonates with Kuyper's organic concept of society, expressed most notably in his doctrine of sphere sovereignty. He found theological justification for it in the Eucharist, the resurrection, and in ecclesiology. Christianity is intensely social because the church is enabled through Christ's risen life to embody the original organic coherence of humanity.

Drawing these ideas together, it may be possible to conclude the following. For Kuyper, property (assuming it is not unjustly obtained) cannot be theft in any absolute sense because humans are not owners in any absolute sense—they are merely stewards. They can, however, be bad stewards, unwilling to recognize that the assets at their disposal are in fact part of an elaborate organic structure of existence that involves a matrix of relationships that obliges them to share those assets with the needy. For this reason, withholding property from the poor is not just matter of charity but of justice. Hence, Kuyper suggested that there are more transgressors of the eighth commandment outside than inside prison. Material goods are not neutral but are part of a deeply interconnected moral universe charged with divine ordinances that allow the planet and its people to flourish, to the glory of God. Kuyper's qualified accommodation of "property is theft" in his commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism, and his promotion of the notion of stewardship and the organic coherence of goods, mean that his view of wealth is more closely in keeping with those of the fathers than his one brief allusion to Chrysostom's social teaching and his polemics against "property is theft" would imply.

Notes

1. Chrysostom declares,

God giveth all those things with liberality, which are more necessary than riches; such, for example, as the air, the water, the fire, the sun; all things of this kind.... For if these necessities were not common, perhaps they who are rich, practicing their usual covetousness, would strangle those who were poor. For if they do this for the sake of money, much rather would they do so for the things referred to.

See John Chrysostom, “The Homilies on the Statues,” 2.19, in *NPNF*¹ 9:351.

2. “Uw hebzuchtige zin gaat zóó ver, dat ge aan de armen ten leste ook het zonlicht en de vrije lucht zoudt benemen.” In Abraham Kuyper, “Eerste Jesaiaansche Wee U!,” in *De Heraut*, May 12, 1895, reprinted in idem, *Als Gij in Uw Huis Zit: Meditatiën voor het Huislijk Saamleven* (Amsterdam/Pretoria: Höveker & Wormser, 1899), 228; and idem, *On Business and Economics*, ed. Peter S. Heslam, Abraham Kuyper Collected Works in Public Theology, ed. Jordan J. Ballor and Melvin Flikkema (Bellingham, WA: Lexham; Grand Rapids: Acton Institute, 2021), 363.
3. From Calvin’s commentary on Isaiah 5:8. See John Calvin, *Calvin’s Commentaries* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003).
4. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* (Charleston, SC: Forgotten Books, 2007); John Calvin, *Praefatio in Chrysostomi Homilias*, in *Corpus Reformatorum: Ioannis Calvini Opera quae supersunt omnia*, vol. 37, ed. Guilielmus Baum, Eduardus Cunitz, and Eduardus Reuss (Braunschweig: Schwetschke, 1863), cols. 831–38. For references to the Catholic social teaching noted, see notes 9, 10, and 79 below. Churches that regard Chrysostom as a saint include the Oriental Orthodox, Eastern Orthodox, Catholic, Anglican, and Lutheran churches.
5. See Kuyper, *On Business and Economics*.
6. Peter S. Heslam, “Calvinism in Business: An Enlightened Enterprise?” in Kuyper, *On Business and Economics*, xix–xxv.
7. Some of the most reliable data on global poverty and entrepreneurship is provided by The World Bank (<https://www.worldbank.org>) and Our World in Data (<https://ourworldindata.org>). For the role of enterprise and faith in tackling poverty, see the following works: Peter Heslam, “The Role of Business in the Fight Against Poverty,” in *Christian Theology and Market Economics* (Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar, 2008), 164–80; idem, “Christianity and the Prospects for Development in the Global South,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Christianity and Economics*, ed. Paul Oslington (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 359–83; idem, “The Rise of Religion and the Future of Capitalism,” *De Ethica: Journal of Philosophical, Theological and Applied Ethics* 2, no. 3 (2015): 53–72; idem, “An Ethical Policy for an Islamic People: The Colonial Policy of the Kuyper Cabinet (1901–1905) and

- the Challenge of Human Development,” *Journal of Markets & Morality* 23, no. 2 (2020): 297–317; idem, “Faith, Fortune and the Future: Christianity and Enterprise in Human Development,” *Religions* 12, no. 12 (2021); and idem, “Calvinism in Business: An Enlightened Enterprise?,” in Kuyper, *On Business and Economics*, xix–xxv.
8. Since the rise of communism in the second half of the nineteenth century, the writings on the fathers have often been regarded as providing a basis for Marxism. See John A. Ryan, *Alleged Socialism of the Church Fathers* (Saint Louis: Herder, 1913); Arthur O. Lovejoy, “The Communism of Saint Ambrose,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 3, no. 4 (1942): 458n1; Jacob Viner, “Chapter One: The Economic Doctrines of the Christian Fathers,” *History of Political Economy* 10, no. 1 (1978): 14–18; Charles Avila, *Ownership: Early Christian Teaching* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1983), xi–xxi; Brian Matz, “The Principle of Detachment from Private Property in Basil the Great’s Homily 6 and its Context,” in *Reading Patristic Texts on Social Ethics: Issues and Challenges for the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Johan Leemans, Brian J. Matz, and Johan Verstraeten (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2011), 162, 162n1; James Bergida, “Patristic Socialism?: Ambrose of Milan and Catholic Social Teaching on Private Property,” in *Journal of Markets & Morality*, 22, no. 2 (2019): 263–80.
 9. *Catechism of the Catholic Church: Revised in Accordance with the Official Latin Text Promulgated by Pope John Paul II*, 2nd ed. (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2000). The sources cited for this paragraph are John Chrysostom, *De Lazaro Concio*, 2.5, in *PG* 48:992; Pope Paul VI, *Apostolicam Actuositatem* (November 18, 1965), § 8, https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19651118_apostolicam-actuositatem_en.html; Gregory the Great, *Regula Pastoralis*, 3.21, in *PL* 77:87.
 10. Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (November 24, 2013), § 57. See John Chrysostom, *De Lazaro Concio*, 2.5–6, in *PG* 48:992.
 11. Far more attention has been paid to aspects of dogmatic or speculative theology. See, however, Peter Brown, *The World of Late Antiquity: AD 150–750* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1971); idem, *Through the Eye of a Needle: Wealth, the Fall of Rome, and the Making of Christianity in the West, 350–550 AD* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012); Helen Rhee, *Loving the Poor; Saving the Rich: Wealth, Poverty, and Early Christian Formation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012); Martin Hengel, *Property and Riches in the Early Church: Aspects of a Social History of Early Christianity* (London: SCM, 1974); Robin Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians* (London: Penguin, 1988); Ramsey MacMullen, “The Preacher’s Audience (AD 350–400),” *The Journal of Theological Studies* 40 (1989): 503–11; Justo L. González, *Faith and Wealth: A History of Early Christian Ideas on the Origin, Significance, and Use of Money* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1990). González provides an interesting discussion of the

reasons for the comparative lack of interest in this area (230–34). More recent studies include Wendy Mayer, “John Chrysostom on Poverty,” in *Preaching Poverty in Late Antiquity: Perceptions and Realities*, ed. Pauline Allen, Wendy Mayer, and Bronwen Neil (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2009), 69–118.

12. The existence of this strand in the teaching of the fathers is not always fully acknowledged in the literature on late antiquity. See, e.g., William H. C. Frend, *The Rise of Christianity* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1984), 570–71; Geoffrey E. M. de Ste Croix, *The Class Struggle in the Ancient Greek World* (London: Duckworth, 1981), 433–34; Wendy Mayer and Pauline Allen, *John Chrysostom* (London: Routledge, 2000). Patristic teaching on the value of wealth is primarily concerned with wealth held by individuals, rather than by large groups of people. This is significant to any attempt to apply the teaching of the fathers to modern socioeconomic policy.
13. See Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 4.30.1; Jerome, *Letters* 120.1; John Chrysostom, *Homilies on 1 Timothy*, 12, in *NPWF*¹ 13:444–48; idem, *De Lazaro Concio*, 2.4, in *PG* 48:987–88; Ambrose, *De Nabuthe*, 11, in *PL* 14:747; Martin McGuire, *S. Ambrosii De Nabuthe Jezraelita: A Commentary with an Introduction and Translation* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1927), 53; Augustine, *Enarrationes in Psalmos*, 88.2, in *PL* 37:1134. It should be noted that a good deal of economic activity in antiquity (and through much of the Middle Ages) was based on zero-sum thinking, rather than on mutual advantage and sustainable economic growth. Economies were largely based on the fixed commodity of land and were characterized by subsistence farming and the economics of plunder and expropriation by means of slavery, tribute, and levies. See Brian Griffiths, *The Creation of Wealth* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1984), 23–36; John Schneider, *The Good of Affluence: Seeking God in a Culture of Wealth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 31; Samuel Gregg, *For God and Profit: How Banking and Finance Can Serve the Common Good* (Spring Valley: Crossroad, 2016), 21–36.
14. Chrysostom, *De Lazaro Concio*, 2.4, in *PG* 48:987–88.
15. Basil the Great, *Homilia in illud Lucae*, in *PG* 31:276–77.
16. Troeltsch famously described the picture of the early church given in Acts 4:32–35 as one of “love communism.” See Ernst Troeltsch, *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches*, 2 vols. (New York: Harper & Row, 1960), 1:63. There is no suggestion in the fathers that radical *koinonia* was to be restricted to religious orders; it was meant to be characteristic of the church as a whole.
17. See, e.g., Ambrose, *De Nabuthe*, 11, in *PL* 14:747.
18. Ambrose addresses the rich in his *De Nabuthe* with these words: “You are not making a gift of your possessions to the poor person. You are handing over to him what is his” (12.53). Likewise, Augustine wrote that “the superfluities of the rich are the necessities of the poor” (*Enarrationes in Psalmos*, 147.12), and that therefore “whatever

you have in excess is not your own property” (*In Psalmos*, 66.3). Aquinas provides a citation from Augustine that makes a similar point: “If we possess privately what is enough for us, other things belong not to us but to the poor, and we have the dispensing of them; but we can claim ownership of them only by wicked theft.” See Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* II-II, q. 185, a. 7. Aquinas is citing from Augustine’s letter 185 to the Roman governor and military tribune Bonifatius, also known as Count Boniface, who died in 432.

19. See *De Arbeiderskwestie en de Kerk. Een Woord over het Sociale Vraagstuk. Naar het Hoogduitsch. Ingeleid door Dr. A. Kuyper* (Amsterdam: Van Kesteren, 1871). Kuyper’s introduction to this booklet is available in English translation in Kuyper, *On Business and Economics*, 127–29. The booklet itself is a Dutch translation of *Zur Arbeiterfrage. Von einem Landpfarrer für Landpfarrer und für Alle welche es lesen wollen* (“On the Labour Question: From a Country Parson for Country Parsons and for All Who Would Like to Read It”), published in Halle in 1870. Although the author is anonymous, the content bears similarities to Wilhelm von Ketteler, *Die Arbeiterfrage und das Christentum* (Mainz: Verlag Von Franz Kirchheim, 1864) and may have been written by one of Von Ketteler’s followers. Von Ketteler was the Roman Catholic Bishop of Mainz and a pioneer of Christian social thought in Germany. Kuyper often expressed admiration for him, after receiving in 1869 a copy of *Die Arbeiterfrage* from the wife of his friend and mentor Groen van Prinsterer (1801–1876) in 1869, when Kuyper was dean of Saint Martin’s Cathedral (known as the Dom Church since it became Protestant in 1580) in Utrecht from 1867 to 1870. See *Briefwisseling van Mr G. Groen van Prinsterer met Dr A. Kuyper, 1864–1876*, ed. Adriaan Goslinga (Kampen: Kok, 1937), 37. Kuyper shared Von Ketteler’s disdain both for economic liberalism and for doctrinaire socialism.
20. *De Arbeiderskwestie*, 23–24. The International Workingmen’s Association (IWA) was founded in London in 1864. The European radicals involved in the IWA included utopian socialist followers of Robert Owen (1771–1858) and of Proudhon, as well as a certain middle-aged émigré journalist by the name of Karl Marx (1818–1883). Its first congress was held in Geneva in 1866. Proudhon formulated his notion that “property is theft” (“La propriété, c’est le vol!”) in idem, *Qu’est-ce que la propriété? Ou recherches sur le principe du droit et du gouvernement* (Paris: Brocard, 1840); ET: idem, *What is Property? An Inquiry into the Principle of Right and of Government*, trans. Benjamin R. Tucker (New York: Humboldt Publishing Company, 1890).
21. *De Arbeiderskwestie*, 24. Kuyper made this point for himself twenty years later, in the published version of his speech at the opening of the Christian Social Congress in Amsterdam in 1891: Abraham Kuyper, *Het Sociale Vraagstuk en de Christelijke Religie: Rede ter Opening van het Sociaal Congres op 9 November 1891, Gehouden* (Amsterdam: Wormser, 1891), 71n78; ET: “The Social Question and the Christian Religion,” in idem, *On Business and Economics*, 215n87.

22. Abraham Kuyper, *Het Modernisme: Een Fata Morgana op Christelijk Gebied* (Amsterdam: De Hoogh, 1871), 64n20; ET: idem, “A Fata Morgana,” *The Methodist Review*, 5th series, 22, nos. 2 and 3 (1906): 185–203 and 355–78. An abridged English version appears in idem, *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader*, ed. James D. Bratt (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 88–124.
23. Abraham Kuyper, “Is Dwaling Strafbaar?,” *De Standaard*, no. 660, May 25/26, 1874–no. 680, June 18, 1874. Published in Abraham Kuyper, *On Charity and Justice*, ed. Matthew J. Tuininga, *Collected Works of Public Theology*, ed. Jordan J. Ballor and Melvin Flikkema (Bellingham: Lexham; Grand Rapids: Acton Institute, 2022), 155–207.
24. See Kuyper, “The Social Question,” 214–16, including n86 (n77 in *Het Sociale Vraagstuk*); idem, “Commentary on Lord’s Day 42 of the Heidelberg Catechism,” in idem, *On Business and Economics*, 39–40 (from idem, *E Voto Dordraceno: Toelichting op den Heidelbergschen Catechismus*, 4 vols., 3rd ed. (Kampen: Kok, 1892–1895), 4:184–227; and idem, *Lectures on Calvinism: Six Lectures Delivered at Princeton University Under Auspices of the L.P. Stone Foundation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1931), 76, 179. In Kuyper’s speech on “The Social Question,” he cites with approval Groen van Prinsterer’s claim that “socialism finds its source in the French Revolution” and, like the Revolution, “can only be vanquished by Christianity” (178n10). On this, Kuyper and Groen resonate with the author of *De Arbeiderskwestie*, who ends his booklet: “Only Christianity can kill selfishness. Liberty, Equality and Fraternity—where can they be found, other than in Christ? Where Christian love dies, that is where communism emerges, for human beings cannot live without community.... Not by the shrill-sounding slogans of the revolution, but only by the reign of Christ’s love is the tyranny of selfishness in national life exorcised” (40).
25. At this congress, an attempt was made by Marxists to expel the anarchists Mikhail Bakunin (1814–1876) and James Guillaume (1844–1916).
26. This does not mean Kuyper can be regarded as politically “conservative.” In many ways, he was “progressive,” not least in his colonial policy, in which he argued that the vast annual profits (*batig slot*) the Netherlands had made through the economic exploitation of its colonial people—especially in the Dutch East Indies (Indonesia) by means of the so-called Cultivation System—amounted to a debt of honor. The money should be returned through a programme of social and economic improvement in the colonies referred to as the “Ethical Policy.” This became official government policy in the Queen’s speech of 1901, written by Kuyper as Prime Minister. See Peter S. Heslam, “An Ethical Policy for an Islamic People: The Colonial Policy of the Kuyper Cabinet (1901–1905) and the Challenge of Human Development,” *Journal of Markets & Morality* 23, no. 2 (2020): 297–317. Despite Kuyper’s opposition to “property is theft,” his attitude to the Cultivation System and its *batig slot* resonates with this notion.

27. John Calvin, *Joannis Calvinii Opera Selecta*, ed. Petrus Barth, Dora Scheuner, and Wilhelm Niesel (Monachii: Kaiser Verlag, 1952–1963), 1:27.
28. Calvin, *Praefatio in Chrysostomi Homilias*. See also Ian P. Hazlett, “Calvin’s Latin Preface to his Proposed French Edition of Chrysostom’s Homilies: Translation and Commentary,” in *Humanism and Reform: The Church in Europe, England and Scotland, 1400–1643—Essays in Honour of James K. Cameron*, ed. James Kirk (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991), 133; Johannes van Oort, “Notes on Calvin’s Knowledge, Use, and Misuse of the Church Fathers,” *HTS Theological Studies* 71, no. 3 (2015): 1–9; Paul A. Hartog, “Calvin’s Preface to Chrysostom’s Homilies as a Window into Calvin’s Own Priorities and Perspectives,” *Perichoresis* 17, no. 4 (2019): 57–71.
29. At Heidelberg, Reiner Bachoff von Echt provided (in a work of over 700 pages) extensive commentary on the patristic roots of the Heidelberg Catechism. See his *Catechisis religionis christianae, quae in ecclesiis et scholis electoralis Palatinatus traditur, testimoniis sacrae scripturae, ac sententiis sanctorum patrum, qui primis quingentis [...] Christo nato annis in eccl. Dei* (Hanau: Guilielmus Antonius, 1603); the leading Princeton Theologian Benjamin B. Warfield, who played host when Kuyper visited Princeton in 1898 to give his famous Stone Lectures on Calvinism, is the author of *Studies in Tertullian and Augustine*, ed. Ethelbert D. Warfield (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1930). Quantin highlights the importance of Heidelberg as a centre of patristic studies in the seventeenth century in Jean-Louis Quantin, *The Church of England and Christian Antiquity: The Construction of a Confessional Identity in the 17th Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 11. See also Irena Backus, “The Fathers in Calvinist Orthodoxy: Patristic Scholarship,” in *The Reception of the Church Fathers in the West: From the Carolingians to the Maurists*, vol. 2 (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 987–1008.
30. See, e.g., Kuyper’s treatments of Origen, Chrysostom, Ambrose, and Augustine in his three-volume work of scholarship *Encyclopaedie der Heilige Godgeleerdheid*, Tweede, Herziene Druk (Kampen: Kok, 1908), 1:58–68; and his treatment of the fathers in general in a section entitled “History of Theology” in vol. 2 of the *Encyclopaedie*, 592–635, available in Abraham Kuyper, *Principles of Sacred Theology: With an Introduction by Benjamin B. Warfield* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), 637–79. This English translation was originally published by Charles Scribner & Son in New York during Kuyper’s visit to the USA in 1898.
31. Out of the 114 theses (propositions or proposals) Kuyper defended, there is some uncertainty as to which actually originated with him. Baarda expresses confidence that the eighteenth thesis, which posits that *crucem* (cross) should be read in place of *Christum* (Christ) in Tertullian’s *De Baptismo*, can be attributed to Kuyper. See Tjitze Baarda, “Het Recht van Tekstemendatie bij Abraham Kuyper” [“Abraham Kuyper’s Approach to the Right to Emend Texts”], in *In Rapport met de Tijd: 100*

Jaar Theologie aan de Vrije Universiteit 1880–1980 (Kampen: Kok, 1980), 27–28. De Jonge suggests that only three of the 114 theses originated with Kuyper, and that they do not include the eighteenth. See Henk Jan de Jonge, “Kuyper en de disputaties geleid door Cobet,” in *Gereformeerd Theologisch Tijdschrift* 81 (1981): 22–35. Kuyper defended his theses under the tutelage of the classicist Carel G. Cobet (1813–1889), who had a flair for palaeography and the emendation of difficult passages of classical text.

32. Kuyper submitted his thesis to De Vries in January 1859. It may have been a more obvious decision for him to have submitted it to the church historian Nicolaas Kist (1793–1859). Jan de Bruijn suggests Kuyper’s lack of regard for Kist influenced this decision. See Jan de Bruijn, *Abraham Kuyper: A Pictorial Biography* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 24. Health factors may have been at play, however, as Kist was sixty-six years old in 1859, and died later that year. A digital copy of the hand-written text of 152 pages is available in Abraham Kuyper’s Complete Archive, curated by the Neo-Calvinism Research Institute, available at https://sources.neocalvinism.org/archive/?id_item=2976.
33. Kuyper wrote this essay from April 1859 to April 1860. The doctorate in theology he derived from it was awarded in 1862 by the University of Leiden. The essay can be found in English and Latin in Jasper Vree and Johan Zwaan, eds., *Abraham Kuyper’s Commentatio (1860): The Young Kuyper about Calvin, a Lasco, and the Church. Vol. 1: Introduction, Annotations, Bibliography, and Indices; Vol. 2: Commentatio* (Leiden: Brill, 2005). This published version of Kuyper’s essay comes to 398 pages. Substantial extracts are published in English in Abraham Kuyper, *On the Church*, ed. John Halsey Wood, *Collected Works in Public Theology*, ed. Jordan J. Ballor and Melvin Flikkema (Bellingham: Lexham, 2016), 5–39.
34. See Abraham Kuyper, *Locus de Deo: College-dictaat van een der studenten* (Kampen: Kok, 1910), Deel I, Hoofddeel V, §2, p. 41. The quote from Augustine occurs in the first volume of a five-volume work of Kuyper’s dogmatics. This work was not written directly by Kuyper but by one of his students, on the basis of detailed notes he took during Kuyper’s lectures on theology at the Free University of Amsterdam. It bears the lecturer’s imprimatur by way of a foreword written by Kuyper.
35. See a lecture entitled “Symbolism and Revelation,” which Kuyper gave three times in 1898 during his trip to the United States of America: to the Congregational Seminary in Chicago on November 12; to New Brunswick Theological Seminary on November 28; and to the Presbyterian Historical Society in Philadelphia on December 6. Published as *The Antithesis between Symbolism and Revelation: Lecture Delivered Before the Historical Presbyterian Society in Philadelphia, PA. by Prof. Abraham Kuyper, D.D. LL.D. M.P.* (Amsterdam/Pretoria: Höveker & Wormser; Edinburgh: T&T Clark; London: Simpkin, Marshall, 1899). Published in Dutch in *De Heraut*, no. 1095, December 18, 1898–no. 1096, December 25, 1898. The citation occurs

in the opening paragraph of Augustine's Confessions. In its fuller form it reads *Tu excitas ut laudare te delectet, quia fecisti nos ad te et inquietum est cor nostrum donec requiescat in te*. This can be translated as "You inspire us to take delight in praising you, for you have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you." The renowned Catholic philosopher Peter Kreeft, who converted from Calvinism, regards Augustine's phrase as "One of the greatest sentences ever written." See Peter Kreeft, *I Burned for Your Peace: Augustine's Confessions Unpacked* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2016), 21. Kuyper refers to Augustine's saying as "beautiful" and "precious" in Abraham Kuyper, *Gomer voor den Sabbath: Meditatiën over en voor den Sabbath* (Amsterdam: Wormser 1889), 185; and as "wonderful" in idem, *Locus de Deo* I.V, § 2, p. 41 ("het heerlijke woord van Augustinus").

36. In this, Kuyper was in keeping with Reformed theologians in the Reformation period. Among twenty-three anthologies of patristic texts published between 1527 and 1565, Lane found that Augustine was cited in them no less than 2,700 times, compared to only eleven citations taken from Athanasius. See Anthony Lane, "Justification in Sixteenth-Century Patristic Anthologies," in *Auctoritas Patrum: Zur Rezeption der Kirchenväter im 15 und 16 Jahrhundert*, ed. Leif Grane, Alfred Schindler, and Markus Wriedt (Mainz: Verlag Philipp von Zabern, 1993); idem, *John Calvin: Student of the Church Fathers* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999), 13. In fact, the Reformers were merely continuing a tradition; Aquinas makes 3,156 references to Augustine (compared to 2,095 references to Aristotle) in his *Summa Theologica*. Indeed, some of Augustine's influence on Kuyper will undoubtedly have been mediated via Aquinas, for whom Kuyper held great regard. See Kuyper, *Encyclopaedie*, 1:103–8; John Bolt, "Doubting Reformational Anti-Thomism," in *Aquinas Among the Protestants*, ed. Manfred Svensson and David VanDrunen (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell), 129–48; James Eglinton, "The Reception of Aquinas in Kuyper's *Encyclopaedie der Heilige Godgeleerdheid*," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Reception of Aquinas*, ed. Matthew Levering and Marcus Plested (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 452–67.
37. Some of this is reflected in the parallels between Kuyper's idea of the Christian's "twofold fatherland" and Augustine's doctrine of the two cities. See his speech "Twofold Fatherland" in Kuyper, *On the Church*, 283–314. For brief critiques by Kuyper of Augustine's theology (including ecclesiology and eschatology), see Kuyper, *E Voto* 2:403; idem, *Lectures on Calvinism*, 48; and idem, *Van de Voleinding. Met een inleidend woord van Dr. H.H. Kuyper*, 4 vol. (Kampen: Kok, 1929–1931), 6–9, 63–69. The title of this latter (posthumously published) work totaling 2,000 pages could be translated "About the Consummation of the Ages," or "On the End Times."
38. Kuyper, *E Voto*, 2:403. In writings by delegations at the Synod of Dordt, Augustine was the most frequently cited Father. See Aza Goudriaan, "Dordrecht, Synod of (1618–1619)," *The Oxford Guide to the Historical Reception of Augustine*, ed. Karla Pollmann et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 897–903. The same is

true of the papers and minutes of the Westminster Assembly (1643–1652). See *The Minutes and Papers of the Westminster Assembly, 1643–1652*, vol. 1, ed. Chad Van Dixhoorn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012). For an overview of Reformed appropriation of the fathers, see Aza Goudriaan, “Reformed Theology and the Church Fathers,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Reformed Theology*, ed. Michael Allen and Scott R. Swain (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 9–23. The regard for the fathers at Princeton in the nineteenth century is reflected in Kuyper’s comment in his Stone Lectures at Princeton in 1898 that the Princeton theologian Charles Hodge (1797–1878) had preferred—in order to avoid the stigma of dogmatic narrowness attached to Calvinism—to speak of Augustinianism, rather than a Calvinism, when handling the doctrine of predestination. See Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism*, 13.

39. Abraham Kuyper, *Pro Rege of het Koningschap van Christus*, 3 vols. (Kampen: Kok, 1911–1912), 3:480; ET: *Pro Rege: Living Under Christ’s Kingship*, 3 vols., ed. John Kok and Nelson D. Kloosterman, *Collected Works in Public Theology*, ed. Jordan J. Ballor and Melvin Flikkema (Bellingham: Lexham; Grand Rapids: Acton Institute, 2016–2019), 3:406; Kuyper, *Van de Voleinding* 1:21, 269, 345.
40. Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism*, 117.
41. Kuyper, *Pro Rege*, 3:454; ET: 369.
42. Kuyper, *E Voto*, 2:160; Abraham Kuyper, *Uit het Woord: Stichtlijke Bijbelstudiën*, 3 vols. (Amsterdam: Kruyt, 1873–1879), 2:129.
43. Abraham Kuyper, *Het Werk van de Heilige Geest* (Kampen: Kok, 1888–1889), 317. This book is available in English, with an introduction by Benjamin B. Warfield, as Abraham Kuyper, *The Work of the Holy Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956).
44. Kuyper, *E Voto*, 3:17 (Lord’s Day 27, chapter 2); Kuyper, *Het Werk*, 370.
45. Kuyper, *Gomer voor den Sabbath*, 127.
46. Kuyper, *Het Werk*, 370.
47. Abraham Kuyper, “Wat de Oude Christelijke Kerk van de Uitverkiezing Hield?,” in idem, *Uit het Woord*, 2:129.
48. Abraham Kuyper, *Confidentie: Schrijven aan den Weled. Heer J.H. van der Linden* (Amsterdam: Höveker 1873). A small portion (one-seventh) of this 114-page treatise is published in English as “Confidentially” in *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader*, 46–61.
49. Examples include Kuyper, *De Gemeene Gratie*, 3 vols (Amsterdam: Höveker, 1902–1904); ET: *Common Grace*, *Collected Works in Public Theology*, ed. Jordan J. Ballor and Melvin Flikkema (Bellingham: Lexham; Grand Rapids: Acton Institute, 2016–2020); idem, *Pro Rege*; idem, *Van de Voleinding*.

50. Abraham Kuyper, “De Voortgaande Verlichting van den Heiligen Geest,” in *Uit het Woord*, series 2, vol. 3 (Amsterdam: Kruyt, 1886), 94. See also Abraham Kuyper, *Locus de Magistratu: College-Dictaat van een der Studenten*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Hulst, n.d.), 6. This “not for trade” publication is not included in all editions of Kuyper’s *Dictaten Dogmatiek*, but it is available here: https://openlibrary.org/books/OL23294418M/Dictaten_dogmatiek.
51. The historian George Puchinger (1921–1995) often emphasized Kuyper’s mystical side in conversation with the author of this article. This emphasis also recurs in Puchinger’s writings. See especially George Puchinger and Nicolaas Scheeps, *Gesprek over de Onbekende Kuyper* (Kampen: Kok 1971); Puchinger, *Nederlandse Minister-Presidenten van de Twintigste Eeuw* (Amsterdam: Sijthoff, 1984), 40–54; idem, *Abraham Kuyper: De Jonge Kuyper (1837–1867)* (Franeker: Wever, 1987); idem, *Kuyper-herdenking 1987 (De Religieuze Kuyper): Vijf Opstellen en Lezingen ter Gelegenheid van de Herdenking van de Honderdvijftigste Geboortedag van Abraham Kuyper, 29 oktober 1987* (Kampen: Kok, 1987). Some of the contents of this latter publication appear in English translation in George Puchinger, *Abraham Kuyper: His Early Journey of Faith*, ed. George Harinck (Amsterdam: VU University Press, 1998). Puchinger may have been influenced on this matter by the theologian Arnold van Ruler (1908–1970). In an interview Puchinger held with him, Van Ruler characterized Kuyper as a theologian with “a great mystical heart.” See George Puchinger, *Hervormd-gereformeerd, één of Gescheiden?* (Delft: Meinema, 1969), 361.
52. Kuyper’s commentary is published in the four volumes of his *E Voto*. See Kuyper, “Commentary on Lord’s Day 42,” in idem, *On Business and Economics*, 39.
53. Kuyper, *On Business and Economics*, 40. In “The Social Question and the Christian Religion,” Kuyper traces the belief in the absolute right of property to Roman law and associates its rise with the French Revolution. For Kuyper, both socialism and economic liberalism were by-products of this revolution (218n92).
54. Kuyper, *On Business and Economics*, 40. Kuyper is referring to Questions 110 and 111, and their respective answers, of the Heidelberg Catechism.
55. Kuyper, *On Business and Economics*, 40, emphasis original.
56. See note 29 *supra* and note 57 *infra*.
57. See Kenneth J. Stewart, “Evangelicalism and Patristic Christianity: 1517 to the Present,” *Evangelical Quarterly* 80, no. 4 (2008): 307–21. Stewart contends that the neglect of the fathers is a relatively modern phenomenon that afflicted Protestantism in both its conservative and liberal expressions in the early twentieth century but has been on the wane since the 1950s. Stewart returns to this theme at greater length in

idem, *In Search of Ancient Roots: The Christian Past and the Evangelical Identity Crisis* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2017).

58. The full text of this address is available as “The Social Question” in Kuyper, *On Business and Economics*, 173–229. Kuyper’s endnote is cited in the following endnote below.
59. “We must admit, to our shame, that the Roman Catholics are far ahead of us in their study of the social question—very far in fact.... Men like [Von] Ketteler ... have not only engaged in serious study of the social question but have also laid out the direction we should follow.... But Catholic activity is even more impressive when we look at their frequent conferences, their periodical literature, and the associations they have founded.... The clear pronouncements of [Saint] Cardinal Newman are familiar enough, and although German and French Catholics are somewhat divided—the former lean more toward relying on the state, the latter more toward the church alone—the encyclical of [Pope] Leo XIII will probably soon bring them together. Thus Catholic activities should spur us on to show greater energy ... all the more so since we Protestants can learn more from the Roman Catholics than from the Knights of Labor in America.... The encyclical ... deals solely with those principles that all Christians hold in common and that we too share with our Roman Catholic fellow citizens.” Kuyper, “The Social Question,” 175–76n4.
60. Maurice and Kingsley inspired, as Kuyper notes, the fellow Church of England priest Stewart Headlam (1847–1924). Headlam had become enamored with Christian socialism when, as a student at Cambridge, he was taught by Maurice. Kuyper also mentions Frédéric Le Play (1806–1882), who was a French sociologist focused on the role of the family in industrial society. Wilhelm von Ketteler was the Roman Catholic Bishop of Mainz and a pioneer of Christian social thought in Germany. The encyclical Kuyper notes is *Rerum Novarum*, promulgated on May 15, 1891, by Pope Leo XIII.
61. “Kent gij *Maurice: Social Morality*? Een m.i. keurig and voortreffelijk boek, dat we vertaald moesten hebben,” from a letter from Kuyper to Groen van Prinsterer on October 28, 1873, published in Gosinga, ed., *Briefwisseling*, 248–49. The full title of Maurice’s book is *Social Morality: Twenty-one Lectures Delivered in the University of Cambridge* (London: Macmillan, 1869). This book did eventually appear in Dutch, introduced by a theological and political opponent to Kuyper, Johannes H. Gunning (1829–1905): F. D. Maurice, *De zedelijke grondslag der maatschappij: eenentwintig lezingen gehouden aan de van Cambridge* (Nijmegen: Ten Hoet, 1890). It influenced a younger generation of anti-revolutionary leaders, especially Syb Talma (1864–1916).

62. Abraham Kuyper, “Professor Maurice,” in *De Standaard*, November 27, 1874; Abraham Kuyper, “Maurice: De Christen-oeconoom [I–VIII],” in *De Standaard*, December 1, 1874 to February 13, 1875.
63. Kuyper, “The Social Question,” 214n86.
64. Maurice, *Social Morality*, 254. Maurice acknowledges that he is influenced on this point by the historian Edward Gibbon (1737–1794). Gibbon’s key work, based on primary sources, was *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, published in six volumes between 1776 and 1788.
65. Maurice, *Social Morality*, 262.
66. Frédéric Le Play, *The Organization of Labor in Accordance with Custom and the Law of the Decalogue* (Philadelphia: Claxton, Remsen & Haffelfinger, 1872), 177.
67. See Leo XIII, *Rerum Novarum*, § 29; the pope is referring to Tertullian’s *Apologeticum*, translated by William Reeve as *The Apology of Tertullian* (London: Griffith Farran, 1893), 110.
68. Proudhon, *What is Property?*, chap. 5, n8.
69. Sainte-Beuve wrote, “Comme la maison Gauthier publiait quantité d’ouvrages de patristique et de théologie, il en vint également, par ce besoin de tout approfondir, à se former des connaissances théologiques fort étendues, ce qui a fait croire ensuite à des gens mal informés qu’il avait été au séminaire.” See Charles Augustin Sainte-Beuve, *P.-J. Proudhon: Sa Vie et Sa Correspondance* (Paris: Calmann Lévy, 1894), 20.
70. Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, *God is Evil, Man is Free* (n.p.: Schooner, 2017), originally published in the newspaper *Le Peuple* on May 6, 1849.
71. Kuyper, “The Social Question,” 218n91. The scriptural text cited here, and in Kuyper’s original, reads Acts 3:44–45 but this is evidently an error, either by Kuyper or by his transcriber or typesetter. The correct verses are Acts 2:44–45 (or Acts 4:32–35).
72. Kuyper, “The Social Question,” 217. Scripture precludes any presumption, Kuyper argues, that property rights allow people to “dispose of your property absolutely, as though you were a god over it, without taking the needs of others into consideration” (218).
73. Reflecting on the *panta koina* account in Acts 4:32, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states, “Everything the true Christian has is to be regarded as a good possessed in common with everyone else. All Christians should be ready and eager to come to the help of the needy . . . and of their neighbors in want. A Christian is a steward of the Lord’s goods” (§ 952).

74. Nicholaas Gootjes has argued that, in modern theology, Kuyper was an early pioneer of the stewardship concept in relation to property. Nicolaas H. Gootjes, “De Mens als Gods Rentmeester,” *Radix* 6 (1980): 20–26; ET: idem, “Man as God’s Steward,” in idem, *Teaching and Preaching the Word: Studies in Dogmatics and Homiletics*, ed. Cornelis Van Dam (Winnipeg: Premier Publishing, 2010), 249–55, reprinted in *Journal of Markets & Morality* 16, no. 2 (2013): 705–11. Gootjes suggests that Kuyper’s use of the term, which he traces back to Kuyper’s commentary on Heidelberg Catechism, may have been inspired by a brief reference to the call to be “a faithful steward of God’s property” (“een trouwe Rentmeester der goeden zijns Heeren”) by the sixteenth-century Dutch Reformed theologian Jeremias Bastingius (1551–1595) in his commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism, published in 1588. Gootjes points out that a new edition of Bastingius’s commentary was published during the time Kuyper was publishing his commentary on the Catechism (in installments in *De Heraut* from 1886–1894). Gootjes fails to note, however, that Kuyper had already used the notion of stewardship in his “Social Question” speech of 1891, before his commentary on Lord’s Day 42 in his series in *De Heraut* in 1893. Kuyper had, in fact, mentioned in *De Heraut* of October 5, 1890, that the new edition of Bastingius’s book was “on the press,” and had referred to the sixteenth-century edition in *De Heraut* of October 8, 1882. It is possible, therefore, that Kuyper discovered Bastingius’ reference to the stewardship of goods before the new edition appeared. But Bastingius’ use of the concept is so brief as to perhaps be perfunctory and may easily have escaped Kuyper’s attention, regardless of when he read Bastingius’s commentary. The new edition of Bastingius’s commentary appeared as Hieremiam Bastingiwm, *Verclaringe op den Catechisme der Christelicker Religie*, ed. Frederik L. Rutgers (Amsterdam: Wormser, 1891), the reference to stewardship occurring on page 633. Hieremiam Bastingiwm (or Bastingius) are Latin equivalents to the Dutch name Jeremias Bastinck.
75. This is the idea that, while property rights do exist, the goods of creation are destined for humanity as a whole. Examples of where this idea occurs in Catholic social teaching include the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (§§ 2402–2406); Pope Paul VI, Encyclical Letter *Populorum Progressio* (March 26, 1967); and Pontifical Council of Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* (London: Bloomsbury, 2006), chap. 4, § 3.
76. For a summary of Kuyper’s doctrine of sphere-sovereignty, and how it embodies an organic view of society influenced by organicist social theories rooted in German historicism and Romanticism, see Peter S. Heslam, *Creating a Christian Worldview: Abraham Kuyper’s Lectures on Calvinism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 154–60. The suggestion is made in those pages that the German historian and legal theorist Otto von Gierke (1841–1921) may have influenced Kuyper’s shaping of this doctrine.
77. Kuyper, “The Social Question,” 192.

78. Kuyper, “The Social Question,” 202n58. Kuyper appeals, on the point about the restoration of the original organism of humanity, to Maurice’s *Social Morality*, the book he recommended to Groen van Prinsterer almost two decades earlier (as mentioned earlier in this article).
79. From Pope Francis, Encyclical Letter *Fratelli Tutti* (October 3, 2020), § 19. The pope’s references for this second quote are to Basil the Great, *Homilia XXI, Quod rebus mundanis adhaerendum non sit*, 3.5, in *PG* 31:545–49; idem, *Regulae brevius tractatae*, 92, in *PG* 31:1145–48; Saint Peter Chrysologus, *Sermon* 123, in *PL* 52:536–40; Ambrose, *De Nabuthe*, 27.52, in *PL* 14:738ff; Augustine, *In Iohannis Evangelium*, 6, 25, in *PL* 35:1436ff; John Chrysostom, *De Lazaro Concio*, 2.6, in *PG* 48:992D; Gregory, *Regula Pastoralis*, 3.21, in *PL* 77:87. It is clear from this quote from *Fratelli Tutti* that Pope Francis considers the “property is theft” theme to be closely related to the notion of the universal destination of goods.
80. Social media coverage of Pope Francis’s social teaching became particularly lively when in 2015 he cited Basil the Great in addressing greed and damage to the ecosystem: “Behind all this pain, death and destruction there is the stench of what Basil of Caesarea—one of the first theologians of the Church—called ‘the dung of the devil.’ An unfettered pursuit of money rules. This is the ‘dung of the devil.’” From Pope Francis’ address at the Second World Meeting of Popular Movements, Santa Cruz de la Sierra, Bolivia, July 9, 2015, available at https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/july/documents/papa-francesco_20150709_bolivia-movimenti-popolari.html.
81. See note 74 *supra*.